

What is the Debate around Paid Maternity Leave Really about? Using CLA to Delve under the Surface...

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Abstract

One role for Futures Studies is the generation of alternative images of the future. These images can help shape the path an individual, group or society may choose to follow. In 2000, a debate in Australia about the provisions for women taking maternity leave expanded into a heated debate about differing constructions of motherhood. Using Causal Layered Analysis to delve beneath the surface, it becomes clear that all sides of the debate share fundamental myths. Recasting these myths must occur before any changes can be made on the surface. Images from fictional societies are used as sources of alternative futures.

Key words: Causal Layered Analysis, applied method, motherhood

Introduction

One role for Futures Studies is the generation of alternative images of the future to those which are currently widely accepted in society. Images of the future can help shape the path an individual, group or society may choose to follow.

Images of the future can also be identified in the debates occurring in the media around issues of importance to a society at a point in time. Many debates such as those around education, immigration, health, and welfare, are a contest of images about how the future 'should' unfold. In the noise and emotion of such debates, the core of what is being argued about can be lost, or left unexamined. In fact, some of these debates that appear divisive in nature on the surface can, at depth inspection, be based upon shared myths or metaphors about what is central to the society. Arguments for change, when the base metaphor is shared, will only ever result in a cacophony of noise. Fundamental change may only come through examining the current myths and replacing them with stories which may allow for new directions and responses.

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Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), a theory and methodology developed by Sohail Inayatullah, can help to illuminate the layers of a debate. This process allows for the perusal of an issue from the litany level, through the social science analysis and policy response, to the clash of worldviews and finally the deep myths and metaphors which underlie the positions. To illustrate this process a debate which has been good media copy for many years in Australia will be examined. In the debate over paid maternity leave, the voices of conservatism have argued against those of feminism. This debate has, at times, become heated with the vitriol emanating from the various positions becoming fodder for journalists, editors, and newspaper letter writers.

Since 2000 when the International Labor Organization (ILO) revised the Maternity Protection Convention, which Australia refused to ratify, there has been a debate about the maternity leave provisions for Australian women, both in terms of paid leave to enable more women to continue working, and to increase birth rates. "Provision of paid maternity leave will address declining birth rates; provide the time and means to ensure the well-being of women and babies at the time of birth; and deliver economic security for women at a crucial time in their lives" (Baird, 2002).

During 2002, the topic moved into more fertile ground, as it changed into a generalized debate about mothers and the effect their employment choices have on their children. The assumption that paid maternity leave would mean that more Australian women would return to the paid workforce more quickly after the birth of a child was under the microscope. Headlines such as "Parenting transcends politics", "What women want – is paid maternity leave enough?", "Kid Stakes", "Women against maternity leave" hit the newspapers and current affairs bulletins across the country, books were published in the following years such as *Motherguilt* and *Motherhood: How Should We Care for Our Children?* Women were attacking each other in print, on television and radio, for their motherhood choices. But what is this debate about? Is it really about justifying a woman's choice to work or not? It is about the best interests of the child? Is it a response to falling birth rates in Western countries? Or is it in fact a skirmish in a larger war between competing images of the future as they apply to families?

Is the debate over paid maternity leave a litany level response to a metaphor of a Western society which embraces unlimited growth, the centrality of work, and the marginalization of men in child rearing? If the debate is about these things, what alternative images of the future are available to act as counterbalance to these metaphors?

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

CLA, developed by Sohail Inayatullah (2000), allows a depth analysis of an otherwise surface discussion. There are four layers to the analysis:

1. Litany – official public description of issue, most visible and obvious, requiring little analysis
2. Social science analysis – attempt to articulate causation, i.e. economic, cultural, political and historical factors. Data is questioned but not the paradigm in which the issue is framed
3. Discourse analysis/worldview – problem constituted by frame of analysis, discern deeper assumptions behind the issue

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4. Metaphor or Myth – the deep stories, collective archetypes.

At each level, analysis can be undertaken to draw out the relevant facts, value systems and myths. This allows for the teasing out of issues and ideas, especially those which appear contentious at the litany level, to investigate the deeper meanings. In classroom and workshop settings this methodology is especially powerful for surfacing implicit and explicit assumptions held by those in the room and can help to illuminate blind spots in decision-making.

The CLA undertaken here was done as a response to frustration, on the part of the author, with the continuing arguments around motherhood and work, in particular. It was done as an individual exercise over a long period which has allowed the analysis to develop.

Background

It seems that, with monotonous regularity, a report is released which adds to the guilt upon the shoulders of those mothers interested enough to read them, be it child-care arrangements, working mothers, stay at home mothers, single mothers or divorced mothers that are under investigation. For example, "Working mums have fat kids" was the news headline for a commentary on a report into obesity amongst Australian children (Masters, 2007). This continued focus on the role and responsibility of mothers in the 'successful' outcomes of their children has resulted in the phrase 'motherguilt'.

"Hardly a universal feature of maternity, guilt is not so much in the nature of motherhood as in the nature of traditional American motherhood, which demands a mother's total self." (Peters, 1997, p. 2)

This statement is also true in much of middle class Australia. Women feel 'guilty' about the care and attention their children receive.

"If mothers are working fulltime in the paid workforce, they feel guilty when not at home. When they are at home fulltime, women feel guilty when they are not earning an income or fulfilling their career potential, and if working part time, they feel guilty because they are not doing either job properly." (Buttrose & Adams, 2005, p. 1)

Divisive debates in Western countries, between the supporters of two mythical creatures – the 'Superwoman' or working mother and the 'stay at home' mother, usually involve middle class women with choices about how they apportion their time. The poor and marginalized are not included in these debates as their life experiences, guilt, or lack of it, are deemed to have more to do with a dearth of monetary support than any other factor (Peters, 1997, p. xiv).

The images of the 'Superwoman' and 'stay-at-home mum'- have developed over the past thirty years. The debate has grown more divisive over the past ten years, as more information about the neurobiological development of children is uncovered.

Virtually every aspect of human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experi-

ences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning well before birth and extending until a child is six. (Bagnall, 2002)

The response to this information has been for researchers and policy makers to focus on the early period of childhood. This is not a new idea, as Caroline Pascoe (1998, p. 30) points out: "mother blaming theories came to play a critical part in child psychology and psychoanalysis after the Second World War". This continued through until the second wave of feminism started to appear.

The mythical Superwoman appeared after women's liberation had taken hold in Western societies. She was a response to the 'control' women gained from contraception, access to education and workplace opportunities. Now they were expected to have a career and mother at the same time (Buttrose, 2005). This was the archetypal feminist woman, especially popular in the 1980's and 1990's, who was able to juggle work, relationships, motherhood and self-improvement, without missing a beat. She was well groomed, her family life ran like clockwork, and she was able to reach the highest rungs of her chosen profession. "The Supermum enhanced family life, made everybody richer, and raised smarter, more creative and independent kids who flourished by being given better role models" (Manne, 2005, p. 37). This myth started to die in the late 1990's as women began to report exhaustion and high profile women opted to 'bow out' from the corporate world in order to pursue their families.

The 'stay-at-home mother' stereotype has a much longer history, harking back to the 'apple pie' images of the 1950's. This was a rosy time where 'real' men supported their families by working and 'real' women subjugated themselves to their husbands and families. In fact this myth had been used to encourage women to remove themselves from their wartime positions after the end of the Second World War. "In 1946, The Australian Women's Weekly...opined that women who had worked during the war, and now prepared to return to the home, would be better wives and citizens" (Pascoe, 1998). This stereotype again became popular amongst conservative commentators and press during the 1970's as women appeared to turn their collective backs on the family to pursue their own goals.

Of course, the reality of the lives of individual women was, and is, different to those images portrayed in the media. Similarly, the images and stereotypes used to back up much of the rhetoric in the debate over motherhood in recent years have tenuous links to real women and their families.

Feminism and motherhood

When a female journalist wrote a heartfelt piece in a large metropolitan newspaper stating:

I am childless and I am angry. Angry that I was so foolish to take the word of my feminist mothers as gospel. Angry that I was daft enough to believe female fulfillment came with a leather briefcase. (Hausegger, 2005, p. 3)

There was an outcry and a flurry of letters to the editor in most major Australian cities either attacking or supporting her position. The majority of respondents felt she had exercised her individual choice, it was also apparent that many of the respondents

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were also angry, either at also missing the reproductive boat or at the circumstance they had found themselves in once they became mothers. A common theme among her respondents was that they had been "sold 'a crock'...it seemed that no matter where a woman stood, be she a mother, mother-to-be or non-mother, something was wrong" (Hausegger, 2005, p. 25).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures in October 2006 which found that pregnant women suffer widespread discrimination at work, with one in fifty demoted and one in fourteen denied promotion. One in five found that they suffered some kind of difficulty whilst pregnant in the workplace, either missing out on opportunities for training and development or having to fend off negative comments and facing a drop in the number of hours worked ("Discrimination of", 2006). The same report also found that 35% of women take paid maternity leave whilst 4.5% did not take maternity leave at all when their children were born due to running their own business or not having access to leave entitlements. This left 60% of the sample, 280,000 women, who took unpaid maternity leave or were not employed at the time (ABS, 2005).

This underscores the response by Australian women to the situation in which they find themselves once they are identified as a mother. As Malcolm Turnbull (2002), an Australian conservative parliamentarian once noted: "There is compelling evidence that while women are increasingly accepted into responsible and well paid roles, their acceptance is often, albeit tacitly, on the condition they don't have children" (Hausegger, 2005, p. 62). That 60% of women chose, or were forced, not to be employed when their maternity leave was due can be viewed from a conservative standpoint as an economic opportunity lost. Second wave feminists view this as another example of how women are not equal in the workplace and some third wave feminists, styling themselves as "maternal feminists", reacted to this situation by calling for changes in the way work and family are integrated. "The new maternal feminist movement is trying to achieve better conditions and recognition for mothers in both domains (at work and at home)" (Manne, 2002).

Aging of the population

Alongside these motherhood debates is the growing concern, on the part of the media and Government in Australia, about the ageing of the Australian population and the effects this will have on economic growth in the future. In August 2002, Kevin Andrews, Federal Minister for Ageing, wrote in *The Age* newspaper under the title "The challenge: procreate or perish". He argued that the Australian population is ageing; however the real issue is "structural ageing caused by the decline in Australia's fertility rate". This issue is faced by many Western countries and is usually discussed in terms of the threat to economic growth, the costliness of welfare required for an aging population, and the effects of a shrinking tax base. Increased immigration and increased fertility rates are the offered answers, and it is perhaps a reflection of the rise in xenophobia within Australian politics that it is fertility rates that are most often the focus of Government policy.

Paid maternity leave

Paid maternity leave became an issue in Australia during 2000, when the International Labor Organization revised the Maternity Protection Convention and recommended fourteen weeks paid leave, two weeks longer than the standard set in 1952 (Baird, 2002). The United States, New Zealand and Australia refused to ratify the changes. This was an issue during the 2001 Australian Federal Election, when the left leaning, marginalized, Australian Democrats and Greens Party floated paid maternity leave policies that differentiated them from the other major parties.

During 2001 and 2002 Pru Goward, then Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, began to debate the issues more forcefully within the media. She gave a number of speeches and interviews around the need for a raft of policies to support women in the workplace. Amongst these were "paid maternity leave, affordable and accessible childcare, access to flexible work arrangements, and part time work and protection from discrimination faced by many women as a result of their family responsibilities" (Goward, 2001). In 2002, this generated a furor in Australia over the issue of paid maternity leave for working women. The debate was particularly vigorous in April 2002 after the release of *Valuing Parenthood, Options for paid Maternity Leave: Interim Paper 2002* by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). In this author's opinion, the paid maternity leave debate is a microcosm of the larger debate around motherhood. It has all the hallmarks of a clash of worldviews between conservatives, second and third wave feminists.

Using CLA to Understand the Debate

The strength of CLA, when dealing with contested ideas, is that it allows space for differing perspectives and worldviews. It is a powerful tool to assist in the recognition of the myths below the surface discussion, this is important as these myths underlie the worldview stances of each side. Questions asked before deciding to undertake a CLA might include: What is this particular debate about at the deepest, usually unexamined, level? Do the various positions actually share a myth or metaphor at depth? If so, what can this tell us about the debate, its framing and possible solutions to the issues?

The litany level – Women want maternity leave?

The second wave feminist argument at the litany level is that Australian women deserve paid maternity leave for two main reasons: international benchmarks and workplace equity. Australia and the USA are the only two OECD countries without a paid maternity leave provision, this is one argument put forward in the HREOC report, 'Valuing Parenthood'. In addition, having paid maternity leave afforded to women is one method whereby workplace inequities can be addressed. The Report attempts to take a first step in assisting women to meet the challenges of being a 'superwoman'. Provision of paid maternity leave will address declining birth rates; provide the time and means to ensure the well-being of women and babies at the time of birth; and deliver economic security for women at a crucial time in their lives (Baird, 2002).

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The Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner argued that the Government was:

offering support for women who make the choice to stay home...but what he's (Prime Minister Howard) not doing is offering anything to the woman who says 'I don't have a choice. I have to go back to work in order to pay a fat mortgage'...the fact is that one income families are now a fantasy. Certainly in our big cities. (Goward, 2002)

Supporters such as Ita Buttrose argue that "we live in a society where women are expected to work, and Australia's high cost of living means many women are unable to stop work for long, if at all, after having children." (Buttrose, 2005, p. 3)

The opponents of paid maternity leave argue that it is too expensive and will discriminate against those women who choose to stay home and raise their children. Conservative politicians and commentators argue that the only way to raise fertility is to encourage earlier marriage and childbearing, and entice women to stay at home. (Andrews, 2002) Prime Minister Howard stated that to "demand every mother be back in the workforce as quickly as humanly possible, now that is quite ridiculous" (Curtin, 2003, p. 3). The economic cost of paid maternity leave is also important to this view. Firms should not be expected to pay for it if it negatively impacts their bottom line. (Curtin, 2003)

Third wave feminists argue that mainstream feminism ignores the issues around motherhood.

After all these years of feminism, we still do more of the child care than our husbands or boyfriends do, we often have to contend with inflexible work schedules or ridiculous hours, and many of us manage all these things on a piddly income. (Wingfoot, 1998)

Therefore this view argues that paid maternity leave will only assist those women in the workforce and will not affect the decision to have more children. The issues around flexible workplaces and the value placed on motherhood are more important. The issue for this group is deeper than just the public litany.

At this level it appears that there are three very different views on the issues surrounding paid maternity leave.

Table 1
Litany Level of the Debate

Perspective	Conservatives	Second wave feminists	Third wave/maternal feminists
Litany	Paid maternity leave is too expensive and discriminates against stay at home mothers.	- Australian women should be on par with those in other countries - Paid leave assists birth rates, women's wellbeing after birth and delivers economic certainty.	Paid maternity leave will only assist those women in the workforce and will not affect the decision to have more children.

The social science analysis level – Paid maternity leave means higher fertility rates?

In the HREOC report 'Valuing Parenthood', the provision of paid maternity leave is linked to a rise in the fertility rate. This reflects the view that "the declining birth rate is the result of the financial and professional/social disadvantage encountered by many families". (Goward, 2001) This argument aims to counter the discrimination that women find in the workforce when they choose to reproduce. Women are consistently penalized, in employment and career terms, due to their greater share of the responsibility in child rearing. Hence, these penalties are what drive women to put off having children and discourage them having more children. Pru Goward comments, "the only people I can find who are romantic about babies are men. The women are very rational. Very calculating. They do a cost/benefit analysis and say 'Why should I?'" (Goward, 2002).

The argument put forward is that women would feel more valued by their employer if they had access to paid maternity leave. This would then give them the economic security they need to embark upon child rearing. In addition, "it would help families have more children and to have them earlier... families saved and made sacrifices for the first child but often could not do it for the second one" (Hudson, 2002).

In addition there is the suggestion that Australia should move towards a gender-equity family, the Scandinavian model, which is supported by Government allowances to enable parents to manage work and family (Porter, 2001). The perceived success of the 'gender-equity' model is seen in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway, where women are given up to three years leave with a guaranteed job at the end. In fact, the Danish experience shows that when men have access to leave, up to three months paid is available, they are reluctant to take it "the average period of paternity leave actually taken by male employees (in Denmark) in three and a half weeks" (IDS, 2006).

The conservative Federal Liberal Government has been using incentives to keep women at home with their children since it gained office; decreases in the public provision of childcare, targeting of family welfare payments and a 'baby bonus' for giving birth, all aim to encourage more 'stay-at-home' mums. In addition, conservatives believe it is ridiculous to suggest that providing paid maternity will raise fertility rates; instead parents should stay home and be paid to do so (Andrews, 2002). A West Australian Federal Liberal MP, Julie Bishop, undertook a survey within her electorate, in which 42% of respondents stated that they were against paid maternity leave. "I have not spoken to a woman yet who says 'I would have left work and had a child' if there was paid maternity leave" (Dunlevy, 2002).

Prime Minister John Howard particularly likes the work of Catherine Hakim, a British sociologist. She identifies three types of lifestyles chosen by women: family-centered, work-centered or adaptive (Hakim, 2002). The size of the groups differs within different societies but the largest group is the 'adaptives', who want to combine employment and family. Her argument is that women are on a 'baby-making strike' because the terms and conditions of motherhood are poor compared to those found in employment. To increase the birth rate, "they need to be made an offer they cannot refuse" (Hakim, 2002). She advocates a home-care allowance to whichever parent

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looks after the children full-time. She also states that maternity leave payments are a 'redundant irrelevance' for the 'adaptives' as it is primarily of value to career women who would return to work anyway (Hakim, 2002). Thus it is the value of work to the mother versus the opportunity costs which is of prime importance. Another researcher, Barry Maley who is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, argues that paid maternity leave will not achieve anything; instead the answer is "stable marriages, tax credits and enhanced value of motherhood" (Lawrence, 2002).

Commentators working from the third wave feminist perspective argue that work is important but children matter more – paid maternity leave is not the answer, rather the workplace needs to change. They challenge the notion that men are applauded if they take time off work to look after a sick child, while a woman is frowned upon. The issue for this group is that second wave feminism promised 'they could have it all', but many found that they either did not want it, or were burnt out trying to have it. "Work hard and have it all was the unspoken feminist promise. Establish a career first. Delay motherhood until the time is right. Women can have babies in their forties, you know" (SMH, 2002). They point to structural issues within a society that does not value parenthood. "The dominant culture of which I had been a part considered child rearing as unskilled labor, if it considered child rearing at all" (Crittenden, 2002). In the USA, the wage gap between childless women and mothers is greater than that between young men and women (Crittenden, 2001).

Third wave feminists attempt to value all mothers, regardless of the choices they make around work. They accuse earlier feminist movements of 'dropping the ball' on the motherhood issue and not valuing women who choose to leave the workforce.

All three perspectives focus on women as the decision-maker about a family's fertility. This is not to say that women do not control their fertility, obviously contraceptives have made this possible. Rather, that men are removed from the debate, when in reality the decision to have children, especially more children, is commonly a joint one that takes into account men and women's needs.

The worldview level – Children? An economic decision

The conservative viewpoint at the worldview level reflects the belief that there is a 'natural' order of things which has been upset. That the economic 'realities' of today are a result of allowing women into the workforce, that two-income families are the worst thing to happen to the stability of marriage and to the birth rate. The solutions offered are economic, only aimed at making the combination of work and motherhood as economically unsavory as possible; to use economics to sway the 'rational' choices of women towards staying at home. There is a positive moral value placed on motherhood, as long as it is a self-less and sacrificing role, compromise by mothers is to be expected and applauded. Fathers are relegated to a traditional male-breadwinner role. Encouraged to stay at work, stay with the family, and 'do their best'.

At a worldview level, the second wave feminist position is that there are others to blame for the falling birth rates; the government for failing to support working women; business for not valuing mothers within their workforce; and society at large for not placing the working woman at the centre of all its considerations. If these 'oth-

ers' are just made to change their ways then the problem will be solved. However, second wave feminists also argue that women should not be *expected* to bear children, so even if all these measures were put in place there would be no guarantees. Second wave feminists have encouraged women to make a 'rational' decision about motherhood. To weigh motherhood against economic independence and ensure they choose wisely. Those women, who are perceived to have chosen badly, i.e. become economically dependent on a male whilst raising children, are removed from the Sisterhood. For women who do choose 'wisely', they need to be protected from the 'sacrifices' they have to make. In fact, parenthood should be as sacrifice free as it appeared to be for men in the 1950s. Women too, should be able to walk through the front door, be handed a martini and have dinner served to them. This division amongst women is a weakness in second wave feminist thought. To try and ignore the pivotal role that motherhood will play in a woman's life alienates women when they do become mothers. In this view, the role that men play in a woman's decision to be a mother is relegated to a secondary one; an economic backstop, someone to whine to about how hard it all is, someone to whine about, the 'father' as a symbol. Men are responsible for their genetic material in an economic sense or in their ability to free up the mother to go to work by sharing the parenting duties. There is an acceptance of the economic 'realities' of a two-income household, with a large mortgage, and that women would be pursuing the same economic and lifestyle goals as the men they aspire to be equal with.

Third wave feminists see these beliefs as part of the 'failure' of feminism. The aspiration was simply to achieve equality with what men already had, rather than true liberation for both sexes. The view of third wave feminists also reflects a wish to value motherhood economically and socially. They argue that second wave feminists are pursuing the wrong means, that there is no correlation between policies that promote workforce participation and higher birth rates. If, however, women are told that life is long and they have time to take 5 to 10 years out of the workforce, they may feel confident enough to have a second or third child (Sherry, 2002b). Another aim is to have the hard work that is required to raise children appreciated. "A society that treats child-rearing as pesky inconvenience makes as much sense as a fine restaurant where diners are made to stand in the entrance, eating out of their hands" (Maushart, 2002). There is some comment in this perspective around the role of men, and how they could be encouraged to participate a little more fully in the rearing of children, but the language is around allowing interested fathers to take a greater role rather than expecting that all will. There is some discussion about whether the economic goals of men and women need to be different in order to parent children, but there is very little questioning of the 'reality' of a two-income family. Many women writing from this viewpoint make it clear that they do on a part-time basis, with their children at their feet. "I play with the baby then put him to bed and run to the desk" (Sherry, 2002a).

Interestingly, research done into narratives about working life and family life in the 1990's "found that there was no coherent pattern to be found in attitudes towards the needs of small children" (Probert, 2001). The heterogeneous images of motherhood and family life found in the current debate contrast with the homogeneous and widely shared attitudes in the 1950s that centered on the male breadwinner and female home maker.

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Table 2
Litany, Social Science Analysis and Worldviews

Perspective	Conservatives	Second wave feminists	Third wave/maternal feminists
Litany	Paid maternity leave is too expensive and discriminates against stay at home mothers.	Australian women should be on par with those in other countries. Paid leave assists birth rates, women's wellbeing after birth and delivers economic certainty.	Paid maternity leave will only assist those women in the workforce and will not affect the decision to have more children.
Analysis	Government policy rewards stay at home mothers and increased fertility. Research shows no link between paid leave and higher fertility rates.	Research shows that paid maternity leave is linked to higher fertility. Paid leave means women feel valued. Assist women to balance work and family more effectively without financial penalty.	Children matter more than work. 2 nd wave feminists have ignored this issue. Revalue motherhood. Assist fathers to be involved if they wish.
Worldview	Natural order upset. Moral value of sacrifice mothering. Go back to a model that has worked in the past. Fathers are at work.	Societal structures must change to support women to work and mother. Motherhood should not handicap women in the work sphere. Women should choose wisely when thinking about having children. Fathers are a symbol, expected to support the mother in her choices.	Should be working for true liberation. Structures need to be changed to support mothers and fathers. Motherhood can be a woman's only role for one part of her lifecycle if she chooses. Fathers are encouraged to participate but not expected that all will.

The Myth/metaphor level

At this level four 'myths' can be identified that buttress all viewpoints. It could be argued that these implicit, deep-seated assumptions sit at the root of contemporary Western societies. There are many similarities between the three worldviews; an economic rationale is applied to the choices around having children; there is an unquestioned assumption that present conditions will continue into the future; and the role of men is marginalized in the family unit. New ways of framing the debate cannot occur unless these deep beliefs are exposed and evaluated.

'Children as personal indulgence'

One of the underlying myths of the debate around motherhood and paid maternity leave is that having children is a personal indulgence on the part of parents, and as such they should make their own arrangements. There is little discussion of the societal and species value of procreation and child rearing. The argument over paid maternity especially reflects this, as it revolves around giving *individual* women financial support while they *individually* care for their children. If they are unable to personally care for their child then they are *individually* responsible for finding an appropriate,

high quality substitute. If this substitute is found to be lacking in terms of the child's development, then that too is the mother's *individual* responsibility.

'The missing Father'

Another common element within each view is the 'the missing Father'. Each perspective deems that a child's 'Mother' is most important. The caring of children is referred to as a women's issue, both as a way of empowering women and also to remove the issue from the list of those held as important to a modern Western society. Women are understood to make all reproductive decisions to do with the size of the family; men's wishes are seen as secondary. As Belinda Probert (2001) states: "the revolution in expectations about women's labor market participation seems to have occurred without any corresponding revolution in the care of children and the domestic sphere. The practice of fathering is relatively unchanged". Carmen Lawrence (2002) adds that the debate "ignore(s) a new generation of fathers who also want to redefine their work and family roles". Tucker (2005) argues that "the idealization of conscientious mothering as a kind of universal slave for what's gone wrong in society has tremendous appeal". All sides debating the issues have ignored the effect of men's career options and choices on the size of families, and the balance that is struck between work and family life. All the emphasis is placed on women and their choices. Men too have noted this exclusion as the proliferation of men's groups supporting the recasting of masculinity and the access of fathers to their children after divorce is testament to this.

'Growth is good'

Probably the most powerful underlying 'myth' that is shared by all groups is that of 'growth is good'. Economic growth figures are breathlessly awaited in economies all round the globe. Conservatives, second and third wave feminists all agree that two income families and large mortgages are a part of both the present and the future. Continued economic growth and the corresponding consumerist boom will, and should, continue. All members of a society have it as their sacred role to contribute to economic growth regardless of the consequences. Family life is sacrificed on the altar of Gross National Product.

'Children as an economic asset/liability'

Following from the growth is good myth, all sides in the debate share the perspective that children can be evaluated as an economic asset or liability in the same way as a house or car. There are economic costs associated with having children, the rhetoric of opportunity cost, potential earnings, and compensation for work, run as a thread through all areas of this debate. Paying women for their time spent raising children at home is an idea supported by conservatives, and feminists cast the decision to have children, especially more children, as an economic one. The core nature of this myth to all worldviews highlights the dominance of economic discourse in Western societies.

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'Work as personal fulfillment'

Another deep-seated myth for both men and women is that work can be totally fulfilling. This myth, along with that of 'growth is good', aims to keep a career at forefront of many people's minds. That family, societal or personal needs should come first became an anathema to some second wave feminists in case women were subjugated to a less important role, hence the lack of importance placed on the volunteering role many mothers have while their children are young. Conservatives are happy to cast men in the role of career focused, with its associated risks, whilst third wave feminism still appears to believe this myth; they are simply trying to find ways to incorporate it around child-rearing. Work for pay is seen as the highest form of self expression in a modern Western society. A career, especially a 'successful' one is worth any sacrifice the family unit may need to make.

What is Missing?

The debate around paid maternity leave is ostensibly about the future, how society should look in thirty years. Women with equal access to employment regardless of their mothering status, support to have a career and children without sacrificing either vs. an ageing society, with births below replacement, vs. a growing society with multiple births per family; economically strong and vibrant societies vs. poor and depressed economies. However, some questions have not been asked. For example, the trade offs between economic growth and the environment are not examined in this debate, which leads to an acceptance that there are no limits, all evidence to the contrary, that continued economic growth should be pursued at all costs.

A discussion is needed about how we want to raise our children, structure our families and order our society in the future. The location of much of the debate at the litany and social analysis level has meant that none of the foundation myths have been questioned. The result of this is that all the ideas discussed in the sections above assume that what is in existence now will always be here.

The challenge of completely re-structuring the current work/life balance or envisioning a different future, one where the nurturing of the next generation was central to society's undertaking is not often discussed. New movements are needed to try and colonize this area of the debate, to re-frame motherhood, fatherhood and the family by generating compelling images of alternative futures.

Scenarios for the Future

One way of combating this 'presentist' mind-set is to investigate scenarios of how the future might unfold for families and mothers. Images of the future which run contrary to accepted 'wisdom' are fertile areas for exploration as they open one's mind to the probability that the future may very well not be at all like the present. Science fiction can be one way of immersing oneself in worlds that do not yet exist and to identify myths that may be introduced into the debate. Two examples will be introduced here: Charlotte Perkins Gilman – *Herland* and Marge Piercy – *Woman on the Edge of*

Time. The story lines are less important in this instance than the images these authors portray of family structures and mothering roles in the future.

Herland – A child centered society

Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote 'Herland' in 1915, as a serial in a monthly magazine she wrote and published. It was first published in book form in 1979. The novel describes the adventures of three young men who find themselves in an isolated mountain valley, with cities and dense forests, populated entirely by women. Many generations earlier the women found themselves separated from the human race, with the men dying off. The women then became capable of parthenogenesis, the fertilization of the ovum without the need for a male, and the society subsequently organized itself around raising children and living in harmony with their surroundings. In its early history, the society emphasized re-population, "each woman bore five children...till they were confronted with the absolute need for a limit...We were living on rations before we worked it out" (Gilman, 1979, p. 60). Families do not exist; rather children are born to be raised by the group. Gilman describes the women as being "Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not...a mere 'instinct', a wholly personal feeling; it was religion....they were Making People – and they were doing it well" (Gilman, 1998, p. 58). The entire community's focus is on the future for the children. It revolves around child rearing as a core goal. All women in the society regard all the children as theirs. Those born were valued by all, not just their parent. The men wondered at how this would work for women; one of them, the narrator Van, comments:

And the mother instinct, with us so painfully intense, so thwarted by conditions, so concentrated in personal devotion to a few, so bitterly hurt by death, disease, or barrenness, and even by the mere growth of the children, leaving the mother alone in the empty nest – all this feeling with them flowed out in a strong, wide current, unbroken through the generations, deepening and widening through the years, including every child in all the land. (Gilman, 1979, p. 81)

Developmental psychology is used to identify those experiences most likely to develop a child to its fullest potential; the development of the individual's brain, their personal development, and the development of the society as a whole, is the focus for the group's decision-making. They work together to achieve common goals for the group.

From a modern perspective this may not be a utopia, as there are very few 'rights' as we may conceive them and many responsibilities. However, there is no motherguilt in this society. There is a responsibility for all to invest effort in shaping the next generation. Decisions are made to ensure the long term survival of the group rather than short term profit.

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Woman on the edge of time – More with less vs. growth run wild

Marge Piercy (1976) in *Woman on the Edge of Time* describes present day society for the poor, dispossessed and desperate through her heroine Consuelo Ramos, a Latino woman in New York who is beaten and raped by the men in her life. She has had her daughter removed from her and was forced to have an abortion, that resulted in a hysterectomy performed without her knowledge. Connie is locked up in a mental institution and realizes that the voices she is hearing are actually people communicating with her from the future. Eventually, she is pulled into the future, to the year 2137 to visit them and she finds two societies – Mouth-of-Mattapoisett which is driven by sustainability and responsibility; and New York, driven by economic growth and hedonism.

Mouth-of-Mattapoisett is a village that is built so its inhabitants can live in a sustainable manner. Solar energy is primarily used, and the community grows enough produce to feed itself. Wealth is shared and communal living takes place. The reproduction function is a community one, in that a child is only born as a replacement when someone dies. Babies are grown in tanks, to remove the need for women to bear them. "Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males would never be humanized to be loving and tender" (Piercy, 1976, p. 105). Three "mother", male and female, are chosen for each child from those who have volunteered for the role; all breastfeed and bond with the baby and mothering is a choice which is highly regarded and supported by the wider community. The community, sees children as a social responsibility rather than an individual one.

New York in the same year is a city of high rise security living, body sculpting, contract sex, short life expectancy (44 years), daily drug use, contract pregnancy and vast wealth disparity. All food is made from coal, algae and wood by-products in factory farms. It is a world reminiscent of George Orwell's 1984, with high level security and entertainment to keep the populace calm and quiet. The 'richies' have used life extension technology from the 1990s and still survive, while others have used genetic engineering and organ transplant. Motherhood as a concept no longer exists; little attachment to parents is encouraged.

The two scenarios contrast each other; "if we think of Mattapoisett as a transformational scenario, New York is the scenario of continued growth (on its way to collapse), although a dark and cancerous growth" (Rosenthal, 1994). In addition, they illustrate communal vs. individual value systems. The New York scenario can be considered an extrapolation of business as usual from today, whilst the Mattapoisett scenario requires that we make changes at the deepest levels of our society.

The myths represented in Gilman and Piercy allow a glimpse of what a society founded on reframed metaphors for child rearing might look like. Imagining a society where the needs of the children are central to the operation of the society, such in Herland, leads to a rather different suggestion when it comes to 'rewarding' women for giving birth. Images of how families and groups may choose to bring up the next generation are powerful ways of recasting the future and allowing the present to unfold in alternative ways.

Conclusion

In Australia, the debate about paid maternity leave opened up a wider discussion concerning the role and construction of motherhood in society. Using CLA to delve into the deepest levels of the worldviews represented, illuminated the shared myths underpinning opposing positions. Whilst this war is fought from mainly middle class privileged positions, which has choices around work and children, the various skirmishes highlight difficulties faced by women of all social classes when they decide to have children. The strong economic discourse underlying the debate at the myth/metaphor level by its nature undervalues time spent nurturing the spirit of children in relation to the contribution mothers make to the economy. The most damaging myth for families of those identified is that surrounding economic growth. Unfettered economic growth, and a continuing belief in the power of the Gross National Product to define a society, is not conducive to healthy societal evolution. Labeled a 'growth fetish', the assumption that increasing economic growth will be the solution to all ills is proving to be false (Hamilton, 2003). Unfortunately this growth fetish has spread to developing countries with the consequence that, if left unexamined, in the future they too may be facing debates around motherhood and family construction similar to those that occur in Western societies today.

The myths identified above resonate strongly throughout Western societies, though counter ideas are developing, and work is now emerging to tell us what many have already guessed, in the long run adherence to these myths may not be good for us as a society or species. Books such as *Growth Fetish* and *Affluenza* by Clive Hamilton from the Australia Institute have highlighted the effects of this economic discourse. Images of possible futures utilized in the paid maternity leave debate assume that present conditions will continue and hence the present myths we hold will be enough to pull us through. In fact, this may not be the case.

Whilst the images portrayed in *Herland* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* are interesting and thought provoking, by themselves they do not necessarily compel us to transform. Through undertaking a CLA on the paid maternity leave and motherhood debates, it becomes obvious that more than just leave provisions must change if want our society to prosper. Men and women are jointly responsible for conception and should be jointly responsible for rearing the child, once born. Evidence is growing indicating that children thrive more readily when their care is a social responsibility and goal, not just an individual one (Bagnall, 2002). Changing our myth from growth is good, to a belief in limits or 'less is more', would radically re-shape the way we arrange our family and work lives.

If, as a society, we decide that the metaphors we are currently using to anchor our beliefs about child rearing do not allow our society to fully express its potential, then new myths must be sought. Images of possible futures such as those contained in fiction, give our imaginations the opportunity to shrug off the shackles of the present and dream about the future.

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