# Is Your Child's Brain Potential Maximized?: Mothering in an Age of New Brain Research[1]

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**ABSTRACT**

Claims about the potential of early education and stimulation to enhance brain capacity have recently gained a prominent place in child rearing advice. This paper places the discourse that surrounds the new imperatives in its historical and sociological contexts and examines its implications for the experience and social expectations of mothers. In this light, the connections to the trend of increasingly child-centred and intensive parenting are explored as is the way in which these current claims fit within a neoliberal rationality where individual self-management, self-enhancement, and personal responsibility are seen as key.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Les affirmations au sujet du potentiel de l'éducation et de la stimulation précoce rehausse la capacité du cerveau ont récemment gagné une place permanente dans les conseils sur l'éducation des enfants. Cet article place le discours qui entoure les nouveaux impératifs dans les contextes historiques et sociaux et les attentes sociales qu'ont les mères. Sous cette lumière les liens entre les tendances du parentage intensif qui est de plus en plus centré sur l'enfant sont explorés en tant que façon par lesquelles les affirmations courantes sont intégrées à l'intérieur d'une rationalité néo -libérale ou l'auto -gestion de l'individu, le rehaussement de soi, et la responsabilité personnelle sont perçus comme étant clé.

Sociologists and historians have charted dramatic changes in our understandings of children's needs and mothers' responsibilities in western European and North American societies over the last half of the 20th century. During this time child rearing ideology and advice has become increasingly child-centred, mothers' rights and responsibilities have been increasingly defined in terms of children's needs, and mothers have been seen as increasingly responsible for their children's cognitive and psychological development (Hays 1996; Richardson 1993; Weiss 1978). Children are now viewed, as Sharon Hays points out, as requiring constant nurture and intensive parenting - parenting that is "emotionally demanding, financially draining, and labor-consuming" (1996, 4).

Theories in developmental psychology have played a large part in this ideological shift and John Bowlby's work (1969) on maternal deprivation and attachment has proved to be particularly significant. More recently, however, a new strand of developmental psychology has emerged that has built upon the notion of attachment and makes use of what is called "new brain research." Throughout the 1990s, claims about the potential of early education and appropriate stimulation to enhance brain capacity in children have gained a new and prominent place in child rearing advice literature and discourse. These changes in the social understandings of infant and child development have significant implications for mothers, with whom the majority of responsibility for child outcomes is placed. The ways in which these changes intersect with neoliberal governance also have implications for the extent to which children are positioned as a social versus a private responsibility within public policy.

What follows is an examination of some of the more prominent parental education campaigns and policy initiatives that draw on the discourse of "new brain research." While much of the material discussed has a national or international focus, particular attention is paid to one of the larger policy initiatives in Canada to incorporate the dictums of new brain research - the Ontario provincial government's development of a large network of Early Years Centres in the province.[2] Placing the discourse that surrounds these initiatives in historical and sociological contexts, I will look at the ways in which the claims made and advice given build upon ideological trends in expert advice to mothers, as well as connections with the political ideology of neo-liberalism. This new parenting discourse as currently situated, I argue, further

intensifies the work of mothering at a point in history when parents are struggling to find adequate time and resources for their families. While it amplifies the social importance of child potential and thus mothering behaviour, it also fits easily with an understanding of children as a private responsibility. As such it has the potential to lend legitimacy to increasing social scrutiny of families (and mothers in particular), while doing little to increase social support for the needs of parents and families.

## NEW BRAIN RESEARCH AND CHILD REARING ADVICE

Over the 1990s child rearing advice literature, media articles on parenting, and educational material given out to new parents[3] has increasingly focussed on the importance of early, ample, and appropriate stimulation for shaping not only a child's personality but also their brain capacity and future intellectual potential (Bruer 1999; Castaneda 2002, 46 - 82; Nadesan 2002). Parents are told that this research is new, exciting, and that their behaviour as parents during their child's early years is crucial in determining how intelligent and successful their children will be in the future.

Public awareness and parental education in this regard have been spear-headed in the United States (US) by the Reiner Foundation with their "I Am Your Child" campaign. Materials from this campaign are widely distributed to the public and to parents in Canada by The Canadian Institute of Child Health. In Canada, The Invest in Kids Foundation has also played a key role. It has sponsored "The Years Before 5" campaign and co-sponsored "Get Set for Life: Making the Most of Your Child's First Five Years." Invest in Kids has also, along with The Toronto Early Years Project, and Ontario Early Years, co-sponsored the "What a Child Learns Before Age 6 Lasts Forever" public awareness campaign. These foundations sponsor research, organize multi-media campaigns and produce resource kits and literature which are widely distributed to new parents. By 2003, 400,000 "Years Before 5" Resource Kits had been distributed to individuals and organizations across Canada, with the majority being targeted at parents of newborns. In Ontario, plans for a network of Early Years Centres were initiated by the provincial government in 2001. By early 2003 there were forty-two Early Years Centres operating across the province with an additional 61 scheduled to open during the year. These centres grew out of The Early Years Study (1999) commissioned by Premier Mike Harris and co-authored by Margaret McCain and J. Fraser Mustard, and make use of funds from the Federal government's National Children's Agenda. They offer information, education and referrals for parents of pre-schoolers in order to help them better understand and promote their children's intellectual, emotional, and physical development.

Several common themes characterize the advice and material produced through these campaigns and projects. Parents are told that most brain development occurs before age 5 and that children's experiences during these early years will "actually affect the way children's brains become 'wired'" (Invest In Kids 2001; Reiner Foundation 1997). Children's brains can become wired in "good or bad" ways depending on the types of experiences they have (Hassen 1999, 6). This wiring, which occurs through the development of neural connections in the brain, can be enhanced through repeated experiences of the proper type, referred to in Reiner Foundation's *The First Years Last Forever* pamphlet as "appropriate activation." Appropriate activation involves both ensuring secure attachment and providing ample cognitive stimulation. The absence of appropriate activation or the wrong type of experiences can result not only in children who have more difficulty intellectually, but who may also have behavioural, emotional and social problems.

Parents are told that the early years are pivotal to their children's later success. What opportunity is lost then cannot be easily made up, and the way that children are cared for during this time will have a "profound impact on how productive, resilient, compassionate and confident they will be as adults" (Invest in Kids 2001). As is stated in *The First Years Last Forever* pamphlet, "the brain operates on a 'use it or lose it' principle" and "early experiences help to determine brain structure, thus shaping the way people learn, think, and behave for the rest of their lives" (Reiner Foundation 1997). Invest in Kids has trademarked a slogan that sums up this sentiment: "The Years Before Five Last the Rest of Their Lives." The early

years are, then, a crucial a time for parents to "maximize" their children's brain potential. Castenada (2002, 78) notes that the computer metaphor that pervades current child development discourse, with its emphasis on "electronic circuitry and 'hard wiring'" conveys both the exciting potential of appropriate stimulation and the irreversible consequences of inappropriate or absent stimulation: "Without the proper input, the necessary 'wiring' will not occur."

The claims being made in these campaigns are presented as scientific fact. The phrase "research tells us" commonly prefaces advice to parents as it does in Invest In Kids (2001) Years Before Five resource kit. In 1999 Invest in Kids also sponsored a national poll of 1,600 parents of preschoolers to assess the extent of parental knowledge of early years research and child development. As they state in a document highlighting the findings (Invest in Kids 1999): "The scientific information exits. But do parents know?" They found that less than half of those surveyed did not agree with the following statements: "If a baby does not receive appropriate stimulation - like being read to, played with, or touched and held, his or her brain will not develop as well as the brain of a baby who does receive these kinds of stimulation," and "the things a child experiences before the age of three will greatly influence his or her ability to do well in school" (Invest In Kids 2002). The conclusion drawn by the foundation and presented to the media was not that parents disagreed with such assessments but rather that "parents don't know the most basic facts about fostering healthy development" (Gadd 1999, A3; Invest in Kids 1999).

These "facts," however, have been the topic of some debate in the scientific community. The most notable, but not the only, critique has been John Bruer's (1999) *The Myth of the First Three Years*. Bruer, a philosopher of science and president of the McDonnell Foundation which financially supports developmental research, claims that the brain research being used to back up the developmental claims is not new; rather it has just been newly appropriated by some developmental and educational psychologists, in ways that Bruer suggests are questionable. For instance, he points out that the notion that there are certain windows of brain development opportunity that, once closed, can never again be reopened, is based on research conducted on vision development and cannot be extrapolated to other types of developmental experiences. The research on synaptic loss and gain has also been around for some time. Bruer and others also note that there is little evidence that providing extra enrichment in childhood results in better brains in adulthood. Synaptic loss, which begins in childhood, is a normal part of brain development and maturation. As Bruer notes:

> Although the phrase "use them or lose them" is a popular one in discussing synapses and the brain, it gives a misleading overall description of what goes on during normal brain development. It tends to conceal that losing synapses is also part of the maturation process for our brain circuitry and that such loss is normal, inevitable and beneficial.
>
> (1999, 85)

Jerome Bruner, professor of psychology at New York University, notes that much of the concern about stimulating children in order to enhance brain development has its roots in the post-war studies of severe deprivation and this research cannot be extrapolated to children in the average North American home. In his words, "most kids have plenty of stimulation, and there is no credible evidence that higher-pressure, more 'enriched' early environments produce 'good' effects in the sense that drastically deprived ones produce bad effects" (2000, 30). Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl (1999), authors of *The Scientist in the Crib*, echo similar concerns: "The new scientific research doesn't say that parents should provide special 'enriching' experience over and above what they experience in everyday life. It does suggest though that a radically deprived environment could cause damage" (Bruner 2000, 28). Finally, as Bruer notes, the claim that "the first years last forever" is based largely on attachment theory's claims about the importance of the early years and attachment research itself has had difficulty predicting behaviour at later ages based on infant attachment at one year unless child rearing conditions remain stable in the interim. In his words, "when parenting, childcare, or family conditions change dramatically, for better or for worse, early experiences do not predict later behavior"(1999, 57-58).

My aim here is not to establish the truth or falsity of the scientific claims being made, but rather to suggest that, like other scientific claims, they are not beyond question and are influenced by the taken-for-granted social understandings that characterize the dominant discourses of the time. Diane Eyer (1992, 8-9) has suggested that the zeal with which early mother-infant bonding was accepted and adopted by the medical and social work community and the public in general, even after the notion was widely discredited in the scientific community, had to do with the fact that it fit within "a deeply embedded ideology regarding the proper role of women." Similar arguments have been put forward to explain the deep and long lasting impact of the later debunked scientific claims regarding maternal deprivation and overprotection (Ehrenreich and English 1978; Richardson 1993, 47). As Ehrenreich and English (210) point out, the fact that studies failed to support David Levy's theory of maternal overprotection mattered little; "'overprotection' had entered the vocabulary of the reading public and front-line child raising experts."

The ways in which neuroscience is currently being interpreted and popularized through developmental psychology and expert parenting advice builds on past scientific work and social understandings of motherhood. And it, like previous research in child development, is also interconnected with some dominant discourses of the day and has implications for women's experiences as mothers.

## CHILD-CENTRED AND INTENSIVE PARENTING

Several historians have documented trends in child-rearing advice over the last half of the 20th century that saw a move away from discipline, schedules and routines toward a more permissive and child-centred approach (Arnup 1994; Ehrenreich and English 1978; Richardson 1993; Weiss 1978). Mothers have become increasingly responsible for their children's emotional and cognitive well-being and mothering has become an increasingly intensive task.[4] Research and theories in developmental psychology were key to this shift. Bowlby's theories on maternal deprivation and mother-child attachment followed on the heels of a state-led war in Canada on infant and child mortality that, with the help of medical science, cast mothers as both villains and the saviours of the nation's children. As both Arnup (1994, 149 - 52) and Comacchio (1993, 145) note, it was maternal ignorance and lack of moral responsibility rather than poverty that was targeted in the child welfare campaigns, and it was increasingly assumed during this time that women should embrace "motherhood as a full time occupation" and follow the advice of child-rearing experts judiciously.

It was within this context, then, that Bowlby's theories on maternal deprivation and attachment emerged. Focussing on the emotional and psychological trauma associated with severe deprivation, Bowlby suggested that for normal child development to occur, young children needed a loving mother, or mother substitute "as an ever present companion" (Eyer 1992, 50). These theories were incorporated in the child advice literature of the mid-century, and mothers' responsibilities expanded to include not only a child's physical well-being and proper moral development, but its emotional and psychological health as well. Mother's needs increasingly receded into the background in the child-centred advice literature that emerged, and the idea that caring for children was a full-time job took on "the force of a dictum" (Arnup 1994, 149; Richardson 1993, 40; Weiss 1978). As Arnup states, "these post-war theories made the mother a virtual prisoner in her own home, unable to go out even to shop, lest the baby need to nurse or the two-year old suffer 'separation anxiety'"(149).

Despite numerous criticisms (Belsky and Cassidy 1994; Bruer 1999, 57; Eyer 1992, 67-68) attachment theory continues to hold a prominent and legitimate place in developmental psychology. Although most adherents to attachment theory no longer believe that continuous and uninterrupted contact between mother and infant is necessary for secure attachment to form, Bowlby's ideas, and the advice literature that grew out of them, continue to figure strongly in social understandings of proper maternal behaviour. The advice literature of today continues to emphasize the psychological and cognitive importance of intensive mothering despite the fact that most mothers are now in the paid work force. Hays (1996, 8) describes the good mother of the present as one who puts her child's needs above her own, seeks out expert advice, and expends a

good deal of energy carrying out this advice in ways that are "emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive and financially expensive." The ideological force of exclusive and intensive motherhood is illustrated in Ranson's (1999) study of professional women who had recently become mothers. Ranson found that almost all of the women judged themselves in terms of the ideology of exclusive, full-time motherhood, regardless of their current employment situation. Most agreed that full-time motherhood was what was best for children and many went out of their way to define themselves as full-time mothers even though they were working part time, engaged in self-employment initiatives in the home, or spending significant time in volunteer or recreational activities that did not include their children.[5]

The advice that builds on brain research further emphasizes the importance of time spent talking and singing to, playing with, and teaching children. This is well-illustrated in the posters that accompany the "What a Child Learns Before Age 6 Lasts Forever" public awareness campaign, where a set of three posters depicting positive parenting behaviour encourages parents and caregivers to "Comfort them now," "Play with them now," and "Teach them now."[6] Depicted in the images and advice that accompanies this campaign is intensive, one-on-one time spent with a child engaging in playful, fun, stimulating, and encouraging behaviour. As Kathy Pitt notes in her recent analysis of family literacy programmes that teach mothers how to teach their children, "it is the role of the good mother to be constantly available for the child to develop" (Pitt 2002, 64).

The focus in child rearing advice on brain development thus increases pressure to conform to a model of intensive parenting. It is now not only children's emotional and psychological well-being that are at stake if parents neglect to spend adequate time with their children, but also their full potential in terms of brain development. This is happening at a time when we have unprecedented numbers of mothers of small children in the workforce and family poverty is deepening. Seven in ten two-parent families with preschoolers are now dual income families, up dramatically from previous decades, and 55% of single mothers work in the paid labour force (Vanier Institute 2000, 87). Hours of work for full-time employees have also been increasing over the 1990s. Duxbury and Higgins (2002, 47) report that in 1991 one in ten full-time workers worked 50 hours or more per week. By 2001 this had increased to one in four workers. Reported stress levels among working parents are at an all-time high with close to one half of mothers reporting high work/life conflict. (Duxbury, Higgins and Johnson 1999). Statistics Canada estimates that two thirds of full-time employed parents are dissatisfied with the balance between their job and home life, citing too much time on the job and not enough time with family (Silver 2000, 26). During the 1990s, family poverty also continued to be an issue for a very large portion of Canadian families. Campaign 2000 reported that one in three Canadian children lived in poverty for at least one year between 1993 and 1998, and by 1998 the average poor family in Ontario lived almost $10,000 below Statistics Canada's low income cutoffs (Campaign 2000, 2001). It appears, then, that lack of time and resources have put increasing stress on families during the same period that child rearing advice has increased expectations of parental involvement.

Like previous child rearing advice the "new brain research" advice tends (with some noted exceptions in Hassen 1999) to ignore real life problems and assume that parents have unlimited time to spend with their children. The fact that parents may be stretched for time, energy and resources, and that other children may also be demanding their attention is not acknowledged. The demands facing a single, poor mother with more than one preschool child do not appear in the posters and pamphlets that characterize these campaigns, and mothers' needs in general receive little recognition here.

## NEW BRAIN RESEARCH AND THE DISCOURSE OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Many political theorists argue that a neo-liberal rationality currently prevails in western European and North American societies as governments withdraw from welfare state structures and reconstruct themselves in ways that support market-led global capitalism (Burchell 1993; Fairclough 2000; Rose 1996). There is an emphasis in the discourse that surrounds this shift on what is said to be the powerful, unpredictable, rapidly-evolving, and complex nature of the global economy. There is also a narrative of progress and

opportunity, but progress which requires flexibility, adaptability, and a society which is unfettered by government regulation and unaffordable social programmes (Fairclough 2000, 148). The individual is positioned here as free, autonomous, and able to care for him or herself - in Alan Petersen's words (1996, 48) "the entrepreneurial individual." Greater emphasis is thus placed in this discourse on the ability of individuals to adapt to change, to engage in self-enhancing behaviour, and to manage the risk they pose to themselves and thus reduce their potential burden on society (Donzelot 1991; Robertson 2000, 231). Nowhere is this clearer than in the discourse that surrounds health and health risk. As Petersen (1996, 48-49) states, "neo-liberalism calls on the individual to enter into the process of their own self-governance through the processes of endless self-examination, self-care, and self-improvement," and "there has been a clear shift away from the notion that the state should protect the health of individuals to the idea that individuals should take responsibility to protect themselves from risk."

Many of the taken-for-granted understandings that underlie the parenting advice based on new brain research also mesh with the tenets of neo-liberalism. Linda Blum (1999, 3& 50), among others, has noted a seeming shift in child rearing ideology toward "maximizing" and perfecting children (Wall 2001, 603). This shift, which is certainly evident in the brain development discourse, is tied to angst about a swiftly changing world and the need for children to develop skills as individuals to deal with this. Scattered throughout the Years Before Five Resource Kit (Invest in Kids 2001) are questions to parents such as: "Will a child be well-grounded or blown away by the winds of change?", "Will a child lie and vegetate or blossom intellectually?", and "Will a child crawl along through life, or spread his wings and soar?" In the Ontario Early Years Study, which was designed to influence government policy makers, optimizing brain development in children is tied to creating a smarter, more competent, and competitive workforce for the future (McCain and Mustard 1999). As is stated in this report (2):

> The entrants to the workforce of 2025 will be born next year. From this generation will come a key factor in determining the wealth base of Ontario in 25 years.... Ensuring that our future citizens are able to develop their full potential has to be a high priority for everyone. It is crucial if we are to reverse "the real brain drain."

Children are cast as the potential self-reliant entrepreneurs of the future, or as Nadesan (2002) suggests, "entrepreneurial infants." Such representations are, in many ways, reminiscent of early 20th century child-saving discourse which linked children's physical health to the health of the nation (Arnup 1994; Comacchio 1993). This time, however, it is children's brain potential that holds the key to national prosperity.

Fairclough (2000, 148) notes that the discourse of neo-liberalism constructs "social problems as problems for individuals." In parenting advice that promotes brain development social problems are assumed to stem from individual failures on the part of caregivers and solutions are assumed to involve individual improvement in this regard. Issues such as behavioural and learning problems in children, criminal behaviour in adults, and teen suicide are linked to the failure of parents to influence positive brain development in the early years (Invest In Kids 1999; McCain and Mustard 1999). Rob Reiner in addressing the April 1997 US White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning stated: "If we want to have a real significant impact...on reduction in crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, child abuse, welfare, homelessness, and a variety of other social ills, we are going to have to address the first three years of life. There is no getting around it. All roads lead to Rome" (Bruer 1999, 8). At a later address to the US National Association of Counties he stated, "whether or not a child becomes a toxic or non-toxic member of society is largely determined by what happens to the child in terms of his experiences with his parents and primary caregivers in those first three years" (Bruer 1999, 10). As Casteneda (2002, 77) notes, within "this neurologically defined world...the child becomes the site of human potential as well as its failure, and in the process parents….are assigned a new burden of responsibility for how children 'turn out.'"

In terms of solutions to these problems the major focus in all of the campaigns mentioned is to educate parents about the importance of spending

much quality time with their children, and providing proper stimulation. Early Years Centres in Ontario, for example, don't offer state-funded pre-school services. Instead they offer educational and referral services to parents of preschoolers. Their services consist of helping parents "teach (their) child to read, get ready to be a parent if (they) are going to have a baby, learn new parenting skills, (and) meet the unique needs of (their) family by providing information about other community programs" (www.ontarioearlyyears.ca).

The focus on educating parents fits well with a model of individual responsibility and privatized parenting. It does not require governments to re-invest in the welfare state and design policy to alleviate poverty, provide affordable housing and child care services, and improve employment practices. Indeed, as the Ontario government spent money researching and developing early years centres, they also cut back funding to social assistance by close to 30%, repealed rent controls, opted out of responsibility for social housing, and drastically cut funding to licensed child care centres (Ontario Campaign 2000, 2000). Of the $114 million federal dollars made available to the Ontario government in 2001/02 to promote "early childhood development, learning and care" only 18% was spent on Early Years Centres. None of this money was allocated to regulated child care (Campaign 2000, 2002).

Positioning child outcomes as an individual responsibility and reducing social supports, while at the same time accentuating the social importance of these outcomes, has significant implications for the experience of mothers who still predominate as primary caregivers. Furthermore, it is working class and poor mothers in particular who are more likely to both suffer from lack of social support and be the primary targets of increased scrutiny and rehabilitation efforts (Nadesan 2002, 422; Pitt 2002). It is noteworthy that since 1996 the number of children apprehended by Ontario's child welfare system has increased by about 60% (Trocmé et al 2002, 1). The reasons cited for this increase include welfare cutbacks, an increase in reports, decreasing community supports for families, and a revision of the Child and Family Services Act which standardized risk assessment and made clear that the best interest of children, not families, are paramount (Chen 2003, 211; Trocmé et al. 2002). This strongly suggests that while governments may not be prepared to invest socially in families with children, they are prepared to increase scrutiny and control in an effort to ensure that parents fulfill their individual responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

A recognition of the fact that parents perform a valuable function for society in producing and rearing the next generation is implicit in the various early years campaigns. However, rather than acknowledging that society thus has a responsibility to support parents in this endeavour and that parents are encountering increasing structural difficulties in doing this, the focus on educating parents reconstructs the problems children are facing as problems within the family. In so doing, it adds to an already long list of individual parental responsibilities, most of which fall primarily on the shoulders of mothers.

It is interesting that in the Invest in Kids' 1999 parent survey about half of parents surveyed thought they did not receive enough emotional and practical support when they first became parents and only 40% agreed that Canada valued young children (Invest in Kids 2002). Valuing children means valuing families, and supporting families involves a social commitment based on a recognition of the important and difficult social task parents perform. It involves more than simply educating mothers so that they can optimize their child's future intelligence, adaptability and self-sufficiency. While it is possible that the early years material could be used strategically in the struggle to decrease family poverty, and increase quality child-care and community support services for families, it also fits well within a neo-liberal rationality that promotes individual responsibility and privatized parenting over investment in social welfare programmes. As such, it reflects and participates in a cultural shift that has seen an expansion of the responsibilities and public scrutiny of mothers without a concomitant increase in social support for families.

## ENDNOTES

1. I would like to thank Bonnie Fox, Gail Currie, and the anonymous reviewers for *Atlantis* for their valuable comments and insightful suggestions.

2. While most provinces in Canada produce some publicly-funded parental education material that incorporates the discourse of "new brain research," claims made about programmes in Ontario are not necessarily generalizable to other provincial programmes in Canada.

3. Although the term "parent," rather than "mother," is widely used in the advice literature, it is still mothers who are the primary consumers of this advice. Despite modest increases in the time that fathers are spending with young children, mothers continue to take the majority of responsibility for childcare, and this is especially true in the pre-school years targeted by new brain research (Johnson, Lero, and Rooney 2001, 12; Silver 2000).

4. This is not to suggest that mothers in the past spent little time or energy on their children. Indeed during most of the 20th century Canadian mothers had more children to care for than they do today. The expectations surrounding the type of parental care have arguably changed, however.

5. As Luxton (1997) illustrates, it is important to acknowledge that class differences no doubt have an impact on the ways in which this ideology is experienced. In her study of working class parents in Hamilton she found that many mothers did "share the ideological position that only mothers provide the best care." For others, however, economics and concern for quality care were bigger factors in their decisions to stay home with their children (172). These are concerns that the upper-middle class women in Ranson's study were less likely to share.

6. These posters can be viewed at the Invest in Kids web site at www.investinkids.ca.

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# The Cook's Wife

The cook's wife
cleared tables,
straightened ash
trays, swashed
out glasses
with a wet rag
then dried
the dishes
with a cotton towel
she had ironed
the night before.

The cook's wife
met the fishermen
at the dock, bargained
for the best fish,
filled her apron
with fish smell
and the blood of fish
as she cleaned
and scaled them,
cut them into stew.

The cook's wife
handed plates
from the cook
to the waiters,
her arms strong
and wide, extensions
of the cook's
arms, of the cook
who wanted to take the food
to the tables himself.

The cook's wife
swept the floor
at night, cleaned
the tabletops.
The cook's wife
cleaned up
after everyone
was asleep.

The cook's wife
joined the cook
in bed. The cook's wife
was the cook's,
his heart beating
into the night
this steady
strong beating
to which she woke.

*Donna J. Gelagotis Lee*