ETHNOGRAPHY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DILEMMAS IN REPRESENTING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN

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Particular ethical and political dilemmas arise in representing the lives of people who are marginalised within, and by, the domain of public knowledge. In order to remain critically self-aware about the decisions we take as researchers we need to be able to make explicit both the nature of the dilemmas we face, and the losses, as well as gains, that result from our decisions. This chapter discusses some of the representational dilemmas of research work with children, that is, issues arising in our production of research accounts for dissemination in the public sphere. What claims to represent children's voices can adult researchers legitimately make? And what meanings may we unwittingly reinforce as we make such public re/presentations?

Different research methodologies provide different claims for the status of the knowledge produced. Whilst both ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches can enable a response to the political call to 'hear the voices of children', and provide a means of re/presenting their opinions in 'the public sphere', they often entail radically different ideas about language. As a consequence they make different kinds of representational claims about the status of their accounts. What are the implications of these different claims and warrants for knowledge in terms of the strategies they provide for feminist or critical researchers?

In order to make a particular intervention in public debate, I want to be able to claim that the research account I produce represents participants, yet I have political and theoretical doubts about the representational claims that have conventionally warranted research, and about the particular notion of 'the subject' which metaphors of voice serve. The dilemmas arise from my recognition, or suspicion, that despite these doubts, the discourse of voice and the claims of objectivism and realism to guarantee my 'findings', do still provide the most powerful warrant for my research account. What are the pitfalls or limitations of responding to the 'voices of children' discourse within the terms of existing debates? Might a 'hybrid' approach of discourse-ethnography offer a way forward?

To what extent are these representational issues common to research with any marginalised group, or specific to research work with children? I believe that the issues themselves apply to research with any less powerful social group who

have little access to the practices of public knowledge production. However, the dilemmas we face must involve the consideration of the specific meanings attributed particular social groups since, for instance, in the case of children, certain ideas about their psychological development can allow them to be more easily disqualified as participants of research. Exploring the dilemmas in relation to children therefore engages both specific discussion within contemporary childhood research (Alanen, 1990; James and Prout, 1990; Kitzinger, 1990; Mayall, 1994; Waksler, 1991), and more general debates in feminist theory about the status of knowledge after the 'crisis of representation'.

For three years I was the researcher on the Children's Representations of Family Life project with Dr Margaret O'Brien in the Department of Sociology at the University of East London. I conducted individual interviews and group discussions with children at a primary school and also piloted some graphic approaches. Whilst this chapter doesn't draw specifically from material gathered for this study, (but see O'Brien, Alldred and Jones, 1996), my consideration of the issues raised was stimulated by this fieldwork and came to be articulated more theoretically during my subsequent PhD research.

Hearing children's voices: the political discourse of voice

In the West, there are now established popular discourses of the moral imperative to 'hear the voices' of women, of Black and Asian peoples, of lesbians and gay men, of postcolonial subjects, of people with disabilities, and now, tentatively, of people with learning difficulties, PWAs (people living with AIDS) and 'mental health'/system and abuse survivors. The struggles that these reflect have been about striving to be recognized fully as 'subjects'. These, along with inter-ethnic conflicts, are struggles over identities and the status granted them, rather than over material resources and economics. Political philosophers such as Nancy Fraser identify these as forms of the 'recognition' rather than 'redistribution' struggles which have come to characterize contemporary politics (Fraser, 1995). The 'recognition' granted these hitherto marginal subjects has begun a process of decentring 'the (Western) subject', and has shaken the unthinking confidence with which the dominant masculinist, Eurocentric perspective has been assumed to be <u>the</u> perspective.

Children are another socially silenced group: their opinions are not heard in the public sphere and they wield little power as a social group. Adults are generally more powerful relative to, and specifically over, children. As Brannen and O'Brien note there is increasing consciousness of the fact that '...children's worlds have typically become known through adult accounts' (1996: 1). The demand to 'hear the voices of children' relies upon these earlier struggles as 'conditions of possibility' and employs the same discourses of empowerment and metaphors of voice and perspective. The cultural spaces for children's voices which have opened up over the past decade in the UK are illustrated by the increasing concern in the legal sphere to take children's 'wishes and feelings and self-

defined preferences into account whenever possible' (Roche, 1996: 27) (expressed, for instance, in the Children Act 1989, the Scottish Law Commission, 1992 and supported, at least in principle, by the UK government's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991), as well as by the emergence of organisations and advice centres which are predicated on children's participation and articulation (children's magazines such as Children Express, and organisations such as *Who Cares?* which aims to give children in residential care more of a public voice). The process of recognizing children as subjects is similar in rhetorical character to these earlier struggles, but has lagged somewhat behind.

Children's voices (or my re-presentation of their voices) are notably absent from this chapter. Instead, I focus on the claims of adult researchers, and how we may warrant our accounts of what children say. Of course, some of the arguments I make about the difficulties surrounding researchers' claims to represent children, apply to my representation of the work of other researchers. However, there are also significant differences: firstly, I am representing adult researchers, not child participants (although I will consider whether this alters or simply intensifies the issues); and secondly, material I re-present is from published research that researchers have already placed in the public sphere (so I am not serving up privately elicited accounts for public consumption, as is the case for much research). Following Spivak's (1988) distinction between representation meaning proxy, or meaning portrayal, I am representing other researchers in the sense of portrayal (the 'photographic' meaning of representation), but not in the sense of advocacy. However, in our research roles, these two may not be clearly distinguished, or indeed, we may wish to 'represent children' in both senses. Interrogating the doctrine of empiricism raises problems with both these meanings of 'representing children'.

James and Prout (1990) note the elision of a temporal (re-presenting) and a significatory meaning of 'representation'. Whilst the temporal meaning of repeating raises the possibility of seeing representation as an active process, and therefore one which is conducted from a particular perspective, the word re-presentation does not insist on this. Indeed, both of these meanings may assume that an object exists and is then truthfully reflected in (portrayed by) its representation. I think this ambiguity about what the word means epistemologically is what Hall (1992) identifies when he notes that the term is used currently not only as an unproblematic notion of 'image of' (portrayal or signification), but also to indicate a radical displacement of that notion. I prefer to use the terms 're-presentation' and re/presentation to indicate that my research account is actively produced by me and embodies my perspective, using the former when emphasizing process and the latter when emphasizing its significance for cultural politics. However, neither seems to allow me to distinguish the epistemological positions which this chapter discusses. By making reference to the word 'representational' (even with a critical note) they each suggest to me both an empirical meaning of portrayal, and the significance for

cultural politics of either images of a social group or their advocacy. I like the way in which 're/presentation' admits this ambivalence.

My use in this chapter of the 'discourse of voice' must be distinguished from the specific approach of Carol Gilligan and co-workers (however, see Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner, in this volume). I am referring to the particular, but loose, set of metaphors of voice which circulate in popular political discourse and link (political) perspective closely with 'who the speaker is'.

Childhood research: giving voice to children?

The empirical study of children in the West has, for the last 150 years, been regarded as the domain of psychology. Within this discipline children have been treated as the (passive) objects of study; scrutinized, tested and measured (Burman, 1994; Rose, 1985). The focus has been on what happens to them (and processes they undergo), rather than what they do or say. The psychological construction of the individual which underpins this is hegemonic and has provided the foundation for sociological thinking too. However, for children, it is confounded with developmentalism: the construction of a linear, sequential and normalized process by which children become adults. As Qvortrup (1987) notes, this constructs children as more like 'human becomings', than human beings. Developmental discourses, therefore, exacerbate children's objectification within research. It is not unless children are seen as people in their own right that they can be thought of as participants of research (Speier, 1973, cf Corsaro, 1981).

As the children's rights movement has been developing in the UK, ethnographic research has 'given voice' to children, enabling them to begin to play a more direct part in the production of sociological knowledge than the adult/researcher determined categories of survey or experimental methods (James and Prout, 1990). Hence discourses of 'giving voice' offer a way of constructing children as active subjects, not objects, and of recognizing that they may have distinct perspectives on the world. The recognition that meaning embodies perspective is at least an implicit challenge to objectivism and the arrogant assumption that a perspective is universal, an account definitive. Ethnography has the most established place in the social sciences and humanities as an approach which attempts to place subjects' own perspectives centrally. Its ethical promise rests on its (compatability with) voice metaphors; its political force, on the salience attributed identity in contemporary political discourses; and its immense appeal, on its 'promise to delve into the "concrete" (in the hope of finding "real" people living "real" lives)' (Probyn, 1993: 72). Because it matters 'that some speak and that others are merely spoken' (Probyn, ibid), it offers to meet feminist concerns to 'give voice' to those whose opinions are rarely heard.

Research is, therefore, seen as one of the ways of providing spaces in which hitherto silenced people can 'be heard' and be recognized as subjects. It is hoped that interview-based research and the dissemination of 'findings' in the

public sphere can provide a platform for, or can amplify, these voices. Like most researchers, I imagine, my personal investment in the hope that research has a progressive impact, means that there are personal, as well as institutional risks involved in explicating the politics of research relations and the effectivity of research as an intervention in particular public debates or broader cultural politics.

Ethnographers often use the discourse of voice empirically to mean something akin to perspective, and perhaps some use it in a less literal, illustrative way. Whilst discourse analysis is an approach which can be employed to analyze the things children say, it rejects some of the theoretical underpinnings of the voice-as-perspective discourse. However, both approaches can recognize that interviews are a particular form of social interaction in which the discursive exchange is constructed jointly by researcher and participant; see meanings as grounded in their contexts; and base analysis and interpretation on a theory of discourse and meaning (Mishler, 1986).

What Oakley (1981) called the 'hygienic', traditional approach to interviewing obscures the relations of power that characterize the research relationship. However, a discursive approach requires us to consider reflexively the institutional power carried by researchers, and to avoid creating the illusion of 'democratized' research through the fantasy of empowerment (Marks, 1993). Whilst ethnography can lodge a powerful critique of the conventional research practices Oakley described, it can also be employed within an otherwise conventional approach. The following three sections describe key tensions that can arise within the ethnographic study of children, which are, I believe, general representational dilemmas for researchers. They challenge the assumption that adults' benevolent attempts to represent children (as proxy or advocate) are necessarily always in their interests, and the simplicity with which it is assumed that what children say can be represented (portrayed) through research.

Ethnography of 'children's culture'
In order to gain access to children's perspectives, William Corsaro employed the ethnographic technique of participant observation through which he became '...a participant in children's culture' (Corsaro, 1981: 118) , '...joining in the children's activities whilst not affecting the nature or flow of peer episodes' (ibid: 133). Notions such as '...entering the child's world' (Mandell, 1986; 1991) and interacting 'with children in their perspective' (Mandell, 1991: 59) (emphasis added) imply that adults and children occupy separate social spheres. It constructs children as little aliens to the dominant culture, the exotic objects of some other culture. 'Other', that is, to the presumed norm or centrality of adult culture (which is itself thus imputed with homogeneity and consensuality). The centrality of the researcher and the pseudo-colonialist relation of rendering the strange in terms familiar to the observer culture - which is sometimes reinforced by metaphors of travel (Pratt, 1986a, cf Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) - is, of course, not particular to work with children. For contemporary childhood research there is surely a tension between studying children simply as people, and giving them research (or political) attention because they are currently marginalised, which then risks reinforcing the idea of them as a 'special case'. So fundamental

is our 'knowledge' of adult-child difference that it's difficult to imagine research in which participants happen to include adults and children, yet no between-groups comparison is made. Although, for the present, a strong case can be made for the benefits of 'special case' attention.

When considering his power as researcher, Corsaro notes that '...adults are much bigger than children and are perceived as being socially more powerful' (Corsaro, 1981: 118). Physical size may well have been significant (although he did not attempt the 'least-adult' role that Mandell, 1986; 1991 developed), but it is only one of the features that may have affected the interaction between the children and himself. He might also have considered the ways in which the interaction was informed by dominant cultural meanings assigned to his age and gender, and ideas about paternal playfulness and pedagogic authority. However, in later debates amongst researchers about the extent to which adults can enter children's worlds, Corsaro (1985, cf Mandell, 1991) insists that age and authority continue to separate adults and children and so qualifies his participation as partial, whereas others argue that all aspects of adult superiority except physical differences can be cast aside and that adults can participate fully in children's culture (Goode, 1986; Waksler, 1986, both cited from Mandell, 1991).

Beyond the interaction, in later stages of the research process, there is also an unequal power relationship. Not only are adult researchers '...perceived as being socially more powerful', they <u>are</u> more powerful by virtue of their role as researchers, through which they are in a position to interpret, as well as to represent (Burman, 1992). The reflexive consideration of researchers' power and status is limited by a focus on the dynamics of the interaction 'in the field', with little consideration of the broader power relations within which this is constituted. This is a criticism that Probyn (1993) makes of even some recent ethnography: that reflexivity extends only to the immediate context of meaning production (here, the classroom), and not adequately to the production of meaning in the account (processes occurring back in the academy).

Corsaro does identify the problem of adult assumptions and interpretations of children's behaviour and abilities, so recognizes that <u>how</u> children are heard is an issue. He believes that an adult perspective is the result of removing the interaction from its full social context. However, although 'adult interpretations and assumptions about children's behavior are themselves topics for inquiry (Schwartzman, 1978)' (Corsaro, 1981: 118), such a study is viewed as separate:

> One of the central aims of ethnographies of childhood culture is the suspension of such interpretations. The researcher must attempt to free himself [sic] from adult conceptions of   children's activities and enter the child's world as both <u>observer</u> and <u>participant</u>. (ibid: 119,   emphasis in the original)

The idea that it is possible to suspend, or step outside of, the cultural meanings assigned to childhood must be viewed with scepticism. From where might the researcher's conceptual framework - indeed, the words to speak - then come from? A more realistic aim might be to attempt to examine the 'adult conceptions' closely alongside, and in relation to, the observations that one makes. In this way one could begin to reflect upon the concepts and processes of the analysis as an

'...interrogation of the methods ...simultaneously with, and as an integral part of, the investigation of the object (Woolgar, 1982)' (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: 8).

The approach adopted by both Corsaro and Mandell is realist and implicitly objectivist: children's culture is seen as existing prior to, and independently of, the researcher's gaze, so that they may enter that culture, observe it without altering it, then objectively report without distortion what they have 'merely observed'. Therefore, the ethnographer's perception is the key warrant for the knowledge produced. Corsaro's 'escape from' an adult perspective into the 'real' children's culture demonstrates his reliance on conventional notions of language as reflective or representational (rather than constitutive) and consequently he presents his work as a straight-forward representation or portrayal of children's culture. Claiming this representational status is so conventionalized in Western scientific discourse that the warrant need not be made explicit. Ethnographic techniques can embody a realist epistemology even where they have rejected (unitary) objectivism. So that whilst a researcher explicitly recognizes the existence of different perspectives (hence studying the participants'), it is simply assumed that readers of the research will rest their faith in the researcher's own perspective.

Otherness and the centre

Ethnography is '...a writing practice in which the other is inscribed within, and explained by, the power of the ethnographer's language' (Grossberg, 1989: 23) with '...the onus on the other to fit her experiences into an understandable order' (Probyn, 1993: 63). As in the classical anthropological monographs documenting the West's cultural Others, the crucial relation is of the observed culture to the researcher's culture. Can a description by an outsider remain faithful to the framework of the subjects, as it is inevitably rendered in the observer's terms? Is the representation to a dominant group or culture of 'other' perspectives necessarily imperialist, serving to bolster their own sense of centrality and extend cultural power through 'knowledge of'? But how else can that centrality be challenged?

Adult-(ethno)centrism can be seen to operate at both an individual level, whereby adults tend to interpret the actions and utterances of children as immature versions of their own speech and behaviour (Bruner, Jolly and Sylva, 1976), and also at a cultural level. A researcher employing a discourse analytic approach might share the concern with adult-centrism without expecting to be able to avoid it. Since representation is through language, and the language and hegemonic concepts are those of the dominant culture, marginalized groups have described how the dominant conceptual framework which is not 'their own' may be imbued with negativities for them (for instance, Spender, 1985, on the androcentricism of the English language). For adult-dominated culture, language is, 'by definition', reflective and productive of adult power, status and authority. Since the whole frame of reference is adult-centred, it is difficult to see to what extent children could, as ethnographic subjects, present 'their own' account of their worlds. Furthermore, it can be argued that children are having to render themselves

meaningful in adult-centred terms, and explain themselves convincingly to those in power over them (this parallels the discussion by Ros Edwards and Jane Ribbens, this volume). Seen in this light, children's interviews, because they entail the requirement to make sense for adults, might not necessarily be empowering occasions for children. The idea that any ethnographic subjects are free to present their own meanings in any radical sense neglects the ways in which the dominant culture provides hegemonic meanings.

Post-structuralist approaches to language disallow the fantasy of speaking from outside of the language system, which is why feminist writers influenced by post-structuralism (Butler, 1990; Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Weedon, 1987) emphasize the recognition of resistance to powerful discourses. Recognizing the fact that in providing a research voice for a particular group we may simultaneously reinforce their construction as Other, and concurrently our own perspective or the dominant cultural perspective as central, prevents us from naively assuming that our work is bound to be liberatory. Patai (1991) believes that ethical research is simply not possible in an unjust world, since researchers replicate structures of privilege through the institution of knowledge. Taking up a position as one who knows, in relation to those who are oppressed, is fraught with ethical problems which are not asuaged by good intentions. At the very least, this requires that we focus on the potential losses as well as gains of particular approaches to research. In relation to placing children's voices in the public sphere, we need to examine the broader context of meanings that will be brought into play. Through what cultural understandings of children are the words of any child heard?

How we hear what children say

Corsaro (1981) notes that adults often describe as 'silly' or unimportant what they do not understand in children's speech or behaviour. Berry Mayall describes how discussions of 'methodological issues' in childhood research sometimes constructs children '...as cognitive incompetents, [..] routinely wrong and misunderstand[ing]; likely to confuse fact with fiction; and ...give the answers they think adults want rather than reply accurately' (1996: 13). She reminds us that adults also vary in our knowledge and experience, and that '...we [all] interweave fact and fiction both consciously and unconsciously and tell interviewers what we think they want to know' (ibid). This illustrates how the specific cultural positioning of children within developmental discourses of incompleteness, and as 'not yet there', can further extend the doubts that some have about the validity of 'subjective' research in general. Where objectivism prevails, the subjectivity that is understood as a problem for research, is seen as exaggerated in the case of children. There also exist particular ideas about children's communication skills, knowledge and self-reflection. Therefore, it is not just a case of hearing children's voices, but of how we hear their voices. In terms of feminist intervention, it might be that providing a public platform for children's perspectives is not enough. We need to attend to the meanings that will be made of the accounts.

Both possible meanings of the title of this section are in operation. By emphasizing the how of 'How we hear what children say', I am arguing that, as researchers, we face decisions about how to go about trying to hear what children say. Different methods are underpinned by alternative epistemological perspectives which provide different ways of thinking about the relation between participants' voices and the knowledge that is produced about them. Alternatively, when hear is emphasized, attention is drawn to the way in which children's voices are actually heard. This problematizes the passivity which 'to hear' usually conveys and highlights issues of interpretation. How do both specific context and broader cultural discourses affect the ways in which what children say is understood? Although not conceptually distinct, we can consider this at the level of how researchers hear children, and then how research reports are heard in the public sphere.

Children's voices are heard through cultural constructions of childhood. It is simultaneous attention to childhood, as opposed to a sole focus on (particular) children, that distinguishes writers influenced by social constructionism, such as Burman (1992), Marks (1996), Mayall (1996), and James and Prout (1990), from more conventional ethnographers such as Corsaro (1981; 1986) and Mandell (1986; 1991). Some discourse analytic approaches, such as Parker's (1992), can take into account the social construction of childhood, by insisting that we bring in knowledge of discourses from 'outside'of the research, including those that our politics identify as broader power relations, in order to analyze discourse.

The status of 'voice' in discourse analytic research
In post-structuralist informed discourse analytic research, representations of interviewees' account are made without a realist, objectivist warrant. Research is recognized to be a practice of re-presentation, and 'findings' a re/presentation through a particular lens. This invites reflexivity about the production of the account. The participant's 'voice' is seen as produced from what was culturally available to them, rather than from a private reserve of meaning. The fantasy of the authentic subject, one whose subjectivity is imagined to be independent of, or prior to, culture is rejected. Deborah Marks interviewed young people about exclusion from school. She writes:

> researching into people's experience is fraught with epistemological and ontological dilemmas. Social constructionist theory has warned that giving our 'subject' a 'voice' involves the fantasy that it is possible to have unmediated direct knowledge of experience (James and Prout, 1990). Derrida has challenged the phonocentricism implicit in the notion of speech as a direct and immediate form of expression. Giving primacy to interviewees' talk about their experience of exclusion suggests that their speech may refer to themselves as a unified authentic subject. This Cartesian subject, whose self-consciousness acts as guarantor of meaning, is challenged both by   versions of psychoanalysis (Althusser, 1971; Frosh, 1987) and discourse analysis (Parker, 1992),   which   see the subject as being fragmented and constituted within language. (Marks, 1996: 115)

Marks does not treat the accounts obtained as final and fixed, rather they are '...often ambivalent, contradictory and changing' (ibid: 115). She notes that 'the relationship between an original exclusion and the way pupils talk about it in their interview or discussion group is highly complex', and therefore she doesn't ask about their experiences in order to try to establish 'what really happened'. She does not position herself as able to 'penetrate the manifest content in order to reveal its hidden kernel' and so she is not central in her warrant for the research knowledge: 'I cannot say how participants really experienced the exclusion. However, asking about the experience of exclusion brings forth a number of productive ways of seeing the event' (ibid: 116).

For some pupils, the tone of the interview was confessional as they took responsibility for bad behaviour. Other accounts took the form of factual reports and had a disengaged tone, and in a third type, pupils protested their innocence. The complexity of thoughts and feelings about their exclusions meant that they might be positioned in a variety of conflicted ways. Whilst identifying how these may have functioned psychologically and emotionally for the individuals, and indeed for herself - since she too experienced exclusion by the children during a group discussion - she deliberately avoids '...establishing an opposition between emotional, conflicted and hence "authentic" accounts and generalised, jargon-laden "inauthentic" accounts' (Marks, 1996: 129). The imperative that discourse analysts attend the broader social meanings within which research occurs leads Marks to consider these interviews in relation to powerful psychological discourses of self-regulating individuals who, on reflection, repent their misdemeanors. The possibility that the interviews functioned to further regulate some participants by providing a space in which they drew themselves under disciplinary gaze to produce themselves as good children and self-governing individuals, prevented Marks from assuming the interviews to be necessarily (or only) liberating.

Warranting discourse analytic work
Many feminist theorists use post-structuralist approaches to show how knowledge claims entail plays of power. Without an appeal to objectivity and without asserting the centrality of one's own perspective, with what authority can one present discourse analytic research? Is there an alternative rhetoric of research? Most importantly, could an alternative support effective feminist or critical intervention? This issue is key in debates about feminism and postmodernism, as well as having exercised researchers who have taken the reflexive 'turn to language'. Burman et al. (1996) argue that rejecting conventional ideas of authorship and of knowing through personal identities need not mean losing the relevance of individual experience, nor the possibility of political critique. Losing faith in objectivity need not mean completely undermining our own warrants for speaking critically (Burman, 1990). Fraser and Nicholson (1990) argue that feminists might present local empirical accounts, without the grandnarratives which universalize and ahistorisize. Empiricism without objectivist foundations they argue, requires us to extend self-reflexivity to recognize that our analyses, as well as their objects, are culturally specific.

Erica Burman (1992) interviewed primary-school aged children, but neither warrants her analyses by appeal to objectivism, nor grounds her interpretation solely in her ontology. Her own psychological processes form part of her reflections on her interpretation, but are not the warrant for it. She argues that reflexivity must include the broader context; relations not just within, but also beyond, the interview:

> One of the places where feminist and post-structuralist concerns meet is in affirming reflexivity, both as structured within research relationships (no longer colluding in the sanitization of subjectivity, identification and emotion from research encounters) and within the theory-method relation (e.g. Hollway, 1989; Walkerdine, 1986). (ibid: 47)

Through an analysis of interview exerpts, Burman demonstrates how the structural relations of power and discursive positioning (of interviewee and interviewer), as well as broader social relations of power and knowledge, can inform the micro-analysis of statements from an interview. She argues that drawing on the broader context in this way prevents her refusal to claim objectivity from collapsing into a complete relativization of her analysis. This theoretical position treads a careful path between naive realism and an idealism which could fall prey to relativism and immaterialism.

In the research, Burman set up an agreed exchange of interviewer and interviewee roles with the children, which allowed moments in which the children occupied powerful positions in relation to her. The concept of researcher and researched occupying particular 'subject positions', (rather than being thought of as subjects whose position is unitary and fixed), facilitates recognition of the complexity of the play of power in these exchanges. A particular statement from a boy is open to various interpretations, including that of threat to steal Burman's bicycle. Her interpretation of it recognizes cultural adult-child relations, the specific context of the co-operative switch of 'roles', and her actual retention of certain authority despite this. She comes to understand it as a request that the topic of conversation shifts. Its implicit nature prevented the shift from being abrupt or from challenging her (supposedly relinquished) conversational control. Thus, such an analysis can conceptualise power as operating through both the manipulated (in the 'role exchange'), and the underlying, positions of researcher and researched (and show the children's understanding of this distinction), without simplifying to a model of power as summative. Burman goes 'beyond simply affirming different accounts' and warrants her own interpretation by arguing it is produced and fixed by the power relationships, (though it is not the only one warranted by them): 'The point here is not to arrive at a unique and unambiguous interpretation, but to demonstrate that an analysis of power relations privileges some interpretations over others'. (ibid: 54)

Indeed, this indeterminacy, she argues, is itself only a function of the text being taken out of its linguistic and wider discursive context. Thus, discourse analytic work which is informed by post-structuralist understandings of power can demonstrate how power enters into the interpretation, as well as the production, of discourse (Burman, ibid). This includes how power inheres in the processes of analysis 'back in the academy' as well as in the research encounter. However,

this type of micro-analysis still, inevitably, abstracts the interaction from its context to some degree, and places it in another context for viewing from other perspectives. We can be critical of a researcher's (political) judgement, and hopefully, such critical scrutiny is invited by a reflexive style that acknowledges that the analysis is an artefact, produced in a particular moment, by a person occupying particular subject positions, and within the particular power relations described.

A 'new ethnography'?
Some discursive approaches employ qualified empiricism, as the above illustrates, and some ethnographic approaches recognize that representation is an active, not merely reflective, practice. So, moving beyond my oppositional account, there are now, in fact, researchers who occupy a range of epistemological positions 'within' each approach.

Ethnography has not remained untouched by the 'turn to language'. In addition to radical critiques across the disciplines of cultural studies, critical anthropology and sociology (Nencel and Pels, 1991; Probyn, 1993; Ticeneto Clough, 1992), there are also ethnographers who are developing a 'more textual' ethnography within sociology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 239), for instance, Plummer's (1995) sociology of sexual stories. In a chapter about the rhetorics or poetics of ethnographic writing - perhaps tellingly at the end of the book - Hammersley and Atkinson argue that an ethnography '...is produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis' (ibid: 239). Therefore, unlike in Corsaro's much earlier work, their reflexivity does include textual production within its remit. However, they maintain a broadly objective-realist perspective, illustrated by their remark that it is 'knowledge of', rather than politics, which motivates them.

Similarly, Berry Mayall's (1996) research with children is strongly influenced by ethnography, yet - as with many others in contemporary UK childhood studies - is also informed by social constructionism. She writes of how children's lives are framed within adult understandings of what children are like, and problematizes the conceptualization of children as Other. She partially relativizes her account by recognizing that '...no doubt another approach would lead to another story of where and how children's lives are lived' (ibid: 19), but retains an empiricist warrant and employs the 'up the mountain' discourse of new scientific knowledge improving on the old (Kitzinger, 1987; Rorty, 1980). Her position is neither that of radical social constructionist nor 'naive' objective-realist, but the empiricist epistemology locates her closer to realist ethnography than post-structuralism.

Mayall presents statements from children's accounts 'contextualized' within comments from interviews with adults. Inevitably it is Mayall's own conceptual frame that allows her to articulate the comments from children with those of adults. She recognizes the power imbalance between herself and the child interviewees and is modest about the extent to which it can be rectified. She even wonders: '...[i]f one is not a child, can one and should one attempt to understand and convey what children's experiences are?' (ibid: 1). She describes child-friendly measures she took during the interaction (sitting on low chairs,

letting children choose their companions), and she briefly reflects upon her position as author of 'children's accounts', acknowledging that it is her own argument and mentioning her hope that in future research she will co-write with participants. She therefore engages both of Probyn's (1993) two levels of reflexivity: that is, within the interaction, and in the interpretation and production of the research account. However, on the issue of textual authority, whilst she is explicit about the authority of her account vis-a-vis the child participants, she does not open up issues of the text's authority as one claiming an empirical warrant. This might have been explored through reflexivity about the processes by which she produced her analysis (for instance, meshing together adult and child accounts) and the rhetorical style in which it is presented.

This raises several points. Firstly, we are reminded that how researchers present their work, including their epistemological warrants, relates to considerations of forum, format, and funding. Working within a research unit that is grant-dependent, (as does Mayall), does not lend itself to radical critique of the research enterprise. Secondly, it illustrates the complexity of positions we may take up as researchers: recognizing the productivity of language, yet incorporating such insight into empiricist ethnographic methodology. The radical challenges the concept of discourse may present can be neutralized by an appropriating gesture (Burman, 1990), and the 'findings' of discourse analytic research (about interaction between researcher and 'subject') can even be taken up to 'improve' mainstream experimental work (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Thirdly, the issue of research strategies provides an alternative way of seeing this second point: retaining an objective-realist research warrant provided Mayall with a more powerful position and may have made the particular intervention she desired more effective. However, as readers of the study we cannot actually distinguish between an unreflexive conventional style, and an account which for strategic purposes employs conventional rhetoric and '...deliberately conceal[s] any ostensive signs of reflexivity' (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988: 6). Thus, Mayall's approach may either be straight-forwardly realist, or her account may reflect a decision to take up the authoritative 'voice' of the researcher.

Some pitfalls and possibilities of hybrid approaches
The warrant we claim for our research knowledge, whether stated explicitly or implied by rhetorical style, is the basis of its authority. Feminists have identified the danger of 'kicking the platform from under our own feet' (Burman, 1990) by deconstructing the warrant for our preferred account, but some (Burman et al., 1996; Weedon, 1987) see feminist possibilities in the selective use of post-structuralist arguments such as those employed here. The privilege accorded empirical knowledge makes research powerful, and because the discourse of 'hearing the voices of children' is highly persuasive in contemporary UK cultural politics, ethnographic realism probably provides the most effective warrant for intervention, say, in debates about health or education services for children. So, might I adopt the discourse of voice and employ qualified empirical warrants? The sections above illustrated how empirical claims are sometimes made alongside differing degrees of reflexivity, or recognition of ethical issues surrounding a researcher's power to interpret and to produce an account and the significance of the broader cultural meanings assigned childhood. If one refuses

to employ arrogant, 'self-centred' assertions of objectivity, yet can see current political value in them, could a self-reflexive, re-presentation of others' 'voices' enable partial uptake of research authority? This would not resolve the dilemma once and for all, but neither is that desirable. Burman et al. (1996) argue that we might consider our research as a series of strategic decisions, rather than wed ourselves to any particular approach. Such committment to an approach would be to imagine that any approach could embody (our) politics and would suggest inadequate attention to the context which informs how our research is heard. As a temporary strategy it allows movement beyond the impasse, but is tentative and resists closure - thereby requiring its context-specific reinvention.

A strong case can be made for presenting research as 'hearing the voices of children', and children as deserving and capable of articulating their perspectives, whilst there are still important political gains for children in being granted full subject status. However, we must consider the potential risks of employing the voice rhetoric in each particular case: generalized assertions cannot be made about how it may operate. So, for each research account, we must assess whether the particular research issue or the general affirmation of children as subjects outweighs the pitfalls described above: the reification of 'the centre' at the expense of the Other; the re-assertion of objective-realism; and the obscuring of the researcher's role and denial of perspective in the discourse of representation as portrayal.

Might a 'hybrid' position be possible in which the discourse of voice is employed, but subjects are not attributed authenticity outside of (dominant) culture? Instead, we can present them as finding 'their voices' within and through the networks of meanings made available to them, including where they resist the dominant meanings ascribed them (as does Marks, 1996). Employing the discourse of voice risks reinforcing ideas about the psychological subject, but perhaps there are some ways of limiting this, such as by surrounding the term voice with quotation marks to indicate its metaphorical status. Referring to 'subject positions' allows for an individual to be multiply or shiftingly positioned and hence avoids complicity with the fantasy of unitary, logical beings whose experiences are stable, fixed by identity and internally coherent (Butler, 1990). We might retain the distinction in this chapter between children's voices themselves and the discourse of 'the voices of children' and it may be appropriate to make this distinction explicit. The discourse may still be heard in the singular ('the voice of the child') but for this piece I did not feel the compromise of reinforcing homogeneity amongst children was necessary. The argument for the recognition of differences amongst children might appear, in the abstract, to be robust and incontestable, but there may be times when we decide this oversimplification is worthwhile. James and Prout (1990) suggest that we use the past tense in empirical narratives, because the present tense fixes children in a timeless place devoid of context thereby contributing to their objectification. These suggetsions sketch an approach which could still link perspectives to social location, but would aim to avoid relying on the concept of identity in such a way as to fix and over-simplify the connection. In these ways, local empirical narratives employing the voice metaphor in a qualified way - what we might call discourse-ethnography

- could provide ways of doing politics and research without grounding positions in reified identities.

However, some cautionary notes are needed: methods rest upon methodologies, which themselves embody particular epistemological positions. Given that the most crucial aspect of the context of the public research account to be considered relates to the authority necessary to intervene, the risk of a hybrid method is that it makes neither epistemological claim authoritatively. For instance, it would be problematic to present a realist warrant, (such as for ethnography), within an account that has set up a non-realist framework. 'Triangulation' - using more than one method to study an object - could not employ a discursive approach alongside a non-discursive one, because triangulation assumes realism for its object. Such separation of methods from their epistemological perspectives is not only an issue of theoretical coherence: in order to take up 'the voice' of knowledge authoritatively one usually has to state one or other type of claim. If we assume that such epistemological inconsistencies may go unnoticed in a given forum, questions arise about how explicit we ought to be about our epistemological commitments.

Reflexivity
If reflexivity involves being explicit about the operation of power within the actual processes of researching and representing people (Burman, 1992; Ribbens, 1989), we become suspicious of the techniques (as well as epistemological claims) through which accounts are rendered authoritative. Researchers' power can be conceptualized as operating through multiple levels: through the hegemonic cultural perspective contained within the language we (must) use; through the subject positions we take up and are positioned within (including our deliberate claims to researcher positions); and through our particular individual relationships with participants and to our field of inquiry. In relation to research with children, the first was illustrated earlier through the adult-centrism of language and the second was explored through Burman's study, where the particularity of research with children is the conflation of adult/child with researcher/researched. The third level raises very interesting questions in relation to research with children: how do we account for our own unconscious projections and fantasies concerning children, which include those stemming from our own experiences, above and beyond culture-wide ones?

Ethnographic research raises questions about how much to listen and how much to interpret (Ribbens, 1989), but discourse analytic approaches highlight how the two cannot ultimately be separated out. If we necessarily hear others through culturally dominant meanings, an unacknowledged perspective is most likely the hegemonic one. The task of reflexivity, according to Mishler (1986), is to make explicit the theoretical basis of interpretation. Deconstructing the photographic meaning of representation, as a critique of objectivism begs, means taking greater caution over our representational claims and avoiding obscuring the perspectival nature of knowledge. This issue emerges in considering how close to keep to participants' actual words (see Kay Standing, this volume). Whilst their language and concepts will be of central interest if we wish to (and believe it is possible to) re-present (portray), we might wish, or be drawn, to employ more

politically relevant terms and analytic frameworks when we want to make representation for/about children either as advocacy, or when we take it upon ourselves to intervene in what Stuart Hall (1992) calls 'the relations of representation'. The options can be understood as being about the representative role we adopt. Finch (1993) described the conflict she faced between using women's own terms, and providing the structural analysis she felt their position called for, and Ribbens (1989) argued that if we do not agree with what our participants say, we will have to decide in the context whether and how we try to respect their opinions. In research with children, this conflict is between promoting particular re/presentations of children as a social group, and re-presenting the accounts of the particular children who participated. We must be clear about when our priority is to make an admittedly flawed (say, qualified empirical) re/presentation of children's voices, and when it is for the presentation of <u>our</u> analyses, reflecting an adult, and perhaps personal, agenda within cultural politics. The dilemma can then be located within the realm of research strategy if, from the start of a given piece of research, we are clear about whether we are engaging in representational politics, and in which case will present aspects of the research in particular ways to intervene on particular issues; or we are attempting to hear and re-present particular children's voices. I would want to be decisive about this from the outset in order to be explicit with my participants about which type of representative role I was taking, and clear, though not necessarily explicit within it, about my priorities for any particular representative act. It appears that in either case, we might employ literal ('naive'), or reflexive, or covertly reflexive representational warrants (as discussed earlier).

Of course, the two-horns of the dilemma are an ideal separation because even if we adopt an empirical warrant for placing the 'voices of children' in the public sphere, we surely retain responsibility for not re-presenting uncritically, say, a racist discourse. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Parker and Burman (1993) agree that the researcher's responsibility extends to consideration of the default meanings of the context of research publication. What we consider to be progressive re/presentations could be subverted and carry undesirable meanings in another context. We cannot completely control the meanings that can be made of our research (Foucault, 1983). Not only might our careful wordings, qualifiers and warrants be lost, but another context might produce meanings that we could not have predicted. We cannot ensure our preferred readings, but we must attempt to ward off ones we believe to be oppressive. These, as well as decisions about how to frame, how to write, how and where to publish, are more than mere 'editorial control' over the accounts, and our politics are clearly highly significant, yet because of the taboo on speaking of politics in academic work (a legacy of objectivism), I have found few spaces - although the Women's Workshop has been one - for discussing these concerns. Without recognition and discussion of these dilemmas we risk relying on unexamined assumptions. Reflexive discussion amongst researchers and activists can thus inform our strategies, but are sometimes blocked by the presumption of realism. Hopefully, being reflexive enables us not simply to reproduce the cultural positions, but to ask new questions about the existence of these positions.

Reflexivity can be extended to make explicit the warrants we employ for the status of our accounts, to attempt to disassemble them where we feel it is appropriate, but perhaps taking up some positions of authority and presenting our research as knowledge where we feel it is politically expedient to do so. To demonstrate our recognition that we actively provide narratives for our material, and construct the authority of knowledge, we may use active verbs such as 'producing' (also avoiding the realist implication of pre-existing data), and might undo the specular metaphors of research which obscure the processes, deny the particularity of perspective and the differential investments in particular kinds of knowledge. However, it might sometimes be useful to <u>exclude</u> discussion of our methodological dilemmas in our finished reports. This goes against the grain of recent feminist research debates about making explicit both our practices and dilemmas, but there might be good grounds for considering which 'public' we are open with about issues; an audience of feminist and critical researchers (such as I assume here), or a broader audience (when we aim to disseminate our reports widely). Could we choose a strategy of omitting the discussion of decision-making processes or the political nature of knowledge production, that is, maintaining these conventional silences? For instance, might we deliberately employ the specular metaphors of research despite their implicit objective-realist warrants? The description earlier of different epistemological warrants within either discourse of representation suggests moments at which this might be useful. However, is it ever acceptable to present a piece of research with a contradiction between its re/presentational claims and our actual confidence in these claims? This is one of the ethical/political questions politically motivated researchers might begin to discuss more broadly. One of the contributions of a book such as this is the opportunity to voice questions and discuss the dilemmas we work with, without the same pressure to find 'answers' that writing for a broader public usually requires.

How our accounts might be heard
Being critical of the presuppositions of the voice discourse would not necessarily prevent me from insisting 'that children be heard' in a particular forum. However, when employing it, I would be concerned that my research might satisfy the demand that 'the voices of children' be heard, without actually altering <u>how</u> they are heard, or challenging the limited impact that what children say usually has.

Discursive approaches, by rejecting the possibility of escape from the cultural web of meanings, direct our attention to the consideration of what ideas we unwittingly reinforce. Given that the cultural construction of childhood is dominated by discourses of developmental psychology, there is a danger of reifying these particular ideas about children through our research. Even our strategic use of 'voice' metaphors may endorse the hegemonic notion of the rational, integrated, psychological subject (of which post-structuralist positions and some non post-structuralist feminist positions are critical), but furthermore, these may have particular implications for children.

Children, in particular, can be closely associated with the emotions, through ideas which link them to nature, and through discourses of their development towards rationality (Walkerdine, 1988). Where rationality is privileged,

'emotionality' can disqualify them as research participants. Similarly, failure to meet the expectations of conventional interview research (of consistency, and of 'independence' from the researcher), can be interpreted as failings of children to be successful interviewees, rather than problems with the mythical notion of the 'individual' which underpins the approach. This too can function to undermine the idea that children can, or should, be 'given voice'. The concept of attitude (or opinion) involves a single, stable or consistent perspective (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, interviewing anyone about 'family', for instance, will elicit a range of contradictory ideas, so a contribution of discourse analytic work is to demonstrate that multiplicity, complexity and contradiction are features of our linguistic repertoire, rather than the incompetent expression, or limited cognitive sophistication, of a particular child. In conventional accounts, the ambiguity of children's talk would either not be recognized, or, if acknowledged, would be interpreted as evidence of immature logical reasoning or loss of narrative control because of its abstraction from social relationships (Burman, 1992).

For the above reasons, we may be critical of children being 'given voice' only if they can present themselves as subjects or individuals in this (Cartesian) sense, and ambivalent about some of the policy changes which require such bases for recognition. For instance, my support for the 1989 Children Act's requirement that children's wishes be heard on decisions that affect them, is tempered by the knowledge that popular psychological notions about children (about fantasy, 'impressionability', reliability as witnesses) form the inescapable context within which statements will be heard. The complexity of issues that we face is illustrated by the fact that these same psychological discourses of the subject which allow some children to be heard, will disallow other children, including those who present contradictory or illogical accounts and don't manage to make themselves understood by (particular) adults, in 'adults' terms'. Attaining subject status in current hegemonic discourse is fraught with risks as well as benefits for those currently on its margins.

Even after we have adopted a strategy either of engaging in representational politics or of claiming to re/present particular children, further issues may arise which repeat this question. Within either approach, particular discourses may have apparently contradictory implications. For instance, the discourse of child protection can reinforce the idea that children are weak, vulnerable and in need of (adult) protection (Kitzinger, 1990), even as they simultaneously provide help for particular children. Alternatively, there may be times when this kind of emphasis benefits children as a social group, say in securing funding for services, but is unhelpful for an individual child.

Even though 'the voices of children' discourse is deliberately plural, (as mentioned above), there is the danger that invoking the category, despite taking care to speak of particular children, risks reifying children as an homogeneous social group whose 'nature' is different from that of adults. As for the category 'women', there may be times when the benefits of naming the social group outweigh the costs. Throughout this chapter I have retained 'children' as an unproblematized category in order to focus on questions of representation. I have

presumed the constituency of childhood when, perhaps, the dilemmas in representing children depend crucially on which children.

Kay Standing (this volume) also explores the risk that our research reinforces assumptions about the research participants. There is the danger that our critiques reify what we would rather dispel if we concentrate too much on dominant meanings, with too little attention to times and places in which they are contested (Alcoff, 1988). Parker and Burman remind discourse analysts of the importance of theorising the '...fluctuations and transformations in discursive relations to ward off a reading of them as unchanging' (1993: 164). This dilemma can be aligned crudely with the tension between 'gritty realism' ('showing it like it is') and 'positive images' (presenting a preferred version). It re-states the alternative between re-presentation (understood as empirical, realist) or re/presentation (as an intervention in cultural politics). I have argued that, although this is a false opposition (as Walkerdine,1990, and others have shown) and risks reasserting a truth/ideology distinction (see, for example, Barrett, 1991), it can be useful for thinking strategically about our research.

Representations in the public sphere: choosing a strategy
To summarize, our strategic decisions might include, not only which approach to adopt and what representational claims to make, but also, precisely how reflexive to be about these in a given forum. One could be aware of the rhetorical ploys and epistemological imperialisms by which one's textual authority is supported, but choose not to deconstruct it at a given point, in which case, the strategic use of conventional research rhetoric might be indistinguishable from its unreflexive use (Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988). However, in doing so, hitherto taken-for-granted notions may have been displaced. For example, James and Prout (1996) call for children to be studied within family contexts once again because they are an '...important social context in which children discover [sic] their identities (James, 1994)' (James and Prout, 1996: 42), rather than, unthinkingly, because the family has been naturalised as the place where children exist. Another illustration might be using the discourse of 'public sphere' in order to emphasize the broader political consequences of our research, even though we might reject theoretically the idea that there can be a separate sphere of (private) meanings which are not cultural which it sometimes implies. Perhaps another illustration is my use of the notion of strategy despite its implication of rational, goal-oriented subjects (and its militaristic resonances) (Edwards and Ribbens, 1991), alongside the fact that I have deconstructed this model of the subject in relation to interviewees, whilst retaining it to speak of us decision-making researchers!

In the same way that researchers set the terms for discussion in an interview, so public debate may already be framed in such a way - again by adults - that intervening within the terms of the debate is a compromise. A sense of perspective is needed to weigh up whether an idea is worth challenging, or whether granting it research attention bolsters its status. This can be thought of as a question about whether to try to make gains within the existing terms of the debate or to challenge those terms (Alldred, 1996; Kitzinger, 1987; Prince and Hartnett, 1993). The dilemma, again, concerns the risk of reification by critiques.

How specific to research with children are the dilemmas discussed here? It seems that the theoretical issues are not specific, but apply across the board in feminist and critical research. However, the precise meanings assigned childhood in this culture make the detail of the dilemmas of research with children particular. Ideas about marginal groups may be structured similarly in relation to the presumed centre, but do not necessarily require the same responses. It is the specific forms of these dilemmas to which researchers must attend in relation to the participants' social group, and in relation to the precise moment and location of their research intervention. Thus, the possible losses and gains of employing the discourse of hearing voices must be considered in relation to children (as a rhetorical category), and perhaps in relation to particular children, and the discourse might then be drawn on with varying degrees of literality.

Whilst much feminist research is concerned with adequately recognizing difference, representing children within research is always characterised by Otherness across the construction of a defining adult-child difference. Unlike Women's Studies, Childhood Studies has not arisen from a politics of experience (Oakley, 1994) and is conducted by adults on those who are Other to them. Children do, of course, make political representations on their own behalf, as well as on behalf of others (Hoyles, 1989), but more often through direct action, rather than through re/presentational or symbolic politics. As adults representing children we can try to recognize the ways in which our researcher status may confound and exploit our adult status, and clarify whether we are representing children in the realist, photographic sense of portrayal, or using our political perspective to make judgements about the way they are represented as we engage in struggles about 'recognition' or meaning. Referring to 'children's perspectives', naming their particularity, even though inevitably drawing into play their Otherness and our cultural centrality, we may be able to make use of the benefits this can provide in claiming that people who are marginalised 'as children' ought to be heard. Researchers interviewing children need to consider how we hear children's voices, meaning not only the approaches we employ, but also how the representations we make of their voices will be heard in the public sphere. Children's voices need to be heard alongside critical attention to the way childhood is constructed. This should then inform a more preliminary question, which, as Alderson (1995) notes, is often bypassed: not how, but whether the research should be done, and, I would add, not just how, but whether each particular re/presentational act should be made.