

The Messy Work of Child Care: Addressing Feminists' Neglect of Child Care Workers

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ABSTRACT

In studies of extra-family child care, feminists have generally attended to the needs and experiences of mothers purchasing care and, to a lesser extent, to the needs of children in care. Feminists have tended to neglect the experiences of women who care for children as a subject of research. This paper argues that the study of child care as work can contribute to the growing challenge to academic feminism's focus on relatively privileged women. Such research simultaneously widens the frame of the lens of study to a larger group of women and challenges dichotomous frames of research and interpretations.

RÉSUMÉ

Les études sur les services de surveillance d'enfants démontrent que les féministes se sont penchées plus sur les expériences des mères et les frais déboursés pour ces services et moins sur les besoins des enfants qui reçoivent ces services. Dans leurs recherches, les féministes ont négligé d'évaluer l'expérience des femmes qui offrent ces services. Le présent article donne comme argument qu'une étude des services donnés aux enfants en tant que travail peut contribuer à remettre en question l'orientation des féministes universitaires qui s'adressent aux femmes relativement privilégiées. Une telle recherche élargirait le champ d'étude à un plus grand groupe de femmes tout en remettant en question les dichotomies qui caractérisent les structures de recherche et d'interprétation.

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS, BEGINNING with mothering and extending to the many other nurturing roles filled by women, are usually painted as either women's downfall and central oppression or as women's unique path to power and salvation. Feminists have tended to argue either that women should reject these roles and the oppression that goes with them (Firestone, 1970) or that, in articulating and developing these roles, women find one of their best chances of changing and im-

proving the world (Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989; Tong, 1989). Gilligan's (1982) work on women's moral development celebrates women's connectedness and poses it as an alternate and potentially superior model of moral growth (see also Belenky et al., 1986). As understanding of women's relationships to nurturing emerges and continues to evolve (e.g., Abel & Nelson, 1990; Baines, Evans & Ney-smith, 1991), nurturing can become a more legitimate part of the agenda of feminists with-

out either slipping into the dangers of essentialism or dominating the feminist agenda or women's daily lives (Fuss, 1989).

For a number of reasons, the analysis of child care work offers the possibility of finding this middle ground. The very existence of extra-family child care asserts that mothering does not have to be a woman's exclusive full-time occupation,¹ and that children can be nurtured effectively by more than one person and in non-exclusive relationships. The existence of extra-family care contradicts the central ideology of motherhood. When women can, in their daily lives, be mothers without sacrificing or subordinating other valued dimensions of themselves, the all-or-nothing approach to motherhood is challenged. Furthermore, the relationship of paid child care workers to the children in their care (as in the case of many other paid caring relationships) expresses, from the other side as it were, the notion that individuals can care deeply and effectively for children without being their biological mothers (or fathers), without having exclusive or even primary responsibility for their well-being and development, and without harming the children. Viewed from both the perspective of the mother and the paid child care worker, child care itself embodies the notion that caring and nurturing can be less than full-time and exclusive and still be caring nurturing.

Spelman (1988), among others, has argued that dominant feminist theory's search for a theoretically consistent explanation of women's subordination has stifled awareness of the need to study women's experiences rather than "woman's experience" and has unwittingly replicated the dualisms of patriarchal structures. This article participates in the growing challenge to a feminism that ignores difference by investigating the contributions the study of child care as work can make to the under-

standing of women's experiences and to the development of feminist theory.² (Although I recognize that children are always cared for by their parents or guardians, in this article, my primary interest is in extra-family child care — care provided by someone other than a member of the child's immediate family — and I use the term child care here to mean extra-family child care.) In the first part of this article, I will describe the ways feminists have tended to talk and write about child care. In the second part, I will explore what feminism has to gain by addressing child care as interesting and theoretically important work.

Feminist Approaches to Child Care

Feminists have been very interested in child care; it facilitates women's participation in paid work and it affects family dynamics. Child care also has the potential to provide children with non-traditional gender models and to nurture their growth and social development (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987). What feminists have largely failed to do so far is to pay adequate attention to child care as work. In this section, I argue that academic work on child care reflects both an excessive focus on the experiences of a limited number of women and on the search for a grand theory to explain women's subordination. The focus of most academic studies on child care has represented the concerns of middle-class women who hire child care workers. These studies fail to represent the concerns of the women who are often situated differently given their race and class, and who do the work.³

Child care can be thought of as involving three principal sets of actors: the child, the child's parents, and the person caring for the child.⁴ In general, feminists have given most attention to the study of child care as a service for parents (particularly mothers), a secondary

glance to child care as a service for and experience of children, and very little attention to the study of child care as work. Child care workers, when they are mentioned at all, are usually mentioned as an afterthought or an aside; they are a necessary but not very interesting element of the issue. Feminists' attention to child care workers themselves is limited and largely restricted, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Nelson, 1990b), to an acknowledgement that those who care for others' children ought to be paid fairly.

Women have always worked inside their homes and out. Western industrial economies, in recognizing only work in the official economy and rewarding particular kinds of work with power, prestige and pay, and structuring "work" as an activity that takes place outside the home, have contributed to the need for extra-family child care. After the second world war, feminists responded to this structuring of work by arguing that moving into paid jobs was an essential step in the process of achieving women's equality (Hofferth & Moore, 1979; Kamerman, 1983). Child care became generally acknowledged as an important feminist issue at the time when white middle-class mothers began their exodus from the domestic roles of the 1950s into greater participation in the labour force. Lack of child care services and lack of public and employer funding and support for child care expressed and reinforced ideas about women's "proper role" in the home and the family. When feminists asserted the need for child care they asserted women's right to participate in employment, in public life and in roles not exclusively defined by their place in the family structure.

In the feminist discussions of child care in the 1960s and '70s, the picture of child care itself ranges from the flat and uninteresting to those texts which describe the work of caring for children as a monster, a dark image over-

shadowing women's lives and dominating their existence. It is something from which to escape and be liberated. In 1970, for example, Firestone called for the "freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available" (cited in Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 141). In most texts, the work of caring for children is discussed as if it is simple drudgery, something to be avoided if possible but not something to be analyzed. Freidan wrote in 1981 that "many feminists insist that the family was, and is, the enemy, the prime obstacle to women's achievement" (p. 95). A liberal view of equality for women suggests that women's traditional relation to employment and their children is an opposite of men's stereotypical roles. The role of child care is to release women from their limiting obligations to their children and free them to participate as equals in the (male) world of employment.

In later feminist analyses on child care, this argument became more complex. Child care centres and services, feminists argue, even where they are available, do not adequately meet the needs of employed mothers (Kamerman, 1985; Yeager & Strober, 1990). In particular, sick children and very young children may have needs which are not properly met by child care centres as they function in Canada and the United States. Finding care for children in the evenings, at night, and part-time (especially in centres) is more difficult than finding care for children during the standard work week (Lero, Goelman, Pence, Brockman & Nuttall, 1992). Recently, more analysts have recognized the importance of care that respects and nurtures children's cultural heritages (Chud, 1985). As these unmet needs became more widely recognized, employers and governments were pressured to recognize employed mothers' needs and circumstances. From this grew demands for better child care: for flexible days for taking care

of sick children, for flexible schedules which accommodate children's school schedules, for maternity and child care leaves, and for employer- and government-sponsored child care.

This process illustrates the evolution of the dominant feminist perspective on child care. The first articulation of feminist positions in the 1960s was dominated by married white middle-class women who wanted to be liberated from the drudgery and the confinement of full-time child care (and housekeeping) so that they could participate in the labour force the way men did. Gradually, demands for simple equality gave way to demands for greater equity, and the needs of mothers in the workforce were pressed more forcefully. As the needs of employed mothers were highlighted, so too were the needs and responsibilities of employed fathers. Fathers were called upon to be more involved in child care — in both daily responsibilities and the care of sick and infant children.

Feminists also discuss child care from the point of view of children and their welfare. Mothers whose children are cared for by child care workers are concerned about the consequences for children. Psychologists (especially males) did much to fuel the fear in their theories of child development and "attachment" (Bowlby, 1973; Fraiberg, 1977; Packard, 1983). The result was a feminist literature that argued either, defensively, that child care did not harm children or, less frequently, that it was actually to their benefit.

Sandra Scarr (1984) melded the perspectives of mothers and children as she made the argument that women's participation in paid work is not necessarily in conflict with their children's welfare. After demonstrating that the modern form of the nuclear family is his-

torically and economically, rather than biologically or developmentally, determined, she discusses children's needs throughout their development and the ways that different kinds of extra-family care are likely to meet those needs. Even in 1988, however, Skold is still arguing that the interests of feminists and children conflict and challenge the still dominant idea that the only good care for children is full-time mother care. She demonstrates that "conflicts between them (feminists' and children's interests) result from the way in which work and family life are structured in our society" (p. 115). Suransky (1982) takes a more conservative view, arguing against the institutionalization of childhood and criticizing a number of child care settings in terms of the damage they do to children's developing sense of self and of themselves as competent actors in the world. Other feminists have advocated children's participation in child care as an opportunity for children to be exposed to progressive notions of gender roles, to preserve cultural heritages and to promote cross-cultural understanding (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 1989).

In these analyses of child care, the experience and work of caring itself is almost entirely neglected. Indeed, Suransky's description of the women caring for children in the settings she observed is so critical and sharp that very little sympathy for the women or understanding of the task is evident. In reflecting on interactions she saw at the "Lollipop Learning Center," a for-profit daycare, Suransky (1982) wrote:

I saw ... a gradual disintegration of shared child bonds, an erosion of play, a growing tide of alienation and social dislocation, an atmosphere of smoldering resentment and anger directed more frequently toward peers than towards the perpetrators of the cycle of violence — the staff. (p. 121)

Scarr discusses caregiver attributes, training, and the need for adequate pay in some depth but, except for occasional mention of the stress of caring for children in isolation (and, hence risks to children), she does not analyze the work of child care. Analyses which, like Skold's, Gaskell's and Chud's, emphasize the connection between quality of care and caregivers' pay, and between working conditions and status, provide beginning points through which the tension between affordable and available care and caregivers' experiences can begin to be addressed.

Demands for child care in order to facilitate mothers' employment, together with demands for high quality care, contributed to challenges to the structure of employment for both men and women and to the structure of the nuclear family. With increasing frequency, feminists have also realized that "freeing" some women from child care responsibilities necessarily implies transferring those responsibilities to others — who are also usually women. Feminists are usually quick to acknowledge that child care must be adequately compensated. Underpaid, overburdened workers do not provide quality care to children (Skold, 1988). A developing notion of sisterhood, of a movement committed to the welfare of all women has come to argue that whatever is oppressive about the work of child care should not merely be passed from more to less privileged women.

Feminists have more frequently demanded that child care workers be paid adequately than they have talked about the actual work of caring for children. Scholars discussing the implications of child care for women's employment generally limit their attention to the people actually providing the care to acknowledging their right to decent pay. Two well-worn examples, one from the U.S. and one from Canada, are repeatedly trotted out to

demonstrate indignation at how caring for children is undervalued. In the U.S., indignation is vented at the insensitivity and lack of depth of an occupational skill-rating guide which ranks the skills of child care workers below those of parking lot attendants (e.g., Skold, 1988, p. 124). In Canada, the ire-raising example is the comparison between the average pay of child care workers and the average pay of government employees caring for animals (e.g., Cooke, 1986).

Neither of these examples is pursued to their logical ends, that is, to questions about the real skills and tasks involved in caring for children. A more productive response to this irritation would be to investigate, as Jane Gaskell (1991) has done, the ways skill is socially constructed and the ways in which women's work is devalued. Women caring for children without pay — mothers caring for their own children — are also neglected or condemned by a literature which privileges women's employment in paid occupations. Critiques of child care workers' wages and working conditions, as with child-focused researchers' concern with quality of care, present an initial step in the construction of a more complex and complete picture of the significance of child care for understanding women's work.

The history of women's labour force participation and the consequent demand for child care is written primarily from the perspective of privileged white women. It neglects the view from elsewhere. It neglects, for example, the critical importance that Black feminists have attributed to the domestic realm as a site of resistance and strength. As bell hooks (1990) argues, the significance of "homeplace" for Black women and families is dismissed in the dominant feminist focus on the home as either politically neutral or a site of oppression:

Historically, black women have resisted white supremacist domination by working to establish homeplace. It does not matter that sexism assigned them this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom. (p. 44)

The meaning of domestic space and work is determined not by its domesticity per se but by the other structures and values within which it is embedded. Whether or not employment outside the family is liberating or constricting is likewise constructed, not predetermined. Salaff (1981) studied women working in Hong Kong and found that, in general:

the labor force participation of Hong Kong working daughters is invariably harnessed to realize ... family objectives ... the ability of the daughter to sell her labor power for a price does not attenuate the bonds of familialism. Ironically, wage labor-force participation has enabled close-knit families to reintegrate their daughters toil by incorporating their earnings and experiences as a promising means of attaining primary family goals. (pp. 258-259)

Ferree (1976) challenges the notion that women's reasons for entering paid labour are less complex than men's:

The fact that paid employment may be better able than housework to meet the non-financial needs of working-class women should not be taken to imply that these women are working "just for the fun of it." The economic necessity with which they are faced is real enough, but it ought not be allowed to disguise their equally real needs for social contact and self-esteem. (p. 433)

The meaning of any work is constructed by the situation in which it occurs; "the meaning and the oppressive nature of the 'housewife' role has to be understood in relation to the roles against which it is contrasted" (Spelman, 1988, p. 123).

As hooks and Spelman challenge the notion that the domestic sphere is necessarily a site of oppression, Sara Ruddick (1989) challenges the argument that caring for children is mindless. Her philosophical investigations of the nature and consequences of what she calls "maternal thinking," or thinking that arises from and is necessary to caring for children, is an invitation to feminists to consider the ways in which they have underappreciated the work of caring for children. She details the journey she took in coming to the realization of the importance of this kind of thinking.

However disenchanted I became with Reason, it did not occur to me that there was an intellectual life that had anything to do with mothering. I "thought" only when I had time to myself, put my children out of my mind, and did philosophy....

Now ... I and a few close friends found ourselves preoccupied with our children's conflicts and changes.... We started again, with each other and in long internal dialogue.

Could this "chattering," so unlike the philosophy in which I was trained, be "thinking"? Did I, did we, through endless telephone calls and late night coffees, create themes of a "discourse"? (p. 11).

The feminist literature has also recently included studies of the significance of the work of caring for children. In particular, Margaret Nelson's (1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b) studies of family care providers have brought a sensitive eye to understanding the daily work and lives of women who care for other women's children in their own homes. Saraceno (1984a)

has analyzed child care in terms of its potential to illuminate the impact of the public/domestic boundary in women's lives in Italy. Griffith and Smith (1991) have looked at how the work of mothers is necessary to the work of schools.

To summarize, the ways feminists have thought about child care mirror the ways they have thought about equality and reflect feminist theory's development, its contradictions and its dominant location in the experience of white middle-class women. Early attempts to theorize about care were premised on the liberal notion that women needed an opportunity to participate equally with men in the labour force. They were similarly grounded in an acceptance of the dominant devaluing of domestic tasks and the domestic sphere. As white middle-class women increasingly entered the labour force, the limitations of weekday formal child care were emphasized, and the difficulty of replacing women's unpaid domestic labour became evident. This coincided with and contributed to a feminist theory that recognized that simply placing women in "man's world" was an inadequate response to women's oppression. Women's participation in the labour force requires more than the provision of child care centres (though even that fundamental need is far from being met); it requires a restructuring of the labour market and of the allocation of labour within the family. Current feminist thought is recognizing that the focus on the experiences of white middle-class women provides an inadequate and limited account of what counts for "women." The current struggle over the exclusiveness within dominant feminist theory reveals the need to work against hitherto accepted dichotomizations of the world.

What Does the Study of Child Care Have to Offer?

Although earlier feminists found it necessary to struggle against the work and rewards of caring for children, feminism has now come of an age where it is appropriate and necessary to re-examine and value this work. Academic feminism, in privileging the experiences of a small group of white middle-class women, has perpetuated many of the structures and habits of thought it purports to challenge while simultaneously exposing its contradictions. One of the structures it criticizes but perpetuates is the tendency to divide humans into groups, and to designate one group as the "norm" and others as the undervalued, undifferentiated "other." The ability of such oppositional thinking to represent accurately the complexities of the world must continually be challenged (Moore, 1989; Spelman, 1988). It must be replaced by a more dynamic, complex and situated understanding.

To study the work of caring for children in North America is to explore the ideological power of a number of dichotomous constructs. Indeed, in itself, the notion of child care *as work* challenges standard definitions of what work is in our society. In the rest of this article, I will explore the limitations of the oppositional constructs which have been central to understanding the work of caring for children. The first and most important construct is the twinned notions of public/private and male/female. A second construct is the implicit notion of "white"/"other" in western feminist (and dominant western) thought. A third is the notion of a division between skilled and unskilled work. In the conclusion to this article, I argue that feminists would do well to examine their tendency to have an all-or-nothing relation to the experience and meaning of nurturing and mothering.

In the 1970s, anthropologists as well as theorists like Friedan and Firestone linked women's apparently universal subordination to their association with the bearing and rearing of children. Women were tied to the domestic realm while men were associated with the public realm in societies across the globe. Early anthropological theorists linked this female/male domestic/public dichotomy with other dichotomizations⁵ of the social and cultural world and the connection was interpreted as universally demeaning to the evaluation of women's lives. Because of their child care responsibilities in the domestic realm, women were attributed other generally devalued characteristics as well (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). More recent scholarship has argued that this application of the notion of a private/public dichotomy is an overgeneralization which distorts many women's lives by presenting them exclusively in the frame of white western women's experience (Moore, 1989; Rosaldo, 1980; Tom, in press). The power of the private/public frame shaping the form of women's oppression, however, remains.

Examining child care as work provides an excellent opportunity to explore, exploit and challenge the tension between the "private" and "public" realms. Caring for children belongs to the private; when this work is moved into the domain of the public — when it is carried out for pay rather than for "love" or when it is located in centres rather than homes — then the interactions of the individuals acting in those realms both demonstrate and challenge the usefulness of these symbolic dichotomizations of the social world. Other dichotomized notions tied to the notion of the public and private either do not work in this setting or are directly undermined by it. Women's paid work, as well as their unpaid work, has often consisted of a caring or nurturing element. In child care (as in other occupations

such as teaching, nursing and counselling), however, the notion that one "cares" for love and "works" for money is challenged since caring is being remunerated.

Margaret Nelson's important studies (1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b) of the work of mothers who provide family day care illustrate many of the ways in which the public and the private are confounded in the child care relationship. The mothers purchasing care and the mothers providing care looked alternately to the public (market) and the private (domestic) realms for frameworks for understanding and negotiating their relationships with each other and the children. These mothers chose different times to assert the primacy of the market or the domestic logic. Mothers purchasing care, for instance, were likely to assert the importance of the domestic/love ideology when they needed extra services from the providing mothers. Providing mothers, on the other hand, were likely to assert the primacy of the domestic when claiming their rights to feelings and rights about other women's children. This work provides one example of how the meanings of public and private shift according to the position and circumstances of the actors.

A thorough examination of the work of child care can contribute to current efforts to overcome the ethnocentric assumptions of dominant feminist thought. The study of child care to date has focused primarily on the needs of middle-class women seeking high-status jobs rather than on the experiences of the women (and few men) who care for their children. Child care workers do not fit the liberal image of achieving equality for women through participation in paid labour. The idea that paid jobs would help women to escape the drudgery and oppression of the domestic realm demeaned full-time homemakers, demeaned the struggles of women fighting oppression from within the domestic realm, and demeaned

the work of those who performed the jobs from which other women escaped. Only a limited number of women have access to employment which provides an income high enough to purchase the services of other women. When this model of "successful" women's employment is held up to represent women's work in general, paid work is valued over unpaid work and intellectual "clean" work is valued over the concrete work of running the world.

Looking at the work of caring for children for pay adds to the small but growing literature that recognized the multiplicity of ways in which women approach and understand paid and unpaid labour. Women's work is not simply constructed by its status as either paid or unpaid. The meaning of each woman's work is also constructed by the family constellations within which she works and lives, the social acknowledgement accorded her work, the impact of social structures (such as heterosexism, racism and classism), the relative economic rewards to her work, and her own personal history. Women do not seek employment for simple reasons; their reasons for doing so are as complex and as varied as men's (Ferree, 1976). Two women working side by side in ostensibly identical jobs may find vastly different meanings in their work depending on the other elements constituting the constellations of their lives.

At an even more basic level, looking at the work of child care brings to the centre of attention women who have often been neglected in feminism's focus on white middle-class women. The current phenomenon of nannies in Canada is a case in point. Many of the nannies come to Canada from less affluent countries, often leaving behind children of their own. They care for others' children in the hope of staying long enough to qualify for permanent residence status — and ultimately citizenship

— in Canada. Clearly, the experience of caring for others' children is shaped by cultural, gender, linguistic and social power.

The meaning of caring for others' children depends on the type of setting in which one provides the care as well as on the broader social, economic and cultural context. This presents a challenge to the notion of skill often used in the literature on work. Gaskell (1986) has demonstrated the difficulties in the way the notion of skill is used in discussions of women's work and the significance of the political power wielded by those groups that have successfully asserted the status of their tasks as skilled. An examination of the way in which child care work is understood and evaluated as "low skill" can add to the understanding of the political nature of skill.

It is clear that it is not the nature of the tasks women do that create women's oppression; rather, the lack of remuneration and power accorded those tasks and the symbolic load they carry create and perpetuate women's oppression — or might bring about their liberation (Moore, 1989). As long as feminists neglect the importance of those tasks, we are agreeing that the tasks themselves, rather than the social constructions of the tasks, are degraded and degrading.

Re-examining child care work also confronts common assumptions about the relationships between skill, education, status and power. In the setting of the child care centre, the significant knowledge is about children's growth and development. In general, child care workers have more formal education in child development than parents. However, in this setting, education about child development is not a clear and simple ace in child care workers' hands. The meaning of that education is interpreted according to the context; parents with more social power and longer association

with their children than child care workers may assert the supremacy of their understanding of their children's development, while parents with less social power may be doubly intimidated by child care workers' credentials and position of power over their children. Some settings can foster a sense of partnership between child care workers' more general knowledge of children's development and parents' intimate knowledge of their child, while others exacerbate and symbolically load the differences.

This power relationship is different in centres, family day care settings, and nanny services. In family day care, the power of formal knowledge about children may lie with either the parent or the provider. In the nanny relationship, parents may hold stronger claims to official knowledge when the nanny is an immigrant from a developing country. This contrasts sharply with the "British" model of the nanny in which the nanny had a clear claim to specialized knowledge and expertise in raising children. Socially sanctioned knowledge about child rearing changes over time and across settings and cultures.

There is yet another dimension which adds to the complexity of the picture of child care workers' relationship to knowledge and education: the debate over practical versus academic knowledge carried on within the child care field. Many in child care claim a "professional" model of their knowledge and practice, reaching for the social esteem and power of the acknowledged professions. Others in the field contest this definition of caregivers' knowledge and assert the primacy of experiential learning and the notion of a "gift" for working with children (Almy, 1988; Finkelstein, 1988). This debate is locked into a frame that opposes these two perspectives on the nature and authority of child care workers'

knowledge. Some child care workers frame their work as being a child's "other mother" while others frame their work in terms of being a teacher (Innes & Innes, 1984).

Conclusion:

The Challenges of Studying Child Care

Feminists need to study child care as women's work and not only as a service to employed mothers or an experience of children. Careful attention to the meaning of the work women do for pay in child care can constitute part of the pressure feminists are putting on the patriarchal structure of the private/public dichotomy. Research in child care offers feminists opportunities to illustrate the power of this ideological construct and to simultaneously point out its inconsistencies and contradictions. In capturing the construct "in action" and subjecting it to critical examination, we push against its power and begin to create alternative ways to understand, value and carry out women's paid and unpaid work.

Feminists need to study child care as work because the focus of feminist research must shift to include not only women who purchase child care services but those who provide the services as well. Feminists need to study child care because the work of child care offers us a firm place from which to stand in order to construct a critique of dominant definitions of skill and notions of the relation between education, skill and power in employment. An examination of child care is critical to feminist study of women's work. Feminist theory increasingly demands comprehensive, holistic pictures of women's lives. As we broaden the focus of the study of child care to include it as a work experience and not merely a support to employment, we grasp an opportunity to move toward a fundamental reconceptualization of women's work.

NOTES

1. Although Nelson (1990b) and Innes & Innes (1984) provide interesting evidence that many family care providers do indeed believe that the best caregiver for a child is the child's own mother.
2. I am grateful to Shauna Butterwick, Jane Gaskell, and Joan Hedrick for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to Richard Fairbanks and Steve Musson for their contributions to this work.
3. This article uses the terms commonly applied to the description of child care. Parental care is care provided by the child's own parents. Family care is care provided within a private home; usually this is care provided by a mother who cares for her own and others' children at the same time. Centre care is care provided in a child care centre by paid staff. Nanny care is care provided within the child's own home by a paid individual other than the child's parent. Other distinctions exist but do not affect the argument here (a critical one, for example, is between "trained" and "untrained" nannies).
4. The state and its agencies also play a significant, if more distantly felt, role in defining and providing care for children (Saraceno, 1984a, 1984b) but this is beyond the scope of this article.
5. For example, messy/clean, nature/culture, emotion/reason, detail/theory.

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