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Introduction

All reflection sets out from the problematic and confused.

—Dewey, *Experience and Nature*

This text is an investigation of the lived experiences of infants and toddlers in day-care centers, specifically as these experiences are problematic with regard to power and emotion in everyday interactions.¹ This project is also a philosophical exploration of the meanings of emotionally responsive, empowering child care in group settings. In the process of setting forth an account of problematic experience, and in imagining more positive experience, multiple theoretical perspectives—interpretive, interactionist, critical, feminist, and postmodern—have been engaged. In this chapter I elaborate the focus on problematic experience and relations of power and emotion, state the assumptions guiding the study, present information regarding the specifics of data collection, and provide a critique of the current research on infant-toddler day care.

PROBLEMATIC EXPERIENCE, POWER, AND EMOTION

The set of activities examined herein are those minor epiphanic experiences for children in the care of adults who manage their daily activities and routines. *Problematic experience* is understood in contrast to the ready-to-hand or taken-for-granted realm of experience described by Heidegger (1927/1962), in which there are no ruptures in the flow of practical activity and experience.² Following Denzin (1989a) by epiphanic or problematic experience I refer to those moments in the lives of children and their caregivers which may (or may not) seem insignificant in themselves and their temporality, but which may be symbolically representative of major tensions, conflicts, or ruptures in their relationships, and which momentarily and cumulatively profoundly affect the meanings children give to themselves and their present and later experiences.

I focus particularly on problematic relations of power within the day care center. "Power is force or interpersonal dominance actualized in human relationships through manipulation and control" (Denzin, 1989a, p. 29); it is the imposition of one's will on the behavior of others, even against their will (Weber, 1962). Power is embedded in the microrelations of everyday life (Foucault, 1980), present in the daily routines and the emotional interactions between the children and their caregivers. Following Foucault, I study power not necessarily at the level of conscious intention or decision, but at the level of everyday practices, "where it installs itself and produces real effects" (1980, p. 97).

Emotion is integral to the relations of power and the experience of being powerful or powerless (Denzin, 1989a), and is therefore also a particular focus of the study. Moreover, children's emotional socialization is intricately tied to the emergence of their social selves (Gordon, 1985). Following Denzin (1984), emotions are understood as persons' self-feelings, experienced bodily, consciously, and in persons' social worlds.³ Caregivers are significant emotional associates in children's lives, defining the "emotional culture" (Gordon, 1989a, 1989b) in and from which they develop their understandings about themselves, others, and their worlds.

The growing number of infants and toddlers in day care centers and the lack of research addressing their lived experiences point to the importance of this study. The most dramatic growth in the child day-care population has been among our youngest children—infants and toddlers, those children under three years of age.⁴ More than half of all new mothers return to work before their children's first birthday (Child Care Action Campaign, 1988). One estimate is that more than five million infants and toddlers under the age of three have mothers working outside the home (Friedman, 1990). Most of these young children are cared for in family day care homes, but an increasing number are being enrolled in center-based group care programs (Hofferth & Phillips, 1987; Neugebauer, 1989).⁵ It is the plight of these children that I address in this text.⁶

ASSUMPTIONS

This inquiry is situated within my personal experiences and convictions. In particular, two major assumptions guide my approach to this investigation. The first is that a primary goal of child rearing is to empower children by responding to their needs

for attention and emotional security; by supporting their developing capacities to think, communicate, and act competently; and by providing opportunities for them to act autonomously, to make choices, and to be self-directed. The process of empowerment, I contend, begins in infancy.

While autonomy has long been a developmental goal in our culture (at least theoretically), we have constructed definitions of autonomy which emphasize self-reliance and separateness of self from others (Gilligan, 1988; Kagan, Kearsley, & Zelazo, 1980). My concern for autonomy does not preclude an equal concern for *connectedness*, or social and emotional intimacy. "A child's sense of self develops within a social context; autonomy grows out of attachment. . . . Autonomy and attachment have a figure-ground relationship—together they make up the gestalt of the complete adult" (Shanok, 1990, p. 3).

My second major assumption is that young children's daily experiences are as important as the outcomes of these experiences, thus the necessity of looking at their experience *as it is lived*. I am concerned that the necessary and legitimate attention to what we want children to *become* has taken disproportionate precedence over attention to who they are *now* and the *present quality* of their lived experience, the relationship of experience to future development and competencies notwithstanding.⁷ In the words of Clarke-Stewart (1977), I am concerned that children have a "happy childhood . . . a time free from pressures and stress, a time for children to be themselves, find themselves, and express themselves" (p. 83). As Dewey (1900/1956) wrote,

Life is the great thing after all; the life of the child at its time and in its measure no less than the life of the adult. Strange it would be indeed, if intelligent and serious attention to what the child *now* needs and is capable of in the way of a rich, valuable, and expanded life should somehow conflict with the needs and possibilities of later, adult life. (p. 60)

METHODOLOGICAL SPECIFICS

We comprehend only part of what we see. . . .

—Packer, *Interpretive Research and Social Development
in Developmental Psychology*

My immersion into the worlds of the infants and toddlers I discuss here has consisted of five to ten hours a week over the

past seven years observing in twelve infant and toddler classrooms in six community licensed day care centers.⁸ These centers represent a range of program types: church-based nonprofit, for-profit chains, corporate sponsored, and proprietary.⁹ Four of these centers accept infants at six weeks of age, the other two between fifteen and twenty-four months. All are open for a ten- to twelve-hour day. All but one of these centers have a local, “word-of-mouth” reputation for being the “best.” Both the university and the two-year community college place students in these centers for practicum experiences.

I observed in these programs as I supervised practicum students. In addition to my own observations, a considerable number of field notes were recorded by practicum and independent study students enrolled in the university’s child care training program. Observations occurred at various times in the day, from children’s arrival through departure, in an attempt to get an overview of the entire day. Caregivers and students usually knew in advance when to expect me.¹⁰

My presence in these rooms ranged from minimal—unobtrusive observation—to participatory. The degree of my involvement varied with my assessment of the caregivers’ comfortableness; I tried to be sensitive to caregivers’ feelings and the demands of their work. Participatory involvement in these classrooms included having conversations with caregivers, talking and playing with the children, holding and comforting crying babies, intervening for safety reasons, and helping out in whatever ways I could when situations became hectic, as they often do in infant group care.

The field notes herein represent repeatedly observed situations, within and across all these centers over the years, and provide the foundation for my interpretations and understandings. By their presentation I invite the reader to see, hear, and experience what my students and I have seen, heard and experienced. In the tradition of Coles (1967) and Polakow (1992), I often have drawn composite pictures, combining two or three similar incidents in order to emphasize and highlight the issues for the reader. I freely admit to the “poetizing” activity and evocative intent of interpretive phenomenological or ethnographic research (Clifford, 1986; Manen, 1984, 1990). In this process, I have attempted to be faithful to the words and gestures of those observed, at the same time noting that the writing of field notes is a corruption; something is “lost when a cultural world is textualized” (Clifford,

1986, p. 119). (See the Appendix regarding the credibility of interpretive accounts.)

Caregivers were aware of my research goals to varying degrees. My university supervisory role allowed for legitimate relations with these programs separate from any specific research purpose. I was there to observe my students, but the activities of the entire classroom were available to me as an integral part of those observations. I did, however, share my research goals with some programs (and parents) in some general terms, both written and verbal. But until the last few years I was unaware of my actual intentions and purposes beyond any general sense of wanting to understand children's daily experiences; my focus has been an emerging project.

RESEARCH ON INFANT DAY CARE

The following commentary on the prevailing literature on infant day care is provided to contextualize the intent and purpose of this text. This review provides a background for the reader unfamiliar with the research literature and points to the need to address the issues I undertake in this project related to power and emotion in daily interactions.

Until recently, researchers who studied infant day care over the past twenty years generally concurred that "day care, when responsibly and conscientiously implemented, does not seem to have hidden psychological dangers" (Kagan, Kearsley, & Zelazo, 1980, pp. 261–62). The following excerpts provide some examples of the conclusions generally reached in these reviews.¹¹

In conclusion, research to date has revealed few significant differences between infants and toddlers cared for in group day care and those reared most exclusively by their mothers. (Kilmer, 1979, p. 112)

With respect to emotional development, available evidence generally fails to support the notion that supplementary child care negatively affects the child. (Belsky, Steinberg, & Walker, 1982, p. 98)

Of central concern in most of these studies was the "effect" of substitute care on the mother-child relationship. Long-standing

cultural attitudes advocating exclusive maternal child rearing have been reinforced by the literature of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1964, 1970, 1973, 1979; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973). This theoretical perspective holds that attachment to a primary caregiver, the mother, is deemed essential for healthy psychological development in the early years, as well as children's later competence and social relationships. "An attachment is an affectional tie that one person forms to another person, binding them together in space and enduring over time" (Ainsworth, 1973, p. 1).

Attachment theory draws from ethology, evolutionary theory, psychoanalysis, and Piagetian developmental psychology, and was inspired by observations of institutionalized orphans who withered away and died in the absence of physical handling and loving attention (Karen, 1990). Built on studies of nonworking, middle-class mothers, attachment theory has influenced the focus of much of the infant day care research. While a full discussion of the merits of attachment theory are beyond the focus of this chapter,¹² some comments can be made here which are relevant to the approach to and limitations of the research on infant-toddler day care.

The primary question in most of this research has been the effect on attachment of a child's extended separation from his or her mother. In studying mother-child attachment researchers predominantly have employed the "Strange Situation," a twenty-one-minute laboratory procedure developed by Ainsworth which

involves subjecting the young child to increasing levels of stress by repeatedly separating him or her from his or her mother and introducing him or her to a strange adult. The assumption underlying this experimental situation is that the child's approach-avoidance responses to mother and stranger, and willingness to explore the unfamiliar environment, index the quality of the infant-mother attachment bond. (Belsky, Steinberg, & Walker, 1982, p. 88)

Based on their performance, children are generally classified as securely or insecurely attached to their mothers, and the patterns revealed in this procedure are believed to be predictive of later social-emotional development. Display of anxiety in the young child is believed to reflect something amiss in the mother-infant bond (Kagan, 1979). This highly contrived laboratory procedure has dominated infant day care research—indeed, without the Strange Situation there would be hardly any research at all in

this area. Use of the Strange Situation persists despite doubts expressed about its

curious procedures involving mother, caretakers and strangers not only going in and out of rooms every minute for reasons quite obscure to the child but also not initiating interactions in the way they might usually do (Rutter, 1981, p. 160).

Not only is the assessment validity of these procedures questioned by some, but their predictive value, that is, the assumption that this early mother-child relationship determines later relationships, is also controversial (Kagan, 1984, 1987; Lewis, 1987). Questioning the theoretical assumptions of attachment theory, particularly those related to prediction versus description, Thompson (1987) pointed out that “a secure or insecure attachment in infancy, by itself, does not lead inevitably to certain psychosocial outcomes in children; it is the ongoing quality and consistency of care which is important” (p. 19; see also Thompson, 1988).

These issues notwithstanding, attachment theory continues to be the primary influence on infant day care research. And until recently, “the consensus among reviewers has been that day care does not unduly affect the child’s attachment to the mother” (Belsky, 1988, p. 250). But in 1986 Jay Belsky challenged his own and others’ previous conclusions with the publication of his article: “Infant Day Care: A Cause for Concern?” Belsky’s early reviews of research on infant day care “found little if any evidence of detrimental effects of nonmaternal child care on infant development,” especially in “model, university-based, research-oriented programs” (1986, p. 3) in which most of this early research was conducted. But upon reconsidering the evidence, Belsky (1986) reversed his earlier position, concluding that entry into care in the first year of life, for more than twenty hours a week, is a “risk factor”

for the development of insecure-avoidant attachments in infancy and heightened aggressiveness, noncompliance, and withdrawal in the preschool and early school years. (p. 7)

Belsky’s 1986 article sparked a debate among scholars and researchers which has taken place mainly in the journals *Zero to Three* (1987, 7 [3]) and the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (1988, 3 [3 & 4]), although it also has appeared in the popular press—magazines such as *Parents*, *The Atlantic*, *Newsweek*, and

Time (Galinsky & Phillips, 1988; Shell, 1988; Wallis, 1987; Wingert & Kantrowitz, 1990), as well as practitioner-oriented professional journals such as *Young Children* and the *Child Care Information Exchange* (Howes, 1989; Phillips, 1987a; see also Belsky, 1989). This debate has focused on whether infants in day care are “at risk” for *later* social and emotional development.¹³

Belsky’s critics for the most part take issue with his “selective” reading and interpretation of the available evidence. While not all question the validity of the Strange Situation, Belsky’s critics question his interpretation of the meaning of children’s behaviors in the Strange Situation. They suggest that children’s personal histories and individual differences were overlooked, and that day-care children, used to daily separations and reunions, perceive the events in the lab differently, thus researchers ought not to interpret their Strange Situation behavior the same as for other (home-reared) infants. Critics also admonish Belsky for his premature conclusion, preferring to say “we still don’t know” the effects of early day-care experience (Thompson, 1987, p. 20) and that the evidence is “complex and contradictory” warranting a “far more cautious and restricted conclusion” (Phillips, McCartney, Scarr, & Howes, 1987, pp. 19–20).¹⁴

In the following discussion, I raise three interrelated issues which have been minimally addressed in the infant day care controversy, and which point to the need for and intent of this project. These issues include the disproportionate focus on the mother-child relationship, the limited conception of emotional development, and the inadequate attention to the ongoing, daily experiences of infants and toddlers. All of these issues reflect the ideological nature of the day-care debate.

Focus on the Mother-Child Bond

Historical and contemporary attitudes toward women’s roles have influenced not only the history and evolution of child care but the research focus of scholars caught in the ideological web of our society. Child care poses not only a challenge to our views about children, but what is suitable for women (McCartney & Phillips, 1988). Continuing a tradition that began with Locke, Rousseau, and Jefferson, and drawing support from psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory has made the mother the central experience and influence in a child’s development, implicitly advocating a stay-at-home role for mothers (Karen, 1990). Re-

search stressing the importance of the mother-child bond for all subsequent development drew upon observations of children in a particular historical period when only (primarily) mothers cared for children, thus leading to *normative* prescriptions that mothers are the most appropriate caregivers (Grubb & Lazerson, 1982). A repeated theme has been that babies require their mother's exclusive care (see, for example, White, 1981). Consider the following comments:

No professional, however well-trained, will know a particular baby as well as a mother will know the infant she has cared for. And any professional, no matter how skillful, will be strange to a baby who from birth has been banking information . . . emanating mostly from its mother. (Glickman & Springer, 1978, p. 113)

Consequently, the overwhelming concern in the day care research to date has been the effects of disrupting the mother-child bond, as mothers go to work outside the home. This is not a question asked when the father goes to work. While mothers are deemed essential to child rearing, a common belief is that "a good job can be done without a father in the home" (White & Watts, 1973, p. 242). Moreover, as Phillips (1987a) pointed out, concern for the mother-child relationship has seldom been an issue in all the years working-class women have held jobs, and upper-class women have traditionally hired help with child rearing, raising generations of children with the assistance of child caregivers. But as the number of middle-class working mothers has increased, who themselves were raised by at-home mothers, supplementary or substitute child care has become more of a public issue in the ideological debate over the role of women in our society.

McCartney and Phillips (1988) highlighted the ideological nature of the day care debate as it is tied to historical and societal conceptions of women, mothers, and families. They point out that, until recently, in our society, "any role for women other than motherhood has been portrayed as deviant" (p. 157). Consequently, "child care services are rarely portrayed as supportive and complementary to the family, unless accompanied by paternalistic motives to rectify the effects of deprivation" (p. 158) or maternal inadequacy.

The social and political ideology of motherhood is clearly reflected in the scientific literature in mother-child attachment theory and its huge role in child care research (McCartney &

Philips, 1988). Attachment theory asserts that children's emotional development depends on mothering. As a consequence, the study of child rearing has focused almost exclusively on the mother-child relationship; "shared childrearing [as in day care] is discussed within the context of *maladjustment*, for example, whether day care leads to attachment insecurity" (McCartney & Phillips, 1988, p. 164, italics added). Although attachment theorists may recognize that infants are capable of multiple attachments, research demonstrating and supporting this view is rarely done, revealing a consistent bias focused on the mother (Lewis, 1987).

This overemphasis on the mother is clear in the overwhelming use of the Strange Situation, which has rarely engaged the participation of the father (and never in the evaluation of day care, to my knowledge). With few exceptions (e.g., Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987; L. Jones, 1985; Lamb, 1976) the father's emotional relationship with his child generally has been overlooked; "child care is never discussed in the context of paternal deprivation" (McCartney & Phillips, 1988, p. 158). The mother is, once again, held solely accountable for her child's development.¹⁵

The specific interest in the developmental consequences of day care masks an ideological struggle, as rhetoric is couched in a language of concern for children but places this concern in a context that focuses on *maternal* responsibilities. The child care debate becomes a battleground that pits mothers against their children. Attachment theory and cultural values have shaped concerns in terms of the effects of more and more women working outside the home, as opposed to the nature and quality of children's experiences regardless of setting. For example, the literature repeatedly refers to the possible developmental outcomes of *maternal employment* (e.g., Benn, 1986; Hoffman, 1984; Lamb, 1982; Rubenstein, 1985; Weinraub, Jaeger, & Hoffman, 1988) or the "*detrimental effects of nonmaternal child care*" (Belsky, 1986, p. 63, italics added). This is almost always the phrasing, as opposed to a view that seeks to explore the quality of "extrafamilial" or "supplementary" group care, terms which suggest a different research focus. As Patricia Smith (1990) wrote, the phrase "working mother" demonstrates that the term "mother" is not a neutral descriptive term. The modifier "working" is indicative of the assumption that the term "mother" describes the norm of the married housewife who does not work outside the home for pay. We seldom hear the phrases "working father" or "paternal employment," especially expressed in terms of concern for children's de-

velopment.¹⁶ Thus the language reveals embedded assumptions and unstated norms that reflect and maintain attitudes about the status quo. In this way, the research rhetoric reveals an underlying ideology in the day care research that directs the political debate over day-care.¹⁷

Limited Conception of Emotional Development

Insofar as infant day care research is grounded exclusively by attachment theory and the Strange Situation procedure, the conception and assessment of children's emotional development is extremely narrow. Emotions and emotional relationships are not static phenomena. "They cannot be taken out of context, classified, and quantified. They are processual . . . grounded in both time and place" (Power, 1986, p. 261).¹⁸ As Kagan observed, the Strange Situation hardly reveals an emotional history between mother and child, and the overemphasis on (insecure) attachment ignores other aspects of parent-child relationships (quoted in Karen, 1990; see also Kagan, 1979). Also overlooked are the emotional relationships the child may have with other emotional associates (including other children), and the contributions of these relationships to emotional development (see Lewis, 1987). Specifically, the nature of the relationships the child in day care has, and what sort of emotional *experience* day care is, has been sorely neglected in research driven primarily by attachment theory (Calder, 1985, p. 252).

This is an ironic conclusion, given the revolutionary contributions of attachment theory to our understandings of infant emotional development. As Karen (1990) explained, attachment theory, blossoming in the heyday of behaviorism, was revolutionary in its contradiction of stimulus-response theory which asserted that picking up crying babies reinforced crying and dependent behavior. In contrast, attachment theory posits the critical importance of responsive care, both physical and emotional, from primary adults for children's developmental autonomy and competence. That is, a secure attachment is understood as the basis for growth, trust, and independence.

Attachment theory posits that the infant is social from the beginning, that all the infants' developmental processes are interlocked with personal interaction. Indeed, a child will not "thrive" without responsive interaction from a primary care

figure. (Unfortunately, this figure is undoubtedly assumed to be the mother.) The child is perceived not as a passive recipient of care, or subject wholly to maturational or environmental processes, but as having an active role as he or she is encompassed in human relationships and engaged in symbolic interaction. The infants' socialization is a reciprocal process where both the adult and child make contributions to the relationship. Attachment theory stresses the importance of continuity of care, and the role of observation, interpretation, and empathy in understanding and responding to the infant. "Tracing the formation of attachment to care giving and responsiveness to relationships, Bowlby rendered the process of connection visible as a process of mutual engagement" (Gilligan, 1988, p. 10).

And so, it is not these premises of attachment theory with which I have difficulty. Indeed, to a great extent they underlie my interpretations of the field notes in this text. They parallel other theoretical perspectives (e.g., symbolic interactionism and interpretive phenomenology) in the importance given to the child's relations and experiences with others, and especially the importance attributed to the child's emotional life as inextricably linked to his or her development and socialization.

These contributions notwithstanding, attachment theory goes astray, I believe, first in its exclusive focus on the mother as the primary attachment figure and, second, in Ainsworth's attempt to quantify the study of this emotional relationship. While much of Ainsworth's early work involved "naturalistic" observation as she studied "real children in real environments," she contended that her twenty-one-minute Strange Situation procedure was more revealing than seventy-two hours of observation in children's homes (Karen, 1990, p. 47). With this move Ainsworth and her followers decontextualized the study of emotions and adult-child relationships, and contributed to a disproportionate emphasis (as with attachment theory overall) on the issue of mother-child separation in emotional development and the effects of day care.

Inadequate Attention to Experience

A reading of the research reviews reveals an overwhelming quantitative orientation, not only in the use of the Strange Situation, but in the use of other procedures as well, and indi-

cated by researchers' vocabulary: main effects, outcomes, time-sampling, frequencies, variables, statistical significance, mean scores, measures, correlates, and so on. Considerable emphasis is placed on outcome measures of children's development, as assessed by various standardized tests and (quasi-experimental) attachment studies.¹⁹

Both the quantitative orientation toward the "effects" on attachment and the ideological focus of the day care research contributes to the shockingly inadequate attention to children's ongoing experiences in day care programs. The focus is upon the effects of an infant's *separation* from his or her mother, rather than what happens to children *during* this separation. As Pawl (1990a) wrote, separation per se is only part of a far larger and perhaps more important issue—children's moment-to-moment experience:

Understanding the experiences of infants in day care does not, as it sometimes seems to, primarily involve an understanding of issues of separation. In fact, that focus as the major issue of concern may be far more central to the experience of the parent than it is to the experience of the child. . . . Most vital . . . is that the infant or toddler is cared for in ways that promote his feeling effective, respected, and understood much of the time. If this occurs both with parents and with caregivers, then we have far less about which we must be concerned. (pp. 1–5)

The few studies that have attempted to focus on children's daily experiences and the quality of child care programs, while they may be "naturalistic," generally involve operationalizing, coding, and quantifying child and caregiver behaviors, which often result in an absence of content and contextualized understandings. For example, one study (Galluzzo, Matheson, Moore, & Howes, 1988) defined positive affect as smiling or laughing, and negative affect as expressing anger or protest. These simplified, decontextualized coding procedures overlook the idea that expressions of anger and protest can be regarded as *positive* developmental achievements in toddlerhood, indicative of separation and individuation, that is, growing independence and autonomy. In this way, research procedures often fail to provide contextualized understandings of the meanings of behavior for the children and caregivers in these settings.

Research articles and reviews typically close with reference to the incompleteness and inadequacy of research attempts to measure the effects of day care, methodological problems and

constraints, sample and design limitations, and calls for better designed and controlled studies, more refined coding categories, elaborate ratings, and clinically sensitive measures.²⁰ At the same time concern is expressed for ecological validity!²¹ As Guttentag (1987) observed,

noticeably absent from this discussion is any evaluation of the rearing conditions from the infant's or child's own *immediate* point of view. . . . To ignore completely the quality of experience from the infants' and children's perspectives is to deny the validity of their feelings. There should be more to evaluating the quality of child rearing than measuring its impact on later functioning. (p. 21, italics added)

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have stated the purpose of this project with regard to the focus on problematic relations of power and emotion in infant-toddler day care centers. I have described my guiding assumptions and the nature of data collection. I have reviewed the research in the field, noting the limitations which point to the importance of this work.