

# IS THE GENDERED NATURE OF TOILETING CARE AND TOILET TRAINING SHIFTING?

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## INTRODUCTION

Toilet training is a co-occupation involving an adult and child who are interactively shaping each other; involving the teaching and learning of cultural practices that will enable the child to urinate and defecate in an appropriate place and manner for a particular cultural setting (Aitken, 200; Wolraich & Tippins, 2003). These practices are determined by the conditions unique to a specific historical time and context. In Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018 this role is shared by a range of adults, mostly parents, and early childhood teachers. Media advertisements for nappie (diaper) products and trainer pants in Aotearoa New Zealand present this role as within the domain of concern for both male and female adults. I argue that this has not always been the case, however.

This article proposes that the gendered social construction of toilet training is undergoing a shift. With a change of discourses comes change of practices, subjectivities and opportunities. As either parent is now sanctioned as an appropriate person to carry out toilet training and toileting care for their child, both parents are also given the opportunity to engage in this co-occupation, thereby dismantling the argument for the gendered suitability of mothers as the adult primarily responsible for socially shaping their child's toilet learning.

Co-occupation occurs when the co-creation of shared meaning is engaged in by two or more people; it encompasses three elements – shared physicality, shared emotionality and shared intentionality (Pickens & Pizur-Barnekow, 2009). This article illustrates how, historically, fathers were excluded from the co-occupation of toilet training in Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1950s due to the belief that fathers were unable to engage in shared emotionality or shared intentionality, compounded by limited opportunities to engage in shared physicality.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper utilises a poststructuralist Foucauldian genealogical lens (Foucault, 1977). A genealogical analysis describes how discourses emerge from the “conditions of possibility” (opportunities provided) specific to a particular historical context. Discourses are both a phenomenon and a form of social action that shape how a specific phenomenon such as toilet training is understood and carried out (Rudman, 2010). The carrying out of an action is shaped by society, and the person engaging in the action also shapes the understanding of how and when this occupation should be carried out, and by whom. Therefore it could be argued that every occupation is a co-occupation with society.

Occupation is a word that has many meanings and definitions attached to it (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015). For the profession of occupational therapy, occupation is seen as health-influencing, multi-dimensional and complex. The complexity of occupation and co-occupations relates to its ongoing subjection to societal influences, which

rise from the social, physical, institutional and cultural environment; therefore the knowledge which shapes the understanding of an occupation is historically and culturally situated (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015). The cultural value placed on different occupations and co-occupations, and the practices created through engaging in occupations, are mediated through the process of discourses.

Discourses are productive: they shape knowledge, actions and people's subjectivities (Foucault, 1977). Subjectivities are identities that people take on, or others place on people, and relate to the development of a person's sense of self and the actions and occupations they carry out (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). There are multiple discourses present within a society, and therefore multiple possible subjectivities and ways of engaging in the co-occupation of toilet training. Co-occupation is one way in which social messages and ways of doing are transmitted from one generation to another.

This article is informed by the author's PhD studies (Robinson, 2018). Following Hook's (2001) methodological interpretation of Foucault's genealogical work, I embarked on a discourses analysis of toilet training texts using a biopolitical focus. Biopolitics is a Foucauldian concept which describes how the state is concerned with the population's health and wellbeing. This methodological focus is in alignment with the profession of occupational therapy's understanding of occupations as health-related and complex (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015).

Occupations and co-occupations are based on a shared understanding of what, how and whom should engage in them, the enactment of this knowledge being demonstrated by groups of people carrying out occupations in roughly similar ways. This engagement in similar ways of doing is maintained by the process of normalisation. Foucault's thinking is central to understanding why people self-govern their behaviour through normalising influences, and how they indirectly manipulate others into conforming (Rose, 1992). A biopolitical focus throws light on the normalised behaviour relating to toilet training in the 1950s, and reveals the elements that were sufficiently compelling to make the population comply of its own accord with this co-occupation, in ways specific to this period.

Identifying the conventional discourses of the 1950s has assisted in identifying discourses in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand by utilising the notion of the "history of the present" (Foucault, 1977). This methodological tool was deemed essential, as discourses and discursive actions that make up our everyday doing are taken-for-granted truths, and are therefore difficult to identify without utilising the distance offered by a different historical context.

In the study, statements drawn from influential texts on parenting and toilet training that were circulating in Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1950s, and which demonstrate the process of socialising a child from 'instinctual' to toilet-trained, were selected and reviewed. These texts provided the data which was used to complete the discourse analysis presented below (Bevan Brown, 1950; Bowlby, 1953; Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1953; Keritepu, 1956; Phillips, 1955).

This paper begins by considering the roles of women and men in the 1950s. I then show how fathers were excluded at a temporal level, as well as at a discriminatory level. I conclude by allowing readers to consider if they are also experiencing a shift in discourses relating to the gendered role of toilet training within their own contextual space.

## GENDERED ROLES

Gendered roles are socially constructed roles associated with the biological sex of the person involved in the behaviour: In the creation of a gendered social role, a range of behaviours and attitudes are scripted as appropriate and desirable, but also potentially limiting (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the 1950s have been described in many ways – often fondly as the nation's golden years, but also as a decade when clear gendered expectations were placed on both men and women. The 1950s achieved its 'golden years' status as a result of the economic security enjoyed during these years, with unemployment at very low levels (May, 2013). It was also a time marked by a strong gender-based division of labour (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003; May, 1992), which reflected an

idealised family-based society, with women staying at home engaging in the vocation of motherhood, caring for the growing population of 'baby boom' infants.

As mothering was seen as a vocation (Kedgely, 1996), this enabled young women, many of whom who had just left school, to go straight into the role of motherhood. This situation meant that many women had limited time for career development, as it was the practice to leave work within the first few months of becoming pregnant (May, 1992), which limited their ability to re-enter the work force. This practice was sanctioned by successive governments through unequal pay structures, limited provision of child care facilities and an underlying belief that the emotional health of children required consistent attention from their mothers (Bevan-Brown, 1953; Kedgely, 1996; Tennant, 2007). Discourses influenced by John Bowlby's report to the World Health Organisation (1951) on maternal deprivation reinforced this mindset (Kedgely, 1996; May, 1992; Pool et al., 2007). Bowlby's report was interpreted as meaning that mothers needed to be in constant attendance on their children (May, 1992).

In addition, the New Zealand government took steps to increase the wages of working people. While this enabled one income to meet the needs of the family, it also created an expectation that men would be the sole income earner (May, 1992), thus limiting the time available to men to father their children in a hands-on way (Bryder, 2003). This practice was reflected in an article published in the *New Zealand Women's Weekly* in 1959: 'Millions of fathers leave home early in the morning and get back just in time for dinner at night' (Popenoe, 1959, p. 37). Therefore, just as there was a gendered expectation for mothers to engage in child care and household tasks, there was an equally gendered expectation for fathers to be the primary income provider, usually away from the home environment.

## INSTITUTIONS MAINTAINING CONVENTIONAL PRACTICES

During the 1950s, there was three influential women's organisations which supported mothers and children – the Maori Women's Welfare League, Parents Centre and Plunket. The Maori Women's Welfare League provided health services and support to Maori mothers and babies; Parents Centre was a volunteer organisation which followed what was considered at the time to be fringe practices, influenced by psychoanalytical knowledge; while the Royal Society for the Health of Women and Children, better known as Plunket, was the predominant authority on child and maternal welfare and provider for Pakeha women and children. Each of these organisations identified a need to educate mothers in the role of parenting. This educational need emerged out of new knowledge of maturation processes emerging from the 'ages and stages' research led by American-based child development specialists Arnold Gesell and Frances Ilg, which merged with current psychoanalytical perspectives (Beatty, Cahan, & Grant, 2006).

Although initially targeting mothers, in the 1950s educational opportunities in child care expanded to include fathers (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1953; Bell, 2004). Interestingly, education targeting fathers was more practical in its application: how to build baby furniture or help with clearing away the dishes at night (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1953). Advice was also pitched through popular media sources. For example, the *New Zealand Women's Weekly* (a popular women's magazine) utilised a male columnist, Brian Knight (BA, Dip Ed.), who provided advice on 'the problems of fatherhood from mending leaky taps to questions in up-to-date analytical psychology' (Knight, 1953d, p. 56), and also to the fathering demographic.

Although Brian Knight proposed that fathers be more involved in childrearing, he was careful not to undermine wives' "responsibilities." His articles were pitched at parents whose children were older; able to speak, walk and catch a ball (Knight, 1953a, 1953b, 1953c). Specific tasks held to be the legitimate responsibility of the father were also outlined in an article by Dr Paul Popenoe, an American expert in family problems. Also writing in the *New Zealand Women's Weekly*, he asserted that the father's role in the home was to model to his children an appropriate attitude towards his wife; link the family with the outside world; be kind and intelligent, but possessed of firm authority; and to take on a large part of the responsibility for sex education and financial authority within the home (Popenoe, 1959, p. 37). Caregiving tasks are noticeably absent from this list.

Fathers were encouraged to be involved with younger children through activities such as making toys for playcentre or engaging in working bees (Stover, 1998), once again illustrating how fathers were missing out on opportunities to engage in caregiving tasks directly with their child. While mothers were expected to linger and engage with their children each day when they dropped them off at kindergarten, fathers might experience kindergarten with their child only once or twice a term on a Saturday. The discourse of fathers repairing toys and completing maintenance during this time was also noted by Marshall (1959).

However, a few examples of opposing discourses can be located, including a letter from *Women's Weekly* correspondent 'Glesca,' thanking husbands who helped their wives with young children, including her own husband who gave her the night off by changing a nappy or giving a bottle (Glesca, 1953). In contrast to Glesca's husband, who enabled his own opportunities by giving his wife the night off, other men were constrained from expanding their roles as demonstrated by another correspondent, 'F. M.' (F. M., 1953), who wrote about preparing for his upcoming fatherhood role. He shares people's negative reactions and excluding behaviours, including a retailer refusing to sell him a modern parenting book. He talks about the challenges encountered in his quest to be an involved father: 'It is the modern husband who is ignored, pitied, patronised and painstakingly instructed. He really does feel that when his views are asked for it is only because his is the hand that may write the cheque' (F. M., 1953, p. 59).

Therefore, although we can find a few examples of subjugated discourses of fathers as active caregivers in the lives of their young children, the dominant discourses situate fathers as effectively excluded from the lives of their children, especially infants and toddlers (Burgess, 1997). Thus the absence of evidence of fathers engaging in toilet training their children is hardly surprising. An American study by Klatskin (1952), using a sample drawn from three socioeconomic categories of fathers' employment, sought information about the time fathers spent participating in the care of their child. As a result of analytical challenges, Klatskin devised three broad time categories for this question: minimal participation (an estimated time of under 15 minutes a day), moderate participation (15 to 30 minutes a day) and maximal participation (over 30 minutes a day). Two-thirds of the 93 fathers surveyed – irrespective of whether they worked in professional or managerial positions, white collar or skilled employment, or in semi-skilled or labouring jobs – spent less than 30 minutes a day interacting with their child. Although Klatskin's study was undertaken in the US, it suggests the general level of fathers' participation in caregiving in the 1950s.

Even Bevan Brown, a prominent New Zealand Freudian-trained psychiatrist who had a strong influence of the philosophy of Parents Centres, suggested that a father's role in the first year of a child's life should be a supporting one (Bryder, 2003), thus reinforcing the discourses of the primary importance of the maternal–child relationship and the gendered suitability of women for caregiving roles.

Although psychoanalytical discourses provided more space for the infant's emotional health and relationship with the father to be acknowledged, the focus on maternal bonding had ignored Bowlby's endorsement of a mother substitute, which would have enabled a more active role for the father or other consistent caregiver (Bowlby, 1953). Combined, these factors led to the exclusion of fathers in caring for young children and the limiting of the female role to that of mother only (Bryder, 2003; May, 2013), therefore affecting the opportunities and choices open to both men and women.

Gendering women as caregivers, and therefore wholly responsible for toilet training their children, was the result of psychoanalytical and other intersecting discourses and the practices they engendered. For a family to contest the prevailing view meant resisting discourses which were formally maintained by government initiatives and legislation, medical structures and taken-for-granted truths. Dissatisfaction with and resistance to these restricted gender roles can be clearly seen in the examples of F.M. (F.M., 1953), who wanted to be an active, involved father; and the husband of Glesca (Glesca, 1953) who willingly and spontaneously carried out nappy changing (at least when he chose to give his wife a night off).

Further questioning of gendered roles and the belief that bonding with and caring for babies was an instinctual,

female-only ability was raised by Quintin Brew, an educational psychologist and the husband of Helen Brew, founder of Parents Centre. At the 1957 Parent Centres conference, Brew argued that men were capable of responding to the subtle, non-verbal communication of their babies, thus questioning the social construction of beliefs about fathers' abilities in this area (Dobbie, 1990). Linking this to the three elements of co-occupation outlined above (Pickens & Pizur-Barnekow, 2009), fathers were excluded from engagement in the shared physicality of the task of toilet training, potentially because of reduced opportunities due to time limitations. Furthermore, Brew's comment also highlights the potential discrimination inherent in New Zealand society's understanding that fathers and young children could not engage in shared emotionality and shared intentionality.

## SPACE FOR NEW DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

In 2011 the Ministry of Social Development funded a series of parenting resources, *Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents (S.K.I.P.)*. One resource specifically targeted toilet training, an 8-page booklet with five illustrations. On the first page, a mother kneels by the toilet with her arm around a young child's shoulder, presenting the toilet to him. The fourth illustration shows a child pulling at the shirt-tails of his father who is walking away, half turning around and engaging in eye contact with his son, who is communicating the need to be taken to the toilet. These illustrations reflect how, in New Zealand, the decreased exclusion of fathers in the body-waste management of their children is being endorsed at government ministry level.

## CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated how, in the 1950s, men were limited in their opportunities to engage in the co-occupation of toilet training their children. This situation was the result of gendered expectations which created temporal limitations on interactions between fathers and young children, as well as potential discrimination forming barriers to fathers' abilities to engage at a co-occupation level with young children.

In Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018, discourses of fathers as early caregivers of young children are prominent in the media due to the willingness of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's partner, Clarke Gayford, to take a lead role in the care of their recently born daughter. Hopefully, this flood of new discourses will shift what was once the strongly gendered discourse around toilet training to one with more balanced roles and subjectivities that will benefit all parties involved.

In conclusion, I suggest that toilet training discourses in the second decade of the 2000s are creating a new taken-for-granted truth about how both parents can engage in the toileting care of their children. Although continuing challenges involving limitations on parents' and children's time together and underlying discrimination in the area of gendered abilities still lurk in contemporary discourses, they are no longer taken as truths which cannot be contested. As Foucault himself was opposed to telling people what to think, in keeping with my Foucauldian influences in this paper I have attempted to encourage the reader to consider if they are also experiencing a shift in discourses relating to the gendered role of toilet training within their own contextual space.

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