

Discourse analysis has become an increasingly popular approach to research across the social sciences, and a particularly important tool for feminist psychologists. *Feminism and Discourse* provides a showcase for a wide range of discourse analytical work in psychology from a feminist perspective. It constitutes a thorough critical evaluation of this approach for the feminist project of intellectual, social and political change.

Original contributions by leading researchers explore the benefits and contradictions of discourse analysis and consider its value for feminist psychology. The first part of the book illustrates the application of discourse analysis to four key topics of feminist concern: adolescent knowledge about menstruation, sexual harassment, gendered representations of childhood, and anorexia nervosa. The second part contains five assessments of the usefulness of discourse analysis – both as theory and as method – for feminists.

This book will be of great interest to critical theorists and discourse analysts across the social sciences, as well as to students and lecturers in social psychology, the psychology of women, psychology and language, women's studies, linguistics, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.

Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger are active members of the Loughborough Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG) and teach courses on Feminism and Psychology in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University.

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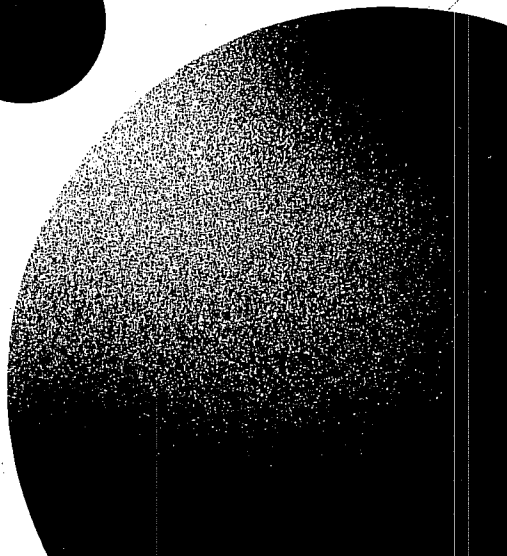
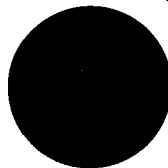
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Feminism and Discourse

Psychological Perspectives

edited by

Sue Wilkinson and
Celia Kitzinger



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Sue Wilkinson teaches social psychology and women's studies at Loughborough University. She is also Editor of *Feminism & Psychology: An International Journal*.

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Introduction

Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger

The 'turn to language' is a defining feature of contemporary social science; and central to it is 'the emergence of a discourse framework' (Parker, 1992: xi). Discourse analysis has been described as 'a new wave of research sweeping across social psychology', and one which is currently almost synonymous with 'critical' and in some cases 'feminist' research (Burman and Parker, 1993: 1, 9). Given the long history of feminist concern with language, from the nineteenth century on (see Cameron, 1990, for an excellent review; also the 'landmark' texts by, for example, Lakoff, 1975; Thorne and Henley, 1975; Spender, 1980; McConnell-Ginet et al. 1980; Kramarae and Treichler, 1985; and Cameron, 1985), it is perhaps not surprising that discourse analysis has become so popular among feminist psychologists (as witnessed, for example, by the numerous discourse analytic papers published in the international journal *Feminism & Psychology*, such as Burman, 1992; Gavey, 1992; Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Chesters, 1994; Crawford et al., 1994). What is surprising is the curious absence of any text dealing specifically with discourse analysis from a feminist psychological perspective.

Forms of discourse analytic work range widely, from the primarily linguistic (such as Stubbs, 1983), through conversation analysis and ethnomethodology (such as Atkinson and Heritage, 1984), to semiotic, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist/postmodernist variants (such as Henriques et al., 1984). Across these forms, however, non-feminist writing on discourse analysis routinely ignores the contribution made by feminists, while feminist writing on discourse analysis often excludes psychology altogether. So, for example, 'feminism' is not indexed in such key mainstream discourse analytic texts as Norman Fairclough's (1990) *Discourse Analysis*; Teun van Dijk's (1985) *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*; Deborah Schiffrin's (1994) *Approaches to Discourse*; Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology* or Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter's (1992) *Discursive Psychology*. Even Ian Parker's (1992) *Discourse Dynamics* has only two references in the index to 'feminism and discourse analysis' (131, 140): these pages

briefly mention the work of Walkerdine, Hollway, Squire, Gavey and Haraway as contributing to the development of poststructuralist discourse analysis – and that's all. Similarly, the omission of work by psychologists in interdisciplinary feminist work on discourse is apparent from volumes such as the *Discourse & Society* Special Issue on 'Women Speaking from Silence' (Houston and Kramarae, 1991) which includes contributions from researchers based in sociology, speech and communications studies, women's studies, English literature, linguistics, and adult education, but not one contributor who identifies herself as a psychologist; and the volume in the *Advances in Discourse Processes* series on *Gender and Discourse* (Todd and Fisher, 1988) which includes only one contribution from a psychologist (Kathy Davis). The omission of psychological perspectives in feminist discourse analytic writing is clear, too, when well-known feminist writers on – and popularizers of – discourse analysis, such as Deborah Tannen (1994), make virtually no reference to contributions from psychologists. There has been no attempt to pull together the diverse strands of feminist psychological discourse analytic research in a single collection; nor to consider in any sustained way the value of discourse analysis for the project of feminist psychology.

This book fills that gap, offering an edited collection of discourse analytic work which is specifically feminist in content – constituting both a 'showcase' for a major strand of contemporary feminist social psychology in Britain, and a critical evaluation of discourse analysis in relation to feminism. This book brings together, for the first time, a collection of original chapters by feminist psychologists exploring the contributions and contradictions of discourse analysis.

The first part of the book, entitled 'Empirical Work', consists of four chapters not primarily concerned with arguing the merits of a discourse analytic perspective, but which – on the whole – simply assume these as self-evident and get on with the work of 'doing' discourse analyses in a feminist context. These four chapters present discourse analytic work on key feminist issues of particular interest to feminist psychologists: adolescent knowledge about menstruation (Lovering, Chapter 1), sexual harassment (Kitzinger and Thomas, Chapter 2), gendered representations of childhood (Burman, Chapter 3), and anorexia nervosa (Hepworth and Griffin, Chapter 4). They include very different kinds of data, analysed at very different levels: data from group discussions with school children, textually analysed with the help of the computer program *ETHNOGRAPH* (Lovering); data from interviews with adult men and women, thematically analysed with reference to social context (Kitzinger and Thomas); and data based on broader socio-cultural representations,

analysed by deconstructing the discursive imperialism of mainstream institutions, including film, advertising, and developmental psychology (Burman), and therapy, psychiatry, and medicine (Hepworth and Griffin).

It could be argued that it is the *topic* of these chapters that makes them feminist – they function primarily as illustrations of what can be *done* with discourse analysis, in contrast to other theoretical or methodological frameworks. They are united by their shared view of language as an interactive activity, mediating linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge, and constituting a site for the construction of identities and subjectivities – and they also see language as a key site for feminist resistance.

From a discourse analytic perspective, the language within which experience is framed is seen not simply as describing the social world, but also as, in some sense, constructing it. So, as Hepworth and Griffin (Chapter 4) and Kitzinger and Thomas (Chapter 2) show, respectively, 'anorexia' and 'sexual harassment' are, in part, created by the language that is used to describe them. Such phenomena do not have their origins inside the individual (indeed, the concept of 'the individual' is itself a product of Western discursive practices: Kitzinger, 1992), but, rather, they are constitutive of individuals as social products. In discourse analytic psychology, '[i]nstead of studying the mind as if it were outside language, we study the spoken and written texts . . . – the conversations, debates, discussions where images of the mind are reproduced and transformed' (Burman and Parker, 1993: 2).

In this way, the discursive location of the individual frames his/her 'personal' experience of self and subjectivity. What it means to be an individual person in the 'modern' world involves taking on *as our own* the very discursive practices through which we are constituted' (Davies, 1990: 506, italics in original). So, Lovering's (Chapter 1) analysis of 'the transformation of the girl-child into the bleeding woman' rests centrally on the ways in which girls' subjectivity is shaped by the available discourses, practices and meanings surrounding menstruation. (The theorization of subjectivity is taken further by Hollway (Chapter 5), in the second part of the book.)

An attention to discourse facilitates a historical account of psychological (and other similarly hegemonic) knowledges, and mounts a critique of practice derived from such knowledges by challenging their truth claims. So, Burman (Chapter 3) shows how prevailing Western discourses of childhood (in both popular and psychological texts) are deeply gendered, while Hepworth and Griffin (Chapter 4) examine the discursive continuities and disjunctures between nineteenth-century texts about anorexia and feminist

analyses over one hundred years later, and the inter-relationship of such discourses in interviews with British health care workers. Indeed, it has been argued that the current popularity of discourse analysis owes much to the ways its analytic tools can be used to inform political practice and struggles (Burman and Parker, 1993): the chapters in Part 1 *demonstrate* its utility in the pursuit of feminist goals (while chapters later in the book *debate* its utility for feminism).

In the first two chapters, the authors (Lovering; Kitzinger and Thomas) document moves from positivist agendas (exposing negative attitudes and ignorance about menstruation, and developing a 'watertight' definition of sexual harassment, respectively) to discourse analytic ones. However, the authors' subsequent analyses lead them to very different political ends. While Lovering is critical of existing sex education practices in schools, which pay little attention to the meanings of menstruation for young women, Kitzinger and Thomas regard the development of institutional policies on sexual harassment as largely futile. They argue, rather, that the assertion of one view of reality over another is a common technique employed by a dominant group in order to maintain its position of power – and that what is needed instead is a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which sexual harassment is rendered insignificant or invisible (in other words, how it is discursively defined and managed).

The second part of the book, entitled 'Theoretical Advances', consists of five chapters which offer reflections upon the utility of discourse analysis (both as theory and as method) for feminists. The authors of three of these chapters (Hollway, Chapter 5; Wetherell, Chapter 7; Squire, Chapter 8) provide broadly favourable evaluations of discourse analysis; while the remaining two (Widdicombe, Chapter 6; Gill, Chapter 9) express serious reservations.

Key among the issues addressed by these chapters is the status afforded to the ~~extra-discursive~~ – that is, material beyond the discourse analytic text, whether this is primarily characterized in terms of an 'exterior' world of social practices and their material effects, or in terms of an 'interior' world of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. While Wetherell (Chapter 7) worries about the extra-discursive, she clearly privileges the linguistic over the social or the psychological, arguing that '[h]ow social objects . . . are constituted in talk is pivotal to the nature of those objects. Talk about these things does not play a reflective or after-the-event role; it is the medium of the formation of social objects and social practices' (140). By contrast, Hollway (Chapter 5) assumes experience which is extra-discursive: the experience of egalitarian heterosex, for which feminist discourse offers no words (as do Kitzinger and Thomas, Chapter 2, in their discussion of 'unrecognized' sexual harassment).

Hollway argues that the dominance of discursive approaches in social science has led to 'a remarkable avoidance of the extra-discursive'. Further, she contends that 'a recognition of the fact that all understanding of the world is mediated through language has been falsely reduced to a premise that the world can be understood as discursive' (91). Hollway's remedy for this alleged reductionism is to add a psychodynamic dimension to the theorization of subjectivity.

A very different solution is advocated by Gill (Chapter 9), whose conception of the extra-discursive is located firmly in the social world. As part of her indictment of postmodernist discourse analysis as hopelessly relativistic, Gill identifies feminists' need for a vocabulary of value, 'without which we will be left theoretically and politically paralysed in the face of enduring inequalities, injustice and oppression' (165).

Contributors to Part 2 also seek to document the range of different forms of discourse analysis (see, for example, Squire, Chapter 8; Gill, Chapter 9), and sometimes to differentiate between them in terms of their particular advantages or disadvantages for the feminist project. So Gill argues, in relation to the rampant relativism of much postmodernist discourse analysis, that 'the way in which relativists theorize the relationships between politics, personal life and academic research is antithetical to feminism. They explicitly proscribe political commitments in their research . . .' (173). Widdicombe (Chapter 6) is also critical of poststructuralist/postmodernist discourse analysis: specifically of the way in which it is typically used by feminists. She takes issue with 'the analytic rush to identify discourses in order to get on to the more serious business of accounting for their political significance' (108), asserting that 'by elevating their own political agendas as the pre-established analytic frame [feminist] researchers may actually undermine the practical and political utility of the analyses they undertake' (111). For Widdicombe, the solution is to favour the 'unfashionable' ethnomethodological variety of discourse analysis, to focus on 'the mundane contexts of interaction [where] institutional power is exercised, social inequalities are experienced, and resistance accomplished' (111).

More generally, there is detailed consideration within these chapters of the implications of discourse analysis for developing feminist theory and politics. While there is, of course, no *necessary* coincidence between the interests of feminists and discourse analysts (as Squire points out in Chapter 8: 145), the potential for fruitful engagement is clear. Wetherell says: 'Together discourse analysis and feminism produce a radical and liberating scepticism' (Chapter 7: 135); while Gill's view is that 'discourse analysis has an enormous amount to offer feminists. It offers a principled and coherent means

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by which feminists can study talk and texts of all kinds – shedding light on old questions and provoking new ones. It has the potential to revitalise feminist studies of language . . .’ (Chapter 9: 167). Squire presents the benefits of doing discourse analysis for feminist psychologists as (at least) threefold: as instrumentalist (it provides ‘a respectable institutional front’); as pragmatic (it offers ‘some help in answering questions about method and theory that block their work’, together with a ‘qualitative yet systematized method’); and as political (it offers ‘hope for a radicalization of the discipline’) (Chapter 8: 146–7). However, there is considerable debate as to whether there is a *necessary* connection between discourse analysis (as theory or method) and a critical politics (as Burman and Parker, 1993, and Parker, 1992, sometimes seem to suggest); and whether discourse analysis is necessarily of value for *feminist* political purposes.

There is a growing feminist literature (for example, Lovibond, 1992; Soper, 1990; Jackson, 1992; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1995; see also Gill, above) arguing that discourse analysis/postmodernism is antithetical to feminism; indeed, although using discourse analysis here in pursuit of feminist goals, Burman is elsewhere (1990; 1991; 1992) quite sceptical about its value for feminists. Many contributors to this volume remain optimistic, however: those who demonstrate discourse analysis in action in Part 1 and, in Part 2, Wetherell, who proposes ‘a feminist politics of articulation’ (141), and Squire, who exhorts feminist psychologists consistently to conjoin ‘narratives of pragmatism’ and ‘narratives of extravagance’ in their discourse analyses (146).

Gill (Chapter 9) is more equivocal. Although, as noted above, she sees great potential for the use of discourse analysis by feminists, she follows Burman (1992) in distinguishing between the *applications* of discourse analysis and the theory itself, and goes on to suggest that it is precisely those features of discourse analysis’s *theoretical* commitments making it so productive for feminists, that also make it deeply problematic. The stress laid by discourse analysis on simple ‘diversity’ masks *power* differences; its notion of multiple, fragmented subject positions can lead to the denial of any single identity around which to organize; its emphasis on the micro-politics of power downplays macro-structural inequalities; and – most importantly – its commitment to relativism disavows the grounds for feminist politics. Ultimately, as a feminist, Gill rejects the postmodernist discourse analytic position on relativism as offering ‘no principled alternative to realism by means of which we might make *political interventions*’ (171, emphasis in original). She argues, instead for a type of ‘passionately interested inquiry’ (175);

‘a relativism which is unashamedly political, in which we, as feminists, can make social transformation an explicit concern of our work’ (182).

In sum, then, this volume highlights the uses of discourse analysis by feminist psychologists and illustrates its applications to a range of feminist topics (Part 1); it also provides a critical evaluation of the theory/method for the feminist project of intellectual, social and political change (Part 2). It is difficult to identify foundational premises or techniques which are specific to discourse analysis, not only because of the breadth and conceptual/methodological ‘fuzziness’ of the term, but also because of the common ground it shares with other critical approaches in social science (for example, social constructionism, the study of rhetoric, ideology, textuality, critical ethnography – and qualitative methods more generally). Nonetheless, this volume addresses many of the key issues raised by discourse analysis for feminists.

Many feminist social scientists have argued that there is no single feminist method, no one approach to data collection or analysis which is distinctively and inherently ‘feminist’ (Wilkinson, 1986; Peplau and Conrad, 1989). Thus there is nothing distinctively feminist about the theory or method of discourse analysis. Although not all of the contributors to this book would call themselves discourse analysts, all are feminists and/or are engaged in feminist research – and all have found some aspects of discourse analysis of value in their work. As editors of this volume, we have brought together leading British feminist psychologists working in discourse analysis, and have raised for debate and discussion some of the key issues in the relationship between feminism and discourse. We consider this book to be an essential resource for all feminists, psychologists, and discourse analysts seeking to explore and make sense of the complexities and contradictions of doing feminist psychological discourse analytic research.

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Part 1

EMPIRICAL WORK

1

The Bleeding Body: Adolescents Talk about Menstruation

Kathryn Matthews Lovering

The transformation of the girl-child into the bleeding woman is, and has been, for me a problematic and fascinating subject for research. In 1989 I began what was to have been a feminist but otherwise conventional psychological study into 'The effects of menarche on aspects of girls' self-concept'. Over the next three years I made the difficult but liberating move to a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis of menstrual discursive practices and girls' subjectivity. It is this move and its results that I want to discuss in this chapter.

Background – making the move

When I began my original research into the effects of menstruation on girls, I learned from contemporary psychological research (see Ruble and Brooks-Gunn, 1982; Scott et al., 1989; McGrory, 1990; Rierdan and Koff, 1990) that adolescents have largely negative attitudes to, and a lack of knowledge about, menstruation. However, this literature does not address the questions of *why* adolescents have such negative attitudes, nor of *how* they remain so ignorant of such a common event. The social and political aspects of menstruation never feature in these accounts of girls' experiences of menarche, nor are feminist issues debated. I became increasingly intrigued by this psychological silence on these aspects of menarche, the source of adolescents' negativity, and what menstruation might mean for girls and boys.

There did not seem to be a place for my questions, values and desires within the conventional psychology of menarche. As Nicolas

Rose (1985:3) comments, psychology has emerged as an 'indivuated scientific discourse' which seeks to produce rational and objective explanations of a unified subject that are 'true'. This scientific psychology bases its claims to truth on formalized methods of experimentation and data collection with an emphasis on reliability and validity, and it assumes

that ignoring the constitution of science within political desires, values and interests will somehow increase the reliability of accounts of nature and social life. (Harding, 1991: 148)

As a feminist, I found this standpoint increasingly incompatible with my commitment to the improvement of women's position in science and society, and with my experience as a menstruating woman and female researcher. The separation of the means of doing research from its ends, the removal of the researcher from the research process, and the assumption that 'facts' can be collected about the social world can place the researcher in the position of simply reflecting and perpetuating the 'unequal power relations which already exist in the society' (May, 1993: 41). I found myself in just this position with a paper I gave early in my research – entitled 'The Experience of Menarche: Misconceptions and Miseries'. Here I inadvertently pathologized the female body (as a source of miseries), labelled girls as 'ignorant' (they don't or won't understand the biology of menstruation), and placed the fault with either the mother or the teacher (they should tell girls about 'it'). It was never my intention *just* to reflect existing power relations, or to 'blame' women for their own oppression, or to detach myself from my research

... in such a way that we strip 'ourselves' from descriptions, or describe our involvements in particular kinds of ways – as somehow 'removed' rather than full-blown members of the events and processes we describe. (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 155)

Slowly I realized I needed a different theory and methodology. Conventional psychology does not address the production of knowledge, the issue of power, or questions of meaning; it does not account for the patriarchal nature of menstrual attitudes or for the scientific production of knowledge/ignorance about menstruation. Even women psychologists researching menarche have focused on the quantification of menstrual attitudes and knowledge rather than questioning their nature or source. Their research is based on the 'taken-for-granted, common-sense facts' (Henriques et al., 1984: 2) of the female body and of menstruation which is always everywhere 'tabooed' and the symbol of 'womanhood' (see Laws, 1990, for a critique of these essentialist ideas).

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LOWCEPT

Neither is the more explicitly feminist qualitative methodology in psychology – which aims to 'give a voice' to women – necessarily a 'valid one' (Bhavnani, 1990: 141); in part because such an approach does not theorize the social aspects of women's subjective experience, and in part because it does not consider the production or meaning of silence. Too often, this research neglects the issue of social and power relations in the formation of women's experience and 'voice' as well as neglecting questions of who is being empowered, and in whose interests this empowerment is being enacted.

I required an analysis that would enable me to get behind the assumptions of the present psychology of menarche so that I could analyse menstrual conceptions and practices, their meanings for boys and girls, and girls' subjectivity. The psychological approach concerned with these questions is associated with what is called poststructuralist psychology and discourse analysis as influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, and 'already has a history in psychology' (Parker, 1992: 1). It was to this approach that I decided to move.

Unfortunately for those of us new to this area, there are major difficulties in such a move. The first is that the category 'discourse' within the social sciences is, as Cousins and Hussain (1984: 77) pointed out more than a decade ago, 'becoming embarrassingly overloaded and more likely to induce confusion than any clarity it might originally have been set to produce'. Discourse has been put to various uses, from extending the theory of ideology to informing philosophical debate about knowledge and reality. In psycholinguistics it has focused on structural linguistics with an 'emphasis on structural analysis and its relative neglect of content' (Henriques et al., 1984: 105). In contrast, poststructuralist discourse analysis as influenced by Foucault has a central concern with content and therefore is a 'step away from language' (Parker, 1992: xi). In part it is this paradoxical move to discourse but away from language, as well as its break with many of the major assumptions of modern psychology (Kvale, 1992), that make this analysis problematic as well as 'curious, useful, dangerous and liberating' (Parker, 1992: xi).

So what does this move to discourse mean for my analysis? It means that by using the term 'discourse' I am establishing a critical distance from concepts of language and internal mental states which ignore how our subjectivity is constituted by history, culture, and power relations. Rather than assuming, as do attitude tests or inductive content analysis, that language reflects some individual internal state, I assume instead that discourses 'do not simply describe the social world, but categorise it, they bring phenomena into sight' (Parker, 1992: 4-5). As my additional research into the

present history of the psychology of menarche revealed, the 'pre- and post-menarcheal' girl of psychological research did not exist as an object of study before 1937: she was a historical and cultural construction of psychological practice. In the same way, we could question whether menstrual attitudes tests and questionnaires simply report individuals' beliefs or whether they actively produce them.

This move to a poststructuralist discourse analysis does not come easily. We have to give up ingrained habits of thought and practice. Not only must we think of discourse as bringing 'phenomena into sight', but we must not distinguish between theory and practice. Knowledge must always be conceived of as practice. In this way we can consider how knowledge comes into being rather than assuming it just stands for some 'real' thing; and how knowledge(s) regulate and discipline bodies. For example, when I first began my research into menarche and girls, I just took it for granted that the female body and male body are completely different, have always been completely different, and will always be completely different. This seems just 'common sense' as well as scientific 'fact', and it underwrites much research into the menstrual cycle. But this has not always been the case: there have been and are different ways of seeing the human body. Early sixteenth-century British anatomy and medicine viewed the female and male body as essentially the same, although some differences were recognized (Laqueur, 1990). Even in the scientific Victorian era, a prizewinning feminist scientist and physician argued for the similarities between the female and male body, stating that between the 'two sexes, is a difference not of kind, but of degree' (Jacobi, 1878: 101). Importantly, she was arguing against such biological sex differences because in practice these scientific 'truths' were being produced to deny women equal access to education, professions, and politics.

A feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis allows us to see the female body as a 'medium of culture' and, as Foucault has argued, 'a practical, direct locus of social control' (Bordo, 1989: 13), as well as a material, biological body. Far from being the pre-given object about which psychologists make 'discoveries', the body is 'trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of and selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity' (Bordo, 1989: 14). And if, as Chris Weedon (1987: 2) argues, 'patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference', then it is fundamental to a feminist psychology of menarche that we tackle questions of how and where knowledge is produced, and by whom. These questions about knowledge are especially important if we accept that the production of psychological knowledge is always open to the effects of politics. There is always the danger of psychology

re-producing rather than challenging, resisting, or transforming existing relations of power. We can become enmeshed by the practices of institutional psychology so that we are drawn into collusion with the forces that sustain our subordination as women. We see this happen in the history of menstrual research with women researchers (see Helene Deutsch, 1944; Phyllis Greenacre, 1950; and Therese Benedek, 1952), re-producing the arguments of anti-feminist male biologists that women's emotions and social behaviour are controlled by their 'sexual cycle', arguments that have been used repeatedly to restrict women's participation in public life. These women psychologists re-produced the very arguments which were used to subordinate their own, and other women's, interests and ambitions.

In the research on menarche, it has been anti-feminist (and male-dominated) discursive practices that have constructed the onset of menstruation as a 'critical' period marking the menstruating girl both as vulnerable to trauma and as fundamentally different (biologically different) from the adolescent boy. This construction of menarche as a 'significant' developmental event – with no male equivalent – signalling 'womanhood' and 'femininity' remains unexamined by many women research psychologists. Menarche is treated as a pre-given object of biology: not as the historical creation of a particular kind of twentieth-century science. So that even as women in psychology are seeking to redress the gender imbalance in psychological practice with more research by women on topics of interest to women, they re-produce patriarchal conceptions of the female body by ignoring the historical and cultural construction of their subject. With a psychology ignorant of history and devoid of power relations, we risk mistaking man-made objects for nature-given realities, thereby inadvertently supporting the *status quo*.

(In contrast, when a poststructuralist discourse analysis is applied to the psychology of menarche, knowledges of the female body and menstruation are treated as historical and cultural productions involving the participation of wider social practices. The psychology of menarche and adolescents' experiences are seen as produced by particular discursive practices located in history and society, not by the 'truth' of an independent, materially given object which psychologists 'discover'. It is these patriarchal, cultural and scientific discourses and practices of the female body and sexuality which constitute girls' understanding and experience of their body, femininity, and menstruation.

This, then, was the framework which I brought to my analysis of adolescents talking about menstruation. Although it is through an analysis of their conversations that I make sense of the girls' and boys'

knowledge and experience, these conversations must be interpreted. Knowledge and meaning are not directly reflected in words because as Wendy Hollway (1989: 42) says:

... a theory of meaning incorporating personal history, culture, unconscious processes and social differences is required to make good sense of them.

As a consequence of my move to a 'new' analysis the aims of my research changed from investigating the 'effects' of menstruation to questions about the discourses and practices available to young adolescent girls and boys in relation to menstruation, the meanings menstruation has for them, and the ways in which these discourses, practices, and meanings constitute girls' subjectivity.

Methodology

Having discussions and having problems

I held a series of discussions with young adolescents on 'Growing up', the purpose being to encourage them to talk about different aspects of being a girl or boy 'growing up', including puberty and menstruation. The discussions were in semi-structured, single sex groups in order to encourage a 'diversity of participants' accounting practices' (Potter and Weitherrill, 1987: 164). I thought informal groups would produce a wider range of material than the more traditional one-to-one formal interview with a set of specific questions.

Although problems and 'mistakes' in research are often written out of accounts, I want to point out that these group discussions were done before I had adopted my present theoretical position. When I planned them I thought of them either as focus groups or as a pilot study, but as soon as they started I realized they would be invaluable as a study in themselves. Even though I was undecided on my exact approach, I knew I was not attempting to test attitudes or beliefs, nor trying to obtain representative or normative data or statistically significant 'results'.

Participants – recruiting girls and boys

I recruited the participants from a state school in a large town in the South West of Britain. The school had boys and girls from all abilities and socio-economic classes but few from ethnic minorities. The participants were all eleven to twelve years old. As the pupils in this school were placed in one of three academic ability bands, I decided to have a girls' and boys' discussion group from each band. I visited three classes to tell the pupils about my research, and to request volunteers for the following week. The pupils who volunteered were