

Summary

This paper make use a feminist poststructuralist framework of discursive analysis to explore the ways in which women academics with children are both positioned and positioning within the complex and often contradictory discourses surrounding the positions of the “successful academic” and the “good mother”. Taking a biographical approach, these discourses are explored within the everyday experiences of Susan, an academic and mother. It is argued that while the intersection of these discourses – which are fluid and in process, rather than fixed and unchanging - creates conflict for mothers not only within the academy but also in terms of their subjectivities outside of the academy, they can also be empowering, potentially creating a space within which mothers can begin to consider the possibilities for new ways of being within the academy. Implications for the academic community and HEIs are considered, with a particular focus on the development of a critical literacy.

Mothers in the Academy: positioned and positioning within discourses of the “successful academic” and the “good mother”

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ABSTRACT Using a feminist poststructuralist framework of discursive analysis, this paper explores the ways in which women academics with children are both positioned and positioning within the complex and often contradictory discourses surrounding the “successful academic” and the “good mother”. A biographical approach is taken to explore these discourses within the everyday experiences of Susan, an academic and mother. It is argued that while the intersection of these discourses – which are fluid and in process, rather than fixed and unchanging – creates conflict for mothers, not only within the academy but also in terms of their subjectivities outside of the academy, they can also provide sources of empowerment and potentially a space in which mothers can begin to consider the possibilities for new ways of being within the academy. Implications for the academic community and HEIs are discussed, with a particular focus on the development of a critical literacy.

Introduction

This paper makes use of a feminist poststructuralist framework of discursive analysis to explore the position and positioning of mothers in the academy. The subject of mothers in the academy is an interesting area for research, particularly in terms of issues such as the tension between, as will be discussed, what is constructed as the independent, aggressive nature of academic work and the dependent, caring nature of mothering. However, the amount of research to date in this area by no means reflects the place that mothering and caring roles have for many women academics’ lives both inside and outside of the academy (e.g. Leonard and Malina, 1994); and the impact of academic and mothering discourses for both mothers and non-mothers (e.g. Ramsey and Letherby, 2001). Indeed, as will be discussed, women academics with children often feel a need to disconnect from their mothering role and responsibilities while at work in the academy (Leonard and Malina, 1994).

In this paper, I explore some of the underlying discourses and assumptions within the construction of mothers’ positions in the academy. As Due Billing and Alvesson (2000)

highlight, there is a need to recognise the role of dominant discourses and perceptions in the positioning of women and men in the organisation. I equally explore the ways in which academic mothers are not only being positioned, but positioning within discourse. As will be outlined, several feminist poststructuralists' understandings of power and resistance have highlighted that women are not only positioned or shaped by dominant discourse, but are also capable of positioning in terms of accepting, resisting and transforming discourse. In effect, power, as Foucault (1972, 1977) has shown, is not simply top-down, but multiple and complex.

I will explore the nature and construction of the “successful academic” and the “good mother”, using a biographical approach to focus upon the intersections between these two shifting and fluid discourses in the everyday life of Susan, an academic and a mother (a pseudonym has been used here to protect the identity of the respondent). For example, the academic mother is positioned/positioning within the points of intersection between such competing narratives as: production/reproduction; selfishness/selflessness; independence/dependence; career-orientation/mothering instinct. As well as creating strong expectations of what the successful academic and the good mother are/ do, the ambiguity and ambivalence between these competing narratives also creates spaces within which academic mothers can think about how best to fulfil these competing roles. Hence I consider the ways in which these discourses are simultaneously – and paradoxically – *both* disempowering *and* empowering for mothers/women in the academy. This proceeds to a discussion of the implications of this research for the academic community and higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly how we can begin to consider new ways of being and the multiplicity of positions available to us in the academy.

Method/Methodology/Epistemology

Feminist and poststructuralist theories highlight the subjective nature of the researcher and the fundamental connection between method, methodology and epistemology. Thus, in this section I outline the theoretical framework underpinning my methodology, proceeding to discuss the ways in which analyses of discourse can illuminate the positioning nature of dominant discourse, but equally the possibility for individuals to position in ways which resist and ultimately alter discourse. I then outline the data collection and analysis used in this

research, moving on to present some of the main discourses that have been identified within Susan's narrative.

My theoretical framework draws on feminist thought and what has been termed a "soft" or "weak" post-structuralism (Benhabib, 1995). Central to this position is the understanding that while categories such as "male" and "female" are socially and linguistically constructed, there remains evidence worldwide of the structural and material inequalities to which women are subject (Butler, 1999; Francis, 1999). Discourses are both 'signs' and 'practices' through which subjects are both represented and formed (Foucault, 1972: 49). The exploration of such discourses enables us to make visible ideologies that have been naturalized: the '...never-said', an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its mark' (Foucault, 1972). These are values or practices which, for example, are accepted without question as masculine or feminine, or as a "natural" part of woman's or man's identity (Butler, 1999; Walkerdine, 1998).

However, as Katila and Meriläinen (1999: 171) assert, women are not 'passive victims' incapable of '...taking part in the meaning creating process of academic work'. Indeed, discourse is performative (Walkerdine, 1998; Butler, 1999): it not only constructs individuals' subjectivities, but changes over time and through the ways in which individuals are positioned and positioning. Discourse is:

...constitutive both in the sense that it helps sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. (Wodak, 1996: 17 cited in Wodak 1997: 6)

Susan's experiences of "juggling" multiple responsibilities and forming connections between home and work life were explored through an in-depth, semi-structured interview. The interview was based upon five pre-prepared questions around the areas of learning experiences and what it meant, to Susan, to be a woman. Susan and I were already acquainted before the interview, which may have impacted upon the form the interview and the responses took. Indeed, this was really more of an 'inter-view' (Kvala, 1996) than a traditional one-way interview, since many more questions were asked around Susan's responses, and Susan asked for my opinion on certain issues, which led to an exchange of experiences. The interview data

was treated as a narrative for the purposes of the analysis. I will now outline the importance and usefulness of the biographical method.

The biographical method: stories of the “self”

Sociological research has often taken an approach which studies society from ‘...social structure ‘downwards’ [rather than] individual ‘upwards’ (Rustin, 2000: 45). Biographical research, however, starts from the perspective of the individual. While an individual’s experience can rarely be used to make large-scale generalisations, there will be a certain amount of resonance with other people’s experiences, and themes and issues that we can highlight for general consideration.

Two aspects of the biographical approach are particularly important to this research. Firstly, by focusing on the narrative of one person, or a small group of people within a particular context (e.g. a family, or particular ethnic group), the biographical researcher is able to explore ‘lived realities’ (Chamberlayne *et al*, 2000: 1). These individual meanings and experiences can be lost when using methods such large-scale surveys. Secondly, by treating the interview as narrative, and speech as text, we are subjecting the interview data to a particular set of assumptions. Poststructuralist theories, in particular, highlight the centrality of language in the construction of individual subjectivities, as well as the situatedness of interview responses. By treating the interview as narrative, therefore, we assume that the stories individuals tell about themselves are subject to the process of interviewing, to the context of the interview, and to the researched-researcher interaction.

Researchers within the positivist paradigm, as well the interpretative paradigm, have questioned the “validity” of the biographical approach. As Halford *et al* (1997: 60) assert, however, rather than giving us ‘...privileged or unmediated access to people’s thoughts and feelings...[depth interviews] produce specific accounts designed to meet the particular situation’. As opposed to seeking “truth”, biographical methods can highlight the ‘discursive reconstruction’ that takes place within the interview – the individual’s ‘attempt to impose an orderliness, a shape, on a life which is essentially irrecoverable’ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 167). Thus, I would assert that the interview on which this paper is based provides only an insight into certain aspects of Susan’s life at a particular time through Susan’s own stories

about her life; a narrative which may be shaped by the interview process and by the process of storytelling. These stories of the “self” are essential to our understanding of the attitudes, meanings and values that individuals attach to certain behaviours, activities, and discourses, and the contradictory ways in which individuals internalise, accept, resist and potentially transform discourse in everyday life.

The following table outlines all of the main discourses identified in the interview with Susan. I have included all of them here as a means of highlighting the multiple discourses at play in Susan’s narrative. However, in order to form an in-depth analysis of key discourses, I focus specifically on the two dominant discourses of the “successful academic” and the “good mother”. As such, I do not seek to constitute a comprehensive overview of the discourses seen in the positions of mothers in the academy. Furthermore, this is my personal reading of the interview, and different readings may identify different discourses.

Table I. Discourses identified in Susan’s narrative

Discourses of the “successful academic” and the “good mother”

The “successful academic” and “good mother” are both powerful and dominant discourses in their own right. Indeed, both the family and the academy are described as “greedy” institutions (e.g. Currie *et al*, 2000; Edwards, 2000). Whilst constructed as universal and as apolitical, these discourses can be seen as mediated by gender, class, race, dis/ability, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on, and differ across contexts and cultures. Thus, while I use the categories “successful academic” and “good mother” as a heuristic device, I also try to show how they are neither fixed nor universal. Furthermore, while the institutions of academy and motherhood/family are often portrayed as separate spheres – as the “public” academic work life, and the “private”, “personal” home life – it is hard to draw a line between the two spheres, either in terms of their public/private nature, or in terms of Susan’s subjectivities within the home/academy.

The “successful academic”

The “successful academic”: devotes all of their time and energy to the university (David *et al*, 1996; Goode, 2000); networks both in and out of work hours (Poole and Bornholt, 1998); is

guided into and through their career by a mentor (Heward *et al*, 1997); builds a reputation through research (Bagilhole, 1993; Heward *et al*, 1997); is ‘career-oriented’, ‘productive’, ‘hard working’ and ‘enthusiastic’, and publishes, in the *right* publications (Harris *et al*, 1998); has a linear career path (Poole and Bornholt, 1998); gains the majority of their experience within the university environment, particularly within a ‘prestigious’ faculty or field (Luke, 1994); focuses on research rather than teaching, administration or the caring, pastoral role (Bagilhole, 1993; Edwards, 2000; Goode, 2000); and has a particularly high research output in the early years of their career (Heward *et al*, 1997).

This discourse fits within what has been identified as higher education’s framework of “masculinist” values, ideals and power relations, which construct women as the “other”, or as “outsiders”, in the academy (Acker, 1994; Bagilhole, 1993, 1994; Luke 1994, 2000). These are just some of the ‘covert messages’ which underlie the ‘overt message’ (Walkerdine, 1998) of meritocracy in the academy.

While it is not explicit that the ‘successful academic’ should be a man, or indeed a child-free woman, a number of aspects would seem to stand in the way of mothers being able to succeed in this field and to fit into these values, namely:

- the material realities of women’s primary responsibility for caring and domestic work in the family in the majority of cultures and countries;
- the fact that academic mothers have to take time out of their career to have children;
- that they often dominate the lower-level and part-time jobs in universities.

Furthermore, while the majority of research time is “after hours”, in ‘...what remains of the private sphere, in non-work time’ (Goode, 2000: 251), women’s research output is likely to suffer due to the ‘...double whammy of being required to perform a second ‘second shift’, in the ‘private’ sphere of the home, as well as in the ‘public’ sphere of paid work’ (Goode, 2000: 252). Indeed, Leonard and Malina (1994) note that the occurrence of mothers in full-time academic posts is a ‘relative rarity’: that there seems to be a need for them to hide or conceal their family responsibilities, or even to postpone having a family in favour of career advancement. In effect, the academy’s discourse is one of production over reproduction and

the caring (and domestic) role, while the academic career is constructed around the male breadwinner/female carer model.

Perhaps further evidence for the masculinist bias of the “successful academic” discourse is the suggestion that to succeed in an academic career women must become ‘honorary men’ (Thomas, 1990 cited in Bagilhole, 1993). Thus, Heward *et al* (1997: 213) found that the characteristics needed to succeed as an academic were often perceived, by women and men, as conflicting with women’s femininity, presenting women academics with a ‘double bind’; while Harris *et al* (1998: 140) found that both women and men perceived the need for academics to be ‘ruthless and aggressive’ to succeed. Such characteristics appear to conflict not only with what has been described as women’s role as the “good citizens” of the university (Thomas, 1990 cited in Bagilhole, 1993), but equally with the discourse of the “selfless mother”, as will be outlined in the following section. Furthermore, this need to be “one of the boys” positions women in the academy as lacking, as needing to change in order to fit into the discourse of the “successful academic”, rather than recognising the gendered nature of the academy.

Susan’s narrative would seem *both* to confirm *and* contradict the discourse of the “successful academic”, and the above arguments. Indeed, within Susan’s narrative, areas of tension and conflict coexist with areas of ambition and joy. While there was no evidence in Susan’s narrative of a need to compromise femininity in the ways described above, Susan does experience a tension between her desire to be a “good mother” whilst succeeding in her academic career. For example, Susan feels a strong sense of guilt when she is not putting her daughter first, and refers to herself on several occasions throughout the interview as “*selfish*”:

...Mainly between Daisy being born and not being born, now I am much less selfish... People around me might not be able to tell that I am less selfish, but in my own life, I am less selfish... Like before she was born, everything was about me, and now nothing’s about me- Well, not nothing’s about me, but most things are about Daisy, so in that respect I think I have changed a lot.

When talking about her academic career, it is evident that Susan feels “*selfish*” when she invests in and enjoys it. Interestingly, however, Susan sees this “work self” as the self closest to who she is. The following statement is important in two ways: 1) as evidence of the way in

which an individual attempts, through the narrative, to form a sense of a coherent self; and 2) as evidence of the fundamental place of the academic career in Susan's own sense of self, an aspect that is perhaps overlooked in theories of women's "otherness" in the academy.

...At work I am completely different to how I am at home. When I'm at work I don't feel like a mother at all, and sometimes I feel guilty. I think 'God, I've hardly thought about Daisy all day' because I know that somebody else is doing that, in a way. But the minute I get to the nursery, it's changed- then as soon as Daisy's gone to bed I'm different, I'm still the mother but I'm different, I'm more myself again.

...I think that when I am most myself is at work. That's probably an awful thing to say. But I think it's probably true...

Indeed, Susan particularly feels that she is able to be "herself" when she travels for work, which she describes as an opportunity to relax and to do some of the things she would not normally have time to do. This was perhaps so because travel had been important to her before becoming a mother. Also, note how Susan constructs divisions between her "public" academic life and her "private" home life (i.e. describing how she is a different at work and at home), whilst simultaneously describing how her subjectivities at home and at work overlap (i.e. feeling guilty at work when she has not thought about Daisy). Nevertheless, we can see that working in the academy creates a space within which she can build a sense of self outside of the mothering or (female) partner roles. This forging of a sense of self outside of the good mothering role – which, as will be seen in the next section, is partly constructed around the notion that the mother gives up her sense of self to the child's needs and identity (Lawler, 2000) – can be seen as a form of resistance. Lawler (2000: 167) identified similar forms of resistance in mother/daughter narratives – practices, however 'partial...[or] fragmented', through which women resist the selfless "good mother" position.

Of course, this space is not without tension. Susan finds it hard to justify simultaneously pursuing a career – which is something she sees as entirely for herself – and being a "good mother" – which she states is putting her daughter first in all cases. Equally, she expresses a strong wish to develop her research interests and, potentially, to become "*someone who knows*" – an "*expert*" in an aspect of her field. She stressed that this was important for her academic career, but she was also excited by, and felt a sense of achievement at, the prospect

of becoming such an “*expert*”. As Luke (2000) highlights, higher education has ‘...historically [been seen as] the exclusive preserve of men as speakers of truth and knowledge’. Thus, in becoming an expert, Susan is potentially invested with some of the power related to the traditionally male academic role: the power to know. As Foucault (1977) asserts, power is not merely repressive but is productive – as we see here, it can bring pleasure to the individual. However, Susan recognises that ideally she would need to be able to “*dedicate loads of time*” in order to be “*successful*”. Since she also has to think about the needs of her daughter and partner, it would be – and has been – difficult to do this:

I mean it's the same for most people I don't get any time to relax at all until about half past eight at night. Dinner's done 8 o'clock and I could do some work then but my brain isn't in the right frame of mind. And I'm tired and moody and horrible, so it's better if I just sit down and watch TV or something!

And like, if it wasn't for Daisy and for other things, I'd stay at work and I'd do work then, so I wouldn't leave at five, I'd stay here till eight, and I'd go home and get some food then it would be me and my food, it wouldn't be like Daisy and Philip and all of that to think about. And that's getting a bit better and I can get some time to myself and I can be more focused on it.

While Leonard and Malina (1994) found that women academics had to disconnect from their family responsibilities at work, Susan had actually drawn on her experiences as a parent to develop her current research interests, thus forming connections between her home life, her personal experiences as a parent and her academic work. When asked to describe the research and the impact it had on her, it did not appear that, in bringing together her research and her mothering role, Susan had gained access to alternative ways of understanding her own position as was found to be the case by David *et al* (1996), as mothers undertaking research about/with mothers, and by Tyler (2000) in rethinking philosophy as a pregnant woman. Rather, she spoke about the innovative nature of the methodology and the excitement she felt at working on a little-researched area (details are not given to protect the identity of the respondent). Thus, Susan described the impact in terms of her personal gain as an academic engaged in research, and in terms of the academic career, as opposed to a political and/or ontological context.

In support of Leonard and Malina's findings (1994), Susan did state that, except on the few occasions when her daughter is physically with her in the office, her responsibilities outside of work were overlooked by colleagues. Furthermore, as the following quote illustrates, Susan is aware of finding herself criticising other women's inability to cope with a career and children. We see here how Susan recognises the contradictions in the way she positions within the discourse of the "good mother"; *both* expecting mothers to cope with multiple roles/workloads, *and* arguing that this expectation is unjust:

...if he <Mike> sees Daisy, he's like... "God, I can't believe you've got to do the stuff you've got to do when you've got her", but when he can't see her, he's like, "Why haven't you done this, and why haven't you done that?" <bangs her hand hard on the table>. And I think most people are like that. You can't help it. And then I look about at people and I think, "God she's only got one child, what's wrong with her?" and I think "Oh God I've only got one, and I moan about it non-stop!" <laughs>

Susan clearly feels a conflict between others/her own expectations of her as an academic – the strong pressure to focus on publications and to travel for her career – and others/her own expectations of her as a mother and the responsibilities (caring and domestic) that entails. Susan worries that, unlike several colleagues, she does not have a "five year plan", which is evidence of the narrative of the 'focused' academic and the linear career path. She also states that "successful" academics are either childless or have partners who are not "career-minded". Indeed, she describes the situation for an academic mother as "depressing". In the following quote, we can see the pull of the narrative of the career-oriented, productive, successful and in this case, male, academic (Mike), but also how, even within the supposedly "private" sphere of the home, Susan feels guilt and tension when she relaxes after fulfilling her caring duties, or when she is not focused on her research work:

...I think that to be successful you've got to be able to dedicate loads of time to your career. And I think that people in academic roles that you see, women that have been successful haven't got children or else they've got a partner who isn't career-minded. So I think that to be able to achieve, and yet carry on those other multiple tasks, it's- it's not impossible, but it's- well you can't be like Mike and look after your children...I was trying to do something last night, and I was thinking of Mike's- I'd talked to Mike during the day, and he'd said "You've got to be driven, you've got to be driven and get those articles done!" And I was sitting watching something really crap on

TV and I was thinking, "Oh God, I should be driven to pick up my lap top and start doing it, but I can't!" So I think that is hard. It's depressing really.

Susan did highlight that as Daisy was getting older, things were “*getting a bit better and I can get some time to myself and I can be more focused on it*”. Equally, this was the first job where she felt she could really progress. However, she was concerned that the only way to cope once Daisy started school might be by working part-time – perhaps compromising her career ambitions. Furthermore, she worried that if she were to have another child, it would all be “*back to square one*”: that the progress she had made towards accommodating, and attempting to “succeed” in, the roles of *both* “successful academic” and “good mother” would be lost.

The discourses of the “good mother”

There are a range of discourses at play within the position of the “good mother”, in this section I explore two of the most dominant discourses of mothering: the “selfless mother” and the “best of both worlds mother”. As will be seen, these are constructed, in many ways, as “selfless”, dependent, full-time mothering, versus gaining a measure of independence by “juggling” a career with part-time mothering.

The most dominant discourse of mothering has long been that of the “selfless mother”, who places her caring role before everything else in her life, in effect giving full-time attention to her children. This discourse is constructed, performed and reinforced through a matrix of social systems such as the media, the state, religious doctrine and “empirically-based” psychological and medical studies. In the UK, for example, the “Beveridge family” – the normative male breadwinner/ female carer model – and thus women’s dependence on men, was fundamental to the post-World War II liberal welfare state regime and to full-employment (Pateman, 2000). Of course, as Bang *et al* (2000: 127) highlight, this dominant model has shifted over time towards more of a ‘male breadwinner/ female part-time carer model’, in which men retain their primary breadwinner role and women work part-time while there are ‘dependent children in the household’. In effect, women in this position remain dependent and give “selfless” care by working around school hours, for example, whilst supplementing the household income.

The “selfless mother’s” dependence and full-time caring role has also been constructed by, for example, psychological discourses propounding the necessity of mother-child love and the damage of maternal deprivation when mothers of young children go out to work (Sharpe, 1994). In such ‘child-centred accounts’, mothers are ‘seen to exist only in relation to the child, rather than as a subject in her own right’ (Marks, 1997: 89), while the ‘predominant image of the mother in white Western society is of all-providing woman’, both caring ‘for and about others’ (Marks, 1997: 88). Thus, within the “selfless mother” discourse, motherhood is constructed as an essential, ‘natural’, ‘intrinsic’ part of ‘adult female identity’ (Ireland, 1993: 1), creating a strong case for women to become mothers: a ‘constant back and forth debate about private values and public expectations’ (Benn, 1998). As Ireland states (1993:12-13), by overemphasizing ‘women’s capacity for maternal relationships’, women’s capacity to succeed in other areas (such as work) have often been overlooked.

Nevertheless, the “selfless mother” discourse competes and conflicts with the discourse of the working mother who seeks the ‘best of both worlds’, who can be seen as ‘having it all’ (Hughes, 2002): one of the most dominant and visible discourses of mothers and mothering in current times. In turn, this discourse is characterised by two competing narratives. Firstly, that of the independent, strong woman with her own interests and identity outside of the family. Secondly, that of the selfish woman, who places her own needs before those of her children, or perhaps before the choice to have children at all.

The “best of both worlds” discourse appeared within feminist literature in the 1980s, being taken up by the media with the image of the ‘Super-Mom’ (Kaplan, 1992) and can currently be seen within state policy. If we return to examine the role of the state in the construction of this discourse, this shift in dominant discourses of mothering can be linked, in part, to the shift in state ideologies of the family and motherhood, as well as to “expert” knowledge, and economic, social and cultural trends. For example, over time, and intricately linked to the shift towards market-led society and globalised competition, ‘third way’ political ideology has shifted towards a gender-neutral focus on work-family balance (e.g. Giddens, 1998) as opposed to the male breadwinner/female carer model. Thus, the position of mothers in society and in relation to the state is increasingly constructed as producer/reproducer – as having (to have) the ‘best of both worlds’, of ‘having it all’ (Hughes, 2002) In policy terms, this has led

to a growth in ‘marketised’ childcare facilities to enable mothers to return to work (Bang *et al*, 2000: 128), alongside growing consideration of the need for flexible working policies for both women and men, and increased *parental* leave; although the gender neutrality of these has been questioned (Smithson and Stokoe, 2001). Thus, the dominant state model of the family has shifted towards a ‘dual earner/ marketised carer’ model (Bang *et al*, 2000: 128) in which the “norm” is for a balance between work and part-time mothering.

Furthermore, contrary to the empirical evidence for full-time, selfless, mothering, a growing body of empirical research shows the positive benefits for children of having an economically active mother, disproving the risks that childcare, other than that offered by the mother, might pose (Scarr *et al*, 1990). While, culturally, the image of the “1950s mother” is unfashionable: Sharpe (1994) found that, in the UK, for the majority of working class girls she spoke to in the 1990s, the full-time stay-at-home Mum was ‘boring’, while working was seen as both economically necessary, and personally and professionally desirable. Similarly, Apter’s study (1993: 85) in the UK and USA found that many women were ‘determined...[not to] follow in the steps of unfulfilment’ they associated with the ‘traditional’ mothering they had received.

However, while the discourses of the “selfless mother” and the “best of both worlds mother” are constructed in many ways as universal, they can be seen as neither universal nor fixed; although they are influential and pervasive. Since these discourses co-exist and compete, rather than replacing one another, the conflict between them creates ‘ambiguities...spaces’ (Marks, 1997: 89) and ‘ambivalence’ (Blättel-Mink *et al*, 2000) within which women must decide how best to fulfil the good mothering role. Thus a mother might ask herself, is a “good mother” a selfless woman who puts her child first and lives through her children in some sense, or is she economically active, productive as well as reproductive, and forging some sense of an identity outside of her mothering role: or can she be both?

Within Susan’s narrative, we have already seen the conflict and tension between experiences of being positioned/attempts to position as the “successful academic”, becoming an “*expert*” and being “*career-minded*”, and those of being a “good mother” who selflessly puts her child first in all cases. Indeed, in the following quote, it is evident that Susan had herself framed her academic career with her current employer in terms of her motherhood, and the discourses of

the “selfless mother” (although not in the “full-time” sense), from the moment she took up her current post. This is in terms of the time she could give to her career; her time management; her research (both in terms of the area of interest and the time she could give to this); and her ability to take part in all aspects of the teaching, administration and management work at the university.

...From the minute that I started this job...even when she wasn't born, she was on my mind before she was even here. And all the time I've been doing this job, which is the main job I've had that I feel I can make progress in, it's been- I haven't been held back by her at all, but I've been restrict- not restricted, that's the wrong word. But it's...

Q. It's framed it?

Yeah, it's framed it. That's it.

While Susan seeks to position somewhere within the ambiguous/ambivalent space where these contradictory and conflicting discourses intersect, she is equally being positioned by those around her: not just within the academy, but also within so-called “private” sphere of her home life. For example, the following quote shows how Susan's career ambitions are not taken seriously by Phillip's mother. Susan's mothering and caring role is constructed as her primary function, while her career is seen as secondary and comparatively unimportant. In contrast, Susan describes how Phillip's mother's attitude to her son is quite the opposite:

...I think that if I were Daisy's father, me going on visits and working at weekends would not be an issue at all in anyone's book...for Phillip's mum it's a massive issue, “Ooh you've got a nice little job there, you should work on the occasional Saturday to keep your- to get a good reputation for being keen, but ooh you don't want to be going away too often” <tone of voice is condescending >. She hasn't got a clue. Whereas if it's Phillip, she's like “Ooh yeah, you must go on that work trip because it's imperative for your job” <tone is strong and proud>...I think there are massive conflicts.

However, while Susan is both positioned/positioning within the discourse of the “selfless mother”, it appears that she feels more confident when positioning within the “successful academic” and “best of both worlds” discourses. Susan stated that, as a mother, she “fulfil[led] all the clichés” – here we see evidence of Susan both drawing on narratives of the selfless, caring mother whilst simultaneously resisting them. She unsettles the “truth” of such

narratives by referring to them as “*clichés*”. While Susan believes she fulfils the narratives of the “good mother” she made several references to times when she had felt “*out of control*” when Daisy was a baby. Susan talks about times when Daisy “*was in control*”, when things were unstructured, and it was easier to give that role to someone who knew what they were doing (the nursery). As seen, Susan also expresses feelings of guilt at enjoying her time at work (an area in which she evidently feels confident) and letting someone else – albeit someone she could trust – look after Daisy. I have tried to show the difficulty with which Susan speaks about this through the transcription.

...when I was at home with her on my own <long silence> Umm. It wasn't really long enough to- what was it, fourteen, no, twelve weeks. I felt overwhelmed with what I was having to do. I didn't understand- I was out of control really. Because I didn't know what was- It wasn't like being at work where everything's really structured, no, she was in charge in a way. And I- Although I wasn't looking forward to coming back to work, as soon as I got back I was quite pleased. That's not to say I don't want to be with her. It's just easier. Being here <we are sitting in Susan's office. Susan laughs>.

Susan's own expectations of herself as a mother appear to draw on the narratives of selflessness, and of an intrinsic caring role which should come naturally to a new mother. It seems that Susan feels a lack in herself because she was not always confident and in control with her baby, although she does highlight that things are “*getting easier*”. Similar sentiments of a “lack” were expressed by Hewlett (1987 cited by Edwards, 2000), and by mothers in Oakley's (1992) research on motherhood. This is perhaps not surprising when discourses of good mothering are so intricately linked to concepts of morality – both in terms of the morality and respectability of care-giving (Skeggs, 1997), and a mother's responsibility for the development of her child's self-identity (Lawler, 2000). However, I detected neither – as Oakley found – that Susan was jealous of her daughter's attachment to the people who care for Daisy in her absence, nor that Susan was bitter about her need to place Daisy in a nursery to enable her to work. Indeed, Susan emphasises that she would not want to stay at home, she resists that position, highlighting that it is not what she wants for herself. Thus, while there is a sense of lack in the above quote, in the following quote Susan positions herself within the “best of both worlds” (production/reproduction) discourse, inferring that the “natural” course for mothers is no longer to stay at home caring for their children, but to go out to work: to “have it all”. This is just one of the many examples of the contradictory and conflicting ways

in which individuals are positioned/positioning within competing discourses. Furthermore, by talking (tentatively) about what she wants, Susan positions herself as having some agency:

...my Mum was saying to me the other day, "If you could give up work and stay at home, would you want to?" and I said, "I don't think I would", and she said "I think you would if you tried it". But I don't think I would. I don't think I am- I'm not used to- well I suppose most people aren't now.

Equally, contrary to feelings of a lack of control within the position of the "selfless mother", Susan appears to feel strong and independent when she is positioned/positioning within the "career woman" discourse. She feels in control; it is structured; she knows what she is doing and can do what she wants, when she wants; she can be herself and put her own needs and wishes first. Susan evidently feels empowered when positioning/being positioned within this discourse. Indeed, she describes being at work as "*less stressful than being at home*", since she knows that she only has to think about her own needs:

I don't think many people would say work's more relaxing than being at home, but it is for me...coming in here and going "Ooh, I can have a coffee now, I can send an e-mail, ooh I can do this, oh this is great".

As Rout et al (1997: 264) highlight, studies of worker stress have tended to concentrate on male workers and, as such, have constructed the home as a '...favourable environment', and the caring role as 'natural' and free from undue stress', thus overlooking the potential stress caused by women's dual roles of worker and carer. Furthermore, Hochschild (1997) asserts that the workplace has become favourable for many women (and has long been for men) to the second shift that women face in the home.

Discussion: acceptance, resistance, and creating new spaces

When trying to "fix" the discourses surrounding the position of the academic mother for the purposes of this research, it is apparent that these discourses are constructed across a number of sites, drawing on numerous ideologies and fields of knowledge (e.g. state policy, "expert" knowledge, media representations), differing across contexts and cultures (Foucault, 1972). It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that there is contradiction, conflict and ambiguity within the multiple positions in which academic mothers find themselves. Referring, for example, to the discourses identified in Susan's narrative (see Table 1), there is clear conflict between the

narratives of the “proper girl” – whose main interests/ roles are centred around the body (physical appearance and reproductive roles) – and that of the career woman – whose main roles and aspirations are centred around the “mind” and, although feminists writing on careers and embodiment would disagree (e.g. Hughes, 2001), an inferred freedom from embodied roles (intellectual pursuits and independence).

It is evident that Susan is both positioned and positioning within many discourses – some traditional and some challenging the traditional conceptions of what it means to be an academic, a woman and a mother. There are very evident pulls on Susan, which she simultaneously accommodates and resists, and she expresses very contradictory feelings and views about being an academic, a mother and, although this has only been touched upon here, a (female) partner. On the one hand, she wishes to be all of these things, but to be what she sees as ‘herself’ also. On the other hand, she feels a very strong expectation from others, and herself, to fulfil those roles in a particular way – to be a “proper girl”, or a “good mother”, or a “successful academic”. Indeed, Acker and Feuerverger (1997: 136-7) write of the ‘... ‘bifurcated consciousness’ (Smith, 1987); or ‘segmented self’ (Miller, 1983), or ‘outlaw emotions’ (Jaggar, 1989)...[that women experience] as they try to live up to contradictory prescriptions for ‘caring woman’ and ‘productive academics’.’

I would argue that this positioning, both by Susan herself and by others, can be seen simultaneously, and paradoxically, as *both* disempowering: as constructing and fixing individual’s subjectivities and identities, positioning them without their consent in ways which can prove debilitating; *and* empowering: as positing the subject as agentic; as enabling them to manage their relationships with those around them; as creating a space in which individuals can begin to think about (albeit small) ways of transforming dominant discourse. As discussed, the discourse of the “successful academic” disempowers mothers/women by constructing them as “other” in the academy. This is due both to the masculinist culture of the academy and to the material impact for women of being both mothers/carers and academics: of being called on, simultaneously, to invest their all in the academy, or in the care of their children, or in successfully balancing the two. On the other hand, Susan appears to feel empowered by the discourse of the ‘successful’ academic in terms of feeling a sense of control over her life, a sense of structure, which she did not experience whilst caring full-time

for her baby. Equally, she is excited by the potential of being someone who “*knows*”: of being invested with the (male) power to know. Whilst this might be seen as internalising, or buying in to, the masculinist culture without transforming it, it might also be seen as opening an opportunity for women’s voices and knowledge to be heard in the academy; as giving them a space in which to think about and influence change. These are spaces within which women can begin to question what it means to be *both* an academic *and* a mother, and in which there is potential for academic mothers to position in new ways of being, both within and outside of the academy. This might be equated with what Davies (1997: 12) describes as ‘the power to be convincing to others, to ensure she was recognised as a legitimate member of the culture’. As Davies (*ibid*) suggests:

Such recognition is probably essential for those who want to transgress the boundaries of the dominant culture or to deconstruct old patterns and speak into existence new ones.

Nevertheless, while there is then a sense of potential access to new spaces of being, I would stress that Susan is not necessarily inhabiting these spaces at this time. Indeed, while there is a sense of resistance, there is not strong evidence of a politically-driven resistance: of seeking consciously to change the ways in which mothers position/are positioned within the academy. Susan does express dissatisfaction with the gendered division of labour, for example, she notes that it is always women in her department who bring in and clear up the sandwiches at staff meetings, and that child care and domestic work are generally left to women. However, there remains a tension between a sense of accommodation and of a resistance which may be seen as coping with, or adapting to, multiple roles, rather than attempting to unravel the status quo. Thus Susan attempts to fulfil *both* the expectations of those around her, *and* her own expectations of herself as an academic and mother. Susan is working hard to be *both* an academic “*expert*” *and* to put Daisy first, and has been able to form connections between these two traditionally separated and seemingly contradictory parts of her life through her research in ways which have benefited her academic career. Nevertheless, I would assert, as Katila and Meriläinen (1999: 171) do, that women in the academy are not ‘passive victims’: that there is evidence of Susan’s *both* being positioned *and* positioning within discourse – both consciously and sub-consciously – and, in this way, of being *both* disempowered *and* empowered.

So what might this discussion of the position/positioning of academic mothers mean for practice and policy in HEIs?

Conclusion

In terms of implications for practice, common responses such as flexible working practices, or assertiveness training for women academics, are not sufficient to bring about real change in the academy. As Edwards (2000: 319) asserts, 'it is an issue of the transformation of the academic cultural base and power relations'. As such, I would argue that there is a need to critically and reflexively engage with mother's/women's position/positioning in the academy through a practice of discursive analysis in a move towards a critical literacy. Critical literacy, as outlined and developed by writers such as Davies (1997), involves a reflexive awareness of the multiplicity of positions and possibilities. This multiplicity is in contrast to the construction of binaries through which 'ascendant' categories (e.g. man, white, heterosexual) have been constructed as 'normal', 'natural', and in opposition to the marginalised 'other' – a binary that often remains unquestioned as simply 'the way things are' (Davies, 1997: 26). However, critical literacy equally involves taking ownership of one's traditionally "othered" position and of the multiplicity of potential positions open to us:

These are no longer experienced as 'other' to an ascendant category but as a rich, shifting complex set of possibilities which may or may not take their meaning in relation to the once ascendant 'other' category. Having disrupted the apparently natural ascendancy and rightness of the ascendant term, the binary begins to lose its original meaning and force. (Davies, 1997: 26)

Thus, as individuals, as part of an institution, as a community, we can engage reflexively to rework the meanings attached to being a "successful academic" and a "good parent". Furthermore, it involves developing a reflexive understanding of the multiplicity of ways in which we/others position and are positioning ourselves/others. As Davies (1997: 26) argues, this leads to a disruption of '[o]ld notions of identity', as:

...new discursive possibilities are opened up through a play on language, and the unconscious, the body, desire and emotions are made relevant in the playful construction of new identities and new meanings. (*ibid*)

Indeed, while I have performed a discursive analysis of Susan's narrative, in doing so, I have also reflected upon my own experiences of being positioned/positioning myself/ positioning others within and outside of the academy. I have found this a productive activity on an individual level – not just in terms of writing a paper – through which I have reassessed my own assumptions about academics and mothers, and have gained access to alternative discourses in developing my understanding of positions/positioning and critical literacy. This approach can be equally productive on a group or community level, for example, in presenting conference papers on this research, I have engaged in reflection and discussion with other women and men in the academic community. Of course, there still remains the inevitable question of what compelling reason I might give for communities of academics and HEIs to engage in this critical literacy; in this troubling and reimagining of the greedy institutions of the academy and motherhood/family. Indeed, the traditional research-based system of academic merit and success has worked for many (primarily white, male) academics; a discourse of success which, even when positioned within by those constructed as 'other', can bring a sense of empowerment. Furthermore, there may be an inability, or unwillingness, among those for whom the traditional discourses of academic success have worked, to see why these normative discourses and their related narratives act to "other" mothers/women and minorities in the academy. As Davies (1997: 13 citing Davies, 1993: 89-90) asserts:

People inhabiting such ascendant categories, such as male, heterosexual, white, middle-class, able-bodied, adult or sane, often wonder what all the fuss is about, and doubt even the relevance of their own category membership in determining who they might be.

Nevertheless, it is well documented that while women and minorities are filling the lower ranks of the academy, there is continued concern over the small number of women and ethnic minorities in senior academic posts, and over the gendered pay gap in the academy. Some argue that this will be balanced out in time as women, and ethnic minorities to a lesser degree, are working their way up through the ranks. However, this overlooks, for example, the fact that women academics have been dissuaded from going for senior posts by the extra-visibility and marginality they will encounter in the white, male-dominated ranks (Bagilhole, 1994). Thus, while equal opportunities policies may continue to open up equality of *access* to the

(masculinist) academy, if we are serious about widening *inclusion* and *participation* (for staff and students) we need to be asking whether equal opportunities open up a space in which mothers, and others, can flourish and be more than “present and accounted for”.

Thus, I would argue that by making visible the taken-for-granted assumptions about *who* a “successful academic” is, and *what* they must do to become “successful”, or the discursive practices embedded in everyday practices through which individuals are positioned in the academy, we can begin to work towards a transformation of the values and cultures of academic life. We can speak and write into existence (Davies, 1997) a culture which facilitates and celebrates, rather than works against, multiple positions of academic “success”. Of course, one issue for consideration is whether a (feminist) political position is necessary to engage in acts of resistance, if it is to undo the gendered order, and to the development of a critical literacy. As Davies (1997) highlights, critical literacy is about more than merely opening up or recognising possibilities – it is about developing a critical, reflexive awareness of the seductive, appropriating, nature of discourses. It is about exploring the possibilities of discourse and language, whilst being able to ‘break its spell’ (Davies, 1997: 28). This can be a difficult task when an individual does not possess, or is not ‘offered [the] discursive tools’ (such as feminist poststructuralism) through which they might engage with and ‘choose between’ competing discourses (Davies, 1997: 25).

Equally, while I argue for a critical engagement with the multiple ways in which one can be a “successful academic”, I remain sceptically optimistic about the potential for change in the academy, particularly since the traditional system has often worked in the favour of those who are in a prime position to change it. Furthermore, as Acker and Feuerverger (1997) argue, while there are increasing cut backs in HE, it is unlikely – although not impossible – that reward systems and, I would argue, the ways of working in the academy, will change for the better. Nevertheless, I agree with Adams St Pierre (2000: 43) that the space within which we can resist and question discourse is ‘not at all insignificant’. We can ‘seek out the inconsistencies of outlook and practice, find out where there is the greatest ambivalence, and push on that’ (Apter (1993: 80). Thus, while we cannot escape the belief systems within which the academy operates, we can certainly shift them ‘in a direction more to our liking’ (Hekman, 1999).

It has been argued that while mothers' identities in the academy are constructed through being positioned within the many discourses, including those of the "successful academic" and the "good mother", there is a room for resistance and, ultimately, transformation of dominant discourse. I have argued that the application of a discursive framework can add greatly to our understanding, on a personal and wider level, of the ways in which discourse acts to position us/others, but equally the ways in which we/others are positioning/positioned. In developing a greater awareness of discursive positioning, we begin to develop a critical literacy which, together with aspects such as flexible working arrangements and equal opportunities legislation, might begin to make real changes needed to develop a truly inclusive academy.

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Table I. Discourses identified in Susan's narrative

Discourses	Narratives
A "proper girl"/ woman	Looks; glamour; interest in make-up, hair and clothes; sexy; concentrating on home and family; caring.
A good mother	Selfless; subordinate; caring; mothering; giving; emotional; able to cope; cooking "proper" meals; concentrating on home and family; it's okay to have a "nice little job", but it can't take precedence.
A proper female partner	Selfless; subordinate; caring; mothering.
A successful academic	Focused; has a plan; puts academic life first; probably doesn't have a family, or has a non-career-minded partner; publishing/ producing; selfish.
Working mother	Selfish; putting their interests before those of their child but also working to support her child; independent; has a life outside of the home.
Career woman	Independence; mobility; intellectuality; strength and confidence; selfish.
In/Equality of men and women	Women and men <i>should</i> be equal, but in everyday life, they're not; women give more; women always end up with the caring role; men can pursue their career without worrying about others; no-one worries when men devote time to their careers, it's natural; when women devote time to their careers, they are seen as neglecting their caring role.
Superiority of women/ inferiority of men	Women are better at coping/ juggling and "multi-tasking"; women give more and get more back; men are "useless"; women are "nicer".
Subordination of women/ power of men	Women clean and tidy up; women carry out the sandwiches for lunchtime meetings and are left to clear up at the end; women cook; when men cook, women still end up cleaning up afterwards; women care for the house, their partner and their child, while men watch the TV or pursue their career.