Parenthood Discourses: the Construction of Fatherhood and Motherhood in Parentcraft Literature

by

Jane Sunderland

1997
All rights reserved. This document is placed on the Internet solely in order to make it freely available to the wider research community. Any quotation from it for the purposes of discussion must be properly acknowledged in accordance with academic convention. The reproduction of any substantial portion of this document is forbidden unless written permission is obtained from the author. The use and reproduction of this document and any part of it is protected by the international laws of copyright.

© 1997 Jane Sunderland

*Editorial address:*
Centre for Language in Social Life
Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language
Bowland College,
Lancaster University,
Lancaster LA1 4YT
United Kingdom
Parenthood Discourses: the Construction of Fatherhood and Motherhood in Parentcraft Literature

The study of language and gender has for some years now been moving away from ‘gender differences’, and from corresponding debates about whether such differences are best approached theoretically through the ‘dominance’ or ‘cultural difference’ approach, towards the study of the construction of gender through a range of gendered discourses. In this article I hope to show how the gendered discourses evident in parentcraft texts contribute to the shaping of both fatherhood and motherhood - parenthood being one aspect of gender, and, importantly, of gender relations, but an aspect which has hitherto been underexplored.

I myself became a mother for the first (and only) time four years ago, and hence was in a good position to conduct a small-scale study of what contemporary parentcraft texts have to say to, and about, fathers and mothers. There are of course many older texts on childcare, such as those by Hugh Jolly (1975, 1977) and Benjamin Spock (many editions, from 1946 onwards (the most recent is 1992). In some ways these are predictable in what they say about fathers and mothers. On ‘How a Husband Can Help’, Jolly (1977) reads

Your husband can help by being useful with the baby and sympathetic about chaos in the house; by not expecting you to feel like a mother overnight when your past life has been spent in a totally different way; and by taking the initiative sometimes to prevent you from becoming a drudge who never wants to leave the house. When a woman does need help from her doctor in adjusting to the new life, it is disastrous for her husband to scoff. His role is to try to understand the stresses she feels when she suddenly becomes completely responsible for their child, and to offer her practical sympathy. Arranging for domestic help, buying her a washing machine, taking her out regularly - all can help (1977: 169).
And, from Spock:

Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother’s job entirely. But a man can be a warm father and a real man at the same time (1978: 41).

In other ways, however, these quotations are surprising, since at the time of their publication, the modern Women’s Movement was well underway.

Given the continuing changes in gender relations and gendered social practices at all sorts of levels, along with evidence that Anglo-American men’s involvement in childcare and housework is increasing (e.g. Ross Parke, 1996), it might be expected that more recent parentcraft literature might manifest rather different views of motherhood and fatherhood. And indeed Diane Richardson, in *Women, Mothering and Childrearing* (1993: 51), observes that “By the mid-1980’s ... most authors of childrearing advice books encouraged fathers to become more involved in the care of their children.”

By parentcraft literature, then, I mean texts on childcare written by professionals, such as doctors or midwives, for parents - mothers, fathers or both. Whether in book, booklet, brochure or magazine form, these texts are clearly written to constitute advice. They are often be described as manuals, or handbooks. Parentcraft texts can thus be seen as prescriptive texts, even if a range of prescriptions are there for the selecting from. And parents - especially, I would suggest, first time parents, will often consult such a text for advice, general or particular, especially in the early months of their child’s life.

**The data**
The source texts I have chosen data from (summarised on p. 5) are simply those that I was given by my doctor and local hospital when I was pregnant in 1993, those my partner and I bought ourselves, and those I received as presents, prior to and just after Emily’s birth. I am not saying I was a typical expectant mum, but certainly the literature I was given by members of the medical profession (*Pregnancy Book, Birth to Five, The Bounty Babycare Guide, the Bounty Health and Infant Feeding Guide, and Your First Baby*) would have been given to every expectant mother at that time who had informed her GP of her pregnancy and was visiting him or her, and/or a local hospital, regularly. The booklet ‘It’s Your Baby Too: a Guide for Fathers’ was also free and widely available, but may not have been given to or picked up by every mother and/or father.

I have not chosen to look at the whole of each source of data for what it says about motherhood and fatherhood, not only because of the immensity of such a task, but also because some parts will be much less relevant than others. For example, a section on babies’ ailments which refers to ‘parents’ and when a pronoun is needed, ‘you’, may not be very revealing - although it may make implicitly gendered recommendations which notably do not challenge gender roles, for example visiting the doctor on a weekday, traditionally something a ‘non-working’ woman would do rather than a working man.

I have instead decided to look at the treatment of two particular topics in these sources of data: those texts that refer or are addressed to fathers, and those that focus on expressing breast milk. (For those not familiar with this practice, it refers to the mother either manually or by means of a device called a breast pump expressing milk from the breast - with the option of saving this milk to be given to the baby later in a bottle.) A
further characteristic is that all texts focus on the care of young and very young babies - hence the focus on expressing breast milk.

References to fathers and expression breast milk were both principled choices of topics. Texts on fathers are interesting because texts on the care of newborn children can logically be written with no mention of the father at all, whereas, because of the possibility of breastfeeding, it is hard to imagine one which does not refer to the mother. References to the father - whether these are mentions of the father in passing, or whether they are sections entitled something like ‘Fathers’, ‘The Role of the Father’, or ‘For the Father’, which may even be addressed to him - are therefore worthy of investigation (1).

Second, why texts on expressing breast milk? I would regard it as salient if a text which gave reasons for expressing breast milk did not give as one of these the fact that the father can then play a role in feeding the baby - the purpose of which may be described as any of giving him pleasure, making him feel involved, ensuring he has some responsibility, allowing him to ‘bond’, or briefly freeing the breastfeeding mother so that she can have a few hours extra when she can choose whether or not to be with the baby. (Logically, in this respect, texts on bottle feeding could have played exactly the same role - but since bottle feeding tends to be a large topic, that would again have meant looking at what would have been an unmanageably large amount of data.)

This gave me eleven ‘advice’ texts, listed below (full references are in the Bibliography).

(1) Texts addressed or referring to fathers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Text addressed to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Home from hospital’ and ‘Helping with baby’</td>
<td><em>It’s Your Baby Too</em></td>
<td>fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dad Chat’</td>
<td><em>Your First Baby</em></td>
<td>fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The modern father’</td>
<td><em>Dr Miriam Stoppard’s New Babycare Book</em></td>
<td>both mothers and fathers (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How do you determine when bedtime should be?’</td>
<td><em>Nanny Knows best: How to Bring Up a Happy Child</em></td>
<td>‘… mothers, or for nannies of course, but mainly … mothers’ (p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The father’s role’</td>
<td><em>The Bounty Babycare Guide</em></td>
<td>distributed free to mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Accepting help’</td>
<td>‘Coping together’, in <em>M and M</em></td>
<td>‘the magazine for the mum-to-be and new mother’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Texts on expressing breast milk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Text addressed to?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Putting the baby to the breast’</td>
<td><em>Your First Baby</em></td>
<td>distributed free to mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Expressing your milk’</td>
<td><em>The Bounty Babycare Guide</em></td>
<td>distributed free to mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Coping with breast feeding’</td>
<td><em>Birth to Five</em></td>
<td>both mothers and fathers (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Expressing milk’</td>
<td><em>Pregnancy Book</em></td>
<td>both mothers and fathers (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How to express breast milk’</td>
<td><em>The Bounty Infant Health and Feeding Guide</em></td>
<td>distributed free to mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The unit of analysis, the ‘text’ in the charts above, is therefore a *selected extract*. I have however attempted to contextualise these extracts as far as possible by giving in the Appendix the whole of a section in which mention of the father, or of expressing breast milk, occurs.

**The analytical framework**
The analytical framework is textual analysis done with the assumption that language through its discourses has a role to play in actively constructing the social practices surrounding childcare, not merely reflecting these practices, and that by doing so it is specifically shaping *motherhood* and *fatherhood*, not just *parenthood*. I am regarding the grammar and vocabulary which realise these discourses as systems of *options* from which writers of parentcraft texts can select. I am also assuming that these options have contrasting or at least non-equivalent meanings, and that choices of forms, though not necessarily intentional, and certainly not conspiratorially-motivated, are meaningful (Norman Fairclough, 1992).

I thus hope to show that these extracts, through these language choices made by their authors, realise a *range of discourses*, and that these are gendered. What I am not looking at here is use and interpretation of these texts - I believe these are very important, and in terms of social practices looking at these is in fact more fruitful than looking at the texts themselves, but they are not the subject of this study. Neither will I be looking at the use of such terms as *husband* and *wife*, when these may not apply, nor at what is often dealt with under the heading of ‘sexist language’ - in this case, most obviously, referring to the baby as ‘he’. (Several texts still do this - though others alternate between ‘he’ and ‘she’.) This is not because I am not concerned about such uses of language (2), but because looking at discourses may be more relevant to the study of gender, if only because discourses can be realised by non-sexist language items as well as sexist language items. A pornographic text, for example, may objectify women without using a single linguistic item which of itself degrades, trivialises or defines women. As Deborah Cameron points out, the real problem is *meaning*, which does not always correlate with form (1994: 29). She observes
... sexism in language exists below the surface, so that superficial reforms (like proscribing some finite set of offensive forms or making all texts formally gender neutral) are insufficient to combat it. Many instances of sexism are manifested not in single words or specific constructions but through an accumulation of discursive or textual choices; this kind of sexism will always elude the mechanical application of a standardizing rule (1994: 32).

Overall, then, I am looking at what sort of ‘gendered identities’ are being constructed through discourses and textual choices around parenting in these selected extracts. I will look at what grammatical and lexical choices have been made from those available, and at what others could have been made. Importantly, then, I will be looking at what is not said, as well as what is said, and at what is made explicit and what left vague.

Specifically, I will be looking at the use of

(a) mother/father/wife/husband/partner (and omission of these), at who is the agent and who the object in a given construction, as well as substitution forms like someone else

(b) other key lexical items, e.g. play, help, share, fun

(c) imperative verbs

Looking for discourses in parentcraft literature is not new. Hariette Marshall (1991) has identified three main discourses in childcare and parenting manuals, which she refers to as ‘Ultimate Fulfilment’ - for women, which they find in motherhood; ‘Happy Families’ - by which she means that often the language use implies that the child is living with its biological parents, a happy heterosexual couple; and ‘Sharing the Caring’, by which she means that both mothers and fathers are seen as being involved in childcare - though she points out that the meaning of such ‘sharing’ is that the father’s role is limited to the most positive aspects of childcare, and the mother is the one who does all the maintenance work. My study clearly overlaps with Marshall’s, though whereas Marshall focuses on motherhood, the focus of this study is more on
fatherhood. And, methodologically, whereas Marshall looks at a range of manuals, I am looking also at extracts from booklets, brochures and magazines.

I am going to suggest that current parentcraft literature clearly embodies the two main discourses of what we can call ‘Mother as main parent’ and ‘Part-time father’, and that these are manifested in the texts under discussion here. Though these two discourses may reflect what is frequently the case in practice, they clearly do not reflect what is always the case. I am not suggesting that these different texts all exemplify the same discourses in the same way or to the same extent. However, there are similarities.

‘Mother as main parent’ and ‘Part-time father’ discourses

Clearly, ‘mother as main parent’ and ‘part-time father’ are really part of the same discourse, exemplifying masculinity and femininity as relational and to an extent, here, oppositional. It is not hard to find textual manifestations of these discourses in terms of recurrent lexical items. One example is the word help, when applied to what fathers can do: Text 1, ‘Helping with baby’: the title, and ll. 1, 4; Text 2, ‘Dad Chat’, in the subtitle “Your wife still needs lots of support and help with all the chores”; and Text 6, ‘Accepting help’, addressed to mothers: “If you do need to ask for help, go to your partner first” (l. 16) - the do suggesting that the mother not taking sole responsibility for the baby is the exception rather than the rule. Another manifestation of the ‘part-time father’ discourse is the recurrent and slightly mysterious phrase someone else, or its semantic equivalent another person, which occurs frequently in the texts on expressing breast milk, as follows (the italics are mine):

Text 5: “...breastfeeding mothers are encouraged to express their milk, so that another person can sometimes give the feed” (l. 43)
Text 7: “if you want to go out and let someone else give the baby his feed” (l. 23)

Text 8: “you can express your milk into a sterile bottle so that someone else can give the feed” (l. 7)

Text 9: “you may want to express some milk for someone else to give to your baby in a bottle” (l. 49)

“it can be an advantage later when you want to leave your baby with someone else” (l. 59)

The first three of these do not even mention the father as a possible ‘someone else’ - though logically could have done so. Text 9 however does refer to a partner between the two someone elses, and Texts 10 and 11 explicitly to the father (l. 11) and partner (l.2), respectively. These texts thus do not ignore the father to the same degree; nevertheless, the father’s role is never one that comes across as crucial.

Other lexical items which illustrate the ‘part-time father’ discourse are phrases like those addressed to the father in Text 1, ‘Home from Hospital’: “take a few days off work” (l. 10), “give her a break” (l. 20). Interestingly, what is not mentioned in any of these texts about fathers, is the possibility of paternity leave - a salient omission since several institutions in Britain (for example, Universities and local government) do allow fathers to take a week’s unpaid leave for this purpose, and did when these texts were written. In this way these texts can be seen as endorsing the status quo as regards the structures surrounding childcare practices. Text 2, ‘Dad Chat’, does not in fact mention taking leave of any sort when the baby is born, nor, surprisingly, does Text 3, which is Dr. Miriam Stoppard writing on ‘the modern father’.

Text 5, ‘The Father’s Role’, refers rather oddly to a father getting ‘acquainted’ with his baby (l. 7), and to his doing this by, among other things, “taking a turn at nighttime care” (l. 21) and “being aware of the general routine” (l. 22).
My final example in relation to these two discourses comes from Text 4, from ‘Nanny Knows Best’ (originally a television series). I am not suggesting this is typical of parentcraft texts in any way; rather, it is an illustration of the ‘part-time father’ discourse *par excellence*. Part of Nanny’s response to the question “How do you determine when bedtime should be?” is

> Nowadays it seems quite usual for a mother to keep her child up so her husband can see him when he comes back late from the office. I would say ‘Too bad’. The husband can peep at him whilst he is asleep and play with him at the weekend.

Though my own position is that I would like to see more, and more central reference to fathers, one problem that writers of parentcraft literature may have is that they are writing for a huge and very diverse audience, which includes single mothers, as well as mothers from cultures in which there is as yet no discourse of what we can call ‘fathers’ full involvement in childcare’, and in which the mother is the only (almost) guaranteed common denominator. The Bounty writers in particular cannot even target an audience, since their booklets are automatically given to all pregnant women and new mothers registered with a GP and hospital. It is perhaps then not surprising that texts are full of mentions of mothers rather than fathers. These writers will in addition be well aware of the much quoted finding that one in three babies is born out of wedlock and of these, half have parents who do not live together. This means that one in six babies does not live with both parents, and the majority of these babies live with their mother rather than their father. They may feel that since mentioning the father when the father is not around is inappropriate and may not be well received, the safest thing to do is not mention him at all. Some writers may even see themselves as promoting mothers’ autonomy or as not wishing to undermine this. Parentcraft text
writers are therefore in something of a dilemma, since excluding the father can be seen both as radical and as conservative.

There are, I suggest, different discourses within the ‘Part-time father’ discourse, and which indeed can be seen as acting to shore it up. These are what I call ‘Father as baby entertainer’, ‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ and ‘Father as manager of the mother’.

‘Father as baby entertainer’ discourse

‘Father as baby entertainer’ discourse is probably the most prevalent of the three, common lexical exponents of this being obvious words like play, enjoy and fun. In Text 4, from Nanny Knows Best, the father’s sole role during the baby’s waking hours is to “play with the him” - at the weekend (3). Nanny Knows Best may be extreme, but this discourse is echoed elsewhere. So in Text 1, ‘Helping with baby’, we read about how “playing with your baby will help get him used to his environment and help with his development” (l. 22), that bathtime “offers a good opportunity for play” (l. 26), that “babies are lots of fun so enjoy playing with him” (l. 31), and that the father “should take every opportunity ... to play with [his] child as this is a vital part of his development” (l. 32). In Text 2, ‘Dad Chat’, the subtitle ends with the injunction, in bold type, “Have fun”, and the father is reassured in the last paragraph that “Babies are for loving and enjoying”, and that “Babies can be fun!” - positioning him to some extent as someone who might think they are just boring and a lot of hard work with no rewards. And even in Text 3, Miriam Stoppard’s ‘The modern father’, though this father is expected to change nappies and get up at 2 a.m. to feed the baby (l. 15), he will also (from l. 10) “spend playing with [his children], showing them new things,
helping them with their hobbies, taking them with him when he enjoys his own”, and (from l. 18) will “participate with reading stories, playing games and singing songs before bedtime”. Despite Stoppard’s claim that “the modern father is a full-time parent, not a part-time stranger” (l. 20), the emphasis here is definitely on fun and enjoyment rather than on washing the baby’s wet sheets.

‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ discourse

The discourse which I have called ‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ is less pervasive than ‘Father as baby entertainer’. It can be seen however in Text 1, from ‘It’s Your Baby Too’, in ‘Helping with baby’, in which the imperative ‘Remember’ occurs three times: “Remember never to leave your baby alone with a bottle” (l. 9), “Remember to always check the temperature of the [bath] water before putting him in” (l. 28), and “Remember that babies are rather fragile so don’t be too rough [when you play with the baby]” (l. 36). This could well come across as a mixture of patronising and hectoring, and positions the father as a bumbling assistant rather than as a competent parent.

Texts 2 and 4 do not adopt this same sort of positioning practice, but this is simply because there is in these little or no mention of fathers doing these traditionally feminine tasks - Text 2 because it largely identifies a father’s roles in different terms, which I will return to, and Text 4, ‘Nanny Knows Best’ because, as we have seen, the father’s role is minimal (4). Text 5, ‘The father’s role’, however, refers to the possibility of the father being made to feel “less confident” (l. 34). And Text 6, ‘Accepting help’, line 19, reads “They [fathers] are often keen to be involved, but are not sure how to go about it” - importantly, this is from M and M Magazine which has
no surface aspirations to appeal to men, but is again positioning men as far from being competent carers. The problem fathers are supposed to have here, like in Text 5, is again identified as lack of self-confidence, being unsure - an individual, psychological explanation, rather than one drawing on the lack of societal practices such as paternity leave being standard, playgroups being referred to as ‘Mother and Toddler’ rather than ‘Parent and Toddler’, nappy changing facilities being located in women’s toilets rather than both women’s and men’s, or in a third area entirely, and fathers facing disapproval if they take leave from work to look after sick children.

An alternative explanation that *is* given for the father’s lack of competence, however, as Marshall observes, is the idea of men feeling left out because of women’s own attitudes and practices, women thus being seen as to blame. She quotes from a recent National Childbirth Trust publication:

> Some people think that babycare is ‘woman’s work’ and this can cause problems. It may be that the new mother gets pleasure from feeling indispensable, or that she has old-fashioned ideas about gender roles. By monopolizing the baby she can frustrate her partner’s desire to be a tender and caring father, and can hurt him very much (1987, quoted in Marshall, 1991).

There is a version of this in Text 5, ‘The Father’s Role’: “A mother can unwittingly delay [‘father-baby bonding’] by discouraging offers of help” (l. 23). This may lead to her partner ‘feel[ing] less confident about offering her a ‘break’ in future’ (l. 31).

Only in Text 3, ‘The modern father’, is there no suggestion that the father might be up to scratch in his (fun-oriented) parenting role.

‘Father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ discourse is of course really the other the side of the same coin of the discourse Marshall calls ‘Motherhood as ultimate fulfilment’, one aspect of which is that ‘mother love’ is natural, and, by extension, childcare on the
part of the mother is ‘natural’, exemplified by advice to the mother such as “Do whatever suits you: so long as your baby is loved, fed and washed he will be all right” (from the 1986 edition of Hugh Jolly; quoted in Marshall (1991: 72)), and, here, in Text 6, ‘Accepting help’, addressed to mothers, “Follow your instincts” (l. 43) - a far cry from the ‘bumbling assistant’ positioning assigned to fathers in Texts 1, 5 and 6. Interestingly, the first part of Text 1, ‘Home from hospital’, refers to the father having to ‘adjust’ (lines 3 and 6), suggests that taking a few days off work will help him “understand the new routine”, and how ‘experience’ will help him learn why his baby is crying (l. 26) - nothing very instinctive there!

‘Father as manager of the mother’ discourse

The third part-time father discourse, ‘Father as the manager of the mother’, is I would suggest here only really evident in Text 2, ‘Dad Chat’. Here there are several imperatives which contrast strikingly with ‘you can help with’ or ‘you can help by’ and which position the father as the protecting and authoritative ‘Head of the Family’ (the bold typeface is mine):

...limit the number of visitors you invite into the house, stop them from disturbing the baby when he is asleep. Ensure that your family routine is protected (Paragraph 2)

And, in paragraph 5, “... plan for the future. Get yourselves a stairgate, put locks on all the low cupboards, protect electric wires and sockets”. And again, this time as regards the mother “Go out together for a treat that is fun for both of you. Let her know that you still enjoy being with her” (paragraph 3). This last invokes the possibility of the logical converse - that new motherhood may in fact make a woman less enjoyable as a companion than she previously was.
‘Mother as manager of the father’s role in childcare’ discourse

This ‘Father as manager of the mother’ discourse ‘nicely’ compliments one of the ‘Mother as main parent’ discourses: what I have called ‘Mother as manager of the father’s role in childcare’ (which in turn compliments the ‘bumbling assistant’ discourse). This was hinted at in Text 6, ‘Accepting help’, in the claim that men “are often keen to be involved” (l. 19), and in Text 1, ‘Home from hospital’: “expect to be called upon to step in” (l. 19) - a truncated, agentless passive, agentless because there is no doubt about the identity of the agent, the mother as ‘manager’ who will “call upon” him to help with childcare tasks. In Text 6, ‘Accepting help’, the mother is urged to “try getting your partner to take some of the strain while you recover” (l. 26), try suggesting that the father may not be as easy to ‘manage’ as all that, and that his help should not be taken for granted (5).

So while the father is managing the mother in the wider sense of ‘Head of the Family’, the mother is managing the father, but only in his role as a father actively involved in ‘parentcraft’. Discoursally shaped motherhood and fatherhood can in their turn be seen as shaping gender relations.

‘Mother as wife/partner’ discourse

The final discourse, ‘Mother as wife/partner’, is evident throughout parentcraft literature. In these particular extracts there are examples in Text 5, ‘The Father’s Role’, which reminds mothers of the risk that ‘your partner may feel ‘left out’ and rejected” (l. 11), which could be read as being rejected as a father, or as a companion and sexual partner. In ‘Dad Chat’ (Text 2), l. 17 reads “They [most mothers] need to have times when they are women instead of mothers” (my italics). This reads
incongruously to me as a woman and mother - what is meant by instead? and what is the writer, writing for men, intending this use of women to mean here? Presumably someone who is sexual, whereas, paradoxically, mothers are not. Ironically, though the ideal reader of this text is ostensibly a man, this is masked by the suggestion that this mother/woman binary distinction is to be operated (by men) for the benefit of women.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, then, I suggest that it is possible to see two dominant, overarching discourses in these parentcraft texts - a ‘mother as main parent’ discourse, and a ‘part-time father’ discourse. This is perhaps predictable. What I have also tried to show however is how these overarching discourses are shored up by other discourses: ‘part-time father’ by ‘father as baby entertainer’, ‘father as mother’s bumbling assistant’ and ‘father as manager of the mother’; ‘mother as main parent’ discourse by ‘mother as manager of the father’s role in childcare’ and ‘mother as wife/partner’, and that these discourses are realised textually both by recurring and non-recurring linguistic elements.

Parentcraft texts are not the only genre concerned with parenthood, of course. Other written text types on parenthood and childcare which do not specifically constitute parentcraft advice include academic articles from the fields of social history, psychology, sociology and anthropology; teaching materials for would-be nursery officers doing an NVQ; medical texts for future and practising paediatricians; documentation from Nurseries; and paternity leave policies. And some texts whose discourses may shape motherhood and fatherhood may not focus on childcare at all: self-help manuals, for example, which deal with questions of personal identity and
personal growth, and how being a parent may be seen as contributing positively to these, or damaging them. All these sources of data (6) may well be worth investigating for how they may too through their gendered discourses construct motherhood and fatherhood.

Jane Sunderland

Endnotes
(1) In principle, it is of course possible and would have been interesting to look at texts which specifically address or refer to mothers, as well as those which address or refer to fathers, and, where appropriate, to compare them. However, again, that would have meant too much data for a small-scale study.
(2) Especially because it seems to me that recently there has actually been an increase in the use of the so-called generics he and man in the media.
(3) Hariette Marshall (1991) in her examination of motherhood discourses makes the points about the concept of ‘fun’ in parentcraft texts that it is not mentioned as much when the focus is on the mother, since the mother’s experience is overall described as positive, and therefore there is no need to go on at length about ‘fun’.
(4) It is in fact minimal throughout Nanny Knows Best, not only in this extract. Interestingly, Nanny is not overconcerned about children living with single mothers - for if the main carer is Nanny, and the mother is secondary, this displaces the father even further down the line, something which may apply even when there is no Nanny.
(5) I similarly remember reading another edition of the Bounty Babycare Guide in which there was a section entitled “Five Ways to get His Help”.
(6) Taking a step back, locating parentcraft texts and the construction of motherhood and fatherhood in a wider context, and considering future work on gender relations, I suggest that any text which is related to the act of sex in some way, but which moves beyond the merely biological (as most do), provides good data for the study of gender. In addition to childcare texts, then, almost any text on any of the following topics would thus be a fruitful source of data in that it too is likely to contain several gendered discourses: sex education; puberty, including menstruation; sex itself; sexuality; HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; conception; contraception; abortion; pregnancy; childbirth.
Data Sources


Bibliography