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INNOCENT CURIOSITY: 
A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF NURSERY STAFF'S 
ACCOUNTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S SEXUALITY

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Dissertation submitted for the award 
of Doctor of Philosophy degree,

Department of Social Policy and Social Work
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August 1997
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I declare that this Thesis has been composed by myself and has not been presented for any other degree. All quotations are differentiated from my own work by quotation marks and all sources of information have been acknowledged.

Signed: [Signature] Date: [Date]

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis is based on findings from a qualitative study of nursery staff’s accounts of sexuality in young children and it aims to examine the ideological sources on which staff draw as a preliminary study. This focus was conceived in an atmosphere of intense concern about the sexual abuse of children. It was formulated at a time when interest in childhood sexuality was being rekindled because many child care professionals, most notably those from paediatrics and social work, were addressing the detection of this newly discovered social problem. Two main methods of data collection were employed in the investigation of this sensitive topic: a period of participant observation, in all nurseries sampled, and over one hundred individual interviews with nursery staff (teachers and nursery nurses).

Chapter 1 sets out to introduce central ideas about children drawn on by nursery staff and emphasizes how ideologies of childhood innocence are central to understanding the views of professionals who engage with young children. First it addresses the social construction of childhood and highlights how psychoanalytic and developmental accounts of the child have impacted on understandings of children. Specific attention is paid to the ways in which discourses about childhood sexuality have been reformulated in the political context of the emergence of child sexual abuse as a key social issue. Chapter 2 however explains how the research focus of the present study was translated into a research enterprise. This Chapter therefore considers the rationale for the present study in detail, the methods used and the analysis of data.

Chapters 3 and 4, examine the inadequacies of psychological and sociological approaches for the study of professionals’ accounts of childhood sexuality. Chapter 3 addresses scientific discourses about childhood sexuality and discusses methodological limitations of empirical studies of sexuality in young children. Here it is argued that, ideologies of childhood innocence and the psychological construct of ‘innocent incompetence’, largely explain the absence of children’s accounts from scientific versions of childhood sexuality. Chapter 4 identifies weaknesses and strengths of two important theoretical explanations of childhood sexuality - including Freud’s ‘grand narrative’ (cf. Stainton-Rogers, 1992) and Gagnon and Simon’s (1978) scripting approach towards human sexuality. In short, it is argued that sexuality during childhood is dominated by, the measure of adulthood and that the topic of early childhood sexuality is not considered in it's
own right. Further, it will be demonstrated how developmental versions of the child, resurface in theoretical understandings of childhood sexuality.

Chapters 5 to 9 focus exclusively on the presentation of findings and examine the perspectives of nursery staff. One prime aim of Chapter 5, is to consider the dominant versions of childhood sexuality found in the accounts of nursery staff therefore will consider images of sexually innocent and sexually knowing young children. Further, this chapter addresses how staff discriminate between 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour in nursery children. Here it will be shown how staff distinctions are underpinned by powerful ideologies of childhood.

Chapter 6, however concentrates on nursery staff's accounts of normal and atypical 'sexual' knowledge for pre-school children. Staff views will be shown to be informed by developmental accounts of the child as well as by social factors such as the child's age and social class background. Chapter 7 moves on to another dimension of sexuality in early childhood, focusing on the topic of 'sexual' language in young children. Importantly, it is argued that genital naming in young children contributes to our understanding of the construction of gendered sexualities in early childhood, and that it illuminates our understanding of the repression of sexuality in young girls.

With regard to further assessments of nursery staff, Chapter 8 addresses the ways in which staff articulated changes in attitudes towards sexuality in young children. Staff emphasised that substantial changes have taken place in attitudes, and this view will be located as reflecting moral panics about the disappearance of childhood. In contrast, Chapter 9 concentrates on how staff explain their opinions about childhood sexuality, and discusses the life events they cited as relevant.

In conclusion Chapter 10 draws together and summarises the main findings of the thesis. It considers the contribution of the present study towards our general understanding of children, the development of theory, and finally pays particular attention to the implications of findings for professional practice. In conclusion, this thesis maintains that it is necessary to critically evaluate our constructions of the child; their social value, and, most importantly, individual and collective investments in ideas about children.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude to the nursery nurses and teachers who took part in this study, and to all of the nursery staff who welcomed me into their establishments and contributed to making my fieldwork, both a stimulating and worthwhile experience. This would have not been possible without the permission granted by the Education Department, Strathclyde Region, giving me access to their pre-school centres. Thanks go to my supervisors Professor Malcolm Hill, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Glasgow and Dr. Rose Barbour, Department of Public Health, University of Hull. Appreciation to Sue Davidson, Postgraduate Research Student, Department of Social Work, University of Dundee and Dr. Ann McDowell Caledonian University for their friendship throughout and helpful discussions. Many thanks to Dr. Anmarie Turnbull, Goldsmiths' College, University of London for her very helpful comments on drafts. Thanks also to Euan McKay and Laura Lockhead for their assistance with the layout of this thesis. Finally, I am indebted to my family who have tolerated my preoccupations over a long period of time. Thanks to my daughter, Hannah, who enthusiastically became my official tape recorder tester during my fieldwork, (no minor task once confronted with practicalities of interviewing). Gratitude to my partner Bob Clarke who provided the support which enabled me to complete this thesis.
CHAPTER 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SEXUALITY: PUTTING CURRENT CONCERNS IN CONTEXT

Introduction

If we regard children as a special category of people and sexuality as a special area of social life then any meeting of the two is likely to be explosive. Not only are both subjects controversial in their own right, but bringing them together breaks a particularly powerful social taboo: that children and sex should be kept apart.

(Jackson, 1982: 2)

This thesis is based on a study which has examined nursery staff's ideas about sexuality in early childhood. It does not attempt to address the causal factors that might explain specific perceptions of individual nursery staff but seeks, rather, to explore the ideological sources upon which staff members draw, to account for sexuality in young children. It has explored, through interviews, the views of a substantial number of professionals - a total of 106 nursery nurses and nursery teachers - an important population for the control and surveillance of young children. Significantly, the present study found that minimal attention was paid to the issue of childhood sexuality in the training of nursery staff and the question of professional training will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

The subject matter and focus of this study, were developed in an intense atmosphere of both public and professional concern regarding the sexual abuse of children, in the aftermath of the Cleveland Enquiry in England and during the Orkney case in Scotland. The rise of child sexual abuse as a social issue in the 1980s and the accompanying imprint this phenomenon has made on both professional (Finkelhor, 1989) and popular consciousness (Sheper-Hughes et al, 1987), makes it one of the key social issues of the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed it has led some commentators to suggest that we are a culture obsessed by abuse (Coward, 1993; Archard, 1993). Today, attention has shifted to the institutional
care of the young, and the abuse of a startling number of former residents of local authority care. Over the last two decades, the development of professional interest in, and focus on, the identification of child sexual abuse, has highlighted the importance of social constructionist perspectives for understanding sexuality during childhood.

In attempting to identify and understand the sexual abuse of young children, textbooks aimed at professionals (i.e. MacFarlane, 1986; Glaser and Frosh, 1988), have pathologised 'sexual' behaviours in children, constituting a polarised division between 'normal' sexuality on the one hand, and the pathological and symptomatic on the other. Generally, the findings presented in this study identify contributory social factors which influenced nursery staff's evaluations of socially acceptable and unacceptable sexuality in early childhood. These indicated that factors such as, the child's age and social class background, had some impact on staff members' views. However, the most powerful influence on the ideas of nursery staff, was the idea of 'childhood innocence'. Whilst the social factors identified in this research project might provide a basis for further systematic study the present thesis will focus primarily on the ideological sources upon which nursery staff draw in formulating their understandings and responses.

In order to understand and contextualise the evaluations of nursery staff it is necessary to turn our attention to the topic of childhood. This will not only present the reader with a broad introduction to the subject matter of this study, but will enable links to be made with constructions of the child identified in the literature, and the themes which will be examined later in staff accounts.

Primarily, this section will explore the genesis of the modern form of childhood and dominant ideas about young children. How is it possible to comprehend early
childhood sexuality and what kinds of versions of the child are central to understanding the evaluations of nursery staff?

A) The Emergence of the Modern Child

The idea that childhood is a special and dependent period of life, which is fundamentally different from adulthood, is a relatively modern conception of childhood (Postman, 1982; Ennew, 1986, Archard, 1993). The genesis of this contemporary view of childhood is commonly pinpointed in the era of the Romantic Revival, and the publication of Rousseau's influential 'Emile'. Here Rousseau detailed how he would educate an imaginary boy, emphasising children's innately 'good' and innocent nature. According to the literature, this period of rapid industrialisation, marks a watershed in appraisals of children (Hendrick, 1990). Echoing other writers on this topic, Shipman states:-

Rousseau was saying something entirely new in 'Emile'; the child is not a man but a creature in his own right requiring special consideration.
(Shipman, 1972: 4)

Shipman maintains that, from the sixteenth century onwards, children increasingly became a major focus of study, which was fuelled by a developing recognition about the 'special' nature of children. Historians of Western childhood, who have studied past perceptions of children (most notably Aries, 1973), have argued that in Western Europe the notion of childhood as a distinct, prolonged and dependant phase of life emerged from the 18th Century onwards. As a consequence, the modern form of childhood, including its duration and the degree of children's dependency on adults was related to the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Aries postulated that prior to this period, children were regarded as 'miniature adults', and as soon as they reached about 5 or 7 years of age, they were fully absorbed into adult society. Aries concluded that in Medieval times not only was
childhood was short lived but, more contentiously, that a concept of childhood did not exist. Although Aries' inferences have been criticised on the basis of subsequent findings (Pollok, 1983), and for his lack of methodological rigour (Fox, 1988), Leonard makes the point that Aries work remains valuable because he demonstrated that 'there is no single trans-historical notion of childhood' (Leonard, 1984: 122).

While the history of childhood in Western societies remains shrouded in controversy, it is evident that two fundamental changes occurred from the mid nineteenth century onwards, which are helpful in terms of understanding contemporary visions of children. Firstly, the fact that children were removed from direct participation in the workplace had a profound impact on the social value attached to children:

The emergence of this economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child has created an essential condition of contemporary childhood.
(Zelizar, 1985: 3).

This, Zelizar maintains, represented an important cultural transformation, where the middle classes pioneered what she describes as the 'sacralization of children's lives'. Secondly, an interrelated development was the introduction of formal and compulsory education for children and this, as Logan (1979) explains, served to segregate the modern child (spatially, psychologically and socially), from the world of adults. While schools were not originally organised around the strict segregation of children or the rigid age grading of pupils (Postman, 1982), such practices developed alongside a growing recognition of the special status of childhood (Hockey and James, 1992).

It is the twentieth century, which has been characterised as 'the century of the child', and from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards 'the child',
became the object of a new and intensified form of professional and scientific interest (Takanishi, 1978). Concern with the welfare of children - including their moral training, physical, psychological development and sexual habits - has been explained as a variation of the Romantic, pastoral, idea of childhood, in that 'the child' was viewed as a dynamic site of the social control of human evolution (Ehrenreich and English, 1979: 133). This era in Western civilisation, where childhood was accorded a special social status, witnessed the burgeoning of new professions and 'child experts' (e.g. child and adolescent psychiatry, paediatrics), and related disciplines (e.g. child psychology, child health), exclusively concerned with the study and management of children's behaviour. As a consequence the period of childhood has been socially defined as a 'problem area', and has received unprecedented attention and state intervention (Jenks, 1996).

(i) Visions of Infancy and Early Childhood

The fact that children are constructed as a special class of people, with special needs and requirements, obviously has a tangible basis in biology - particularly with regard to young infants. As Ennew (1986: 24) points out, there are observable, physiological criteria that justify distinguishing adults from children; in addition to which there are further physiological categories within childhood itself, that separate broad periods of childhood. According to Ennew, these generally correspond with the following age grades: infancy: 0 to 5 years of age; pre-pubertal childhood: 6 to 12 years of age, and finally post pubertal adolescence: 12 years to adulthood. Clearly, there is also a sound physiological basis for regarding infants as vulnerable, dependent, and in need of protection: but the way in which societies interpret, and manage immaturity, is subject to cross cultural, and class variation.
It is the period of 'infancy' where observable physiological changes are most striking and momentous; the infant is transformed, from a person who is completely dependent on caregivers, to an individual who is ambulant and usually possesses language. Other obvious milestones include the development of hand to eye co-ordination and manual dexterity. Of course, this normalised framework cannot be generalised to all children, as a profoundly handicapped child, for example, may well forge their very own individualised physiological pathway.

The early years are also marked by events which are variably invested with social meaning, and in our cultural context, this would include transitions such as weaning (a period which continues to require 'a specialised diet', of mass produced powdered and tinned 'baby foods', 'baby and toddler juices', etc.). Other milestones would include the appearance of a baby's first tooth, baby's first word and the development of bladder and bowel control. Interestingly, examinations of past child care advice (Hardyment, 1983), show that it is essential to understand such advice in its historical context, since what is considered acceptable practice shifts over time. Taking the example of toilet training for young children, the age at which it was recommended - as well as the tenor of advice - has changed over time. In the post war era, when discipline and self restraint were emphasised 'potty training' was authoritatively advised for babies; while today, less prescriptive advice is given, and anytime in toddlerhood, 'when the child is ready', is recommended (Leach, 1983).

It is also important to highlight the economic context of Western childhood. Today, a pervasive image of the child, is, as an expensive accessory (Holt, 1975); and childhood as a period of life which requires specialist clothing, entertainment, food, and scaled down equipment. Contemporary childhood is big business and

this can be copiously illustrated by reference to the construction of the material 'needs' of babies. Babies require a plethora of specialist equipment: carry cots; car seats; disposable nappies (now gender specific); baby walkers; baby bouncers; feeding equipment; soothers and bibs. Yet Ennew and Milne (1989), describe a rather different scenario in a Third World city:-

Parents taking their new baby on a Sunday visit to grandmother in Third World cities, get on the bus with a child in a shawl in their arms or the mother's back. If the baby is hungry it is breast fed with no fuss. At grandma's it will be handed from person to person and will always find some accommodating lap to sleep on. In the West it is a different performance.
(Ennew and Milne, 1989: 8)

Another characteristic of the modern form of Western childhood is its ability to further fragment into increasingly more specialist periods. We now have within the period of early childhood the relatively recent categories of the 'new born'; 'the toddler', and 'the pre-school child'. The category of pre-schooler, would be inconceivable without the existence of the modern hierarchical and stage-based system of schooling. Historically, the meaning of 'infant' has shifted to denote the period of early babyhood, whereas Freud (whose ideas and influence will be discussed throughout this thesis), clearly used this term, to refer to a longer period of childhood (0 - 5 years of age). Further, medical and technological innovations in the Western world have facilitated the construction of new categories of persons, and the 'premature baby' illustrates the mutability of modern boundaries of childhood. As technology has greatly enhanced the chances of survival, at earlier periods of pregnancy, so public concepts have altered regarding the beginnings of childhood (Holland, 1992).

The social organisation of early childhood differs in some fundamental respects, from the remainder of childhood and, in an important sense, young children exist 'outside', and on the periphery of non-familial socialising institutions. In Britain, for example, nursery education is not compulsory nor does state provision have the
capacity to accommodate all of Britain’s 3 to 5 year old children even on a part time basis (David, 1994). Furthermore, there is a diverse and largely uncoordinated array of services (both public and private) which constitute ‘pre-school provision’; Mother and Toddler groups, Play groups, Childminders, Day Nurseries and Nursery Schools, all offer different forms of services, and varying degrees of support for families with young children. Infants, and inevitably the mothers of these infants, are subject to a particular type of state surveillance. Health Visitors have special responsibilities for the ‘under five’s’, whose development and progress, is periodically monitored in ‘Baby Clinics’, by these health care professionals. Infant testing and check-ups have now become routine social practices which promote ideas about ‘normal’ child development (Unwin, 1985). In contrast to other periods of childhood, the physiological immaturity of the infant, especially the baby, has been constituted as individual responsibility, invariably that of the mother. This is underpinned by scientific discourses regarding the moral superiority and exclusivity of the mother/child bond (cf. Bowlby, 1965; Winnicott, 1967), rather than as a collective responsibility of the state.

The rite of passage which symbolises the transition from early childhood into pre-pubertal childhood, is the child’s entry into mainstream institutional life, and in Britain: as a rule, 'going to school', and subsequently becoming literate, marks a child’s departure from the dependent, and marginalised world, of early childhood. Even within Europe the ways in which ‘infancy’ is organised, and expressed socially, show subtle, cross cultural variations. It would appear that in the European context, 'going to school', as young as four or five, is a largely British phenomenon which can be explained by a rather idiosyncratic quirk in our parliamentary history. In Italy, Germany and other European countries, 2

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2 cf. The Sunday Correspondent, 25/2/90 for a brief account of the reading of the 1870 Education Act.
mainstream education begins at 6 or 7 years of age, which reflects a different interpretation of the divisions of childhood. Moreover, this way of marking the boundaries of early childhood surfaces in some educational philosophies, such as Montessori, and Rudolph Steiner, who both distinguish early childhood in a similar manner. This also informs their teaching practices, as emphasis is not placed on reading and writing until a child reaches about seven years of age. Historically, seven years also functioned as a significant marker because in pre-industrial societies it was around this age that children, (or more precisely 'the peasant child'), began to participate fully, in production (Logan, 1979). In other cultures seven years can operate as a salient, age grade. For example, Korbin (1981), points out that cultures vary in terms of the age at which children are expected to behave responsibly, and if a society believes that children do not 'have sense' until seven or eight, then punishment at this stage is viewed as pointless. This, she maintains, contrasts sharply with rigid, age-appropriate expectations, which operate in Western cultures. Here, family stress is exacerbated by unrealistic expectations of children's sleeping patterns and crying, which characterises much child maltreatment.

(ii) Ideologies of Childhood: Tensions and Contradictions

What is most striking in the literature which addresses the genesis of the modern form of Western childhood, is the reoccurring tension evident in historical constructions of the child's nature. Ennew, explains this as: 'a built in ambiguity and constant interplay between good and evil, and paradoxical attitudes towards sexuality' (Ennew, 1986:12). She illustrates this by making reference to the 1930s and the juxtaposition of innocent, and sexual images of childhood, at the time when Freud's ideas about infantile sexuality had been embraced by professionals, permeating public ideologies. This libidinous version of the child existed alongside innocent and asexual representations of childhood in children's literature.
A. A. Milne's "House at Pooh Corner", is one such example (relating to a middle class childhood), where Christopher Robin inhabits an alien landscape, totally detached from the rest of society. But there is nothing particularly new about contradictory accounts of the child as ideas regarding innocent children, have always co-existed alongside Judeo-Christian ideas, about the evil nature of children and the belief that they exist in a state of 'original sin' (Skolnick, 1989). As Archard points out:-

The Christian image is defined by familiar ideals and their polar opposites. In the first instance, children are seen as nearest to God, whilst adults, correlative, are furthest from him.

(Archard, 1993:37)

Similarly, Synnot (1983) demonstrates, how competing and contradictory ideas about children have often co-existed. During the early modern period, for example, Synnot documented at least five different conceptions of children; these are a) innocent child, b) the child as a tabula rasa, c) in the state most approximate to 'nature', d) as angels e) or little devils. He emphasises that there is a continuity in our thinking about children because some early modern conceptions of children, have re-surfed in contemporary constructions of childhood. Clearly, there is ample evidence to suggest, that historically the idea of the child, has simultaneously provoked, both hostile and sentimental views about children and Vizard (1987) explains this in terms of the fact that children are often the recipients of powerful, projectile, adult fantasies. According to Firestone (1971), these projected images, largely consist of sentimental and nostalgic, reconstructions of childhood.

It is interesting that early references to the word 'innocence' describes a rather generalised condition of being innocent because age, intelligence, and sex are not specified (O.E.D: 313). Nevertheless, there exists one notable exception, which
not only associated 'innocence' with the period of early childhood, but links the state of being innocent with the moral purity of children:-

A young child, as being free from actual sin, or unacquainted with evil, the young children slain by Herod after the birth of Jesus. (ibid.)

'Holy Innocent Day', was celebrated on the twenty ninth of December, to mark this occasion. Importantly, however, it is apparent that in the modern period the word 'innocent' increasingly became linked, not only with being a child but with being a "little child" (O.E.D, op.cit.). This connection, between 'innocence' and the young child is particularly crucial for the present study, as contemporary ideologies of childhood innocence are intimately bound up with images of young children. Furthermore, it is stated that innocent is: "an unsuspecting nature of the child, or one ignorant of the world"; suggesting synonymity between innocence and ignorance. Significantly, Chapter 5 will argue that, the 'sexually innocent and ignorant child', was a dominant version of childhood sexuality found in the accounts of nursery staff.

It is relevant, that the link between innocence and the absence of knowledge, has re-emerged and has been explicitly reconstituted, within the context of contemporary debates about the sexual abuse of children. Ideas about the innocence of children have been re-examined in critiques of traditional positions regarding child protection (e.g. Nelson, 1987; Kitzinger,1988). Central to traditional conceptions of children is the idea that the child has a basic right to protection, owing to her/his cognitive and moral incompetence. According to McKenna and Kessler, traditionalists define children as: 'those who do not yet know about sex' (McKenna and Kessler, 1985: 249). Kitzinger (1988) is critical of the child protection lobby in Britain, maintaining that ideologies of childhood innocence actually deny children access to 'sexual' knowledge. This, she
maintains, not only stigmatises the sexually abused and knowing child, but ultimately increases children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

(iii) Powerful Psychologies: Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology

So far, it has been argued that ideologies of childhood are characterised by contradictory views about children and the intention at this stage is to identify further constructions of the child, which are pertinent to understanding the views of nursery staff. Now, more explicit attention will be paid, to outlining some of the ways in which Freud's ideas and those of developmental psychology, inform popular understandings of children.

Coveney (1967), maintains that it was the discoveries of Freud which furnished the conditions, where an 'objective' and 'rational' study of the child became possible since his elaboration of infantile sexuality eclipsed the Victorian myth of childhood innocence. Freud's constitution of the sexualised child, permeated professional ideologies and legitimated regimes of control of young children's 'sexual' behaviour (Foucault 1976; Riley, 1983; Jenks, 1996). Freud's influence, can be readily found in 'child management' type texts aimed at professionals published around 1950s and 1960s. Patricia Edge's (1971) manual, for example, aimed at the nursing profession, offered advice on restraining 'bad habits' in young children. With regard to masturbation in childhood, she draws on psychoanalytic accounts and warns against over stimulation: 'As the external genital organs of both boys and girls are so sensitive, it is important to make sure that the children are not wearing knickers that are too tight' (Edge, 1971:115). In order to manage the sexually aroused child, it is recommended that their attention should be focused away from this undesirable 'problem'. Management of masturbation in young children, is a topic to which we will return in Chapter 5.
There is no doubt, that the impact of Freud's conceptualisation of infantile sexuality was instrumental in producing one particularly powerful version of the child's nature; as sexual and full of libidinous impulses. Yet, his influence goes beyond this specific contribution. In a more general manner, Freud can be credited with elevating the status and importance of early childhood in scientific discourses about childhood (Jenks, 1996). The significance he ascribed to this period of early development for functioning in later life has been elaborated by a range of professionals, including early learning specialists. Educationalists of the early years have applied this general assertion to the child's intellect since it is maintained that pre-school children have a tremendous capacity to learn during this period. Montessori, for example, proposed that young children displayed greater receptivity to learning about colour, shape and texture between the years of 2 and 6, and such ideas continue to inform the curriculum and visual landscape of nursery schools (see Chapter 2). Images of absorbent sponges pervade educationalists accounts of the young child, in what is construed as a critical and hypersensitive period of learning (e.g. Van Der Eyken, 1977).

While psychoanalytic ideas have had a profound and far reaching influence on understandings of young children, it has been the compendium of ideas known collectively as developmental psychology, which provides a most powerful source of ideas relating to the period of early childhood and young children. As Burman (1994) points out it is developmental psychology, more than any other sub discipline within psychology, that has impacted on our everyday lives in a far-reaching manner; influencing both our thinking about ourselves as well as children. While sustained critiques of developmental psychology emerged from the 1970s onwards (e.g. Henriques et al, 1984; Richards and Light, 1986; Skolnick, 1989), Burman argues that part of its power, lay in the way it continues to permeate our daily lives which is evident in social policies as well as education.
Yet it is Piaget’s theories, which have had a most significant impact on understandings of young children. His theories, have been used to justify ‘child centred’ regimes in primary education (Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers, 1992), have influenced the layout of primary school classrooms (Walkerdine, 1984) and currently underpin national testing of children in Britain. Significantly, in contrast to Freud, Piaget did not address expansive areas of children’s experience because his specific interest was evolving knowledge in children. Piaget’s stage based explanation of children’s cognitive development is described by Jenks as: ‘chronologically ordered, but also hierarchically arranged along a continuum from low status, infantile, ‘figurative’ thought to high status adult ‘operative’ intelligence’ (Jenks, 1996: 23). This ordering of the young child’s development, can be found in child care advice aimed at parents (e.g. Leach, 1983; Fahlberg, 1986). Here, each phase of early childhood is typified by generalised stages of development, which are neatly aligned with age-appropriate expectations about the behaviour of children. For the young child this includes the orality of the young baby; the tantrums and emotional instability of the toddler (the ‘terrible twos’), followed by the intellectual enquiries of the pre-schooler (the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions). Also, Piaget has been held responsible for characterising young children as ‘egocentric’ and ‘presocial’ and not possessing fully developed selves (Joffe, 1973). Goode (1986) argues that it is developmental psychology’s tendency to frame children’s development in terms of their abilities, which has helped construct the child as an ‘incompetent being’. With regard to the present study, this tremendously powerful construction of the young child, is especially crucial to understanding staff’s accounts of sexuality in early childhood. Moreover the idea that young children are unable to understand anything other than basic information and simple language provides one central and crucial theme of this thesis (see Chapter 3, 5, 6 and 7).
B) Understanding Early Childhood Sexuality

Now the intention is to address the topic of sexuality in young children and the main aim is to show how particular versions of childhood sexuality (e.g. as sexual, precocious and eroticised), have emerged in the context of professional concern about the sexual abuse of children. Nevertheless, these understandings of childhood sexuality have been formulated within the wider context of changing ideas and practices regarding sexuality and sexual behaviour. A profound change, evident from the 1960s onwards, has been the rapid development in the sexualisation of contemporary societies (Evans, 1993). This has meant that increasingly sex, and especially sexual imagery, has been used to sell a growing range of commodities (Hawkes, 1997). Today sexuality is regarded a central component of modern identities. It is in this broader social context that both parents and professionals have become sensitised towards tactile and sensuous contact with children (see Coward, 1990), children's sexual behaviour and explorative games. Given that the concern of this chapter is to show how understandings of childhood sexuality have shifted in the context of the emergence of child sexual initially attention will be paid to the 'discovery' of this key social problem.

(i) The Rise of Child Abuse - A Very Modern Social Problem?

Explanations of the rise of child abuse tend to revolve around two basic, contradictory arguments; that it is something which has always existed, or alternatively, it is a new phenomenon therefore a very modern social problem. Some commentators have suggested, that it is the ways in which social problems are constituted and the manner in which they are dealt with that have altered over time. Stainton-Rogers (1992), for example, draw parallels with the preoccupation with childhood masturbation during the nineteenth century, and contemporary obsessions with the sexual abuse of children. Alternatively, others maintain that child sexual abuse is an outcome of structural changes in our society, including
more transient intimate relationships. It has been argued that the creation of new family situations, such as step families, now expose children to risks associated with the sexual abuse of children.

While controversy continues to surround the emergence of this key social issue, there remains no doubt, that concern regarding child sexual abuse, appeared quite suddenly; first in the North American context, and somewhat later in Britain. The unitary concept of 'child abuse', however, comprises of a number of aetiologies, including physical; emotional, and sexual abuse of children. The first dimension to 'appear' and be brought to public attention in the 1960s, was the physical abuse of children, and it is Henry Kempe, the American paediatrician, who is credited with the discovery of the 'battered child syndrome'. Yet in relation to our main concern - the emergence of child sexual abuse - it was the highly publicised 'discoveries' of child abuse, first in Cleveland in England, and later Orkney in Scotland, which were crucial in terms of the British context. Significantly however, it was the campaigning on behalf of the Women's Movement, as well as the child protection lobby which did much to raise public and professional awareness regarding the sexual exploitation of children (Jenks, 1996). Later, we will see how these movements in Britain, articulated this particular social problem in very different ways; and we will explore how childhood sexuality was reformulated, within this political context. In order to contextualise contemporary versions of childhood sexuality, first we need to identify some rather powerful ideas regarding children's sexuality.

(ii) Separating Adult Sexuality from the Domain of Young Children

Consideration was previously given, to the socially constructed distance, which has been created between adults and children and nowhere is this segregation more powerfully articulated than in our attitudes and practices surrounding sexuality in
In a host of ways, it is deemed appropriate, that young children are protected from the realities of adult sexual activity, as well as from sexually explicit and ‘offensive’ types of language. This morality is enshrined in censorship legislation (Evans, 1994), including children’s formal access to sex education and through the social mores which regulate the private expression of adult sexuality. In relation to the latter, Foucault (1976), pinpoints the emergence of heterosexual ideals in the triumph of Victorian bourgeoisie:

On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as a model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom. (Foucault, 1976: 3)

While Foucault has been criticised for taking a sweeping view of history (Caplan, 1987), he nonetheless locates the genesis of a morality which today informs much of our thinking about what is suitable for children. That children should be excluded from parental bedrooms, and shielded from the sexual activity of adults, is a product of modernity; an idea which developed alongside changes in attitudes towards privacy and notions of intimacy in Western society (Hawkes, 1996). According to Hawkes, in Medieval Europe, bedrooms were not viewed as private places. Today however, the idea that children should be kept away from adult sexual activity is apparent in texts which consider child development (Fahlberg, 1984) and is suggested in child care manuals which recommend separate bedrooms for children (Spock et al, 1992). In Fahlberg’s account of ‘sexual’ development,

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3 The subject of death is also thought to be unsuitable for children (cf. Bluebond-Langer, 1978).
4 In regard to censorship in the cinema distinctions such as ‘U’: suitable for all and ‘P.G’- parental guidance, relate specifically to the moral protection of young children. For instance, the film ‘Mrs. Doubtfire’, was awarded a ‘12’ rating (over 12 years of age) but was later edited and re-released with a ‘P.G.’ certificate; ‘offensive language’ (the word ‘fuck’ was replaced by ‘fuss’), was deleted from the latter version.
she assesses parental nudity and children's exposure to coitus, as inappropriate for young children:

The child's natural curiosity about sex should be satisfied by talking or reading books with the parents rather than by observing the parents undressed or engaged in sexual intercourse. *(Falkberg, 1984: 93)*

Books and talk it would seem, keep children's 'healthy interest' at a safe and comfortable distance. This advice, however, represents an interest based morality, since 'the underprivileged child' (usually a synonym for the working class child), is assumed to be more routinely exposed to an unrestrained kind of adult sexuality. According to the child psychologist Gesell, the disadvantaged child "sees sights and experiences shocks from which more fortunate children are in decency spared." *(Gesell, 1950:42)*. Assumptions about the sexual socialisation of the working class child can be found elsewhere in scientific discourse where working class children are portrayed as less well protected than their middle class counterparts *(cf. Gagnon and Simon, 1978)*. Aspects of their upbringing are highlighted as different from, and inferior to, the lot of the middle class child because they are more likely to engage in unsupervised street play; interact more freely with peers and older children (a copious mine of sexual information), and enjoy a freedom of movement unknown in the cosseted world of the middle class child. Stereotypical images of a middle class childhood, promote an image of containment and a fostered dependency, where adults confine their sexuality to the decent place (bedrooms) and children are appropriately managed and chaperoned.

Undoubtedly, psychoanalytic versions of childhood sexuality, have informed thinking about what is regarded as morally desirable for children. Children apparently can be 'over stimulated' and eroticised 'too early', by sleeping in the same bedroom as parents or by adults walking about naked *(Litin, et al, 1956)*.
Finch (1967), also maintains that witnessing sexual intercourse leads children to 'act out' in a 'sexual' and therefore inappropriate way.

Constructions of this moral threat to children have their origins in the work of Freud, since he maintained that children who observed sexual intercourse would inevitably interpret this act in a 'sadistic' manner, where a stronger person (male) inflicts themselves on the weaker (female). Clearly, on this particular issue, Freud's thinking is more relevant to Western bourgeois cultures because we know that in other cultures communal sleeping arrangements ensure that children witness the sexual activity of adults (Ford and Beach, 1952; Malinowski, 1968; Mead, 1981). As we have seen, cross-generational sleeping arrangements, which afford such opportunities for children, are readily associated with 'overcrowding' and 'deprivation' in our cultural context. On this issue, Freud's interpretation may tell us more about gendered power relations at the turn of the century (i.e. in relation to both dominance and submission, as mediated in the 'sexual act'), than they tell us about the possible reactions of children. It is relevant that very few research studies have actually sought the views of children. Importantly this thesis argues that it is the absence of children's first hand accounts which constitutes a weakness in psychological and sociological accounts of childhood sexuality (see Chapter 3, 4).

(iii) Child Sexual Abuse and Childhood Sexuality - Incompatible Topics?

There is no doubt, that the discovery of child sexual abuse, has radically altered the cultural landscape in which young children's sexuality is observed and responded to by adults. This has impacted on private domains, including intimate relationships, and has pervaded the atmosphere of institutional life, particularly where children are cared for and schooled. The emergence of child sexual abuse has, therefore, brought into the public arena, and problematised issues which were
once unspoken dimensions of sensuous aspects of relations between adults and young children. In the context of the newly-found intolerance to the mistreatment of children, sensuous aspects of adult/child relationships, has now become an object of both professional and public scrutiny:-

Openness about sex is essential to healthy family life, and part of that openness must include an understanding of the right kind of touching. Normal people know this without having to be told. It is the parent with problems who needs to be told to touch, and how to touch. (Renvoize, 1982: 5)

In the above Renvoize makes a clear distinction between 'problem parents' (which in this context refers to parents who engage in incestuous relationships with their children) and 'normal parents', who intuitively know how to have healthy tactile relationships with their offspring. Importantly, this socially constituted difference, between 'good' (healthy) and 'bad' (presumably unhealthy therefore abusive) touch resurfaces in child sexual abuse prevention programmes (Gilbert et al, 1989). In an evaluation of one pre-school training programme, Gilbert found that afterwards young children assessed 'ambiguous touch', defined by the programme as bathing and tickling, as bad touch. Finkelhor (in Gilbert, 1989), has questioned the validity of such programmes, suggesting that, if children have already engaged in sex play with peers, an increased awareness of the negative potentialities of touch could engender guilty feelings in children. Previously, it has been maintained, that the sexual socialisation of Western children, primarily involves learning about guilt and shame (e.g. Gagnon, 1967; Postman, 1982; Ennew, 1986).

Importantly, Gough (1991) found that prevention programmes aimed at children, completely ignored the topic of childhood sexuality. 'Teachers', for example, were found to use non-specific descriptions because genitals were identified (or remained unidentified), by referring rather mysteriously to 'places underneath swimming costumes'. Similarly 'Kidscape', a package developed in Britain,
advises: 'Children must know that their bodies belong to them, especially the private parts covered by their swimsuits' (Leaflet: Preventing Crime Together in Scotland: 15). Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers (1992), maintain that descriptions used by sex educators serve to specialise the topic of sex. Crucially, this thesis will argue that the hitherto ignored topic of 'sexual' language, is central to understanding constructions of childhood sexuality (see Chapters 3, 6 and 7).

Confidence regarding knowing what is 'normal' or healthy, has been problematised by the heightened awareness about the sexual abuse of children. In David's (1993) examination of Child Protection, specifically in relation to early years teachers, a nursery teacher highlights this issue with regard to changes in parental attitudes:

'I've noticed that parents have become openly testy about some things too... And of course there's been complaints if it's been something like pulling other children's knickers down, even when children are tiny... as though people are confused about what's normal children's curiosity, or children's sexuality, and what's really worrying.' (quoted in David, 1993: 129)

It would appear, that the time when sexuality in young children could be straightforwardly assessed, has passed. For instance, Mullins (1969), in a Nursery School Association leaflet entitled: 'Children and Sex', could, at that time, appraise cross gender sex play (i.e. a boy removing a girl's knickers in an attempt to find out 'how it's done') as harmless and 'perfectly natural'. Similarly, Rutter (1971) in the early 1970s, could confidently address the topic of 'Normal Psychosexual Development' in childhood. Here, activities labelled as 'coitus training' (pelvic thrusting movements apparently 'observed' in young children), could be unambiguously mentioned, as could be observations that young children

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5 I do not wish to suggest here that sexuality in young children was previously a topic which was considered unproblematic. As Mullins (1969) points out, she had, in response to her publication: 'Children and Sex', received abusive and critical letters. Rather, the intention of this section is to explore the ways in which the perception of the taboo childhood sexuality, has been reformulated in the context of the emergence of child sexual abuse as a key social issue.
commonly engage in genital handling, sex play and that they regularly attempt to
fondle their mothers' breasts. These portrayals of childhood sexuality require to
be understood in the British, post-war, political context. This was characterised
by a growing liberalism, and was followed by the 'Woodstock era' with its
emphasis on sexual freedom and emancipation (Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers,
1992). It was during this period, that liberationists could actually address the
sexual rights of children (e.g. Constantine, 1981).

This has changed within the context of more recent concerns about the sexual abuse
of children. For example, when textbooks aimed at professionals attempted to
balance the symptoms of child sexual abuse with baseline information about
'sexual' development of young children, 'the norm', is constructed as particularly
limited. In one such developmental account, Waterman (1986), considers a range
of research literature, yet concludes that pre-school children are occasionally curious
about the origins of babies and notes that some children are interested in genital
differences. Crucially, this rather unitary representation of childhood sexuality
contrasts with earlier considerations of psychosexual development which portray a
more active and diverse image of sexuality in young children (e.g. Rutter, 1971).

Desexualised images of children have emerged in the context of debates about the
sexual abuse of children. Here, two movements have been especially influential in
While there exist a number of feminist positions on the sexual abuse of children, it
has been the campaigning of the Women's Movement which was instrumental in
raising awareness regarding the sexual exploitation of children. Put simply, the
interpersonal dynamics (i.e. sexual and erotic components) involved in child sexual
abuse were side-stepped in favour of a model which focused on the structural

6 There has been a number of feminist analyses of child sexual abuse. For a useful discussion see
Bell (1993). Here the intention is to explore the link between one particularly influential
perspective and contemporary perceptions of sexuality in young children.
oppression of women and children. Sexual abuse had little to do with sex, but was a result of 'the social legitimation of unequal, power relations within the family', (Dominelli, 1987:293). This meant that male power and male sexuality was located as 'the problem', since it was men in positions of authority; as fathers, stepfathers, and uncles, who abused primarily, girl children. Thus child sexual abuse was viewed as a common problem; undermining ideologies of the sanctity of the family. Families were regarded as unsafe places for children. In this context, it was argued, that the topic of child sexual abuse, should be completely divorced from issues relating to sexuality in childhood, because even to hint at the existence of sexuality in children could implicate children. The idea that children were inherently 'sexy', and 'seductive', was vigorously challenged, as well as the child's unconscious desire for the opposite sex parent (cf. Nelson, 1987).

The child protection movement however, was also an significant force, in raising public awareness about child sexual abuse, although events in Cleveland in 1987, instigated a public backlash against more interventionist approaches to child protection (Meyers, 1994). Their articulation of the problem, differed markedly, from the position taken by the Women's Movement, since they located the problem within individual families, tending to adopt a moralistic approach to the abuse of children (cf. Taylor, 1989). In opposition to the critical position taken by the Women's Movement, the child protection lobby took a conservative stance and regarded families as thriving and healthy environments for children. Also, they tended to promote explanations of abuse which stressed family dysfunction, maintaining that parenting roles and communication had 'broken down' in 'abusing families' (e.g. Bentovim, 1987). Central to this model was the homeostatic unit generating social stability through allocation and maintenance of roles, and psychological stability through the satisfaction of 'needs'-disposition (Jenks, 1996:94). In contrast to the remedies advocated by the Women's Movement,
increased awareness and vigilance of professionals, was viewed as one strategy, for tackling the sexual abuse of children (e.g. Mayer, 1987; David, 1993).

It is in this political climate of concern about the sexual abuse of children, that childhood sexuality, was reconstituted as an 'uncomfortable subject' (Tucker, 1987: 9) or rather more alarmingly:- 'probably the most taboo (topic) of all' (David, 1993: 51). Thus, childhood sexuality, has been reconstituted impossible topic where its exploration has been aligned with the sexual exploitation of children. Some have maintained, that even open discussion of sensuality, has become stifled in this regulatory atmosphere (Holland, 1992).

Paradoxically, at a time when it has become difficult to acknowledge, and dispassionately address the topic of sexuality in early childhood, young children, in their everyday lives, are increasingly exposed to an array of visual representations of 'eroticised' and 'sexualised' imagery. In advertising 'the girl-child', in particular, is often represented as a sexualised object. Holland (1992) comments, that there has been an observable shift over a period of time, maintaining that over the last twenty years, there has emerged a tendency to 'push the explicit sexualisation of girl children to an ever younger age' (Holland, 1992: 138). Today it is argued that the modern 'adult-child' is bound by enormous pressures, especially with regard to increasingly earlier sexual socialisation (Postman, 1982).

The issue of non-verbal messages in eroticised imagery, which are a pervasive component of our cultural and social life, remains pertinent to this consideration of sexuality in younger children. As Berger points out:-

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak.

(Berger, 1977: 7)
Berger highlights, not only the significance of non-verbal meanings (i.e. in gestures, facial expressions and bodily movements), in the perceptual world of young children, but also the possibility of young children's heightened sensitivity to cues of a non-verbal kind. Again, this suggests that any examination of sexuality in early childhood, requires to be firmly grounded within its contemporary context, including the global expansion of mass communications; the commercialisation of early childhood and the emergence of social issues such as child sexual abuse and AIDS. Today, therefore, it is highly likely that many young children, on this structural level, will have encountered and assimilated some of the social meanings attached to sexuality; through the AIDS Campaigns, the sexualisation of the 'product' in advertising and the mass marketing and consumption of gendered toys and items of clothing. While this underlines the necessity to re-evaluate our conceptualisation of the child (and ideologies of childhood innocence in particular), the publication of the 'Primary School Workbook', by the Family Planning Association (Landeryou, 1993), prompted predictable moral outrage;-

Those disturbed by the idea of four year olds being able to name nipples and testicles often use the argument put forward by the former Education Minister Sir Rhodes Boyson: that a degree of sexual knowledge destroys the innocence of childhood as if childhood was some hermetically sealed state.
(Quoted in Observer 31 October, 1993:25)

It is the work of Foucault (Foucault, 1976) which has been most influential in terms of developing our theoretical understanding of the role of discourse in modern life. According to Humphries, Foucault has contributed 'to a theory of language and social power which pays attention to the institutional effects of discourse and its role in the constitution and government of individual subjects' (Humphries, 1997: 642). Discourse is also a form of social practice which signifies the world thus constituting social subjects and systems of knowledge. Foucault suggests that the modern state exercises power partly through the work
of health and caring professions whose ideologies help shape the attitudes and behaviour of families. The study of discourse involves examining its ideological effects and as this chapter has stressed, this thesis examines the ideological sources on which nursery staff draw, in order to explain sexuality in very young children. This approach is important given the current focus on the study of discourses of child protection and welfare (Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers, 1992; Jacks, 1997).

Conclusion

The aim of this introductory Chapter, has been to introduce topics which are central to understanding, the forthcoming analysis of nursery staff's views about sexuality in early childhood. First, it considered the social construction of childhood, the emergence of the modern child and the ways in which a distance has been created between adults and children. With regard to influential ways of thinking about children, it was maintained that, both psychoanalytic and developmental accounts of the child, have provided dominant versions of the child and childhood sexuality. It was emphasised that, ideologies of childhood innocence were central to understanding nursery staff's accounts of childhood sexuality. Importantly, attention was paid to the ways in which sexuality in childhood had been reconstituted in the context of the rise of child sexual abuse, as a major social issue.

Bearing in mind some of the themes identified in this introductory Chapter, I will now move on to the question of methodology and the research design of the present study. We have seen how the topic of childhood sexuality, has been reformulated as a highly contentious and sensitive topic, so the intention is to proceed by documenting how the concerns of the present study (nursery staff's views about young children's sexuality) were translated into a research project.
CHAPTER 2: FOCUSING ON THE ACCOUNTS OF NURSERY STAFF: RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

Introduction

Nobody would now dispute that the cultural world has different properties from the natural world and that this implies that some different methods of investigation are appropriate. However, it is also an increasingly accepted view of science that work becomes scientific by adopting methods of study appropriate to the data at hand. Sociology is scientific in the sense that it uses appropriate methods and seeks to be rigorous and critical in its investigations. (Silverman, 1985: 20)

This Chapter is about the underlying rationale behind the choice of research methods; the methodological issues that arose during their implementation and finally the analysis of data. Moreover, because this has been a qualitative study, one aim of this Chapter will be to document the research process. In the second section of this Chapter, the progress of the study will be presented in phases, since it will indicate at what point particular methodological issues arose and the types of strategies that were employed in order to respond to them. Further, a key characteristic of this project is that it has been a preliminary study; therefore, an intention of this Chapter will be to explain and emphasise the inter-relationship between the focus of the research topic on the one hand and the selection and implementation of research methods on the other.

Inevitably, this study has been influenced by broader debates in the social sciences and, in particular, critiques which have examined and questioned what has been termed 'the played out polarism', between 'positivism' and 'naturalism' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). A tangible outcome of this influence has been the premise from which this study has been conducted. Rather than starting from the assumption that particular methods that are available to the social researcher are inherently less biased than others, this chapter traces the development of my
research question and attempts to justify the methods, strategies and techniques which were used to engage with nursery staff on the contentious topic of childhood sexuality.

A) Formulating a Research Strategy

The focus of this study has been on nursery staff's accounts of sexuality in young children. Specifically, it has examined the views of nursery nurses and nursery teachers, who are in every day contact with young children. This precise topic of investigation was arrived at through a process of considering a preliminary review of the literature. In the following discussion the original impetus behind this study will be described.

(i) Identifying the Research Topic

Philips and Pugh (1987), comment on exploratory research in the following manner:

This is the type of research that is involved in tackling a new problem, issue, topic about which little is known, so the research idea cannot at the beginning be formulated very well.

(Philips and Pugh, 1987: 45.)

Whilst this is also the case with many qualitative studies (Buist, 1984), exploratory studies are initially less structured; in the sense that in the early stages of data collection an overriding aim is to define and refine the research problem and evaluate the suitability of particular methods. It follows, therefore, that hypothesis testing is not necessarily a guiding principle of exploratory projects, although hypotheses may be developed and formulated as the project progresses.
The 1980s witnessed the ‘discovery’ of child sexual abuse as a social issue and a great deal of professional energy during this period, centred on convincing funding bodies of its existence (cf. Finkelhor, 1989). An ever-increasing number of textbooks aimed at professionals were published and interestingly, some of these texts (e.g. MacFarlane, 1986; Glaser and Frosh, 1988) by reference to a limited number of developmental studies, attempted to make generalisations regarding normal, ‘sexual’ development in childhood. While the emergence of child sexual abuse had, in effect, pathologised sexuality in childhood, this drew attention to the fact, that there was very little documentation of baseline information, regarding sexuality in younger children.

An initial search of the literature, revealed that the basis for understanding early childhood sexuality was research conducted in the 1950s and 1960s (cf. Rutter, 1983) and, inevitably, this did not take into account the impact of awareness of child sexual abuse, and AIDS. Previous studies were also dominated by developmental and psychoanalytic accounts of the child (e.g. Cohen and Parker, 1977; Gundersen et al, 1981) and were firmly located within scientific discourses of positivism.

Not only was it the case that there a limited number of studies conducted on the topic of early childhood sexuality; but with the exception of Isaac’s (1933) early work, the British context had been neglected in this regard. Moreover, existing studies had tended to use teacher and parent accounts as the authentic source of data about children, while children's accounts are notable by their absence in scientific constructions of childhood sexuality (see Chapter 3).

Other criticisms are that empirical studies tended to consider one single dimension of sexuality in children, and that this area remains theoretically undeveloped (Serbin and Sraikin, 1987). These points are especially relevant to the period of
early childhood, since empirical studies have addressed specific realms of children's sexuality, for example, children's responses to the discovery of genital differences (Conn and Kanner, 1947). This tendency, as we shall see later, needs to be understood within the context of shifting research agendas, and the prominence of particular understandings of children.

Other data on childhood sexuality came from more general research and the Newsons (1963; 1968) work, is an important example. Among their findings on parenting of pre-school children is information on select topics, such as mothers' attitudes towards genital play; physical modesty, and imparting information about the origins of babies. It is of relevance, that their early series of longitudinal studies, form the basis for research findings on social class differences, in parental attitudes towards sexuality in younger children.

Given the neglect of the British context, care staff and nursery settings, the present study set out to explore this gap and inevitably this been a preliminary exercise. Using a qualitative approach, it has sought to illuminate the views of professionals (nursery nurses and nursery teachers), who are employed within Day Nurseries and Nursery Schools, regarding sexuality in young children. The focus on 'adult accounts', from a constructionist perspective, was justified primarily, in terms of the theoretical assumptions and methodological limitations of previous studies (i.e. a positivistic world view and therefore their uncritical reliance on 'observations' and accounts of carers). In light of findings of earlier pre-school studies, an explicit aim of the present study emerged, which was to focus on the opinions of nursery staff, and explore how they construed sexuality in young children.
(ii) Selecting Methods

As data is amassed and direct experience of the research settings is accumulated, one method may prove impractical or inappropriate. In the present study, the initial plan was to use focused group discussion as one method of data collection; but it was found during the early stages of fieldwork that some staff expressed reservations about discussing the sexuality of young children with their colleagues, in organised groups. This, they said, would be 'too embarrassing' so alternative options were then explored. It transpired, that group discussions could be incorporated into the entry process into establishments because at the onset of fieldwork, Heads of establishments had spontaneously suggested that I attend staff meetings and introduce the research topic to staff. This was to prove one viable, and convenient way of engaging with staff in group discussions. In addition to this, subsequent contact with nursery staff showed that pre-existing working patterns provided ideal opportunities where data could be gathered from staff groups. As a researcher, it was possible to utilise what may be loosely termed a 'naturalistic' kind of approach (cf. Schatzman and Strauss, 1973) by collecting data from a cross section of personnel in a range of social settings. For example, it emerged that I could listen to, and participate in, the staff room talk of basic grade staff (tea breaks, lunch hours and so on), as well as engage in impromptu discussions with promoted staff (Head teachers in Nursery Schools; Heads and Deputies in Day Nurseries). This usually took place in their private office accommodation.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, particular attention was paid to the selection of research methods and the ways in which these, could be presented and introduced to nursery staff. How then, would it be possible to engage staff in discussion and what sort of framework would facilitate this task? We have previously seen that formal group situations were regarded as
inappropriate by some nursery staff, therefore individual interviews were selected as the main method of data collection. Yet, it was also necessary to build up contact with staff in their working environment and to provide the circumstances, where staff would be more likely to consent to individual interviews. This was a central concern because clearly, sexuality in young children, is not an everyday topic of conversation. Indeed, as we shall see, according to some nursery staff, it simply was not on their agenda, since they viewed young children as sexually innocent and unknowing (see Chapter 5). A further aim was to contextualise the opinions of nursery staff; by having first-hand knowledge of their working routine, the physical layout of individual establishments and direct experience of play in young children. Therefore, as a prelude to interviewing, a period of participant observation was conducted, in all pre-school establishments sampled. Observational data was to prove invaluable in interview situations because it was later found, that staff consistently associated certain kinds of 'sexual' behaviour in young children, with a specific type of play and location in nursery settings.

Now that the underlying rationale of the present study has been outlined and the two main methods of data collection have been identified (participant observation and individual interviews), a detailed description of fieldwork will be outlined.

(iii) The Study Design

In the following table the main sources of data will be identified and the types of data generated by these sources will be indicated. For the purpose of presentation fieldwork will be described in stages, although as one would expect, in reality, these phases overlapped.

The first stage involved the piloting of one 'Day Nursery' and one 'Nursery School'. This included initial meetings with heads of establishments, observation
within playroom situations, and individual discussions with those members of staff who agreed.

During the second stage however, a total of 16 establishments were to be sampled (8 Day Nurseries and 8 Nursery Schools). This main body of fieldwork was envisaged as involving repeated contact with nursery staff, including:

1) An introductory meeting with the Head of establishment.
2) The introduction of the research topic at a staff meeting.
3) A period of participant observation in each of the 16 establishments sampled.
4) Individual interviews with nursery staff (in total 106 interviews)

With two exceptions\(^1\) the above sequence was followed in each nursery setting.

\(^1\) In these two exceptions the individual Heads of establishments stated that they wished to be responsible for introducing the research topic to their staff.
Table 2.1: Sources and Types of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MULTIPLE SOURCES OF DATA</th>
<th>TYPE AND STATUS OF DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A) FIRST STAGE -</strong></td>
<td>Pilot of 1 Day Nursery and 1 Nursery School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) individual discussions with Heads of establishment.</td>
<td>Collecting background data re. history of establishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) observational period within each setting.</td>
<td>Orienting data to be used in identifying issues to include in interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) individual, exploratory interviews with staff.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B) SECOND STAGE -</strong></td>
<td>Sampling of 8 Day Nurseries and 8 Nursery Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) initial meeting with Head of establishment.</td>
<td>Source of background data relating to perceptions of area type; parents; children; staff and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) introduction of research topic at a staff meeting (group discussions).</td>
<td>Source of 'sensitising' data in preparation for individual interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) observation within 16 establishments (2 to 3 days)</td>
<td>Main source of 'contextualising' data relating to physical and social context of establishment. Also staff perceptions of professional and institutional role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) semi-structured individual interviews with Nursery staff (total 106)</td>
<td>Prime source of data for analysis on the research topic: adult accounts of young children's sexuality.</td>
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</table>
(v) Sampling

Traditionally, the advantage of qualitative studies has been pinpointed in their concentrated and exclusive attention, on a limited number of cases and the 'rich', data yielded by such an enterprise (Blumer, 1986). Here, it is argued, lies both their methodological strength, as well as their weakness; in-depth and revealing data about a topic, which cannot be readily generalised. Nevertheless, the following description of the present study's use of multiple settings, its sampling procedures, and the extensive numbers of interviews conducted, will show that qualitative studies can successfully incorporate techniques, that are more commonly associated with the 'rigour' and strengths of quantitative approaches.

Bearing in mind that former pre-school studies had not addressed systematically the issue of social class background of children, it was considered to represent a range of establishments, from a cross section of area types. Furthermore, it was also apparent that existing pre-school studies had either been single one off studies or studies that had sampled a limited number of settings. This raised questions about the extent to which their findings could be generalised. As Buist (1984) points out, one way of overcoming the problem of generalisation, is by the use of multiple settings. As a consequence, a total of 16 establishments were finally sampled (8 Day Nurseries, 8 Nursery Schools). Owing to the much smaller number of Day Nurseries in the Glasgow area (20 as compared with 94 Nursery Schools), the 8 Day Nurseries were selected in order to represent a spread across the north, south, east and west areas, of the city district. In relation to the 8 Nursery Schools however, a representative sample was achieved by employing the 8 category classification scheme adopted by Greater Glasgow Health Board. This scheme differentiates between areas, in terms of socio-economic characteristics; including types and levels of employment, quality of housing and age profiles of populations. Therefore, one Nursery School, was randomly selected from each of...
the eight Area Types, as designated by the post codes of the city district. The following gives a brief synopsis of this scheme:-

AREA TYPE 1: 'Large owner-occupied housing with two or more cars; mainly professional and non-manual workers.'

AREA TYPE 2: 'Mainly owner-occupied housing, families with young children; professional and non-manual workers.'

AREA TYPE 3: 'Mixed tenure accommodation, high proportion of families with no children, single persons and students. Mainly non-manual and professional workers.'

AREA TYPE 4: 'Mainly inter-war, local authority housing with ageing and elderly population.'

AREA TYPE 5: 'Mainly post-war local authority housing with young families and skilled workers.'

AREA TYPE 6: 'Mixture of small-rented furnished, and owner-occupied households, with shared amenities; single persons, students, immigrants and high unemployment.'

AREA TYPE 7: 'Post-war local authority housing with young families; high unemployment and mainly unskilled workers.'

AREA TYPE 8: 'Mixed tenure-type but mainly local authority, vacant properties and small, overcrowded households, sharing amenities. Ageing population with few children and high unemployment, mainly unskilled workers.'

In relation to the forthcoming Chapters which focus on the presentation of findings (Chapter Five through to Chapter Nine), it is helpful to bear in mind that it is AREA TYPE 1 and 2 which represents the most affluent districts: while AREA TYPE 7 (peripheral housing schemes), and 8 (inner city areas), represent areas of socio-economic deprivation. Quotes from nursery staff, will be identified by the abbreviation 'T' followed by the number of area type (e.g. T.1. to T.8.). Owing to the fact, that Day Nurseries were selected to achieve a spread across the city district, they will be identified by capital letters from A to H.
Generally, it was found that the characteristics of each Area Type broadly corresponded with background data collected from individual establishments, although there was one notable exception. The composition of children from the Type 8 Nursery School, contrasted with the population profile, indicated in the classification scheme. Here, an unexpectedly high proportion of children (50%) from ethnic minorities was found.

B) Putting the Research Strategy Into Practice

(i) Piloting

The objective of the pilot stage was to assess the feasibility of conducting this study in pre-school settings, as well as to record and assess nursery staff’s initial responses to the research topic. This phase of the research also allowed the research question to be developed further. As Buist (1984) notes, a common feature of many qualitative studies is what she terms ‘progressively focusing’, a process whereby a gradual, narrowing down of research focus takes place.

An organisational issue that arose during this phase was the demand on staff time. The difficulties encountered in securing individual time with staff, highlighted the need for flexibility in the forthcoming fieldwork. Owing to this practical consideration, the final interview schedule included 12 general questions, and this could, if the need arose, be realistically concluded within a limited time.

During this period, a total of 14 individual, preliminary discussions, were undertaken with staff (2 teachers and 11 nursery nurses, eleven of which were tape recorded). This, together with observational fieldnotes, provided the basis for developing a semi-structured, interview schedule. Certain topics mentioned by nursery staff were incorporated in the final interview schedule (see appendix).
Issues that were spontaneously raised by staff, included using dolls with genitals, in playroom situations and child sexual abuse (in terms of professional involvement with a child who had been abused and how heightened awareness made some staff more suspicious of young children's 'sexual' behaviour). Other issues included, the ways in which staff evaluated their own attitudes towards sexuality in young children (e.g. being 'open minded'; 'middle of the road', or 'old fashioned').

A further consideration was staff responses towards observation in playroom situations. Regularly, I was asked to become involved with playroom activities, and on one occasion, an outing was dependent upon my participation in order to complete staffing ratios. Responding positively to understaffing and staff requests, was to become an important strategy in building up rapport with nursery staff, in preparation for individual interviews. This, as will be considered later, had important implications not only for the type of observer role adopted in nursery settings, but also for organisational issues relating to note taking and recording.

(ii) Gaining Access

As one would anticipate with a potentially contentious topic gaining formal permission to access nursery schools and day nurseries, proved a long and laborious process; involving protracted negotiations with the local authority education department. This process was prolonged by the heightened sensitivity of gatekeepers towards media interest in research topics of this nature. I was told that, owing to media misrepresentations of former research study's findings on school children's awareness of AIDS, the education department had to allay anxieties of the general public. Gaining access therefore, required considerable patience and perseverance since gatekeepers were understandably cautious. As a result it took over a year before permission was granted to approach individual establishments.
Out of the total of 16 establishments sampled, 13 establishments granted access on initial contact. Reasons for refusal varied among individual establishments and ranged from; reports from one Nursery School Head that staff felt uncomfortable with the research focus on staff views, to another Head's response that: 'We don't want any of that here'. In addition, one staff group with whom I made contact, had been unhappy with a presentation of another research project's findings, therefore they declined to participate.

The initial contact with the Head of establishments proved to be an invaluable source of accounts regarding opinions about institutional and professional roles; as well as views about nursery parents, children, and the local community. Further, it was also found that by virtue of their many years of work experience they could provide invaluable, historical data, regarding the development and changing social role, of their establishments. One head of a day nursery, proved particularly knowledgeable in this regard, recalling how originally they catered for the children of unmarried mothers: emphasis being placed on hygiene and health, rather than the emotional well-being of children. It was vividly recalled, how mothers were told to leave their children at the door of the nursery and were not permitted to enter the premises. Another head was illuminating on day nursery buildings, many of which were old canteens, mobilised for child care during the Second World War when women were required for the labour force (cf. Riley, 1983). Nursery schools, however, developed from a rather different impetus, as heads spoke of ideas behind the first nursery schools in Glasgow. These were based, as elsewhere in urban Britain of the 1940s and 1950s, on philanthropic 'concerns' regarding the health of working class children, and anxieties about the spread of infectious diseases. Interestingly these concerns had a tangible outcome in the architectural layout of nursery establishments. Verandas where children could be exposed to the elements and 'fresh air', was observed to be a design feature of nurseries built during this period.
Heads could also provide an overview of the changing nature of their professional status. For example, one head of a day nursery, who had embarked on her career when the nursing profession had held promoted posts in day nursery settings, reflected on the low status of nursery nursing:

'They first told me I wasn't a nurse and now they tell me I'm not a teacher.
(Head of Day Nursery, E.)

Similarly, a head teacher of a nursery school was able to express succinctly the present atmosphere of early education. Here it is helpful to point out that, at this time, 'Quality Assurance', had been introduced into some nursery schools:

You can't sing a nursery rhyme now without justifying its educational content.
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.4.)

Moreover, because heads had typically been employed in a range of settings, over a considerable period of time, they could readily illustrate differences between different area types. In the following a head referred to the fact that the majority of young children in her present establishment had their own social worker:

In R having a social worker was a social stigma, in G it's a status symbol.
(Head of Day Nursery, C.)

('R' = Area Type 2, whereas 'G' = Area Type 8)

Overall, introductory meetings with Heads of establishments provided the circumstances where it was possible to discuss the research topic; consult with Heads regarding the project's demands on staff time and gather background data. Moreover, during this initial contact, I was normally given a guided tour of the nursery and introduced to available nursery staff. It was during my initial contact with heads of establishments that I was able to arrange to attend staff meetings.
Through my attendance at staff meetings it was possible to become sensitised to issues raised by staff groups. Introducing the research topic served a dual purpose:

1) Explanation of the research topic and encouragement to participate.
2) Identification of staff general responses to research topic.

One issue that arose in the early stage of fieldwork was confusion regarding the actual focus of the research. This centred on the interpretation, by some staff, of the research as being about the sexual abuse of young children. Given that staff had initially been informed of the research topic via their Heads of establishments, particular attention was paid therefore to explaining the focus of the study. As a consequence, attendance at staff meetings afforded a crucial opportunity to clarify the focus of the study first-hand and engage in preliminary discussions with nursery staff.

(iii) The Observer Role and the Benefits of Using Participant Observation

The observational phase of this study involved spending at least 1/2 a day within each playroom in all of the 16 establishments sampled and the amount of time spent in each setting, was directly related to the size of establishments. In day nurseries for example, there were generally three main playrooms catering for a range of age groups (babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers), while nursery schools accommodated children aged from three to five years. The number of playrooms were also found to vary in Nursery Schools settings, as a small establishment (under 25 children) would normally have one main playroom whereas the larger type (over 60 children) could have up to three.
Prior to addressing the observer role, it is first necessary, to provide a generalised outline (or ‘ideal type’) of salient differences and similarities between both types of establishments. These findings help to explain the rationale for the participatory kind of observer role adopted in nursery settings.
Table 2.2: Differences between Day Nurseries and Nursery Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Staff</th>
<th>DAY NURSERY</th>
<th>NURSERY SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all female staff</td>
<td>all female staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>age of staff noticeably younger (twenties)</td>
<td>staff tends to be women who have had families and returned to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high rates of temporary workers apparent</td>
<td>long service of staff apparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high rate of absenteeism among staff</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Inter-Professional Attitudes</th>
<th>DAY NURSERY</th>
<th>NURSERY SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nursery nurses view teachers as overpaid</td>
<td>teachers view nursery nurses training as inadequate and inferior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>critical view of nursery schools apparent</td>
<td>critical view of day nurseries apparent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Children</th>
<th>DAY NURSERY</th>
<th>NURSERY SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>age range:</td>
<td>3 months to five years</td>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• parents of children more likely to be described as single parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• child more likely to be described as having own social worker etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• substance abuse, child abuse and unemployment more likely to be mentioned in family background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• mother more likely to be classified as depressed or having mental health problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SOCIAL MIX much more apparent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In relation to the type of observer stance adopted an aim was to develop a low key and unobtrusive role within nursery settings, similar to that described by Speckmanklass (1986), in her study of Day Care situations. As has been suggested previously, it was also essential to respond to staff requests, particularly in Day Nursery settings where staff shortages were a common problem. In this context, therefore, I was more likely to be asked to help change nappies, supervise children at lunch tables and accompany staff on outings. A further concern was to show an interest in staff duties and as a consequence staff would often offer views about individual children and parents. In addition I would often hear 'potted histories' of their own work experiences. Having my own pre-school child and having previously worked in a professional capacity with young children, I found helped sustain these conversations. My own experiences meant that I was familiar with some of the demands and rewards of work with young children. During these conversations, Day Nursery staff frequently expressed their preference for working within this type of establishment (i.e. more prolonged and intimate contact with children, more relaxed atmosphere etc.). This kind of discussion was vital, because it was within this context, that nursery staff offered their perceptions about professional and establishment differences. For example, many Day Nursery staff said that Day Nurseries were regarded as the 'poor relations' of nursery schools, and that nursery nurses were undervalued and worked longer hours than their counterparts in nursery schools. Indeed many nursery nurses mentioned how their training was regarded as inferior by the teaching profession. This view was confirmed during similar, private discussions, I had with nursery teachers who regarded nursery nurses training as inadequate. Sensitivity towards these areas of contention and potential sources of conflict, proved particularly valuable in developing rapport with nursery staff.

This responsive approach was also applied to my interactions with young children, who occasionally enquired about my presence and were curious about a range of
personal details (e.g. 'What's your Mummy and Daddy called?', 'Do you have a
dog?', etc.). Significantly, it was through responding to, and interacting with
children, that I was able to make contact with the majority of staff in their working
environment.

Obviously, the participatory approach developed in the observational phase of the
study had implications for note taking and the recording of data. Fieldnotes, were
taken as soon as possible after observation had taken place but it is necessary to
clarify what the term 'fieldnotes' meant in the context of this particular study.
According to Jackson (1990), the definition of the term 'fieldnote' fluctuates and
can be used to refer to 'raw data'; reconstructions of events or 'a running log at the
end of a day' (Jackson, 1990:6). In the present study, 'fieldnotes' were written in
order to give a condensed overview of the daily routine in nursery settings; provide
a record of what might be termed 'incidental observations' of institutional daily life,
and record data which I viewed, as directly relevant to the research topic (e.g.
when a child said that her mummy was having a baby; a member of staff made a
comment to two children who were kissing). Initially fieldnotes were taken in an
abbreviated form, as soon as practicable after having left the nursery setting and
these acted as a reminder for a more detailed note taking when I had returned to a
suitable setting. This note taking form was found to be more suitable for studying
a sensitive topic, since unobtrusive note taking proved more conducive to
developing rapport with nursery staff. During the early stages of fieldwork, for
example, I was told by the head of a day nursery, that another researcher, had also
been carrying out observation in playroom situations at her establishment.
Apparently staff had objected, as they had said that they felt uncomfortable, owing
to the fact that the researcher was obviously taking notes and timing staff
interaction with children.
According to Silverman (1993), one of the 'greatest dangers' when writing fieldnotes is the temptation to write everything down. In order to avoid this potential problem, the following basis was developed for the recording of notes:

1) **Framework for Playroom Observations:** This included an initial description of layout of playroom, including arrangement of tables, provision of activities e.g. in 3 to 5 year old playrooms: jigsaw table, painting, cutting out table etc., sand or water play, play corner (e.g. house corner normally with cooking utensils, bed etc.) and the siting of reading or 'cosy corners'. The layout of baby and toddler rooms differed in that they generally had changing facilities and sleeping areas. From this framework it was possible to provide an overview of playroom routine, and an outline of the sessions activities (i.e. free play, snack time, group activities and story time).

2) **Who Said What and Where?** Attention was paid to the social context where data was gathered. For example; was information collected in staff room or playroom situations? Were statements made in individual discussions, or collected in group situations?

One advantage of using participant observation in nursery settings was that I became familiar to many nursery staff which helped encourage them consent to being interviewed on such a sensitive topic. This was an important consideration since some staff intimated during the introduction of the research topic at staff meetings that they did not regard the subject of sexuality relevant to young children. This indicated that much ground work had to be done, to engage with staff who held this opinion. As one member of staff put it, she really couldn't see the point of what I was doing. However, once I had spent sometime with this particular member of staff, and helped out in the baby room, she did consent to an
On occasions however, it was clear that some staff were wary of my presence in play and staff room situations, and avoided contact. Understandably, these staff did not usually wish to be interviewed.

Access into establishments - the initial meeting with Head of establishment - the introduction of the research topic at a staff meeting, and the observational phase of the study, were all instrumental in developing rapport and initiating contact with individual, nursery staff. As Measor (1985) points out, gaining access is an important strategy in building on relationships with potential interviewees and this was found to be the case in the present study.

Another advantage of using participant observation was its potential to yield data on institutional settings. Specifically, the low key type of observer role adopted, was instrumental in generating such data. It was found that 'hanging about' and 'responding' was instructive in developing an understanding of the nature of work in nursery settings. For example, 'just hanging around' in baby rooms usually meant sitting and talking with staff while playing with babies. Staff appeared to enjoy my presence and our conversations. The process of participant observation therefore highlighted the often monotonous and demanding routines of caring for very young children.

(iv) Collecting Interview Data on a Sensitive Topic

The majority of the interviews were tape-recorded and all participants have been women (94 trained nursery nurses as compared with 12 teachers). One to one interviews were chosen in order that staff views about children's sexuality could be explored in an open-ended manner, face to face with nursery staff; an important consideration since this was a preliminary study. Also, it seemed unlikely that in-
depth information could be elicited from a questionnaire with pre-defined categories.

It is crucial to stress that the present study did not assume that nursery staff accounts provided 'facts' about the social world and therefore represented an objective reality. Staff accounts were viewed as versions of events as opposed to providing absolute 'truths' about children's behaviour. As a consequence this study has sought to understand how staff made sense of children in their everyday work and did not regard staff as proxy informants about child behaviour. This way of dealing with accounts is very much in keeping with recent innovations within the social sciences since there is a developing recognition that it is more appropriate to treat interview data as 'compelling narratives' (Silverman, 1994: 114) rather than as representing distorted or accurate accounts of reality.

Issues that were explored within the interview situation focused on two inter-related areas of interest. The first area, considered staff definitions and interpretations of sexuality in young children whereas the second, explored staff attitudes towards this topic. In regard to the former, issues which were addressed included, staff definitions and evaluations of 'sexual' types of behaviour in young children, while the latter concentrated on staff values and staff accounts of salient influences on their opinions.

As Lofland (1971) points out, it is important in interview contexts to alert participants to potential difficulties with questions. This was to prove a helpful strategy when interviewing nursery staff, since some reported that 'sexuality in young children' was a topic which they had not previously considered in any depth. The following represents a common response of nursery staff:-

I hadn't really thought about it until you came.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School,T.I.)
Furthermore, it also transpired that some nursery staff encountered difficulties with the interview questions which focused on individual assessments of their own opinions. Again, this was a subject to which staff said that they had not previously given much consideration. As a result, this was integrated into interviewing protocol and staff were alerted to this possibility prior to introducing these specific questions. Therefore, it was suggested that they may need, as other staff had required, some time to think about these particular questions.

Talking with nursery staff about sexuality raised some specific methodological issues, regarding humour and the use of informal and formal language styles:

Sexual matters, except for the most blunted individuals, are essentially private and delicate. Learning to use the vocabulary for sexual parts and activities in a manner which is low-key and calm, yet unambiguous is difficult even for very experienced workers. (Stone, 1987: 7)

Here, the psychiatrist Fred Stone, discusses the implications of talking about sexuality for professionals who interview children who have been sexually abused. How relevant was this issue in relation to the researcher’s role and talking with staff about sexuality in young children?

Early during fieldwork, it became apparent that I required some time to become accustomed to openly discussing sexuality in young children. This period of acclimatisation was necessary in order to put aside social conventions which normally apply to talk about intimate matters. Initially, therefore, I had to overcome my own feelings of embarrassment regarding broaching this topic with strangers. While this process of acclimatisation was essential to my subsequent interactions with nursery staff, on occasions I was aware of the unsettling social consequences of my newly acquired ease. This meant that sometimes I completely forgot that the topics on which I instigated conversations with nursery staff could embarrass and temporarily unsettle them. Early field experiences highlighted that I
needed to be aware of this issue and be sensitive towards staff's possible discomfort.

Another important issue that arose with regard to talking about sexuality, related to the types of terms and phrases that should be used in my interactions with nursery staff. Initially, the review of the literature revealed that discussion of this topic, was framed in a rather diffuse and non-specific kind of terminology. For example, most people don't talk in terms of reproduction and conception, with regard to young children: we talk about 'where babies come from,' or the 'origins of babies'. Similarly, when the Newsons (1968), asked Mothers about genital manipulation (or masturbation?) in their 4 year old children, they posed the question: 'Does he play with his private parts at all?'. Therefore, a pertinent consideration in interviews with nursery staff, was to use what appeared to be an acceptable form of language in relation to sexuality in children while using terminology which was to the point. For instance, question 3 of the interview schedule asked: How interested do you find young children in where babies come from?'. Yet, when staff raised issues about young children 'playing with themselves', I would use the terms masturbation and genitals to further enquire about staff opinions.

It is of relevance, that the Newsons' (1968) study of mothers' attitudes to their four year old children found that mother's talk regarding what they called 'modesty training' was characterised by polite euphemism. This has also been a finding of the present study as, in the interview scripts, phrases such as 'down there'; 'playing with himself'; 'touching herself'; 'quite explicit'; 'you know' and 'it' appeared frequently.

The first point it is necessary to highlight relates to the criteria that have been employed in order to make sense of this data. Where there has been no explanation...
of a particular phrase such data has been treated with caution. One significant advantage, however, of interviewing a range of personnel from the same establishment has been that this has provided a check on the meaning of ambiguous data, comments or phrases. In one interview, for example, a nursery nurse described a girl's behaviour as being 'very explicit' and this child was said to 'know what she was doing', but when questioned further about the nature of the child's activity, the interviewee was reluctant to elaborate. Importantly, in subsequent interviews in the same establishment, staff spontaneously described this same child's behaviour in more detail and this was said to involve the 'girl placing a boy's hand to her genital area.

A further issue that arose in relation to the use of euphemism was its potential to illuminate staff beliefs about sexuality in early childhood. While it is plausible that in particular circumstances the use of euphemism may have reflected embarrassment, the way in which staff labelled 'sexual' behaviour in young children was also found to have conceptual implications. Whether staff defined genital handling as 'masturbation' or 'playing with themselves', linked with staff evaluations of sexuality in early childhood. This issue will be considered fully in Chapter 5.

Finally, as one might expect with a topic such as sexuality in young children, it was a subject area which, on occasions, prompted the recounting of humorous incidents, anecdotes and stories on the part of nursery staff. In one nursery school with a high representation of children from ethnic minorities, I was told that one child's first spoken word in English had been 'condom'. In a pilot interview with a staff member of a day nursery she recounted an incident which caused great hilarity. On a recent nursery visit to a farm the subject of cow's udders had aroused curiosity in children. Later a boy's mother had reported that her son had drawn conclusions about his own genital anatomy which he now referred to as his
udder'. Awareness of the kind of humour which discussions could engender proved one useful strategy in interview situations because anticipation of this issue enabled me to both respond and enjoy the humour then proceed with the discussion. This was brought to my attention early in field work when interviewing a nursery nurse. She had been discussing how, in her opinion, little girls were particularly fascinated by the genitals of boys, adding that we (women) never really lose interest in this part of the male anatomy.

C) Analysis

A central task in the analysis of qualitative data is ordering and making sense of the large quantities of data frequently generated by such an exercise (Jones, 1985). As the present study yielded a particularly large body of data, this section will now address how this task was accomplished.

(i) Ordering the Main Body of Data (Interview material)

It should be remembered that with qualitative research, data gathering and analysis are very often neither in time nor logic distinct and a good research proposal will discuss ways in which the potential interaction between these twin processes will be exploited and managed. (Walker, 1985)

Similarly, data analysis in the present study was conducted as fieldwork progressed, and as data was amassed. As a consequence, data analysis was conducted over a prolonged period of time and this meant that the ordering and analysis of data was ongoing throughout. Management of this task was approached in a series of stages. Initially, the early interviews with nursery staff were transcribed, in order to provide a basis for the subsequent organisation of interview material. In regard to ordering the remainder of the interview data, a proforma was developed, which summarised each interview tape. This involved listening to each interview tape with the aim of gauging the general flow and
content of the conversation, which was then, followed by a closer scrutiny of the interview data.

The proforma which evolved as a practical alternative to full transcription of all interview tapes, utilised the interview schedule as the organising principle for both note taking and selective transcription from tapes. Because the interview format had generally followed the same sequence, initially it was possible to group the data around the interview questions. Importantly however, managing the data in this way permitted the relevance of each individual question to be assessed, as familiarity and analysis of the data progressed. In a preliminary manner, it was also possible to compare and contrast the responses of individual nursery staff. As an expressed aim of the present study was to investigate staff accounts of what constituted sexuality in young children, examples (i.e. masturbation, interest in genital differences, explorative play and so on) could be listed and then examined. As a result establishment profiles could be compiled, as specific types of data were 'lifted' from the proforma and re-organised around broad headings, such as; 'Examples of Sexuality in Young Children'; 'Names for Genitals'; 'Influences on Staff Opinions' and so forth. The following will outline some basic criteria employed in the use of the proforma:-

1) Care was taken to indicate the order in which the interview was conducted.

2) Whether statements were 'directed' i.e. elicited in response to a question, or had been 'volunteered' (cf. Becker, 1961).

3) Key phrases, or words which were consistently used in interview scripts were highlighted i.e. 'very explicit', 'they knew what they were doing', 'innocent', 'natural' 'abnormal' and so on.
(ii) The Role of Concepts in the Analysis of Data

Where do concepts come from, and what role do they play in the analysis of data? Concepts play a central and vital role in the organising of sociological data and according to the influential work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), concepts should emerge from the data. Importantly, as Jones (1985: 59) points out, they emphasise: 'building understanding of the social world; which is firmly grounded in the concepts and theories of the persons inhabiting and acting in it'. Here, Jones maintains, lies their appeal to qualitative researchers. Similarly, the present study has been explicitly concerned, with representing nursery staff's perceptions from their 'point of view'. But how realistic is it to suggest that concept-formation automatically emerges from the data? Bulmer argues that:

The process is one in which concepts are formed and modified both in the light of empirical evidence and in the context of theory.
(Bulmer, 1979: 635)

In opposition to Glaser and Strauss, Bulmer maintains that members' accounts rather than being the sole origins of concepts, are but one of many. He goes on to list ten possible sources including: 'common sense' constructs; the literature on a given topic, or from an empirically convenient grouping (for full list see Bulmer, 1979: 668). While Bulmer recognises the central importance and validity of actors' accounts, he offers a more plausible explanation by highlighting the diverse origins of concept-formation. Bulmer's point will now be explored and illustrated specifically in regard to the present study.

(iii) Developing an Analytical Framework

An analytical framework for the study was developed from concepts and ideas which evolved from an interplay of sources. One of the fundamental ideas which was instrumental in the analysis of data was the grouping of nursery staff's
responses around the notions of socially acceptable and socially unacceptable sexuality in young children. Crucially, genesis of this conceptual division arose from a combination of sources; both from members' accounts and from the literature. For example, it transpired, during the early stages of fieldwork that it was necessary to be alert to the concepts employed by some nursery staff. During one staff room discussion, a Head teacher spontaneously raised the example of a young boy's behaviour which apparently had caused concern among some nursery staff. This child was said to dress up 'constantly' in frilly dresses. The fact that this child's behaviour provoked anxiety among her nursery staff was said to give the Head teacher cause for concern. When I asked whether she would then consider this 'normal' behaviour, this label was vigorously challenged. She put forward a position reminiscent of the cultural relativism found in other studies of professionals' views about children (cf. Dingwall et al, 1983). This incident, however, signalled the need to be aware of the range of conceptual distinctions made in staff's accounts. These included evaluating 'sexual' behaviours in young children as 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'; 'natural' or 'unnatural', and 'normal' or 'abnormal'.

While it was evident that there was a pool of concepts available in 'actors' accounts', the literature which addressed the sexual abuse of children tended to employ conceptual distinctions which either implied a disease model (healthy-unhealthy) of understanding sexuality in young children, or a medical model (normal-abnormal). As my research is a sociological study of sexuality in young children, it seemed important to develop an analytical framework which:-

1) Could embrace both:-
   a) the range of concepts available in 'actors' accounts'.
   b) the subtle interaction of non verbal and verbal cues (e.g. the tone accompanying staff expressions such as 'I was
amazed!'; 'they don’t often go as far as that'), recorded in interview tapes. This was found to be a salient issue in categorising some staff appraisals, where they had not employed an obvious conceptual framework.

2) Could take into account the interpretative strategies engaged in by nursery staff in accounting for sexuality in young children.

As a result, plotting nursery staff’s responses along the following continuum enabled analysis to proceed and to be developed.

Diagram 2.1: Analytical Framework: The Starting Point

\[SOCIALLY\ ACCEPTABLE\]

\[\text{area articulated as neither acceptable or unacceptable in staff accounts}\]

\[SOCIALLY\ UNACCEPTABLE\]

\[\text{Taboo}\]

From this basis it was possible to start to consider nursery staff’s explanations of specific examples of sexuality in young children (e.g. a child’s use of a particular style of language; expression of a certain type of sexual knowledge or behaviour). Initially, this was a fluid process where data was moved around and re-grouped

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along this continuum. At this early stage of analysis, three major themes were identified in staff accounts of sexuality in young children and these dimensions will be discussed fully in Chapter 5 (the first data analysis chapter). Once a broad typology had been developed around the notion of socially acceptable and socially unacceptable sexuality in young children, it was necessary to examine more closely the explanatory frameworks adopted by nursery staff. How did staff assess and explain a particular facet of sexuality in young children: and were any patterns evident in staff accounts? In order to answer this question, the following will show how the framework was extended to incorporate staff explanations.

Diagram 2.2: Analytical Framework - Developed Version
The implication of this framework was that while the interview data had originally been ordered and grouped around individual interview questions, it was now possible to explore the links between the whole body of interview data. So while the mass of data had initially been 'controlled' by treating nursery staff's responses as discreet entities, now analysis could proceed by bringing data together within an extended, conceptual framework. What impinged on staff assessments of acceptable and unacceptable, sexuality in young children? In relation to children, the child's age, social class background and staff ideas about childhood innocence and children's lack of understanding were salient factors identified in staff accounts. Additionally, staff views about the area in which they worked with young children could influence staff perspectives. If, for example, the child in their home environment was thought to be exposed to explicit material (e.g. 18 certificate videos), this could subtly influence staff interpretations. Moreover, in specific instances the gender of the child was found to impinge on staff assessments (see Chapter 5 and 7). Turning our attention to the second part of the interview schedule, it was possible to make implicit links between staff views about influences on their own attitudes and their assessments of socially acceptable sexuality in young children.

Conclusion

This chapter has a) outlined the underlying rationale behind the present study b) justified the choice of methods c) described how these were then implemented and d) addressed the analysis of data. A prime consideration in the formulation of the research design was the sensitive nature of the focus of study; therefore emphasis was placed on building up contact with nursery staff. As a result, the present study adopted a mixed method approach where participant observation was conducted in playroom situations and individual interviews were carried out with 109 nursery staff. In relation to the analysis of data, plotting nursery staff's responses around
the conceptual distinction of socially unacceptable and socially acceptable sexuality in young children was instrumental in understanding the accounts of nursery staff.
CHAPTER 3: STUDYING SEXUALITY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Introduction

One of the most interesting contradictions in the contemporary study of human sexuality, as a glance of any textbook will demonstrate, is the fact that although children are assumed to be sexual, and although understanding childhood sexuality is assumed to be critical for an understanding of adult sexuality, there has been virtually no research that has directly studied this seemingly crucial phenomenon.

(McKenna and Kessler, 1985: 241) (my emphasis)

This chapter examines scientific discourses regarding sexuality in young children and the ways in which dominant scientific constructions of the child have contributed to our understandings of sexuality in childhood. Fundamentally, it addresses the ways in which psychoanalytic and developmental accounts of the child, have impacted on the orientation and focus of empirical studies, in addition to the interpretation of research findings. Importantly, this chapter will highlight the fact, that few studies have actually talked directly with children and this will be explained primarily in terms of ideologies of childhood innocence and constructions of the young child as asexual. Indeed it will be demonstrated that relatively few studies have actually talked to adults about the sexuality of young children. Scientific discourses about children, most notably those originating from developmental psychology, have fostered a particular version of childhood sexuality; namely that of 'innocent incompetence' (cf. Archard, 1993) where the child is regarded as incapable of understanding information about sex.

First however, this chapter will refer briefly, to past interest in studying sexuality during childhood. Comments will also be made about the two main psychologies (see Chapter 1), which have dominated empirical studies conducted in this particular area.
A) Researching Sexuality in Young Children

In the following the background, as well as assumptions about children, will be addressed in relation to previous interest in studying sexuality in children.

(i) Background and Influential Ideas

The historical background to both professional and academic interest in studying sexuality in children is surprisingly long. As Kern (1973: 118) points out: 'As early as 1867 the English psychologist Henry Maudsley, described manifestations of sexuality in children. According to Kern, literature on childhood sexuality prior to Freud was extensive - particularly in relation to pre-pubertal intercourse and masturbation in children. However, in 1892 the American psychologist Earl Barnes, identified what he regarded as an omission in the literature. He bemoaned the fact that most 'sex studies' focused on the pathological, informed by preoccupations with moral degeneracy; yet "none of them make any attempt to trace normal development of sex feelings and ideas to children, nor examine the sex conditions actually existing in children's lives." (quoted in Kern, 1973:119).

As we have seen, similar ideas about the necessity of knowing more about 'normal', sexual development in childhood have forcefully resurfaced in contemporary discourses regarding the sexual abuse of children (cf. Wattam and Blagg, 1990; Grocke and Smith, 1995).

There is no doubt, however, that what has been called 'the child saving era' (cf. Gagnon, 1965; Tananski, 1978), which gathered momentum at the turn of the century, in conjunction with the emergence of Freud's work on infantile sexuality, fuelled academic interest in sexuality in children (Elias and Gebhard, 1969). Freud's theories, have had a pervasive and enduring impact on empirical studies, which have addressed this arena of development in children. His constitution of
the child as inherently 'sexual', has not only prompted empirical enquiry but has
directly informed the objectives of a range of studies which have examined
sexuality in younger children. Freud's cloacal theory of childbirth (cf. Moore and
Kendal, 1971; Cohen and Parker, 1977); penis envy (Katcher, 1955); children's
psychological disturbance at the discovery of genital differences (Conn, 1940a)
have all been used as hypotheses to be tested in the field of empirical enquiry.

In an implicit sense psychodynamic theories have also informed empirical studies.
Justifications for gaining insights into this topic area have included the notion that
the development of sexuality, provides the cornerstone of all human development.
The conclusion to Gundersen et al (1981) study of younger children demonstrates
this point where the core nature of the child is constructed as 'sexual':

The child must be seen as a sexual being, in whom sexuality is a
dynamic force in total personality formation, a force determining much
of his or her happiness and fulfilment as an adult.
(ibid: 59)

From Gundersen's pseudo-scientific view of the world, this can only be achieved
when the prime managers of children (parents and teachers), have access to an
uncontaminated 'value-free' knowledge. Of course, the central and determining
role ascribed to sexuality is fundamental to psychoanalytic constitutions of human
development.

Other studies, however, have been guided by ideas from other developmental
theorists who have also had a widespread impact on understandings of children.
Some studies have amalgamated the ideas of Freud and Piaget, to guide hypothesis
testing (cf. Goldman and Goldman, 1982) while others have borrowed heavily
from Piaget's work, placing their findings firmly within a developmental account
of children (Moore and Kendal, 1971; Cohen and Parker, 1977). This is not
surprising since the academic study of infancy and early childhood has been
largely claimed and colonised by developmental and experimental psychology (Bradely, 1989; Burman, 1994). Importantly, with regard to empirical studies of early childhood sexuality development theorists have had a precise and specific influence. Ideas of cognitive theorists, most notably those of Piaget, have been instrumental in constituting the topic area of 'sexual knowledge in children. As we shall see, Piaget's pre-artificialist theory which holds that young children make a transition, 'from artificialism to naturalism', has provided the account of child development in a number of studies which examined 'sexual' knowledge in early childhood (cf. Bernstein, 1976; Cohen and Parker, 1977). Furthermore, the idea that children progressively come to comprehend more complex information, is a powerful constitution of the child's mind in scientific discourses of the child's sexuality (cf. Rutter, 1971; Grocke, 1991).

Although the early pioneering work of the behavioural psychologist Kinsey, could not be classified as a theoretical approach as such (Victor, 1980), his work warrants inclusion because findings from this early body of 'sex research', are consistently referred to today particularly in sexual abuse texts concerned with identifying the sexual abuse of children (cf. Waterman, 1986; Wertele and Miller-Perrin, 1992). Kinsey has been described as 'a 'true' scientist of sex', since he believed that, a 'value free' approach was possible, and that the study of sexuality could combat ignorance and prejudice (Hawkes, 1996).

(ii) Studying Sexuality in Young Children - Some Ethical and Methodological Issues

Certainly, it is easier to observe and ask questions about children's sex-typing, which is typically measured by toy and activity choices, than about their sex play!
(Serbin and Sprafkin, 1987: 176)

Making overt and direct enquiries about sexuality in young children, undoubtedly raises ethical questions for the researcher of sexuality in early childhood. First, it
is necessary to make reference to the well documented issue of 'resistant attitudes' (cf. Gagnon, 1965; Constantine and Martinson, 1981; Jackson, 1982), towards the existence of sexuality in young children. Constantine and Martinson (1981) maintain that the topic of childhood sexuality has been understudied by social researchers because:-

the area of childhood sexuality lies in that territory at the edges of our psychological maps bearing the legend, 'Here be the dragons'.

(ibid: 3)

There is no doubt that ideologies regarding the nature of young children (i.e. as innocent and above all unknowing about sex), have influenced the amount of research conducted in this particular area.

Goldman and Goldman (1982), for example, anticipated difficulties with gaining access to primary aged children and circumvented this problem by omitting direct reference to the sexual content of their interview schedule to gatekeepers. In addition Gordon et al (1990B), referred to ethical considerations in their study of children's knowledge of sexuality. They pointed out that selection of stimulus materials were restricted because researchers were not always able to show children (aged 2 to 11) explicit and unambiguous pictures. As a result research interest in children's knowledge about sexual intercourse had to be investigated in response to an acceptable image of a couple cuddling in bed, suitably covered by bed clothes. One Austrian social scientist's attempt to get parental permission, to talk directly to primary aged children about their 'sexual' behaviour was refused, so he attempted other means of accessing children. He sat in parks and attracted children's attention by playing 'naughty' rhymes on a tape recorder which gained the interest of groups of children and was subsequently arrested (McKenna and Kessler, 1985:242). McKenna and Kessler argue, that widespread adherence to conceptions of children as inherently vulnerable and requiring protection,
underpins this general lack of research interest in this topic area. This gap is most noticeable in relation to very young children and babies.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate concern about the potential sensitivity of this particular research subject. Whilst it may be neither feasible, nor desirable to gain direct access to talk with children the Newson's (1968) findings provide useful insights into gathering specific kinds of accounts of sexuality in young children. Contrary to popular opinion, they found that the mothers of four year old children enthusiastically discussed issues such as attitudes towards nudity, 'genital play', and giving information about the origins of babies. What the Newsons noted, was the ease with which mothers spoke about their embarrassment towards and anxieties about, these topic areas. This observation fits in well with Foucault's (1976) thesis, that the twentieth century has witnessed an explosion in discussion about sexuality, while simultaneously, exploiting 'it' as 'the secret'.

Interestingly, other studies indicated that parents were willing to discuss sexual issues in relation to their young children. Cohen and Parker (1977), for example, regarded the middle class parents in their sample, as particularly co-operative. Furthermore, they also noted the regularity with which parents asked advice of the researcher. Significantly, parental anxiety about this subject matter is an issue addressed in advice literature aimed at parents (Updale, 1989).

What methods have been employed in studying sexuality in young children? The following will consider some options which have been used and sometimes combined, in previous studies.
B) Approaches to Researching Sexuality in Children

(i) Direct Observation of Children's Behaviour

In relation to the general topic of sexuality in young children, Spitz (1962) employed direct observation to gather data about the autoerotic development of young children. Isaacs (1933), on the other hand, combined her own direct observations of young children in the nursery environment with the recorded observations of nursery teachers. While observational methods of this type may side-step the standard difficulties associated with assessing the reliability of secondary sources of data (see next section), it does shift the attention to the researcher's own orientation and the implications this has for their interpretation of children's behaviour. Isaac's record keeping, for example, encompassed a wide range of behaviours in children, including biting incidents; aggressive play and talk; voyeuristic activities and children's conversations about 'being married'. This is not surprising since she adopted a psychoanalytic framework where sexuality in young children is conceptualised in broad and pliable terms (see Chapter 4). Moreover, from this perspective young children's references to 'being married' is interpreted in a metaphorical sense; representative of the young child's fragmented understanding and intuitive awareness of the existence of sexual intercourse.

It has already been indicated that there is a noticeable gap, in that there is very little research which examines sexuality in very young children and babies. Here, it is relevant to note, the obvious ethical and technical difficulties associated with studying sexuality in very young children. Further, it is also necessary to mention, the previous bias towards research of male babies (cf. Rutter, 1983) as, presumably, it is easier to directly observe physiological responses in male rather than female babies. Serbin and Sprafkin (1987), however, are rightly sceptical
about such claims which draw exclusively on biological sex differences. They suggest that stereotypes of male and female sexuality may also inform the agenda of many research studies.

(ii) Reports of Parents and Professionals

There are a number of studies which have treated adult reports as a prime source of data regarding children and these remain important sources of information but few researchers have talked directly to children. Early studies of parents such as the work of the Newsons (1963; 1968), remain relevant: firstly because they provide a valuable insight into mother's attitudes during the 1960s and secondly because their findings continue to be used in reviews of childhood sexuality (e.g. Grocke, 1991, Martinson, 1994).

Using secondary sources of data about sexuality in children raises peculiar issues for the social researcher. Is it to be treated as giving a 'true' account of sexuality in children, or is it assumed to more accurately reflect the views and attitudes of respondents? Previous studies have indicated that issues such as religious beliefs, social class background and levels of education, inform adult attitudes towards sexuality in children (cf. Newson and Newson, 1968; Gagnon, 1985; Grocke, 1991; Grocke and Smith, 1995) but very few studies of childhood sexuality acknowledge this as problematic in their research reports (cf. Cohen and Parker, 1985). Gundersen et al (1981), openly address this issue in their study of the sexuality of kindergarten children in Norway. Based on individual interviews with 60 pre-school teachers they comment on the limitations of this method of collecting data:

We have no measures of reliability or validity in this survey. The teacher's reports most likely reflect a mixture of their actual observations, their interpretations, their sexual attitudes, the length of their working experiences etc.

(Gundersen et al, 1981: 48)
Nevertheless, at the heart of their approach, lies their adherence to a positivistic world view where a truthful and objective account of sexuality during childhood is regarded as attainable.

(iii) *Retrospective Accounts*

Retrospective data, as a rule, are based on the recollections of adults or young people (cf. Gebhard, 1967), and positivistic approaches emphasise the inherent weaknesses and biases of data collected through retrospective methods. The issue of 'faulty recall' of respondents is stressed as particularly salient to assessing the 'validity' of data gathered in this manner and this issue has recently surfaced in debates regarding "false memory syndrome". Doubts about the accuracy of individual recollections of abuse testifies to widespread scepticism regarding retrospective accounts. In relation to social research, we know that respondents have often been asked to reflect on events which occurred many years earlier either, in face to face interviews, or by the use of anonymous questionnaires by social researchers. Criticisms have also been levelled at the latter kind of study because they have tended to sample college and university student populations, which are likely to be different from the general public.

It is argued, that thorny theoretical questions are posed by asking individuals to reassess childhood experiences as 'sexual' with the benefit of hindsight and adult experience. It is claimed, that adult re-interpretation of past childhood experiences as 'sexual', obscures the fact that young children were unlikely to view them as 'sexual', when they actually took place (cf. Gagnon and Simon, 1974). But, as we have seen, the accounts of children are missing from the social construction of knowledge of this topic area (cf. McKenna and Kessler, 1985). Yet this is located as a substantive epistemological concern, underpinning much scientific discourse on this issue; a topic to which we will return in Chapter Four.
Nevertheless, it is of interest to consider in more detail the value of retrospective studies. The criticism of faulty recall is a vocal one, which requires closer inspection. It seems reasonable to suggest, that recall would be particularly unreliable when individuals are asked by social researchers, to remember particular types of detailed information. For example, when people are requested to align incidents and experiences, with specific ages during early childhood (cf. Gebhard, 1967), it is the researchers' enquiries that require to be questioned, rather than reliability of memory. While information of this kind no doubt aids the organisation of findings for the social researcher, asking for this rigid age graded information seems pointless.

Yet it is necessary to pose the question "What can this method tell us about sexuality during early childhood?" Findings from other research areas, point to the potential strengths of retrospective methods. Studies of bereavement (cf. Parkes, 1986) for example, illustrate that individuals, have an ability to recall significant life events, with surprising clarity and detail many years later. This suggests, that recall is not simply faulty or suspect, and prompts questions about what is clearly remembered and why. Perhaps it is no coincidence that negative and unpleasant accounts of early 'sexual' experiences seem to dominate the literature (cf. Constantine et al, 1981; Jackson, 1982; Martinson, 1994).

(iv) Children's Accounts

In the context of contemporary debates about the inter-relationship between theory, methodology, and studying children, it has been argued that social researchers, should now consider other methods that would give children a more 'authorial' role over their accounts of their lives. It has been suggested by James (1995) that children's drawings, free play and writing, are fruitful ways of gaining insights
about the views of children, methods which have been used for many years, in art
and play therapy.

Previously it was maintained that very little research had focused on children's
views or had asked them about their sexual behaviour, feelings and ideas. There
are, however, some earlier studies, which did use some of the methods suggested
for gaining information about childhood sexuality. Janus and Bess (1976), for
example, used similar techniques (drawings and writing of children), to 'test out'
Freud's theory of latency. As a consequence, the premise of this study was not an
interest in children's views in their own right: the explicit aim was to 'test' the
concept of latency and its' significance for the period of middle childhood. While
these researchers' orientation was psychoanalytic, they did recognise the potential
of children's drawings and writing to find out about their levels of sexual interest.

With regard to other studies which have directly engaged with younger children,
the 'play interview' technique has been used to gather information about a range of
sexual issues during early childhood. As early as the 1940s, Conn conducted a
series of studies in clinical settings where he used dolls in interview situations with
children (Conn, 1947; Conn and Kanner, 1947; Katcher, 1955). Conn comments
on the efficacy of this method for studying sensitive topics with children:

While direct questioning was apt to arouse self-consciousness,
evasiveness, embarrassment, and yielded relatively little information,
children were able to reveal attitudes, difficulties and dream contents
with greater ease through the medium of dolls.

(Conn, 1947: 747)

This method, Conn maintains, proved of particular value in gathering data on a
topic which typically provoked inhibitions in children. More recently, the use of
anatomically correct dolls has been adapted for use in investigative interviewing
with children, when there are allegations of abuse. Similarly, it has been argued
that the use of these dolls aids the communication of vulnerable children. It is of
significance, however, that the focus of such explanations, concentrates on the
capabilities of children (e.g. their linguistic incompetence), shifting attention away
from the child’s social milieu and relationships. This, as we have seen
previously, is a characteristic of developmental versions of the child (see Chapter
1). Inevitably, the introduction of anatomically correct dolls in the investigative
interviewing of abused children has prompted empirical enquiry and researchers
have attempted to establish differences in the reactions of ‘non abused’ children to
this stimulus in controlled situations (Glaser and Collins, 1989). The emergence
of child sexual abuse, as a key social problem, has instigated a range of research
studies which aim to assist its discovery by establishing differences between ‘non
abused’ and ‘abused’ samples of children. This expanding area of investigation,
has largely been claimed by developmental and experimental psychologists.

The necessity of employing ‘child specific’ techniques when interviewing young
children is a view emphasised by Kinsey et al (1948). He stressed that children
under the age of eight, needed ‘a totally different approach’, thus exaggerating
differences between adults and younger children. Kinsey, advocated a
methodological approach which has much in common with the therapeutic mode;
suggesting that play materials should be simply provided and that interviewers
should behave in a non intrusive manner and ask questions in response to
children’s play. Informed by the influential notion of separation anxiety and
young children’s ‘known’ reactions in ‘strange situations’ (cf. Bowlby, 1965),
Kinsey suggested that one parent should always be present to reassure the child
during the interview. It is of note that no significance was attached by Kinsey to
the child’s unfamiliarity with the social context of the interview (e.g. clinic
setting).

Kinsey recognised the advantages of using children’s drawings and grounds these
firmly within a developmental framework. He comments, that drawings give
insights into the working of the child’s mind; a realm which is constructed as fundamentally different from the adults in developmental accounts of the child. Kinsey maintains, that drawings can be used as a reliable ‘measure’ of the child’s cognitive understanding of physiological, sex difference. This ‘special’ insight and area of knowledge however, was attributed to the discipline of psychology:

The child’s drawings are highly significant, as psychologists will understand. Many a small child who cannot describe the anatomical differences between males and females, will draw pictures of boys and girls which will make the distinction. (Kinsey et al, 1949:58)

Cohen and Parker (1977) similarly studied young children from a developmental model of understanding children. They combined the ‘play interview technique’, advocated by Conn and Kinsey, with individual interviews with parents. They concluded that while parent interviews had been straightforward, interviews with children in the nursery setting proved ‘the most demanding aspect’ (ibid:184) of their study. In keeping with developmental versions of the child they emphasised young children’s incompetencies (i.e. their lack of concentration, difficulty with particular questions), and the child’s comprehension is constituted as fundamentally different from that of adults. Ironically however, researchers measured the performance of young children against the criteria (or goal) of adult behaviour; another characteristic of this stage-based thinking about children. With regard to researchers’ enquiries about children’s toileting experiences they were reported to either joke or simply refuse to answer questions. Here, they completely detach the child from their psychological context, a common criticism of developmental psychology (Burman, 1994). As a result, they ignore children’s ability to comprehend the social conventions which apply to discussing ones toilet habits in public.1

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1 Some exceptions to this would include certain social settings or social encounters (e.g. the clinic or GP consultation) as well as among specific social groups (e.g. the elderly). Murcott (1993) notes that for mothers of young infants a prime concern is with the management and control of their bodily functions.
It is of relevance, that in the above mentioned studies, child interviews were conducted in clinic or nursery school situations. More recently, questions have been raised about the impact of social context on collecting data from children (Green and Hart, in press). Sometimes it is stressed, that interviewing young children poses very 'special' considerations for the researcher (Garbarino and Stott, 1992). This is particularly noticeable in developmental accounts where their inability to think logically; to recognise the perspective of others (egocentricity) and their tendency to display separation anxiety are all located as 'special' considerations for the researcher/interviewer of young children (cf. Waterman, 1985). As a consequence, familiarity with adults, the social setting of the interview and appropriate types of methods are recommended for this younger age group.

In reading studies which have addressed sexuality in early childhood, one is struck by the diverse range of terminology and phrases, employed in research reports to describe specific aspects of sexuality during childhood.

With regard to the general topic area of sexual knowledge in young children some researchers refer loosely to 'the origins of babies' (Conn, 1947), or to 'where babies come from' (Newson and Newson, 1968); whereas others, use more formal and precise terminology, such as 'sex information' (Cohen and Parker, 1977), or 'sex and birth' (Bernstien, 1976).

The language employed to address the handling of genitals by young children is particularly varied. Some authors refer to 'masturbation' (Gagnon, 1985; Wurtele and Miller-Perrin, 1992); 'self stimulation' (Kinsey, 1948; Martinson, 1994) or 'genital manipulation' (Grocke, 1991) while others allude to more suitable 'child-like' activities, by the use of 'genital play' (Newson and Newson, 1968). The
implications of these different forms of language usage will be explored with regard to constructions of childhood sexuality.

Owing to the range of terminology available to consider sexuality in young children research evidence will be presented under three general headings. For convenience, these three dimensions have been co-ordinated with the present study's findings regarding the views of nursery staff. In the following (i) 'sexual' knowledge (ii) 'sexual' behaviour and (iii) 'sexual' language in young children, will be addressed.

C) A Review of Previous Studies

This section will review studies which have addressed sexuality in younger children and, as a result, will demonstrate that relatively few studies have been conducted on this specific topic area. Furthermore, it will show how empirical studies have tended to focus on one single aspect of sexuality in young children and that the British context has been a neglected cultural site of study.

(i) 'Sexual' Knowledge in Young Children and the Case of the Decontextualised and Homogeneous 'Child'

Studies suggest that there is a developmental progression in children's concepts about reproduction and their understanding is related to their cognitive development.

(Grocke, 1991: 9)

Empirical studies which address 'sexual' knowledge and curiosity in young children have been dominated by developmental accounts of the child and have been heavily influenced by Piaget's work in particular. Burman (1994) points out, that much infant research from the mid 1970s onwards was concerned with testing out and developing Piagetian theory and this is illustrated in the cluster of empirical studies conducted in North America around this period (cf. Moore and
Kendal, 1971; Bernstein, 1976; Cohen and Parker, 1977). Standard criticisms which have been levelled at Piaget's work (e.g. ethnocentrism and class-centrism), can also be applied to these studies because they sampled white, middle class parents and their children, selected mainly from University based, nursery schools.

A finding from the above mentioned studies was that very few young children expressed knowledge about sexual intercourse and this is confirmed by earlier retrospective reports (Kinsey, 1953; Gebhard, 1967), as well as previous studies which included interviews with young children (Conn, 1947). Yet, it is necessary to indicate, that the question of young children's 'sexual' knowledge, especially about sexual intercourse, is a relatively recent addition to the research agenda. Today, whether young children have access to - or knowledge of - sexual intercourse has taken on a new significance, especially since such knowledge has been construed as suspicious in sexual abuse texts aimed at professionals (cf. Waterman, 1986; Smith, 1995).

Standard criticisms of a developmental approach to understanding the child can be levelled at several studies of children's 'sexual' knowledge. First the child was abstracted from 'its' social context, as it is automatically assumed that parental accounts were authentic and truthful, whereas the child was treated as the focus and 'unit' of investigation (cf. Burman, 1994). When parents said that their children had been told about the father's role in reproduction, an explanation for children not expressing this information in interview situations was sought in the cognitive structure of young children. As a result, social context (e.g. family relationships) was treated as invisible and as having no consequences for the child's level of knowledge. Similarly Cohen and Parker (1977), explained children's absence of knowledge about sexual intercourse in terms of incompetencies; young children's 'forgetfulness' and inability to absorb complex
forms of information. According to, Anna Freud, even intelligent children cannot absorb and retain information about reproduction. Bernstein (1976), however, openly rejected the social context of telling:

Even when adults give children the straight facts, the story of human reproduction often gets twisted into a remarkable version of creation. (Bernstein, 1976: 31)

Today, it has been argued that now we have to know more about 'normal' sexuality during childhood, in order to inform the detection of the sexual exploitation of children (cf. Wattam and Blagg, 1990; Grocke and Smith, 1995). Grocke and Smith, found that the majority of children in their sample (in total 400 aged from 3 to 11 years), had access to media, such as television where they were likely to have observed the act of sexual intercourse. Little appears to be documented about the ways in which the media and advertising may interact with knowledge levels in young children.

With regard to young children's curiosity about the origins of babies, the majority of nursery teachers in Gundersen et al's (1981) sample thought that the extent of children's inquisitiveness was not fully expressed in the nursery school context. Referring to children's curiosity in the home environment, Newson and Newson (1968) found that mothers reported that; children showed interest in this topic area by asking questions of their mothers especially when they were pregnant. Yet they found class differences with regard to mothers' anticipated response to children's questions. When specifically asked whether they would explain where babies came from, more middle class mothers said, that they would tell their 4 year old children. Nevertheless, it is important to point out, that in this historical context telling children about where babies came from was interpreted by both researchers and mothers as informing children that the mother's body was the source of the baby without reference to conception. Today, with the topic of sexual abuse firmly on the research agenda, social researchers can now at least, justify raising
the issue of knowledge of sexual intercourse with regard to younger children. It was in this climate that the present study could employ a 'sexualised' and broad definition of the origins of babies which is fully explained in Chapter 6: 'The Origins of Babies and Permissible Knowledge'.

The research focus and related findings of early studies indicate how social attitudes towards imparting sexual information to children have changed over time. In Conn's (1947) study, for example, which meticulously recorded children's responses to interviewers' questions about the origins of babies, children's most common responses were 'from the store'; 'from the hospital' or 'from baby Jesus'. In contrast later research found that many children knew that the mother's body was the source of the baby (Newson and Newson, 1968; Moore and Kendal, 1971; Cohen and Parker, 1977). Cohen and Parker (1977), also found that the majority of pre-school children who participated in their study were reported to view the father's role in terms of nappy changing and assisting practically the new mother. They also noted that when asked about the role of fathers, many children responded by making the following statement: 'I really do wonder, don't you?'. This finding which clearly demonstrates the competencies of young children is at odds with representations of the child's, low level of motivation and interest which dominates developmental accounts of the children's 'sexual' knowledge (cf. Rutter, 1983; Waterman, 1986).

Very little appears to be known about the issue of 'sexual' knowledge in young children, in other cultural settings. One exception to this is Goldman and Goldman's (1982) cross cultural study where they found that Swedish children had more comprehensive knowledge about the origins of babies than did children from other Western countries (i.e. North America, Australia and Britain). For example, Swedish school children were said to be aware of the recreational and pleasurable aspect of sexual intercourse at a much earlier age (from about 5 years
of age), than children from other countries. This, the Goldmans attribute to cultural and educational differences and it is also of note that in Sweden, sex education is compulsory in schools from 7 years of age.

We will now move onto the second dimension of childhood sexuality, and consider studies of 'sexual' behaviour in early childhood.

(ii) 'Sexual' Behaviour

It is clear that infants are born with a capacity to respond to tactile stimulation and it has been observed that some male babies have erections during birth and female infants have been reported to experience lubrication of the vagina soon after birth (Martinson, 1979). Moreover, Kinsey's (1948; 1953) work has often been quoted for recording thrusting and pelvic movements with 'orgasmic type' responses in babies, but this remains a rare example cited in scientific discourses about childhood sexuality. The meaning accorded to such movements remains dependent on the observer, rather than the observed, and his/her assumptions regarding the nature of children (e.g. innocent- asexual; libidinous-sexual). Later we will see how very few nursery staff regarded babies as 'sexual' (see Chapter 5).

A consensus of opinion emerges from the research literature, in relation to the approximate age when children begin to engage in sexual type play. Empirical studies (Gundersen, 1981; Goldman and Goldman, 1982) as well as reviews of the literature (Grocke, 1991), portray sex play as a relatively common occurrence in early childhood, becoming obvious from about 4 years of age. The actual frequency with which these types of games occur remains unclear (Rutter, 1983). Also, little appears to be known about the cross gender nature of young children's explorative encounters, but it is of note that young children are often portrayed as
a homogeneous and undifferentiated category of person in developmental accounts of the childhood sexuality (e.g. Waterman, 1986).

Games which involve undressing and exploration (such as Doctors and Nurses) and role play (such as Mummies and Daddies), have been observed in young children in nursery settings (Isaacs, 1933, Gundersen et al, 1981); recalled in retrospective accounts (Elias and Gebhard, 1967); and reported by mothers of young children (Newson and Newson, 1968). These kinds of games tend to be constituted as a relatively 'normal' aspect of 'sexual' development in childhood.

With regard to our knowledge about same-sex play in early childhood, Kinsey’s (1953) early account, provides some interesting information, since he maintains that inserting objects or fingers into the vagina or anus, apparently are not uncommon 'same-sex' experiences during childhood. In the present day climate, such activities are more likely to be construed as peer abuse, rather than common childhood experiences. Indeed today, this kind of portrayal of children’s 'sexual' behaviour would be more likely to be found in sexual abuse texts, as indicators of the sexual abuse of children.

According to Martinson (1994), same-sex, 'sex play', is to be expected throughout early and middle childhood, but his review draws on a limited number of empirical studies which were carried out some time ago in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Children’s everyday lives have changed in some relevant ways since this period, for example; gay and lesbian relationships have been prominent story lines in soaps (e.g. Eastenders, Brookside) many of which are viewed by children. Children’s programmes have also featured similar storylines (e.g. Biker Grove). In addition, the emergence of AIDS as a major social issue has thrust the question of homosexuality into the public arena. It would be, therefore, of interest to know if children’s awareness of homosexuality informs their attitudes towards, or their
participation in, same sex play because in the past this has been represented as a 'natural' stage of 'normal' sexual development (cf. Rutter, 1971).

Few reports consider, that attitudes towards sex play in children, vary cross-culturally. While it has been maintained that parental attitudes in the North American context are especially punitive and conservative (see Gagnon, 1965; Victor, 1980), other cultures regarded as 'exotic' have been found to be tolerant of this kind of play in children (Ford and Beach, 1952; Malinowski, 1968; Mead, 1981). Malinowski found this to be the case among the Trobriand Islander's. He explained it in terms of their more egalitarian relationships with children, maintaining that during his fieldwork, he never encountered an adult interacting with a child in a manner which suggested that children were expected to automatically comply with adult requests. This provides a stark contrast with our own cultural context where it is not unusual to witness the public smacking and humiliation of children.

It is also necessary to refer to representations of the sexual mores of other cultures. In some research reports the 'permissive' morality of other cultures is over emphasised (e.g. Constantine, 1981). While the Trobriand Islanders displayed tolerant attitudes towards sex play in preadolescent children, the separate residence of adolescent males and females ensured that they did not witness parental sexual intercourse.

In Britain, Newson and Newson (1968) found that mother's reported responses to sex play in children, suggested class differences. They concluded that middle class mothers tended to respond to their children in a manner which would make their behaviour more amenable to adult surveillance and control (by bringing it out into the open); whereas working class mothers reported more direct, punitive responses.
(iii) Genital Handling, Interest and Masturbation in Young Children

There is ample evidence to indicate, that young children fondle and caress their genital areas from an early age (Spitz, 1962; Newson and Newson, 1963). Gundersen et al (1981) found that 94% of nursery teachers, reported that children (aged 3 to 7), showed an intense interest in their own genitals, by examining or fondling them, as well as displaying them to others. Unsurprisingly, nothing is documented, regarding children's own accounts of genital handling and interest during childhood.

Gender differences tend to be emphasised in reports of rates of genital handling for children; 55% for boys as compared to 16% for girls (cf. Rutter 1983: 325). This anomaly is supported by other parental reports (see Newson and Newson; 1963) and Friedrich et al (1991), reported similar differences in the accounts of mothers. He found that 19% of girls and 36% of boys (aged 2 to 6 years) were reported by mothers to touch their genitals in public places. Interestingly, in Gagnon's (1985) large scale sample he found that mothers were less likely to report masturbation in their female children. Retrospective studies (i.e. Kinsey, 1948; Gebhard, 1967) also conclude that there are significant gender differences in genital handling during childhood. Girls are portrayed here, not only as the desexualised gender, but also as lagging behind boys in their 'sexual' development:

> On the average, females begin masturbating a good deal later than males, often not until dating or the marital years.
> (Morrison et al, 1980: 2)

Nevertheless, the status of these reports (mainly of mothers), should be questioned. It is plausible, that women may find it more difficult than men to openly talk about masturbation, in relation to both themselves and their female offspring. Ideologies about differential sexual 'drives' and sexual appetites of
males and females (cf. Caplan, 1987), may also impact on women's willingness to openly broach this topic area.

Unfortunately, little attention has been given to the characteristics and nature of genital manipulation in young children. In some research reports, for example, it is not always explicit whether writers are actually referring to qualitatively different kinds of genital manipulation in children, or one generic all embracing type (see for example Grocke, 1991). This confusion, as previously seen, is compounded by the use of different kinds of terminology to describe genital manipulation in early childhood. While 'genital play' implies a rather innocent and suitably 'childish' activity, 'masturbation' suggests something more goal oriented and focused. The term 'masturbation' in effect bridges the semantic and conceptual divide, between young children's sexuality on the one hand, and adult sexuality on the other, suggesting some level of continuity, between 'sexual' experiences in childhood and adulthood (see Chapter 4). In contrast, expressions such as 'genital play', clearly separate childhood sexuality from that of adults. Other semantic nuances, effectively separate childhood sexuality from that of adulthood. 'Sex play' is confined to the innocent world of childhood (play is often described as the 'work' of the child) whereas foreplay is confined to the adult world of 'knowing' sexuality.

One of the few researchers, to address the question of qualitatively different types of genital manipulation in young children is Spitz (1962), who concludes, that there is an conceptual distinction between a diffuse and accidental type of genital play in very young children and a more focused form of masturbation, observed in older pre-school children. Martinson, argues for a similar conceptual developmental framework:-

An important distinction can be made between genital play and masturbation in infancy. Infants in the first year of life generally are
not capable of direct-volitional activity required for the behaviour that we call masturbation.
(Martinson, 1994: 21)

Drawing on the work of ethologists and making links with studies of nurture-deprived monkeys, Spitz draws unusual and unsubstantiated conclusions, regarding genital interest in early childhood. Rather than upholding the innocence and asexuality of young children, he posits a psychoanalytic version of childhood sexuality maintaining that genital interest is a 'normal', and essential aspect, of a child's satisfactory emotional development. Moreover, he promotes the social superiority and exclusivity of the mother-child bond by concluding that levels of genital interest are indicative of a satisfactory mother-child relationship. As Burman (1994) points out, attachment theory and ideas about maternal deprivation, were powerful discourses about women and children, particularly during the post war period. These kind of ideas had a important impact on social policies, including nursery provision; in addition to influencing the agendas of the caring professions (cf. Riley, 1983).

What about scientific constructions of pathological kinds of genital manipulation in childhood? Standard psychiatric texts on childhood (Illingworth, 1991); child care advice (Hardyment, 1983) and psychoanalytic studies (Isaacs, 1933), describe an activity, termed 'excessive masturbation' in children. A common thread in these accounts is that 'excessive masturbation' is defined as abnormal and symptomatic of a more general psychological disturbance in childhood. Interestingly, this also implies that a lower level of masturbation is considered 'normal' behaviour. Today, however, the significance attached to this type of 'sexual' behaviour in childhood has been reformulated in the context of professional concern regarding the sexual abuse of young children. Now, 'excessive masturbation' is more likely to be considered an indicator of the sexual abuse of children (cf. Mayes et al, 1992; David, 1993) rather than as, a symptom of psychological disturbance. Yet little is
documented regarding the connection between 'excessive masturbation' in young children and child sexual abuse; raising questions about the claim, that today we know more about 'abnormal' 'sexual' development than we do about 'normal' sexuality during childhood. As this chapter has shown, the general topic area of sexuality in younger children has largely been absent from the research agenda. This was found to be particularly marked, in relation to research interest in babies and toddlers which was accounted for, in ideologies of childhood innocence; that are especially powerful with regard to 'little children'.

(iv)'Sexual' Language

Finally, we will now consider the constitution of 'sexual' language in childhood sexuality and it will be argued that this remains the neglected dimension of children's sexuality in scientific discourses about childhood. How then, is 'sexual' language construed in relation to the period of early childhood?

In Chapter 1 it was indicated that current censorship guidelines for 'U' and 'PG' certificates were informed by ideas about protecting children. In this context, this involves the realm of language; especially 'explicit' and unsuitable forms of language. Here, 'explicit' refers to what is regarded as 'offensive' types of language (e.g. 'sexual swearwords'), in addition to 'sexy scenes' or 'nudity' (see 'A Parents Guide to Video Classification - British Video Association').

One of the few studies which touches on this topic in relation to pre-school children defines 'sexual' language in a manner which positions the body as central. As a result 'sexual' language is linked with words for areas of the body and bodily functions:-

We identified sexual words and expressions as words related to sexual organs, elimination processes and sexual acts.
(Gundersen et al, 1981: 49)
Names associated with and used for, referring to genitals, sexual acts, urination and bowel movements, all constitute the realms of 'sexual' language. Clearly, this image presents a psychoanalytic version of the child's sexuality since 'elimination processes' are associated with the 'sexual'.

Research interest in genital naming in early childhood has been infrequent and information originates from other cultural settings, namely Norway (e.g. Gundersen et al, 1981) and the North American context (e.g. Conn 1947, Moore and Kendal, 1971). Data on this subject has been incidental to studies prompted by psychodynamic theories, such as 'penis envy' (Conn, 1947) and research interest in children's cognition which initiated limited interest in children's comprehension of reproduction (Moore and Kendal, 1971).

A consistent finding highlighted by the above mentioned studies was that young children rarely - if ever - used formal kinds of language to refer to their genital areas. Moore and Kendal (1971) found wide gender differences in young children's knowledge of vocabulary for genitals, reporting that girls were better informed and knew a greater variety of terms for the genitals of boys. In contrast, boys knowledge of names for the genitals of girls was found to be especially limited. With regard to scientific constructions of gendered versions of sexualities in early childhood, we saw how genital handling and masturbation were attributed to the sexuality of boys, while girls on the other hand, were constructed as the asexual gender. Similarly, in regard to genital naming, girls are constituted as the insignificant gender, since boys do not know the names for the genitals of girls; yet girls know many for those of boys. This important issue will be explored further in Chapter 7.

^ For a detailed consideration of genital naming in young children see Chapter 7 entitled: "Genital Naming in Young Children - A Specialised Language of Early Childhood?". The findings of the present study suggests that the character of names used by young children are subject to cultural and class variation.

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Young children's use of sexual swearwords has prompted little research interest since the child who is defined as requiring protection from the unsavoury language of adults. Gundersen et al (1981), reported on some gender differences found in the accounts of nursery staff: it was boys who were thought by nursery teachers to use 'sexual' swearwords more often than girls and in particular, it was children from nursery schools in 'lower socio-economic areas' that were said to use words viewed as 'vulgar'. Words such as cunt, cock, fuck and shit from the Norwegian 'fitt'; 'pikk'; 'pul' and 'dritt' were thought by nursery staff to have been learned from older children. Earlier, we saw how the 'deprived child' was constructed as less well protected than their middle class counterpart. In scientific discourses the image of the working class child was the one who was routinely exposed to an open and debased kind of adult sexuality.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that developmental and psychoanalytic versions of the child have dominated scientific constellations of early childhood sexuality. While psychoanalytic theories had a tremendous impact on research interest during the 1940s and 1950s, it was the ideas of Piaget that informed empirical studies in the 1970s and later. With regard to Freud, his influence could be summarised as having sexualised the young child's nature. Piaget's ideas, however, had a rather powerful impact in the construction of young children's 'sexual' knowledge. Above all, the child was viewed as unknowing, in the sense that they were incapable of assimilating complex information. In relation to 'sexual' knowledge, it was 'confirmed' that the child could not possibly understand anything other than basic information. Importantly, this chapter also highlighted the fact that little research has been conducted in this topic area and this was particularly noticeable with regard to babies and toddlers. A glaring omission identified was that virtually no research had attempted to talk directly to children about their 'sexual' feelings.
ideas or behaviour. This was explained in ideologies of childhood innocence, which were shown to have powerful impact on research agendas.
CHAPTER 4: EARLY CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY: GRAND THEORY AND THE GOAL OF ADULTHOOD

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show how two main theoretical positions regarding sexuality in young children have been constructed primarily in relation to the achievement of adult sexuality. This is important because it illustrates further how scientific discourses have tended to ignore the topic of early childhood sexuality, in its own right. Initially 'infantile sexuality' will be considered because Freud's edifice remains the 'grand narrative' of psychosexual development (cf. Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers, 1992), where sexuality in early childhood is central to his overarching scheme. Indeed Freudian theory can be held responsible for the particular positioning of childhood sexuality, in ideas about children (see Chapter 1). The work by Gagnon and Simon's (1974; 1984), has also been selected, as their 'social script theory' provides an illuminating contrast with psychoanalytic formulations. Comparison of these explanations highlight the conceptual problem of definition - can behaviours in young children be labelled 'sexual'? This chapter intends to explore this issue, with reference to other writers on sexuality during childhood.

A) Psychodynamic Theory

Prior to outlining Freud's account of psychodynamic development, it is first necessary to outline briefly the background to theorising sexuality in young children and its relative neglect.
In Chapter 3, we saw that sketchy, empirical evidence exists on the subject of sexuality during early childhood and this may partly explain why our theoretical understanding remains underdeveloped. As we have seen dominating accounts have included the work of both Piaget and Freud; yet Piaget's work, has specifically applied to the realm of 'sexual' knowledge in young children. In contrast psychoanalytic discourse has had a decisive impact on modern ideas about childhood sexuality and the social control and management of young children in institutional settings.

But what of more recent developments in regard to our comprehension of sexuality? Gagnon\(^1\) maintains that the subject of 'sexualities' and sexual identities has only recently moved from the margins of 'sex research' and has acquired a legitimate and serious academic status. This, he attributes, to three distinctly 'modern' innovations, including the rise of post 1960s feminism; the emergence of lesbian and gay political movements and finally the widespread application of social constructionist perspectives to our understanding of sexualities (cf. Foucault, 1976; Weeks, 1986; Caplan, 1987; Evans, 1993; Wilton, 1995). As Gagnon points out, this signalled a decisive shift in our theoretical understanding because prior to the 1960s, sexuality was viewed as essentially different from other human activities.

The emergence of AIDS as a social issue has invigorated interest in sexuality; necessitating a more widespread recognition of the diverse nature of sexual orientation and practice. Thus, the sexual practices of a range of social groups, have come under academic scrutiny since the advent of AIDS. These have included dominant groupings (heterosexuals); those defined as minorities (gay and lesbian

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people), and those regarded as members of deviant and problematic sub cultures (drug users and prostitutes). In this contemporary climate the sexual stories and preferences of paedophiles can now be told (cf. Plummer, 1995).

The discovery of AIDS has also prompted research interest and released funding into the area of sexuality and young people. Concerns about the spread of the AIDS and other sexually transmitted viruses (e.g. chlamydia) has highlighted the need to develop preventative strategies. As a result, attention has focused on the sexual health of young people and how and from whom, they acquire sexual knowledge and information. Inroads have been made in relation to our understanding of the construction of feminine and masculine sexual identities (e.g. Holland et al, 1992).

But what about our understanding of sexuality in young children? The emergence of AIDS in the 1980s has initiated some interest in the sex education of primary aged children (cf. Barnardos, 1994), but the topic of sexuality during early childhood, remains resolutely on the margins of academic discussion of sexuality². The emergence of child sexual abuse as a social issue has had a far greater impact on researching sexuality during early childhood, initiating interest in differences between 'non abused' and 'abused' samples of children (e.g. Glaser and Collins, 1989; Gordon et al, 1990; Freidrich et al, 1991). This focus has been fuelled, largely by pragmatic concerns relating to the identification of sexually abused children. Nevertheless, psychodynamic theories of the child continue to inform debates about the sexual abuse of younger children (cf. Waterman, 1986; Nelson, 1987; Glaser and Frosh, 1988).

² Out of the 257 abstracts for The British Sociological Association Annual Conference 1994 "Sexualities in Social Context" only I focused on sexuality in early childhood.
(ii) Freud and Infantile Sexuality

When considering infantile sexuality, it is important to emphasise that there is no such phenomenon as the 'definitive Freud': as Freud was a prolific writer who continually revised his theories throughout his lifetime (Bocock, 1993). A contentious example of the shifts that are evident in Freud's work, is his abandonment of the seduction theory, which ultimately led to the development of the Oedipal drama where Freud placed considerable emphasis, on the role of fantasy in the life of the young child (Masson, 1985). As a result, this section will draw on a selection of Freud's original texts, most notably his 'Essays on Sexuality'; 'New Introductory Lectures', and his final work: 'The Origins of Psychoanalysis' (1949). There is no doubt, that Freud's contribution has been enormous and his work remains relevant in the present day context. For instance, his comments in: 'The Sexual Researches of Children', (1908) which deals with sexual curiosity in young children is directly relevant to the present study and will be discussed fully later.

In order to understand Freud's conceptualisation of infantile sexuality, it is first necessary to refer to the basic structure of his theoretical scheme where the unconscious plays a central role in all human development. He asserted that the first five years of life were critical for the individual's subsequent, psychological development and in this sense the adult has to be understood in their historical context; mainly in relation to the atmosphere of early childhood. Crucially, it is Freud's concept of the unconscious which provides the underlying link between childhood and adult experiences (MacIntyre, 1958).
As the above diagram shows, in Freud's topography of the mind, the unconscious continually exerts causal influence over conscious activity. In early childhood traumatic experiences which are primarily of a sexual nature are repressed; a process which Freud terms 'infantile amnesia'. He maintained that the psychical structure of every young child was basically similar and that individual differences could be explained in the actual intensity experienced by children in the course of sexual development. For Freud, the achievement of 'normal' sexuality in adulthood was a precarious and difficult goal and one which made enormous psychical demands on the young infant. Essentially for Freud, this process was characterised by tremendous conflict.

Moreover, the emphasis Freud placed on the similarities in the psychic structure of all young children provided one justification for his retrospective method; data gathered largely from the psychoanalytic treatment of neurotic and hysterical patients. As a result Freud argued that findings based on the analysis of his patients informed and enhanced our generic understanding of 'normal' sexual development.

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3 see 'Three Essays on Sexuality', footnote (1977:92).
A central component of early childhood sexuality for Freud was 'auto-eroticism'; a term originally coined by the sexologist Havelock Ellis. This refers to the young child experiencing pleasure from zones of their own body. In Freud's final work he summarises the main components of sexuality in the following manner:-

a) Sexual life does not begin only at puberty, but starts with clear manifestations soon after birth.

b) It is necessary to distinguish sharply between the concepts of 'sexual' and 'genital'. The former is the wider concept and includes many activities that have nothing to do with genitals.

c) Sexual life comprises the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body - a function which is subsequently brought into the service of that of reproduction. The two functions fail to coincide completely'.

(Freud, 1949: 10)

Here Freud clearly outlined his position:-

1) Humans are born sexual beings.

2) The 'sexual' is perceived in broad and unconventional terms and was regarded as 'polymorphous perverse'.

3) Freud viewed infantile sexuality as qualitatively different from, but connected to adult sexuality.
4) Finally, the last stage in the development of sexuality culminates in a concentration of pleasure in the genital region, which coincides with physical maturity in puberty.

How is this development accomplished and how does Freud explain the transition from a rather pliable and polymorphous type of sexuality evident in early childhood, to a more focused and 'socialised' position emerging around puberty?

Overall, Freud maintained that sexuality in childhood was 'diphasic', characterised by two intense periods of development (Freud, 1949: 11). The first critical phase in early childhood was said to peak at about 5 years of age, followed by what Freud describes as a 'lull' in sexual development, more commonly known as latency. The closing phase, emerges in puberty, when the genitals assume primacy over more diverse bodily sources of pleasure. As this thesis examines nursery staff's perceptions of young children's sexuality, the intention is to concentrate on the infantile period (0 to 5 years).

Freud stated that in infancy three stages were distinguishable in sexual development: the oral, the anal and the phallic stages. Nevertheless, he did not assume a rigid chronology in progression but maintained that these phases were subject to both variation and overlap.

The fundamental and most dynamic relationship for Freud was the child's attachment to the mother or mother substitute. Ultimately, it is the atmosphere and content of this first relationship which sets the tone for the development of sexuality. This is accomplished through the child's relationship with the breast and the initial fusing of the satisfaction of hunger and the experience of pleasure. Gradually however, factors such as teething and weaning, sever the link between
hunger and pleasure. In the following extract Freud, elaborates on the importance he ascribes to the mouth, as the first source of 'sexual' pleasure:

The first organ to make its appearance as an erotogenic zone and to make libidinal demands on the mind is from the time of birth onwards, the mouth. To begin with, all mental activity is centred on the task of providing satisfaction of the needs of that zone. In the first instance of course, the latter serves the purpose of self-preservation by means of nourishment; but physiology should not be confused with psychology. The baby's obstinate persistence in sucking gives evidence at an early stage for the need for satisfaction which, although it originates from and is stimulated by the taking of nourishment, nevertheless seeks to obtain pleasure independently of nourishment and for that reason may and should be described as 'sexual'.

(ibid: 12)

What is interesting about Freud's consideration of the mouth as the first erotogenic zone is that at this early stage of the life course it is clearly regarded as an ungendered 'sexual' orifice. Yet, as Coward (1984) has more recently argued, it is a part of the body which later becomes almost exclusively associated with female sexuality, especially in media representations.

There are two, interrelated elements however, in an infant's 'sexual' development; first in the separation of pleasure and hunger and second in the baby's compulsion to re-experience pleasure through the mouth. This repetition is motivated by psychical energy (libido) which attaches itself to knowledge of previous satisfaction. Crucially, one criteria Freud employs in defining sucking as 'sexual' is the desire of the young child to experience pleasure 'for its own sake'. It is for this reason that thumb sucking is labelled a 'sexual' act because the infant is actively seeking pleasure from this zone. The mouth as a source of sensate pleasure is also supported by physiological evidence: as Winnicott (1968) points out that the inner lips in early infancy have particularly dense clusters of nerves which gradually disappear during the second year. Because of this, Winnicott maintains that sucking is an intensely, pleasurable activity. But as Rutter (1983) points out, whether sucking can be defined as 'sexual', is clearly dependant on the
definition of eroticism employed and it has already been emphasised that from a
psychoanalytic point of view, this is located within a particularly broad framework.
Furthermore, on this issue, it is exceedingly difficult to test out Freud's
formulations because of the methodological constraints which inhibit research of
very young children (see Chapter 3). Neither, can we possibly 'know' in any
absolute sense, nor fully capture the young infant's subjective experience of
pleasure. But the child's perspective can partially be gained through retrospective
methods (adult memories), in addition to the direct observation of infant behaviour.
With regard to the limitations of these particular approaches, we shall subsequently
return because interpreting infant behaviour with the benefit of adult experience
(i.e. adult language and their associated meanings), remains a fundamental criticism
of 'infantile sexuality' (Gagnon and Simon, 1974: 12-13).

The mouth as a source of pleasure, however, is augmented and gradually overtaken
by another erotogenic zone the anus. It is the citing of this orifice next to the
genitals which explains Freud's pessimistic views, regarding attitudes towards
sexual life. He argued that in 'civilised' societies sexual life could never be
regarded as anything but dirty and sordid because of the proximity of the anus to
the genitals. Similarly, Conn found that young children were embarrassed about
using names for genitals and often they were thought to be 'dirty' and unacceptable
terms. While Freud sought an explanation in physiology, Conn and Kanner
(1947), accounted for this in terms of parental inhibition and embarrassment which
was indirectly communicated to children.

The anal phase, however, tends to coincide with the period of toilet training and is
demonstrated by the child's fascination with its own faeces and the stimulation of
this mucous membrane by retention or evacuation of faeces. At this point, another
element is introduced to the infant's sexual development, as the child's apparent
pleasure in the retention of faeces is also accompanied by pain. Freud used the
term 'ambivalence' to describe this process which he maintained formed the basis of all relationships.

Finally, the last phase in infant sexual development is the phallic stage, evident in the 3 to 5 year period. According to Freud, it is at this stage that the 'sexual' life of children becomes accessible to observation (i.e. exploratory games and masturbation), and this has been supported by findings independent from psychoanalysis (see Chapter 3). Freud defines this stage as phallic as the clitoris is viewed as the female equivalent of the penis; yet the clitoris remains the hidden sexual organ, because of the physiological positioning of the female genitalia.

The final stage in infantile sexuality is thought to be superseded by an abeyance in children's sexual development and while Freud acknowledged the impact of social factors on this process, his explanation for the latency period was primarily organic. According to Sulloway (1980) it is impossible to understand Freud's framework, without reference to the emphasis he placed on organic processes.

(iii) 'Sexual' Curiosity in Young Children

In keeping with Freud's 'diphasic' notion of sexual development, Freud maintains that children in the 3 to 5 year old period display a keen and intense interest, in questions of a 'sexual' nature. Subsequently, however, the sexual curiosity of young children was said to fall prey to 'infantile amnesia' and is therefore largely repressed. He believed that children of both sexes had a common misconception during this time:-

The assumption that all human beings have the same (male) form of genital is the first of the many remarkable and momentous sexual theories of children.
(Freud, 1977: 114)
While girls are said to be overcome by envy on the discovery of genital anatomy of males (penis envy), boys on the other hand, experience acute anxiety (castration complex), when they become aware of the female genitalia. The defining nature of the phallus as 'the' significant marker, has prompted both criticism and debate (Jones; 1961) and feminist psychoanalysts such as Karen Horney have sought to redress this imbalance in Freud's analysis (Person, 1987). On this issue Miller (1984), diverges from the traditional, psychoanalytic position and emphasises the sexual socialisation of young children: her ideas are important both in terms of her critique of Freud's scheme and her influence on thinking about children (cf. Rex and Wendy Stainton-Rogers, 1992). What Freud regarded as 'penis envy', Miller maintained, is largely socially constructed, in the sense that it is adult reactions which engender 'penis envy' in girls. If, for example, the importance of masculinity is exaggerated and genital differences are explained in terms of 'having one' or 'not having one', this effectively undervalues femininity, inducing jealousy in young girls.

Not surprisingly, common theories of conception and birth are said to involve the mouth and anus, for example, children often believed that babies are born through the bowel and that they are conceived by the person eating a particular type of food. Young children are also viewed as being very curious about sexual intercourse (the primal scene) and in this context, 'being married' is used as a metaphor for the sexual act. As a consequence children's interest in being married which can be observed often in young children's role play, is thought to be symbolic of this interest. Further, if a child witnesses sexual intercourse at an early age, it is inevitably thought to be a negative experience: a stronger person inflicts pain on another.

With regards young children's questions about the origins of babies, Freud's comments are both incisive and subtle. Again, he maintains, that children show an
intense interest in the origins of babies but tend to respond to the evasive explanations of adults with silent scepticism\(^4\). This is a momentous experience from the perspective of the young child because it is at this point that the child recognises that adults are dishonest. In keeping with Freud’s underlying pessimism, the child's relationship with adults from this point, has been irretrievably damaged.

We now turn our attention to the contrasting position of Gagnon and Simon which will provide a basis for further discussion.

B) A Comparative Discussion of Scripting and Infantile Sexuality

Now that a psychoanalytic position has been outlined, it is possible to use Freud’s constitution of infantile sexuality as a basis for a comparison with Gagnon and Simon's (1974; 1987) position. Prior to identifying the salient differences and similarities between these two approaches it is necessary to introduce the work of Gagnon and Simon, and briefly explain the role of scripting within their framework.

(i) A Sexual Scripts Approach

Gagnon and Simon’s work has been variously described as a social learning perspective (McConaghy, 1987); a sociological approach (Delamater, 1987) and occasionally a dramaturgical account of human sexuality. These capture the basic premise of social scripting; that there is very little human behaviour which can be realistically thought of as spontaneous. Gagnon and Simon, apply this idea to the realm of sexual behaviour, rejecting the claim that sexuality is an innate and a

\(^4\) Changes in adult attitudes towards imparting information about the origins of babies is addressed in Chapter 6 "The Origins of Babies and Permissible Knowledge".
'natural' force which is biologically programmed (cf. Goettsch, 1989). They maintain:

From a scripting perspective the sexual is not viewed as an intrinsically independent or universally significant aspect of human conduct. Rather, it is viewed as becoming significant only when it is defined as significant by collective life (sociogenic significance) or when individual experiences or development assign it a special significance (ontogenic significance).

(Gagnon and Simon, 1987: 363)

For Gagnon and Simon, sexual scripts exist on three distinct analytical levels; cultural scenarios; interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. While 'scenarios' provide guidelines for behaviour on a rather general level when specific individuals respond collectively to these guidelines this then involves 'scripting'. Cultural scenarios however, deal explicitly with the sexual in our everyday lives and Gagnon and Simon stress, that the sources of cultural scenarios are diverse. For example, they could include images and meanings suggested in the mass media and folklore, as well as images found in buildings such as schools and churches.

Cultural scripts provide just a partial picture of sexual conduct because they only describe which behaviours are sexual, what is permissible and what punishments may occur if one deviates from these scenarios (DeLameter, 1987). Interpersonal scripts, represent an individual response to the external world and on a basic level they accommodate an actor's assimilation of cultural scenarios.

(ii) Scripting, the Immature Child and Adult Power

Gagnon and Simon (1974) assert that young children are 'potentially sexual', by drawing on developmental accounts of the child. Consequently they argue, on the basis of the child's cognitive and physiological immaturity, that young children cannot possibly impute, 'completely sexual' meanings on activities such as masturbation. The fact that the young child's behaviour is viewed as 'sexual' is
located in the superior insight. The later having advanced powers of understanding, including linguistic competencies not available to the child. Thus Gagnon and Simon's construction of the protosexual child is based on the dichotomy which exists between adult 'sexual' knowledge and language and that which is comprehended by the young child:-

The assumption of an identity between perception based upon adult terminology for the description of a child's behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour for the child must be treated with extreme caution. (Gagnon and Simon, 1974: 14)

Here lies their substantive criticism of the Freudian model because they question the validity of taking the retrospective accounts of adults, as evidence of 'sexual' experiences and desires in early childhood. These they regard as distorted reconstructions because of faulty recall and the problem of inaccurate memories. Reflections are now sometimes understood from a rather different standpoint. The underlying assumption that a truly accurate and objective account actually exists, has been questioned and terms such as 'regressive narratives' (cf. Jenks, 1996) and 'stories' (cf. Plummer, 1995), are used, in order to avoid this former implication. Thus personal narratives, are viewed as dynamic and subject to change, in the act of retelling. But how can we possibly capture, in the immediate and 'here and now' sense, the subjective understandings of very young children? It is not only the adult's benefit of experience and hindsight which necessitates rejecting the label of 'sexual' but the adult's knowledge of language and vocabulary to describe 'sexual' feelings and behaviours. Gagnon and Simon therefore, imply that in order to comprehend the perspectives of younger children it is necessary to understand their modes of expression. Of course, in the case of younger children, this would involve taking into account both verbal and non verbal forms of communication.
While Freud constructed the young infant as inherently 'sexual', Gagnon and Simon (1974), desexualised the child maintaining that the 'sexual' cannot be attributed to the behaviour of young children. But on what grounds? It seems that Gagnon and Simon justify their position, on the basis of their interpretation of the motivation of infants. The act of masturbation, for example, is 'merely a diffusely pleasurable activity, like many others' (Gagnon and Simon, 1974: 14). Implicit in their appraisal is an alternative assumption about the motivation of young children. This issue of interpretation of children's motivation is vital to the forthcoming analysis of the perceptions of nursery staff since it is central to staff discrimination of the 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour in young children (see Chapter 5).

The table on the following page will now generalise basic differences and similarities in Freud's and Gagnon and Simon's positions.
Table 4.2: A Comparative Table Of Two Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFANTILE SEXUALITY</th>
<th>SCRIPTING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>emphasis on:</td>
<td>emphasis on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• unconscious processes</td>
<td>• external reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• social factors acknowledged</td>
<td>• intra-psychic factors acknowledged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• infants 'sexual' beings</td>
<td>• infants 'protosexual' beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>key word</em>: 'sexual'</td>
<td><em>key word</em>: 'potentiation'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internally determined</td>
<td>externally determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sexuality in early childhood central to development</td>
<td>• sexuality in childhood marginal to development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 'sexual' experiences in childhood structurally equivalent to those in adulthood</td>
<td>• 'protosexual' experiences in childhood structurally opposed to 'sexual' experiences in adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• continuity between Infantile Sexuality and adulthood emphasised</td>
<td>• continuity between childhood experiences and adulthood questioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• role of adults important: ensures sexuality in child because of unconscious desires</td>
<td>• role of adults important: misguided definers of what is sexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• gender regarded as relatively unimportant until phallic stage (3 to 6 years)</td>
<td>• acquisition of gender identity seen as structuring the development of sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 'normal' sexuality a result of trauma and conflict</td>
<td>• 'sexual' maturity a result of social learning e.g. internalising social scripts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now that Freud's and Gagnon and Simon's positions have been outlined, it is possible to develop the discussion further. Three general issues have been identified by the present study as fruitful areas worthy of exploration. These are as follows - how is it appropriate to define sexuality in the infantile period; what roles do adults play in the construction of childhood sexuality and the significance attributed to gender.

1) The Problem of Definition

Throughout this thesis it is maintained that a central area of debate is whether behaviours in the infantile period can be defined as 'sexual'. This contentious issue will now be explored.

Freud maintains that humans are 'sexual' beings from birth and this remains one of his most controversial claims, even in the contemporary context. Weeks (1985), asks why Freud resisted describing infants as 'potentially sexual', especially since young children could not possibly be regarded as orgasmic in the full physiological sense.

According to Weeks, Freud argued that there was nothing to be gained by assuming the purity of children. Certainly, the wider dissemination of Freud's work at the turn of the century is often regarded as a watershed in our thinking about children because it made a rational study of the child possible (Coveney, 1967).

Freud also explained his position by referring to his retrospective methods maintaining that the analyst only becomes aware of the existence of infantile
sexuality, through the adult patient's associations. Therefore, it is the patient who makes the connection, not the analyst. Week's criticism is as follows:

it is difficult not to think on this issue Freud's thinking is tautological. For he argues simultaneously that sexuality exists from the beginning, is a dynamic force through the development of the child, is detachable from all conventionally recognisable definitions of the sexual, while being unable to offer any criteria by which to define what is sexual.

(Weeks, 1985: 137)

Yet one important strength of the framework provided by Freud is that sexual experiences in childhood are regarded as continuous with those in adulthood. As a consequence, 'sexual' experiences in the infantile period are not viewed as 'incomplete' (cf. Jackson, 1982) or less authentic (cf. Miller, 1984), than experiences in adulthood. On the contrary, they are viewed as structurally equivalent. One way this is made possible, is by conceptualising young children as 'sexual' and this provides one link between experiences in childhood and adulthood.

Jackson however, questions Freud's position. From a standpoint similar to Gagnon and Simon, she argues that it is more realistic to class behaviours in young children as sensual because activities such as masturbation are not assigned 'complete' sexual meanings by children. In her account, she stresses the significance of social processes and how children gradually learn about sexual meanings:

the erotic significance of an act or a situation lies in the meanings we apply to it, a child who has not learnt these meanings cannot be regarded as fully sexual.

(Jackson, 1982: 69)

Indeed, on the basis that children do not fully comprehend the wider implications of their actions, Jackson cautions against using misleading phrases, such as 'childhood sexuality'. In her view, sexual maturity is an outcome of a cumulative
process. But as Glaser and Frosh (1988), rightly point out describing children's behaviour as 'sensual' creates another conceptual problem. At what stage or point does the sensuality in the child become 'sexual'? Miller avoids this thorny problem by asserting that:-

Genuine sexual maturity coincides with physical maturation in puberty.
(Miller, 1984: 122)

Are we to suppose that a 'true' sexuality magically appears during adolescence? If physical maturity is aligned with the idea of a 'genuine', 'sexual' maturity, it would seem that 'protosexual' experiences in childhood are by implication in some sense inferior to 'sexual' experiences in adulthood. This position could be criticised for overemphasising the goal of adult sexuality. Furthermore, this type of framework fosters the idea that a full and 'complete' kind of understanding is automatically achieved in adulthood. This ignores a number of possibilities. First, it underplays the changes which may take place, in understandings and meanings attached to sexuality over the life span, and this, of course, is likely to vary over time. Second, it assumes a rather straightforward and simple progression. Freud's point is that the transition to reproductive sexuality in adulthood where pleasure becomes genital specific is characterised by conflict.

2) The Role of Adults

An illuminating source of insights about the development of sexuality in young children is a consideration of the role of adults. On this issue, there exists an overall consensus that adults are important, but commentators opinions differ, regarding the nature and extent of their influence.

From Freud's perspective, it is the pre-existence of adult desires which ensures sexuality in young children. Weeks, effectively describes this atmosphere, as a
'hothouse of unspoken (and unspeakable) desires' (Weeks, 1985: 137). The mother, is viewed as particularly significant because of the tactile relationship she enjoys with her young offspring. According to Freud, this is derived from her own sexual life, but the mother draws the line at treating her child as the 'complete object'.

On this issue Miller's viewpoints are similar to Freud's, as she recognises also the symbolic transmission of 'sexual' and erotic meanings. She maintains, that gestures of a disapproving kind can psychologically damage children. 'Sexual' glances however, are particularly harmful and confusing for young children, because they do not know how to satisfy the unmet needs of adults.

But Miller's (1984) position on the role of adults differs fundamentally from the traditional Freudian model. She rejects the concept of 'infantile sexuality', on the grounds that it is largely an adult construction. It is adults who misinterpret the motivation of infants and label behaviours as sexual. While the Freudian position has been vigorously challenged for over emphasising the significance of fantasy life for the child (cf. Masson, 1985; Nelson, 1987), Miller points out, that Freud also neglected the crucial issue of adult power over children:

I understand the concept of 'infantile sexuality' as an expression of a pedagogical way of thinking that actually overlooks the imbalance of power.
(Miller, 1985: 124)

The power of the adult is so strong during early childhood because the child is unable to effectively counteract the world view of adults. Moreover, in our social and cultural context, young children are constructed as dependant for increasingly longer periods making them particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. On this issue, Miller bases her assessment on a historically and culturally specific form of family organisation, since one would expect children's dependency on parents to
be intensified in social circumstances where there is an absence of social support combined with smaller types of family situations (e.g. single parent and nuclear families). Similarly, it has been argued that the modern nuclear form of family is a claustrophobic and emotionally damaging institution (Zaretsky, 1976).

In opposition to Freud, Miller maintains, that children's reports of sexual encounters with adults should not be treated as fantasies but as authentic accounts. Miller's perspective regarding the role of adults is both pessimistic and negative. She explains this, in the propensity of adults (especially parents) to emotionally abuse, neglect and sexually exploit children. Her pessimism centres on her view, that psychological well being is a near impossible goal while Freud expresses similar sentiments in relation to the satisfactory achievement of reproductive sexuality in adulthood. According to Freud, a satisfying sexual life is exceedingly difficult to accomplish.

There are a few parallels between Miller's position and Foucault's (1976) seminal work, on the history of sexuality. He was also concerned with pedagogical thinking about children but viewed this within a wider, historical framework. What he called the 'pedagogization of children's sex' was said to have it's origins in the 18th century and involved an increasing preoccupation with the sexuality of children. Moral concerns about masturbation in childhood, most fervent in professional discourses, led to measures which meant it could be controlled and manipulated. This was expressed in the physical layout of public institutions (e.g. schools); in addition to permeating ideas about how children should be appropriately socialised in the home. As a consequence, Foucault also assigned considerable significance to the role of adults because he maintained that the professions, especially of medicine and psychiatry, played a central role in 'discovering' sexuality during childhood. From Foucault's point of view this facilitated it's surveillance.
Gagnon and Simon's position, differs markedly from Foucault's thesis, yet they too see adults as particularly powerful. From Gagnon and Simon's perspective (1974), 'sexual behaviour' in early childhood can be explained largely in terms of adult mislabelling of 'acts' which from the child's point of view, inevitably has partial meaning. As a result, it is adult observers who 'naively' define the sexual in childhood. They cite the example of children playing doctors and nurses and maintain that it is the adult's response which explains the child's fear of being found playing this type of exploratory game. Thus, adults are viewed as having a particularly, detrimental impact on children's 'sexual' socialisation since their responses foster guilty feelings in children.

3) The Significance Attributed to Gender

Clearly a critical issue in regard to our theoretical consideration of sexuality in early childhood is the question of gender. Both Freud and Gagnon and Simon view gender as important but their opinions differ as to when and how it impinges on the childhood sexuality.

According to Freud, gender is relatively convergent until the phallic stage and the momentous discovery by children of genital differences. It is at this point that the psycho-sexual development of boys and girls becomes polarised and permanently separated. In contrast to boys, the psycho-sexual path of girls is especially painful because she assumes that she has been castrated and her envy for the penis pervades her whole psycho-sexual development. As a result, psychically, she becomes the negative gender (Person, 1987). Inevitably, Freud's original standpoint has since been modified in the light of subsequent findings (Person, 1987). Reformulation of Freud's position has come from the psychoanalytic profession (e.g. Settlage, 1981), as well as being an outcome of critiques by feminist scholars (cf. Chodorow, 1994). From a psychoanalytic point of view, it
is now maintained that young children's sense of being male or female, begins during the pre-oedipal stage (from about 9 to 36 months): 'an early non-conflictual phase of gender development, which overlaps the later conflictual phase' (Settlage, 1981:20). Yet according to Freud, gender is relatively unimportant during the initial stages of early childhood.

Gagnon and Simon's position provides a helpful contrast, owing to the fact that the basis for their social learning approach, hinges on the significance they ascribe to gender identity. They maintain once children are labelled as male or female at birth, a fundamental process is then set in motion:-

there are released the separate cultural syndromes that are related to the rearing of male and female children.
(Gagnon and Simon, 1974: 29)

Thus how babies are spoken to, how babies are touched and played with, have been found to be influenced by the assignment of gender (cf. Serbin and Sprafkin, 1987). For Gagnon and Simon, the ascription of gender, and the divergent responses of adults which duly follow, ultimately explains issues, such as differential rates of masturbation in boys and girls during adolescence. Moreover meanings and fantasies attached to this activity are also thought to be structured by the successful acquisition of masculine and feminine identities. From Gagnon and Simon's point of view, gender appears to be the organising principle, which guides the development of sexualities during childhood. While Freud clearly views the discovery of genital differences as the momentous experience of early childhood, and indeed 'sexual development, Gagnon and Simon assert that it is the decision to raise a child as male or female which lays the foundations for psycho-sexual development.
Conclusion

This chapter has considered the weaknesses and strengths of one central, psychoanalytic version of infantile sexuality and one influential sociological approach to sexuality. The fundamental difference identified in these positions, was that Freud stressed organic processes in his account, whereas Gagnon and Simon emphasised social learning and 'scripting' in their explanation of human, sexual conduct. However, one important similarity in these two positions, was the way in which 'adult sexuality' was taken as the goal of 'sexual' development. From Gagnon and Simon's point of view, 'protosexual' experiences in childhood were marginal to the development of sexuality in adulthood. Moreover, in their account, it was adults, and 'sexual' experiences in adulthood that were considered the authentic source of 'sexual' knowledge and experience. Similarly, Freud 'discovered' infantile sexuality through the regressive narratives of his adult patients. As a result, this chapter has argued that the perspective adulthood pervade these explanations of childhood sexuality.

Now that we have considered scientific discourses of childhood sexuality in detail, we will now turn our attention to the accounts of nursery staff.
CHAPTER 5: THE SEXUALLY INNOCENT AND THE SEXUALLY KNOWING CHILD: THE ACCOUNTS OF NURSERY STAFF

Introduction

Infantile sexuality is an obvious fact to anyone who has observed young children that it is seldom denied. Who today would claim that if an adult manipulates his or her genitals for pleasure this is unmistakably masturbation, yet if a child does exactly the same thing it is not? And who, furthermore, would claim that children do not routinely behave in this way? The answer is: no one who knows anything about children. (Badcock, 1993: 86)

Throughout this thesis we have seen how psychoanalytic versions of the child dominated scientific discourses about childhood sexuality. This chapter however focuses on the views of nursery staff, exploring their constitutions of the childhood sexuality. Here, it will be argued that images of the sexually innocent and unknowing child were the dominating accounts of young children's 'sexual' behaviour. Moreover, it was found that innocent images of the child were found to be most powerful with regard to staff views about babies and toddlers.

A further aim of this chapter will be to examine how staff discriminated between 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour in young children. Here a concern will be to show how staff accounts were underpinned by developmental versions of the child since their assessments contained core ideas about the motivation of children. In the main this chapter will focus on 'sexual' behaviour while subsequent chapters will examine 'sexual' knowledge (see Chapter 6), and 'sexual' language (see Chapter 7), in young children.
A) Constructions of Childhood Sexuality - the Sexually Innocent Child

So far it has been argued that dominant versions of childhood sexuality are underpinned by ideas which promote the child as innately different from the adult. We have seen previously how the child was constructed, in the early modern period, as a distinct category of person who is psychologically, physically and intellectually distinct from the adult. Now we will see how sexuality in early childhood was described as fundamentally different from that of the adult, in the accounts of nursery staff.

(i) The Sexually Innocent and Natural Child (babies and toddlers)

Bradley (1989) in his critique of child psychology and in particular his appraisal of work on the development of babies, locates a number of powerful images of the baby evident in scientific constitutions of their lives. These portrayals, largely ignore critical aspects of their everyday worlds and one major omission, is how they neglect the fact that babies are capable of experiencing unhappiness. Bradley elaborates: 'young babies spend a large proportion of their lives, fussing and crying' (Bradley, 1989: 152); a fact conveniently missing from developmental accounts of being a baby. This idealisation of babyhood and its association with paradise links with nursery staff's constitution of the natural and innocent baby which will be elaborated in the following.

According to Rutter's (1983), the way in which psychosexual development is classed (or constructed) in babyhood largely depends on the definition of eroticism employed. This means that if a broad meaning is attached to the 'erotic', then a the baby's oral impulses are thus construed as sexual. In psychoanalytic versions of
childhood sexuality, the child is sexualised from the moment of birth. In their accounts, nursery staff rejected the idea of the 'sexual' baby:-

I don't tend to think when I see a baby maybe making some movements that, you know, he's finding what I would know as sexually pleasing. I can't honestly say when I look at the child, I think they are getting sexual relief. I tend to think it's just comfort - they are enjoying the sensation.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, B.) my emphasis

This provides an illuminating contrast with Kinsey's early work and his portrayal of the sexualised baby. He reports, on what appears to be similar movements in babies, but in this context, pelvic thrusting movements, are interpreted as 'orgasmic like' responses, a view clearly questioned by nursery staff.

Images of asexual babies were promoted by nursery staff's use of a more playful sounding style of language and terms such as 'curiosity', 'exploration', 'discovery' and 'experimenting' have been key words identified in staff accounts:-

I don't know if it's sexual. I think maybe it's experimenting with each other or exploring what they see. But I don't think I would class that as sexual.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.) my emphasis

Importantly, the use of this type of language effectively desexualised the child; distancing their sexuality from anything that remotely resembled adult sexuality.

Young children are portrayed as mini adventurers and here, there are noticeable parallels with the language of child care manuals and baby toy catalogues where the baby is portrayed as a mini adventurer. The 'Baby Kaleidoscope' toy, for example, will help the baby 'to discover at the twist of a button', while the 'Softown Activity Book' are 'for children to explore and tell their own story'.
(Early Learning Centre, Spring/Summer Catalogue, 1997).
Revealingly, nursery staff's use of these asexual and less controversial labels (e.g. discovery, experiment), were aligned with what was regarded as a 'healthy', or 'natural' kind of sexuality in early childhood. Babies and toddlers were expected to playfully explore their environments and be sporadically interested in genital differences.

Furthermore, young children were also expected to show an occasional and passing interest in exploring their own bodies, as well as engage in an 'unknowing' form of explorative play. Similarly, the value of 'explorative play', is stressed in developmental accounts of the child since it is viewed as both enhancing and accelerating intellectual development. Explorative play however, is not an activity recommended for stimulating children's 'sexual' development. The following illustrated how 'explorative play' was linked with 'sexual' interest of toddlers. One particular member of staff's opinions about childhood sexuality were encapsulated in the key phrase: 'innocent curiosity':

It really tends to be in the house corner or when they are doing the toilet routine, you know, just the usual thing playing doctors and nurses. I wouldn't class that as sexual. Just the odd wee thing....

innocent curiosity: 'You've got a different bottom from me!', that sort of thing.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.) *my emphasis*

Again, it is necessary to draw attention to the way in which the use of the phrase 'innocent curiosity', dessexualises the child dispelling any suggestion of sexual activity. Importantly however, the toddlers referred to in this extract were desexed in another significant sense because the term 'bottom' was used generally to signify the genitals of both boy and girl children. As a consequence, the child was represented here as a homogeneous entity, illustrating the unitary idea of the child so powerful in ideologies of Western childhood (Jenks, 1996). It is also of relevance that in the above example, 'sexual' behaviour in young children was characteristically associated with specific areas in nurseries and children's play.
Nursery staff, consistently referred to toilet areas and house corners and role play (e.g. doctors and nurses; mummies and daddies), when discussing the 'sexual' behaviour of young children.

While the majority of Day Nursery staff, who work with babies and toddlers, directly questioned the idea that younger children could be described as 'sexual' there were two exceptions. Examples of what was described as 'sexual' types of behaviour in very young children have been reported as atypical and 'one off' occurrences, within the overall experience of individual, nursery staff:-

There was a wee girl I worked with and her manner was quite explicit, especially if she went into the house corner. It was almost as if they were in bed kind of thing and the actions she used. I was surprised.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.) my emphasis

In Miller’s (1984) critique of ‘infantile sexuality’ she presents a contextualised and broad description of sexuality in early childhood. Similar to the opinions of Day Nursery staff, she maintains, that sexuality in young children consists of a number of related elements including autoerotism (children’s exploration of their own bodies including genital areas), an intense physical enjoyment from bodily sensations, particularly in the oral and anal areas and an interest in physical differences between the sexes. Moreover, like most Day Nursery staff who work with very young children, she also rejects the claim, that sexuality in early childhood can be construed as 'sexual'. This label, she argues, is wrongly attributed to the motivation of infants, by adult observers. From the child’s point of view, their 'sexual' interest and exploration are not recognised as being any different from other experiences during the infantile period. According to Miller, here lies the critical point; the young child is, as yet, not aware of the social prohibitions which suppress the manifestation of sexuality in childhood. As a consequence, their behaviour cannot and should not, be described as 'sexual'. The
idea that younger children are incapable of assimilating anything other than basic information is central to ideologies of 'innocent incompetence' (cf. Archard, 1993).

In relation to staff assessments of sexuality in toddlerhood, even on the two occasions when children's behaviour was viewed as 'sexual', a toddler's level of awareness was portrayed as rather limited. For example, toddlers who were thought to be simulating sexual intercourse were said to be 'just copying'. This is an interesting characterisation since the idea of 'copying' and 'mimicking' is a popular typification of toddler behaviour, especially in baby and child care manuals (cf. Leach, 1982, Falhberg, 1984). Apparently, toddlers and young children are great mimics; they love to dress up and behave just like the grown ups. This idea is exploited in children's literature aimed at the pre-school market where appealing and gendered images are constructed. Girls are depicted in mum's, high heel shoes, wearing flamboyant hats and carrying enormous handbags (Hughes, 1972). Implicit in the idea of copying behaviour are constitutions of the child as an incompetent being since they are regarded as lacking comprehension. Commonly it is assumed that the child is merely replicating adult behaviour.

B) Discriminating the 'Sexual' from the Innocent

(i) The Sexually Knowing and Adult-Child

Staff accounts of sexuality in young children subtly changed when they talked about older pre-school children. This finding was also supported by expectations expressed by 'Baby Room' and 'Toddler Room' staff. During individual interviews they regularly stated that I would find many more instances of 'sexual' kinds of behaviour when I talked with their colleagues, who worked with older age groups of children.
While nursery staff still tended to regard childhood sexuality as for the most part 'unknowing', and therefore innocent, the homogeneity apparent in staff accounts, was found to become increasingly susceptible to more frequent reports of exceptions to this general expectation. These data are crucial, since they will illuminate, how staff discriminate between 'sexual', and 'non-sexual' behaviour.

The following represents a generalised image of an innocent kind of sexuality in the pre-school child:-

You notice the ages they begin to get curious but not a lot. The older ones understand more that they might get caught doing something they shouldn't. I think they understand it more. I think the curiosity bit is still there but there is a greater understanding of 'I shouldn't really be doing this but I'll just do it anyway'. I don't think they really understand .... I saw a wee girl lying on top of a wee boy and he was going up and down. He was obviously copying. I don't think he knew it was a sexual act or anything. (Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

In this example, which draws heavily on a developmental version of the child, the child's behaviour was still construed as 'copying'. How then, is it possible to account for this since earlier it was maintained that a moral imperative of the Western constitution of childhood was that the witnessing of sexual intercourse was harmful for children because it leads children to 'act out' in an inappropriate way. Sexual abuse texts regard a young child's awareness of sexual intercourse as inherently problematic and worrying; namely because a child could not possibly 'know' about such things without being exposed to, or directly involved in, this kind of activity. Yet in relation to the accounts of nursery staff a child's awareness of sexual intercourse was not found to be the sole discriminating factor in their constitutions of the 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour. Indeed staff offered a wide range of explanations why a particular child might act out their knowledge of sexual intercourse in nursery settings. This often was related to their ideas about the child's social relationships and environment. Being exposed to 'over 18 certificate' videos; living in households where they were suspected of sharing...
bedrooms with adults, or playing with older groups of children were all cited as explanations. A rather unusual explanation for one child's acting out behaviour (reportedly accompanied by an oral and grunting commentary) was that the parents of the child had learning disabilities and the child was in their bed when they had intercourse. Clearly these broad-based explanations contrast sharply with sexual abuse texts which problematise a child's 'awareness' of sexual intercourse.

So how do nursery staff distinguish the 'sexual' from the 'non-sexual' in young children? The following example provides a Head teacher's direct response to the opening question of the interview schedule:— 'Is there behaviour in young children that you would regard as 'sexual' in any way?':—

Yes. I think I would say if a child climbed on top of another in a bed. ...I would think that was. But there would have to be other circumstances to surround it that would make it sexual, from just messing about or just playing. There would be an intent that would be obvious.  
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.4.) my emphasis

Here it is suggested that the child demonstrated some level of awareness of sexual intercourse; yet it was the reading of a child's 'intent'; in the level of calculation and deliberateness attributed to the activity, which distinguished this account of the 'sexual'. In the above instance, it clearly marked out the playful and aimless (i.e. 'just messing about'), from a more serious kind of sexual activity in nursery children.

The following contextualises this idea of intent by showing how this purposeful kind of sexuality was regarded as very unusual in nursery children:—

I don't think it's sexual with intent. It's sexual to me as an adult looking on, but most of the time apart from one recent exception I would say it's quite unintentional. They don't realise that there's any difference in that behaviour, to any other behaviour that they actually exhibit in here.  
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.2.)
Parallel to theoretical arguments addressed earlier (see Chapter 4), authors such as Gagnon and Simon (1974); Jackson (1982), and Miller (1984), distinguished the 'sexual' in a similar manner. They also viewed it as attributed to the behaviour of children by adult observers, thus constituting the child's sexuality as distinctly different from that of the adult. These kinds of scientific discourses about sexuality in childhood, not only position the academic gaze as superior to other 'adult observers'; but ignores the fact that children's accounts are completely missing from scientific discourses on childhood sexuality. As a consequence, the child is disregarded as an active participant. This means that it the adult alone, who is attributed with the power to label (or mislabel) the child's behaviour. One may ask - where is the child and what might they be thinking? The following account is illuminating in this regard yet it remains an unusual example. Here a novel idea was introduced, in that a child was invested with the ability to regard her own behaviour as 'sexual':-

Just yesterday - this was nothing really but obviously the children see it as they shouldn't be doing it. Now what was it. There was a child with a tube and a jug. I don't know what he had said to the little girl but she was lying in the bed and she had her top up and her tummy exposed and he had the tube in her umbilicus (laughter) and pouring (laughter). It was so funny and he said something about 'She's got a sore tummy'. But as soon as she saw me looking she pulled her jumper down. So obviously she thought she shouldn't be doing this. That wasn't really sexual but it was the fact that the child who had her top up obviously felt that she shouldn't be bearing her tummy. I think she viewed it as sexual if you know what I mean. (Head - Day Nursery, H.) my emphasis

While the portrayal of this gendered glimpse of interaction is most interesting (note how the boy 'does things' to the girl's body), I would argue, it also gives insight into what was identified earlier as the social construction of sexual shame and embarrassment about the body, which characterises the 'sexual' socialisation of children. As Ennew (1986) comments, it is relatively easy for adults to relay
powerful messages about bodily taboos to children, particular in non direct ways, including disapproving glances and gestures.

Returning to the specific question of how staff distinguish the 'sexual' from the 'non-sexual', the following shows how the 'sexual' was aligned with a knowing kind of sexuality in childhood:-

You do see young children touch themselves. But I think in young children it's finding out about themselves. I wouldn't say that I've seen them doing that in a sexual way (pause) in a knowing way.

(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.3.) my emphasis

The following develops this idea of intent by showing how it was read in relation to what was interpreted as the child's heightened awareness of specific areas of their bodies:-

All kids are aware of what they've got, but there are some who are aware of what it's [genitals] for and that can be kind of strange in a 3 to 4 year old.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.) my emphasis

While the 'sexual' in this instance was linked with knowing about the pleasurable potential of genital areas, another account explains the wider context of one child's actions:-

He knew exactly what he was doing and he was constantly wanting to take girls into the house corner.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.) my emphasis

Similarly, the child's behaviour was viewed as calculated, since he was construed as having a precise idea of what he was doing and with whom he wished to do 'it' (girls). Furthermore, it was also suggested that he knew about suitable locations, away from the gaze of adults since housecorners and toilet areas, were found to be the most secluded and private areas in most
nursery settings. The following illustrates how other children were aware of this:

Yesterday ... I don't know if this behaviour would be sexual, certainly they knew what was going on. They were in the house corner playing and I heard them talking about going to bed and 'You go to bed and kiss', and I went up and looked over the house corner just to see exactly what was happening, and I asked them if they could open the curtains of the house. But they wanted to keep the curtains closed. They knew what was going on, and they knew it wasn't quite right. They knew an adult wouldn't approve of it.

(Head - Day Nursery, A. *my emphasis*)

Whether children were thought to know that their behaviour was wrong and that an adult certainly would not approve of it, if they were caught, were found to be important components of a child's 'sexual' behaviour. Similarly, in the next extract, the 'sexual' is connected with the child's moral awareness:

*He knew he was doing something he shouldn't have been doing.* Whether he'd seen adults having sex - there was something that seemed different.

(Teacher - Nursery School, T.4.) (*my emphasis*)

How did staff read this from children's actions? Significantly in describing a child's moral awareness, staff often referred to the child's facial expressions and accompanying gestures. For example, a child's 'guilty look' could distinguish an account of a child's 'sexual' behaviour. Alternatively, a child could be deemed both watchful and overly conscious of staff behaviour, closely monitoring staff whereabouts in playroom situations. One girl who was identified as acting in a 'sexual' manner was described as observing staff and waiting until they were suitably occupied, then taking other nursery children into secluded areas.

Conversely however, it was a child's lack of moral awareness which was found to be characteristic of the 'non-sexual':-
We've got a wee boy through there who constantly looks up your skirt but that's sort of...he will when you are sitting telling a story. He's not listening to the story - he has a look up. But then he doesn't think there's anything wrong in that. If I thought he was doing that and he knew it was wrong then I would think 'Why is he?', but you see he doesn't see anything wrong in it. So I don't think that's sexual behaviour.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.2.)

It is of significance that Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers (1992) raise the question of the child's moral awareness with regard to the constructed differences between adults and children. Indeed they argue, that constitutions of the child's moral development, as distinct from that of the adult, legitimated the regime of discipline (corporal punishment) established in post war schools. Interestingly, they suggest that ideas about the moral differences between adults and children, underpinned legal understandings of children's culpability. Clearly, in relation to the accounts of nursery staff, what was viewed as an unusual and heightened moral awareness for children was closely linked with staff discriminations of the 'sexual'.

Yet, other core ideas about the opposing nature of adulthood and childhood were found to emerge in staff accounts of the 'non-sexual' and 'sexual'. Previously, we saw how being playful and happy was associated with nostalgic and sentimental, visions of childhood while more responsible and serious activities are more readily linked with adulthood. The changing nature of nursery staff's constitution of childhood sexuality is captured in the following extract where a child's behaviour was construed as innocent and acceptable and then something more serious:-

We had a wee boy in here once who we thought was very curious, and when he went to the toilet he'd take another child with him, and they'd be looking at each other and touching each other's penis. And if it was a wee girl he'd want to take her pants down. And we thought 'Well it's just curiosity and you'd expect it at this age'. It started to become not a laugh anymore - he was getting quite serious. At that point we were following into the bathroom to make sure no harm was coming, you know. And we saw him behind the other boys and girls making gestures and motions and movements. And I thought, 'This is not...!' and Here this boy knows that this goes on between two
people'. Just certain words he would come away with. After, we found out it wasn't just curiosity - that's what we put it down to. We actually talked to the parent...\textbf{That's the most serious I've come across.}

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.) \textit{my emphasis}

Again, we see how perceptions of a child's awareness of sexual intercourse, in addition to coercive and suggestive role play were relevant but not central to staff distinctions. In this account it was the absence of fun and frivolity (i.e. 'not a laugh anymore'), which are commonly thought to typify the world of children that distinguishes the 'sexual' from the 'non-sexual'. Indeed, according to this member of staff, the child's behaviour was deemed to be so serious that it warranted discussion with child's family. Overall this was found to be a highly unusual outcome since nursery staff expressed reservations about broaching problematic, 'sexual' behaviour with the parents of nursery children. They explained this in terms of the acute embarrassment which they experienced, especially when instigating discussion with fathers.

\textit{(ii) The Playful Versus the Self Abusing Child}

It has already been suggested that the issue of how staff regarded the child (i.e. as innocent, lacking understanding), linked with their views about childhood sexuality. Basically, an innocent and childish kind of curiosity was expected in most young children, whereas a 'sexual' and knowing type was not. The intention at this stage is to develop further constructions of the sexually innocent and sexually knowing child, specifically with regard to the topic of genital manipulation in early childhood.

Grocke (1991), in her consideration of family attitudes towards sexuality in young children, discriminates between two schools of thought with regard to genital manipulation in childhood. The discussion is entitled: 'Masturbation or Genital
Play', reflecting divergent opinions about the nature of the activity (see Chapter 3). From a psychoanalytic position Spitz (1962), also maintains that there are two kinds of autoerotic activities evident in early childhood. He makes a conceptual distinction, between a diffuse and accidental type of genital play, apparent in very young children and a more focused and purposeful kind of genital stimulation, observed in older, pre-school children. As a result Spitz's conclusions are based on a stage based model of understanding sexuality in early childhood. In keeping with psychoanalytic accounts of the child, he locates the child's sexuality within the child's psyche, maintaining that they become progressively aware and overtly sexualised. Similarly, the present study identified two kinds of accounts of genital stimulation in young children but as we shall see these were not associated with the progressive development of libido in children. In order to provide a basis for discussion a table will now outline the salient features which have been found to distinguish staff accounts of two types of genital manipulation in young children.
Table 5.1: Main Characteristics of Staff Interpretations of Two Types of Genital Manipulation in Young Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Playing with themselves'</th>
<th>Masturbation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Behaviour perceived as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comforting</td>
<td>compulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soothing</td>
<td>exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relaxing</td>
<td>intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Regularity of activity assessed as</td>
<td>constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Child described as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tired</td>
<td>disturbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mildly anxious</td>
<td>as having 'family problems'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stressed</td>
<td>'hard to reach'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Behaviour contextualised as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end of the day</td>
<td>corners and quiet areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at story time</td>
<td>child said to use objects (eg table legs, floor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Behaviour assessed as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural</td>
<td>unnatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>abnormal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>innocent</td>
<td>harmful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non disruptive</td>
<td>disruptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acceptable</td>
<td>unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Staff responses more likely to be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personalised (e.g. 'I just ignore it. I tell them to go and wash their hands')</td>
<td>prompt staff group discussion and management (eg may be brought to the attention of staff group at staff meeting)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is it about nursery staff's accounts of children's experience of pleasure, which differentiates a more acceptable form of 'genital play', from an unacceptable type of masturbation in early childhood? Significantly, pleasure in itself, was not necessarily considered problematic, from the point of view of nursery staff, crucially it was nursery staff's reading of a child's overt and intense display of pleasure which distinguished staff reports of permissible type of genital manipulation in childhood. While a 'comforting', and aimless kind of pleasure was construed as 'natural' and acceptable for young children, an obviously deliberate and intense kind of sensate enjoyment was not. Underlying staff assessments of acceptability were constitutions of the child as innocent and unknowing; in a casual and accidental portrayal of genital play: in contrast to images of the sexually knowing and precocious adult-child who knew precisely what to do to gain pleasure. This is illustrated in the following, where a nursery nurse, reconstructs two, young girl's experience of pleasure. The first kind was viewed as 'comforting', whereas the second type was articulated as 'exciting'. Unsurprisingly, it was the latter 'exciting' and intensely pleasurable type which was said to require intervention:-

If it was Theresa... she used to lie and it was just like a comfort to her. That kinda helped her fall asleep, you know. It was just like a comfort, just like someone would have a teddy or whatever. So you would kinda ignore Theresa. But if it was like Laura, it was quite funny (laughter) and she was like lying down and she be like face red and you know she'd be really getting too excited kind a thing. You'd be like that: 'Oh Laura you should be sleeping'. You wouldn't say 'Don't do that', and we never say 'Oh that's wrong', or anything. It would be just trying to take their minds off it: 'Oh Laura it's time for a wee sleep, turn round'. They would stop doing it then.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.)

In relation to understanding nursery staff's constructions of the child's 'need' for comfort there are some relevant parallels with Winnicotts' (1968) psychoanalytic formulations; a scientific discourse which continues to inform the practice of the
caring professions (Stainton Rogers, 1992). Basically, Winnicott maintains that transitional objects (e.g. teddies, blankets, dummies etc.), play a necessary role in a young child's psychodynamic development. During the symbiotic stage, the child must adapt and psychologically come to terms with separation from the mother, especially during sleep times (Winnicott says very little about fathers in this context). In order to negotiate what is portrayed as a rather difficult psychodynamic hurdle, the child may seek comfort from, or be soothed by, other 'objects', which symbolise the reassuring presence of the mother. Here, there are obvious links between Winnicot's framework which constructs the child's reliance on transitional objects, as a 'normal' aspect of children's psychodynamic development; and nursery staff's construction of the young child's 'need' for comfort as a legitimate and acceptable 'need'. As a result the child's 'need' for comfort was constituted as normal; while the child's desire for sexual pleasure was rejected as an inappropriate 'need' for children. Here the child is constructed as emotionally vulnerable and dependant (i.e. needing comfort) which separates the child from the world of the adults and their legitimate need for 'sexual' pleasure. As we have seen, the idea that the child is defined as the category of person who does not (and should not) know about sex, is a fundamental to traditional understandings of children (McKenna and Kessler, 1986).

It is therefore not surprising, that intense kinds of openly pleasurable masturbation was considered undesirable and as requiring management on the part of nursery staff. The following illustrates this, showing how observation and control were deployed in order to put a stop to this undesirable form of behaviour:-

We had a wee girl in here who was masturbating; who was getting a good thrill out of it. And when we saw her starting we just went over and spoke to her and she stopped. And she tried to masturbate herself in the toilets and she got a good thrill from pulling the plug. But we just made sure that there was a member of staff with her to keep her occupied and she stopped doing it.  
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.)
Keeping children suitably occupied with more acceptable and less solitary activities were found to be common responses described by nursery staff. Moreover 'distraction' (i.e. 'lets go and tidy up the book corner' type response), was the most regularly cited method of controlling 'sexual' behaviour, deemed anti-social. While many staff stressed that they did not disapprove of children touching their genital areas, their accounts revealed ambiguous attitudes. Sometimes it was reported that children would be asked to go and wash their hands, or told jokingly to 'get their hands out of there' (pants). Ideas about 'sexual' shame may be relayed to children through auto suggestion; by referring indirectly to the offending activity yet still conveying negative sanctioning (i.e. the association of dirt with the genitals). Indeed, changes in modes of communicating with children were located as a relevant shift in professional practices by nursery staff. In the past, staff were thought to have sanctioned similar behaviours, whereas today diversionary tactics were regarded as a preferable method of dealing with undesirable 'sexual' behaviours in nursery children (see Chapter 8).

While the child's public display of 'sexual' pleasure posed management problems for nursery staff, other dimensions of the child's behaviour also emerged as salient issues. Reference to children's compulsive and repetitive behaviour were also key components in staff accounts of unacceptable masturbation in childhood. Descriptive terms such as 'unnatural'; 'unhealthy' and 'abnormal' were all used to pathologise this kind of behaviour in young children. It is of crucial importance however, that accounts of this 'compulsive' and solitary type of masturbation in young children have largely referred to young girls (out of a total of 11 individual staff accounts, 9 have been girls¹). The following will provide one of the few examples which specified the behaviour of a boy:-

¹ The 11 accounts were found in 4 nursery schools (Type 2, 3 and 4) the remainder being from 6 Day Nursery settings.
There's been a boy who has been lying on the floor a lot and he gets quite excited. And that's been hard to get him up and distract him away from it because he gets upset. That's what I consider abnormal - that's going overboard. (Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.) *My emphasis*

Interestingly, the increased likelihood of 'compulsive' masturbation in girls is an opinion shared by Isaac's (1933), and she is one of the few writers to address it's gendered manifestation in younger children. She maintains, primarily on the basis of her psychoanalytic practice and letters from concerned and anxious parents, that it is girls who tend to indulge in this intense form of solitary masturbation. Furthermore, she contends that it is a symptom of a more general psychological disturbance in childhood. In contrast, boys are portrayed as the ones who were more likely to openly touch and fondle their genitals in nursery settings. She explains this by recourse to biological reductionism in the easy accessibility of the penis and the boisterous and outgoing personalities of boys. Previously, we saw how scientific discourses fostered stereotypical images of sexuality in young children, by constituting sexuality in young boys as active and vigorous. Girls on the other hand, were portrayed as asexual and showing less interest, especially in relation to masturbation and genital fondling in early childhood (see Chapter 3).

Thus, what is commonly seen as a relatively 'normal' aspect of childhood sexuality, is attributed to the masculine; while the girl-child is constructed as the passive gender. Significantly, however, when it comes to symptomatic and pathological forms of sexuality (e.g. excessive and compulsive masturbation), it is young girls who are represented as the 'disturbed' and 'hysterical' gender. The contradictory constitution of feminine sexuality is of relevance here because asexualised images, coexist alongside obsessive and uncontrolled portrayals of female sexuality.

There are obvious links between the construction of gendered sexualities in scientific discourses with the accounts of nursery staff. Staff also claimed that
genital handling, was much commoner in the nursery setting among boys. When contextualising this form of 'sexual' behaviour they said it occurred when children were listening and concentrating at story time; when they were tired at the end of the day, or mildly anxious and worried. This reassuring and comforting kind of genital play was aligned with the harmless and 'natural', and was said not to pose management problems for nursery staff. As a consequence, staff thought it was possible to easily distract or ignore, this inoffensive and less embarrassing type of 'sexual' behaviour in nursery children.

**Conclusion**

Fundamentally this chapter has considered two main polar versions of childhood sexuality in the sexually innocent and sexually knowing child. Nevertheless, with regard to young children, the dominant idea regarding childhood sexuality was the sexually innocent child; articulated by most nursery staff as one who was oblivious of, and detached from, the corrupt world of adulthood. In contrast, the sexually knowing child was found to be a far less common, yet powerful portrayal of childhood sexuality in the accounts of nursery staff.

Another aim of this chapter, was to explore how staff's discriminated between 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour and staff perspectives were underpinned by key ideas about the nature of children. For example, the 'sexual' was constituted in terms of the child's intent, their morality (i.e. they knew their behaviour was 'bad'), and guilt. Conversely however, the 'non-sexual' was viewed primarily in terms of childhood innocence: and the child's absence of awareness and guilt. While 'sexual' behaviour in young children was classed as 'serious' and worthy of closer scrutiny, the 'non-sexual' was viewed as suitably playful, and therefore 'childish'. This first data analysis chapter has, in the main, considered 'sexual' behaviour in young children. We will now turn our attention to another dimension.
of sexuality during early childhood; since Chapter 6 will address the topic of
'sexual' knowledge in young children.
CHAPTER 6: THE ORIGINS OF BABIES AND PERMISSIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

There is no such thing as not giving sexual instruction. Most of the significant sexual attitudes are presented to children in an unverbalized form. These attitudes and standards, like so many songs without words, are the melodies which linger on.
(Conn, 1940b: 1119)

This chapter will explore the topic of 'sexual' knowledge with regard to young children. The present study found that sex information in early childhood was largely defined by nursery staff as young children's awareness about the origins of babies; so the discussion will focus on staff accounts of reproductive knowledge in young children. These findings are relevant for the training of nursery staff (see Chapter 10) and could usefully inform sex education policy in both the pre-school and primary sector.

First however, a dominating account of nursery staff will be addressed and it will be illustrated how staff relied heavily on developmental versions of the child to explain permissible levels of knowledge in young children. This will be contrasted with nursery staff's views about atypical 'sexual' knowledge in early childhood. Finally, 'where babies come from' was found to be a difficult area for staff, so the closing section of this chapter will focus on the constraints highlighted by nursery staff.

A) Constructions of the 'norm' and Acceptable Knowledge

Prior to introducing the views of nursery staff, it is necessary to make reference to contrasting interpretations of the phrase: 'where babies come from'. As we saw in Chapter 3, the range of terms used to describe sexuality in young children is...
sometimes ambiguous and often confusing. It is helpful therefore to explain the present study’s use of this phrase.

(i) 'Where babies Come From': Interpretations and Meanings

In Newson and Newson's (1968) study, it is evident from the point of view of mothers and researchers that telling young children about where babies come from was appraised as the mother’s body being the source of the baby. This censored version of reproduction is also apparent in other early studies (Gebhard, 1967; Farrel et al; 1978). In Farrel’s study, for example, the origins of babies is again interpreted spatially as the mother’s body being the source of the baby while knowledge of 'sexual intercourse' provides a separate category in the analysis of data.

Findings which will be considered in this chapter however, were elicited from staff responses to one main interview question: 'How interested do you find young children in where babies come from?'. In the current political context of concern about the sexual abuse of children this phrase was interpreted broadly, encompassing sexual intercourse; conception, the fact that babies grow inside the mother’s body and the birth of the baby through the mother’s vagina. As a consequence, staff responses have been analysed within this wide framework. This will include staff accounts of children’s language use, their role play and drawings. Here, sexual intercourse has been straightforwardly linked with 'procreative sex' because this study has found no evidence which suggested that either parents or nursery staff discussed 'sex' with young children independent from its reproductive context. In fact, discussing sex within this framework has also been infrequently reported by nursery staff. Other studies confirm this

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1 Here it is acknowledged that criticisms have been levelled at the exclusive connection often made between coitus and 'procreation' (cf. Foucault 1976; Constantine et al, 1981). This association has also been identified as a forceful idea in both Judaism and Christianity (cf. Parrinder, 1987).
finding. Goldman and Goldman's cross cultural study, for example, found that children's awareness of the recreational aspects of sex (i.e. sex for enjoyment), emerged from about 9 years of age. Nevertheless, this was subject to some cultural variation, since a small number of Swedish school children were found to have this knowledge at an earlier age (Goldman and Goldman, 1982).

This section describes how staff normalised 'sexual' knowledge for young children.

(ii) The 'Normal' Child and Permissible Knowledge

Most nursery staff expected pre-school children to know about the source of the growing baby and be aware that babies come from the 'Mummy's tummy'. Significantly this widespread opinion was articulated by the majority of nursery staff (over 80 individual staff), since they thought that young children had limited and partial knowledge about the origins of babies:

They know that the baby is in mummy's tummy but it's not ready to grow yet.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, B.)

This however, marks a departure from findings of previous studies, since Conn (1947) found that children's awareness that the Mother's body was the source of the baby was understood by children from about 7 years of age. In this historical context he confidently concluded that:

It is inconceivable to the child of pre-school age that the baby may be in the Mother.
(ibid: 161)

But if we turn our attention to a later study conducted by Gebhard (1967), he found that the average age for children knowing about pregnancy was 6 years for boys
and 5 years for girls. Yet when compared with the findings of the present study, this indicates that there has been a shift in the ages at which children acquire this information. The present study found that pre-school children were now said to know that the baby was in the mummy's tummy and this was also confirmed by information collected during the observational phase of this study. I witnessed on two occasions, children telling their nursery teacher that their mummy had a baby in her tummy and some staff reported that a few 2 to 3 year olds knew the whereabouts of the growing foetus.

This would not only suggest that younger children are now increasingly likely to have access to this type of information, but that attitudes to openly broaching this topic have shifted over time. But it is important not to over emphasise this point about changes in attitudes because the information that 'the baby is in the mummy's tummy', remains a rather non-specific and vague explanation. The word 'tummy', for instance, is used loosely in everyday speech to indicate the middle area of the human torso and according to the 'Concise Oxford Dictionary' this term can be used to refer either to the stomach or navel (belly button). Interestingly, in this dictionary it is also defined as a 'childish' style of language; a theme to which we will consistently return throughout this thesis.

Of course, we (adults) know that babies do not grow in tummies, but develop in an organ called the womb or uterus. Unsurprisingly an examination of the accounts of nursery staff showed that this precise type of information was not commonly relayed to children. Similarly, it is also noticeable that few 'where babies come from' type texts, aimed at very young children, cover this issue in any detail. In Babette Cole's (1995) imaginative "Mummy Laid an Egg", for example, she addresses issues such as mummy and daddy having seeds which come together, yet fertilisation and the growth of the baby take place "inside her [mummy's] tummy". One exception to this lack of precision is an Open University publication,
which is a teaching resource aimed at parents of young children. Unusually, this text advocates that young children should be spoken to about the existence of wombs, suggesting it could be tackled in the following manner: "Girls have a kind of strong balloon inside their tummies like this ....[illustration of a clenched hand] inside where no one can see. It's where babies grow". (Pre-School Play group Association, 1979: 177). Nevertheless, uncertainty surrounds whether parents should directly refer to this organ and use the 'correct' terminology. In keeping with other advice about talking to young children (e.g. Updale, 1989), developmentalism prevails, since a dosage technique is advocated. Here it is advised that children should only be gradually exposed to small amounts of information.

Not only were young children thought to know that: 'the baby is in the mummy's tummy', but they were reported to speak openly and confidently about this in nursery settings:-

They'll say: 'My mummy's got a baby in her tummy and it's going to come out at Christmas. Just general things like that.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.I.)

Communication of this knowledge was not merely confined to the talk of young children, but was said to emerge in role play, especially of young girls. Some staff said that they observed, girls pretending to be pregnant by placing cushions up their jumpers while others referred to girls acting out childbirth. Here, their panting and puffing was emphasised and that they adopted the conventional and passive position of childbirth. Staff occasionally mentioned the role play of very young children and reported that some toddlers also played at having babies. One member of staff described how she saw a group of 2 to 3 year olds, pretending to saw open a child's stomach to procure the new born baby. Yet most Day Nursery

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2 This incident was contextualised as taking place on the bed in the house corner. One nursery teacher commented: 'Goodness knows where they get it from - they must have seen it on the tele.'
staff who worked with toddlers thought that they were not particularly interested about where babies actually came from:-

In the age group I'm working with they are not interested in where babies come from. They are interested in babies. They are interested in changing babies nappies, what comes out of babies bottoms. I mean messy things. But that's just messy play.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.)

While the 'sexual' curiosity of toddlers was viewed as especially limited, pre­school children's open expression of their awareness was said to be a recent development. This was now regarded as a commonplace occurrence in nursery settings:-

Things have changed since I started in nurseries. Things have changed. A few years ago you wouldn't have got them speaking about it so much. But nowadays they take it for granted: 'the baby is in the mummy's tummy.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.7.)

Moreover, staff on occasions, spontaneously offered information regarding their own childhood memories of pregnancy and childbirth and this data is illuminating because it supports the idea, that there has indeed been some change in social attitudes and conventions. Previously, social prohibitions about direct references to childbirth were said to operate:-

You weren't allowed to ask if so and so had a baby, you had to go up and say: 'Is Mrs Thompson any better?' It was a taboo subject.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.)

Furthermore, the exclusion of children from the events surrounding childbirth was recalled by nursery staff. In the following one Nursery Nurse recounts an incident from her own childhood as she remembers the arrival of a sibling:-

I remember saying to my mum: 'You never told me about a baby'. She said 'I did'. I remember we got sent up to aunty Katy's but I didn't know why. I thought this was marvellous - getting up to aunty Katy's and it's dark. This was great and off we went. I didn't know.
I suppose now thinking back that must have been when she went into labour. I didn't know. That's all the memories I have of my mum expecting.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.5.)

Other accounts suggested that in the past a sibling could suddenly and magically arrive in a household without prior warning:-

When I was young, babies just appeared - and my wee sister was in a cot (laughter). I had no idea that my mother was pregnant or anything.
(Nursery Nurse- Day Nursery, F.)

Recollections of these past social practices and conventions are incongruent with staff’s current accounts of pregnant mothers and their attitudes towards informing their children. Overall, staff now approved of the fact that mothers told children about their pregnancy; involved them in ante-natal visits and encouraged discussion about the growth of the foetus.

Nevertheless in our social and cultural context children's presence at the birth of a sibling, would appear to remain a largely unacceptable and marginalised practice (Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 1989). Explaining staff attitudes towards a more detailed and comprehensive knowledge about childbirth will be considered later in Section B: 'Deviating from the Straight and Narrow - Atypical Knowledge'.

(iii) What is Normal and the Power of Developmental Psychology

Now it is necessary to consider staff explanations regarding 'the norm' of knowing. How then did staff account for this rather basic level of knowledge in most young children? In order to tackle this question, it is necessary to draw on developmental versions of the child and refer to studies which have applied

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3 It is relevant to note that there were boundaries to staff approval. For example, mothers who were said to inform their child 'too early' (e.g. in the first trimester of pregnancy) were critically regarded by some nursery staff. The possibility of miscarriage and the duration of pregnancy were cited as important considerations in this regard.
Piaget's model of child development to the realm of 'sexual' knowledge in younger children. In the following table, Bernstein's (1976) study has been used as a basis for identifying and generalising staff accounts of the young child's understanding; since she used a Piagetian framework to explain children's progressive cognition of sex and birth. Burman (1994) points out, that during the 1970s much empirical research emerging from developmental psychology was concerned with furnishing theories of children's development.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL ACCOUNT</th>
<th>STAFF EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young children react to concrete and observable events.</td>
<td>Young children are interested when pregnant mums come into the nursery. They are only interested in why she has a big tummy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Children can only absorb a certain amount of information at a specific stage in their development.</td>
<td>Young children aren't capable of understanding the 'whole story'. It would just confuse them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children's questions should be used as a guide to indicate the amount of information they can assimilate.</td>
<td>Young children do not ask the question 'Where do babies come from?'. Therefore, they do not need to know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A dosage of information is desirable progressing to a more complex stage as the child matures.</td>
<td>Young children are happy with the information that the baby is in the &quot;mummy's tummy&quot;. There is plenty of time to tell them more when they are older.</td>
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</table>
In relation to the origins of babies, a salient explanation for the parameters of young children's knowledge has been staff constitutions of the child's motivation. Importantly, pre-school children's 'need' for explicit information was constructed as especially limited:

"I think the only thing they need to know: 'It's in mummy's tummy', because they are not looking for big detailed information, as they are only curious why Mum has a big tummy."

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Similarly, in the following extract imparting 'detail' to young children was again viewed as inappropriate, yet another central tenet of a developmental account was pinpointed; a pre-school child's restricted cognition, particularly in the realm of language:

"I don't see the point of telling them all the details. I'm not saying it would be wrong to tell them, but I don't know how much of it they would absorb or what it would mean to them. I think you've got to keep the language very simple, so they can understand it. If you tell them all the ins and outs, every single detail, they'll not remember it, they'll not be able to make sense of it and it will confuse them."

(Nursery Nurse-Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

In order to underline the prominence of this staff account of the child's incompetence, the following will illustrate an alternative version of the child. Here the idea that young children have limited understanding is directly challenged, providing one of the four examples of this critical viewpoint:

"I believe that people treat children with less respect intellectually than they deserve. I think they are a lot cleverer, a lot more intuitive and a lot more intelligent than we often know and people won't tell them things because they think they won't understand."

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.) my emphasis

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4 The word 'detail' was identified as a key word in staff accounts. The meaning of this term will be explained further in Section B.
The idea that the child possesses a superior wisdom and a 'primitive knowing' is one account of the child which has been attributed to Christianity (Archard, 1993). Similar constructions of the child, emerge in the educational philosophy of Montessori, where the young child is invested with an elevated understanding and intuition (Synnot, 1983).

Another nursery nurse highlighted a further element which originates from a developmental account, namely, attuning the quantity and complexity of information given to children, with their 'level' of understanding:

I think if you explain it in a fairly concise way and just making it suitable to their level, you couldn't go into detail about different parts of your body or the reproductive system or what have you.

(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.3.)

In Bernstein's (1976) developmental account, she identified 5 levels of understanding in children. Children's explanations regarding the origins of babies were neatly aligned to a specific stage in their 'mental development'. She generalised that Level One: The Geographers (usually 3 to 4 year olds) tended to believe that babies have always existed inside the mother. Bernstein, maintained that her findings supported the Piagetian notion of a 'pre artificialistic' stage of thinking in early childhood. Yet an earlier study by Moore and Kendal (1971), found no evidence of these kinds of beliefs in interviews with pre-school children; which is perhaps surprising since both samples of children were drawn from 'white, middle and upper class', North American children.

Furthermore, it is also pertinent that Goldman and Goldman (1982) questioned the extent of Bernstiens 5 levels of understanding because they argued that some of these levels could be side-stepped if adults were more forthcoming and less inhibited with children. The view that adults are reluctant to discuss 'sexual'
matters with children is consistently highlighted as an issue in the literature (Gagnon, 1965; Moore and Kendal, 1971; Jackson, 1982).

A further issue identified by nursery staff was that children did not make specific and searching enquiries about the origins of babies:

I've never had a child ask me how the baby gets out: 'Where does it come from?' Mummy goes to hospital and gets the baby and that's it.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.8) *emphasis in original*

The view that young children do not generally ask adults about this area, combined with the idea that questions should be used as an indicator of a child's readiness for more complex information, is a theme which emerges in child care advice offered to parents (e.g. 'Woman's Own'; 'Parent's Magazine'). This demonstrates that the origins of babies is one of the few subjects which is thought to require a 'special' kind of response from adults. Paradoxically, adults are advised to wait for the child's questions rather than to instigate interest (Updale, 1989). This inert mode of dealing with 'sexual' curiosity in young children provides a stark contrast with thinking regarding other areas of young children's development and the onerous pressures placed on parents to stimulate their young offspring (cf. 1997 Early Learning Centre Catalogue). In our social and cultural context, a bizarre idea would be to suggest that educationalists and parents wait for a pre-school child to initiate discussion on numeracy or colour recognition. Here it is helpful to bear in mind, that a pervasive discourse about childhood sexuality is that children can be 'over stimulated' by exposure to too much 'sexual' information. Moreover a rather vocal view which is evident in conservative responses to the sex education of children, is the idea that increased knowledge prompts sexual experimentation. This claim however has been consistently challenged by liberal positions promoted by organisations such as the Family Planning Association (e.g. Sex Education Forum, 1994).
B) Deviating from the Straight and Narrow - Atypical Knowledge

Periodically moral panics regarding the assault on childhood innocence are brought to public attention in the context of debates about the sex education of children. One such wave of indignation, was prompted by media reporting of an 11 year old boy's enquiries about blow jobs in a sex education session. This incident, which took place in a Leeds middle school, also heightened anxieties about the harmful influence of knowledgeable and 'sexually precocious' children, on others portrayed as ignorant and oblivious of adult forms of foreplay. Clearly such responses are underpinned by contradictory attitudes towards children, illustrating the interplay between knowing and innocent images of childhood sexuality. So far however we have seen that developmental versions of the child permeated staff views about of normal 'sexual' knowledge in pre-school children. It is of importance that the significance of this powerful account of the child, diminished when nursery staff elaborated on what they regarded as, 'out of the ordinary' levels of knowledge in nursery children. As we shall see, this demanded an alternative kind of reasoning on the part of nursery staff.

(i) Knowledgeable Children

Previously, we saw that nursery staff regarded imparting 'detailed' reproductive information as inappropriate for young children. Principally this was accounted for by drawing on what Jenks (1996) calls, the Piagetian paradigm; where the child is constructed in terms of their limited cognition, linguistic incompetence and absence of motivation. How then did staff locate atypical levels of knowledge in young children? Basically, the present study has found, that when staff reflected on what

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they considered out of the ordinary kinds of knowledge for young children, they tended to draw on social class and ethnic background of nursery children.

In keeping with related findings from the present study (see Chapter 7), young children's use of what was considered 'sophisticated' and 'adult' forms of language were raised as noteworthy occurrences from the point of view of nursery staff. In the following example, a girl's knowledge and use of a biological term was accounted for in terms of her parent's occupational status:-

One girl said that her Mummy was pregnant but that was the parents - I think they were Doctors or lawyers or something.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.4.)

This economical and precise use of language provides a stark contrast with the suitably 'childish' styles, said to be used by most pre-school children (i.e. 'the baby is in the mummy's tummy').

Similarly, one child's apparent knowledge of contraception required explanation, from the perspective of another member of staff. Again this unusual level of knowledge was accounted for in terms of the mother's occupational status and the child's intelligence. This provides an important example since it is one of the few instances where the gender of the child was identified as a boy:-

On my first day here there was a wee boy in my group - he was a real smart cookie , this wee guy - but I was astounded. We sat down at the lunch table together and he said to me 'Karen sure if you wear a condom you won't get AIDS ?', and I was flabbergasted (laughter). Obviously he must have asked his Mum. His Mum was up to the minute. She was a lawyer and very straightforward and honest and it was during that big AIDS campaign that was going on. (pause) that takes you aback as you don't often get things like that.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

Significantly these descriptions of atypical types of knowledge do contradict the general assumptions made regarding the competencies of young children. As we
have seen, nursery staff viewed young children as incapable of understanding anything other than simple vocabularies and basic information about the origins of babies.

There were other examples, where the intelligence and questioning nature of children were raised as salient issues. That specific children were viewed as 'very clever'; 'very precise' or as 'bright as buttons', were combined with other explanations involving the child's social class background. The fact that a parent was a health care professional (e.g. nurse, dentist or GP.), or a university lecturer were all used to account for comprehensive levels of 'sexual' knowledge in individual children. Nevertheless, the professional class of parents was not the sole explanation because mothers who were students (e.g. a drama student), were associated with less conventional and 'avant-garde' parenting styles. This meant that the sexual socialisation of these particular children was portrayed as more liberal and relaxed than other nursery children; since their mothers were thought to talk openly with their children, and have more permissive attitudes to issues such as nudity.

Instances of atypical forms of knowledge included awareness of reproductive organs. Previously we saw that when children made a comment such as 'My mummy has got a baby in her tummy' this was interpreted as acceptable language use for young children as well as being a permissible level of knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that one child's awareness of 'wombs', was assessed as slightly unusual by a member of nursery staff:

We had a child once it was quite interesting, if we still had the drawing: and her Mum was pregnant. And they were doing pictures of who lived in their house, and she did a picture of Mummy. And inside she put the, you know, and the inside was a womb and she had a baby inside that. She'd absolutely everything in the drawing. That was quite interesting because they don't often go as far as that. (Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.3.) *my emphasis*
With regard to children's knowledge about childbirth there was some evidence to suggest that staff appraisals were linked, to some extent, with the social context in which they engaged with young children. In the Area Type 2 Nursery School (suburban area), for example, the subject matter of childbirth was said to be openly tackled with groups of nursery children:—

We have slides on it and it shows everything the birth - the lot. I find children except it. This is a very Catholic area so we have great big families. It so happens that seven out of ten children in this area are Catholics. You tend to get big families. They talk about it quite the thing - that's straightforward.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.2.) *my emphasis*

While childbirth was portrayed as a 'straightforward' topic, in what was described as a Catholic area, this was not the case in different establishments situated in other locations. In one Day Nursery, based in a housing estate (Area Type 7); one girl's 'detailed' knowledge of childbirth was appraised as highly unusual. In this social context this child's knowledge of childbirth was reported to raise concern among members of staff:—

Susan was particularly knowledgeable. We were a bit worried about her at first. But it all came down to the mum who was very open. And Susan was particularly interested at this time, and I think the aunt was pregnant or something or she'd just had a baby. And she'd seen all these explicit photographs that were taken during the labour. She was just very interested, and was a bit more knowledgeable and her Mum did not believe in quietening her down. She just told her what she thought was relevant.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.)

So far the liberal views of mothers (e.g. 'up to the minute', 'very open'); their professional status, and the intelligence of their children, have all been used in nursery staff accounts of unusual kinds of 'sexual' knowledge in young children. It is also of relevance, that the earlier work of the Newsens (1968), suggested that class differences were apparent in mother's attitudes towards both communicating about sexuality and imparting information about the origins of babies. They found that 44% professional class parents, had told their offspring about where babies
come from (defined as the mother's body being the source of the baby); compared with 15% in social class V. The increased likelihood of liberal, sexual attitudes among professional class parents was a view shared by some nursery staff who had worked in a cross-section of areas in the city:-

One of the nurseries I was in, was near the University and a lot of the children's parents were doctors; and they asked more, for obvious reasons. 'Do you know how the man put the baby in the mummy's tummy?' And I'd say: 'Yes' do you?' And they'd usually say: 'Yes' I'll tell you how', because they had it explained to them. They were quite philosophical about it.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Importantly however, a finding of the present study has been that there were few examples where an individual child's, extensive 'sexual' knowledge, was described in detail by nursery staff. The following provides one, highly unusual example where a child was reported to speak about sexual intercourse and fertilisation, in the nursery setting:-

We were just talking around where babies are and 'It's all in Mummy's tummy'. We were talking about breast feeding as well. And a wee girl did turn round, and we were giggling about it. It just shows you a couple of children had said Oh a cauliflower patch. 'Oh how do you have a baby ?'; 'It comes out of a cauliflower patch' and other Mums had said - Oh you can buy them', you know, this was coming off the children. - But this wee girl said, 'No'. -She was really explicit. She said: 'When the married woman gets together, he puts his penis in her vagina', and you know her Mum must have explained to her. I know she was only four years of age but she explained how it happens. 'And when the sperm'. ... Oh God, I thought, - she knows more than I do you know (laughter) 'and that is how you have babies.' And I went - That's correct Elaine.' We were kind of shocked as well, not shocked but taken aback.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.) *emphasis in original*

This description however captures a qualitatively, different kind of 'sexual' awareness, than examples of 'sexual' behaviour considered earlier (see Chapter 5). In the above instance the young girl simply talked about her knowledge whereas in Chapter 5 we saw that some pre-school children were reported to act out their 'sexual' awareness by using gestures and motions, which suggested to staff that
they were aware of coitus. As a consequence these children did not articulate their knowledge, but communicated it symbolically through their role play. But some sexual abuse texts (Waterman, 1986; Glaser and Prosh, 1988) problematise children's knowledge of sexual intercourse. In these texts no explicit distinction is made between childhood sexuality and the outcome of sexual exploitation of children. Clearly, a young child sitting and talking about their knowledge of sexual intercourse is a very different scenario from aggressive and coercive forms of acting out behaviour, described earlier. Previously, we saw how in the present day climate it is virtually impossible to separate discussion of childhood sexuality, from the exploitative - namely the sexual abuse of children (see Chapter 1).

Furthermore, an implicit idea in scientific discourse is that specific modes of learning about sexuality are morally superior and more desirable than others. Fahlberg (1986), for example, recommends that children should learn about sex through having books read to them and being spoken to, rather than by direct observation of adult behaviour. As far as I know, no text endorses direct observation or hands on experience (sex play), as legitimate sources of learning for young children. Gagnon makes the following comment about the 'sexual' socialisation of Western children:

> Appropriate instruction is usually considered to be that, which teaches without provoking either discussion or overt behaviour. (Gagnon, 1965: 213)

We do know, however, that for many children finding out about sex includes learning from peers (Farrel et al, 1978); observing sex scenes on the television (Grocke and Smith, 1995) and engaging in some form of exploratory sex play during childhood (Martinson, 1994). Becoming aware of sexuality within our mass-media culture must now include learning about sexual innuendo and the double entendre through the medium of television; since these devices are staple ingredients of the British sitcom (e.g. 'Birds of a Feather') and the game show
(e.g. 'The Generation Game'; 'Blind Date'). Yet it is necessary to remain sceptical about moral evaluations made regarding specific modes of learning (e.g. street play), since as we have seen, certain kinds of learning were aligned with the social class background of nursery children.

(ii) The Innocent and 'Totally Ignorant' Child

The present study found there were far fewer accounts of children who were regarded as 'totally ignorant', or were thought to have been deliberately misinformed about the origins of babies. While most nursery children were viewed as knowing very little, a small number of children were said to have been told fanciful stories about the origins of babies. Occasionally, staff talked about children who believed that babies were found in cabbage patches, cauliflower patches and gooseberry bushes. Sometimes children were said to believe that babies had been brought by the stork, or the sand man. Similarly these types of explanations can be found in the popular culture of early childhood since the stork myth, for example, is exploited in the Walt Disney's cartoon "Dumbo". Here, the baby elephant is eagerly awaited by his mother and delivered by an obliging stork. Moreover, the character of the sand man features in games and songs of early childhood, as the sand man is associated with night time; a figure who assists children into the land of dreams and slumber.

Other procreative type myths were found to dominate children's accounts of the origins of babies in Conn's (1947) much earlier study, conducted in North America. Here, children commonly offered biblical explanations; the idea that babies came from heaven, were sent by God, the angels or baby Jesus.

Further stories were that babies came from hospitals, or had been purchased from shops. These could be construed as 'modern myths' of procreation since the
medicalisation of childbirth (Oakley, 1984), and the fact that children have now become expensive accessories (Zalizai*, 1985) are relatively recent developments.

When staff accounted for the use of mythical explanations by young children this was usually explained in generational differences and that grandmothers had spent a lot of time with these particular nursery children, passing on these 'old fashioned' ideas:-

Some of the children here you find are with their Grannies a lot. Obviously the older generation has different views from a young mum. (Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.S.)

While we have seen that some groups of children were thought to receive 'explicit' instruction from middle class parents, the working class child was represented as knowing very little about the origins of babies. Two nursery teachers, from different nursery establishments said that children from areas of socio-economic deprivation, were likely to have had more visual experiences and were thought to have 'seen more', by several nursery staff. As we will see in Chapter 8, the present study found that reports of children being exposed to over 18 videos were given by staff working in specific areas. In contrast children from more affluent areas were thought to receive much more adult led information about the origins of babies.

Other social groups of children, from inner city areas, were said to remain ignorant about this topic area. In the two nursery schools where there was a high representation of children from ethnic minorities, mothers were reported to hold strong views about the passage of information:-

The very shyest mums find it very hard to discuss this subject. And if I was to say to some of our Muslim mums: 'Your child is wanting to know where babies come from, do you want me to explain?' They
would just faint with fright. No. They demand that their child is ignorant of that.
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.8.) *emphasis in original*

Another Head teacher confirmed this image of the innocent child; since she likened children from ethnic minorities attending her establishment with Scottish children, and how they behaved about twenty years ago. She commented that these children played innocently in the house corner, spending time preparing food and pretending to cook.

The Muslim background of children, was not only held responsible for restricting the kinds of information which could be safely relayed to nursery children, but was considered to impinge on the provision of some activities. The use of a paddling pool, which involved the communal undressing of children, was said to require careful management on the part of nursery staff. In one establishment, staff ensured that boys and girls undressed separately, while another nursery school avoided this activity altogether by ceasing to use the paddling pool.

(iii) *Constraints on the Responses of Nursery Staff*

There is no doubt that the issue of where babies come from was a problematic topic for nursery staff, for a number of reasons. What would parents think if staff used the 'correct' words for genitals and named other reproductive organs? Would parents approve of 'detailed' explanations regarding the origins of babies?

Although establishments did not formally seek out the views of parents: nursery staff made evaluations of parental opinions in terms of their occupational status; area of residence; personality type and presumed parenting style. Interestingly however, many staff highlighted the diverse nature of parental views as inhibiting staff response to tackling this topic area:
Obviously everyone has got their own views, what they would tell their children and what they wouldn't. It's very hard for us to say certain things because some parents would object. Some would want you to use the proper names and some wouldn't. You really have to tread quite carefully, you know just say: 'That's a baby in the mummy's tummy and it will come out of the tummy later on', that kind of idea.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Although staff regularly used the collective term 'parents', when they actually specified the gender of the parent, staff consistently identified the child's mother. Similarly, the prime and pivotal role of mothers in the dissemination of sex information to their children (especially to their daughters), has been found by a number of studies (e.g. Gebhard, 1967; Farrel, 1978; Sex Education Forum, 1994). Some nursery staff explicitly acknowledged the central importance of mothers in their accounts:-

It just showed you the couple in bed together, then it showed you the daddy on top. Then it showed you the mummy actually having the baby, but the pictures were quite realistic looking pictures. I mean they were using the proper words and that. The children were saying penis and things, and then laughing. But then we were saying - well we've all got different views on it - but it's really up to the mums I suppose. The book was kind of put away.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.) *my emphasis*

Furthermore, mothers were occasionally held responsible for neglecting to inform their offspring. This was said to create difficulties for some members of staff:-

Not so long ago, a couple of months ago we did a baby project. It was quite .. you don't know what to go into and you don't know what to do and then describe a lot of things, then the mothers don't tell them.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.) *my emphasis*

While staff understandably said that they approached this topic area with caution, a few staff pinpointed a further source of uncertainty. These particular staff raised questions about the parameters of their professional role in responding to the sexual curiosity of nursery children:-
It can be a very difficult one in the sense of what is your role and what will be the parental view of your role and your answer.

(Head of Day Nursery, C.)

While the issue of comprehensive and integrated guidelines have been openly debated in relation to the primary school sector (cf. Landeryou, 1993; Sex Education Forum, 1994), policies in regard to pre-school children remain uncoordinated. Issues relating to policy and practice will be addressed in the final chapter.

We have seen that some topic areas were assessed as especially difficult for nursery staff and considerably more embarrassing than others. Whilst issues, such as the source of the growing baby were viewed as 'straightforward' and 'no problem' by most nursery staff, the topic of sexual intercourse was clearly an uncomfortable area:-

We used to do a baby theme in the nursery school and we'd put books out and they did not really pay much ..., I myself skipped a few pages I have to admit (laughter). I cheated a bit, you know, and skipped a few pages in some of the books but they didn't seem anymore interested than in other books. But we did do the baby theme if their mummy and daddy did have a new baby at home.

Interviewer: Why did you skip the pages?
That's just me personally (laughter). I just felt I didn't want to go into that too deeply, you know.

Interviewer: What was in the book
It was telling you first of all, you know mummy and Daddy and what happened when they cuddle and you know, quite explicit at stages.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Why was this difficult for nursery staff? First, there were issues relating to viewing the child as a person who should not be prematurely burdened or frightened with unnecessary information. Staff maintained that children had plenty of time to learn about such things later in childhood. As a consequence knowledge of sexual intercourse was constructed as an unnecessary 'need':-
They don’t need to know about the penis in the vagina - they don’t need to know about that.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.)

In addition to ideologies of childhood innocence, other explanations for reticence among nursery staff, centre on the emotions this subject engenders. According to the Newsons (1968), it is the intense emotions aroused by sex which makes discussion of this subject with children especially difficult while Weeks (1986) argues that our sexuality provokes some of our most powerful emotions. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers (1992), discuss the highly emotionally charged reaction to childhood sexuality and use the following cultural equation 'children + sexuality = visceral clutch', to describe the intense reaction to this topic area.

Conclusion

With regard to pre-school children 'sexual knowledge' was found to relate mainly to their understanding of the origins of babies. Nursery staff thought that most young children knew very little about this topic area: expecting the majority of nursery children to know that 'the baby is in mummy’s tummy'. Their explanations for this were shown to be heavily influenced by a developmental accounts of children. In contrast, when staff reflected on what they viewed as atypical 'sexual' knowledge they tended to draw on social and cultural explanations. As a result, issues such as the child’s area of residence, the parents' occupational status and the religious background of nursery children, were employed to account for both lower and raised levels of awareness in young children.

Finally this chapter explored the difficulties, staff said they encountered in dealing with this topic in their day to day work with young children. Uncertainty about
parental attitudes of nursery children, their professional role, and their own embarrassment were all said to influence the responses of nursery staff.

So far this thesis has considered two dimensions of sexuality in young children: 'sexual' behaviour, and 'sexual' knowledge. We will now address the third aspect of sexuality identified by the present study - 'sexual' language in young children.
CHAPTER 7: THE NAMING OF PARTS - A SPECIALISED LANGUAGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Introduction

Wee willie winkie rins through the town,
Up stairs and doonstairs in his nicht-goun
Tirlin at the winnock, crying at the lock,
'Are the weans in their bed? For it's noo ten o'clock'.
(From 'Scottish Nursery Rhymes', Montgomerie, 1987: 69)

This chapter will address the topic of language styles in relation to young children's genital naming. Moreover, it will focus on what could be regarded as a transient and expedient form of language; one which is finely attuned with nursery staff's expectations about the innocent world of early childhood. Above all, it will examine a private and intimate sphere of language, some of which is embedded in a particular ethnographic and class experience that has spawned terms with an unmistakable Scottish flavour.

What significance does genital naming have for our understanding of sexuality in young children? Foremost, the following findings shed light on the social processes, which feed into the development of gendered sexualities during childhood. This chapter will maintain, that the use of language is crucial to this process.

Importantly, genital naming in young children, is an area about which little is known. While some evidence exists on the kinds of terminology used by American children (Conn and Kanner, 1947; Katcher, 1955; Moore and Kendal, 1971), no attention has previously been paid to this topic in regard to British preschool children. Significantly, the findings of the present study have practice implications for professionals who work in the field of child protection. An increased awareness about the variability of language styles used by young children
could enhance practitioners' communication skills when interviewing young children.

A) A Specialised Language of Early Childhood - An Introduction

In order to contextualise the perceptions of nursery staff, it is first necessary to introduce the kinds of social circumstances in which genital reference was said to occur.

(i) Naming in Social Context

In Day Nursery settings, where staff care for children from birth to five years of age, verbal reference to genital areas is not perceived as an issue for nursery nurses who worked with babies. Not surprisingly, this is viewed as irrelevant by this group of nursery nurses, because of a young baby's stage of linguistic development. Nevertheless, what has been reported as observable from the perspective of 'Baby Room' staff, is infant's tactile exploration of their own bodies, including their genital areas. In contrast, staff who work with toddlers and pre-schoolers, maintain that children's reference to their genital areas arises within the context of toileting and nappy changing situations, or when they complain of genital soreness or irritation.

Similarly, in the Nursery School setting, genital reference has also been linked to toileting situations; yet staff evaluations of its relevance have contrasted with the perceptions of Day Nursery staff. Nursery school staff explained their infrequent witnessing of young children's genital naming in the physical layout of establishments. Often, in Nursery school settings, toilets were far away from the main playroom. This made the close supervision of children in these areas impractical. Furthermore, in the Type 6 Nursery School where there was an 80%
representation of children from ethnic minorities, with one exception, all staff stated that they did not know whether children named or referred to their genitals because of their unfamiliarity with the first language of these particular children.

The table on the next two pages will show the range of names collected by this study.
Table 7.1: Table to Show Range of Names for Genitals and Types of Language Styles

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOYS</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(1) Colloquial Expression</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• willie</td>
<td>• flower</td>
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<td>• wee man</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>(2) Idiosyncratic Names</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• jimmy</td>
<td>• francis</td>
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<td>• toot</td>
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<td>• wee bobby</td>
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<td>• button</td>
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<td>• wee sausage</td>
<td>• jeanie bean</td>
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<td>• tinkie</td>
<td>• cookie</td>
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<td>• peepabo</td>
<td>• lally</td>
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<td>• peter penis</td>
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<td>• tom tom</td>
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<td>• fish</td>
<td>• pretzel</td>
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<td>• wee chipolata</td>
<td>• smiley face</td>
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<tr>
<td>• carrot</td>
<td>• daisy flower</td>
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<td>• little policeman</td>
<td>• twinkle</td>
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<tr>
<td>• wee pinkie</td>
<td>• little girl</td>
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<td>• knob</td>
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<td>• tiddler</td>
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<td>• william</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• little thomas</td>
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<td>• dick</td>
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<td>• willy man</td>
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Table 7.1 (continued): Table to Show Range of Names for Genitals and Types of Language Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOYS</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2) Idiosyncratic Names</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• tinkle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• dinkie</td>
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<tr>
<td>• peter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• scoutie</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• streamie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Pejorative Terms</td>
<td>• fanny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• foolai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Biological Terminology</td>
<td>• vagina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• penis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total 53 terms were collected by the present study and immediately, one is struck by both the diversity and richness apparent in the extensive group of terms. In this seemingly disparate range of names for the genitals of young children, are any common threads apparent?

(ii) Some Introductory Themes

First, there are a few points to be drawn from the use of diminutives. Clearly, as a perusal of the names shows, the use of the prefixes 'wee' (e.g. 'wee man' and 'wee lady') and to a lesser extent 'little' (e.g. 'little thomas' and 'little girl') are noticeable conventions. Does this reflect the social position of young children? As we know, young children and adults represent polar categories in hierarchies of juniority and seniority. Here parallels may be drawn with the use of diminutives:

1 foolai' is a punjabi word for penis.
the dependant social status of young children and the enclosed and protected world of early childhood.

But there are also emotive connotations to the use of diminutives. In general conversation, diminutives are often used to express affection (i.e. 'my wee darling') and can be used as terms of endearment. As we saw in Chapter 1, the idea, especially of young children, can provoke both emotional and sentimental reactions towards children.

The second noteworthy theme, relates to the ambiguous character of particular terms. For example, there has been the regular substitution of christian names to indicate genital areas. All William; Peter; Jimmy; Penny and Francis illustrate this point. Use of this form can be found in English literature, as rather notoriously the term 'John Thomas', was adopted by D.H. Lawrence in his novel: 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'. Moreover, the term 'wee man' can be used as a colloquial and indigenous form of address. The double meaning evident in this term has also been apparent in the humorous stories told by nursery staff:

My friend was at the dinner table. And it was a nursery school, and she said to this wee boy: 'Now where is your wee man?', because it was a wee 'He Man' figure he'd brought in. And his mum had said 'Remember don't loose it'. And he just looked at her. And she went 'Steven, show me your wee man'. So the next thing he dutifully did show her his little man. That was what he was obviously tuned into: his little man was his penis. That was it. She felt quite perverted after it (laughter), hurried to the mum to explain.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.)

Other humorous anecdotes have included stories about children who had discovered that common christian names could have anatomical meanings. One nursery child's discovery was said to have had unfortunate consequences. Having

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The term 'wee man' is also used in this broad sense in the nursery rhyme 'The Woe, Wee Man'. See Montgomery (1987: 127). Similarly the term 'cock' has an ambiguous usage. According to Thorne (1994) it can be used as a form of address, in an affectionate way, or alternatively to refer to the penis.
recently found out that the term 'willie', could refer to the penis she apparently could not refrain from laughing when she encountered her next door neighbour (called Willie) on the tenement stair. This was reported to have embarrassed the child's mother.

Where an earth do these names come from? Some names such as 'toorie' (girls) have distinct Scottish roots and according to the 'Concise Scottish Dictionary', toorie refers to a pom-pom on a bonnet or some form of ornamental head dress (ibid: 729). Moreover, the term 'lally' has a fascinating origin. Lallation refers to childish speech and pronunciation (see Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary: 594), while lallare is 'to sing a lullaby'. Significantly, other names symbolise what is regarded as 'childish' styles of language and clearly 'wee willie winkie' is a term which originates from the Scottish nursery rhyme. It is also plausible that other names such as 'twinkle' (e.g. as in 'Twinkle, twinkle little star'), for girls, may have similar origins.

It is also of note that some of the names cited by nursery staff appear to have been in use for some considerable time. The term 'fanny', for example, has been in use since the 16th century, and probably gained currency because of the erotic novel "The Memoirs of Fanny Hill", by John Cleland. Names such as 'peter', 'william' and 'john thomas' have been in circulation since the mid to late 19th century (Beale, 1989; Thorne, 1994).

There are issues relating to metaphorical allusions. The topic of food has long been associated with sexuality and the sexual organs. Names such as 'pretzel' and 'cookie' (meaning a plain bun see Concise Scottish Dictionary: 114) for girls and 'wee sausage' and 'carrot' for boys, demonstrate this theme. To a lesser extent there has been reference to animals and the terms 'chicken' for boys, and 'polly' and 'bird' for girls illustrate this point. Yet, other terms would appear to be
indigenous metaphors. For example, the term 'wee pinkie' for boys can be used to refer to the little finger (Montgomery, 1987: 149) and 'The Concise Scottish Dictionary': 495) while scoutie refers to 'a sudden gush of water from a spout' (ibid: 589).

Strictly speaking, all of the genital names collected by the present study (with the exception of biological names), could be assessed as the mislabelling of pre-school children's genitalia. Indeed, Gagnon (1965) has persuasively argued that mislabelling and non-labelling is a characteristic of adult responses to sexuality in childhood. But is it wise to dismiss this group of terms, en masse, as a form of mislabelling? In order to begin to address this question we will now turn our attention to the present study's classification of language styles. This will provide a framework for presenting nursery staff's views about young children's use of contrasting language styles. As a consequence, the following discussion will outline the basis for explaining (and therefore understanding), the existence of this specialised language of early childhood.

(iii) Classification of Language Styles

Out of the 53 terms collected by the present study, four distinct language styles were identified. These are 1) colloquial expression, 2) idiosyncratic terms, 3) pejorative terms and 4) biological terminology.

1) Colloquial Expression

Colloquial language is a familiar sort of expression, used in informal talk. The main examples of this language style are 'flower' for young girls and 'wee man' for boys. While the range of colloquial language is limited (a total of 3 names), these terms constitute the most frequently cited names for young children's genitals.
(over 25 individual staff references for each). There is however, a sub category of this type of language and here it is necessary to distinguish between: an indigenous form of expression, where comprehension seems to be largely confined to a geographical area (e.g. 'wee man' and 'flower' appear to be culturally specific to Scotland\(^3\)) and terms that have a wider cultural significance such as 'willie' (cf. Thorne, 1994). According to Beale (1989), the common usage of this term emerged in the latter part of this century.

2) Idiosyncratic Terms

Idiosyncratic names constitutes the most extensive group of names for both boys and girls (in total 45 terms). This group of terms are characterised by their diversity and tend to reflect a highly individualised style of language (e.g. 'jeanie bean', girl; 'chicken', boy). Another facet of this language mode is the 'nursery rhyme' imagery which specific names suggest. For example, associations between the nursery world of early childhood (i.e. in nursery rhyme language, sounds and games), are evoked in names such as 'wee willie winkie', 'toot' and 'peepabo'\(^4\).

Sociologically, this is a revealing body of data as it offers some insight into the 'private' language or 'idiolect' (Thorne, 1994: iii) used in intimate family life. This is an area about which little is known (Grocke, 1991).

\(^3\) Mills (1993) points out, that colloquial terms are often transmitted orally and are not formalised or written down. As a result, I am suggesting here, that seems likely that 'wee man' and 'flower' are culturally specific to Scotland.

\(^4\) Hide and seek type games are a popular theme in children's literature aimed at very young children. See for example, Janet and Allan Ahlberg's (1981), book for babies entitled 'Peepo!'. This text is based on the premise that very young children, enjoy and respond to, 'peepo' type games, which commonly involve an element of surprise.
3) Pejorative Terms

Pejorative terminology has been infrequently reported by nursery staff (5 separate staff references), and examples of this type of language would be 'fanny' (girl) and 'dick' (boy). These terms are similar to colloquial styles as they constitute an informal sort of expression, yet are distinguished by their negative connotations and associations with insulting and derogatory forms of language (Mills, 1993).

4) Biological Terminology

Biological terminology in this context, refers exclusively to the terms 'vagina' and 'penis'. Both these terms are examples of a formal and clinical type of language that are established names for genital anatomy. Historically, the genesis of biological terms has been closely aligned to the development of medicine (see O.E.D.) and interestingly, this link is evident in staff assessments of children's use of this form. Importantly, staff perceptions of the use of this style show marked gender differences, and this finding will be addressed and explained in the section entitled 'Biological Language'.

C) Language Use and the Perceptions of Nursery Staff

Generally the data which forms the main body of material for this chapter was elicited in response to the question: 'Do the young children you work with name their genitals?' However, the immediate concern of this section is to introduce on a general level:- 'staff perceptions of language use in young children'. Owing to the fact that 'non biological terminology' has been most frequently and extensively cited by nursery staff, this will provide the starting point for discussion. In this context, 'non biological' terminology refers to:- colloquial expression, idiosyncratic terms and pejorative terminology.
Non-Biological Language Styles

A prevalent view among nursery staff has been that young children commonly use informal kinds of expression (colloquial and idiosyncratic forms), in relation to their genital naming. Moreover, staff have drawn on a varied range of definitions (e.g. 'nicknames'; 'pet names'; 'everyday names' and 'family names') to describe this informal type of talk in young children. Generally, it is mothers who are thought to be responsible for transmitting this terminology to their children, within their home environments:-

I don't think they start off with a name for it. But that's the way the mum will explain what it is.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

As regards the use of colloquial expression, this was viewed as an acceptable mode, especially for young boys. Indeed some staff accounts suggested that staff readily adopted this style in their dealings with young children:-

Wee boys are very fond of their wee man. But that word is used a lot in Nurseries by Nursery Nurses: 'Put your wee man away'.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.)

In addition to the widespread popularity of the name 'wee man', the term 'willie' was said to be 'a favourite' and 'very common' name for boys in all types of establishments:-

Willies are very popular in this area.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.I.)

Interestingly, in relation to girls use of the common term, 'flower', nursery staff opinions have been subject to some individual variation. In the following a nursery nurse succinctly articulates her own personal preferences:-
I've heard one mum say: 'Her flower'. I certainly would not use that expression - just bottom for a little girl.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, B.)

Yet, in another establishment a member of staff approved of this term:-

Flower's very common for wee girls and that's acceptable socially.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.)

While it has been apparent that young children were expected to adopt informal and 'childish' forms of expression, highly original and inventive types of idiosyncratic terms were regarded as peculiar and humorous by nursery staff. The laughter and surprise generated by these terms, were not unique to the group of nursery staff who participated in this study since similar reactions are apparent in the accounts of other professionals. One Health Education Specialist, revealed his own personal dislikes when he encountered the use of the name 'pussy'\(^5\) (girls), when involved in a health promotion seminar for teachers. He commented:

At our house a pussy is a ginger thing that purrs loudly when stroked!
(Uffindall, 1994: 51)

The name 'jeanie bean' (girl), for example was described as 'weird' by a member of Nursery School staff, whereas the following gives a response to a boy's use the term 'chicken':-

One of the boys - it was 'my chicken', which I found extraordinary. I didn't know if it was going to be served up to him once a week on a plate (laughter) ... a bit silly (laughter).
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.)

Significantly, on occasions staff have offered information relating to their own individual family names for genital areas. This data is illuminating because it gives

\(^5\) 'Pussy' was first recorded in the sexual sense during the 16th century. This word according to Thorne (1994: 409) has been the source 'of many double entendres and minor embarrassments'.

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a brief glimpse of the intimate language shared between adults and young children and highlights how individuals can creatively invent their own personal language styles. For example, one nursery nurse laughed when she recalled how she 'made up' the term 'wee chipolata' for her young son's penis while another nursery nurse recounted how her four year old daughter had invented her own term for her genitals: 'my smiley face'. Interestingly, this suggests that idiosyncratic terms may be coined by children as well as parents.

As one might expect, references to young children's use of pejorative terms has been infrequently reported by nursery staff. Without exception, this type of language was constituted as a crude and unacceptable style for pre-school children; and one very much at odds with staff expectations regarding the innocent nature of children. Similar to scientific constructions of childhood sexuality certain kinds of children were portrayed as more inclined to use crude and explicit language. First, being from a large families was cited as relevant since contact with older siblings was said to expose younger children to more sexual information and inevitably 'indecent' kinds of language. The second related explanation focused on the constitution of a particular type of area (a deprived one) where unsupervised street play was thought to be a typical childhood experience. In the following it was the 'street wise' child who was linked with this knowledge of language:-

In this area you've got to be careful as well as the children are quite street wise. Some of the children can be out playing with older brothers and sisters where they are picking things up in the streets which doesn't necessarily mean they have been sexually abused or anything. It's just that they have been out with older children and they've been hearing these terms and they don't even know what it means.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

While pejorative language use was found to be infrequently cited by nursery staff, so were reports of words used by children from ethnic minorities. In fact there has
been one sole reference to language use of this kind. In this example ‘foola’, a Punjabi word for penis was used and the child’s embarrassment was emphasised:

This child came to me and he said another child had showed him his foola. He felt quite embarrassed. I said ‘Maybe that was an accident. Don’t worry about it’, and do you know his face was bright red.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.6.) my emphasis

From this single account it remains unclear whether this child’s embarrassment may have been prompted by the public display of another child’s genitals; discussing this with an adult or a combination of both. As we have seen previously, the young child’s account is almost completely missing from scientific discourses regarding childhood sexuality. Also, virtually no attention is given to the ‘ethnic minority child’ in specific cultures.

(ii) Biological Terminology

We have seen, that biological terms constitute a medical and technical type of language; a form of language which is not readily aligned with nursery staff’s expectations about the linguistic competence of young children. Not surprisingly therefore, some staff have openly expressed reservations about young children’s use of biological terms. Significantly, this attitude has been found to be typical in specific kinds of contexts; most notably in Day Nursery settings, in addition to the Type 7 Nursery School. In these settings, staff were more likely to state that they had never heard young children using what they defined as the ‘correct’ or ‘proper’ names for genital areas. These findings will be both explained and explored in this section. How then have staff misgivings been explained? First, there is the opinion that biological names constitute an explicitly ‘sexual’ and inappropriate style of language for young children:-

I’ve never heard them say sexual words like vagina or penis.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.7.)
The above link between biological terminology, the 'sexual' and socially unacceptable language styles for young children is developed in the following. Here a nursery nurse describes nursery staff's responses to a two-year-old girl using the term vagina:

To hear a child of two and a half... you know then... you're armed with the knowledge that the child has been told by the parent and I think some people might be slightly uneasy with this and think: 'Why on earth are parents talking to a child about sexual organs at this age?' (Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.)

The staff view that biological terms are intrinsically 'sexual' and inappropriate words for young children, also helps explain the social acceptability of young children's use of informal language styles. As Ennew (1986) points out, the distinguishing feature of the modern form of childhood is the progressive separation of adults and children. One way this division is maintained is through a 'specialised language' of childhood. Previously, it has been highlighted that nursery rhymes constitute one specialised form for young children. Similarly, staff ideas about permissible 'childish' names for young children, are relevant because existence of this specialised and intimate language of early childhood, effectively separates the innocent world of young children from the active and knowing world of adult sexuality.

In addition to the view that biological terminology is a sexual type of language, another important perception relates to staff evaluations of area types. Basically, this has meant that the use of specific language styles have been linked with children from particular social circumstances. Here, there are parallels with nursery staff perceptions and Bernstein's (1990) work, where he differentiates between language styles on the basis of the child's, social class background. While 'restricted codes' were found to be employed by working class children, 'elaborated codes' were identified with the language use of middle class children. Class distinctions of a similar kind were also evident in some staff accounts. In the
following a nursery nurse compares the language mode of children in her present establishment situated in a peripheral housing scheme (Area Type 7), with her previous employment in the West End of the city:-

There was the same sort of generalised children's names but there was also more explicit names that the children had obviously been told and that was what they knew it as. It's a dreadful thing to say but I suppose there are class differences.
(Nursery Nurse-Day Nursery, H.)

The acceptability of the use of informal modes of language was evident in the Day Nursery context. This point is highlighted by the following statement of a nursery nurse, who regarded her own views as exceptional:-

I heard one boy say his penis. Members of staff at the time thought that was really strange and didn't like that: 'I don't think they should', you know. I was the only one who thought: 'What's wrong with that?' I'm very much a believer with a baby, in what's the point of teaching them it's a 'choo choo', and then saying it's a train now, just because they've reached a certain age.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

In order to examine this issue further, it is necessary to examine findings relating to gender and biological language. Crucially, it is at this stage that the link staff make between language use and children's social class background become influenced by the issue of gender. While staff evaluations of children's social class background appear to explain children's use of differential language styles on a general level, this did not operate in the same manner, when applied to a girl's use of the term vagina. Also, in relation to boys, the setting in which biological language use is assessed has been found to impinge on staff explanations. The subtleties evident in these findings will now be explored.

What then makes a boy's use of the word penis acceptable and permissible? In the Day Nursery context, where staff have commonly expected young children to use informal styles, two explanatory frame works have been adopted. Interestingly,
these relate to the association of biological language with the medical profession. If, in this setting, the child's parent is said to be a health care professional; the child is reported to have been hospitalised or had visited their GP., recently this then accounts for the use of this form:-

I did come across one wee boy that said...he'd been in hospital or something, and he was calling it his penis. I was amazed that he was calling it his penis because he'd only just turned three.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.)

In the Nursery School settings in more affluent areas (Type 1 and 2) however, the social class background of boys was directly connected with their use of biological styles:-

I remember we used to bring out the pulses so that the children could get the experience of touching these; and one little boy said to me, Tve got a lentil on my penis'. And so I think this is again from the background. It's the parents - they call a spade a spade. They want the actual thing to be called the correct name.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.1).

In staff perceptions of young children's use of biological terms substantial gender differences have been apparent. While there have been over 15 references to a boy's use of the word penis, crucially there has been two single references to girls using the word vagina. The following quote gives a vivid account of the strength of the attitudes of Day Nursery staff towards this topic:-

I remember a child did actually use the correct word. It's just come back to me and it was a wee English girl who probably had quite forward thinking parents. And the child came away with, that her vagina was hurting her and most people were like, 'Oh no! That's disgusting', you know, and you listen to yourself and that's dreadful. It's the correct..., but most people felt it was off that, I think she was two and a half, should say that.... I think there was something funny about her knowing so....
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

The social prohibitions and taboos which surrounds a girl's use of this style, becomes comprehensible when we turn our attention to the experiential accounts of
nursery staff. Occasionally, staff have made references to their personal unease with the use of biological terms for female anatomy. For example, one nursery stated that if she had painful breasts, she would not come into work and say that 'my breasts are sore today'; as she would adopt the more familiar and colloquial term 'boobs'. In the following, another nursery nurse describes her reticence towards using the clinical term vagina:

I don't feel comfortable using the word vagina, it's just .... I wish I could....I wish I was a bit more, I don't know. Maybe it's the way I've been brought up.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.4.)

Adult women's rejection of the formal term 'vagina' is highlighted in articles which have considered genital naming in women (e.g. Coombe, 1994). For example, Coombe, in her search for acceptable and agreeable labels, dismisses the word vagina as a textbook term which is 'polite but dull'. Women's discomfort and embarrassment with using this medical term has been highlighted in popular representations of female sexuality (cf. Jeale, 1992). Jeale maintains, that many women find it difficult to make direct and unambiguous references to their genital areas. The following findings from the present study will shed light on this view. On this issue there are a further two aspects of staff views which are important in terms of understanding:

1) The responses of nursery staff towards biological language use in young girls.

2) The suggested reticence in adult women which may inhibit direct and unambiguous reference to their genital areas.

Presentation of the subsequent findings will suggest ways in which the gendering of sexualities is set in motion at an early stage of young children's 'sexual' socialisation. In this complex process, it will be argued that both the use, and non-use of language, plays a potentially divisive role in gendering young children's sexualities.
The first issue to address is that nursery staff have consistently maintained, that it is boys, rather than girls, who refer to their genitals on a regular basis:

I've hardly ever heard a girl saying anything for her genitals whereas a boy would say it much more.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.8.)

Moreover, there has been evidence to suggest that, in group situations, young children (particularly boys), were able to refer openly to male genitalia and positively identify their sexual organ:-

Last week we had a picture of a baby, a young baby with a doctor. The baby was naked and a lot of them, especially the boys, were laughing and saying: 'There's his willy. It's a boy baby. There's his willy'.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.2.)

Not only are boys thought to refer regularly to their genitals, staff also maintain that boys have at their disposal a much wider range of terms than girls have. This staff opinion is supported by the greater number of names collected for boys by the present study (35 for boys; 18 for girls):-

Boy's certainly do but I've never heard a girl say anything other than her bottom. But boys have the widest variety - wee mans, willies and tinkles and all sorts of things.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.)

How then do staff account for these gender differences? When staff have considered this issue they have drawn on a biological account; explaining this in the physical differences between the sexes. More precisely it is the genital positioning of the penis, as compared with the genital organisation of females, which accounted for this gender anomaly:-

With boys you can see it. They've actually got to put it away and bring it out and I think that's why it gets called a name rather than girls who sits up on the toilet.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, II.)
Clearly physiological sex differences alone, cannot adequately explain the following social processes portrayed in the accounts of nursery staff:

1) the positive and acceptable public image of genital reference and naming in boys.

2) the negative public image of genital reference in girls.

Now we will examine the issue of non-labelling in young girls. This phenomenon refers to the occasions when staff have spontaneously stated that they have never heard a girl name her genital area. This has been cited by over 15 participants. Critically, non-labelling was not raised as an issue for boys. On non-labelling, it is helpful to highlight a common theme in staff reports. This is important because the spontaneity evident in these accounts, adds considerable weight to the validity of this data; and secondly it offers insight into the low levels of awareness among nursery staff. The immediacy apparent in staff responses is captured in the following extract:

I've never heard a little girl calling her private parts any name. It's amazing - I've never really thought about that.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, B.) *my emphasis*

Significantly, one teacher attributed relevance to what appeared to be her sudden realisation, by commenting that 'Freud would have something to say about that - wouldn't he?'

That young girls were said never to refer to and name their genital areas, is supported by Moore and Kendal's (1971) earlier study. Here, they found that only 14% of 3 to 6 year old girls could offer any names for female genitals. Significantly, girls were found to show a greater knowledge of vocabularies for the genitals of males.
In addition to the non-labelling of young girl's genitals, mislabelling where the use of the generic term 'bottom', and the marginally more specific 'front bottom', have both been cited by over 15 individual nursery staff. This type of terminology suggests a public denial of sexuality in young girls. Other names such as 'my secret place', also promote images of social concealment. Importantly, there has been some evidence in staff accounts of their use of non-specific terminology when interacting with girls:

I'd tend to say: 'Dry your bottom', or something like that. You would use that expression rather than being any more specific.
(Teacher - Nursery School, T.5.)

Mislabelling, as the following demonstrates, could inhibit the communication skills of young girls:

Quite a lot of children if they are talking about their vagina would say their bum was sore because they don't know. We had a wee girl and she had a wee bit of thrush and all she knew was her bum was sore. She didn't know how to explain, you know, to tell us what else it was.... her bum was sore.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.)

Victor (1980) in his consideration of Moore and Kendal's findings, concludes that young girls would seem to have a limited body consciousness of their genital areas. Non-labelling reported by the present study is similar to Moore and Kendal's earlier findings, but it is not possible to assume there is a direct relationship between the absence of verbalisation and bodily awareness. What we can reasonably surmise however, is that non-labelling and mislabelling of female genitalia at an early stage of socialisation, would impair women's ability to unambiguously refer to and name their genital areas (cf. Jeal, 1992). Also, it seems unlikely that non-naming and mislabelling would actually encourage boys
understanding of female genital anatomy. Names for girls such as 'flower', 'toorie' and 'pretzel', also imply that the genitals of girls have a marginalised and inferior social status than those of boys, as they symbolise ideas about adornment and passivity. In contrast, the centrality of a young boy's penis for his social identity was apparent in common colloquial terms such as 'wee man'. Moreover, Christian names such as 'willie'; 'peter' and 'thomas', regularly cited for boys further encourages a link between a young boy's sense of masculinity and his genital anatomy. Overall however, this section has shown that for boys, their genitals were viewed as a socially acceptable public reference point whereas clearly this was not the case for girls.

Conclusion

Generally this chapter has examined what has been largely regarded as a suitably 'childish' language of early childhood. In an important sense, this study has identified and recorded a range of specialised language styles of early childhood; much of which may well become expendable and lost as children pass from the nursery world of early childhood. This seems a likely prospect when children enter mainstream social institutions (schools), and formally engage in an established peer culture (playgrounds). In specific social contexts, pre-school children have been viewed as 'too young' (innocent), to use biological styles. In these circumstances biological forms have been assessed as an explicitly 'sexual' and an adult kind of language. Yet, this issue was found to be influenced by a child's age, gender and social class background. For boys, it was found that the

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6 In a recent presentation (of the present study's research findings), I gave to a mixed group of training nurses, a male nurse offered some useful insights. He spontaneously raised this issue of mislabelling of female genitals (specifically the use of 'front bottom' and 'bottom'), and stated that the use of these terms had confused him as a child.

7 The point was raised earlier, that in many instances colloquial and informal forms of language are not in fact written down (see Mills, 1993). It seems reasonable therefore, to suggest, that a significant proportion of names collected by the present study represent an orally transmitted form of language.
child's social class background could contribute to staff views about acceptability. Significantly however, a young girl's use of the term vagina was found to violate social taboos.

It has been indicated, that it is necessary that all children have access to appropriate terminology for bodily organs so that they can participate competently in sex education programmes (Landeryou, 1993). Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that nursery staff's opinions about 'appropriate terminology' for young children, were influenced by the social environment in which they work with children. We will return to these findings when we tackle the question: 'How might the findings of the present study inform the development of training for nursery staff?' (see Chapter 10).

Now that all three dimensions of sexuality in young children have been considered we will turn our attention to how staff identified changes in attitudes towards childhood sexuality.
CHAPTER 8: THE CHANGING NATURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Introduction

As a society, we are saddled with and delighted by an imagery of change - indeed, of revolution - when we talk about sexuality. This climate of opinion clouds our ability to judge accurately whether or not there is change, and if there is, what direction it is taking.
(Gagnon and Simon, 1974: 283)

This chapter will examine staff perceptions of the changing nature of early childhood. Generally, staff maintained that attitudes towards young children's sexuality are now more open and liberal than they were in the past and this appraisal of social change will be critically examined in the introductory section entitled: 'Changing Childhood'.

One broad theme in the second section of this chapter however, will focus on how staff evaluated the influence of popular mass culture on the modern child and contemporary childhood. In this regard, excessive exposure to television and videos are thought to have had a substantial impact on the knowledge base of young children. This topic has consistently emerged in the data and clearly the mass media are now thought to be part of the everyday fabric of young children's lives. Finally, in conclusion to this chapter, attention will be paid to the ways in which the emergence of Child Abuse as a social issue has impinged on the perspectives of nursery staff.
A) Changing Childhood - Children and Adults

This chapter will draw on data which constitutes staff responses to the broad question: 'Do you think there have been any changes in attitudes towards this topic?'. Initially, this section will briefly examine staff assessments of social change as this will contextualise the specific changes that have been raised by nursery staff.

Overall, staff thought that there have been considerable changes in attitudes towards young children's sexuality, consistently placing their assessments within rationalistic discourses about the progressive liberalisation of attitudes. Today, it was assumed that we all have more tolerant views about sexuality during childhood:

People generally - it's a lot more open subject nowadays.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.)

This contrasts sharply with individual accounts of the silence and inhibition which were previously thought to characterise responses towards sexuality. On occasions staff drew on the idea of a 'generation gap', to explain the genesis of more open views about sexuality. In the following one nursery nurse compared her own mothers 'hang ups', with those of her own younger and more relaxed generation:

My mother would turn the television off if a sex scene came on. Now it's not a taboo subject - it's changed for my generation - it's much more open.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, D.)

While this idea of distinct, attitudinal differences between generations and age groups was important so was the issue of attitudes towards the body which were
regularly discussed by nursery staff. Changing views about physical modesty was raised by the following member of staff:-

Years ago you didn't talk about your body - you just covered it up.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.)

As regards the issue of increased openness it is pertinent that Foucault (1976) argues, that the Twentieth Century has witnessed an explosion in public discussion and talk about sexuality but he assesses this overt articulation critically. Rather than viewing this phenomenon as evidence of social progress, he contends that it is a subtle and pervasive mechanism of the control of sexuality. In other words, this so called 'openness', makes sexuality much more amenable to social intervention.

Staff on the other hand, have drawn on a diverse range of illustrations to support their opinions about the progressive, liberalisation of attitudes. These have included, more widespread sex education for children, as well as more communicative and informative parents. Nevertheless, as we shall see, not all innovations have been regarded as positive advances for children.

(i) The Knowing and Innocent Child

The first finding relates to staff accounts of the changing nature of children. A common and widespread opinion among staff, was that children have fundamentally changed, in the sense that they were now seen as more knowledgeable and more aware than they were in the past. The following nursery nurse's presentation of herself as 'innocent' provides an effective contrast with her opinions about the modern 'knowledgeable' child:-

I do think you notice that they know a lot more. When I think back to when I was that age - I didn't know anything.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.)
In addition to this description of knowledgeable children, staff maintained that today young children 'grow up too quickly', and they mature earlier than previously:

"Children, there's no doubt about it, they mature earlier than they did."
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.3.)

Further expectations regarding conventional stages of childhood were said to be broken down by today's knowledgeable children:

"Now children are teenagers at nine and they seem in an awful hurry to get older."
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.)

Interestingly, such views suggest that age-appropriate expectations about childhood are, in some sense, 'out of kilter' with the reality of contemporary children. Significantly, these ideas promote an image of a generation of precocious and prematurely aged children. Similarly, the modern child has been likened to a 'miniature adult', and as being exposed to a kind of 'pressure' which is more comfortably associated with the weighty responsibilities of adulthood:

"I think now when you see children they are like miniature adults, you know, six year olds getting the same clothes as their Mums. And I think there's an awful onus on children to be mature and grown up and they don't to me - they're not allowed to have a proper childhood. They just want them to be a miniature adult."
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.) my emphasis

Images of the adult-child or the diminutive 'little adults', is a consistent representation of the child in nostalgic accounts of the state of modern childhood (e.g. Observer Life Magazine, 'Little Adults'; Freely, 1993). Freely constitutes the contemporary child, as all knowing and assertive, again, characteristics more commonly aligned with adult roles and levels of experience. The connection staff make with clothing of young children and their conceptions of childhood, is also apparent in debates regarding past perceptions of children.
Ironically Aries maintained that 'childhood' is a modern phenomenon, partly by arguing that in the 17th Century children were perceived as 'miniature adults'. He supported his thesis, by reference to the artistic representation of children in that period, drawing conclusions from their depiction as little adults. He also ascribed importance to the fact that adults and young children wore identical clothing. This issue of clothing will be considered more fully in the second section of this chapter.

Crucially, nursery staff accounts of childhood innocence were intimately bound up with the suitability of restricted knowledge in the pre-school years. This is illustrated in the following where the increased knowledge base of the contemporary child was thought to undermine the innocence of childhood:

Today I think that young children are getting to know too much too early. What I feel is there's no innocence today. I think children should be children for as long as possible.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.2.) my emphasis

This division between the world of childhood innocence and the corrupt world of adult knowledge, is also evident in the following extract. Yet here, another key component is added to this dominant version of modern childhood; the association of the period of childhood with happiness and enjoyment:

As a child I wouldn't have liked to have known more. I enjoyed my childhood and I enjoyed being a child.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.)

Ennew (1986) maintains that the link between 'childhood', 'innocence' and 'happiness', is a relatively recent development in thinking about childhood. In the past she suggests that much more importance was invested in the acceptable behaviour of children but now emphasis has shifted to more hedonistic concerns; namely the child's enjoyment of childhood. Above all childhood today is viewed as a pleasurable period. What status can we ascribe to these contemporary
conceptions of childhood? First, it is necessary to make the rather basic point (or draw on common sense constructs) that anyone who has spent time with young children will know that early childhood, as any other period in the life cycle, has its own pleasures and frustrations. We also know that globally child prostitution and the fact that many millions of children are exposed to social conflict (e.g. famines and war) in their day to day lives, is an experience of many children. This supports the view that the myth of a happy and protected childhood is best understood as an adult fantasy and therefore an adult construction (Firestone, 1979; Vizard, 1987). Others have argued that the myth of childhood innocence has more specific origins (e.g. Coward, The Guardian, 2 December, 1994). Coward maintains that such contemporary constitutions of childhood are crystallised in an idiosyncratic form of middle class bigotry. These parents, she argues, uphold critical views about certain kinds of childhood(s) thus protecting their own children from what they regard as harmful aspects of popular mass culture. She argues that blanket criticisms of cultural mediums such as television and computer games, contributes nothing to our understanding of the modern experience of childhood(s). These types of views, are worth bearing in mind when we will later consider the staff views regarding the impact of popular mass culture.

(ii) Changing Adults: Parents and Nursery Staff

Not only has the nature of the child thought to have changed but according to staff so have adults and their accompanying attitudes towards children. Parents, for example, were now construed as being more open than they were in the past especially with regard discussing sexuality with their children:

The parents are kind of more open - it looks like parents are more open with their children and I think that’s a good thing. I think years ago it was a ‘No, no!’ area - it was very much a closed book. (Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.)
Nevertheless, it is possible to question staff assessments of the extent to which parental attitudes have changed over time. Studies which consider sources of sex information for children show that the rates of change in parents as opposed to peers as imparters of sex information, have not altered radically over time (cf. Gebhard, 1967; Parrel and Kellaher, 1978). Today concerns have been expressed about the difficulties parents encounter with broaching this topic area and the fact that children's sexual socialisation now involves gleaning information from television, videos and magazines (cf. Morgan, 1994). This does suggest that staff constitution of the modern parent's increased openness with their children should be interpreted with caution. Moreover, in staff accounts there were exceptions to this widespread evaluation of social change. The following represents a highly unusual view, in that this member of staff rejected the assessment of the more liberal, modern parent. This member of staff identified the environment and the media, as the prime source of information for children:

When I do think about the children now they do seem to know a lot more. But I don't think it's the fact that mums are sitting down and telling them. **I think it's just the environment and T.V. - that's got the influence on them.** I don't think it's the fact that mums are really modern and sit down and talk to them about things.

(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.) *my emphases*

In addition to this rather unusual view, there were significant typifications of working class and middle class childhoods in the accounts of some nursery staff. Basically some parents were thought to be 'more open' and communicative with their children than others. The working class child, for example, was viewed as receiving minimal verbal stimulation from their parents:

A lot of children here don't get spoken to at all, except for: 'Shut your effing mouth', or something or not to be such a nuisance.

(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.7.)
This version of a working class childhood, provides a stark contrast with staff portrayals of a middle class childhood where parents from more affluent area types were constructed as both responsive and honest in their interactions with their children:

I think very few parents would brush them aside and tell them something completely wrong, deliberately.
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.2.)

A further innovation which can be located within the broad framework of adult/child relationships, was the view apparent among some nursery staff which maintained that children are now exposed to more 'adult conversations'. In the past, children were said to be physically excluded from these interchanges, but significantly now, they are thought to be permitted to listen. In the following example, a member of staff contrasted recollections of her own childhood with the modern child's increased exposure to 'adult conversation':-

My parents were the type who wouldn't have spoken in front of me - they wouldn't have had an adult conversation in front of me or whatever. If there was anybody up, you would have played in the room. You didn't hang about and listen to what was going on. I think children hear a lot more now rather than it being explained to them. They listen into a lot of things.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.)

This is an interesting example of social change because Ennew's (1986) argument is, that contemporary society is characterised by the progressive separation of adults and children. This noteworthy perception among nursery staff however, suggests that there may be critical anomalies. It is plausible, and also methodologically desirable, that an examination of counter processes could enhance our understanding of modern forms of childhood(s). Exceptions to the 'separation thesis', need to be fully investigated alongside supporting evidence. For instance, children were previously excluded from certain public places, but modified licensing laws now make it acceptable for adults and children to eat
together in restaurants and public houses. Interestingly, this new development has been combined with the advent of the 'children's menu', making it possible for adults and children to 'eat together', yet consume different types of foods. An analysis of these innovations as inter-related processes, could broaden and extend our understanding of contemporary childhood(s).

Placing the attitudes of nursery staff firmly within the context of the wider changes that have been presented earlier, it is not surprising that professional attitudes and practices were thought to have altered. The following nursery nurse reflected on how her own individual attitudes towards talking about sexuality, have shifted over time:

Like ten or fifteen years ago - even if you asked me these kinds of questions, I would have been very shy to answer them.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.6.)

Staff accounts of the professional development of attitudes revealed that their interpretations of childhood masturbation were thought to have altered over the years. The response of verbally reprimanding young children and openly drawing attention to the offending activity was associated with the past practices of nursery staff:

I think people are a lot more open now. I think years ago for instance, if you had seen any sexual behaviour it would be just like: 'Stop that, that's dirty', and it wasn't talked about - it was a closed door. Whereas now I think people's attitudes are changing.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Nevertheless, while staff intervention today was construed as less punitive, present assessments of this kind of behaviour were found to constitute a 'grey' and uncertain kind of area. This has meant that staff did not clearly specify what has replaced these former staff attitudes and practices:
We tend to accept that now, not as accepted behaviour as such, but at one time children would not be exactly smacked but told it was wrong and they shouldn't be doing it. **We try not to act in that way now.**

(Teacher - Nursery School, T.5.) *my emphasis*

Advice in child care manuals is helpful in illuminating these staff opinions. For example, Edge (1971) writing in the 1950s and 60s is confidently prescriptive about dealing with masturbation in young children, communicating a strong sense of disapproval. Loose knickers are recommended in addition to other diversionary activities. Yet Spock and Rothenburg’s (1992) later advice is less definitive. While acknowledging 'the need' to be sensitive to the position of children, they offer no clear cut advice as to how parents should effectively respond to their offspring¹. This perhaps reflects the 'built in ambiguity' in attitudes towards children and particularly childhood sexuality (Ennew, 1986). On the one hand, emancipatory discourses about childhood maintain that children are entitled to rights and adults should therefore abandon their authoritarian control over children (cf. Archard, 1993). Yet on the other hand, dealing positively with their sexuality remains highly problematic within the present atmosphere of concern about the sexual abuse of children.

What was regarded as the progressive liberalisation of staff attitudes was also said to have been enhanced by the introduction of teaching aids, broadly related to sexuality in young children. This development has been evaluated as a relevant change in the working environment of nursery staff:-

I think it's more open now explaining things to children. We've got books and jigsaws now that explain about the baby being in the mum's stomach and it comes out of the jigsaw by taking the pieces out. So that was never an issue when I was training at college. This has all

¹ In Yates (1978) American publication 'Sex without Shame', she confidently suggests that parents should positively respond to their children's masturbation by stating: 'Hey that looks fun!'. This advice requires to be understood within the context of the counter-culture and the emergence of child rights movements in the 1970's.
come to the foreground now, so definitely a better attitude than there was years ago.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.)

But this unproblematic evaluation of the use of teaching aids warrants further consideration. Contrary findings from the present study, suggest that some staff encountered difficulties in relation to the use of teaching aids. These have included, staff accounts of uncertainty with regard to responding to young children's sexual curiosity and feelings of embarrassment when intervening in the 'sexual' activities of nursery children. Also, one nursery nurse described in detail how she missed crucial pages of a book while reading to children about the origins of babies. It was found that dolls with genitals were kept in cupboards because they initiate interest and unwanted questions from young children. In addition, jigsaws which illustrate physical sex differences were said to present difficulties for some members of staff:

We've actually got a puzzle and you take the wee boy's clothes off and take the wee girls clothes off and you can see their bodies are different. And we sometimes get questions then: 'Why is the wee boy different from the wee girl?'. And you have to sit down and start explaining. I don't know how to explain to them right enough (laughter).
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.) my emphasis

Clearly the difficulties highlighted by nursery staff, raises the issue of professional training. This is an important question to which we will return in the closing Chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 10).

B) Changing Childhood - Popular Mass Culture, Social Issues and Social Problems

Now that staff accounts of social change have been examined, it is possible to explore the ways in which popular mass culture and the emergence of child abuse as a social issue were reported to have altered the social landscape of early
childhood. With regard to popular mass culture, both the development of mass communications and the commercialisation of early childhood, have been broadly identified by the present study as the main sources of change cited by nursery staff. Here young children's exposure to television and videos, the mass marketing of fashion and popular music were all thought to have undermined the innocence of childhood. Generally, these contemporary innovations were assessed as 'taking childhoods away' from children, by thrusting them prematurely into the adult world of experience and knowledge.

(i) Violence, Sex and Television

Buckingham (1994) places current debates about media influences on children in context by tracing the shifting concerns about harmful activities for children. He argues that in the 1950s public concern regarding moral threats to children, focused on the detrimental impact of reading comics for children. Today however, it is television and computer games which are regarded as undesirable for children. It is therefore not surprising that nursery staff reflected similar views about what is damaging for children, since television was thought to have had a profound impact on the everyday lives of young children. This was found to be a consistent concern expressed by many nursery staff, mirroring modern anxieties about the moral protection of children. An absence of censorship and appropriate management of children's television viewing was held accountable in some family circumstances:

I have noticed when you listen to children talk they are seeing too much on the television and it's not restricted.
(Teacher - Nursery School, T.7.)

Nursery staff also stressed the impact of media imagery and the lyrics of popular music, on play in young children:-
Children under five imitate characters they see on television programmes and the popular music industry or whatever. They have a huge impact on them and their lives.
(Head - Day Nursery, A.) *my emphasis*

Other members of staff described what were interpreted as children's provocative and suggestive movements when they acted out popular music videos. The impact of television on the content of children's play, is further supported by Opie's (1994) observational study of children in playground situations. She found that a large part of children's play centred on characters and scenarios from television; this marked a departure from the author's earlier study carried out in the 1950s, where 'street games' and the influence of film stars were popular among children (Opie and Opie, 1977).

What types of television viewing were considered detrimental from the perspective of nursery staff? Both violence and 'explicit sex' scenes were thought to be harmful for young children:-

I just think they are watching the most appalling television - totally. Parents obviously don't censor what they are watching. I would say, what is maybe worse than the sexual things, is the horror things. I would say that.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, C.)

Crucially however, this study found evidence of subtle variations in the kinds of viewing reported in 'area types'. Staff accounts of young children acting out or talking about horror videos with '18' certificates was apparent mainly in the Day Nursery context, but also in the Type 7 Nursery School. For example, reports of young children playing or discussing 'Freddie', a character from the film; 'Nightmare on Elm Street', were cited in 4 Day Nurseries, and in one Nursery School situated in a peripheral housing estate. The following provides one such account where children's exposure to this film was viewed as destroying the innocence of young children:-
It's all about slashing, and I don't know what else happens but obviously it's a creature that terrifies. They are absolutely into that. In fact not so long ago, they were doing the foam finger things - it's a piece of foam and they had them on their fingers and they were doing this Freddie at each other. You're talking about children just out of nappies.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, A.) my emphasis

A further disturbing report of a young child being threatened by a character called 'Chuckie' (from 'Child's Play', an '18' Certificate Video banned from video outlets in the aftermath of the James Bulger murder trial), was again cited in another Day Nursery setting, situated in a comparable area type. This data was elicited in response to a request for examples of young children's television viewing:-

One of the wee girls watched - I've not actually watched it, but some of the staff have: 'Child's Play'. There's a wee doll called Chuckie, it's actually supposed to be a horror movie. This wee girl's not even three, but she's now frightened of this doll called Chuckie. I think the mum threatens her if she misbehaves then Chuckie's going to get her. That's a horror film - I don't know what else is in it.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, H.)

This adds weight to the association between area type and the increased likelihood of exposure to violent and explicit material. In the following extract, a nursery nurse made a link between young children's experience of unsuitable viewing, with parenting in areas of socio-economic deprivation:-

I know that children are exposed to things that they really shouldn't be. They shouldn't be seeing an '18' film anyway. I think videos have got a big part to play in things especially in the more deprived areas. They tend to let them watch anything.
(Head - Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

How then did staff explain the influence of television viewing? Not only was it held responsible for creating a sexual awareness characteristic of the modern 'knowledgeable child' but for instigating this awareness earlier:-
I think children now are becoming aware of sexual matters younger and younger. And I think one of the factors in that is television - without a shadow of a doubt.

(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.2.)

A further staff opinion was that particular kinds of viewing had a direct impact on the content and nature of young children's play, which was thought to be more aggressive and weapon oriented than in the past. This increased aggression was associated with the play of boys:-

Play has changed in so much as a lot of what they are doing is what they see on television. Their play is more violent because of - even children's programmes. With a lot of the boys just now everything's a weapon they make - everything is a weapon.

(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.3.) my emphasis

The connection staff make between aggressive play and television viewing, was further supported by data collected during the observational phase of this study. Staff consistently expressed concerns about the impact of the then popular cartoon: 'Ninja Mutant Hero Turtles', as exposure to this genre was said to intensify the 'rough and tumble play' of young boys. Yet beliefs about this link however, were not confined solely to the nursery staff who participated in this study. In the trial of the James Bulger murder case, significance was also ascribed to the fact that the accused children had watched horror videos. This was mentioned by the Judge and in the subsequent media attention. Some psychiatrists have expressed similar concerns about horror videos on children (cf. Sims and Melville-Thomas, 1985). But it was children's exposure to explicit sex scenes fused with violence which was assessed as especially harmful for young children:-

They get all mixed up with it - just like horror films - they can't separate fantasy from reality and what is real and what is not real. And I think they end up all mixed up and don't understand what it's all about and sometimes they think it's violence if they see sex. I think they think it's a form of violence if they see sex. I think they think it's a form of violence especially if it's in a violent film - the man's hurting the woman. I think it confuses children and makes them afraid of what
should be a natural loving thing. The love's gone and it's either lust or violence.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, F.)

If, as nursery staff claimed, some young children learn about sex in this skewed and negative context - what implications does this have for the sexual socialisation of children? This thesis has shown that adults' communication with young children about sexuality tends to be proactive and that open discussion of 'sex' was found to be a highly unusual occurrence. We can then reasonably assume that for some pre-school children such violent imagery may in fact be their first introduction to sexual relationships. This points to a need to examine, not only how children learn about 'sex', but to explore how different kinds of family contexts and corresponding sources of early learning, influence sexual attitudes. In the following, Rosalind Coward comments on the impact of television violence and explicit sex on children:

Children's reactions are very often conditioned by their own environments and those who become preoccupied by sex and violence are often those for whom sexuality and aggression are live issues within their families.
(Quoted in The Guardian 2 December, 1994)

Rather than viewing concerns about children's increased aggression and sexual awareness as an inevitable by-product of contemporary mass culture, she suggests that it is the interaction between children's exposure to aspects of popular mass culture, combined with a certain kind of family atmosphere which can be damaging for children. In other words sexual violence only becomes meaningful for children in particular social contexts. This suggests that the focus of our attention regarding the impact of the media on children should consider the interplay of influences for possible answers.
(ii) Pop Music and Fashion

We have seen that particular types of television viewing were associated with increased aggression in the play of boys. In contrast however, the data shows that it was girls who are reported to be more susceptible to the influence of another aspect of popular mass culture: music industry role models and the mass marketing of fashion. In the following, a teacher articulated her discomfort at a particular kind of dress and sexualised demeanour, she had observed in young girls. She described this kind of dress as 'provocative':-

Even in dress, if you want to look at it from that point of view. The way some little nursery girls dress - it's quite - if you want to use the word sexual, they emulate Madonna and people like that. So I don't know what kind of effect that has on them. But sometimes when they do look like that, I find that rather upsets me. That kind of dress is disturbing.

(teacher - nursery school, t.5.) my emphasis

Similarly other nursery staff highlighted the ways in which young girls 'used their sexuality' in interactions with other children and thought that girls were constrained by popular portrayals of feminine behaviour. In Holland's (1992) examination of popular imagery of childhood, she observes how young girls are portrayed as sexualised objects at increasingly younger ages. Today, she maintains, it is prepubescent young girls that are now captured in erotic and sexualised poses. While nursery staff accounts suggested that girls sexual socialisation was earlier, girls were also identified as enthusiastic consumers:

A lot of the stuff they are getting is for girls: handbags and makeup. They are very clothes conscious. I find that incredible that they can make demands on parents for 'Reeboks'; leggings; ankle boots. I don't know what they are going to do when they are sixteen - buy them a house (laughter). Incredible.

(head - day nursery, a.)

Images of the child as an expensive accessory is a popular representation of the contemporary form of childhood (e.g. Holt, 1975). Also the image of the adult
child re-emerges in the following, illustrating how structural processes interact with the sexual socialisation of girls:

Just now the girls are delighted with what they call 'their bras' that they wear. There's new wee sets with pants and tops and the tops are like bras and several of the girls have come to me showing me their bras. So I suppose it makes them feel grown up
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.1.)

The recent introduction of 'bras' for pre-school children is a further example of a counter process which is at odds with the separation thesis outlined earlier. On one level, this blurs the distinction between adult women and pre-school girls; gendering their sexuality at a very early stage of their sexual socialisation. Interestingly, it also brings forward and alters one established rite of passage because in our cultural context, wearing a bra for girls, did mark the transition from childhood to young adulthood. Today however, it would seem that physiological maturity is not necessarily a prerequisite of this experience.

(iii) Child Sexual Abuse and Changes in Staff Awareness of Children's Behaviour

Both professional and public concern regarding the abuse of children intensified during the 1970s, latterly focusing on the issue of child sexual abuse in the 1980s. Inevitably awareness of this topic and the accompanying constitution of the dangerous nature of families was generated initially by events such as Cleveland (in 1987) and later by Orkney in Scotland. More recently however, public anxieties have moved to the caring professions and adults who are involved in recreational activities with children. This has been prompted by the Dunblane tragedy and the public airing of revelations of adults who were abused when in the care of local authorities. Currently media attention has focused on the issue of known paedophiles who have returned to unsuspecting communities. It is pertinent however, that fieldwork for the present study spanned most notably the
media coverage of the Orkney case where the question of 'ritualistic and satanic' abuse were forcibly brought to public attention. This case was spontaneously debated in staff room situations and initial responses included staff concern about the methods social workers were reported to have used in order to remove children from their homes. Staff expressed dismay, at reports of children being 'snatched' from their beds in the middle of the night. As the coverage of the case intensified, discussions focused on the validity of social work assessments and whether the ritualistic abuse of children had in fact taken place. Generally, staff opinion was found to be sceptical, since only two members of staff at that time expressed privately their support for social work intervention.

The media, primarily television and newspapers, were regarded as the main source of information by nursery staff. Over 40 individual staff stated that it was their main source of awareness and consistently stressed the high media profile of child sexual abuse:

> In the past five to ten years every time you pick up a paper - all you're hearing about is abuse and rapes.
> (Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.4.)

It is of relevance that the question asked of nursery staff (see appendix), enquired about the 'general topic of the abuse of children', yet the majority of staff identified 'the topic of child sexual abuse', as a specific concern.

Staff who had direct experience of dealing with a case of sexual abuse in nursery settings identified this as a further source of awareness. In the following, a nursery nurse vividly describes her reactions to her first experience of working with a child who had been sexually molested:
I couldn't cope at the thought of that wee boy. Probably because it's my first experience of it. I just turn away - it's horrible. How can anybody do that? Sickening. I can feel the boak rising now.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.5.)

Nursery staff who described similar accounts, conveyed the emotionally charged character of their experiences; illustrating how difficult this topic was for nursery staff. Staff participation in 'In Service Training' and the use of official child abuse literature which was available in nursery settings were identified as fostering staff awareness. Nevertheless, it was newly qualified, nursery nurses who were more likely to refer to their basic training as a relevant source of information. Training of this kind was viewed as an emotionally demanding part of their initial training:

The modules we did at college were a very, very hard module to do. I mean the way we sat in the class. She put us all in a circle, so we were all facing each other and so we could discuss it. It was a very hard module for a lot of people to do - to discuss. You know what happens and you know it's reality, but admitting things like that happen. It was very hard to think how people could actually do that.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, E.)

Other more experienced staff were able to compare their previous ignorance of this issue with their new found awareness. For many staff this meant more intensified surveillance of young children's behaviour:

I don't think we would have thought about it 20 years ago. But now you hear so much about it - you look and listen for things.
(Nursery Nurse - Nursery School, T.4.) *my emphasis*

Overall, staff maintained that their recognition of the sexual abuse of children had made them closely monitor and be more suspicious of a range of 'behaviours' in young children. Staff regularly made statements such as 'you watch them more closely now', or alternatively 'you listen in more, to what they say these days' indicating how staff awareness encouraged an intensified kind of observation of

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2 'Boak' is a Scottish word meaning to retch or vomit see Robinson (1985: 51).
nursery children. Staff highlighted a range of indicators of the sexually abused child, very much in keeping with checklists compiled for professionals (cf. Brain and Martin, 1991; Smith, 1995). Issues such as the child's demeanour (withdrawn and cautious about physical contact with adults), their role play ('sexually explicit play'), art work (drawing male genitals on bodies), and explicit language (talk which was regarded as 'too adult'), were all identified as possible symptoms by nursery staff.

Occasionally the implications of staff's heightened awareness was described as 'double edged':-

In the positive sense it's made staff more aware of children's sexual behaviour whether for example it would be in the home corner, imaginative play - if something happened that they weren't too happy about - two children in the bed together or maybe a painting activity. I think it's given us more awareness to stop and listen to what they are saying. In a negative way - that you're not oversensitive and jumping in too quickly and thinking: 'What's all this about?'
(Head teacher - Nursery School, T.l.)

This raised awareness, not only made nursery staff more suspicious and watchful of children's behaviour, but was viewed as influencing attitudes towards men as fathers and carers of young children. Another nursery nurse described how her own awareness of child sexual abuse had prompted suspicion of men caring for children:

I certainly think you have a different outlook. I don't mean every time you see a man with his child you think: 'Something strange about that'. But certainly I think if you go through the park and you see a man - a father and he's with his children - there is always a second glance.
(Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery, G.)

The theme of suspicion is a particularly powerful one which emerged in staff accounts both in regard to the behaviour of nursery children and parents. Tucker (1987) writing in the aftermath of the Cleveland Enquiry, addresses this issue
when exploring implications for adult/child relationships; arguing in the present
day context it has become increasingly difficult for males to interact intimately with
children. Today the possibility that affectionate behaviour between men and
children could be misconstrued, has been constructed as a very real danger.
Indeed one story which was circulating staff rooms in a number of nurseries
during fieldwork, related to the employment of male nursery nurses in nursery
settings. Apparently one mother had expressed concerns about a male member of
staff changing her young child's nappy owing to her fears about sexual abuse.
During meetings with Heads of establishments, I was told that fathers of nursery
children now expressed anxieties about bathing their young children.
Paradoxically, Finkelhor (1989) maintains that it essential that men become more
involved in the everyday and intimate care of their young children because it is
men's distance from this tactile day to day care, which makes it more likely that
men misread the behaviour of children. Clearly the emergence of child sexual
abuse as a key social problem, has impacted on adult-child relationships and tactile
contact has been problematised and sexualised. Today intimate contact between
men and young children, has been constructed as a 'risk behaviour'.

Conclusion

The extensive chasm between staff conceptions of early childhood and what was
constituted as the reality of young children's lives has been a coherent theme of this
Chapter. There was a striking ideological component in staff versions of the
authentic child and the 'proper' form of childhood. In short, staff maintained that
childhood should be a happy and innocent time where children were protected from
adult forms of knowledge. According to staff, popular mass culture has had a
decisive and largely negative impact on children; thus the modern 'adult-child' was
viewed as more knowledgeable and more precocious than the past. What
conclusions can we draw about the modern form of early childhood?
Fundamentally, this Chapter has shown that it is necessary to conceptualise childhood in a manner which accommodates the diverse social experience of children by referring to childhood(s).

Finally we will now turn our attention to the reconstructed narratives of nursery staff. In the final data analysis chapter which follows, staff explained the genesis of their own attitudes towards sexuality in young children.
CHAPTER 9: HOW STAFF ACCOUNTED FOR THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN'S SEXUALITY

Through it [sexuality] we experience ourselves as real people, it gives us our identities our sense of self, as men and women, as heterosexual and homosexual, as 'normal' and 'abnormal'.
(Weeks, 1986: 13)

At the onset of this thesis the significance of nursery nurses for the surveillance and control of children in care was stressed; a point which highlights the need to address the issue of training. Yet guidelines which recommend training for sex education specialists emphasise that it is necessary to explore professionals' own opinions about sexuality, in order to equip them to sensitively engage with children. Indeed this experiential approach is an integral feature of recommendations for professional training (cf. Massey, 1988). As a consequence, the findings presented in this penultimate chapter have implications for both the training of nursery staff and sex education specialists.

How then did staff locate their views regarding childhood sexuality? What kinds of relationships and life experiences were identified as important in their accounts? The following discussion will argue that the majority of nursery staff drew heavily on memories of childhood to explain their attitudes. Nevertheless, as we shall see, appraisals of the long term impact of early experiences provided a significant source of contrasting assessments among nursery staff.

A) The Self Assessments of Nursery Staff

The data which forms the basis for this section was elicited in response to the question, 'How would you describe your own opinions about this topic?' Some staff however sought clarification in response to this particular question, so in
these instances, prompts were used from pilot interviews with nursery staff. Staff were informed that some nursery staff had thought they were 'open minded', others had described themselves as 'middle of the road', while some said that they regarded themselves as 'old fashioned'. When necessary these options were presented to nursery staff.

(i) The Evaluations of Nursery Staff

As we saw in Chapter 8, nursery staff often made unambiguous and straightforward assessments about the shifts in general attitudes towards sexuality in young children, since today staff regarded mores as more open and more relaxed than they were in the past. Placing nursery staff's own views within this general notion of progressive liberalisation, it is not surprising that when staff classified their own personal views, over 40 members of staff regarded themselves as 'open minded'. This kind of appraisal was consistently linked with age ('youth') by younger members of nursery staff:-

I would say that I am quite open minded. I'm pretty young and I don't know if that's got something to do with it.
(Nursery Nurse, Age 25 - Nursery School, T.4.)

Ideas about the existence of tangible generational differences in sexual attitudes was often expressed by younger members of staff and they frequently promoted stereotypes of a less tolerant and relaxed older generation. Yet the question of age did not emerge in the same manner in the accounts of more experienced nursery staff. Significantly these members of staff were able to reflect on the genesis of their opinions and readily identify how their own views had shifted over extended periods of time. The following teacher who said that she now viewed herself as 'quite liberal' but as 'having values', illustrated this dynamic perspective:-

When I think of my schooling it was very strict. It was absolutely awful to get changed or if anyone mentioned a dirty word, things like
that. You very much had to shake that off and that does take time. I suppose it comes after 18 years of conditioning (laughter). You've got to get rid of all that and it does take time.

(Teacher, Age 48 - Nursery School, T.5.)

Moreover some members of nursery staff placed their 'open minded' views firmly within the wider context of what they saw as contemporary attitudes. Today, it was argued that being a member of a more liberal and tolerant society made 'open mindedness', a prerequisite of work with young children:-

I don't think these days you could be very old fashioned. I don't think there's a lot of room for you if you are very old fashioned. I think in this day and age with children you've got to be pretty open minded. I think you're closing your mind because times change and you have to change with them.

(Nursery Nurse, Age 57 - Nursery School, T.3.)

In contrast, others said that they thought of themselves as 'middle of the road', or alternatively 'old fashioned'. One nursery nurse who regarded herself as 'old fashioned', expanded on her views about young children's sexuality in the following manner:-

It's a grey type of area as you don't want to go too far too soon.

(Nursery Nurse, Age 36 - Day Nursery, D.)

The idea that young children can be inappropriately informed about sexual topics at an early and vulnerable stage of their development, is a key theme which has recurred throughout this thesis. As we have seen these kind of views were inextricably bound up with ideologies of childhood innocence.

Similarly the idea that nursery children are just 'too young' to comprehend, was used by members of staff to account for their 'middle of the road' attitudes:-

Working with the pre-threes I think they are too young to understand anything. I would maybe be 'middle of the road' with pre-threes.

(Nursery Nurse, Age 30 - Day Nursery, G.)
While some staff highlighted cognitive immaturity, and drew heavily on developmental accounts of children; others emphasised the context bound nature of their opinions about sexuality in young children. In the following, one nursery nurse illustrated this point by using an example of masturbation in young children:

I would maybe try and redirect them in public. Obviously if it was my own child in my own home I would leave them.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 24 - Day Nursery, C.)

This distinction between public and private domains is particularly salient to our understanding of attitudes towards sexuality during childhood; since this thesis has shown that even on a more general level, sexuality is an area which is socially defined as an exclusive and separate sphere of social life (Weeks, 1986).

The Newsons (1968) work contributes another aspect to the distinction between public and private domains with regard to parental attitudes towards nakedness in their young children, suggesting that a numbers of factors come into play in the home environment. Whether visitors are present for example, was said to have an impact on parental attitudes towards behaviour which involved children running about naked, or displaying their genitals.

Interestingly some nursery staff highlighted the issue of the types of relationships they enjoyed with children: whether or not they were acting in a professional capacity or were related to the child (e.g. parent, aunt) was thought to impinge on their attitudes towards and modes of responding to, sexuality in young children. Some staff said it was easier to be more responsive and relaxed at home with their own offspring, or alternatively with a child to whom they were related:

If one of my nieces asked me a question I would answer it for them because I feel that would be acceptable to my family.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 35 - Nursery School, T.7.)
While being related to the child was thought to inform individual skills when dealing with sexual curiosity and behaviour in young children, a few nursery staff expressed an alternative viewpoint. Unusually, they maintained that their professional relationships with nursery children, made it easier and 'less embarrassing' for them to deal with children in the nursery setting:

I think I'm more open minded at work than I am at home with my own son.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 33 - Nursery School, T.5.)

As a consequence, both the character of social contexts, as well as the nature of social relationships were reported to impact on ways of thinking about sexuality in childhood. This indicates that attitudes towards this general area were rather complex, as a degree of pliability and social mutability were apparent in staff reports. Moreover these findings suggest, that it would be unwise to assume that it was automatically easier for staff to deal with sexuality in their own children because as we have seen, there have been a few counter examples to this viewpoint.

Another important consideration identified by the present study relates to the views and attitudes of parents of nursery children. This proved a pressing concern for many nursery staff, particularly in relation to the passage of information regarding the origins of babies. Nevertheless nursery staff spontaneously referred to this issue in the context of their assessments of their own opinions. One nursery nurse, for example, who thought that she was 'quite open minded', said that it was the views of parents which placed constraints on her being completely frank with nursery children. This was described as a 'tricky' and difficult area for nursery staff:

It's their place [parents] to deal with it although you can talk about it and you can read books about it but you don't want to go over that line.
because the parent's thinking: 'Look - I don't want my child knowing about that. You've got to keep the balance and it's hard sometimes.'

(Nursery Nurse, Aged 31 - Day Nursery, A.)

Previously it was identified that the social class background of nursery children, impacted on how staff judged the attitudes of parents. While professional parents were thought to engage with and inform their young offspring some parents from peripheral housing estates were said to actively discourage any form of dialogue with their children (see Chapter 6).

In relation to alternative views, some staff raised other types of issues regarding their interactions with young children. These staff expressed concern about creating inhibitions in children:

I would hate to be responsible for any child growing up with a fear, or a feeling of guilt, or a feeling that it was wrong or dirty because of anything I'd said.

(Head teacher, Aged 38 - Nursery School, T.6.)

Furthermore the desirability of being 'completely honest' with nursery children was consistently found to be highly rated by nursery staff. 'Being totally honest', was cited by over 25 individual nursery staff as central to their views regarding sexuality in young children, ascribing considerable importance to the view that it was important to engage with young children. Similar to the views of Freud, a few staff viewed young children as astute observers and assessors of the reliability of adult explanations. Yet, as we have seen, both ideologies of childhood innocence, in addition to developmental accounts of the child, influenced staff evaluations.

There was further evidence to indicate the flexibility of staff views. One member of staff emphasised that attitudes of colleagues could influence her opinions in playroom situations:
I wouldn't say I was so open that nobody else is going to influence me. You're definitely influenced by how other staff act round about you. Definitely.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 26 - Day Nursery, H.)

According to nursery staff a range of factors were thought to impinge upon their attitudes of nursery staff. Attitudes were said to develop over time; to be influenced by the social setting and be modified or relaxed depending on the social relationships enjoyed with particular children.

B) Locating the 'Starting Point' - Memories of Childhood

So far we have focused on staff appraisals of their current views about sexuality in young children. How then did nursery staff account for the genesis of these attitudes and what type of life events and experiences were located as effecting attitude formation?

Previously we saw (see Chapter 1), that it was psychoanalytic discourse which ascribed central significance to the period of childhood and it was Freud who was responsible for elevating the status of early childhood in Western consciousness. He asserted that what happened to children in early childhood, did indeed matter, and had a overwhelming impact on an individuals subsequent psychological functioning.

With regard to the perspectives of nursery staff, there are links with Freud's view about the momentous nature of childhood experiences. Similarly the present study found, that staff consistently drew on their childhood experiences to explain the development of their own attitudes towards sexuality. In fact the diverse and variable nature of early childhood experience was used to explain the existence of differential opinions among nursery staff. In the following quote a nursery nurse succinctly summarised this viewpoint:
We all come from different starting points don't we?
(Head, Aged 37 - Day Nursery, C.)

Ideas about the link between the general atmosphere of childhood and the formation of subsequent attitudes was supported by the fact that over half of the nursery staff interviewed spontaneously raised issues such as childhood relationships (primarily with parents) and experiences (e.g. in school playgrounds), when they reflected on the development of their opinions.

(i) 'Upbringing' and the Perspectives of Nursery Staff

The present study found that over one third of nursery staff spontaneously identified what they labelled as their 'upbringing' as having a substantial impact on the formation of sexual attitudes. Dictionary definitions of this generic term, tend to stress its training and educational connotations: "the fact of being brought up while young, or the manner of this, early rearing and training" (O.E.D.: 421), and this definition has been both developed and elaborated in staff accounts.

When nursery staff elaborated on their 'upbringing', three key themes were evident in staff accounts:-

1) First, staff continually stressed and accentuated the centrality of their relationship with mothers. The prime role of mothers in giving sex information to their children is a finding of previous studies (e.g. Farrell, 1978; Sex Education Forum, 1994)

1 The work of Rousseau could be considered a seminal and early text on the topic of upbringing. He elaborated in 'Emile': 'The theory and art of upbringing of the young' (O.E.D.: 421). The nature of early 'upbringing' has been the focus of moral panics about the state of modern parenting. In the media attention which followed the James Bulger murder case, for example, the accused children's 'upbringing' was scrutinised, found lacking (eg. the children were reported to be permitted to view violent video material; were regularly absent from school etc.) and held partly responsible.
2) Secondly, a crucial and revealing theme which emerged from staff accounts of this relationship focused on the issue of communication. This has meant that the nature and quality of interaction about sexuality between mothers and daughters was found to be an important issue.

3) Thirdly, a striking (and perhaps not surprising) finding, was the regular reference among nursery staff to the onset of menstruation in their personal narratives. Memories and atmospheres associated with this rite of passage, proved a significant and sometimes momentous 'life event' from their point of view.

These three themes will be addressed within the context of the subsequent discussion.

With regard to the first theme; the pivotal and central role ascribed to mothers', the following nursery nurse provided a straightforward assessment. Here she underlined the ongoing and ubiquitous influence of mothers on their daughters:

Possibly girls are more close to their mothers. I think nine times out of ten they are. Possibly they model themselves on them and what they talk about and the things they tell you as parents. And as you grow older, although you've got your own group of friends, and you're thinking 'I'll do my own kind of thing', probably in the back of your mind you're thinking about the kind of things your Mother said to you when you were younger. Just her influences.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 29 - Nursery School, T.3.)

This seemingly intense and emotionally entangled relationship between mothers and daughters, is identified as inherently problematic by therapeutic discourses and approaches, which focus on the mental health of women (Eichenbam and Orbach, 1985). From this perspective, the mother/daughter relationship is used as a key site of therapeutic intervention.
Furthermore, the gendered nature of children's psychological separation from mothers, has been considered in the context of feminist re-appraisals of psychoanalytic theory (cf. Mitchell, 1974; Chodorow, 1978). Girls, it is argued, tread a rather different psychodynamic pathway from that of boys. Since psychoanalytic theory maintains that children normally identify with the same sex parent, the situation for girls is compounded by the fact that the main caregiver and source of emotional nurturance during early childhood (as a rule the mother) simultaneously becomes her role model. According to Wodak and Schultz (1986) this dynamic explains the 'uniqueness' of the mother/daughter relationship. In contrast however, boys must 'turn away' (and hence psychologically separate) from their mother, in order to successfully negotiate this developmental hurdle.

According to some nursery staff, mothers could be controllers and censors of information for them as young children, although as the following suggests, opinions of mothers could be openly questioned as children matured:-

I do remember maybe watching television and if anything was on and we could see anything, it was: 'Oh, turn it over. Oh, it's time for their bed. Bob is it not time they were in bed?' I can mind that and I used to laugh at that as I got older. 'Mum be quiet', you know - 'Don't you think I've ever seen anybody naked before?'
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 24 - Day Nursery, E.)

The point about developing resistance towards attitudes of mothers has been an important issue identified in staff reports, especially when mothers were described as 'narrow minded' or 'old fashioned'. One nursery nurse who ascribed importance to trusting and honest relationships with children, defined herself as 'very open minded'. Ultimately however she attributed her own current thinking to her mother's absence of communication about sexuality during her own childhood:-
I had a lot of traumatic experiences because my mother told me nothing.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 28 - Day Nursery, A.)

Another nursery nurse developed this point about active resistance by explaining in more detail why she had adopted opposing views to those of her mother. As a consequence, she now thought that she was more open minded with her own child, as well as with other nursery children:

I think my own upbringing. I think that, influences you to the extent that what you felt you hadn’t been told or what you felt you didn’t know, or didn’t know enough about; or how terrible you felt about being the one that didn’t know about periods and things like that or not knowing the facts of life. And somebody not explaining things to you. **You act upon that and that’s influenced me.** I’m not going to be like that. I’m not going to be like that with my child, and I’m going to be a bit more broad minded with other people’s children, and not have that sort of narrow mindedness of my mother. That’s influenced me; I’ve acted upon that and tried not to be like that.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 32 - Day Nursery, F.) *my emphasis*

Interestingly this kind of perspective was not found to be exclusive to any particular age band of nursery staff, since the following shows a more experienced member of staff expressed a similar perspective:

My mother was very old fashioned and very, very churchy; and things like that were not discussed and I didn’t know. I wasn’t told. Obviously children in school had told me, but my mother didn’t tell me. But when I had a period I had to pretend: ‘What’s this? What’s wrong?’ That’s the sort of relationship I had with my mother, although I had a very good relationship with my mother. Things like that were not spoken about and not discussed. Bringing up my daughters I encouraged them to speak and perhaps that’s because my parents were the opposite with me. **Perhaps it was a swing in the opposite direction.**
(Head, Aged 59 - Day Nursery, H.) *my emphasis*

The view that individuals could ‘swing in the opposite direction’ and actively develop attitudes which were at odds with parental attitudes, was found to be an important assessment among nursery staff. This perspective provides a distinct contrast with the position taken in some health education texts where linear types of
explanations are adopted. One such publication posits the view that: "From a very early age young children absorb the atmosphere of the home and set their standards by what they observe around them" (Scottish Health Education Group, 1990: 34). This kind of deterministic explanation is echoed in other sex education texts (e.g., Barnardos, 1994) neglecting the potential of individuals to question and actively resist the 'atmosphere of the home' and parental attitudes.

While most nursery staff who said that their parents had been uncommunicative, or evasive about sexual issues during their childhoods, thought this was inappropriate and on occasions a damaging experience, there were a few notable exceptions. In the following two examples, the central issue of communication about sexual issues was raised yet again. Here being misinformed, in addition to receiving little or no information about the onset of menstruation were appraised as 'harmless' experiences:-

I was told I came from a cabbage patch and it didn't do me any harm.  
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 53 - Nursery School, T.2.)

I was never told about periods and was no worse off for it.  
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 24 - Day Nursery, A.)

Girls lack of preparation for the onset of menstruation was a finding highlighted by Prendergast's (1992) study. She found that over one third of girls interviewed, had not been informed by parents about periods, before the event. More worryingly, one in ten girls reported that they had received no information at all, from any source, prior to their periods. This absence of education and preparation has been a key theme in retrospective accounts of nursery staff.

Conversely, staff who recollected that parents had been open and liberal about sexual issues offered a different kind of perspective. Parents who were reported to be approachable, responsive and honest about this general topic area, were said to
have been a positive influence. These reports have been classed as 'linear' accounts of the development of sexual attitudes because staff aligned themselves closely with the views of their parents:

I think I'm quite open minded about the whole thing and I think possibly that's my upbringing. It's my parents we've always been ... we're a very close family. My mum never sat me down at four or told me the facts of life or anything. She didn't have to do that because we asked questions as we went along and she just answered them truthfully and there was never any problem.

(Nursery Nurse, Aged 27 - Day Nursery, C.)

In the following account a nursery nurse offers another similar explanation. Importantly however, this account suggests that an open dialogue about sexuality during childhood may well counteract and help clarify misinformation about sexuality gathered in playground situations:

My parents were very forward modern thinking people. And my Mother told me the facts of life almost word for word what I've just told you that I told to my boys. These were my Mother's words and they don't date - it's the same principle. And if I didn't understand things I could go to my Mother and ask. And even in later years as I got into Secondary School, if I heard a dirty joke I didn't understand I could go and ask my Mum. And I'd like my boys to be like that with me and, we are; and we do talk very openly about these things. And that's influenced me and I happen to believe, because of my upbringing that that's the right way.

(Nursery Nurse, Age 40 - Day Nursery, G.)

The playground as a source of sexual information, as well as hearing misleading stories, was an issue addressed by other members of nursery staff. Instances of sexual myths circulated in playgrounds have included getting pregnant through kissing or sleeping in the same bed as a boy and becoming pregnant through sitting on toilet seats. The following provides a rather extreme example:

My mother told me nothing, and I heard horror stories if your period blood ran down your leg you would die. I discovered things in the playground.

(Nursery Nurse, Aged 33 - Nursery School, T.S.)
This type of scenario was also recalled by one nursery nurse who located her own experience in the realm of the natural:-

I remember being at school with people who thought they could get pregnant off a toilet seat and they nearly died when they got their periods. It was terrible these poor girls. I don't mean I had constant sessions being told about it. But I was told about it in a very natural way.... no big deal and not shied away from.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 33 - Day Nursery, F.)

While sources of misinformation were attributed to the home (mothers) and playgrounds (peers), by nursery staff, today it has been claimed that children are even more likely to be misinformed about sexuality through their exposure to the mass media². Widespread coverage of subjects such as AIDS, sexual scandals and sexual abuse are held responsible for the modern child's confusion about sexuality (cf. Sex Education Forum; 1994: 55). This, of course, lends weight to the liberal arguments for more comprehensive and extensive sex education programmes in schools.

Although some nursery staff highlighted the fact that they received misinformation about sexuality during their childhood; others stressed positive influences. The experience of having younger brothers and sisters was identified as a helpful source of information about sexuality in young children:-

Being the eldest of a large family and being able to look back because I've got younger brothers and sisters who are fifteen years younger than me. And so I was able to see them grow up. I was never aware of my own sexuality when I was young but I was able to see it in my own brothers and sisters and then when my own children came along.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 33 - Day Nursery, H.)

² One sex education text consistently emphasised the influence of the media on children (e.g. Barnardo's, 1994). In setting the scene for a conference on 'HIV and Sex Education for Primary Children', Marsh (1994:2) accentuated the impact of both the media and peer groups: "At a time when children are bombarded with conflicting sexual messages from the media and peer groups, good quality sex education is about providing the right information, at the right time and in the right way ....". See also The Leader page: The Guardian, 12th August, 1995: 'New Ways to Fund Sex Education'.

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In contrast, having older siblings (especially older sister) was reported to have been an important source of sexual information, particularly regarding sexual changes during puberty. However, the impact of birth order, and family composition on the genesis of attitudes towards sexuality has received relatively meagre attention in scientific discourses about sexuality. Goldman and Goldman's (1982) cross-cultural study, for example, concluded that the optimum conditions for the development of sexual thinking in children was the presence of opposite sex siblings, upholding popular ideologies regarding the desirability of this nuclear and symmetrical form. It is of note that they neglected to include particular kinds of families in their sample (e.g. single child, single parent, and families with more than 3 children).

C) Other Reported Influences on Nursery Staff

So far we have addressed childhood experiences and the intention at this stage is to move on to what could be loosely termed the adult experiences of nursery staff. Specifically, this section will explore the extent to which issues such as the professional training of nursery staff; their work with children and their assessments of other life experiences (e.g. motherhood), were thought to have informed attitudes towards sexuality in young children.

(i) Staff Training, Parenting and Work

In the opening pages of this thesis it was indicated that an important finding of the present study, was that scant attention had been paid to the topic of sexuality in the initial training of nursery staff. While newly qualified staff regularly referred to their basic training when asked about the impact of child abuse, their initial training was rarely identified as an influence on general attitudes towards sexuality. Significantly, there was one sole example, where a member of staff said that her
initial training had been helpful in terms of informing her understanding of childhood masturbation. Owing to the fact that this topic had been covered briefly in her initial training she explained that she now expected to encounter this in nursery children. Clearly the fact that nursery staff said that they had received minimal input on the topic of childhood sexuality has obvious implications for the future training of nursery staff (see Chapter 10).

It is therefore unsurprising that many nursery staff drew on their own narratives of mothering to explain the genesis of their opinions. Being a mother was thought to develop levels of understanding thus enhancing professional skills:-

I think that when you have your own children it arises much more at home and I think that maybe gives you more understanding when you are working with young children in nursery schools.
(Head teacher, Age 33 - Nursery School, T.1.)

In addition nursery staff also highlighted how family size, could influence their views about sexuality in young children. Having a larger than average number of children was regarded as especially beneficial by some nursery staff:-

It's my own experience of having a big family. There are certain things that you learn.
(Teacher, Aged 46 - Nursery School, T.6.)

The idea that mothering was a salient and authentic source of knowledge about sexuality in young children was a view shared by other nursery staff who were not themselves parents. This group of staff were often apologetic and qualified their statements by adding comments such as: 'But I don't have my own children though', drawing attention to what they appeared to regard as a gap in their knowledge. These accounts require to be understood in the context of ideologies of femininity and the centrality of being a mother to feminine identity.
Sometimes nursery staff elaborated further on the impact of mothering. One teacher said that having her own children had informed her opinions about the constitution of 'normal' sexuality in childhood. She thought that other professionals she had come into contact with had unrealistic ideas about 'normal' 'sexual' behaviour in pre-school children, which she explained by their non-parent status. As a result they were thought to misinterpret and overreact to, what she considered everyday occurrences with very young children (e.g. interest in genital differences; lifting garments and showing stomachs to other children and adults etc.).

Similarly one Head of Day nursery made a connection between her experience of having her own children and her expectations regarding manifestations of sexuality in young children. Since her own young child had shown an intense interest in her breasts and often attempted to touch them, she thought this was an acceptable and 'normal' aspect of sexuality in pre-school children. Overall, the experience of parenting was thought to contribute positively to the professional practice of nursery staff and being a mother was viewed as one of the most important and authentic sources of knowledge about children.

Other staff stressed their work experience in nursery settings, highlighting their day to day contact with children. In the following example one nursery nurse emphasised how her professional experience with both nursery children and colleagues had been prime influences on her opinions:

As a kid I wasn’t told much and found out at school and sort of went 'Ugh!' Probably my work has given me the biggest influence because you’ve got to be more open minded as you have to discuss this and a lot of it is coming up in your work. I think that’s influenced me the most - my work with children and colleagues.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 30 - Day Nursery, F.)
Another nursery nurse not only identified her day to day contact with children but stressed her prolonged and intimate contact with day nursery children:

Here you're practically living with the children.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 53 - Day Nursery, E.)

Prolonged contact as a source of knowledge about children was peculiar to the accounts of Day Nursery staff since they spent many hours with the young children in their care. Frequently I was told that a child could be left at the nursery at 8 am and collected at 6pm, when the nursery closed; and many Day Nursery staff explained their preference for this working environment in terms of their intimate and prolonged contact with children. They often made the point that they spent more time with nursery children than the parents of the children did.

Interestingly it has been suggested that it is women's intimate and close contact with very young children, which partly explains the fact that they are less likely to sexually exploit children. Conversely it has been argued that men's distance from sensuous and everyday contact with young children actually furnishes the conditions where they are more likely to misread children's behaviour and sexually assault them (Finklehor, 1989). In relation to the women who participated in this study however, their experience of day to day care of young children (as both mothers and professionals), was reported to be significant sources of knowledge about sexuality in young children.

(ii) Sub Themes - The Question of 'Feelings' - the Body and Sexuality

Finally there have been two important themes that warrant consideration in the closing section to this chapter both of which relate to staff views about how they feel about the body. These are topics which could have been readily included in either of the preceding discussions of child and adult experiences. With regard to
childhood experiences, often staff spontaneously recalled parental attitudes and practices regarding nudity and the open display of bodies. Whether they were permitted to see their mother's naked body; whether undressing was perceived as a private activity, or whether nakedness was regarded as unsuitable television viewing for children were issues raised by nursery staff. But nursery staff, also referred to their current ideas about children being naked in the nursery setting, reflecting differences in opinions as to whether or not they would allow children in their care to paddle naked during the summer. In one nursery school, one staff group discussed how they had disapproved when a child's mother had allowed her daughter to walk home without any knickers. As a result, the issue of clothing and the public and open display of particular areas of the body (especially genitals and bottoms), was a source of contention for some nursery staff. Interestingly attitudes towards nudity have been found to be linked with more general views about sexuality and it has been suggested that such attitudes towards nudity are influenced by social class background (Newson and Newson, 1968; Grocke and Smith, 1995). The overall significance that nursery staff ascribed to the body, fits in well with developments in social sciences, since sociological investigation of the body has become a burgeoning field of enquiry. Scott and Morgan (1993), criticise the mind/body dualism which has characterised much previous discussion of this topic area. Similarly with regard to the present study, perceptions and feelings about the body were interrelated themes in staff narratives about sexuality. The 'feeling' component of sexuality has already been highlighted by other writers since Weeks (1985) maintains that sexuality provides a focus for our most intense and powerful 'feelings' while Massey (1988) stresses both its emotional and physical components. She suggests that influences on sexuality emerge directly from 'feelings and activities related to sex' (Massey, 1988: 40). But what place does the body occupy with regard to 'feelings'? And to what extent are we talking about perception or bodily sensations? The O.E.D captures both the emotional and physical components of 'feelings':-
The faculty or power by which one feels; the 'sense of touch' in the looser acceptation of the term, in which it includes all physical sensibility not referable to the special senses of sight, hearing, taste and smell.

(O.E.D: 132)

In the development of the meaning of this term, a tension is evident in the emphasis placed on the words emotional and organic connotations. It is this 'emotional' and rather diffuse bodily sense which is apparent in staff perspectives.

Staff spontaneously raised the question of feelings in the context of describing their attitudes towards sexuality in young children. In the following example one nursery nurse explains both her willingness and reticence to discuss openly certain topic areas with children through the idea of her own 'feelings':

I had a very sheltered upbringing. There are things that you'll talk about and things you won't. I think if I feel comfortable about talking about it, I'll talk about it. And then if I don't feel comfortable it's a no go area.

(Nursery Nurse, Aged 37 Nursery School, T.7.) my emphasis

'Feeling comfortable' was an issue pinpointed by other nursery staff. In the next extract one nursery nurse lists an impressive range of factors which were thought to influence attitudes towards sexuality in young children, but significantly she emphasised 'feeling comfortable':

It's maybe what you've experienced yourself in childhood, what your parents allowed, it might be different from what someone else's parents allowed, maybe your age, if you're married or single - also the age group of the children you're working with. But I think it's individual - it's what you feel comfortable with.

(Nursery Nurse, Age 26 Day Nursery, B.) my emphasis

But 'feeling comfortable' was strongly connected with the body because it was described as being the transmitter of feelings and attitudes about sexuality to nursery children. If a member of staff did not feel comfortable regarding some aspect of the child's behaviour or curiosity, this was thought to be communicated
to the child through bodily gestures and posture. As a consequence how one felt about one's body was viewed as synonymous with attitudes towards sex:-

It's to do with a personal thing because each persons different and the way they feel about sex, their body and everything and I think it's a really personal thing.
(Head, Aged 33 - Day Nursery, F.) my emphasis

More specifically, inhibitions about one's body were regarded as pivotal to one's sexuality:-

I think a lot of it is to do with the individual some people are very open and outgoing. With close friends I could maybe discuss things but there are some areas that I think are personal things that I want to keep to myself. And I'm not really extrovert. I don't think in for example, like going to the swimming or something and some folk just stand and strip off in the shower I couldn't do that. I just couldn't. That's maybe a thing with me, my awareness of my own body and my own sexuality. I'm maybe a bit embarrassed with that angle.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 32 - Day Nursery, H.) my emphasis

Other nursery staff raised similar issues about the open display of bodies. One 57 year old nursery nurse vividly recalled how her own mother used to undress underneath her dressing gown and she thought that her own father had never seen her mother naked. Similarly a 24 year nursery nurse mentioned that she and her two sisters never undressed openly in front of each other. Attitudes towards sexuality and the body were also connected to religious beliefs by some nursery staff:-

I'm from the older generation where you were told absolutely nothing. You were so ignorant it just wasn't true. I think children should be guided on these things and spoken to. But I think there is a line where you could go over... where you could become permissive about it. There should be a dignity. I'm sorry that's my word for it, there should be a dignity when you are speaking to them about it. We have a permissive society at the moment. In my opinion there is no dignity given to the sexual, you know, act. In the teaching of it I would like to think of building some dignity and some guidelines. Your body should be precious to you. But then it could be partly a Christian background and partly what I have grown up with.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 56 - Day Nursery, G.) my emphasis
The idea that the body should be treated with dignity and respect was a view echoed in other staff accounts. One nursery nurse explained her disapproval at a child's mother who permitted her daughter to walk home without wearing her knickers:-

Some parts of the body you should respect them by covering them.
(Nursery Nurse, Aged 49 - Nursery School, T.6.)

Parallel ideas about respecting and covering parts of the body, especially in relation to women, are central ideas in religious faiths such as Islam (cf. Sarwar, 1994).

Conclusion

Initially this chapter emphasised the flexibility of nursery staff ideas about sexuality in young children. These were shown to be influenced by the age of nursery children, the social context (home or nursery), and the kind of relationships enjoyed with particular children.

In relation to staff explanations of the genesis of their opinions, personal experiences were found to dominate the accounts of nursery staff. Here the term 'personal experiences', was found to span nursery staff's memories of both child and adult experiences. One unifying theme, identified in the perceptions of nursery staff, was that of 'parenting', looked at from two different perspectives. As we have seen staff consistently drew on their own childhood relationships with their parents (mainly mothers), to explain the development of their attitudes towards sexuality and members of staff who were themselves parents, stressed that this had enhanced their understanding of sexuality in young children. This chapter also illustrated how feelings about the body were salient issues in the accounts of nursery staff.
The overall importance nursery staff ascribed to 'personal', rather than 'professional' experiences, are worth bearing in mind when reading the next and final chapter which makes recommendations for the training of nursery staff.
CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRAINING OF NURSERY STAFF

Introduction

This thesis has addressed the ways in which nursery staff accounted for sexuality in young children. This is a sensitive topic because it integrates categories which, as a rule, are separated within our cultural and social life. Asking questions about childhood sexuality undermines, traditional conceptions of the child and assumptions regarding the natural state of childhood. Ideologies of childhood innocence was a central theme in the accounts of nursery staff and one which has provided an underlying link to this thesis.

Hence this study, has contributed to our understanding through its systematic exploration of how a substantial group of individuals (a total of 106 nursery staff), constituted sexuality in very young children. Previously few studies had addressed professionals' views about sexuality in pre-school children (see Chapter 3), and the present study aimed to fill this gap and now provides a solid empirical platform for examining contemporary understandings of children.

Besides reviewing the findings and implications of the study, this concluding chapter will suggest strategies for the training of nursery staff. This issue is crucial, since nursery staff are an important professional group who manage the everyday lives of small children in institutional care. The present study, however, has identified a gap in staff training, so this chapter will address how the findings might be usefully incorporated in the training of nursery staff.
A) The Contribution of the Present Study

The following section will recap on the aims and methods adopted by the present study and summarise the main findings.

(i) Summary of Aims and Methods

- the general aim was to examine the accounts of certain professionals towards sexuality in young children. Nursery staff were selected as a most important professional group, who had day to day contact with very young children.

- two prime objectives were a) to identify what staff regarded as 'sexuality' in the pre-school period, and b) to explore the ideological sources on which they drew, in order to account for sexuality in younger children.

- this was a qualitative and preliminary study and hypothesis testing was not a guiding principle of this particular study.

- two main methods of data collection were used which were a) a period of participant observation in all the 16 pre-school settings sampled and b) semi-structured individual interviews with a total of 106 nursery staff. Observational methods were selected primarily to build up rapport with nursery staff and to understand their working environment; while individual interviews were used in order to elicit in-depth data on children's sexuality.

- establishments were systematically sampled in one major Scottish city. In total, 16 establishments were selected including 8 Day Nurseries and 8 Nursery Schools. Multiple settings were sampled, in order to address issues
such as the social class background of nursery children, since this was found to be an omission of previous pre-school based studies.

(ii) **Brief Summary of the Main Findings**

- 'sexual' behaviour; 'sexual' knowledge, and 'sexual' language were identified as the three main components of childhood sexuality in the accounts of nursery staff. The realm of language was found to be crucial to understanding childhood sexuality, in addition to illuminating the socially constructed differences between adults and young children. 'Sexual' language was found to be the most neglected dimension of sexuality in early childhood.

- the dominant ideological sources on which nursery staff drew, were those relating to childhood innocence and developmental accounts of the young child and childhood. Both ideological sources were found to produce their own particular versions of children's 'sexual' innocence and ignorance.

- nursery staff who worked with babies and toddlers, viewed their sexuality as 'natural' and therefore innocent. Similarly while most pre-school children were regarded as innocent, a minority of 3 to 5 year olds were viewed as behaving in sexually explicit ways. Staff appraisals of what could be termed 'sexual' behaviour were based on their readings of the child's level of intent, moral awareness and dispay of guilt. As a consequence, central to staff assessments of 'sexual' behaviour were their accounts of the child's heightened awareness and motivation.

- the two dominant versions of early childhood sexuality found in the accounts of nursery staff were a) the sexually innocent and natural child,
and b) the sexually knowing adult-child. These polar images of the young child and their sexuality were central to nursery staff's constitutions of childhood sexuality.

- that sexuality in young girls was repressed and rendered invisible in nursery establishments through a) language use with regard to genital naming and reference, and b) staff accounts of masturbation in nursery children and their reported responses to what was described as intense and pleasurable 'sexual' activity in girl children. In contrast, genital play was portrayed as 'normal' and acceptable in male nursery children.

- this preliminary study identified factors which could provide a basis for more detailed and systematic work. For example, findings from the present study indicated that social factors, such as a child's age and social class background, contributed to staff evaluations of children's 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour.

- the majority of nursery staff regarded the topic of childhood sexuality, and their attitudes towards it, in personalised and individual terms. This, as we shall see, has important implications for the training of nursery staff.

We will now consider how the present study's findings add to our comprehension of early childhood and conceptualisations of young children.
(iii) Competencies of Young Children

Findings from the present study are very much in keeping with the growing sociological interest in researching children and reconceptualising childhood (cf. James and Prout, 1990; Qvortrup, 1991; Mayall, 1994). One premise of the current approach to studying children's own perspectives is that they are increasingly regarded as competent social beings. James, illustrates this point, when she describes her approach to studying young children:

I assume that the children with whom I talked were competent social actors and thinkers. In this sense, the heuristic value of their words and ideas, is not seen to be limited by the immaturity of their bodies and minds.

(James, 1993: 102)

Parallel to this positive perception of children, is the growing body of empirical evidence which catalogues the abilities and competencies of children, (e.g. Bluebond-Langner, 1978; Buckingham, 1994). This provides a stark contrast with the orientation of earlier developmental studies, which have been criticised for negative portrayals of children (Walkser, 1986). As a consequence, the traditional, stage based model of understanding children has now been questioned for over-emphasising the abilities of children on the one hand, while underestimating their competencies on the other (cf. Goode, 1986).

In keeping with the view that children are indeed competent social actors, the present study found many instances of children's behaviour, which illustrated the capabilities of young children. Some children, for example, were reported to have absorbed the social conventions which surround the public expression of sexuality during childhood. Children were found to employ a range of strategies to avoid adult intervention, including drawing the house corner curtains, keeping watch and playing in enclosed spaces (e.g. behind bushes, under tables etc.). These reports not only question ideologies of childhood innocence and 'innocent incompetence'
(cf. Archard, 1993), but add to the growing body of empirical data which recognises the resourcefulness of children. These findings however, are particularly illuminating, since they illustrate the competencies of younger children during the period of early childhood.

(iv) Constructions of the Modern Child

In Chapter 1 it was illustrated that historically ideas about children have frequently been characterised by contradictory versions of children and that ideologies of innocent as well as evil children have often co-existed (Skolnick, 1989). According to Coward (1993), children today can be viewed simultaneously as 'angels' or 'little devils'. With regard to conceptions of innocent, young children, there appears to be some continuity and overlap between different historical epochs. Childhood innocence and ideas about the innate 'goodness' of children, inevitably are connected with sentimental perceptions of children. Significantly, this was poignantly and dramatically illustrated in the media reporting, after the tragedy at Dunblane primary, where numerous references were made to the innocence of little angels. Such perspectives on children, provide a stark contrast, with responses to the James Bulger murder case, where the two accused children were demonized.

The present study however has added to our understanding of contemporary childhood, by identifying and elaborating two dominant versions of the young child in the accounts of nursery staff. As one would expect, ideas about innocent young children featured consistently and this is not surprising, since we previously saw that the connection between innocence, and very young (or 'little') children has been a long-standing perception of children. The second competing idea was one of 'knowing' and precocious, adult-children. Drawing on the accounts of nursery staff, we saw how modern developments in the mass media, including
videos and television were held responsible for eroding what was regarded as the natural innocence of young children. Basically children's exposure to popular mass culture was said to have increased the knowledge base of young children; therefore children today were thought of as more knowledgeable and more 'knowing' than in the past (see Chapter 8). Importantly, this vision of the modern child, was found to co-exist with ideas of innocent children and significantly this tension was identified in historical constitutions of the child's nature. Indeed it has been emphasised throughout, that views about children have been consistently characterised by a constant interplay between good and bad (Ennew, 1986).

Findings from the present study reflect contemporary debates about the diverse nature of contemporary childhood (cf. Jenks, 1996). On the basis of systematic sampling procedures, the present study was able to address how nursery staff assessed and explained a range of social circumstances of children. In Chapter 6, for example, we saw how nursery staff linked children's levels of 'sexual' knowledge with factors such as their social class and religious backgrounds. Now, it is explicitly recognised that it is necessary to resist constructions of the homogeneous and one dimensional child, most noticeable in Western ideologies of childhood (Ennew and Milne, 1989; Holland, 1992).

Now we will address the ways in which findings of the present study contributes to our more specific understanding of childhood sexualities. Since one prime aim of this study was to identify what constituted sexuality in early childhood, we will embark by summarising the study's findings.
(v) Locating Childhood Sexuality

The present study found that sexuality in early childhood, as reported by nursery staff, comprised of three main dimensions: 'sexual' behaviour, 'sexual' knowledge, and 'sexual' language in young children.

In relation to what staff described as 'sexual behaviour', the fact that young children were reported to play exploratory games of mummies and daddies, touch their genitals and masturbate, does not contribute anything specifically new to our knowledge of childhood sexuality. Other studies which have focused the views of adults have produced similar accounts of young children. However, findings relating to the ways in which staff distinguished between what could be termed 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour, does add considerably to our understanding of childhood sexuality. These particular findings, show how staff separated a type of behaviour seen as natural and innocent, from an explicitly sexualised kind regarded as 'worrying' and requiring intervention by nursery staff. How staff discriminated between the 'sexual' (unacceptable) and 'non-sexual' (acceptable and natural), has become an increasingly relevant issue in the current climate of concern regarding the sexual abuse of children (see next section).

Further findings with regard to the topic of 'sexual behaviour' do prompt important questions about the sexual socialisation of young children in institutional care and the construction of feminine and masculine sexualities during early childhood. For example, masturbation in female children was either pathologised or rendered invisible in the accounts of nursery staff because both 'excessive masturbation' and lack of genital interest was attributed, in the main, to girls children in nursery settings. In contrast, masturbation and genital exploration was accepted as 'normal' and permissible in male nursery children (see Chapter 5). Findings from this preliminary study however, indicated that our knowledge of the
impact of the child's gender, on the attitudes of adults towards masturbation during childhood, is inadequately understood and requires further systematic investigation. Clearly such work would contribute to our comprehension of the 'sexual' socialisation of children and the construction of feminine and masculine identities; a central and very important concern within contemporary sociology. What the present study has highlighted, is that it is important to build on these preliminary findings and conduct a more detailed analyses.

Findings relating to 'sexual knowledge' in young children, were particularly illuminating with regard to the ideological sources and social divisions on which staff drew, in order to account for sexuality in younger children. While staff depended on developmental models to locate and explain normative levels of 'sexual' knowledge in early childhood, they turned to social factors to account for atypical 'sexual' knowledge in young children. Typically the working class child was regarded as 'streetwise', and one who gleaned sexual information from interaction with peers and older children. Whereas, for the middle-class child, the gaining of sexual information was thought to be adult led. Findings from this aspect of sexuality in early childhood, are especially relevant to policy, and staff training, which will be discussed in Section B.

The present study stressed the centrality of 'sexual' language for our understanding of early childhood sexualities. Importantly, it showed how 'childish' and 'babyish' forms of language were linked with more acceptable modes of communicating with young children. This finding also has implications for understanding the distance, which has been socially constructed between adults and children. As Ennew (1986) points out this process of separation is expressed in the artefacts of childhood; for example, in specialist books and toys deemed necessary for children, but she also identifies the potential of language to accentuate this social division. A specific kind of 'childish' language was found to
Previously it was argued that, a weakness in sociological and psychological accounts of childhood sexuality was that they did not examine young children in their own right and tended to overgeneralise sexuality in young children (see Chapter 3 and 4). One central implication of this thesis is that it is necessary to move towards an explanation of childhood sexuality, which incorporates the notion of diversity. This means that, commensurate with our understanding of the

be especially relevant to the period of early childhood because specialist names (i.e. for intimate bodily parts or functions), rhymes, and songs, are all integral to the social institution of early childhood. Suitably 'childish' terms for genital areas, found by the present study to be commonly used, distanced the knowing world of adult sexuality from the innocent world of young children. Similarly this division, is evident in more formal and academic descriptions of sexuality in younger children. Terms such as 'genital play'; 'sex play' and 'explorative play', are terms used by this study and other studies, to locate childhood sexuality away from the adult world.

Language use and silences were found to have crucial implications for the repression and control of female sexuality. Data presented in Chapter 7, demonstrated how genital reference was found to be much more common and readily accepted in boys while this was not the case for girls. Staff practices such as non-specific naming for girls (e.g. use of the terms 'bottom' and 'front bottom), and reports of the absence of reference terms for girls suggested that an open and active sexuality was discouraged in young girls. This very important finding adds considerably to our understanding of the social construction of gendered sexualities at an early stage of children's 'sexual' socialisation. In Chapter 4, it was argued, that the topic of early childhood sexuality remained on the margins of mainstream debates about 'sexualities' but findings from the present study highlights the potential of studying the period of early childhood.

Previously it was argued that, a weakness in sociological and psychological accounts of childhood sexuality was that they did not examine young children in their own right and tended to overgeneralise sexuality in young children (see Chapter 3 and 4). One central implication of this thesis is that it is necessary to move towards an explanation of childhood sexuality, which incorporates the notion of diversity. This means that, commensurate with our understanding of the
construction of adult sexualities, we now need to conceptualise 'childhood sexuality' in terms of 'sexualities' in younger children. Importantly this thesis provided a base for identifying, constitutions of heterogeneous sexualities in early childhood. Chapter 5, for example, identified two main accounts: an 'innocent' form of curiosity, and a 'sexually knowing' sexuality in early childhood. However, Chapter 7 illustrated how stereotypical ideas regarding feminine sexuality (passive and latent), and masculine sexuality (active and vigorous) were central to the accounts of nursery staff.

(vii) Understanding the Sexual Abuse of Young Children

Scientific discourses regarding the sexual abuse of young children have been dominated by developmental and staged-based versions of childhood (cf. MacFarlane, 1986; Glaser and Frosh, 1988; Smith, 1995). Consistently identification of child sexual abuse is located in 'developmental delays' in the young child, set against a backdrop of 'normalised' and generalised development in early childhood (cf. Waterman, 1986). In this context, 'sexual' behaviour is pathologised because children's sexuality is discussed solely in terms of symptomatic behaviour in childhood and emphasis is placed on the child's body as an observable site of detection.

Findings from the present study shift attention away from the child's body and symbolic behaviour, to adult assumptions about what they perceive as worrying behaviour in young children. This focus is especially relevant to the period of early childhood, since detection of sexual abuse in very young children is more inclined to be dependent on adult appraisals. This study found that nursery staff's discriminations of a 'sexual' and 'non-sexual' behaviour were, to some extent, context bound. An analysis of staff accounts, revealed that the social environments in which they engaged with young children, impacted on their
evaluations. Initially professionals maintained that the sexual abuse of children constituted a classless phenomenon (cf. Finkelhor, 1989). But findings from the present study suggest that it's detection may be influenced by nursery staff's expectations regarding the different social worlds of working class and middle class children. We saw how the working class child was considered to be routinely exposed to a blatant and obvious adult sexuality, while the middle class child was thought to receive much more adult-led, discussion based information. Importantly, this study has suggested how professional expectations regarding the social class background of children, fed into their assessments. For instance the occupational status of parents; their particular parenting style (e.g. liberal, traditional working class); their values and area of residence, consistently featured in staff evaluations. This indicates that it is necessary to re-think checklists which were originally compiled in order to alert professionals to the sexual abuse of young children because they uncritically accept the child's body and demeanour as an 'objective' site of detection. The child as the unit and sole focus of investigation, has been an important criticism of developmental psychology (Burman, 1994).

B) Policy, Practice and the Development of Staff Training

A general aim of this final section is to respond to findings of this study by exploring: - a) implications for policy and practice and, b) recommendations for the training of nursery staff.

(i) The Scope of Educational Responsibility

It follows from the findings presented in Chapter 5, that it is necessary to develop an integrated and co-ordinated policy with regard to sex education in the pre-school sector, by providing coherent guidelines for nursery staff. This is necessary since
Many staff reported that they did in fact introduce themes about babies in nursery settings and that books about the origins of babies were available for children in playroom situations. But it would be misguided to link sex education, solely with the origins of babies. Current liberal and emancipatory discourses about the sex education of children, emphasise a broad based approach because topics such as relationships, families, and education for healthy living, are all now regarded as fundamental to integrated programmes for schools (cf. Landeryou, 1993; Sex Education Forum, 1994). In relation to the present study, it was found that many establishments, routinely covered topics such as diet and dental hygiene with young children.

While it would appear that some preliminary and elementary forms of 'sex/health education' are currently being implemented in pre-school settings, this area remains unco-ordinated in the sense that guidelines are not presently available for nursery staff. The introduction of the 'National Curriculum' in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, underlines the necessity to address the parameters of sex education specifically in regard to pre-school children.

Inevitably a topic which has been constructed as highly 'personal', would require the exploration of the views of both nursery staff and parents. Discussing sex information with young children was shown to be problematic for staff since embarrassment and uncertainty on how to proceed, were common themes identified in staff accounts. Such responses however were not peculiar to nursery staff because these themes surface in parental reports and in child care advice aimed at parents. This demonstrates that it is necessary to respond constructively to the concerns expressed by nursery staff, by developing guidelines which clarify the professional role of nursery staff:-
1) **Do nursery staff have an explicit remit with regard to sex/health education of young children in nursery settings?**

2) **If so what are the boundaries of their professional role?**

Developing guidelines would ideally involve an ongoing dialogue with nursery staff, parents and health education specialists. Primarily, staff require guidelines which spell out 'approved staff practice'. Staff require guidelines on dealing with a wide range of issues, some of which would include how best to respond to the 'sexual' questions of young children and tackling what might be termed 'explicit' behaviour with the parents of nursery children. The following will suggest areas which require both consideration and clarification:

a) **What sort of topics can staff realistically tackle and confidently address with young children?**

The clarification of this area is inevitably dependant on the development of policy in regard to 'Sex/health Education in Pre-school Establishments'.

b) **What kinds of resources and teaching aids are available?**

This is an area which requires further input and co-ordination. There is a need to develop a comprehensive package which gives staff information about the availability of teaching aids and accompanying guidelines which advises on their use and their value within the existing curriculum. Could Babbette Cole's (1995) 'Mummy Laid an Egg', which is aimed at younger children be recommended as a resource for use in pre-school settings. What other kind of books, jigsaws and materials are available for young children? Integration of staff views, which would include their practical experiences of various teaching aids, could be made a helpful component of a resource pack. Moreover, it would be essential, where appropriate
to seek out parental views on this topic area and incorporate these in a training pack. Findings from the present study suggest that it is necessary to be sensitive to issues such as the social class and religious background of nursery children.

c) What kinds of language use are recommended at an organisational level?

This is an important question, since a formal policy decision on this matter could enhance continuity between the curriculum in pre-school settings and the primary sector. Today, it is advised that young children should have access to official and formal terminology so that they can participate competently in sex education programmes (Landeryou, 1993). Findings from the present study however, suggest that what was considered appropriate terminology by nursery staff, was influenced by the social class background of nursery children as well as their gender (see Chapter 7). On occasions, staff attributed their discomfort with particular language styles, with their own personal views. In the following a health education specialist offers his own viewpoint:

We perhaps do our children a disservice by using colloquial expressions for bodily parts, referring as we do to tails, naughty bits and as one teacher said, telling his daughter to dry her 'pussy' when getting out of the bath. At our house a pussy is a ginger cat that purrs loudly when stroked!
(Uffindall, 1994: 52)

While this opinion may reflect a 'politically correct', and therefore constraining viewpoint (cf. Jenks, 1996) this is at odds with the findings of the present study, especially those considered in Chapter 7. Here acceptable language styles for young children were shown to be intimately bound up with deeply held beliefs about the innocence and vulnerability of young children. Given the sensitivity of this topic area, it would be impossible to prescribe how individual staff should respond to children. Yet it would be helpful if staff were advised, as to whether
or not it was appropriate for them, to make nursery children aware of biological terms ('penis', 'vagina', 'womb', etc.). This is relevant because some staff expressed uncertainty about this aspect of interaction with young children in their care.

Other research highlights this topic area. Goldman and Goldman (1982), for example, suggest that adults' use of informal and vague terms with children, can in fact impede their 'sexual' thinking. Similarly an Open University (1979) text, which focuses on the parenting of pre-school children, recommends the use of biological styles and suggests that young children should be informed about the important role of 'wombs' in the procreative process. This latter point is especially relevant, considering findings which were presented in Chapter 7 showed how the gender of nursery children, influenced staff views about acceptable styles.

d) What is appropriate staff practice in relation to staff responses to young children's 'sexual' behaviour (i.e. masturbation, interest in genital differences, sex and explorative type play)?

Given that nursery staff have prolonged and intimate contact with very young children, this is a most relevant question. But again prescriptions about how staff should respond to 'sexual' behaviour in children is a misguided approach towards a topic which was regarded as a personal issue by the majority of nursery staff (see Chapter 9).

In order to address staff awareness regarding the impact that their responses could have on children it is necessary to acknowledge the complex range of influences on their opinions towards sexuality (cf. Massey, 1988). Indeed Chapter 9 illustrated how childhood experiences, and staff's own experiences of parenting were cited as the most important influences on staff attitudes towards sexuality. One way in
which this finding could be usefully developed into training for nursery staff, would be by using the childhood memories and reflections of nursery staff, as a basis for the exploration of the impact of adult carers on children. In fact, this reflexive and experiential approach is an integral feature of current thinking regarding training for the sex education specialists (Massey, 1988; Landeryou, 1993).

The influence of adults on young children could be constructively explored with staff, by integrating the question of staff’s control over young children into the broad based in-service training of nursery staff. One particular finding is instructive in this regard. ‘Distraction’ (i.e. ‘let’s go and tidy up the book corner’ type reaction), was reported as the most popular staff response to sexual behaviour thought to require intervention since they indicated that they did not verbally refer to the offending activity. Interestingly, non verbal elements were highlighted in staff discriminations of ‘sexual’ behaviour, because some staff highlighted the child’s ‘guilty looks’ and facial expressions, in their accounts of ‘sexual’ behaviour in young children (see Chapter 5). This indicates that a broad based topic such as non verbal communication with children, could provide one broad framework where staff could be encouraged to consider how their own responses may be viewed by the child.

A significant and highly relevant finding was that during their initial training, staff said that very little attention was given to the subject matter of sexuality in young children. Lack of confidence in dealing with ‘sexual’ and ‘acting out’ behaviour was an issue raised consistently by nursery staff. One nursery nurse, for example, said she ‘wasn’t qualified enough’ to talk competently with a young child about his masturbatory activities. Uncertainty regarding how to handle ‘sexual’ behaviour in nursery children, as well as staff anxieties about instilling ‘guilty feelings’ in children were recurring themes; which could be effectively addressed in the
training of nursery staff. On the few occasions when staff mentioned that issues such as childhood masturbation, had been covered in their initial training, this was regarded as helpful and instructive by individual staff.

Some staff however, identified that there were no official guidelines available which outlined 'normal', sexual development in young children. This, as was found, led them to rely heavily on what they regarded as their own personal views. Guidelines which were readily available for staff, concentrated specifically on the sexual abuse of children; thus alerting staff to what was officially deemed 'worrying' sexualised behaviour in children. This indicates that it is necessary to provide some kind of baseline information for nursery staff.

This thesis has argued that the notion of 'normal' sexuality in childhood is highly problematic and that childhood sexuality requires to be understood in it's social, cultural and historical context. Similarly it has been maintained that the emergence of child sexual abuse in the 1980s, has had a profound impact on thinking about childhood sexuality; producing it's own version of what constitutes 'normal', and 'abnormal', sexuality in young children.

Another possible way of tackling the question of baseline information for nursery staff, could be developed through addressing the question of diverse social experiences of nursery children. During fieldwork an experienced nursery nurse, referred to the fact that her own staff, had met with another group of colleagues who worked in a area of socio-economic deprivation. Comparing her own experience of working in an relatively affluent area (Type 2 Nursery School), with the accounts of this other group she commented that she inhabited 'a completely different world', in her current establishment. This study has similarly documented, the contrasting work experiences described by nursery staff. Thus,
collaborative discussions involving these diverse staff members could yield fruitful information for all nursery staff.

**Conclusion**

This concluding chapter has summarised the main findings of this preliminary study of sexuality in young children and considered the implications of findings for the future training of nursery staff. This was a particularly challenging area of investigation because sexuality and especially early childhood sexuality, is commonly construed as irrelevant to the social worlds and experiences of very young children. Ideas about innocent young children remain powerful and dominant ideologies of childhood and these were found to permeate the accounts of nursery staff. Central to constitutions of early childhood sexualities were notions of childhood innocence, and the 'need' to protect children from corrupt and inappropriate forms of 'sexual' knowledge.

One crucial implication of the present study related to the training of nursery staff and this thesis argued that it was necessary, at least, to acknowledge the topic of childhood sexuality in the basic training of staff. Today this is especially relevant considering current concerns expressed regarding the sexual abuse of children. Indeed, as this thesis has argued, the emergence of child sexual abuse as a major social issue has, in effect, pathologised modern understandings of childhood sexuality. This underlines the necessity to tackle the topic of childhood sexuality with groups of professionals who care for and spend considerable amounts of time with young children.


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APPENDIX

Semi-structured Interview Schedule Used with Nursery Staff

1) Is there any behaviour, in the young children that you work with, that you would describe as sexual in any way?

2) Are there any places/times of the day that children are more likely to behave in a sexual way?

3) How interested do you find young children in where babies come from?

4) Do you think there in anything that they shouldn't know about?

5) Do you have dolls with genitals in the nursery?

6) Have you got any views about having them in the nursery?

7) What kinds of names do children use for their genitals?

8) How would you describe your own views towards this topic area?

9) Have you got any ideas about what has influenced your opinions?

10) Do you think there have been any changes in attitudes towards young children's sexuality?

11) Has the increased awareness of child abuse had any influence on your work with young children?

12) Where has your own awareness come from?