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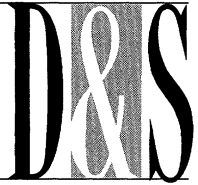
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ABSTRACT. This article analyses the co-presence of two potentially contending discourses of gender relations – the Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations, and the Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations – in the domain of parenthood in a Singaporean national advertising campaign. The difference between the two discourses is a question of symmetry and asymmetry, respectively, in gender roles and expectations. By undertaking a combined analysis of linguistic and visual structures in the texts, I will show how the two discourses are manifested within, and across, the advertisements in the series. I conclude by suggesting that the distinction between the two discourses is not a clear-cut one. Rather, on closer scrutiny, they work in tandem to maintain a largely unchallenged conservative gender order.

KEY WORDS: *critical discourse analysis, discourse, gender symmetry and asymmetry, parenthood/motherhood/fatherhood/, semiotics*

Introduction

The aim of this article¹ is to examine the politics at work in representations of parenthood in a national, government advertising campaign in Singapore. Although it is not uncommon these days to find egalitarian or **symmetrical** models of parenting in the media, this is not to say that the more traditional, **asymmetrical** division of labour between women and men in this domain has disappeared. The asymmetry may not be as blatant as it was decades ago, but as this study will show, it continues to thrive in sometimes less obvious and seemingly innocuous forms. The particular concern of this article is to examine the **coexistence** of both symmetrical and asymmetrical forms of representation of parenthood in the same ad or set of ads. The dynamics of the two will be analysed in terms of what I call the Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations and the Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations, respectively.

Representational practices are deeply political in at least three key ways. The first involves the question of **relative** representation and non-representation –

who is represented (or not) in what ways **in relation** to the other? Secondly, there is the issue of **modes** of representation – how is representation achieved textually? What linguistic and non-linguistic resources are deployed, and in what ways? The two points intersect with the third, which is an interrogation of the **power dynamics** at work – what does the representation/non-representation tell us about the (changing or unchanging) contemporary balance of power between, in this case, women and men in the domain of parenthood? Whose interests are served by it, and whose suppressed? Part of the interrogation of interests, in this study, inevitably includes the stake the state has in these representational practices, and the support (or otherwise) for particular orderings of gender relations.

In what follows, I will begin by locating the present study in terms of the socio-political context of Singapore, and also in relation to previous work that I have undertaken in this area. This is followed by a discussion on the view of ‘discourse’ adopted in the study, and a case for the inclusion of multisemiotic analysis in the study of discourse. In the succeeding section, I will present the analysis of the two apparently contending discourses of gender relations (the Egalitarian Discourse and the Conservative Discourse) in the advertising campaign in question, which I refer to as the ‘Family Life’ ads.² In the campaign, approximately 14 of the ads deal with representations of parenthood;³ a brief description of these is outlined in the Appendix. I will conclude by summarizing the findings of the analysis, and suggesting that far from being straightforward, the Conservative/Egalitarian distinction itself is in need of problematization.

The study in context

The present study is part of a larger project on a critical discourse analysis of gender (and sexuality) in Singapore’s Family Life advertising campaign that I have undertaken over several years. This campaign arose from the changed, pronatalist fertility policy actively pursued by the government of Singapore since the 1980s. At that time the government had become concerned with the rapid decline in the country’s birth rate, both in terms of the ‘quantity’ of births (i.e. nationally), as well as with the ‘quality’ of births (i.e. the better-educated segment of the population, in particular, were reported as markedly under-reproducing). Amongst the various measures undertaken in order to rectify the situation was the inception of the national, multi-media ‘Family Life’ advertising campaign. It needs to be said that the launching of such a campaign in itself is quite unremarkable in the Singapore context, which may be dubbed a ‘campaign country’. Historically, since the present leadership came to power 41 years ago, an assortment of national campaigns have been utilized as regulative instruments in the service of social engineering. The present campaign under study is no exception.

The ‘Family Life’ campaign is a two-pronged endeavour: one half of the programme is targeted at single women and men, encouraging them to get married, and another, concurrent, half is addressed to those already married, urging them

to have babies soon. In an earlier paper to *Discourse & Society* (1993), I had dealt, in part, with the 'first' half of the campaign. In the present paper, my focus is on the 'second' part, in which I am specifically interested to ask what it means in these ads for women and for men to become parents, and what are the power dynamics at work in and through these representations.

In order to appreciate the workings of the Egalitarian and Conservative Discourses of Gender Relations that are co-present in the 'Family Life' ads (and, as we shall see, the complexity of their inter-relationship), it is necessary first to consider why it is that childbearing had become generally unpopular in Singapore, thus precipitating the inception of this national campaign. Apart from the effectiveness of the previous (now defunct) Family Planning or Limitation campaign, which had extolled the benefits of a small family, the practice of having fewer children had become symptomatic of a coping strategy employed by many Singaporean women who were in the paid labour force. This is perhaps best understood in terms of what Bernard (1972) has described as the transition from the 'One Role Ideology' to the 'Two Role Ideology' (cited in Quah, 1994: 189). According to the 'One Role Ideology', women's roles were exclusively those of childbearing, childrearing and housekeeping. In the case of the 'Two Role Ideology', women's roles were extended to include paid work outside the home in addition to their original domestic responsibilities. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the government had urged large numbers of women to enter and stay in the paid workforce, many Singaporean women found themselves at grips with the 'Two Role Ideology'. The change occurring for women in regard to the public sphere, however, was not matched by concomitant changes in gender roles and expectations in the (distinctly separated) private sphere where housework and childcare were concerned. Optionally, some men have helped out in the home, but it has been just that – 'helping out' or 'lending a hand', which in itself is deemed praiseworthy. There is nothing remarkable, however, when women perform daily domestic chores and care for children – in addition to working outside the home – for that is considered 'women's work' anyway. With little restructuring of the gender order, this means that women in paid employment have come to hold two equally demanding jobs. Commenting to *The Straits Times* (Singapore's main daily), one (female) academic summed up the impact this has had on women:

Anyone who has attempted to hold two jobs will understand why the key terms recurring again and again in women's letters to the press are 'exhaustion', 'guilt', 'conflict', 'burden', and 'tired[ness]'. They will also see why so many women try to curtail one job or the other – by dropping out of the work force or having only one child. (Heng, 1983)

In fact, some women have opted for **childless** marriages. Figures have shown that since 1980, the proportion of all ever-married women with no children had risen by a third, to 12 percent, in 1990 (Liak, 1994: 56). The majority, who would like to have children, have tended to postpone childbearing, or space out the birth of their children over a wider period (Fawcett and Khoo, 1980, reported in Hill and

Lian, 1995: 150), and they generally have small-sized families. The number of births per woman, moreover, correlated directly with her educational attainment, which caused much consternation to Singapore's eugenic-minded leaders: they were worried that the better-educated class of women, whom they saw as having superior or more intelligent genes, were not reproducing sufficiently. There has also been a noted discrepancy between the numbers of children this class of women are generally willing to have compared to men of a similar educational background. In a relatively recent government survey, it was found that whilst most female tertiary graduates only wanted two children, most male graduates wanted three. The difference was explained by the fact that 'women were aware of the heavy responsibilities in the dual roles of being mothers and career women' (*The Straits Times*, 21 April 1997).

The double bind that has confronted women is not only asymmetrically apportioned at the level of private interaction between women and men, but is underscored by various public policies and practices of the state (see Lazar, in press). Women are granted (almost) the same access to educational and employment opportunities as men, and are much needed for their economic productivity. However, at the same time, a range of state policies hold sacrosanct traditional, Confucian-Asian values that support men's position as heads of households,⁴ and unequivocally emphasize women's reproductive and nurturing roles as mothers. Whilst women are urged to remain economically active, their maternal roles are prioritized for them, as the following rhetorical question by the former Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, makes amply clear: 'Do our women need to value their careers more than, and at the expense of, their families?' (*The Straits Times*, 19 February 1984).

Discourse and semiotics

DISCOURSE(S)

'Discourse' is here understood in Foucauldian terms to mean a set of related statements that produce and structure a particular order of reality, and which within that reality makes available specific subject positions. In this vein, I find it useful to think of discourse as a socio-historically contingent 'meaning potential' – to borrow a Hallidayan terminology – that both enables and constrains possible ways of knowing about the world, a sense of who we may (and may not be) within that world order, and how we may (and may not) relate to one another. In the domain of parenthood, this means that there is nothing inherently fixed about the identities of 'mother' and 'father', or in the way gender relations between them have tended to be structured. Rather, these are socially formed and fixed in and through discourse. We perceive these relations and identities in certain ways (say, motherhood as 'natural' and fatherhood as 'social') as a result of conventional ways in which the societies we live in have come to express and think about them. What is fixed, therefore, can be analytically un-fixed or dismantled. That is to say, discourses (and the realities and subjectivities that they

make available) can be taken apart in such a way as to reveal that they are not immanent truths, but rather are constructed that way from particular positions that serve particular interests, whilst subordinating others.

In this study, I analyse the interplay of two discourses of gender relations that operate in the domain of parenthood: a **dominant** Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations, and a **counter** Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations. Both underscore the **relational** aspect of gender construction, that is, ways of being a 'woman' and a 'man' (or, as is the case in this study, 'mother' and 'father') are always explicitly or implicitly co-constructed one in relation to the other. The two discourses, however, structure this relationship in different, indeed (potentially) contradictory, ways. The difference is one of parity; specifically, whether possibilities for ways of being and becoming are equally available and interchangeable between women and men. The Conservative Discourse deriving from a Confucian–Asian ethic favours a traditional, asymmetrical arrangement between the genders, whereby women and men each have gender-specific roles, responsibilities and expectations to fulfil. The Egalitarian Discourse, in contrast, which is motivated in part by feminism, strives for gender parity in all aspects of personal and public life. At stake in the two discourses is the balance of power between women and men as they enact their respective parental (and other, careerist) identities.

BRIDGING DISCOURSE AND SEMIOTICS

A valuable insight worth importing into CDA from Foucault is that discourse is not equivalent to language use alone. In his view, discursive **statements** are not reduced to sentences and propositions, as is the usual understanding of the term 'statements' in linguistics. Indeed, discursive statements are not units or structures (in the way, say, that sentences are), but a **function** (or meaning) that operates as much through language as through other semiotic modalities. In other words, graphs, maps, classificatory tables, statistical calculations and algebraic formulae (Foucault, 1972) are as much forms of discursive statement as is language.

Extending from this conception of discourse, 'text' can be viewed as the multi-semiotic manifestation of discursal meaning(s). Typically, however, many studies have tended to conflate 'discourse' with 'language' and therefore, by analysing only linguistic structures and meanings in texts, have had a restricted scope. And if images (for example) are also discussed, they have been considered separate from 'text' – a term which, like 'discourse', is reserved only for linguistic phenomena. What I propose, therefore, is the uncoupling of the two categories 'discourse' and 'language' in favour of discourse encompassing semiosis of various kinds (including language). A critical analysis of discourse, in other words, involves a commitment to the analysis of various strands of semiosis that configure in the realization of particular discursal meanings in texts. The present study will demonstrate, for instance, how the interplay of language and visual images (including layout, gestures and actions) contributes to the manifestation

of the two contending discourses of gender relations in the 'Family Life' texts. Not to attend concurrently to both modes of semiosis, in this case, would be to offer a less than complete analysis of discourse (Lazar, 1999).

ANALYSING DISCOURSE

Discourse is analysable in terms of a set of representations that express a particular discursual meaning (e.g. Conservatism or Egalitarianism). To give an example, part of the Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations in the 'Family Life' ads can be analysed in terms of particular representations of gender identities: the 'New Man' and the 'New Woman'. The aim of the analysis is to show up these various representations, singly and in constellation with others, which evidence the operation of a particular discourse in the text(s). This being the aim, the starting point of the analysis will be to identify types of representation articulated in the ads, supported by an amalgam of textual structures and processes that cue these representations. The explication of textual resources involves the **interplay** of several categories of textual structure (be that linguistic, non-linguistic, or linguistic **and** non-linguistic) that work in tandem to manifest a particular type of representation.

In order to analyse the linguistic and visual structures in the texts I use the grammars of Halliday (1994), and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), respectively. The various aspects of the grammars will be drawn upon in different degrees in the study. As many will know, Halliday's functional grammar is based on a view of language as simultaneously involved in three kinds of meaning-making:

- Ideational (representing the world 'out there' and our inner states – analysable in terms of participant types, processes, and circumstances).
- Interpersonal (enacting social relationships between participants – analytic categories include types of mood and modality choices).
- Textual (making connections within the text, and the text and its social context – analytic categories include thematic and information structures, and cohesion).

The grammar is analysable at the ranks of word, group and phrase, and clause and clause complex (sentence).

The analysis of the images in the texts is based largely on the grammar of visual design developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, following Halliday's theory of triple meaning-making.

- Ideational meaning is of two types: (a) narrative, which includes dual participant ('transactional') or single participant ('non-transactional') action and reaction (or perceptual) structures, realized by vectors of various sorts; and (b) conceptual, which includes classificational ('type of') and analytical ('part-whole') structures.
- Interpersonal meaning includes, amongst others, contact (or mood) – realized by eye contact; and distance or social affinity – realized by frame size and types of shots.

- Textual meaning (or composition) includes such categories as salience – realized by relative size and sharpness of focus; and information value – realized by relative position (centre or margin) within a frame.

My use of the visual grammar is supplemented by insights selectively drawn from Goffman's work on gender in advertisements (1979).

Analysis of parenthood in discourses of egalitarianism and conservatism

In this section, I begin by presenting the analysis of the Egalitarian Discourse of Gender Relations, followed by the analysis of the Conservative Discourse of Gender Relations in terms of the interplay of linguistic and visual resources deployed in the ads. The two discourses are co-present within single ads, as well as across the intertextual spread of the 14 ads in the campaign. The basic distinction between the two discourses, as previously indicated, is one of gender parity, i.e. whether there is an equitable access to possibilities for being. In modern industrial societies, the issue of gender parity largely rests on the possibilities, and the extent of negotiation, that are available to women and to men between the private and the public spheres of life (i.e. between the home/the family and paid work/career).

THE DISCOURSE OF EGALITARIAN GENDER RELATIONS

The Discourse of Egalitarianism in the ads is identifiable in terms of three types of representation: (1) the representation of parenthood as symmetrical for women and men; (2) the depiction of men in the domestic sphere as devoted, nurturing fathers; and (3) the portrayal of women as mothers as well as successful careerists outside the home.

Women and men One way that egalitarianism between the genders is construed in the ads is through an invitation to view parenthood as being identical for women and men. In many instances, women and men are collectively referred to as joint participants. For example, in terms of lexical choice the gender-neutral noun *parents* or *parenthood* is overwhelmingly favoured (over the gender-specific terms 'mother'/'motherhood' and 'father'/'fatherhood'). And in terms of the choice of pronouns, we repeatedly find either the collective *our/we* or the indefinite pronoun *you* (depending on whether the ad is presented from the first or second person point of view). In either case, gender is again elided, and it appears to represent women and men alike, as constituting a single undifferentiated unit. For example:

- (1) *It's the most precious gift **parents** can give* (Lonely Child).
- (2) *Becoming **parents** changes **our** lives completely ...* (Something Wonderful Happened).

- (3) As **you** gaze at **your** child, **you** will feel so proud to be **parents** (Experience The Joy).
- (4) Understandably, **parenthood** is a big decision (Experience The Joy).

As a corollary of being referred to as joint participants, we also find in the above clauses that women and men are represented as sharing a common experience. They are affected by parenthood in the same way, and appear to respond to it identically. The representation of egalitarianism expressed in the language structures, moreover, finds visual support in one of the (print) ads. In *Something Wonderful Happened*, the symmetry is striking on two counts. The couple are shown in a joint action process of pushing a baby stroller together, thereby showing that what they are doing is a joint endeavour. In addition, the couple are portrayed as distributed symmetrically across the picture space (i.e. they are at equal distance from each other, and are roughly equal in size and orientation), which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 88) expresses a 'covert taxonomic classificational process'. What this classification process suggests is that the couple belong to the **same** category of 'parents', rather than being classified according to the differential and value-laden roles of 'father' and 'mother'.

Commenting on the now widespread use of such gender-neutral terms as 'parenting' and 'parenthood', some scholars (e.g. Busfield, 1987) have noted that two different but related assumptions underlie their usage. Both of these support the egalitarian thesis put forward in this paper. The first assumption is that gender relations are becoming more symmetrical (as analysed above), and the second assumption is that men are becoming more involved in the day-to-day care of their children – which is the focus of the next sub-section.

Men The Discourse of Egalitarianism in relation to parenthood is also articulated in terms of a construction that is widely known in gender and cultural studies as the 'New Man'. This is a type of masculinity that has gained popularity in the (mainly Western) media since the 1980s, in response to feminism's critique of traditional forms of masculinity. A significant dimension of the modern New Man is a caring, sensitive and nurturing depiction of fatherhood – an involvement that is a far cry from 'authoritarian' or 'distant breadwinner' (Pleck, 1987, cited in Chapman, 1988) images of fatherhood in the past. According to this new portrayal, men are very comfortable with infants and very young children, and are expressive of care and emotion, which traditionally were seen to be the prerogative of women and motherhood. Indeed, what makes the New Father a part of the egalitarian discourse of parenthood is its breaking down of gender stereotypes. As Rutherford (1988: 34) describes, the New Father 'looks soft and gentle and, what's more, he's not afraid to show it'. Somewhat ironically, therefore, the egalitarianism appears to be based on the feminization of men.

In the 'Family Life' ads, the New Father is especially strongly represented in interactions between men and their newborn babies. The portrayal is jointly realized by visual representational structures as well as in compositional structures.

In terms of the visual representational structures, three characteristic features of tenderness and emotional bonding are evident: cradling, intently gazing, and sweetly smiling at the baby. Quite obviously, cradling is a transactional action structure whereby the man (Actor) carries the infant (the Goal) gently in his arms. At the same time, however, the cradling is also indicative of an analytical structure that represents a compound relationship between the man as Carrier and the baby as an Attribute, which is visually seen to be extension of him. Coupled with cradling, are the reactional structures of smiling and gazing upon the infant in his arms.

Compositional structures, further, frame these depictions in ways that heighten their emotional value. Close-up shots are especially deployed for this purpose. So, for example, a close-up in *Your Family is Your Future* focuses on the facial expression of a young father, who gazes lovingly and smiles almost tearfully at his infant. Also, in *Something Wonderful Happened*, there is a close-up shot of a large male hand holding the very small hand of a baby to the accompaniment of the following reiterated adjective in the lyrics '*tiny fingers, tiny toes*'. Emphasizing the contrast in the size of the two hands, and the gentleness of the touch, evokes a heart-tugging quality of the father's sensitivity vis-à-vis the baby's vulnerability.

The tender, nurturing role of the New Father in these representations approximates so much to stereotypical constructions of motherhood that in a family shot in *Your Family is Your Future*, there is a reversal in the positions occupied by the father and the mother in relation to their baby. In contrast to traditional representations of the mother carrying the baby and the father protectively wrapping his arm around her shoulders (Goffman (1979) calls these 'shoulder-holds'), in this particular ad, it is the father who is shown cradling the baby, with the mother's arm around him.

The Sensitive New Man is constructed not only visually, but also linguistically:

(1) *And it was only then, as I took her [the baby] into my arms for the very first time and looked down into her tiny, perfect face that I realised mywhole life had changed.* (Your Family is Your Future, TV)

(2) *They're [My children are] my life and my future.
They are my hope, my strength.
The reason I can carry on.* (Collage Ad, TV)

In these extracts we find an emotional response to the experience of fatherhood. (The first example from *Your Family is Your Future* is the verbal equivalent of the visual structures earlier analysed). They are both expressed from the first person point of view (*I, my*) and stress (via repetition of *my life*) that the lives of these men are profoundly affected by children (note the material processes: *had changed* and *(can) carry on*). Whereas the impact is succinctly encapsulated in the first of these ads via premodification (*my whole life*), this is elaborated over a series of identifying relational processes in the second ad, in which the father identifies himself wholly with his children.

More generally, too, many of the ads show men to be highly visible and actively involved in family life. Apart from representations of men as Actors in the visual structures of these ads, the men are also depicted in analytical terms. To take just one example, in the (TV) ad *Why Build Your Career Alone?* we are presented with various snapshots of a father playing a board game with his family, sitting alongside and watching his son do school work, and sitting with his family gathered around him. In all of these scenes, the man together with the other characters are represented as parts that make up 'the (whole) family'. Such a representation invites an interpretation of egalitarian gender relations, for here is a man who is portrayed as very much involved, and part of the everyday family scene.

Women Whilst men in the Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations are represented as involved participants in the domestic sphere, women in this discourse are shown as participants not only in the private but also in the public work space as well. This is a depiction of the modern 'New Woman', as opposed to traditional images of women as full-time caregivers at home. In two of the ads, *Make Room For Love* (TV) and *Babies and Careers* (Print), it is suggested that women can have a career and be successful at it, whilst also fulfilling familial roles. In *Make Room for Love*, this is conveyed in the depiction of 'Mrs Tan', a senior, newly retired career woman. Two pertinent aspects of her identity are revealed in the following congratulatory utterance by a younger (former) colleague: *You had a wonderful career, Mrs Tan*. The clause neatly brings together the woman's dual participation in the public and private spheres: she is represented as Carrier both in terms of a career (and note the epithet *wonderful* to describe it) and in terms of marital status, indicated by the title *Mrs*. Later in the ad, Mrs Tan is also called *mom* and *granny* by another woman (her daughter) and two youngsters (her grandchildren), respectively, who enter the scene. 'Wife', 'mother', and 'grandmother' all belong within a common semantic field of familial identities attributed to this career woman. In other words, she is offered in the ad as an example of a woman who has had it all – a marriage, a family, and a successful career.

If the portrayal of Mrs Tan – someone of an earlier generation – appears optimistic, then the following declaration in *Babies and Careers* by a 29-year-old woman (the age group of the target audience) is even more heartening: *It's now easier to be successful in both [a career and motherhood]*. The choice of declarative mood together with categorical modality renders the proposition a simple undisputed statement of fact. These, plus the time indicators – *now* and *easier* (a comparative reference presumably being made to an earlier generation) – construe a 'reality' that purportedly reflects current, more enlightened times.

THE DISCOURSE OF CONSERVATIVE GENDER RELATIONS

Although thus far we have seen a discourse at work that promotes a symmetrical and egalitarian gender order, there is a concurrent overwhelming presence of the Discourse of Conservatism that maintains gender asymmetry in the ads. In what follows, I analyse the gender asymmetry in the construction of parenthood on

two levels: (1) the systematically divergent roles performed by women and men within the domestic sphere itself, and (2) the different ways in which women and men may negotiate their respective parental identities **between** the private and public spheres of life. I shall first present the two-level 'asymmetry analysis' in regard to fathers, followed by the analysis concerning mothers. A discussion on the dynamics between the conservative and egalitarian discourses of gender relations will be undertaken in the concluding section of the paper.

Men

(A) Within the private sphere

In terms of the construal of the conservative discourse, let us now consider the (asymmetrical) representation of men's involvement in the private sphere. First of all, there appears to be a clear representation of gender role differentiation in the home front. Fathers are mainly depicted in executive (functional) roles, realized in transactional action structures. The role of the executor as Goffman (1979: 32) has noted, is typically performed by men and not women in representations where the two are co-present. To take an example, it is the fathers in the 'Family Life' ads who are consistently represented as the Actors operating such equipment as cameras and camcorders in family situations.⁵ In *Something Wonderful Happened*, a young father uses a camcorder to 'record' images of his sleeping infant; in *Because That's Your Family*, the father sets up the camera and runs back to join his family in a self-timer shot; and in *Precious Moments*, the mother passes the camera over to the father to take a photograph of their children playing together, instead of taking the photograph herself.

Fathers-as-executors extend to men's interactions with children. Fathers are commonly represented with sons, and in these interactions, men are shown in various ways directing their young sons in gendered play and behaviour. For instance, in *Because That's Your Family* (TV), the father is represented showing his son the mechanics behind the running of a toy train, and in *Kids Make You See* (TV), the father teaches his son to ride a bicycle. Even where the man is not in an active instructor or executor role (i.e. as Actor), we have a powerful representation in *Fam, Fam, Fam* (TV) of a boy learning gendered behaviour, nonetheless, from his father through observation and imitation. The father, shown leisurely reading the newspapers with his legs widely crossed, becomes the Phenomenon (or object) of his son's avid gaze, and his body posture and activity are directly replicated in the boy's subsequent actions. The boy's emulation (Phenomenon), in turn, does not go unnoticed by the father (Sensor), who smiles approvingly to himself. In this way, the father is still shown very much in the executive role, only this time directing indirectly. Following Pleck (1987) (reported in Lupton and Barclay, 1997), who undertook a historical study of fatherhood in America, all these portrayals seem to support the more traditional, 'sex role model' type of fatherhood, which pre-dates the New Father.

Apart from the executor representation above, fatherhood (compared to motherhood) is largely construed in terms of fun and physical play. While the rep-

resentation of men's involvement with children in this way is undeniable, it is asymmetrical in so far as gender roles and relations are concerned. Fun, play and popularity appear to be the prerogative of fatherhood and take centre-stage, whereas, as we shall see in the section on 'Women', support and routine care are largely left to motherhood, which is relegated to the periphery. Taking centre-stage means that there is greater frequency in the portrayal of fathers' activities with children, and these appear saliently in relatively large shots (e.g. *Fam, Fam, Fam* (Print), and *Kids Make Your World Brand New* (Print)). Moreover, father-child interactions typically centre on leisure activities rather than on intensive day-to-day care-giving activities. This is indicative of differential understandings of care that apply to fathers as opposed to mothers: 'care', where fathers are concerned, is understood purely in terms of fun and relaxation. ('Care' and motherhood will be dealt with in the following section.)

The popular 'fun dad' representation is realized mainly through transactional action structures. In many instances, fathers are the Actors and their children are the Goal or Beneficiary⁶ at or for whom the men's physically affectionate behaviour is directed. For example, a father is shown ruffling his son's hair, tickling and playing with him, nuzzling and kissing his children, and making funny faces at them (in *Kids Make Your World Brand New* (TV), *Kids Make You See* (TV), and *Fam, Fam, Fam* (TV)). In some instances, the roles are reversed, that is, fathers are the recipients and the children are the Actors. One such case is found in *Fam, Fam, Fam* (Print), where three young children (Actors) sitting on their parents' bed pillow-fight their dad (Goal), who good-naturedly receives the 'blows'.

The playfulness of dads is also significant in portraying them as 'one of the kids', which accentuates their popular appeal. For example, in the same ad (*Fam, Fam, Fam*, TV), the father and children are united in their role as Actors, who conspire to 'steal' and eat cookies from the kitchen counter – cookies freshly baked by the children's mother. The representation of being 'one of the kids' is especially well expressed via a classificational (covert taxonomic) process. Preceding the cookie stealing shot, the father and children are identically represented as they place their heads one on top of the other, in a totem-pole fashion, forming a symmetrical vertical composition. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 81) have observed, 'For participants to be put together in a syntagm which establishes a classification **means** that they [are] judged to be members of the same class and are to be read as such.'

It is important to bear in mind that representations of gender role differentiation – whether in terms of men's executive role or their 'fun daddy' role – are not simply about functional difference but, rather, are implicated in asymmetrical power relations. This is perhaps most striking in representations of fathers as heads-of-households. In *Why Build Your Career Alone?* (Print and TV) this is indicated by the central position occupied by the father in relation to members of his family. Such a shot demonstrates an exhaustive analytical structure, whereby the two adults and three children in this ad are parts (or 'Attributes') that altogether comprise 'the family' (the 'Carrier'). However, although the father is **one** member

of the family (and one of **two** adults), he is represented as the most salient – literally the central – figure, flanked by his wife, who stands partially hidden behind him, and his children who encircle him in the front. Furthermore, other portrayals of him in relation to his family represent him as a Carrier himself, with members of his family represented as his Attributes. This interpretation of the analytical structures evokes a proprietorial relationship, expressed by the man placing an arm around the shoulders of his family members. In one scene, he has an arm around the woman in the ad, which defines her in relation to him as **his** wife, and in another scene, the man has an arm around a little boy, which defines the child in relation to him as **his** son. Shoulder-holds⁷ are a common enough gesture also found in other ads where men are represented with their family (for example, *Experience the Joy*, *Because That's Your Family*, and *Kids Make You See*).

What I have analysed so far in terms of the Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations are asymmetrical representations of men's roles in the family (i.e. in the private sphere) as (1) executors, (2) popular and fun dads, and (3) heads of households. In the next sub-section, I shall focus on how men are represented as being able to negotiate between their identity as fathers and their public work identity.

(B) *The public versus the private*

In contrast to ads that address women, those directed at men construct a world in which men basically can have it all without significant tension. Three broad types of representation are found in the ads, which I will examine in turn: (1) the harmonious co-existence of a man's career with family life; (2) absenteeism of fathers on account of their careers as excusable; and (3) a family as beneficial to men's own self-interests.

First, in some ads family life and paid-work life are represented as co-existing harmoniously for men, that is, the identities of father and careerist are reconcilable without one compromising the other. The compatibility between the identities is enacted by bridging representations of men in the public and private worlds. The portrayal of men in the public world of work is signalled by the clothes they wear (long-sleeved shirts and ties),⁸ i.e. men here are seen as Carriers whose professional identities are inscribed upon their bodies, and (optionally) also in terms of the representation of an office setting. Although the men, in these instances, are seen primarily in their professional capacity, their identity as fathers is quite easily co-enacted. This is explicitly the case in *Why Build Your Career Alone?* and *Fam, Fam, Fam*: the words *for dad* handwritten on a gift box and *dad* written in icing on a birthday cake, respectively, are displayed in the foreground. The men are shown in turn, via transactional actional or reactional structures, as claiming this identity. In *Why Build Your Career Alone?* (TV) the man is represented lifting the gift up from his office desk with a smile. In *Fam, Fam, Fam* the man, still in his office attire, is represented peering through the kitchen doorway of his home and being pleasantly surprised by a birthday cake being prepared for him by his family. The direction of his gaze forms a vector linking him (in his professional identity) to the cake with the words *Happy Birthday Dad* written on it.

Even where there are admissions that a man's career commitments may compete with his family role, this is rendered as expected and understandable. The following are two verbal examples from the *Collage Ad* (TV):

(1) *even though my work takes me away, when it comes to joy and dreams, my children are the key.*

(2) *even though my work takes me away, my children are my hope and joy supreme.*

The concessive (conjunctive) adjunct at the beginning of the clause complexes sets up a presupposition that men would be away on account of their career, and that this in itself is hardly surprising. Further, the choice of the material process attributes *my career* with an agency of its own, positioning the man himself as the unwitting Goal, haplessly 'taken away' from his family. The remainder of the clause complexes, moreover, appears to compensate the absenteeism by representations of effusive declarations of the importance of his children to him. Through the rhetorical strategy adopted in these clauses, absenteeism of fathers is accepted and forgiven, and not seen as a censure on men to better balance their twin roles. Further, the representations in the examples are one-sided: we are told of the effect children have on the father, but not the effect of his absence upon them. The latter is borne out by Phoenix and Woollett's (1991) observation that the existing literature on fatherhood rarely deals with the impact that fathers' frequent absences on account of their careers have on the development of their children.

Further to the representation of the unproblematic co-existence of family and career for men, men's careers are represented as positively enriched by family life. It is not only the case that, as we saw, fathers are showered with gifts and birthday surprises from their family members, but that having a family is construed as positively benefiting their personal and career development. In two of the ads – *Why Build Your Career Alone?* and *Your Family is Your Future* – the family is portrayed in instrumental terms, as bringing about certain personal qualities deemed necessary for men's professional success. In the following clauses, the selection of material processes (in examples 1–4) and causative constructions (in examples 5–7) systematically represents family life as a helping, enabling agent, and men, on their part, as the recipients – the ones who stand to gain.

(1) *Family Life helps (Why Build Your Career Alone? Print)*

(2) *It also provides stability, encouragement and support (Why Build Your Career Alone? Print)*

(3) *It's broadened my horizon (Why Build Your Career Alone? TV)*

(4) *It gives you a direction, a purpose. And most of all, it gives you a future. (Your Family is Your Future Print)*

(5) *[. . .] a happy, well-rounded Family Life makes people wider in their outlook (Why Build Your Career Alone? Print)*

(6) *Family Life has made my life really good (Why Build Your Career Alone? TV)*

(7) *[It has] made me more stable, understanding and less selfish (Why Build Your Career Alone? TV)*

Men are also represented as active participants, but in clauses with mental processes. These convey men's response to the benefits they have received from having a family. The self-revelatory construals by means of the mental processes indicate the positive transformation family life has had on these men.

(1) I've **learned** a lot (*Why Build Your Career Alone?* TV)

(2) And it was only then, as I took her [the baby] into my arms for the very first time and looked down into her tiny perfect face that I **realised** my whole life had changed. (*Your Family is Your Future* TV)

All these personal benefits accrued on account of having a family translates directly into men's professional success. Herein lies the instrumentality in men's involvement in family life; it enables the preservation and development of their own career interests. Nowhere is this raised so pointedly as in the ad *Why Build Your Career Alone?* (Print), where upon outlining the usefulness of family life (see examples of clauses above), the ad closes with the rhetorical question: *Isn't that what you need for a successful career?* The question presupposes that the answer is in the affirmative.

Another way that family life is construed as having an instrumental effect upon men's careers is that it is shown to imbue the pursuit of a career itself with greater, tangible meaning. Consider the following excerpt from *Your Family is Your Future* (TV):

Now for the first time, I seem to have a direction and a purpose (cl.7)

And *I know what I'd been working for all my life* (cl.8)

Not for money or status (cl.9)

I've been working for the future (cl.10)

And *here in my arms was the future* (cl.11)

Here, by means of the conjunction 'and' (used twice), the instrumental link between family life and work life is established. On the first occasion (clauses 7 and 8), fruits of family life (*direction* and *purpose*) are causally linked (by *and*) to the realization of the significance behind the pursuit of a career. On the second occasion (clauses 10 and 11), the new realization concerning his career is tangibly reinforced in terms of the baby in his arms. The depiction of meaningfulness of one's career in this way, in fact, may be viewed in relation to what scholars such as Burgoyne (1987) have suggested about conventional styles of fatherhood, namely, that men tend to translate their new responsibilities as fathers in terms of an increased commitment to (paid) work.

Women

(A) Within the private sphere

In the preceding section, we noted that there were particular executive tasks in the family that almost certainly fell to men. Similarly, in this section, we shall see that most routine, practical care-giving tasks are reserved for women. What is most striking in the conservative discourse of gender relations is the way that

motherhood is constructed as entailing total devotedness to others, whereas as we saw in the previous section, representations of fatherhood, to a large extent, looked to the preservation of the self-interest of men. In the final part of this section, we shall see how other-centeredness is also the operative principle behind the negotiation of the public and private spaces for women.

Firstly, let us consider the representation of women within the private sphere as mothers. By 'other-centeredness', I mean women's acute consciousness (or consideration) of their husbands and their children in the enactment of their motherhood identity. The implication to be drawn from this is that women derive self-fulfilment indirectly through the happiness and fulfilment of others.

Already, in the first instance of expecting a baby, women's experience of pregnancy and would-be-motherhood is defined almost entirely in relation to their husbands. Consider the following two scenes from the ad *Something Wonderful Happened*, where the would-be-mother is represented as responding directly to her husband's evident interest in having the baby. In the two scenes, the pregnant belly of the woman is the prime object of her husband's gaze and actions towards her. In the first scene, the husband's gaze is eye-level with his wife's abdomen as she emerges from a gynaecologist's office. The shot cuts to a close-up of the woman's face as she slowly meets her husband's gaze. Whereas his gaze is full of eager expectancy, her look is less certain, pensive, and searching. In other words, her own feelings and thoughts about having a child are unclear to us, but the fact that she locks eyes with him suggests a willingness to engage with him in terms of his evident interest.

The reactive (as opposed to the active or initiative) position of the woman in relation to her husband is also manifest in a later scene in the same ad. Triggered by her husband's action of leaning to keenly listen at her pregnant belly, the woman responds through a configuration of reciprocal transactional processes, whereby she looks and smiles at him (reactional processes) and kisses his forehead (actional process). Whilst all these processes are other-directed, her **own** reaction about having the child is left unrepresented. What is represented, however, is her joy as a mother-to-be that is experienced on account of **his** paternal interest.

The only time a woman is represented as claiming motherhood as a self-determined choice occurs linguistically in *Babies and Careers: I want to be a mother. My life would be incomplete without kids of my own*. Notwithstanding the reason she gives for wanting children, she is represented here on her own terms, without reference to her husband. Clearly identified in the first person singular (possessive) pronoun, the woman is represented as the **Senser**, who desires motherhood, and explains the consequence that not having children would otherwise have on **her** life. However, one clause later, **her** wish gets subsumed within **our** wish, i.e. making sure that this is also what her husband wants:

*We want someone else to make **our** lives complete. To finally make **us** a family and bring new meaning to **our** lives.*

The shift in pronoun from singular to plural, in other words, signals the similar

sort of other-centeredness found in the representation of would-be-motherhood, as discussed earlier.

My point in earlier discussion is not that I find problematic representations of men being keen on fatherhood, or that women would want to consult their partners in parenthood. Such portrayals in themselves are fine; indeed, sharing and (men's) keen involvement, as we have seen earlier, make for an egalitarian model of parenting. My point, rather, is that whereas in these examples the experience of motherhood is directly defined vis-à-vis their husbands, the representation of fatherhood is relatively independent of their wives, since it only focuses on their own interaction with the children. Further, as I have shown in *Something Wonderful Happened*, the other-centeredness of women entails a submergence of their own dispositions on becoming mothers within their husbands' expressed desire for fatherhood. What may appear as a joint decision by couples to have children, therefore, may belie divergent and potentially conflicting views held by each party, and one party may be 'pressured' into having the baby. Burgoyne (1987) has found, for example, that men in partnerships with women who are highly career-oriented, or who wish to use commitment to parenthood as a means of cementing an insecure relationship, are more anxious to become parents than their partners, a situation which is borne out in the story-line of *Something Wonderful Happened*.⁹ In the light of putting to work the principle of other-centeredness, I would argue that the 'pressure' placed on women may also be self-generated, thus obliging them to respond 'appropriately'.

Other-centeredness applies not only to wives' relationships with their husbands, but also to mothers' relationships with their children. In the 'Family Life' ads, one of the most powerful other-centred gestures mothers can express is to consider the interest of an only child by producing siblings for that child to grow up with. Consider the following extract from *Lonely Child* (TV):

You may give your child the best things money can buy (cl. 1)

But the most precious gift of all is a brother or a sister (cl. 2)

The most precious gift you can give your child is a brother or sister (cl. 3)

What we find in the above is the construction of a 'giving' mother. A giving mother, by implication, is a Good Mother, someone who has the child's best interest at heart. The adversative conjunction in clause 2 suggests to mothers that they may be somewhat misguided, and directs them to choose what is set up as the ultimate thing that mothers can give to their only child. The full impact of the verbal text is best understood in the light of the visual portrayal of the child in the ad. In the visual image, in spite of being surrounded by toys of various kinds (cf. clause 1 above), the child is portrayed as aimless and miserable. The dissatisfaction of the child is conveyed in two concurrent grammatical structures: although the boy is in Actor position, holding a toy motor car in one hand, he is at the same time a Reactor in a non-transactional reactional process, who looks away from the immediate scene into the mid-distance. Similar to Goffman's 'licensed withdrawal', the child is physically present in the scene, yet mentally

'absent' from it. His sullen facial expression and listless body posture, moreover, suggest that he is not looking at anything in particular outside the picture frame, but is merely bored and unhappy. If the child is unhappy, the implication is that the mother has not been other-centred enough, not giving enough. In short, she has been a Bad Mother.

Clauses 2 and 3 in the extract (p. 389) are grounded, in this visual context, in which the onus is placed on mothers to ensure the happiness of the child by having another baby. From the point of view of the construction of other-centredness in this discourse, this is a rather interesting expectation: women are encouraged to have more children – regardless of how they themselves might feel (cf. the discussion earlier in relation to men) – out of a sense of maternal duty towards their children. The onus on women is particularly emphatic in the print version of this ad: *But there's one precious gift, which only you can give – a brother or sister.* 'Only' accentuates the obligation women have as Good Mothers to keep their child happy by **giving** him or her a sibling. The final segment of the TV version of the ad concretely plays this out through the deployment of a transactional action process, whereby the mother, the Actor, gives a new-born baby, the Goal, over to the delighted boy, the Beneficiary.

Less dramatically, women are also represented in a range of gender-differentiated tasks that emphasize their other-directedness. Visually, this is manifested in transactional actional structures in which the mother is the Actor, and her family, the Goal or Beneficiary. For example, mothers are depicted towel-drying children's wet hair, baking cookies for the family, cheering and applauding children's efforts at tasks, getting children dressed and preparing them for public events, and taking care of children's safety at outings (*Fam, Fam, Fam* and *Because That's Your Family*). The gendered nature of the mundane care-giving tasks the mother performs is emphasized in contrast to what the father is shown doing at the same time, if co-present. To take one example from *Fam, Fam, Fam*, whilst the mother is represented as watching over the safety of her youngest son at the beach by holding on to his float, the father, although also represented as an Actor, is engaged in an activity entirely different in nature from the basic care-giving function performed by the mother. The father is shown enacting his 'popular dad' role by entertaining the child (and the child's siblings) by making funny faces at them.

The care function performed by mothers is not only different from the roles performed by fathers in the same settings, since mothers are also sidelined by the fathers' enactment of their 'fun daddy' role. Unlike the father, the mother is rarely the focus of the children's attention. Instead, she stands at the margin looking in at the bonding that goes on between the father and the children. The spectator role of the mother is realized by transactional reactional structures, where she is the Senser watching her husband, her children, and the interaction that transpires between those two, without being included in their activities. The implication is that women derive happiness indirectly through witnessing the happiness of others. Further, her own care-giving function (e.g. holding on to the boy's safety float) is **subsumed** within the father's interaction with the children.

The implication is that the type of care performed by women taken for granted as something mothers do 'naturally', and is therefore quite unremarkable. Feminist scholars (e.g. Ann Oakley, 1974) have long criticized assumptions about the naturalness of motherhood, and the construal of motherhood as being the greatest achievement of women's lives, since these contribute to the perpetuation of women's disadvantaged status in relation to men (Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

(B) *Between private and public spheres*

Let us now look at the representation of women in terms of their negotiation between the public and private spheres of life. One of the heartening aspects of the egalitarian discourse, which we saw earlier in the article, was that in encouraging motherhood, the pursuit of a woman's career was not overlooked. However, further analysis shows that the negotiation of the public in relation to the private spheres is remarkably dissimilar for women and for men. Whereas for men, the representation was that the two spheres are entirely compatible, for women, the relationship is fraught with tension. In the following examples from *Babies and Careers*, the two spheres of life are set up as co-existing contentiously, through a set of presuppositions.

- (1) *I'm really excited about parenthood, but I also love my job.*
- (2) *Babies and Careers. Who says you can't have both?*
- (3) *How will you divide your time between the kids, housework, and the office?*

In Example 1, the use of the adversative conjunction sets up a presupposition that the two interests are conflictual. In Example 2, such a question can only be asked based on the presupposition that according to some discursal point of view, it is inconceivable or problematic for women to have babies as well as a career outside the home. A further presupposition that arises from this is that (as in Example 1) babies and careers are incompatibly matched. The asking of the question in Example 3 also conveys presuppositions, namely that it is an extremely difficult juggling act, and that the need for time management between her public and private roles is a concern that is unique to her alone as a woman (since no indication is given of sharing the tasks with a partner). Note also the order of the list presented: *the kids* come first and *the office* comes last, suggesting an implied order of priority prescribed for women.

The fact that these utterances are even made suggests that women's experience of having a family and a career is markedly different to men's. The assumptions that underlie each of these examples are absent in the representation of men in relation to their career and family life. Nowhere is it questioned, though, why the tension should exist for women and not for men. Since men, as we have seen, can have it both ways without any problems, the issue clearly is not that one's public and private identities are inherently irreconcilable. Rather, what is at issue in these representations is the asymmetrical assumptions and expectations in regard to gender.

In constructing a world in which, for women, the twin pursuits of a career and a family are deemed problematic, the solution offered to women (and only women) is to self-regulate the two carefully; to strike a balance. Note the reiteration of this concern:

(1) *Oh, I'm sure you'll do very well, Lin. But do **balance** your career with a family.* (*Make Room For Love*, TV)

(2) *One of my major concerns right now is **balancing** family and career. But I have friends who have shown me that it can be done. A lot of Singaporean women are making that choice, too.* (*Babies and Careers*)

(3) *And along the way, **balancing** what's best by making the right choices and practical decisions.* (*Babies and Careers*)

The need for balance, furthermore, is represented in terms of choices and decisions that women are obliged to make. This is found in Examples 2 and 3 above. Also, it is found in *Make Room For Love* (TV): *There are choices we make today that we'll be living with for the rest of our lives.* In these three examples, note the reiteration of the word *choice* as well as the transitivity structures, in which women are represented as the Actors who (need to) make those choices. Further, note that *choice* in this conservative discourse does not connote freedom or the availability of a range of options. On the contrary, it suggests that women are **not** at liberty to pursue a career and a family anyway they like, but are constrained to select very particular options – which, according to Example 3 above, are deemed to be the **right** choices.

Why is striking a balance and making the right choice so important when it comes to women? What is this 'right' choice? As we shall see, to balance a career and family does not mean giving the two equal weightage. Rather, it is tipped in favour of fulfilling the family role. Indeed as the analysis of the ad *Too Old* will show, the juggling act is construed as necessary in order to ensure that a woman's maternal role is accomplished. In other words, women's identity as mothers is prioritized for them as their primary identity. The cornerstone of motherhood is other-centeredness, and in the Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations, this is something that needs safeguarding. Thus, a career associated with self-fulfilment and self-directedness is regulated in relation to women's prioritized, other-centered maternal identity. The regulation is achieved via two threats or sanctions on women: (1) the inability to bear (more) children as they get older, and; (2) the implication this has for women as deficient or Bad Mothers. These sanctions both draw upon and reinforce the social disapproval of 'late motherhood'. Let us take each of the sanctions in turn.

The threat of inability to bear children is explicitly presented in the ad *Too Old*. The following is an excerpt from the print version of the ad:

Because while you're busy building your career (cl.9), or saving for your dream home (cl.10), Mother Nature just won't wait (cl.11).

The older you get (cl. 12), the more difficult it can be to conceive (cl.13).

You may find pregnancy a whole lot tougher (cl. 14).

And the risk of something going wrong increases (cl.15).

Note that there is an implied causal relation here that is established linking a woman's career building (thematic clause 9) to her getting older (thematic clause 12). The ramifications of this are built up through a combination of lexical choices in clauses 13–15. The words *more difficult*, *tougher* and *risk* – accentuated by the comparatives (in the first two instances) and by the verb *increases* (that follows *risk*) – portray a consistently bleak, problematic scenario. Such an outcome, moreover, is constructed as inevitable, based on (the personified) representation of *Mother Nature* as an Actor following her own natural course. The threat of a reduced childbearing capability foregrounds the reproductive function of women, and uses that as a 'natural' justification for getting women (and, therefore, not men) to keep their careerist motivation in check. Further, the scare tactic employed here through an appeal to a (pseudo-)medical perspective on later motherhood ignores a host of other contending, liberatory views on the subject. These include advances made in obstetric knowledge; the fact that in previous generations women continued to have children until later in life; that in many respects women (in industrialized countries) are now healthier than ever; and the positive view taken by 'older' women themselves of becoming mothers after 40 (Woollett and Phoenix, 1991: 40, 220–1).

It is also the case that the threat of a diminishing childbearing capability is not represented in terms of how this would impact on women themselves, but on how it impacts on others in the family. Unlike representations of men and the family, therefore, the focus is once again fixed on other-centeredness. In *Too Old*, the inability to have children is not about the woman being childless, but about her not producing more than one child. And in this respect it is construed as a failure – **her** failure – to give her only son a sibling. Consequently, as we see in the following extract from the TV version of the ad, she is ascribed blame and guilt for depriving him of a brother or a sister. (The extract involves a boy of about six years old chatting with his friend, a girl.)

Boy: [...] *And as for starting a family* (14), *mom and dad put that off for some more years.* (15)
And then they couldn't. (16)

Girl: *They had you, silly.* (17)

Boy: *Eventually.* (18) *After a lot of trying.* (19)
But by that time, mom was getting so old. (20) *The doctor said* (21) *it wasn't advisable to have any more children.* (22)
That's why (23) *I've got no brothers or sisters.* (24)

Girl: *That's awful!* (25)

Boy: *She was too old, you see.* (26)
[...]

The boy attributes blame for being an only child squarely on his mother: the demonstrative in clause 23 – **That's** *why* – refers to his mother being *too old* to have a safe pregnancy. Interestingly enough, although in clauses 14 and 15 he says that both his mother and father had delayed parenthood, when it comes to allocating blame, she alone is singled out. Note the shift from the co-ordinate structure *mom and dad* in clause 15 (and the third person plural in clauses 16 and 17) to the singular noun *mom* in clause 20. Subsequently all reference pronouns are in the third person singular feminine, whilst all traces of the father disappear. In this way, blame is asymmetrically apportioned. What is more, according to conservative discourses of mothering prevalent in developmental psychology, mother-blaming appears to be justified. Woollett and Phoenix (1991: 216) explain that studies in the field make an expressed link between mothers and children, such that mothers are held directly 'responsible' for the ways in which their children develop and behave. According to this reasoning, then, the loud complaining of the boy in *Too Old* is not seen as a reflection on him but as symptomatic of his mother's deficiency as a 'Good Mother'. Therefore, when she is blamed, this happens because she has 'asked for it'.

Conclusions

In this article I have suggested a view of discourse-as-meaning-potential that is jointly realised by (though not limited to) linguistic and visual structures and strategies. By arguing for the co-presence of two discourses of gender relations in the domain of parenthood in the ads, therefore, we have two sets of socio-historically contingent meaning potentials at work at the same time. This is indicative of the contemporary social order that Singapore finds itself in as it negotiates between competing forces of traditionalism (hence, the Discourse of Conservative Gender Relations) and modernism (hence, the Discourse of Egalitarian Gender Relations). The question I now want to address in this section is how the negotiation between the two discourses is accomplished in the text(s). Before I do this, however, let me recapitulate the analyses undertaken of the two discourses.

THE TWO DISCOURSES IN A NUTSHELL

In the Egalitarian Discourse, we saw the representation of identical parenting (expressed gender-neutrally in such terms as 'parent' and 'parenthood'); the construction of the sensitive New Man, and the portrayal of the New Woman as someone who has career commitments outside the home. By contrast, we found that in the Conservative Discourse the relationships between the public and private spheres, and the involvement within the private sphere itself, were structured in markedly dissimilar ways for men and for women. In the home front, men were represented as executors, and heads of the family, and fatherhood was depicted as all fun and play. Moreover, there was no significant tension between their identity

as fathers and their professional identity at work. The two were represented as co-existing well, absenteeism on account of their careers was excused, and family life was shown to enhance their self-interest.

A different picture emerged in the representation of women as mothers. Women were constantly encouraged to be other-centred, to the extent of their own self-effacement. In the private sphere, their experience of motherhood was defined in relation to the concerns of their husbands and children, and they performed gender-differentiated tasks that put the others in the centre, occupying a marginal and vicarious role themselves. We also saw that where a career was concerned, this was represented as causing tension, and that women were advised to strike a balance between a career and their families. The 'balance', too, was construed unequally, in favour of prioritizing women's family role, with the underlying threat that they might otherwise face personal and social censure.

The principle that underpinned the analysis of the two discourses was **relationality**, namely, how women and men were represented in relation to each other.¹⁰ In so far as the Egalitarian Discourse was concerned, there was an evening out in terms of representations of gender responsibilities and expectations. The New Man and the New Woman representations, for example, worked in tandem to redress gender stereotypes; fathers had a strong presence in the home front, which has been traditionally the preserve of women, whilst women were portrayed as 'working mothers', disrupting the association of motherhood solely with the private sphere. In so far as the Conservative Discourse was concerned, the asymmetries in representation came into stark relief only when we looked through the lens of gender relationality. If the representations of motherhood and fatherhood are considered in isolation, these in and of themselves may not be faulted. However, where relationality becomes the interpretive principle in the analysis, this changes the complexion on matters. The question that gains prominence is how men are systematically represented in ways that women are not, and how women are systematically represented in ways that men are not. In other words, the politics of representation is one of relative presences as well as of relative absences that are organized along gendered lines. This is fundamentally an issue of power, since possibilities for ways of being (or not being) are unequally available to men and to women, and the inequity benefits one party at the expense of the other.

THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE TWO DISCOURSES

What is the dynamic **between** the two discourses of gender relations in the Family Life ads? How are the two apparently dissonant discourses co-articulated in the same campaign without jeopardizing an overall sense of coherence? After all this is a strategic ad campaign launched by the Singapore government with very specific social and demographic goals and intended outcomes.

The two discourses, I would argue, are 'managed' in the ads via an implicit strategy of **disproportionate coexistence**. By this I mean that although

certain egalitarian values may be present in the ads they are overwhelmed by a prevailing conservative discourse that is simultaneously at work in the same ads, and which, as a result, renders the egalitarian virtues non-threatening. Further, I would argue that the 'brand' of egalitarianism supported in the ads is itself far from subversive. That is, it does not seriously undermine or challenge the conservative project, which is why the co-existence is even possible. It is an egalitarianism which can be accommodated and/or displaced by conservatism.

In the light of this, it is worth revisiting the three representations of egalitarianism discussed originally. Firstly, the neutering or de-gendering in the use of such terms as 'parent' and 'parenthood' requires scrutiny. At first sight, it suggests symmetry and the mutual sharing of roles and responsibilities. However, as we have seen, in the light of the predominant conservative discourse of gender relations, the apparent neutrality actually glosses over the unequal, gendered work that continues much as before. Further, the notion of sharedness is a tricky one. It encourages a view of gender role complementarity, whereby the functions performed by fathers and mothers are deemed 'different but equal'. Such a view, however, is deeply problematic in that it overlooks the structural arrangements in society that support not just dissimilarity, but a rigidly dichotomous and hierarchical gender order. In other words, we may critically ask what exactly is meant by 'sharing', what and how much is shared, and what this sharing entails for women and for men.

Secondly, it has to be stated that the New Man is not a subversive construction. Scholars in gender and cultural studies have pointed to the disjuncture between the media rhetoric of the New Man and men's actual contributions to childcare in reality. This is no different in the present study. Whilst images of fathers' interest and enjoyment of their children in the ads are heart-warming, there is little evidence to show that there is a significant redistribution of practical childcare responsibilities between fathers and mothers. Moreover, in the light of what I have shown in terms of men's negotiations between the private and public spheres, the New Man or New Father can easily be assimilated within the Conservative Discourse of Gender Relations. The New Man is not an antithesis of conservative masculinity, but may be viewed as a hybridized form of masculinity¹¹ that gets the best of both worlds with little significant cost to men. I would call this a **politically correct (PC) masculinity**, which is geared to appeal to modern women without sacrificing the benefits that accrue to conservative masculinity. As we have seen from the analysis, fathers stand to gain personally and professionally even though their type of involvement in family life is rather limited. An added dimension of PC masculinity is that it is a class indicator. Griswold (1993) (cited in Lupton and Barclay, 1997), for example, argues that the New Man is a middle-class phenomenon, whereby this class of men are shown up as modern and 'enlightened', setting them apart from the crude and overtly sexist working class men. In the Singapore case, the class argument is construed more broadly to include educational class.

Finally, like the New Man, the New Woman represented in the ads is insuffi-

ciently threatening to the status quo. An important characteristic of the New Woman is that she wants a modern career. However, she is not a careerist alone; as we have seen, she is typically represented as someone who combines a career with a family. In other words, already in the first instance of conceptualization, the New Woman is grounded obligatorily, in part, in motherhood. (It is in the light of the conservative discourse that it becomes clearer that this part of her identity is unequivocally prioritized for her as her core identity.) Further, the depiction of the New Woman itself as a careerist-cum-mother is inherently problematic, in that it is based on rather dubious assumptions. Recall the following example from the egalitarian discourse that read: *It's now easier to be successful in both [a paid career and motherhood]* (Babies and Careers). 'Easier' presupposes that at some point in time it had been 'easy' for women to balance the two, and that it has now become even easier.¹² However, one may challenge that premise by asking: has it ever been easy for women to manage the two jobs successfully? In leaving this unquestioned, however, I suggest that the New Woman construction blurs with that of a Superwoman. Far from being a liberating influence, this Superwoman assumption loads a further burden on to women. It presents them with an unrealistic ideal of 'having it all' unproblematically, and it denies the actual struggles experienced by countless women who are forced to cope with increasingly onerous private and public responsibilities. A very recent study by a sociologist in Singapore, in fact, reports that mothers who also worked outside the home struggled as a result of the high expectations placed upon them, as few duties in the home were shared between couples in dual-career families. (*The Sunday Times*, 18 September 1999). (Cf. Heng's quote on page 375; also recall the reasons earlier cited for Singaporean women's reluctance to become mothers, or to have fewer children.)

In sum, parenthood evidently means different things for fathers and for mothers. The analysis has shown that men have a lot to gain from becoming fathers. They have the option of being more, or less, involved in childcare; but either way, they are not tied definitively to this identity. An other-centered motherhood, however, is a compulsory identity for women. It is an identity that has strategic importance for others: for children, for men/husbands, and for the state. It is little wonder that motherhood thus construed has long been considered by feminists as oppressive to women, for the needs of others are met at the expense of women's own desires, aspirations and empowerment (Koh and Wee, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Soin, 1996). A critical discourse analysis of media representations of parenthood, fatherhood and motherhood has shown how the disempowerment of women is discursively maintained by the state in its efforts to boost national fertility rates. As we have seen, the discursive mechanics are less than straightforward: although at first glance there appeared to be two contending threads of discourse running through the campaign, upon closer scrutiny, the two appear to be braided together. In other words, instead of providing a subversive (emancipatory) current, the discourse of egalitarianism is itself subverted (and deflected) by the discourse of conservatism.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper entitled 'Gender, Discourse and Semiotics: Asymmetrical Constructions of Parenthood' was first presented at a meeting on CDA at the University of Birmingham (UK), 6–7 April 1999.
2. I have named these the 'Family Life' ads, based on the fact that the majority were produced by the Family Life Co-ordinating Unit specially set up under the Ministry of Finance.
3. Most of the 14 ads were produced in print and televisual media, which means that the total number of actual texts analysed is around 28.
4. Indeed, the original Women's Charter (1961) description of 'head of household', which had been gender-neutrally worded, was recently amended to ensure that only men could acquire the legal status of being the 'head of the household' and 'principal breadwinner' (Soin, 1996).
5. The depictions support an American study cited in Goffman (1979), which reported that 'the male head of household used the camera most of the time' (Chalton, 1975: 94).
6. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) grammar does not have 'Beneficiary'. This is a category that I have imported from Halliday's analysis of transitivity structures.
7. The shoulder-hold, although appearing to be an affectionate gesture, is clearly asymmetrical (Goffman, 1979). It is also evident between men, where someone senior can put an arm around his junior, but not vice versa. An example of this can be found in the interaction between 'Peter' (the protagonist) and his younger male colleague in *Why Build Your Career Alone?* (TV).
8. In Hallidayan linguistic terms, this is an attributive relational process that is intensive, i.e., the attributes describe what the Carrier 'is'.
9. In the 'story' of *Something Wonderful Happened*, it is the husband who wants the couple to try for a baby, in order to salvage their ailing marriage. They had drifted apart on account of their respective busy careers.
10. The importance of relationality is reflected in the names given to the two discourses: Egalitarian Discourse of Gender **Relations**, and Conservative Discourse of Gender **Relations**.
11. See also Chapman (1988), who uses the term 'hybrid masculinity' to refer to an adapted form of masculinity that is better able to retain control in contemporary society.
12. Another reading of the clause may be that it used to be hard for women to balance their twin roles in the past, but that it has now become less difficult to do so. The point, however, remains that the ad glosses over answering another pertinent question, namely how this change has become possible. In keeping silent, the ad leaves unaddressed important social issues regarding the general stasis in gender relations in Singapore society.

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Appendix

The following is a list of print and televisual ads referred to in this paper, with a brief description on each ad.

1. *Make Room for Love*. Mrs Tan, a senior colleague, advises her younger female colleague on the importance of combining a career with a family.
2. *Why Build Your Career Alone?* Family life is represented as contributing to a man's career by providing him with invaluable support and stability.
3. *Precious Moments*. Snapshots are shown of three children (siblings) playing together, while their parents warmly look on.

4. *Lonely Child*. A miserable only child cheers up when his mother brings home a newborn baby – a sibling – for him.
5. *Experience The Joy*. Married couples are advised on the benefits of starting a family while they are still young.
6. *Fam, Fam, Fam*. A family is engaged in a number of leisure activities, with the father prominently portrayed in his 'fun daddy' role.
7. *Because That's Your Family*. On the pride and appreciation of two parents as their children surprise them in little ways.
8. *Your Family is Your Future*. As a young father holds his infant in his arms for the first time, he realizes that from then on his whole life will take on a new meaning.
9. *Kids Make Your World Brand New*. This presents a collection of photos of many different children, some on their own, others with a parent.
10. *Too Old*. A young boy complains to a friend that he has no siblings because his mother had given priority to developing her career.
11. *Kids Make You See*. A family represented as enjoying active leisure activities together.
12. *Babies and Careers*. The personal account of a young career woman, who describes her decision to become a mother.
13. *Something Wonderful Happened*. The birth of a baby helps to reunite an estranged young married couple.
14. *Collage Ad*. A special compilation of shots on fatherhood, selected from the full series of ads.



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