IS NON-SEXIST CHILDREARING POSSIBLE?

An Investigation of the Relationship between Gender-Sensitive Mothering and Children's Use of Gender Stereotyping

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that I have not submitted it, nor any part of it, for a degree at any other university.

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For Carlyle

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing practices: it inquires to what extent children can be raised to be relatively free of gender discrimination and prejudice. It examined the relationship between mothering and childrearing as social (-ly constructed) processes and practices with a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, it explored how these two social sites are constructed, represented and interact to form a basis for the acquisition of stereotypes which encourage gender discrimination and inequality among children in particular, and society in general. However, it was also concerned with the extent to which these institutional sites contain possibilities for resisting and challenging dominant social constructions about the meaning of gender difference.

A structured questionnaire with open-ended questions was developed and used to form the basis for interviews with eight mothers. Based on the literature reviewed, the questions were designed to elicit the participants' perspectives on the meaning/s and significance of mothering in relation to children's gendered status. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were generated. Thematic analysis was applied to observe and discuss dominant patterns in the participants' responses. Another structured questionnaire was developed and used as the basis for exercises with the (ten) children of these mothers to determine the extent to which the former recognise and make use of gender stereotypes circulating in

the wider culture. It was observed to what extent these children made gender-stereotypical associations: in relation to "masculine" and "feminine" colours, as well as in relation to gender-appropriate tasks, dress, attributes, qualities and forms of play. A simple frequency count of children's responses indicated the extent to which they recognise and use gender stereotypes.

The results revealed a general awareness that mothering and childrearing are socially constructed, and not biologically-driven, processes, and hence, subject to revision and change. In addition to the perception that gender differences are socially engineered and reinforced by real constraints of social pressure and conformity, participants felt that men, as fathers should equally share in the responsibility for rearing children. Although the children who partook in the exercises showed a general awareness and use of gender stereotypes, it was pointed out that these can and should be challenged, given the realities of social (peer) pressure, at both the levels of interpersonal interaction and structural constraints. However, there was a generalised difficulty, as far as undoing gender stereotypes are concerned, to conceive of alternative meanings of "masculinity" and "femininity" (as gendered identities) beyond the binary opposites which inform dominant social constructions of gender and gender relationships.

As institutional domains for contesting varying and competing discourses on gender and gender relationships which circulate in the wider culture, childrearing and mothering practices are sites

of potential resistance: they have the potential to resist and derail dominant patriarchal constructions and practices which generate social relationships based on gender inequality; which, in turn, fosters social oppression and violence. If dominant patriarchal discourses and practices about gender are responsible for generating so much violence, particularly by men as a group against women as a group, then these need to be seriously revisited and challenged. It needs to be challenged at both a social structural level, and at the level of interpersonal interaction. For it is at the level of everyday interpersonal interaction - between men and women, men and children, and women and children - that the "obviousness" of gender relations are culturally relayed and appropriated. Yet social/power relations structured along differential axes of "race", class, language, religion, ethnicity, sexuality - which inform everyday social interaction - intersect with issues about gender difference to make any simplistic notions of mothering and childrearing problematic.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mothering as a social process is conventionally constructed as a site situated in the private domain: a social sphere exclusively or primarily ascribed and inhabited by women as a group. The public domain - the world of work constructed outside the context of the nuclear family - is chiefly viewed as occupied by men as a group, even though women now work in this world as well. Childrearing as social process is primarily located within the private domain - at least during a child's pre-school years. Hence, women, as mothers, have been held primarily accountable for the care of (young) children.

This process - where women are primarily held responsible for the well-being of children; with men competing in the outside world, and providing for the family - lays the foundation for generating and structuring very specific and different kinds and qualities of social relationships between men and women in relation to childrearing. Part of the difference and peculiarity in the relationship between parental caregivers and their children has to do with the gender of the parties involved. This view underlies much of the psychoanalytic (Object Relations) perspective, especially that of Chodorow (1989), in accounting for the acquisition of gendered identities/subjectivities, or even

personalities, by children.

An investigation into the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing, I believe, therefore needs to incorporate a focus on mothering as a social praxis in relation to childrearing and gender. Of course, this does not mean that fathering, and its relationship to the construction of children's gendered subjectivities, is not important. Historically, men as a group, including fathers, have been more socially valued than women as a group. This hierarchical structure of social inequality between men and women cannot but reverberate and influence the nature of relationships between fathers and mothers, fathers and children, mothers and children, as well as interpersonal interactions between children. Women, therefore, mother children from a devalued social position. In a patriarchal society, such as South Africa, women as a group "do not have any power and are regarded as second class citizens" (Cape Times, 1996, p.3).

Through childrearing practices, the pattern of social inequality between men and women, is replicated and re-instated in the relationships between male and female children: children are taught gender inequality. If this process goes unchallenged and is successful, young girls assume their second class status and young boys do the same as regards their socially assigned status. As a potential social site for challenging sexism and gender inequality, there is a crucial connection, therefore, between mothering,

childrearing and gender.

Another reason for choosing to focus on mothering, and not fathering, in investigating the possibilities for challenging gender discrimination in relation to rearing children, concerns the very second class status of women as a group. Feminist authors and activists have attempted to awaken women to this reality and have exhorted them to challenge and fight patriarchy which constructs relationships of social inequality between men and women, and by implication, between male and female children. Part of this investigation involves determining the extent to which women, socially positioned as mothers, have taken up this challenge in a domain which has been primarily assigned to them. In other words, if childrearing is socially accepted as the primary responsibility of women, it follows that, in theory at least, in the private domain they potentially exercise more influence over young children than men. Theoretically, they should have more power in the form of influence over their children. Hence, it is also the site that holds the potential for women to effectively challenge the influence of men in relation to childrearing.

More specifically, one would assume that women, who are conscious of issues generated by the social inequality between the sexes - such as sexism and gender discrimination - and who actively seek to challenge these, would manifest such awareness and activism within the constraints of the private domain, especially in relation to

rearing their children. In other words, it would not be unfair to assume that these women, as mothers (whom I will be referring to as gender-sensitive mothers) would encourage the children in their care to cultivate an awareness of issues around gender discrimination and challenge social inequality based on gender relationships.

The purpose of this investigation is to focus specifically on the relationship between gender-sensitive mothering to explore its possibilities of rearing children to be relatively free of gender stereotyping and gender discrimination. The literature reviewed will cover areas considered to be relevant to the issue: women's views about mothering and fathering; their beliefs about gender difference and expectations about their children with regard to gender; the nature of the relationship between mothers and their children; the acquisition and use of gender stereotyping by children; and their beliefs about gender in/equality.

Childrearing practices, which form part of a culture's initiation of the younger generation into the general social order (Bem, 1993), should be understood in the context of gender inequality with its attendant practices of gender discrimination and the forms of violence this gives rise to. It is the aim of this study to contribute to such an understanding; particularly with a view of informing the younger generation so as not to perpetuate the oppression and violence which stems from gender inequality.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 MOTHERS' AWARENESS OF GENDER ISSUES

2.1.1 WOMEN AND MOTHERING

As far as women as mothers' awareness of gender issues is concerned, it is important to explore, among other things, their conceptualisations of what it means to be a mother and/or what it means to be mothering children. I believe that the manner in which women as mothers conceptualise and perceive their status as mothers and motherhood has implications for their mothering practices and experiences of mothering, especially as these relate to their children's use of gender stereotyping and raising their children to be non-sexist.

2.1.1.1 Mothering as Social Construction

Various authors (e.g. Forcey, 1994; Gerrard & Javed, 1995; Glenn, 1994) have pointed out that mothering - in Western industrialised societies at least - refers to a **socially constructed** set of activities and relationships. As a cultural invention (Kessen, in Singer, 1992), it is not biologically given, but fabricated on the basis of gender (Gerrard & Javed, 1995). In short, exploring mothering practices requires an understanding of gender relations in society.

Any conceptualisation of motherhood and/or mothering, according to Chodorow (1989), in Western society needs to recognise that, not only is it a social category, but that it is conventionally primarily assigned to women; moreover, it is specifically assigned to one woman: the biological mother of (a) child/ren. As a socially assigned activity, mothering is believed to be the primary domain of the biological mother of children. Once a woman is a biological mother, mothering subsumes and overrides other aspects of her identity as a person: a secondary status is conferred upon her other identities as, for instance, a lover, professional person, athlete, etc. In this sense, a central part of her identity as a person becomes socially appropriated (Brannon, 1996).

As a social activity, mothering is performed according to very particular **socially constructed mandates** (that help to structure the social appropriation of women as mothers) which become internalised (to a greater or lesser degree) by women (and some men too) in a given society (Forcey, 1994). In a sense, then, mothers in a particular cultural formation are furnished through social processes - for example, the media, education, commonsense knowledge, and tradition - with particular "mothering scripts." Hence, to "mother" entails working within the confines of particular socially mandated scripts or discourses.

The category of motherhood and the activity of mothering also exists as a social institution and experience which has an impact

on all of society (Chodorow, 1989; Rich, in Gerrard & Javed, 1995; Glenn, 1994). As a social institution, it has a particular history in Western patriarchal culture. At the level of ideology, the history of motherhood and mothering can be captured in what Welter (1978) refers to as the doctrine of the "Cult of True Womanhood" (p.169). Part of the primary function of this doctrine was, and still is, to set a standard of attributes of womanhood by which a woman judged herself and was or is judged by her husband, her neighbours, and society.

Welter (1978) points out that - in line with this doctrine which embedded itself as common sense knowledge (about women) in Western culture - submissiveness and domesticity formed part of the attributes of a "true" woman: "True women were wives whose concern was with domestic affairs - making a home and having children, and caring for them" (p.170). Singer (1992), reminds us that wherever women as mothers attempted to challenge the notion of "mothering as the primary domain of the biological mother" - especially since the end of the sixties in most of Western Europe and the United States - by wanting to work outside the home and hence demanding good and affordable child-care facilities, both politicians and "experts" reacted with shock: daily separations from the mother were supposed to be very damaging to the developing child.

The doctrine of the Cult of True Womanhood was also reinforced by the "doctrine of the Two Spheres" (Lewin, 1984): the belief that

women and men's interests diverge and that women and men have their separate areas of influence. For women, the influence is home and children, whereas men's sphere includes work and the outside world. Indeed, according to Bowlby (in Singer, 1992), a mother's mental health is dependent on the protection (against the outside world) of her husband, to enable her to create the (developmentally/psychologically important) secure base for her child's development. [Bowlby seems to have been ill-informed about women's mental health as historically and cross-culturally, there is considerable evidence that, for women and girls, the family is the most dangerous and violent institution in society (Duffy, 1995)]. Nevertheless, these two spheres are different, with little overlap, forming opposite ends of one dimension. For Brannon (1996), the doctrine of the Two Spheres formed the basis for the polarisation of male and female interests and activities in Western society as a whole.

In present-day patriarchal culture, views about femininity and motherhood are still influenced by remnants of the Cult of True Womanhood, which was dominant during the nineteenth century (Brannon, 1996). In other words, there are mothers who - having internalised conventional stereotypical conceptions of motherhood/mothering to a large degree and, hence, unintentionally reproduce socially prescriptive mandates of motherhood - accept their socially assigned mothering role and practice their mothering in the belief that making a home and raising children are their -

and not men's - primary responsibility. Indeed, parenting - in the nuclear family context - in our culture is automatically equated with mothering (Chodorow, 1989). Even though the moral indignation towards mothers working outside the home - given the shifting needs of capital - has lessened considerably over the years, the undertone of condemnation still remains (Singer, 1992).

I want to suggest, on the other hand, that if women as mothers conceive of motherhood and mothering as socially constructed categories (Glenn, 1994), then this has profound implications for their awareness, practices and experiences. One such implication is the realisation that mothering as a phenomenon is socially fabricated, sustained and performed within a particular social context: it does not take for granted, for example, that there are fundamental differences between men and women (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). In other words, cultural standards of "true womanhood/motherhood" are but a part of the social processes fabricating and sustaining the social construction of mothering. It also means that, to understand their experiences as mothers, requires an analysis and appreciation of the particular social context in which it is shaped and in which it is experienced. As a cultural invention, (Kessen, in Singer, 1992) mothering as an activity has to be understood as part of the broader culture as it is influenced by "greater powers" within the social milieu.

2.1.1.2 Mothering and Difference

Lott (1990), reminds us that women (in contemporary Western society) generally exist and mother in a social context in which power - that is, access to and control of resources - is a major variable which distinguishes the lives of most women and men. It needs to be recognised, however, that power also distinguishes between the lives of women as a group: not unlike the category "woman," the category and activity of "mothering" is not homogenous; what are regarded as priorities, and what concerns constitute the activity of mothering would depend on the perspectives of mothers from various "localities and social positions" (Meintjies, 1993, p.42).

In other words, women do not mother "independently of racial, class, ethnic, regional and other affiliations" (Hendricks & Lewis, 1994, p.61). What this means is that we ought not to neglect the importance of race and class, for instance, in understanding women's experience of mothering. Such negligence is bound to lead to a failure to recognise diversity in the experience of mothering (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). This diversity stems partly from (mothering under) the conditions of racial domination and economic exploitation which profoundly shape the mothering context for women (Collins, 1994). Women and mothers in situations of historical oppression - for example, the majority of Black South African, African-American, Latina, and Asian-American women - were never expected or allowed to be full-time mothers: they were a source of

cheap labour as domestic servants in white households or in lower-level service work in institutional settings (Glenn, 1994). In South Africa, for example, Black women have suffered most heavily under Apartheid policies which have generated the creation of a predominantly Black female domestic work force operating under conditions of "super exploitation and oppression" (Sexwale, 1994, p.202); a situation which renders problematic any idealised notions of "mothering".

In short, then, it is unreasonable, and (politically) potentially dangerous, to refer to mothering/motherhood as a socially disembodied category and activity which can be generalised to all women everywhere who are mothering children. At the same time, however, given that it is necessary (for the sake of intellectual honesty, at least) to recognise and allow for differences in perspective, and to reflect on the context-dependent nature of motherhood and the mothering experience, such approach does not necessarily render the category and activity of mothering meaningless (Campbell, 1993). After all, if women are *so* different, and mothering as social practice *so* diverse, would feminist politics not be rendered invalid?

Before I attempt to elaborate on some of the implications mothering in a patriarchal social formation has for women, I wish to clarify what is meant by "gender issues" in the context of this study.

2.2 MOTHERING AND GENDER ISSUES

The use of the term "gender" describes the traits and behaviours that are regarded by a particular culture as appropriate to women and men (Brannon, 1996). As such it denotes a social label, whereas the term "sex," refers to the biological basis (referring to male and female genitalia) for distinguishing male and female (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). Gender, as social label, includes the characteristics that the culture ascribes to each sex (for example, male means to be tough, strong, competitive; female means to be demure, empathic, elegant, etc.) and the sex-related characteristics that individuals assign to themselves, as well as to the socially created differentiations that have arisen from the biological differences associated with sex (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). In short, "gender should be understood as a social, not physiological, construction" (Peterson & Runyan, 1993, p.17).

Because gender as a category is socially fabricated, particular characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity vary across cultures, races, classes, and even age groups (Peterson & Runyan, 1993): hence, femininity and masculinity are not timeless, or separable from the contexts in which they are observed. The latter authors also observe, however, that - given the socially/culturally relative meanings, roles and activities ascribed to gender - the content of the category might vary, but what seems to remain a constant is that globally, within patriarchal society, males are expected to conform to models of

masculinity and females to models of femininity. Moreover, models of masculinity and femininity are differently and unequally valued: globally, masculinity has an elevated social status (Lott, 1990).

In the context of this study "gender issues" refer to a myriad of problem areas (to be explored later) which emerge from the socially created differentiations between male and female, masculine and feminine, men and women, as well as male and female children. Sexual violence, gender stereotyping, gender discrimination, sexism, for example, are some of such problem areas. It is my contention - and this is what I wish to explore -that women as mothers' awareness of these myriad of gender issues have - to a lesser or greater degree - an impact on their mothering experiences and (childrearing) practices.

2.3 MOTHERING AND GENDER: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF MOTHERING

2.3.1 Patriarchal Domination

The unequal distribution of social power between men and women as groups (Lott, 1990) distinguishes between the lives of women and men in the sense that women mother within, and are constrained by, the structural fact (Connell, 1987), that globally, men dominate over women. Women in general, and women as mothers, have less (in many cases little or no) access to and control over resources.

This domination - which Glenn (1994) refers to as patriarchal control - occurs at the level of the whole society and in face-to-

face interactions. In other words, men's oppression and control over women does not only refer to individual husbands and fathers controlling their wives' and daughters' reproduction (Glenn, 1984), but that male-dominated institutions control women as a group: that is, it occurs within but also beyond the individual lives of women (Gerrard & Javed, 1995).

Because of its global character, the processes of patriarchal oppression and domination operates systematically in a social context: it is organised and reproduced in the social context by various practices and relationships (referred to as "discourses") in society (Gerrard & Javed, 1995). I wish to identify and briefly explore some of the implications various patriarchal discourses have for women's mothering experiences and practices.

2.3.2 Discourses of Objectification: "Otherness" and Difference

In the context of patriarchal culture, women exist and mother in a social milieu where they (as a group) are considered to be "other" - different, outside of, the exception to the rule (Gerrard & Javed, 1995). These authors maintain that casting people as "other" affects their diversity: rendering someone as "other" sets her or him up to be marginalised, trivialised, and/or dismissed. Also, thinking in terms of "other" thus "homogenises" a whole array of specific characteristics; in other words, it destroys the specificity of someone or something and leads to their objectification.

Marginalising women because they are defined as "other" serves to reinforce the notion of difference: women are "other" because they are different to men, with "maleness" - whatever that might mean - being the norm. For women exist and mother in a social hierarchy in which "male is greater than female" (Unger, 1990). The point I wish to stress is that when the "social and cultural powers" (Gerrard & Javed, 1995, p.125) are stronger than an individual woman's own sense of self - as is the case when "male is greater than female" on a social scale - then the greater the loss of a sense of individual self. With the loss of a sense of individual self, comes the experience of "objectification" (Gerrard & Javed, 1995). Objectification of women denotes that they are not only disempowered as individuals, but that their experiences become "socially appropriated."

I want to suggest that the social category of mothering denotes an instance of the objectification of women's existence and their unique experiences as individuals. In other words, it is one of the means by which women (as mothers) have their individual and diverse experiences "socially appropriated" (Gerrard & Javed, 1995); for example, women mother in a cultural context (always and already) saturated with prescriptive discourses about "motherhood," "mothering," "child-rearing," "standards of feminine beauty," etc. Indeed, psychology as a discipline, for instance, has played no small part in constituting and providing "expert advice" (and hence, embedded itself as part of our culture's prescriptive

discourses) on child-care, or the importance of maternal bonding, for example. Needless to say, in a patriarchal society, men have regarded themselves as the one's having the monopoly on knowledge of what constitutes "true motherhood." Appropriately so, O'Brien (in Gerrard & Javed, 1995) has referred to traditional psychology as being "malestream psychology" (p.124), since it is embedded in a patriarchal society that uses male language, values, practices, and propriety as the standard.

2.3.3 Androcentrism and Gender Polarisation

But what are some of the major implications for mothers, the mothering experience and practice, to exist and mother in a social hierarchy in which "male is greater than female?" (Unger, 1990). One important implication is that women mother children in a social context predicated on certain hidden assumptions about sex and gender. In Bem's (1993) terms, women experience mothering - and raise children - in a social world of androcentrism or male-centredness: a definition of males and male experience as the standard or norm, and females and female experience as a deviation from that norm.

Mothering in a male-centred social milieu means, inter alia, that women exist, mother and experience the social world from a position of inequality. Where social institutions are arranged to give effect to the norm of male-centredness, women and men are positioned in unequal positions in the social structure, positions

where men have much more opportunity to earn money and to wield power (Bem, 1993).

Moreover, under conditions of social inequality, privileged members in the society - men in patriarchal society - have control of what Hare-Mustin and Maracek (1990) refer to as "meaning-making": the meanings attributed to the experience and representation of social life is determined by men and disseminated through the largely male-owned and male-controlled institutions, for example, the media. Although experience can have many meanings (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990), certain meanings are privileged because they conform to the explanatory systems of a male-centred culture.

Hence, women as mothers are not really the owners of their mothering experience. They own their experiences of mothering in the sense that they are the ones experiencing it, and ultimately serves as its point of reference. But when it comes to questions of relevance and validity - how valid are their observations and interpretations as mothers and what relevance does it have for themselves, their children and husbands, and society in general? - their experience and its meanings are filtered, and hence distorted, through the cultural dictates of the male experience. In other words, the meanings women attribute to their experience of mothering, how they make sense of their own and their children's experiences, are only culturally acceptable to the extent that they conform to male-centred discourses (systems of meaning) about

gender and sex. In short, then, insofar as women are trying to make sense and understand their experiences of mothering, they are constrained by predominantly male-centred discourses of meaning.

2.3.4 Gender Polarisation: Difference

Another important implication is that women mother in a cultural context where gender polarisation (Bem, 1993), permeates the fabric of social life. Social life is organised around the principle, or perception, that men and women are fundamentally different from one another. Not only has this principle furnished support for the norm of male superiority (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990), but a false symmetry has been created by the idea of difference which has prevented both women and men from recognising inequality.

When male and female is defined as inherently different, this has an influence on how mothers - and indeed people in general - see themselves and the world. One implication is that women as mothers attribute differential responsibilities to mothering and fathering work, as they would attribute different qualities to male and female. In Hare-Mustin and Maracek's (1990) terms, it is unlikely that women as mothers - those who are not aware of, or for that matter believe in, the socially constructed nature of parenting - would consider the possibility that these so-called different qualities which presumably distinguish between male and female, result from social inequities and power differences (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990).

Altogether, women are experiencing mothering in a social context which assigns an inferior status to women. Bem (1993), maintains that because of this unequal positioning, both men and women - and by implication male and female children - are undergoing daily social experiences that, in turn, give rise to drastically different ways of construing social reality.

2.3.5 Diversity and Mothering

Women (in contemporary patriarchal society) generally mother in social contexts which portray motherhood and mothering as fixed and unchangeable categories, as the domain and responsibility of the biological mother. Such portrayal, it appears, robs mothers of the uniqueness and individuality of their mothering experiences, and is psychologically disempowering. A focus on the diversity of the experience of mothering, however, offers mothers of whatever background the opportunity to value and voice with confidence their own experiences of mothering.

Indeed, much feminist theorising about motherhood has failed to recognise diversity in mothering, and has projected white, middle-class women's concerns as universal (Glenn, 1994). The latter author maintains that there are two problematic assumptions based on such a generalisation: first; that mothers and their children enjoy a degree of economic security, and second; that women have the luxury of seeing themselves as individuals in search of personal autonomy, instead of as members of communities struggling

for survival.

It appears that one of the potentially meaningful implications of celebrating diversity in mothering is that women as mothers recognise that there is no need for a universally unified, enduring and authoritative voice/model/standard of motherhood and mothering. There is no need to question their experiences as women and as mothers in the light of an abstract model of what it means to be a mother. Instead, their experiences, and those of their children, can be comprehended and justified in the light of their particular material conditions shaped by the forces of racial oppression, gender discrimination, class or economic exploitation and others. Such theorising, which recognises diversity, indicates that experiences of women of colour, for example, reveal very different concerns than those of white, middle-class mothers: for example, the importance of working for the physical survival of children and the community (Glenn, 1994). In short, the latter author continues, the dialectics of power and powerlessness structures mothering patterns in important ways.

Different values are placed on children of different races and classes under conditions of racial discrmination and class exploitation: historically, white, middle-class children have the highest value, and are deemed worthy of full-time, stay-at-home mothers to nurture them to their full potential (Glenn, 1994). In contrast, racial ethnic children's lives have long been held in low

regard. They often live in harsh urban environments where drugs, crime, industrial pollutants and violence threaten their survival. These harsh climates which confront racial ethnic children require that their mothers "make preparations for their babies to live" as a central feature of their motherwork (Collins, 1994, p.50).

The idea that mothering is not just gendered, but also racialised, has therefore contributed to the historical fact that different aspects of caring labour are assigned to different groups of women. More privileged women have been able to pass off the more physical and taxing parts of the work onto other women -white working-class women and women of colour (Glenn, 1994). Work that separated women of colour from their children also framed the mothering relationship. Women who worked in domestic service engaged in work that denied mothers access to their children (Collins, 1994).

Glenn (1994), maintains that we need ways of conceptualising mothering that transcend the constructed oppositions of public-private and labour-love, and the relegation of mothering to the subordinate pole of each of these dichotomies. This should be done in conjunction with the realisation that mothering is not an exclusive activity of biological mothers, and that mothers have identities and activities outside and often in conjunction with mothering. There are a variety of actors engaged in mothering that needs to be recognised (Glenn, 1994).

2.3.6. Violence against Women

In a male-dominated society, violence, and equally important, the threat and/or expectation of violence permeates the lives and sense of self of almost all women (Duffy, 1995: Kaschack, 1992). Duffy maintains that, for women and girls, the family (in patriarchal society) remains the most dangerous and violent institution: wife abuse was for generations in most societies simply experienced as part of everyday life as people saw violence between husbands and wives as an unfortunate, shameful, and very private aspect of married life. In some instances, even, such violence was and is socially sanctioned as appropriate masculine behaviour.

In sum, it appears from research evidence that for women around the world, love and marriage do not provide protection from violence (Kaschak, 1992). Indeed it is argued that the various forms of violence (against women) and, perhaps more importantly, the fear of violence, perform an invaluable social control function for men and patriarchal traditions by encouraging women to tread lightly in the public domain, to restrict their activities, to accept whatever sanctuary marriage (and motherhood) may offer, and to avoid challenging male preserves such as male-dominated jobs and social institutions (Duffy, 1995). The socio-cultural context, which continues to assert that women are less important and less valuable than men, serves to perpetuate the violence (MacLeod, in Duffy, 1995). The latter author indicates that no amount of economic, social, or class-based privilege can absolutely protect women from

violence in a patriarchal society.

2.4 MOTHERING AND GENDER STEREOTYPING

2.4.1 Gender Stereotyping

Peterson and Runyan (1993), are of the opinion that in every aspect of our lives, we are bombarded with gender stereotypes. A gender stereotype consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics as well as the activities appropriate to men and women (Brannon, 1996).

The concepts of gender role and gender stereotype tend to be related. When people associate a pattern of behaviour with either women or men, they may overlook the individual variations and exceptions and come to believe that the behaviour is inevitably associated with one, and not the other, gender. Gender stereotypes are very influential, affecting conceptualisations of women and men and establishing social categories for gender (Brannon, 1996).

By providing unquestioned categories and connections, stereotypes can mark actual relationships and in effect "excuse" discrimination. Stereotypes, because they oversimplify, overgeneralise, are resistant to change, and promote inaccurate images, significantly affect how we see ourselves, others, and social organisation generally (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). Hence, according to these authors, stereotypes are political because they both reproduce and naturalise (depoliticise) unequal power

relations. They reproduce inequalities by being self-fulfilling:If we expect certain behaviours, we may act in ways that in fact create and reinforce such behaviours. (Expecting girls to hate mechanics and mathematics affects how much encouragement we give them; without expectations of success or encouragement, girls may avoid or do poorly in these activities.) Furthermore, stereotypes naturalise inequalities by presenting subordinated groups negatively. When members of such groups internalise oppressive stereotypes, they may hold themselves - rather than social structures - responsible for undesirable outcomes (Brannon, 1996). Thinking in terms of stereotyped (gender) dichotomies "promotes patterns of thought and action that are static (unable to acknowledge or address change), stunted (unable to envision alternatives), and dangerously oversimplified (unable to accommodate the complexities of social reality)"(Peterson & Runyan, 1993, p.24).

2.4.2 Mothering and Gender Stereotyping: Difference

Most people seem to share the conception that questions concerning gender typically means and has to do with differences between men and women as groups of people: how women differ from men (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). Such a conception takes for granted that women and men - and male and female children - are fundamentally different kinds or categories of people. In other words, women and men as groups are perceived as having different traits: different

temperaments, characters, outlooks and opinions, abilities, even whole structures of personality (Connell, 1987).

If you ask parents whether they treat their children differently simply on the basis of sex, most would probably say "no." There is considerable evidence, according to Renzetti and Curran (1995), that what parents say they do and what they actually do are often not the same. Nevertheless, it is commonplace knowledge that girls and boys are differentiated as soon as they are born: conventionally they are dressed in different colours, different words are used to describe them, and their behaviour and actions are interpreted and responded to differently (Glenn, 1994). Indeed, Brannon (1996) suggests that no matter how liberal or egalitarian the parents say they are, children will still show sexist stereotypes during the early elementary school years.

A controversial yet interesting perspective from within the Psychoanalytic Feminist tradition suggests that within patriarchal society, mothering practices are so constrained and channelled by patriarchal discourses and institutions, that mothers cannot help but be instrumental - mostly unintentionally, it seems (Peterson & Runyan, 1993), - in giving concrete expression - through child-rearing practices - to the belief in difference. Arguing from within this tradition, Chodorow (1989) suggests that where mothers are the primary caretakers of very young children, female infants are treated in ways that contribute to the experience of

connectedness and identification with the mother, while male infants are treated in ways conducive to the experience of separation. This early experience provides each gender with its supposed characteristic orientation to the world and to other persons - connectedness for women, and autonomy for men. Women and men thus differ fundamentally in basic personality as a result of crucial and continuing differences in socialisation, beginning in infancy. In other words, Chodorow maintains, because mothers are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls themselves, they tend not to experience infant daughters as separate from themselves in the same way as mothers with sons (McGuire, 1991). [A detailed discussion of Chodorow's theory will follow later].

This position has been criticised by those who maintain that mothering itself cannot be the legitimate source for the origin of differences between males and females. In a sense, then, Chodorow's perspective (unintentionally) implies that we should hold mothers responsible for their children's (later) use of gender discriminatory practices. On the contrary, we need to incorporate into our analysis the dimension of social power (Bem, 1993; Kaschak, 1992). Such analysis would reveal that what is responsible for the construction of conventionally gendered men and women is not the mother-child dynamic, but the assignment of women and men to different and unequal positions in the social structure.

Gender socialisation is accomplished not only through parent-child

interaction, but also through the ways parents structure their children's environment (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

2.4.3 The Gendered Structure of Children's Environment

Gender socialisation gets under way almost immediately after a child is born. Research shows, for instance, that the vast majority of comments parents make about their babies immediately following birth concern the babies' sex (Woollett et al., 1982) Parents tend to respond differently to newborns on the basis of sex. Research indicated, for example, that when asked to describe their babies within twenty-four hours of birth, new parents frequently use gender stereotypes. Infant girls are described as tiny, soft, and delicate, but parents of infant boys use adjectives such as strong, alert, and coordinated to describe their babies (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

It appears that parents' initial stereotyped perceptions of their children may lay the foundation for the differential treatment of sons and daughters. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) found that parents tend to elicit more gross motor activity from their sons than from their daughters. Parents also tend to engage in rougher, more physical play with infant sons than with infant daughters (MacDonald & Park, 1986). This is especially the case with respect to father-infant interactions. Parents are also more likely to believe - and to act on the belief - that daughters need more help than sons (Renzetti & Curran, 1995). In these ways parents may be

providing early training for their sons to be independent and aggressive, while training their daughters to be dependent and helpless (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

Studies suggest that there are gender-differentiated patterns of communication where parents treat their sons as though they are more valuable than their daughters (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Such differential treatment of boys and girls, the latter authors maintain, appears to be consistent with producing a pattern of independence and efficacy in boys, and a pattern of emotional sensitivity, nurturance, and helplessness in girls. Maccoby (1987), is of the view that in giving dolls to girls but not boys, a culture signals its inclusion of nurturance in its definition of a little girl's femininity. Fivush (1989) found that the one emotion that parents discuss extensively with their sons, but not with daughters is anger, thus perhaps sending children the message that anger is an appropriate emotion for boys to express, but not girls. One outcome is that by the age of two, girls typically use more emotion words than boys (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

Gender polarisation, Bem (1993) maintains, continues at home, where parents dress their children in pink or blue, "coif them with long hair or short, tell them they can't wear or play with either this item of clothing or that toy because it's 'just for boys' or 'just for girls'" (p.146). Furthermore, parental differentiation occurs not only in terms of toy selection and play with children, but also

in terms of the kinds of tasks that children are assigned at home. In almost all cultures surveyed by Whiting and Edwards (1988; Unger & Crawford, 1992), girls are more likely to be assigned tasks that involve domestic and child care responsibilities, whereas boys are more frequently assigned tasks that take them away from home and which may involve other boys.

Weitzman et al. (1985) found that parents provide more of the kind of verbal stimulation thought to foster cognitive development to their sons than to their daughters. This research included mothers who professed not to adhere to traditional gender stereotypes. Although the differential treatment of sons and daughters was less pronounced among these mothers, these authors suggested, it was by no means absent.

It appears, furthermore, that children are born into a world that largely prefers boys over girls. Williamson (1976) suggests that some common reasons for this preference are that boys carry on the family name (assuming that the daughter will take her husband's name at marriage) and that boys are both easier and cheaper to raise. The small minority - in Williamson's research - that preferred girls seemed to value them for their traditionally feminine traits: they are supposedly neater, cuddlier, cuter, and more obedient than boys. These attitudes are closely associated with parental expectations of children's behaviour and tend to reflect gender stereotypes (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

The perception of difference seems so pervasive that parents, according to Unger and Crawford (1992), appear largely unaware of the extent to which they treat their young sons and daughters differently: boys are raised to be primarily productive and independent, while girls are raised to show emotional sensitivity, nurturance and helplessness.

Mothers who share this conventional belief about gender difference, I suggest, would also be more likely to interpret and make sense of the experiences of their children on the basis of the gender or sex of the individual children involved. For they tend to conceptualise differences of any kind as intrinsic to the individuals rather than as the result of interaction between them. In other words, males and females differ because of what is essentially within them (Unger, 1990).

The belief that people should be regarded and treated differently because they belong to different and separate gender categories, will also predispose those, who share such a belief, to have differential expectations concerning people's behaviour and experiences. Thus, boys are not supposed to show emotional sensitivity and appear helpless for these are the seemingly "natural" attributes of girls. The latter, when she cries and seems helpless in a particular situation, is merely doing what all girls are conventionally expected to do.

I want to reiterate my suggestion that mothers who share the conventional conception that the two genders are fundamentally different kinds of people are likely to construe the experiences of her children - depending on their sex and gender - on the basis of preconceived expectations which, in turn, is likely to shape the kind and quality of mothering towards her children. Their experiences and practices of mothering are furthermore likely to confirm such conventional assumptions about gender difference: that boys and girls are fundamentally different categories of people and should be treated as such; they are more likely to reward and punish "appropriate" or "inappropriate" gender behaviour. I believe this is one of a myriad of ways in which the basis for gender discrimination is laid among children.

It is important that this scenario be understood in its proper context or else we end up blaming only mothers - who share the conventional belief about gender differences - for their children's gender discriminatory practices. The fact that the perception of difference is so pervasive, as suggested above, indicates another crucial piece of the puzzle: the wider social and cultural (meta-) messages about gender (difference) constitute an extremely powerful and ubiquitous presence confronting and constraining mothers. It is not difficult to comprehend that - when everyone else in a particular social context seems to treat and regard male and female children as essentially different categories of people - an enormous challenge, with potentially devastating social and

psychological consequences, are facing those who believe that males and females have more in common than they have differences.

What about mothers who claim that they do not share the conventional stereotypes about gender difference: how different, and what is the extent of difference, of their mothering practices? Are they more likely to mother children to be less gender stereotypical? I believe a simple "yes"-response would be naive and unrealistic, for various reasons.

On the one hand, women as mothers are socially constrained within and by a system of patriarchal values (within contemporary Western industrial society) where gender continues to function as a central organising principle in social institutions (Lott, 1990), and where males are more valued than females (Kaschak, 1992; Bem, 1993). A major implication of this, pointed out by Hare-Mustin and Maracek (1990), is that men and women, and male and female children, differ widely in access to resources and to opportunities for personal growth. If boys, for example, are allowed to play at distances further from home than are girls, it provides them with greater opportunity to explore alternative environments which contribute to the development of greater independence (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

Also, in a social context which regards males as the more valued sex (Unger & Crawford, 1992), women in general and women as mothers cannot help but being psychologically constrained. In such a

context, a mother who believes that her children (irrespective of their gender) should be treated and raised as if there is no difference between them, is not merely challenging the notion of gender difference as a social phenomenon, but risks stepping outside *her* assigned position within the broader social hierarchy (Bem, 1993). This can have potential negative implications for a woman's status and experience as a mother.

Patriarchal culture seems to have an endless supply of ingenuous strategies designed to enforce and reinforce gender difference -- even where it is not found. For it is a basic aspect of the gender system, according to Kaschak (1992), to enforce its dictates through the use of the extremely powerful psychological mechanism of shame or humiliation. Just as it is repugnant for a boy to be thought of as being like a girl, for example, can it be humiliating for a mother to be judged - and risk being marginalised - by her peers as unfit to be a mother.

Hence the well-documented finding that although many parents deny any intention to distinguish between their sons and daughters, a child's gender is perceived to be a significant factor in the experience of mothering (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Glenn (1994), maintains that even women who have been influenced by feminist thinking and are aware of the social construction of gender, do not consider the sex of their children insignificant as there is the awareness of the differences between boys and girls as social

genders.

2.5 CHILDREN'S USE OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

Gender stereotypes provide a system for classifying people that operates as a standard throughout people's lives, influencing their expectations for self and others, as well as in making judgements about people based on their gender-related characteristics and behaviours (Brannon, 1996). Whiting and Edwards'(1988), and Williams and Best's (1990) research revealed more similarities than differences in the gender stereotypes of many cultures. They identified six adjectives that were male associated in all of the six cultures they studied - adventurous, dominant, forceful, independent, masculine, and strong - and three adjectives that were female identified in all cultures - sentimental, submissive, and superstitious. Meehan and Janik (1990) propose that once stereotypes are socially formed and shared, people perceive that relationships exist between gender and various behaviours even when no relationships exist, or the relationship is not as strong as their perceptions indicate.

2.5.1 Development of Gender Stereotypes: Learning Gender

Children are not born with gender stereotypes, or any other form of stereotypical beliefs and practices for that matter. Instead they learn how to be males and females in a particular society, with its particular attributions and expectations, that become organised according to the dualistic gender system (Kaschak, 1992). As

mentioned, this learning process starts at a very young age. In fact, from the moment a child is born, almost every, if not all, communication directed at the newborn is imbued with a sense of gender (Brannon, 1996).

Research indicates that gender learning consists of several components, which children begin to acquire around age two years and may not complete until they are 7 or 8 years old. The first of these components to be learned is the ability to label the sexes - and themselves in relation to the caregiver. This initial gender information may be adequate to allow children to begin to develop gender stereotypes. "Once children can accurately label the sexes, they begin to form gender stereotypes and their behaviour is influenced by these gender-associated expectations" (Martin and Little, 1990, p.1430). Thus, there seems to be a tendency for children to develop an understanding of their own gender before they acquire a sense of other children's gender identity.

By way of introducing the discussion on the development of gender stereotypes in children, I thought it useful to briefly refer to Martin and Little's (1990) proposed pattern of gender stereotype development: In the first stage children have learned characteristics and behaviours associated directly with each gender, such as the toy preferences of each. In this stage they have not learned that many secondary associations with gender, and these associations are essential to the formation of stereotypes.

In the second stage, "children begin to develop the more indirect and complex associations for information relevant to their own sex but have yet to learn these associations for information relevant to the opposite sex" (Brannon, 1996, p.173). In the third stage, children have learned these indirect and complex associations for the other gender as well as their own, giving them the capability of forming stereotypes for both women and men.

Socialisation is the process by which a society's values and norms, including those pertaining to gender, are taught and learned (Renzetti & Curran, 1995). These authors maintain that gender socialisation is often a conscious effort in that expectations are reinforced with explicit rewards and punishments. It may also be more subtle, with gender messages relayed implicitly through children's clothing, the way their rooms are decorated, and the toys they are given for play.

Before discussing children's use of gender stereotyping, I think it is necessary to focus briefly on the process of gender formation: that is, learning how to be males and females in a particular social context. It seems appropriate in that, I believe, the acquisition of gender stereotypical beliefs, attitudes and behaviours emerge in large part as products of the psychological and social impact of practices of gender formation on children. Children, for instance, often acquire gender stereotypical beliefs about certain toys or forms of dress as the result of the

experience of constant shame and humiliation (at the hands of their peers) should they veer from practices which are not seen as appropriate for their gender identity. I will briefly consider four major theories - identification theory, social learning theory, cognitive-developmental theory, and social constructionism - which have been most popular in theorising how children acquire gender identities and stereotypical beliefs about gender.

2.5.2 Identification Theory

Chodorow (1989) offers a revision of identification theory that places gender acquisition in a social context while drawing on psychoanalytic (object relations) theory. She aims to explain why females grow up to be the primary caretakers of children and why they develop stronger affective ties with children than males do. Her suggestion is that identification is more difficult for boys since they must psychologically separate from their mothers and model themselves after a parent who is largely absent from home, their fathers. Consequently, boys become more emotionally detached and repressed than girls. Girls, in contrast, do not experience this psychological separation. Instead, mothers and daughters maintain an intense, ongoing relationship with one another. From this, daughters acquire the psychological capabilities for mothering, and "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" (Chodorow, 1989, p.83).

In relation to Chodorow's view, Lorber et al. (1981) argue that the sexual division of labour in which only women care for infants is not present in all societies. Thus the developmental sequence described by Chodorow possibly applies only to Western families, and not all Western families at that. Joseph (1981) argues that Chodorow's version of identification does not accurately reflect the experiences of most African-American mothers and daughters. The presence of multiple mothering figures (grandmothers, godmothers, aunts) require that extensions or modifications to Chodorow's model are necessary to account for racial, ethnic, and social class differences in gender acquisition.

2.5.3 Social Learning Theory

Adherents of this perspective suggest that the notion of reinforcement - a behaviour consistently followed by a reward will likely occur again, whereas a behaviour followed by a punishment will rarely reoccur - applies to the way children and people in general learn, including the way they learn gender (Renzetti & Curran, 1995). Thus children acquire their respective gender by being rewarded for gender-appropriate behaviour and punished for gender-inappropriate behaviour. Often the rewards and punishments are direct and take the form of praise or admonishment. Children also learn through indirect reinforcement; for example, they may learn about the consequences of certain behaviours just by observing the actions and outcomes of others (Bronstein, 1988).

Social learning theory further posits that children learn also by imitating or modelling those around them and that children will most likely imitate those who positively reinforce their behaviour. Children also seem to model themselves after adults whom they perceive to be warm, friendly, and powerful (that is, those adults who are/appear to be in control of resources or privileges that the child values). Others (Bussey & Bandura, 1984) suggest that children will imitate individuals most like themselves: this includes same-sex parents and older same-sex siblings, but teachers and media personalities also serve as effective models for children.

2.5.4 Cognitive Developmental Theory

The theory holds that children learn gender (and gender stereotypes) through their mental efforts to organise their social world. As young children are actively looking for patterns in the physical and social world (Bem, 1993), they are also actively structuring their understanding of gender roles (Richardson, 1993). The latter author argues that all children go through a stage of wanting to conform to stereotyped expectations of what girls and boys are like, irrespective of what their parents or teachers may say or do. Once they become aware they are a girl or boy, around the age of two to three, they seek out opportunities to behave in ways which they see as being 'female' or 'male.' In other words, "Once they discover these categories or regularities, they spontaneously construct a self and a set of social rules consistent

with them" (Bem, 1993, p.112).

At this age, the child's understanding of what it means to be a girl or boy is very restricted. Richardson (1993) maintains that doing what girls or boys are expected to do is what being a girl or being a boy actually means: "You are a girl because you play with dolls. You are a boy because you wear trousers and not a dress"(pp.134-135). It is further believed that as children develop cognitively, they become aware that masculinity and femininity are not absolute but relative concepts, whose meaning can vary (Richardson, 1993).

Sex is a very useful organising category, or "schema" for young children as it is "a stable and easily discriminable natural category" (Bem, 1993, p.112). Children first use the category to label themselves and to organise their own identities. They then apply the schema to others in an effort to organise traits and behaviour into two classes, masculine or feminine, and they attach values to what they observe - either gender-appropriate ("good") or gender-inappropriate ("bad") (Renzetti & Curran, 1995, p.85-86).

Cann and Palmer (1986) suggest that this perspective helps to explain young children's strong preferences for sex-typed toys and activities, as well as why they express rigidly stereotyped ideas about gender. Recent research (Renzetti & Curran, 1995) indicates that not everyone uses sex and gender as fundamental organising

categories or schemas; there are some individuals who may be considered gender "aschematic," although they themselves have developed gender identities.

2.5.5 Social Constructionism and Gender Acquisition

Bem (1993) suggests that there appear to be two fundamental assumptions about the process of individual gender formation: first, that there are hidden assumptions about sex and gender - embedded in a culture's discourses and social practices - that are internalised by the developing child; and, second, once these hidden assumptions have been internalised, they predispose the child, and later the adult, to construct an identity that is consistent with these hidden assumptions about sex and gender.

This process of gender formation - beginning with categorising children as male or female on the basis of their biological characteristics and gradually transforming them into masculine and feminine adults (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990) - has to be understood in the context that all societies have an overarching need to prepare each succeeding generation of young people to take their required places in the social structure.

Such cultural preparation includes that children be differentiated and moulded according to the two conventional categories of male and female genders. Weedon (1987), refers to this cultural moulding as a process of constituting particular modes of gendered

subjectivity: the specific organisation of the emotional as well as the mental and psychic capacities of male and female children. For Bem (1993), this process is socially deemed necessary as male and female children must be shaped to fit their very different adult roles.

Thus the social construction of conventionally gendered women and men, and male and female children, is achieved by situating people in a culture whose discourses and social practices are organised around the hidden assumptions of androcentrism and gender polarisation. Social practices, following Bem, not only programs different and unequal social experiences for males and females, they also transfer the androcentric and gender polarising assumptions of the culture to the psyche of the individual (Bem, 1993). A metamessage about gender is sent, for instance, every time children observe that although their mother can drive a car, their father is the one who drives when their parents or the family go out together (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

It appears, following Weedon's (1987) argument, that an essential part of the cultural programming of children's daily social experiences involves - from the point of view of the dominant patriarchal discourse on what is "natural" and "normal" in relation to gender - that children develop a conscious awareness of a consistent view of the essentially non-contradictory nature of gender identity/subjectivity. In other words, boys will come to

learn what it means to be (and remain) boys and what it means to be different from girls and hence, trying to look or be like a girl is "unnatural."

Furthermore, becoming conventionally gendered in an androcentric/male-centred society also means, according to Bem (1993), that certain social practices communicate to both male and female children and adults that males are the privileged sex and the male perspective is the privileged perspective. It also entails differential treatment of the two sexes, as well as restricted access to certain roles, statuses, and opportunities on the basis of gender (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). Gender-polarising social practices, on the other hand, program different social experiences for males and females, and they communicate to both males and females that the male-female distinction is extraordinarily important, and that it has relevance to virtually every aspect of human experience (Bem, 1993).

Children are believed to be ripe to receive these cultural transmissions because they are active, pattern-seeking human beings. By the time people become adults, it is not just the culture that imposes boundaries on their definitions of gender appropriateness, it is their own willingness to conform to these boundaries and evaluate themselves and others in terms of them. What they have internalised as children is a social/cultural definition of sex, not a biological one, so that the cues children

use for distinguishing between the sexes are also social/cultural (e.g. hair style, clothing) rather than biological (genitals)(Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

2.6 CHILDREN AND GENDER STEREOTYPING

2.6.1 Functions of Stereotyping

Brannon (1996) maintains that the structure and function of stereotypes are important in understanding the impact of gender on people's lives. Because stereotypes - as composite images -filter how we "see," they attribute - often incorrectly and always too generally - certain characteristics to whole groups of people. Oversimplification in stereotypes encourages us to ignore complexity and contradictions that might prompt us to challenge the status quo (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). The latter authors suggest that the use of stereotypes encourages the perception that particular behaviours are timeless and inevitable.

Like Peterson and Runyan, Hoffman and Hurst (1990) propose that stereotyping offers rationalisations for existing situations and allows people to avoid thinking about the complexities of gender. Fiske (1993) is of the view that power and control underlies stereotyping in that "stereotyping and power are mutually reinforcing because stereotyping itself exerts control, maintaining and justifying the status quo" (p.622).

For children, using stereotypes may provide simplification which

may be a necessary part of dealing with a complex world (Bem, 1993). Adolescents and adults, however, are believed to be capable of considering information about individuals and allowing violations of stereotypical prescriptions for behaviour. Nevertheless, maintains Brannon (1996), adolescents and adults still have access to strong stereotypes, and these views influence their expectations about gender-related behaviour.

Virtually every significant dimension of a child's environment -his or her clothing, bedroom, toys, and to a lesser extent, books - is structured according to cultural expectations of appropriate gendered behaviour. Even parents who see themselves as egalitarian tend to provide their children with different experiences and opportunities and respond to them differently on the basis of sex (Weisner et al., 1994). Consequently, children cannot help but conclude that sex is an important social category (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

2.6.2 Physical Appearance: Clothes

It seems that within western industrialised societies, clothes serve as a marker for differentiating beween the sexes (Bem, 1993; Richardson, 1993). The easiest and most accurate way for a stranger to determine the sex of an infant, according to Shakin et al. (1985; Bem, 1993) is by looking at a baby's clothing. Indeed, there continues to exist a differentiation between clothes for girls and clothes for boys (Richardson, 1993). The style and colour of

clothing is a way of emphasising what gender a child is and can influence the way they are treated. The colour of the clothing alone is believed to supply a reliable clue for sex labelling: Indeed, the vast majority of the girls (in Shakin's study observing infants in suburban shopping malls) wore pink or yellow, while most boys were dressed in blue or red.

In a famous study (Richardson, 1993), a group of mothers were observed playing with a six-month-old child dressed in a frilly pink dress and called Beth. Their behaviour was compared to that of a different group of mothers who were observed playing with the same child, but this time dressed in blue rompers and given the name Adam. What the researchers found was that people reacted differently towards a child depending on whether they think it is a girl or a boy based on indicators like clothes and names (Will et al., in Richardson, 1993).

Clothing appears to play a significant part in gender socialisation in two ways. First, by informing others about the sex of the child, clothing sends implicit messages about how the child should be treated. "When someone interacts with a child and a sex label is available, the label functions to direct behaviour along the lines of traditional gender roles"(Shakin et al., 1985, p.956). Secondly, certain types of clothing encourage or discourage particular behaviours or activities. Girls in frilly dresses, for example, are discouraged from rough-and-tumble play, whereas boys' physical

movement is rarely impeded by their clothing. Boys are expected to be more active than girls, and the styles of the clothing designed for them reflect this gender stereotype. Hence, clothing serves as one of the most basic means by which parents organise their children's world along gender-specific lines (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

2.6.3 Toys

Toys are also believed to play a major part in gender socialisation. They not only entertain children, but also teach them particular skills and encourage them to explore through play a variety of roles they may one day occupy as adults. If we provide boys and girls with very different types of toys, we are essentially training them for separate (and unequal) roles as adults (Unger & Crawford, 1992). We are subtly telling them that what they may do, as well as what they can do, is largely determined (and limited) by their sex (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

In contemporary toy catalogues, most toys are gender-linked (Cann & Palmer, 1986). Many of the toys targeted at girls are domestic toys (miniature irons, microwaves, cookers, washing machines, etc.) or fashion accessories for themselves or their dolls. Toys aimed at boys are more likely to encourage mechanical or scientific skills, sports and outdoor activities, and war games (Richardson, 1993).

Toy catalogues are directed primarily at parents. Parents typically

encourage their children to play with gender-stereotyped toys, while discouraging them from playing with toys associated with the opposite sex (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Children are receiving very clear gender messages about the kinds of toys they are supposed to want. These messages are reinforced by their parents, by television commercials, by the pictures on toy packaging (Shakin et al., 1985). By the age of two, children show a preference for gender-stereotyped toys (Roopnarine, 1986).

Toys for boys tend to encourage exploration, manipulation, invention, construction, competition, and aggression. Girls' toys typically rate high on manipulability, but also creativity, nurturance, and attractiveness (Roopnarine, 1986). It seems that "playing with girls' vs boys' toys may be related to the development of differential cognitive and/or social skills in girls and boys" (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

2.6.4 Children's Stories

A lot of the literature deconstructing stories written for children indicate that they tend to reflect traditional gender roles. Davies (1989) read storybooks with feminist themes to groups of preschool girls and boys from various racial and ethnic and social class backgrounds. She found that the majority of children expressed a dislike for, and an inability, to identify with storybook characters who were acting in nontraditional roles or engaged in

cross-gender activities. There were no differences (in responses) across racial, ethnic, or social class lines. What did emerge as significant was parents' early efforts to socialise their children in nonsexist, non-gender-polarising ways. Two children in the study whose parents did not support polarised gender socialisation did not see anything wrong with characters engaged in cross-gendered behaviours and had less difficulty identifying with these characters.

2.7 THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF PRACTICES OF GENDER FORMATION ON CHILDREN

It seems that children's acquisition and use of gender stereotypical beliefs, attitudes and behaviour emerge in large part as the products of the psychological and social impact of practices of gender formation in a gender-polarised and male-centred society. The issue I wish to consider here is how children *do* gender (West & Zimmerman, 1992): how do they employ or use gender stereotyping in their everyday lives?

Between ages 5 and 10 years children seem to have very little tolerance for exceptions to the rules they have come to understand concerning gender (Brannon, 1996). For children, according to Brannon, tend to conceptualise the world in terms of male and female, and variations on this dichotomy are unwelcome. This thinking leads children to have stereotypical pictures of men, women, boys, and girls. Children may even be upset by adults whose

This is a debatable issue, however, as others (e.g. Brannon, 1996) refer to findings which suggest that with increased gender stereotype knowledge comes both the acceptance of such stereotypes as well as the ability to make individual exceptions to these stereotypes. The latter ability allows for gender flexibility rather than the rigid acceptance of gender stereotypes.

Biernat (1991) found that the flexible application of gender stereotypes increases with age. She observed that younger children relied more on gender information about individuals when making judgements about people, whereas older individuals took into account information about deviations from gender stereotypes. This pattern of development indicates that the acquisition of information about gender stereotypes is accompanied by greater flexibility in the use of stereotypes, but that the tendency to rely on the stereotype is always present (Brannon, 1996).

2.7.1 Early Peer Group Socialisation

Perhaps the powerful impact of processes of gender formation on children is best illustrated by the common finding in research that, after a few years of gender socialisation, adults become less important and gender socialisation becomes the responsibility of peers (Unger & Crawford, 1992): Same-sex peers appear to be the most potent agents of gender socialisation (Fagot, in Unger & Crawford, 1992). It seems that by the time children reach the first grade, preference for same-sex companions no longer needs to be

supported by adults but has become part of the group processes of the children themselves. Preference for same-sex peers is also associated both with a devaluation of the others' sex and an avoidance of activities associated with that sex (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

Socialisation is thus not a one-way process from adults to children: children socialise one another through their everyday interactions in the home and at play. Davies (1989) suggest that one of young children's first attempts at social differentiation is through increasing sex segregation. Observations of young children at play indicate that they voluntarily segregate themselves into same-sex groups. This preference for play with same-sex peers, according to the latter authors, emerges between the ages of two and three and grows stronger as children move from early to middle childhood.

There is considerable evidence that children reward gender-appropriate behaviour (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Boys especially are criticised more by their peers for cross-gender play, but both boys and girls who choose gender-appropriate toys are more likely to have other children play with them (Roopnarine, 1986). Available data indicate that at the very least, young children should be considered partners with parents and other caregivers in socialisation, including gender socialisation (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

The above point is echoed by West and Zimmerman (1992), who reported that children very early on come to be involved in a self-regulating process as they begin to monitor their own and others' conduct with regard to its gender implications. Maccoby (1987), suggests for example, that we can explain sex-segregation in childhood on the following basis: firstly, children are able quite early to recognise their own gender and those of others. They are drawn to other children who are perceived as the same with respect to a number of attributes of which gender is a salient one. Secondly, children have been taught some gender stereotypes, and once they can recognise the sex of other children, these stereotypes come into play. The point is that same-gender play preferences emerge quite early - earlier than most children are capable of coding other children's gender as "same as me."

2.7.2 Physical Appearances

Many young (American) children, according to Bem (1993), pay more attention to hairstyle and clothing than to genitalia in identifying, and making attributes about, gender. Prepubertal male and female children are ***dressed differently - to polarise their physical appearances*** - so that their sex will be apparent even when their genitalia are hidden from view (Bem, 1993). Picariello et al. (1990), demonstrated in their study that preschool children shared prevailing societal stereotypes linking colours and gender: they identified clothing colour as one of several defining attributes of gender.

External physical characteristics appear to be extremely important, for both adults and children, in the construction of gender stereotypes. Cues as to physical appearance have been found to carry the greatest weight in subsequent gender-related judgements, influencing inferences of traits, role behaviours, and occupational position (Deaux, 1987). The ready availability of information about physical characteristics thus serves as a point of initial inference - a point beyond which the casual observer may not pass. The stereotypic inference process among children and adults may begin as soon as the visual information is available, and they may not wait to find out whether their inferences are actually based in fact (Deaux, 1987).

Deaux and Lewis (in Deaux, 1987) investigated the content of gender stereotypes and identified four separate components that people use to differentiate male from female - traits, behaviours, physical characteristics, and occupations. Given a gender label for a target person, people will make inferences concerning the person's appearance, traits, gender role behaviour, and occupation. Information about one component can affect the others, with people attempting to maintain consistency among the components. They also found that people relied more on physical information than on traits, behaviours, or occupational information in making gender-related judgements. Physical appearance was the most influential of these components, affecting the other components more strongly than information about traits, behaviours, or occupations affected

judgements about appearance.

2.7.3 Stereotypes: Boys vs Girls

The literature on children's gender-stereotypical behaviour also indicates the fairly common observation that boys show stronger gender-typed preferences than girls at every age. Older girls become more flexible and older boys less flexible than their younger counterparts (Katz & Boswell, in Unger & Crawford, 1992). The latter authors suggest that part of the reason for this sex-related difference is that younger girls are permitted more latitude in their active toy preferences and behaviours than are younger boys.

It is also reported that boys show a greater number of stereotypes than girls at an earlier age than do girls. Boys more than girls have been found to choose gender-stereotypical toys for themselves (O'Keefe & Hyde, in Unger & Crawford, 1992). Children (especially boys) actively unlearn those traits and behaviours stereotypically associated with the other sex. Burman (in Unger & Crawford, 1992), suggests that nurturant impulses are present in boys and girls at an early age, but boys learn to withhold responsiveness to young infants because it is perceived to be incompatible with masculine roles. It is suggested that a boy who prefers stereotypical feminine activities is regarded as doubly deviant, for he is engaged in behaviour that is not only considered inappropriate for an individual of his sex, but that is also of lower status than

masculine behaviours (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

2.8 (GENDER-SENSITIVE) MOTHERING AND NON-SEXIST CHILDREARING

In the following section I wish to discuss some aspects of the relationship between mothering - specifically gender-sensitive mothering - and child-rearing practices. The central issue of consideration here is how gender-sensitive mothering can contribute to child-rearing practices which orientate and encourage children to be free, even if to a limited degree, of gender prejudice. Whether or not it is referred to as anti-sexist or non-sexist childrearing, feminists (in this case, gender-sensitive mothers), according to Richardson (1993), share the belief that is in the best interests of the child, but more especially girls, to raise them to question and criticise stereotyped views about what women and men, girls and boys, are like.

2.8.1 Gender-Sensitive Mothering

What are gender-sensitive mothers or what is gender-sensitive mothering? The meaning and use of these terms (gender-sensitive mothers/ing) in the context of this study draws upon Kimmel's (1989) study of feminism. For Kimmel, feminism could be seen as an umbrella term that not only recognises the diversity of women's experiences as mothers, but also refers to a common bond in the experiences of women in relation to specific issues. Feminist mothers (following Kimmel, 1989) - and in this study, gender-sensitive mothers - are fundamentally concerned with equality of

power between men and women; the need for social change and social activism with regard to the inferior social status of women in relation to that of men; a valuing of women and their experience, and the social construction of gender. In other words, according to Frye (in Gerrard & Javed, 1995): these include people who might not necessarily want to be associated with the label "feminist," but are aware of the oppression of women "because they ...see various (discrete) elements of the situation as systematically related in larger schemes" (p.126). It is for this reason that I chose to use the term "gender-sensitive mothering" rather than "feminist mothering" in this study. In short, as women and mothers, through their activities and practices they try to effect an end to "the social construction of gender inequality" (Peterson & Runyan, 1993, p.19).

I do not assume that all (or even most) of the women in this study would regard themselves, or are categorised by others, as feminists; or tend to make sense of their experiences in terms of the body of knowledge accumulated by feminist writers. "Gender-sensitive" indicates that they are aware of and are concerned with - in their own particular ways, depending on material circumstances due to issues of race, class, etc. - the same or similar issues mentioned by Kimmel. Nevertheless, Kimmel (1989) maintains that the experience of the phenomenon of feminism has made and continues to make an important impact on the structure and functioning of, inter alia, family relationships - especially in the area of child-

rearing practices.

An important aspect reported by the women who identified themselves as feminists in Kimmel's (1989) study - and what I wish to emphasise in relation to gender-sensitive mothers in this study - was that they detailed conscious efforts to raise their children to have an awareness of the implications of the social construction of gender. For Grabrucker (1988), this essentially involves uprooting a process of gender conditioning (in contemporary industrialised patriarchal society) with the aim of raising children in a manner that is free of gender prejudice.

I suggest that it would not be far-fetched to expect that, should a child be raised in a sustained "nonconventional" family life style (Weisner & Wilson-Mithchell, 1990), - nonconventional in the sense that it includes a conscious processs emphasising gender egalitarian values and beliefs, and counteracting conventional gender roles - he or she should show the effects of that family situation by displaying non-sex-typed knowledge and behaviours - even if these are of limited magnitude.

2.8.2 Challenging the Social Construction of Gender

I suggested earlier that belief in the highly exaggerated notion of difference - that there are innate, universal, enduring, and incompatible differences between male and female/masculinity and femininity - helps to lay the basis for discrimination on the basis

of gender. One of the implications, for gender-sensitive mothers, of the awareness that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon is the realisation that the origins of differences between male and female - whatever the constitution of these differences - are largely social and cultural rather than biological. Hence they are also historically changeable (Deaux, 1987; Unger, 1990).

Notwithstanding the pervasiveness and the continuous (seemingly unconscious) presence of the reality of difference (male vs female; feminine vs masculine) in everyday social interaction, various suggestions in the literature do indicate that mothering practices can challenge the notion of difference. In other words, children can be taught that differences between male and female are minimal, or that they are not as significant to the extent that it justifies gender discrimination. Unger (1990), for example, remarks that so-called sex-related differences emerge in some environments but not in others. The presence of other people seems to have an important effect on behaviour. The way many sex-related behaviours change according to the social environment casts doubt on whether such differences exist within the person.

There is also an element of choice - however limited - in many aspects of an individual's gender display that defies assumptions of constancy and inevitability (Deaux, 1987). Weedon (1987), seems to suggest that as mothers' knowledge of varying, even competing, discourses about mothering and child-rearing practices increase,

then a measure of choice on the part of the individual mother is introduced. She also maintains that even where choice is not available, resistance to dominant discourses about mothering and child-rearing is still possible. This element of choice is not only applicable to mothers, however. It is also potentially applicable to children. For the child is not a passive recipient of gender socialisation but actively participates in it by way of his/her view of the self, expectations, and behavioural choices (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

Connell (1987) remarks that children do decline or start making their own moves on the terrain of gender. They may refuse heterosexuality or may set about blending masculine and feminine elements; for instance, girls insisting on competitive sport at school. They are also likely to construct a fantasy life at odds with their actual practice, which, according to Connell, is perhaps the most commonest alternative.

Furthermore, involvement in cross-gender activities appears to influence the characteristics of boys as well as girls. Boys who have had the task of caring for their younger siblings have been found to be less aggressive in encounters with their peers than boys who have not had such responsibilities (Ember, in Unger & Crawford, 1992).

It appears then that, as far as challenging the notion of

difference - as one of the cornerstones of gender discrimination - is concerned, gender-sensitive mothering can defy practices that give concrete effect to the notion of difference. One such avenue of defiance seems to be child-rearing practices, provided that they are sustained over a long period of time, that provide both male and female children the opportunity and choice to participate in cross-gender activities. In essence, I am suggesting mothering practices which provide opportunities of experience for children which are not determined on the basis of their assigned gender.

Weisner and Wilson-Mitchell (1990), found in their research that what distinguished some children living in nonconventional families from their peers living in conventional families, were their selective use of non-gender-typed representations of objects and occupations. Such orientation to the social world was derived in part from being exposed, early on in their lives and on a consistent basis, to non-gender-typed opportunities of experience. The authors reported that these children were simultaneously aware of and selectively practised more than one way to classify information other than by gender only.

2.8.3 Challenging the Social Context

Bem (1993) observes that social change, with respect to gender discrimination, can be effected given that we alter the cultural lenses/assumptions about gender that are transmitted: this entails eradicating both androcentrism and gender polarisation. She

cautions, however, that dismantling gender polarisation involves more than simply allowing males and females greater freedom to be more masculine, feminine, androgynous, heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. It involves a total transformation of cultural consciousness so that such concepts are absent from both the culture and individual psyches. A beginning to this project is for parents to retard their young child's knowledge of our culture's traditional messages about gender, while simultaneously teaching her or him that the only definitive differences between males and females are anatomical and reproductive. In addition, parents must provide their children with alternative ways for organising and comprehending information. Given that parents are not the only ones responsible for gender socialisation, anything short of a collective, social effort to transform the culture is likely to produce only limited change (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

If we recognise, following Hare-Mustin and Maracek (1990), that there is no one right view of gender - that each representation of gender is partial - and that meaning is what we socially agree on, then this should lead to the further recognition that it is only when gender is challenged and disrupted as a category that its instability becomes apparent and other marginalised meanings emerge. Part of the disruption of gender as a category involves -in our analyses and comprehension of social life - treating a particular social context as a psychological variable. This is important as we should not regard perceptions and cognitions about

sex and gender as individualistic phenomena, and that we do not neglect the role of the social framework in creating these perceptions (Unger, 1990).

Social-structural theories, incorporating the dimension of social power, posit that what is responsible for the construction of conventionally gendered men and women is not childhood socialisation per se, but the assignment of women and men to different and unequal positions in the social structure. That different and unequal assignment constrains both children and adults psychologically, by channelling their motivations and their abilities into either a stereotypically male or a stereotypically female direction. It also constrains them more coercively, by restricting their ability to step outside their assigned positions should they be motivated to do so (Bem, 1993).

2.8.4 (Alternative) Constructions of Mothering and Childrearing

It is apparent from the literature reviewed that any (analytically honest) consideration of alternative constructions of motherhood, mothering, and child-rearing, involves a simultaneous consideration of the social contexts in which these phenomena occur. Such consideration entails contesting culturally entrenched, commonsense notions of gender (Weedon, 1987): conventional images of what it means to be masculine and feminine, how girls and boys ought to behave, what it means to be a mother, a child, and so forth.

Much of the research on early-childhood gender socialisation has recruited subjects from white, middle- and upper-middle-class, two-parent families. Hence, the findings of such studies may not be representative of the (gender) socialisation practices of families of other races and social classes (Williamson, 1976). For example, according to Joseph (1981), both (African-American) male and female children, are imbued at an early age with a sense of financial responsibility to earn income for themselves and to contribute to the support of their families. Also, Black children of both sexes are taught racial pride and strategies for responding to and overcoming racism. Thus gender differences in these contexts do not necessarily take on the forms - or are at times less salient - that are generally assumed by researchers studying middle-class white American families.

Furthermore, under conditions of racial and economic exploitation, Black children are often exposed to men and women sharing tasks and assuming collective responsibility (Roopnarine, 1986), and the children themselves have to engage in cross-gender household chores. Some studies indicate that in two-parent black families, women are typically employed outside the home and men participate in child care. In black single-parent households, the parent may be aided in the care and socialisation of the children by an extended kin and friendship network (Joseph, 1981).

In short, gender-sensitive mothers' conceptualisations of

motherhood and childhood requires questioning idealised notions of mothering and infancy and developing conceptions of childhood that recognise the agency and separate interests of mothers and children (Glenn, 1994).

2.8.5 Obstacles to Challenging/Resisting Gender

Challenging and resisting the social construction of inequality on the basis of gender - and by implication, developing mothering and child-rearing practices free of gender-discriminatory elements - is however more difficult than it might seem. Given that the main finding of massive research is a psychological similarity between women and men in the populations studied by psychologists (Connell, 1987), why does it remain an arduous task to challenge and resist gender discrimination?

Unger and Crawford (1992) propose that as long as gender formation takes place in a sexist society, boys and girls will have difficulty escaping gender categories. And as long as male behaviour remains the standard in the culture, women's differences from men will be regarded as deficiencies (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). Coupled with this is the gruesome reality that the "lives of almost all women, regardless of class, caste and age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability or disability have been distorted by violence and the expectation of violence" (Duffy, 1995, p.152).

It also needs to be recognised, therefore, that diverging from the patterns typical in one's society and not conforming to societal expectations about mothering involves transgressing the structurally established distinctions between the private and public spheres (Glenn, 1994). Statham (in Glenn, 1994) noted that families who are trying to combat conventional sex roles and sexist stereotypes note psychological barriers and social constraints which make it hard to have an influence on their children. Generally, it appears that practical processes are less crucial than the models parents provide for their children. Close contact, for example, according to Statham, facilitating discussion between parents and children seems to be important.

In this regard, Katz (in Unger & Crawford, 1992) points out that manipulations (both practical and verbal) by adults appear to have little lasting impact on children's behaviour as such short-term measures are ineffective in changing the cultural context that maintains sex segregation. Children who defy societal pressures for gender conformity appear to have had support from a variety of sources over a long period of time. They must also be able to ignore and withstand a considerable amount of pressure exerted against them because of their social "deviance" (Unger & Crawford, 1992). Davies (1989) indicates that attempts at nonsexist socialisation by parents do have a positive impact on children's attitudes and behaviour. But it must be kept in mind that parents are not the only ones responsible for gender socialisation: schools

and the media take up where parents leave off, and peers remain active socialisers throughout our lives.

For as long as the realities of women, non-elite men, and children are treated as secondary to the "main story" (androcentrism) - as the "background" that is never important enough to warrant being spotlighted - we in fact are unaware of what the background actually is and what relationship it actually has to the main story. What we are unaware of we cannot understand or analyse (Peterson & Runyan, 1993, p.25).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

3.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to investigate the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing practices. More specifically, this study sought to unearth and examine these possibilities - the extent to which children can be raised to be relatively free of gender prejudice and discrimination - as they manifest in the relationship between mothering as a social practice, and children's acquisition and use of gender stereotypes.

On the one hand, this study set out to explore the mothers as participants' awareness of their status as women in general, and as mothers in particular. Moreover, the interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to obtain information about their awareness of the relationship between mothering and gender, but more specifically, how this awareness translates into their childrearing practices and their awareness of their children's gender.

To this extent this exploration was premised on the assumption that where women (as mothers) are aware of, and are committed to resisting, practices which encourage and reinforce gender discrimination and prejudice, they would be encouraged to, given the opportunity, raise their children to become relatively free of acquiring and using conventional stereotypes which encourage gender

discrimination and prejudice. In other words, they would be motivated to raise their children to not only become aware of gender stereotypes and its relationship to gender discrimination and sexism, but also to become relatively free of gender discriminatory practices. It was further assumed that, for these mothers, gender difference - where it implies gender inequality - would not be a salient feature in their childrearing practices.

Furthermore, when preschool children are exposed to mothering practices which consistently transmit, and positively reinforce, the central message that gender difference does not mean gender inequality, then, I argued, gender would not become a salient feature in their relationships with their peers and people in general. Hence, it would not be unreasonable to expect such children to make less use of conventional gender stereotypes. Conversely, where mothers are relatively unaware of issues stemming from gender inequality - or, alternatively, are aware of these but, for various reasons, experience difficulties in transmiting these through their childrearing practices - their children, it was assumed, would grow up learning and exhibiting conventional gender stereotypes.

Another assumption was that preschool children (of the mothers who were interviewed) are less exposed - as far as learning gender stereotypes are concerned - then, say, school-going children, to sources (outside the immediate family environment) that have a

bearing on transmitting the society's messages about gender. Given their relative age, the majority of preschool children in this study were directly and primarily in the care of their mothers. In other words, the majority of the mothers in this study had more opportunity to regulate the lives of their preschool children in terms of exposure to peers, other adults and the media - sources that to varying degrees undoubtedly either complement or counteract childrearing practices and its imparting of the culture's predominant messages about gender.

Structured questions (adapted from a study by Picariello et al., 1990) were designed to obtain information on the extent to which the children in this study recognised and made use of conventional gender stereotypes (see Appendices B and C). If it was found that the majority (or all) of the children generally made use of gender stereotypes, then one can assume, in relation to their mothers' childrearing practices - bearing in mind the influence of other cultural sources - that their mothers' awareness of gender issues were poorly developed. Such awareness would translate into regarding and treating male and female children in divergent ways based on their gender. Alternatively, it could also mean that their mothers' awareness of gender issues were well-developed but that they had difficulty, given various considerations (which would have to be accounted for), to effectively translate these into childrearing practices which would promote non-sexism.

In sum, then, the objectives of this study were to obtain information which would assist in answering questions on:

- the extent of the partcipants' (mothers) awareness of issues around gender discrimination, sexism, and childrearing;
- the extent to which the children in the study made use of conventional gender stereotypes;
- the nature of the relationship between (non-/gender-sensitive) mothers' childrearing practices and their children's use of gender stereotyping;
- whether the (preschool) children of gender-sensitive mothers necessarily made less use of conventional gender stereotypes.

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The central concern of the investigation - which informs the method, analysis and interpretion of information - is around the meanings that gender, mothering and childrearing practices have for the participants. There is the recognition that meanings and interpretations - in this instance around the constructions of gender, mothering and childrearing processes - cannot be regarded as fixed and stable, but that its production is culturally, historically and socially contextualised (Weedon, 1987). As a qualitative inquiry, then, it is clearly recognised that the results obtained are open to a variety of interpretations and no firm conclusions can flow from them. By categorising respsonses into themes, one could derive - and hence focus analysis and interpretations on - temporarily fixed, common or dominant

meanings, articulated at particular points in time and confined to particular spaces.

In accepting the socially constructed nature of gender - and all social objects - this study draws on what has been generally referred to as a postmodern approach to psychology (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990). Postmodern theorists are committed to a constructionist understanding of the social world, its objects and institutions (Harris et al., 1995). As such, given the fluidity and relative instability that constructions and meanings have for a particular group of participants, this study does not attempt - in the vein of mainstream positivist theorising in psychology - to generalise beyond the perspectives of the participants, or to generalise beyond the time and space of the interviews and the study.

3.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Two groups of participants took part in the exercise. One group consisted of eight mothers, and their children (five males and females), altogether ten, formed the second group.

3.3.1 Biographical data: Mothers as Participants

Questions that elicited biographical information in relation to the group of mothers can be found on the front page of the questionnairre (see Appendix A).

All participants in this group live in the Western Cape. In terms of racial grouping/classification, five identified themselves as Coloured and three were White. All particpants fell in the age category twenty-nine to forty-years. Five are married, one widowed, and two are single mothers.

Employment status, type of employment, and highest level of education were taken as indicators of social class status. Seven were employed on a full time basis with one unemployed. Seven indicated that they were skilled or professionally employed and one as unskilled. Six particpiants obtained degrees or diplomas at tertiary insitutions, one has matric.

3.3.2 Selection Procedure

The sample of participants were secured mainly by-word-of-mouth. The writer also approached a group of women who worked as pre-school teachers (or had an interest in the subject matter) and who participated in a series of weekly workshops at the University's Psychology department. They were informed about the mini-thesis project and were asked whether those who mother children would like to participate with their children in interviews. Some of those who expressed interest also contacted other mothers whom they felt would have an interest in participating in the project.

When the researcher had obtained a list with names and telephone numbers of potential respondents, each was contacted via telephone

by the writer to confirm their and their childrens' participation. Both parents' (where spouses were present) consent for the childrens' participation was obtained verbally after the nature of the project and project-exercises were explained by the researcher. The participants were also informed that the interviewers would inform them at the time of the interviews of the nature and purpose of the interviews as well as the purpose of the exercise with their children. Participants were also requested to allow the interviewers to perform the exercises with their children in their absence so as to preclude any possible interference in their children's responses.

The interviewers, after being briefed by the researcher about the project and their tasks, established individual contact with the respondents to arrange for appointments. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents. Both the researcher and interviewers ensured the confidentiality of the information obtained from both the interviews and exercises with the children.

Given time and financial constraints, the three interviewers felt that they could conduct three interviews each. Eight interviews were carried out as one of the partcipants cancelled her participation due to unforeseen circumstances.

3.3.3 Sample selection

From an initial group of 15 mothers who indicated an interest and

expressed their willingness to participate in the project, nine women and their children were randomly selected for the interviews and exercises. The following criteria were considered in the process of selection:

1. The nature of data collection.

Each adult particpant was interviewed for about an hour-and-a-half to two-hours. Each child partook in an exercise lasting about twenty miniutes to half-an-hour. The interviewers recorded each interview while simultaneously writing down the participants' responses. The recorded interviews were transcribed for later analysis.

2. Limited resources.

Three female interviewers (senior students at the university) who claimed familiarity with the area of gender studies conducted the interviews. At the time of the interviews they were registered as students at the university's Gender Equity Unit and were thus familiar with issues in the area of gender studies. Two interviewers had previous experience with interviewing. They were referred to the writer by their lecturers.

3. Number of Children.

Ten children took part in the exercises. It was relevant to the project that an equal number of male and female children took part. Hence, the group of mothers selected for the interviews were chosen

with this prerequisite in mind.

4. Participants' availability

The interviews and exercises were conducted during a two-week period. Participants were also selected and included given their and their childrens' availability during that period.

3.3.4 Biographical data: The Children as Participants

Ten pre-school children each took part in an exercise. Five were male children with the average age of three years (between two to five years), and five female children with the average age of three years (between two to five years).

3.4. APPARATUS

3.4.1 The Interview Schedule

A structured interview schedule (see Appendix A) with eighteen questions were compiled - derived from the relevant literature reviewed - by the writer and was used as the basis for the interviews with the partivipants (the mothers). Specific areas of concern were identified in the literature and the questions were designed to elicit responses in relation to these.

3.4.2 Rationale for Structured Interview Schedule

With a structured interview, a researcher decides in advance what constitutes the required/relevant data and hence constructs questions in such a way as to elicit answers corresponding to, and

contained within, predetermined categories; this means that the researcher establishes precoded response categories which enables him/her to match what a respondent says against the categories on the schedule (Smith, 1995).

3.4.3 Process of Interviewing (Recording and Transcription of Data)

Responses were noted down on the questionnaires as well as tape-recorded for later transcription.

3.4.4 Children's Exercise

A structured exercise schedule (see Appendix B) with two exercises were constructed by the writer and served as the basis for the children's exercise. Questions were derived from the literature reviewed, especially the study done by Picarriello et al., (1990). In conjunction with the exercise schedule, two separate sets of material were constructed by the writer which served as stimuli eliciting responses from the children (see Appendix C).

3.4.5 Rationale for Exercise Schedule

The purpose of the exercise with the children was to obtain information which would indicate the extent to which they held and make use of conventional gender stereotyping. Instead of trying to interpret their use of gender stereotypes, the purpose was merely to get an indication of whether or not they use conventional stereotypes.

3.4.6 Process of Exercise (Recording of Data)

The exercises with the children were conducted at their respectives homes by the interviewees. This was carried out before the interviews with their mothers and was done with only the interviewer and child present. Their responses were recorded on the exercise schedule for later analysis.

3.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Qualitative Content Analysis (Mostyn, 1985; Smith, 1995), was used to identify major or dominant themes which served as the basis for interpretation and discussion of the information obtained from the interviews with the adults. The overall purpose of Qualitative Content Analysis, according to Mostyn (1985), is to identify specific characteristics of participants' communications. It allowed the researcher to scrutinise participants' talk (based on transcripts of the tape-recoded interviews) to see if there were any regularities in terms of single words, concepts or themes. Because it made possible an analysis of the frequency of certain responses (Smith, 1995), it allowed for the detection of responses which were dominant or the most prevalent and that could be grouped into themes for discussion and interpretation. The emergent themes were interpreted in the light of those in the literature reviewed. The information secured from the children was analysed using a simple frequency count of their responses to determine which responses were dominant.

Eighteen sets of open-ended questions were developed to obtain information from the mothers to explore their awareness of gender issues and its relationship to their childrearing practices and beliefs. To derive dominant themes, the following process was followed.

Each question was related to a very specific theme or thematic category. Question one, for instance, was related to the theme of gender difference, whereas question two, on the other hand, probed the participants' beliefs and awareness in relation to the theme of parenting responsibilities. Each participant's response (recorded and transcribed) was then placed under the relevant question and hence, thematic category.

Once all the responses were grouped under the appropriate thematic categories, the process to derive dominant responses in relation to each thematic category then proceeded. When considering dominant responses, the emphasis was placed not so much on whether participants used the same or similar words or sentences, but rather, whether they expressed the same or similar ideas, opinions, thoughts, beliefs or feelings. In other words, a simple frequency count could not be used to derive dominant response themes as careful consideration had to be given to what and how participants expressed themselves.

The dominant or recurring ideas or opinions were then regarded as

a dominant theme in relation to a specific thematic (or question) category. Where no significant dominant themes in relation to the thematic categories were discernable, this was stated as such and briefly commented upon. The dominant themes were then compared, discussed and analysed in terms of the various participants' responses, but also in the context of the literature reviewed.

In relation to the exercises with the children, a more or less similar process was followed in that each question was related to a specific task (see Appendices B and C). The purpose of exercise one (see Appendix B) was to obtain information about whether or not, and to what extent, the children who took part in the exercise recognised and made use of gender stereotypes as it relates to colours (Picariello et al., 1990). In other words, the concern was whether they identified the category "male" with "masculine colours" and "feminine" with "feminine colours".

Six identical drawings with the various "masculine" and "feminine colours" were presented to each child. Each of the children then indicated whether they identified the toy animal depicted as either "male" or "female". A simple frequency count of their responses indicated how many times gender-stereotypical associations in relation to colour was made.

A second part of the exercise with the children required of them to identify certain occupations, attributes and qualities as either

belonging to the male or female gender. Each child was required to associate stereotypical masculine and feminine colours with certain occupations, attributes and qualities (see Appendix C, exercise 2 for the instructions). Twelve pictures depicting the occupations, attributes and qualities were presented to each child. Firstly, they were asked to identify what each picture represented to determine the number of times they accurately recognised the pictures in the drawings. Secondly, the children were required to associate the coloured pictures of identical male and female drawings to each of the twelve drawings in order to determine how many times gender-stereotypical associations were made in relation to occupations, attributes and qualities. A frequency count of the responses gave an indication of the number of times children did or did not make gender-stereotypical associations.

Thus, by using a simple frequency count of the children's responses to both exercises, information was obtained of the extent to which the children taking part in the exercises recognised and made use of conventional gender stereotypes. This information was then interpreted in the light of the themes derived from the interviews with the mothers.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The chief task was to investigate the nature of the relationship between the gendered subjectivities of the mothers (alternatively referred to as their awareness of gender issues) and their children's use of gender stereotyping. The aim was to try to answer the question: can gender-sensitive mothers (as gendered subjects) rear non-sexist children? In other words, I questioned and investigated how and to what extent the participants' (the mothers') awareness of gender issues informed their own gendered subjectivities and how these in turn informed and impacted on the construction, acquisition and development of the gendered subjectivities of their children.

The discussion and interpretation of major themes are then presented. Major themes were derived from the dominant responses to questions. The interpretation of themes was contextualised in the literature reviewed. Relevant quotations of the participants were highlighted to directly reflect instances of particular themes. Central to the process of interpretation was the issue of the nature of the relationship between the mothers' awareness of gender issues and their children's use of gender stereotyping; and to what extent and how this relationship can foster non-sexist childrearing practices. Each section concludes with a summary of the major

responses to the particular areas of concern.

4.1 MOTHERING AND GENDER SUBJECTIVITY - MOTHERS' AWARENESS OF GENDER ISSUES

Introduction

Most people tend to perceive and treat male and female as different categories of people (Connell, 1987). The perception of gender differences reinforces differential treatment and the latter perpetuates such perception: if people perceive the male and female genders as different they are likely to treat them as different.

Questions about the participants' awareness of differences between the male and female genders started off the interviews. The validity and possible origin/s of the perception of gender differences, and the issue of whether there are more similarities than differences between male and female formed part of this section. Issues around gender in/equality - whether male and female should be regarded and treated as equals - were commented upon. Beliefs and perceptions about mothering and fathering practices were also raised. Specifically, participants shared their thoughts about the responsibilities conventionally ascribed to motherhood and fatherhood in relation to childrearing.

4.1.1 Social Processes and Gender Difference

The main response indicated an awareness that there are observable differences between the male and female genders. Social (rather

than biological) processes - education, childrearing practices, social pressure - according to the majority of participants, inform perceptions and beliefs about assumed differences. The perception of observable differences, the majority of participants remarked, relies on obvious physical characteristics which signal assumed differences:

> "They [boys and girls] wear different clothes".
> "They do different things".

There was however the widespread recognition that, beyond the merely observable, differences between male and female have fundamentally more to do with different processes of education and socialisation:

> "They are differently educated and brought up."

In other words, observed and assumed differences attributed to the male and female genders were largely located in wider social processes of education and childrearing practices, which in turn, some participants indicated, can be located in the "type of society" or "patriarchal society". Social constraints and social pressure are believed to heavily influence perceptions of difference between male and female.

"External, and peer influences ..." were recognised as factors

maintaining the perception of gender difference as well as different patterns of behaviour shown towards male and female. For some it appeared that the differences in perception and behavioural orientations toward male and female children and adults originated in "... parental upbringing and teaching", as well as in "the family".

Thus the observable and assumed differences between male and female as gender categories, for the majority of participants, are seen as constructed and not biologically given. For male and female "... are taught to be different." Furthermore, it was also said that " I think it is how you bring up children. There is no reason why a boy or girl should be different."

When social (rather than biological) processes are invoked to account for observable differences between the male and female genders, there is the (implicit) recognition that social life is fundamentally polarised on the basis of gender. What is reflected here are not merely participants' individual beliefs about assumed/observable differences between the male and female genders; they are also reflecting the wider society's conceptualisations and beliefs about such differences. In other words, their beliefs about gender differences (the latter always culturally visible and ever-present) are embedded within social processes within which they live and mother. Changes in the perceptions of gender differences - on the basis of these responses - therefore requires meta-changes

in social processes rather than in the cognitive/perceptual processes of individual men and women.

4.1.2 Social Processes and Gender Inequality

Gender inequality, all the respondents agreed, is primarily sourced in social (rather than biological) processes. Male and female children, they all confirmed, should be treated and seen as equals in order to challenge gender inequality and prejudice:

> "There is too much prejudice ... and one should not perpetuate that."
>
> "We must raise them [children] to believe that the same opportunities [can] come to both."
>
> "If they perform the same tasks they must be rewarded the same."
>
> "I do not believe boys should be treated as more important."

What these responses also implied was the recognition that gender inequality is manifested - and continuously reinstated - in a particular social context. Thus gender inequality is inevitable where social relations are fashioned to celebrate a particular dominant image of "maleness" (Gerrard & Javed, 1995). Gender equality, therefor, demands changes in social relations and processes that regulate interaction between the male and female genders: for instance, changes in labour relations ("If they perform the same tasks they must be rewarded the same").

In conclusion, the majority indicated that social processes are crucial in the perception of differences between the male and female genders as these have a constraining function. Consequently, gender inequality, manifested in differential treatment of male and female, is primarily rooted in social processes which give rise to practices of gender discrimination and prejudice.

4.1.3 Subjectivity, Mothering and Fathering

Most respondents felt that women (as mothers) are and should be primarily responsible for rearing children since they give birth to them and therefore should be primarily accountable for their well-being.

The general belief was that the primary responsibility of being a mother involved being:

> "A nurturer, a giver, and a sharer."
> "She should raise children, ... be a teacher, and be accountable for them."

Their reasons offered indicated that mothers are more accessible to and available for their children. Also, that they are more reliable and committed to their children in that, according to a participant: "Mothers give birth to their children and tend to be more accountable for them."

Mothering practice was directly held, according to Singer (1992), and still appears to be, morally accountable for the health (psychological, emotional, physical) of children. We also know that mothering as social and discursive practice is conventionally confined to the private domain, whereas fathering extends to the public domain. The above response could indicate that women as mothers are biologically preordained to be primarily responsible for childrearing.

On the other hand, it could also be argued (see Chodorow, 1989) that this response reflected the realisation that because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they are socially/structurally located to be primarily responsible and accountable for the well-being of their offspring. So when the participants expressed the notion that as mothers, they ought to be primarily responsible for their children since they gave birth to them, they were not necessarily expressing a (primarily) biologically determined reality, but a socially-derived one. In other words, it is not a biologically-derived fact that in the context of the contemporary nuclear family, the discursive/social status of childrearing and homemaking should automatically be equated with mothering (as opposed to fathering) (Chodorow, 1989; Gerrard & Javed, 1995). Thus, even if a woman is biologically responsible for the process of giving birth, it does not follow that parenting should be automatically equated with mothering.

One of the implications of the dominant view of mother-as-primary-childraiser-scenario is to say that there is a contradiction in their beliefs concerning gender relations. First they indicated that social processes are primarily responsible for gender inequality and attaining gender equality requires changes in social relations. In this discourse it appears as if they were saying that biological processes primarily determine parent-child interactions as far as rearing children is concerned. In other words, they attribute differential responsibilities (based on gender as determined by biology) to parenting practices: meaning that fathers have certain parental tasks or duties while mothers have a different set of parental responsibilities - the old private/public domain divide - and that these are separate and inevitable.

Moreover, if they believe this to be the case, they perpetuate the pervasive polarisation of gender in our culture (Bem, 1993), by (re-)instating differential and unequal responsibilities in relation to parenting practices, not recognising that the social/discursive construction and distribution of power is imbricated in the construction of parenting.

I do not believe, however, that the mother-as-primary-childraiser-scenario is necessarily expressing a case of "anatomy-is-destiny". It could also be interpreted as expressing the (socially/discursively constructed) subject position of women (as mothers) as a group. The one possibility is that they are

expressing the belief that women (as mothers) are biologically predispositioned to be the primary childcarers, and therefore, are fulfilling a "natural" role. The other possibility is their awareness that there is nothing natural about mothers being the primary childcarers, but that women - because they are anatomically capable of giving birth to children - are socially required to be primarily repsonisble for caring for children.

A father's responsibilities in raising children are not biologically determined and fixed. In other words, fathers are not biologically programmed to be emotionally illiterate and to show less intimacy in raising their offspring. Instead, according to the majority of the participants, they should share more of the responsibility of childrearing with mothers, especially in the areas of nurturance and intimacy towards their children; their involvement in childrearing should be more emotional and not only instrumental. Ideally, a man as a father should be " A nurturer, giver of love and attention, and intimacy to their children." He should also be " Sharing responsibility of child-rearing with the mother, and realising their responsibilities toward their family.

The subject position of the male as father does not, conventionally at least, have emotionality (as opposed to instrumentality) in relation to childrearing as a primary attribute: mothers are the nurturers and should provide enough emotional sustenance for everyone in the family.

Here the participants appealed to an aspect of human relationships conventionally primarily identified with the private (mothering) domain, to be equally identified with the public (fathering) domain. In other words, the appeal could be read as stemming from a recognition that the boundaries of the private/public domain (inseparable in the biology-determines-gender discourse) are, or could be rendered, permeable.

In a sense, there was the recognition that a relationship based primarily on being of instrumental use (e.g. the role of the breadwinner) creates a certain emotional/psychological distance for the father in childrearing which - in Chodorow's (1989) theory of gender acquisition - has definite implications for the acquisition of children's gender subjectivities. When children learn to identify with both parental figures as equally available (and capable) for emotional/psychological connectedness, they then learn that this attribute does not belong to a particular gender only.

This has also definite implications for the discursive construction of fathering on a social scale. It not only requires revisiting the private/public domain issue with its attendant social responsibilities based on gender, but opens up other avenues which could be targeted for possible change as far as wider gender relations are concerned. The issue raised here by the participants was that both fathering and mothering subjectivity is permeable and not biologically fixed: it can and should be changed to effect

other changes in gender relations.

In conclusion, the respondents felt that mothers are and should be primarily responsible for rearing children but that fathers should share more of this responsibility, especially in the areas of nurturance and intimacy towards their children; in other words, their involvement in childrearing should be more emotional and not only instrumental.

4.2 CHILDREN'S GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY - CHILDREN'S USE OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

Introduction

There were several areas of concern that the exercise with the children of the mothers addressed. These areas were identified in a previous study by Picariello et al. (1990), as relevant in investigating children's awareness and use of gender stereotyping. The relevant areas included whether they identified male with masculine colours and female with feminine colours;
whether the children identified images (of toys, for instance) and colours along gender stereotypical lines. In general the purpose of the exercise was to investigate whether these children identified stereotypically "masculine" toys and colours with conventional masculine occupations, play, and attributes; and "feminine" toys and colours with stereotypically feminine attributes, occupations, and play.

4.2.1 Results of Exercise with Children

One of the first concerns in relation to the exercise with the children was whether they identified the category "male" with "masculine colours" and "female" with "feminine colours", and to what extent they did this. In the context of this paper the stereotypical masculine colours were red, brown and blue whereas the stereotypical feminine colours were lavender, light pink and bright pink. One part of the exercise with the children asked of them to identify each of the colours with either male or female children.

TABLE OF RESULTS: EXERCISE 1

Association of Colour with Masculinie or Feminine

Colour	Boys		Girls	
	Mas	Fem	Mas	Fem
Red (M)	1	4	2	3
Lavender (F)	2	3	2	3
Brown (M)	5	0	4	1
Light Pink (F)	1	4	2	3
Blue (M)	4	1	4	1
Bright Pink (F)	1	4	1	4

Associations:	Gender-Stereotypical	Non-Gender-Stereotypical
Red	3	7
Lavender	6	4
Brown	9	1
Light Pink	7	3
Blue	8	2
Bright Pink	8	2

With the exception of the colour red, the vast majority of children recognised that certain colours were stereotypically associated with either the male or female gender. One could thus reasonably infer that, in terms of the literature reviewed, these children

would use certain colours to make attributions about gender. Some of the reasons for their choice of certain colours ranged from: "Girls like bright colours" (referring to red and bright pink); "boys like dark colours".

Another concern of the exercise was with whether the children identified images (of toys, for instance) and colours along gender stereotypical lines. In other words, did they identify stereotypically "masculine" toys and colours with conventional masculine occupations, play, etc., and "feminine" toys and colours with stereotypically feminine attributes, occupations, play, etc?

A part of the exercise required of them to identify certain occupations, attributes and qualities as either belonging to the male or female gender (see Appendix). Such identification was effected by requiring of the children to associate the stereotypical masculine and feminine colours with certain occupations, attributes and qualities. The children were required to make associations in relation to the following categories: (1) Choice of play (represented by the pictures of the toy car and truck); (2) Choice of activities (represented by a tool set and cooking set); (3) Choice of occupations (represented by a fire truck, police car and badge; a nurse's badge, thermometer, syringe, scissors and box of bandages; a teacher's desk); (4) Choice of attributes/qualities (represented by noisy musical instruments indicating loudness; a box of heavy weights indicating strength; teardrops and box of tissues indicating weakness, crying, in need of care; a baby/infant indicating nurturing, caring, gentleness.

Children were also required to say whether or not they recognised what each picture represents. This was indicated by the categories "Correct identification", "Incorrect Identification", or "No identification". Where children incorrectly identified what the pictures represented, or did not recognise what they represented, the interviewer had to inform each child about what the picture

represented before they contnued with the exercise.

TABLE OF RESULTS: EXERCISE TWO

(These results reflect the choices of both male and female children together)

Picture	Identification		Colour Ass.	Gender Ass.
	Correct	Incorrect		
Car/Truck	9	1	6 (Blue)	8 (Male)
Dolls	9	1	6 (Blue)	6 (Female)
Tool Set	8	2	8 (Blue)	8 (Male)
Cooking Set	9	1	7 (Blue)	7 (Female)
Fire Truck	9	1	6 (Blue)	7 (Male)
Police car	8	2	5 (Blue)	9 (Male)
Nurse	6	4	7 (Blue)	7 (Male)
Teacher	4	6	6 (Blue)	7 (Male)
Music Instruments	7	3	7 (Blue)	6 (Male)
Weights	1	9	5 (Blue)	7 (Male)
Tears	3	7	6 (Light Pink)	7 (Female)
Baby	7	3	6 (Light Pink)	5 (Female)

Number of times the majority made Correct Stereotyped Identifications were 9 out of 12.

In six (out of the twelve) instances, colours were associated with the drawings in a gender-stereotypical manner; that meant that the colour blue was associated with supposedly conventional "masculine" toys, attributes, occupations, etc., and the colour light pink was associated with gender-stereotypically "feminine" occupations, qualities, etc. In the remaining six instances, colours were associated in a non-gender-stereotypical manner.

In nine (out of the twelve) instances, the male-figure and female-figure were associated to the drawings in a gender-stereotypical fashion; that meant that the male-figure was, for instance,

associated with conventionally "masculine" toys and/or the female-figure was associated with conventionally "feminine" qualities.

In general, there appeared the discrepancy between colour-associations and figure-associations: the latter was an index of more gender-stereotypical associations than the former. This indicated that the children relied more on the gender of the figure, rather than on the colour of the figure, in the drawing to make either gender-stereotypical or non-gender-stereotypical associations.

In sum, six out of twelve instances, children made gender-stereotypical colour-associations: they were able to recognise that certain colours are stereotypically associated with either the male or female gender. The majority of children (nine out of twelve) made gender-stereotypical associations in relation to the gender of the figures in the drawings. They recognised that certain tasks, occupations, activities and attributes are associated with either the male or female gender.

There were no significant differences between the male and female children in the use of gender-stereotypical associations either in relation to colour or the gender of the figures in the drawings. In other words, it could not be established that the male children made more use of gender stereotyping than the female children, or vice versa. They also relied more on the gender of the figures in the drawings to make gender-stereotypical associations, rather than using the colours of the figures in the drawings.

4.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHERS' GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY AND CHILDREN'S USE OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

Introduction

Gender stereotypes and parental stereotypes are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. On the basis of parenting stereotypes, people in general (including parental subjects and their children) come to

associate certain behavioural attributes and responsibilities with fathers (e.g. breadwinner, head of household) and with mothers (e.g. childcarer, emotional provider)(Brannon, 1996). Moreover, parental subjects' conceptualisations of children, as well of childrearing practices, are informed by (the social salience of) their children's gender.

The literature reviewed highlighted several areas which are important in investigating aspects of the relationship between parenting/childrearing practices and gender acquisition. Participants were questioned about their views, perspectives and beliefs about these areas. I assumed that the views of the mothers about these issues would inform their childrearing practices which, in turn, would play a significant part in relaying conventional social assumptions about sex and gender stereotypes to children.

4.3.1 Mothering Practice and Gender Preference

In relation to the question of gender preference at birth, the majority of the participants felt that they did not have any preference for a male or female child. Instead, the majority indicated that the health of the child was more important than its sex.

Thus it appeared that for the majority of these women, the sex/gender of the child took on a secondary role in relation to health considerations. In a sense, then, we could say that for the majority mothering subjectivity in relation to gender (at birth) was "gender-neutral".

But we also know, according to Bem (1993), for example, that within an androcentric society it becomes increasingly important for parents (and others), soon after their children are born, to distinguish between children on the basis of their gender. This distinction becomes important as it informs differential childrearing directed at male and female children.

It is also widely recognised that within an androcentric social context "maleness" is elevated as the normative standard. Hence the observation that there tends to be more pressure on male children, and less so on female children, to conform to what is considered as gender-appropriate behaviour. Moreover, where males are more socially powerful, the literature indicated that, for a large number of parents, the birth of a male child signifies more (future) social influence. In their stated gender preference, then, this group of mothers were not gender stereotypic.

The point is simply that whether or not they choose to recognise it as such, soon after the birth of a child its gender assumes an important facet in its social and individual life.

4.3.2 Mothering Practice and Gender-Stereotyped Attributes

Participants were also questioned in relation to gender-stereotyped attributes, conceptions, beliefs concerning the gender of their children. The majority responded with the conviction that children should be raised to "fit in" with social mores. Morals and principles which are "gender neutral" should guide the rearing and education of children. Their upbringing should not be guided by conventional gender stipulations.

The majority of respondents described their children in neutral (rather than gender-stereotypical) terms: meaning they chose to describe their children in terms of negative or positive terms. Some emphasised their children's "moodiness", being "stubborn," or even "aggressive." One participant described her daughter as "quite intelligent and lively".

Others observed that their children are "loving", "caring", and "nurturing." Another stated that "My child is very intelligent, perceptive, and expressive."

In terms of the personal qualities they would like their children

to have, participants remained relatively neutral, rather than gender-stereotypical: The kind of response most often mentioned was that they raised their children to be independent, confident, principled and growing up with a strong character:

> "I would like my child to become independent".
> "... to be confident, strong in themselves".
> "... as well as principled ... to stand up for what she believes in."

A second line of oft-repeated response revolves around these mothers raising their children to "... take care of themselves". Also, "... to have self-respect as well as respecting others, with the ability to love and care for others".

As a justification for why they considered some qualities as more important than others, the majority felt that "fitting in" with society is of primary concern:

> "It is important to fit in".
> "... to be accepted,... not to be a hindrance, or become a failure."

Such views were true for mothers who raise sons, as well for those raising daughters.

At first glance, as far as non-sexist childrearing is concerned, these mothers appealed to gender-neutral processes of upbringing and education: processes where the emphasis should be on the "characters" and "personalities" of the children. However, in a social milieu where the social construction of gender is rendered virtually invisible, closer inspection will reveal that there is nothing (gender-) neutral about social mores and processes of education and childrearing. For the gender polarisation of social life is ever-present (Bem, 1993).

On the one hand, these appeals by the participants did not necessarily express a lack of awareness of the ever-presentness of gender in society. It could be that such an appeal recognised (albeit implicitly) the salience of gender throughout society. In other words, it expressed the desire that gender should become less important as a factor in socialising children.

4.3.3 Mothering Practice and Gendered Behaviour

The majority of participants expressed the wish to raise their daughters to show behaviour of a responsible adult (and not a responsible woman). On the other hand, male children should show behaviour more supportive of others, especially their future wives.

In relation to the ideal behavioural qualities of their daughters, the majority indicated they would like them to be competitive, have a strong character, and be an achiever:

> "I want her to be competitive with herself in the sense that she wants to achieve ... I want her to be a strong person".
> "... to be independent, be a goal-setter and achieve her goals, ..."
> "... to have a strong personality, to have confidence and strength."
> "I want my daughter to be herself and not act differently because she is a woman."

The general feeling was that these qualities are necessary and important in order for their daughters to become responsible adults:

> "Growing up so she becomes a responsible adult".
> "So others can treat her with respect".

In relation to the ideal behavioural qualities they would you like to see in a male child, the dominant response pattern revolved

around wanting to see their sons to be supportive of others - especially toward their future wives - and learn to share responsibility:

> "I would want for a boy to be sensitive to his needs and to women ... and to help with looking after children and be supportive".
> " To be non-sexist,... to be an equal partner ... and learn not to dominate a relationship."

The latter response in relation to rearing male children is consistent with the earlier-mentioned theme of redefining the boundaries of the public/private domains: fathers-as-more-involved childrearers. It appears that male children should be raised with the awareness that as future fathers (assuming that they will get married to females and have children) they should learn to share more of the responsibility in raising their children. Teaching male children to become more sensitive to their needs (recognising and nurturing their emotional selves) is presented as an aspect of their upbringing which could (eventually) manifest in relationships characterised by mutual sharing of childcare and non-dominance. Once again, this has further implications for wider social processes of education and socialisation directed at male children.

It was also noteworthy that participants described the ideal behavioural characteristics of both male and female children in what they believed to be gender-neutral terms. What they were really doing, however, was to exchange conventional gender attributes: characteristics which are conventionally regarded as feminine (and applied to female children) are attributed to male children. What was refered to as "gender-neutral" is in fact "gender-exchange".

On another level, this raises the issue of the possiblity of a culture or language community constructing genderless/gender-

neutral subjects. It further highlights the role and power of language in naming and constructing what we perceive to be social reality. In post-modern terms (Rosenau, 1992), the ideal of making gender-neutrality a social reality is an illusion. Do we then need to invent new linguistic categories which are gender-neutral and which would aid in the construction of genderless subjects? How would social processes (seemingly operating outside the boundaries of language) aid or obstruct in this process? The issue here is that we (including our respondents) are constrained, among other things, in our conceptualisations (of gender) by the language communities within which we and they live. I do not intend to attempt to exhaust this issue here but merely to indicate the complexities involved in considering the possibility of non-sexist childrearing.

Nevertheless, as the following section will indicate, in their responses dealing with the observable characteristics of gender, participants' observations became more gender-stereotyped than "gender-neutral."

4.3.4 Mothering Practice, Dress Codes, Children's Toys and Tasks

4.3.4.1 Dress Codes

It emerged from all the responses that social and peer pressure (especially in the form of social ridicule) play a powerful role in ensuring social conformity as regards gender and dress codes. The overwhelming concern was that their children, should they not wear gender-appropriate clothing, would become objects of social ridicule and be made to feel ashamed:

> "People will laugh and mock my boy."
> "Because of people's attitudes ..."
> "I do not want to put my child in a situation of compromise."

All respondents agreed that they would not allow their sons to

dress up in girls' clothes. They agreed that social and peer pressure will result in their sons being embarrassed and ridiculed:

> "He is ... like an outcast in society."
> "It would be degrading to the child."
> "Because of the society we live in. I would not want my child to be ridiculed."

This blanket reservation was not entirely applicable to all children, however. Some expressed the realisation that female children are not as pressurised as male children to conform to society's gender scripts.

> "My daughter can wear pants, but my son will not wear a dress."

A few mothers added that clothes are gender-specific and cross-dressing can be confusing to the child:

> "You are making him into a person he should not actually be."
> "Dresses are meant for a girl. He will not look right in a dress."

Should their child persist in cross-dressing, the majority of mothers indicated that they simply will not allow this to happen in order to prevent their children (and themselves?) being socially ridiculed and embarrassed. One participant felt that if necessary, she would punish her child:

> "I will punish my son ... I will not allow him to. My son must grow up as a boy and remain a boy."

Issues around power relations and gender assumes a very concrete reality in the form of social and peer pressure which confront both parental subjects and their children on a daily basis. West &

Zimmerman (1992), observed that the construction of gendered subjectivity, very early on in children's lives, assume the status of a self-/social regulating process. Children begin to monitor their own and others' conduct with regard to its gender implications. Once children have been taught some gender stereotypes, and once they can recognise the gender of other children, these stereotypes come into play (Maccoby, 1987).

These responses are indicative of the notion that, as far as the process of constructing gender subjectivity is concerned, almost all of a culture's observable artifacts are aimed at establishing, representing and reinforcing gender polarisation. Male and female children are dressed differently to polarise their physical appearance (Bem, 1993). Clothes come to serve very particular discursive/social functions: they inform others about the sex of the child and they send implicit messages about how a child should be treated (Shakin et al., 1985). In short, the latter authors maintained, it serves as a basic (regulatory) means by which parents organise their child's world according to gender.

The contradiction in the responses is that - on the one hand, there is the recognition that to achieve gender equality, social processes of upbringing and education, for instance, should incorporate and be based on "gender neutral" principles which fosters character and personality and de-emphasise the salience of gender. Yet the concrete mechanisms which should aide in the process of non-sexist socialisation (such as a culture's dress codes) reinforces, rather than assists in the undoing, of gender polarisation.

4.3.4.2 Toys

In relation to playing with sex-stereotyped toys, the respondents' opinions varied. Yet the majority was at one that the educational function/quality of toys should be emphasised, rather than whether or not it is gender-specific. However, the literature reviewed

indicated that female children were given more leniency with regard to choice of toys than male children and that there is more social pressure on male children to choose and play with gender-specific toys than is the case with female children.

Again, the response of the majority gave voice to the skewed emphasis on gender in an androcentric culture where "maleness" is valued and "femaleness" devalued. In this context differential childrearing practices give different emphases to different children depending on their sex/gender. Generally it was observed by others (Unger & Crawford, 1992) that, because of the uneven emphasis on gender, male children show stronger gender-typed preferences than female children at every age.

Nevertheless, the majority of mothers remarked that the emphasis should be on a range or variety of toys that are educational:

> "There is no girl-only or boy-only thing. I buy my daughter educational toys."
> "I'll try to find a range of toys."

A further significant observation by all participants was that they would not allow their male child to play with female sex-stereotyped toys such as dolls or make-up. Some of the reasons offered indicated that these toys are not educational and they would not buy it for either their daughter or son. Other reasons ranged from preventing their sons from being ridiculed:

> "They will make fun of him. It has to do with acceptance."
> "You buy him things that is meant for a boy."
> "A doll is obviously for a girl."

However, female children, the majority noted, should be allowed to play with a lorry or tool kit if they wanted to. Mothers who would allow their daughters to play with lorries or tool kits indicated

an egalitarian approach in that such choices belong to their daughters:

"She must play with what she enjoys."

4.3.4.3 Children's Tasks

In relation to the kinds of tasks they allowed and/or encouraged their children to do at home, the majority indicated that these need and should not be gender-specific: both genders can perform the same tasks if given the opportunity.

Most mothers would not make any distinction between tasks for their children: they would not reserve tasks according to the child's gender.

"Whether it's a boy or a girl, I wouldn't make any difference".
"He would have to do everything a girl does."

They maintained that tasks need not be gender-specific: they stressed instead that it is important that children be given the opportunity to learn a variety of skills:

"They need to learn all sorts of things".
"It broadens their experience."

4.3.5 Mothering Practice and Relationships

This section explored the gendered nature of relationships between parental subjects and their children. Specifically, it deals with the participants' conceptions about the nature and quality of relationships between mothers and daughters and between fathers and sons. Participants were asked whether they thought that the kind and quality of relationships parents have with their children depends on the genders of the subjects involved.

The dominant response that emerged was that the kind and quality of the relationship between parents and their children need not and should not be informed by gender. In other words, both parental subjects can have equally meaningful relationships with both female and male children.

The majority felt that mothers need not have better or more meaningful relationships with daughters and based their observations on personal experience:

> "My husband has a good relationship with my daughter."
> "I have a good relationship with my son."
> "I do not spend that much time with my children because of work. My husband has a good relationship with the children."

In a similar vein, most participants maintained that fathers do not necessarily have more meaningful relationships with their sons as "Daughters can get on equally well with fathers." It was also said that "It is just a perception [that fathers have more meaningful relationships with their sons], it is not necessarily so."

Altogether, the sentiments of the majority were echoed by one observation:

> "I do not see why there should be a difference. You can have the same relationship with both a boy and a girl."

In terms of Chodorow's (1989) theory, male and female children acquire gendered personalities - they differ fundamentally in personality - given the gendered nature of relationships between parental subjects and their children: female children identify primarily with the mother, whereas male children identify primary with the father. Given such identification, females are psychologically prepared and oriented to be better at establishing and maintaining relationships that are affective and nurturant in

character. For males, however, the outcome of such identification is the propensity to devalue what they perceive (or have been taught to regard) as feminine about themselves and other males.

The participants' responses can be construed as an appeal to relationships almost devoid of the relevance of gender. Implicit in such an appeal is the recognition that relationships primarily based on gender perpetuate beliefs about gender differences which do not foster non-sexism in childrearing practices. Relationships in which the gender of the subjects involved are (virtually unconsciously) foregrounded can only contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes among children and their parents.

In summary, the majority of participants were gender-astereotypical in their preference for either male or female children at birth. They felt that ideally, children should be raised to acquire "gender neutral" personal attributes which conform to moral principles in order for them to become responsible adults, not responsible male or female adults. Male children, especially, should be taught to acquire character attributes which emphasise emotional involvement and relatedness. There was the general recognition, however, that social and peer pressure play a powerful role in ensuring gender/social conformity in, for instance, children's dress codes, choice of toys and forms of play, as well as the choice of household tasks they are required to perform.

The notion that gender-sensitive mothering practices are/can be hampered by social pressures of various kinds seemed to be of significance in that the vast majority of children who took part in the exercises indicated that they made use of conventional gender stereotypes. Given that the majority of the mothers in the study stated that they were aware of issues of gender discrimination and prejudice and, given the opportunity, would raise their children with this awareness in mind, one would expect that their children

would make less use of conventional gender stereotypes. However, the results of the children's exercises indicated otherwise.

The discrepancy between stated beliefs about children and gender, on the one hand, and children's use of conventional gender stereotypes could be accounted for in terms of the pervasive and powerful influence of cultural discourses and practices, other than mothering practice, in relaying conventional messages about gender. The impact of fathering practices, the influence of other adults and family members, the role of the media and peers, for instance, were not adequately explored in this study as regards children's acquisition of gender stereotypes and beliefs. After all, children are not brought up in a social vacuum and it is to be expected that a culture's dominant discourses about gender will be relayed through various intersecting and complex practices.

However, it would not be unreasonable to assume that these group of mothers' own unresolved contradictions and beliefs about gender could also help to account for the finding that, given their stated awareness of issues around gender, their children continue to rely on conventional gender stereotypes in everyday interaction. It was stated, for example, that observable differences between male and female children should not determine the allocation of household tasks and activities as this would encourage, among children, the perception and practice of gender inequality and discrimination. However, a measure of discomfort relating to perceptions and beliefs about sexuality emerged when the participants discussed dress codes in relation to their children's gender. Male children, the majority felt, should not be allowed to wear dresses as these would make them the subjects of social ridicule. In other words, clothing was perceived as a pointer to male children's sexuality in ways that household tasks (boys not being allowed to wash dishes, for instance) did not.

Other contradictions could be discerned in the mothers' belief that

fathers should play an equal role in raising children. If this were to be the case, then children would learn to identify with both parental figures as equally available (and capable) for emotional/psychological connectedness. In other words, they then learn that this attribute does not belong to a particular gender only. Yet there was the acceptance, by the majority of mothers, that childrearing remains the primary responsibility of mothers and that fathers should merely aid this process/practice. In a sense, power structures which locate women as primary childcarers are left virtually unchallenged.

I do not want to suggest that because (gender-sensitive) mothers have unresolved contradictions about gender, their children continue to use gender stereotypes. It would appear, rather, that children, growing up in a patriarchal society, continue to internalise sexist stereotypes where they are presented with contradictory messages about gender.

4.4 GENDER SUBJECTIVITY AND RESISTANCE/ALTERNATIVES:GENDER-SENSITIVE MOTHERING AND NON-SEXIST CHILDREARING

Introduction

The final section addresses the issue of change and mothering practice as the latter relates to gender. More specifically, it asked what kinds of changes the participants considered mothering (or other social) practices would have to undergo to positively effect children's awareness of gender. A central concern was with the possibilities and the extent to which changes in mothering practices could contribute to non-sexist childrearing.

The participants' thoughts and ideas about this issue were inferred from their conceptions about "ideal" motherhood and fatherhood. They were also asked to consider what they would like to have changed or experienced differently, based on their experiences and status as mothers.

Based on their responses, change can be conceptualised at two levels: changes within mothering practice; and changes that would have to take place outside of, but influence, mothering practice.

4.4.1 Change Within Mothering Practice

The majority felt that "improved" mothering could foster non-sexist childrearing practices. Here the emphasis was on personal - seemingly gender-neutral - qualities of the mothering figure. Improved mothering, for these participants, has to do with a mother being more nurturant, care-giving, sensitive, patient, and sharing:

> "She should be very understanding ... and patient."
> "The mother should also be hospitable, caring, a good listener and be creative."
> "You've got to treat your children the same, and be fair and considerate towards the children."

The dominant reason for this response emerged from an awareness of the mother's role as a very influential figure in the child's life:

> "Children learn the most from their mother."
> "The mother plays an important role in forming the child. She spends most of her time with the child."

At first glance, as far as "improved" mothering is concerned, these are seemingly hardly revolutionary changes. After all, is the desire to be better at mothering not reinforcing and perpetuating the conventional stereotypes of what mothers should be doing and be like? Perhaps it is, but what we should not disregard is their earlier emphasis that one of the ways in which to neutralise or marginalise the social salience of gender in childrearing is to focus on what they consider to be qualities which build "character" and "personality". In other words, one of the ways in which to undermine gender stereotypes in childrearing is to focus on teaching children how to be responsible adults, and not responsible

men or women.

Two other points of possible significance were also raised here. One concerns the awareness of the social power and influence the mothering subject has in relation to children. The other refers to the mothering subjects' awareness of gender inequality and how this could be dealt with in childrearing.

4.4.2 Social Power and Mothering Practice

There is the tension between the issue of social power and mothering practice which could be translated into a tension between the ideal and the "real". For these mothers, the stated ideal would be to raise children to be "gender neutral": to emphasise practices which build "personality" and "character." In other words, practices in which gender is not a significant factor in regulating social interaction.

However, social practices - including mothering practices - do not happen in social vacuums. The reality is that mothering practices and gender relations take shape and manifest themselves in contemporary industrialised societies where the gendered division of social (and personal) life assumes the status of the inevitable. Hence the social construction of mothering and childrearing practices - in a cultural context saturated by gender polarisation - reflect and (re-)institutes the gendered division of social life (Bem, 1993). It becomes important for parents in particular and society in general, as far as childrearing is concerned, to distinguish between children on the basis of sex/gender. The almost invisible (socially required) norm is for parents to raise males differently to females; a norm at odds with appeals to instill practices which detract from the significance of gender. In short, the appeal for "gender neutral" mothering and social practices needs to become - as it is - a social issue; not a challenge to be taken up merely by individual women and mothers.

Thus "improved" mothering, for the participants, was primarily conceptualised at the levels of the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions:

> "We must raise them to believe that the same opportunities can come to both, ..."
> "You've got to treat your children the same, ... be fair and considerate towards the children."

Yet there was also the realisation (even if implicitly) that changes in mothering practice at these levels are inescapably intertwined with what happens at the level of wider social processes: changes in the the social position of women (as mothers) requires changes, for instance, in the social status of men (as fathers). In childrearing, fathers should "Adopt an equal role ... like the mother."

4.4.3 Changes outside Mothering Practice

"Improved" mothering entails the awareness of gender inequality ("You've got to treat your children the same") on a social scale. It reflects the consciousness of the social position/location of mothers (and women in general) as enjoying less privileges and access to decision-making processes on a global scale.

The dominant response in relation to ideal fatherhood was that a father should play a significantly more supportive role in the life of the family in general. Significant support from the father in this context means that he:

> "should be there when he is needed."
> "should be responsible and help the mother."
> "should help raise the children, and adopt an equal role like the mother."
> "should be nurturant and care-giving."

This was a response repeated throughout the interviews by virtually every participant and hence was of great importance to them. Even though it was primarily conceptualised and expressed at the level of interpersonal relations - that men as fathers should have an equal role in childrearing and be more supportive of mothers - it reflects on issues of greater importance with wider social implications. In short, it challenges social and ideological practices which structures and emanates from the gender-based private versus public domain phenomenon. Fundamentally, the private/public domain divide is predicated upon, and gives effect to, unequal power relations between male and female - including their social subjectivities as mothers and fathers (Lott, 1990; Connell, 1987). Structurally, the male parent (as father) is more powerful than the female parent (as mother). Both, as social/discursive positionings, are discursively and socially constrained to varying degrees within the spheres of the private and the public. Male and female children, as future adults, are reared to occupy these respective social domains.

Nevertheless, their dominant response recognises that other social practices, which entail familial and fathering discourses and practices, need to undergo transformation if mothering practices are to contribute significantly to raise non-sexist children. Gender should not determine access to processes of decision-making effecting social institutions and practices which (directly or indirectly) regulate social relationships. What is also required at the levels of ideological and discursive processes - which define and regulate gender relationships - is, inter alia, a reconceptualisation (and redistribution) of social power (as a "genderless" phenomenon); a redefinition of gender as a social phenomenon; equality of access to processes which construe and define meaning. For the meaning/s of childrearing ("What does it mean to rear children?") is predominantly controlled and "owned" by male discourses: its meanings are filtered through the largely male-owned social institutions like the media and education

structures (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1990).

Theoretically speaking, if we conceptualise of parenting practices as a phenomenon in which the salience of gender is diluted into obscurity, then it would follow that, for one, stereotypes about parenting - which provide inaccurate images about gender - would be less resistant to change. For stereotypes about parenting are political (like all stereotypes) as they reproduce and naturalise (depoliticise) unequal power relations (Peterson & Runyan, 1993). More particularly, stereotypes about mothering and fathering practices encourage parents (as individuals/subjects) to view parental responsibilities as personal, and not socially constructed, phenomena.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

5.1 Resistance and Change

When considering some of the obstacles preventing mothering practices from contributing to non-sexist childrearing, it is difficult to not feel a sense of being overwhelmed as these are multiple, complex and many-levelled. Nevertheless, sources of gender oppression and discrimination, need to be challenged in one's capacity as an individual subject as well as on a social scale.

An analysis of the obstacles to non-sexist childrearing should start with the realisation that, apart from the devalued and objectified status of women as a group (Bartky, 1990), the (discursive) construction of socially prescriptive childrearing practices should be distinguished from actual childrearing practices. For actual childrearing practices are influenced by "greater powers" within the social milieu. Social practices which entail the rearing of children, following Hendricks and Lewis (1994), vary according to practices and material circumstances unique to particular social localities: involving, for instance, the intersecting forces of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and language. Children, these authors maintain, are not reared "independently of racial, class, regional and other affiliations" (p.61). In other words, various discourses (with varying statuses) - emerging from material conditions - intersect to form part of a particular culture's construction of chilrearing practices.

One of the implications is that the undoing of gender oppression and discrimination requires thorough analysis of how localised social processes and material forces of race and class, for instance, interact to perpetuate multiple-layered practices of discrimination. Moreover, it also requires consideration of how

these forces interact to (re-)produce a subject fashioned by multiple identities. In the Foucauldian sense, the individual subject is decentred: the product, rather than the source, of a multiplicity of discourses entailing the above interacting social processes. Whatever the local material conditions, it becomes difficult to disentangle that which goes into the construction of one's gendered subjectivity from those processes which help to constitute racialised or sexualised subjectivities. In short, to challenge aspects of one's own gendered subjectivity (including those of others), presupposes simultaneously challenging other oppressive practices based on race, class, sexuality, etc.

What detracts from the struggle by women as a group, for example, against their devalued and marginalised social status in a patriarchal social setting, are tensions resulting from the accentuation of difference within the group itself: in other words, "women" are not an homogenous category. Black working class mothers do not necessarily enjoy the same social status as that of white working class mothers. Lesbian mothers also risk social marginalisation and discrimination not experienced by heterosexual mothers. That their childrearing practices are socially frowned upon is almost a natural consequence of their marginalised identities and statuses coupled with conventional cultural images of deviancy and sexual abberation.

From the point of view of social activism against male hegemony, it does not make sense - and would be of limited value - for a group of, say, white, middle-class women/mothers to exclude black, working-class women/mothers in asserting their right for adequate day care facilities for their children. Their is no logic either to teach a child not to discriminate against other children on the basis of gender, but to perpetuate discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation or ethnicity.

Hence, failure to recognise diversity in the experience of

childrearing amounts to ignoring the material and discursive conditions of the contexts which inform particular parental and childrearing practices. Childrearing practices - in a context where, due to consistent daily parental absence, children mix regularly with their peers, for instance - is powerfully reinforced (or contradicted) by peer pressure. Young children (peers), at the very least, should be considered partners with parents and other garegivers in socialisation practices, including gender socialisation (Renzetti & Curran, 1995).

An examination of the very notion of childrearing practice itself presents a plethora or very real problems that threatens to derail any singular meaning it represents. Mothers (and fathers) caught up in situations of dire poverty are often compelled to resort to desperate measures to survive which presents a serious challenge to our conventional assumptions about childrearing practices in general. Consider, for example, a situation where a mother "rented" out her four-year-old daughter to men for R200 (Two-hundred rands)(Mail & Guardian, 1997). It is simply not enough to say that this situation represents the extreme when thousands of children in Johannesburg and at least a quarter of Cape Town's two-thousand street children, according to current police estimates, are selling themselves for sex (Mail & Guardian, 1997) because some parents are too desperate for money to care how they earn it or concern themselves about their children.

This "extreme" example challenges our conventional assumptions about childrearing practices and the status of mothers/mothering in may ways. First of all, it only takes one exception to what is considered conventional childrearing to potentially derail the very notion of childrearing itself: it is partly premised on the assumption of responsible and capable adults who are in a position to provide for the material, psychological and social well-being of their children. It also reinforces an ealier point that mothering practice itself, coupled with an examination of the social status

of children as a group, needs to be considered and evaluated in very particular social contexts in order to shed light on the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing.

Given the localised interconnectedness of social and material forces which generate fluid, heterogenous, multiple and at times fragmented and contradictory (mothering and childhood) subjectivities, I do not believe that future research into the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing is not an important one. It remains an important social site where gender stereotypes are learned, taught, and reinforced; it continous to be a crucial sphere where gendered subjectivities are nurtured and constructed in the images of the dominant culture's representational models of masculinity and femininity. After all, structural oppression (Bulhan, 1985) - in the context of this paper, patriarchal oppression - permeates interpersonal relations between men and women, and between adults and children. Moreover, patriarchal oppression constitutes part of the construction of gendered subjectivities in that it "invades the deeper recesses of the indivdual psyche, permeating fantasies and dreams" (Bulhan, 1985, p.131) of men, women, and children.

Patriarchal oppression in the form of male-to-female violence remains a very real and dangerous threat to women whatever their social location. Forms of parental practices which challenge conventionally constructed discourses about childrearing, risk stepping outside their socially and discursively assigned positionings within the broader social hierarchy (Bem, 1993). In relation to parenting, violence (especially male-to-female violence), and its ever-present threat, serve very definite social/discursive functions: it serves primarily to keep women in an unequal social and subjective position, subordinate to men. The power of violence (and hence domination of women), resides partly in the fact that it is "privatised"; meaning that violence is regarded as an individualised (depoliticised) phenomenon: an

unfortunate and private aspect of married life. As a social phenomenon, violence thus protects male privilege and patriarchal traditions and constrains women/mothering practice to the private domain, leaving he public domain (and power) in the hands of men.

The changes, then, that have to be effected within and outside of mothering practices to educate and socialise children to be non-sexist, has to materialise on many levels: intrapersonally/intrapsychically, interpersonally, as well as at the levels of social positioning and ideological/institutional practices. Even though of limited value, research indicated that parental practices that involve early efforts to socialise children in nonsexist, non-gender-polarising ways, were significant in certain respects. Children whose parents did not support conventional modes of gender socialisation (reinforcing male-female difference), for instance, did not perceive anything "wrong" with storybook characters engaging in cross-gendered behaviours (Davies; Renzetti & Curran, 1995). Such changes do not only require individual and collective effort by both male and female genders, but also entail the undoing of other discriminatory and oppressive practices.

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APPENDIX A

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MOTHERS

Participant no:

Demographic Information

Race: White ( )
Black ( )
Coloured ( )
Indian ( )

Age range: 17-22 23-28 29-34 35-40 40+

Married ( ) Divorced ( ) Widow ( ) Not Married ( )
Single Mother ( )

Total number of Children:

Total number of Boys:

Total number of Girls:

Age of eldest child:

Age of youngest child:

Currently employed: Yes ( ) Full Time ( ) Part Time ( )
No ( )

Type of Employment: Professional/Skilled ( )
Semi-skilled ( )
Unskilled ( )

Highest level of Education:
University/College/Technikon Degree/Diploma ( )
Matric ( )
Other ( )

Questions

1. Men and women, and boys and girls, are usually seen and treated as different from one another.
   (a) Why do you think this is so?

   (b) Where do you think these differences come from?

2. (a) What do you believe is the primary responsibility/ies of a mother?

   (b) Please give reasons for your answer.

(c) What do you believe is the primary responsibility/ies of a father?

(d) Please give reasons for your answer.

3. (a) When you realised you were pregnant with your child [this refers to the child/ren who are going to be part of the exercise], did you hope to give birth to a boy or a girl?

(b) What were your reasons for this?

4. (a) How did you feel when it was a boy/girl?[Refer to the sex of the child who is part of the exercise]

(b) Do you think you would have felt differently if it was not a boy/girl?

(c) Please give reasons for your answer.

5. (a) What kind of person do you raise your child to be? OR What kind of person would you like your child to become as an adult? (Participant to give a description of how she sees her child as an adult).

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

6. (a) How would you describe your child as a person? (Participant to give a description)

(b) What kind of qualities and behaviours would you like to see in a girl/daughter? (Interviewer can elaborate if necessary; E.g. soft-spoken, intelligent, etc.)

(c) Give reasons for your answer.

(d) What kind of qualities would you like to see in a son/boy?
(Interviewer can elaborate if necessary: e.g. intelligent, strong, kind)

(e) Please give reasons for your answer.

7. (a) Do you think that boys and girls are different kinds of human beings?

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

8. (a) Do you think there are more similarities between boys and girls than there are differences?

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

9. (a) Do you believe boys and girls should be seen and treated equally? (Alternatively, should the participant have difficulty in understanding what is meant by the term "equal," interviewer can elaborate by asking: Do you believe girls should be treated as more important than boys, OR, Do you believe boys should be treated as more important than girls).

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

10. (a) Is it important for you that your child wears clothes that is different from those of a girl/boy?(member of the opposite sex) (If participant enquirers about the meaning of "different," interviewer can elaborate: e.g. That boys wear pants and not dresses, and that girls wear clothes of a certain colour and boys wear clothes of a different colour.)

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

(c) Would you clothe your boy, if you had one (assuming the participant has a daughter), in a dress?

(d) Give reasons for your answer.

(e) What would you do/say if your child persists in wanting to dress up like a member of the opposite sex?

(f) Please give reasons for your answer.

11. (a) Is it important for you that your child plays with toys that his/her same-sex peers/mates play with? (If necessary, interviewer can elaborate: e.g. boys are usually not allowed to play with dolls or make-up, and girls are usually not allowed to play with guns and trucks).

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

(c) If you had a boy (assuming the participant has a daughter), would you buy him, for example, a doll and make-up to play with?

(d) Please give reasons for your answer.

(e) If you had a girl (assuming the participant has a son), would you buy her for example, a lorry or a tool kit?

(f) Please give reasons for your answer.

12. (a) Does your child play mostly with other boys or with other girls?

(b) If your child were to play mostly with mates of the opposite sex, what would your response be?

(c) Please give reasons for your answer.

13. (a) What kinds of tasks do you allow your child/ren to do at home?

(b) If your child was a boy/girl (a member of the opposite sex), what kinds of tasks would you not allow him/her to do? (If necessary, interviewer can elaborate: e.g. boys are usually not allowed to do the laundry and girls are usually not allowed to dig in the garden).

(c) Please give reasons for your answer.

14. (a) Do you think that mothers have better relationships with their daughters than with their sons?

(b) Please give reasons for your answer.

(c) Do you think that fathers have better relationships with their sons than with their daughters?

(b) Give reasons for your answer.

15. (a) If you had a child who is a member of the opposite sex, do you believe that your relationship with him/her would have been different than with your current child?

(b) Give reasons for your answer.

16. (a) What kinds of qualities do you think an ideal mother should have?

(b) Give reasons for your answer.

17. (a) What role do you believe a man/father should play in bringing up children?

(b) Give reasons for your answer.

18. (a) If you could change things about your experience as a mother, what would you change?

(b) Give reasons for your answer.

APPENDIX B

ANSWER SHEET FOR CHILDREN'S EXERCISE

Participant no:

Sex: boy ( )

girl ( )

Age:_____years

Exercise 1 (a)

(Mark child's choice with an X)

red ( )

lavender ( )

brown ( )

light pink ( )

blue ( )

bright pink ( )

Response to choice:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 1 (b)

(Mark child's choice -- boy or girl -- with an X and record response for each choice underneath)

red boy ( ) girl ( )

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

lavender boy ( ) girl ( )

_____

_____

brown boy ( ) girl ( )

light pink boy ( ) girl ( )

blue boy ( ) girl ( )

bright pink boy ( ) girl ( )

Exercise 2

(Note down whether or not the child correctly identified the picture or identified it with the interviewer's assistance (incorrect identification). If with the interviewer's assistance (incorrect identification), record the child's own incorrect response. Also mark no identification if child fails to identify the picture).

Picture 1 (toy car and truck)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )
Incorrect response_____
_____
_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Picture 2 (tool set)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )
Incorrect response_____
_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____

Picture 3 (fire truck)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____

Picture 4 (police car and badge)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )

Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____

Picture 5 (noisy musical instruments)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____

Picture 6 (box and heavy weights)

Correct identification ( )

No identification ( )

Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )

girl (blue) ( )

girl (light pink) ( )

boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice:_____

Picture 7 (male and female doll)

Correct identification ( )

No identification ( )

Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )

girl (blue) ( )

girl (light pink) ( )

boy (blue) ( )

Reason for

choice_____

Picture 8 (cooking set)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )
Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )
Reason for choice_____

Picture 9 (nurse's badge, thermometer, syringe, bandages)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )
Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )

girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice_____

Picture 10 (teacher's desk, books and blackboard)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice_____

Picture 11 (teardrops and box of tissues)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

_____

_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Picture 12 (baby)

Correct identification ( )
No identification ( )
Incorrect identification ( )

Incorrect response_____

_____

_____

Choice: boy (light pink) ( )
girl (blue) ( )
girl (light pink) ( )
boy (blue) ( )

Reason for choice_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

CHILDREN'S EXERCISE

List of Apparatus

1. Pictures of six toy animals: red, brown, blue (masculine colours); light pink, bright pink, lavender (feminine colours)

2. Pictures of four twin dolls: Boy and girl in light pink; boy and girl in blue.

3. Twelve drawings

   Drawing 1: toy car and truck

   Drawing 2: tool set

   Drawing 3: fire truck

   Drawing 4: police car and badge

   Drawing 5: noisy musical instruments

   Drawing 6: box and heavy weights

   Drawing 7: male and female doll

   Drawing 8: cooking set

   Drawing 9: nurse's badge, thermometer, syringe, scissors, box of bandages

   Drawing 10: teacher's desk, books and blackboard

   Drawing 11: teardrops and box of tissues

   Drawing 12: infant/baby

****

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S EXERCISE

Exercise 1 (a)

Interviewer: I'm going to show you six pictures of toy animals. (Puts pictures in a row in the following order from left to right: red, lavender, brown, light pink, blue, bright pink). Now I want you to choose only ONE of the animals as your favourite friend that you would like to play with. (Ask child to point to the chosen picture).

Note down the child's response (refer to answer sheet).

Interviewer then asks the child: Can you tell me why you have chosen this picture as you favourite friend?

Note down the child's response on answer sheet. If child does not have a response, point out that it is okay and move on to next part of the exercise.

Exercise 1 (b)

Interviewer points the to pictures and says to child: Some of the animals are boys and some of them are girls. (Interviewer then points to picture with red animal and says): Can you tell me if this is a girl animal or a boy animal? (Note down response on answer sheet).

(Interviewer then asks child): Can you tell me why you say this is a boy/girl animal? (Note down child's response)

(Interviewer follows the same procedure with each of the pictures. Follow the order in which you have arranged the pictures).

After completion of the exercise, put away all the pictures and go on to exercise 2.

Exercise 2

(Interviewer says to child): I am going to show you some more pictures and then I'm going to ask you some easy questions about them (put pictures of two girls and two boys in front of the child in the following order, from left to right: Boy (light pink), girl (blue), girl (light pink), boy (blue). Say to child: These are pictures of boys and girls.

Take out picture 1. Place it in front of the child and ask the child: Can you tell me what this is? (Note down response on answer sheet. If the child does not know or is uncertain or gives incorrect response, interviewer tells the child what the picture is about: e.g. this is a picture with a toy car and truck.

(Interviewer then points to the pictures of the girls and boys and says): I want you to choose only ONE of these pictures that you think belongs with this (points to picture of toy car and truck) picture. (Let child take picture he/she chooses and place it with picture 1. Note down the choice on the answer sheet. Ask the child): Can you tell me why you think the picture you have chosen belongs with this one? (Note down the child's response)

(Interviewer places the picture that was chosen back with the rest in the same order and puts away picture 1. Take out picture 2 and continue the same procedure as with picture 1 until the whole exercise is completed.

Please make sure that at each stage of the exercise (1 and 2) the child understands what he/she is to do.

Please make sure that you note down the child's responses correctly on the answer sheet.

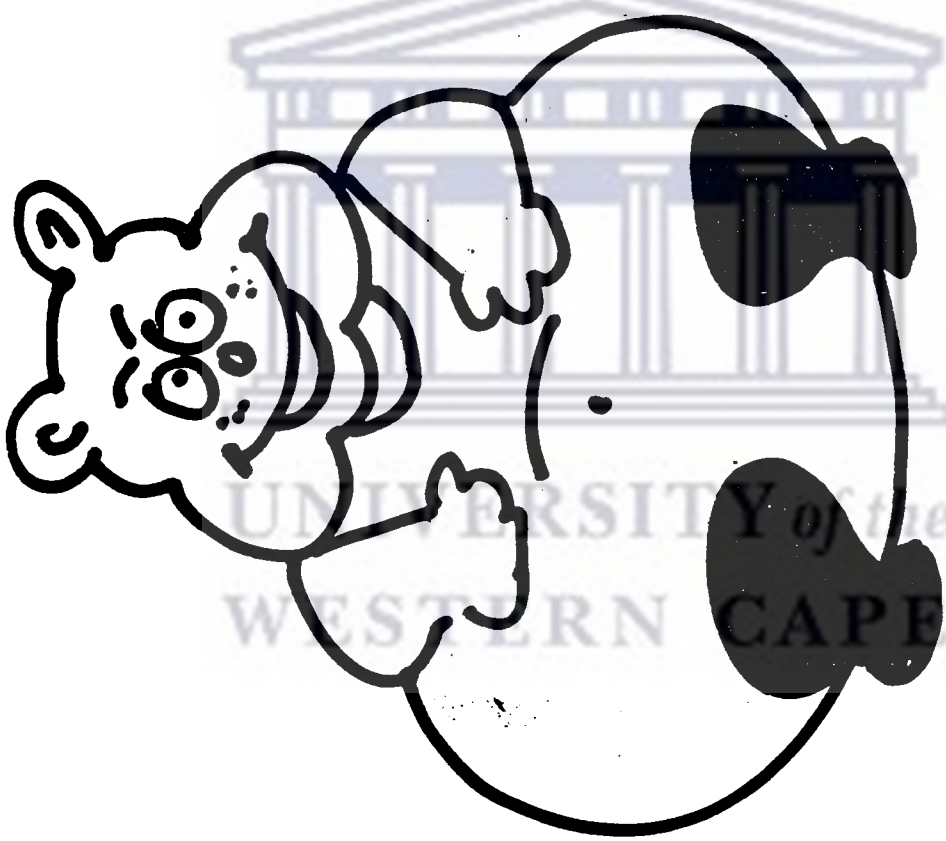
****

(RED)

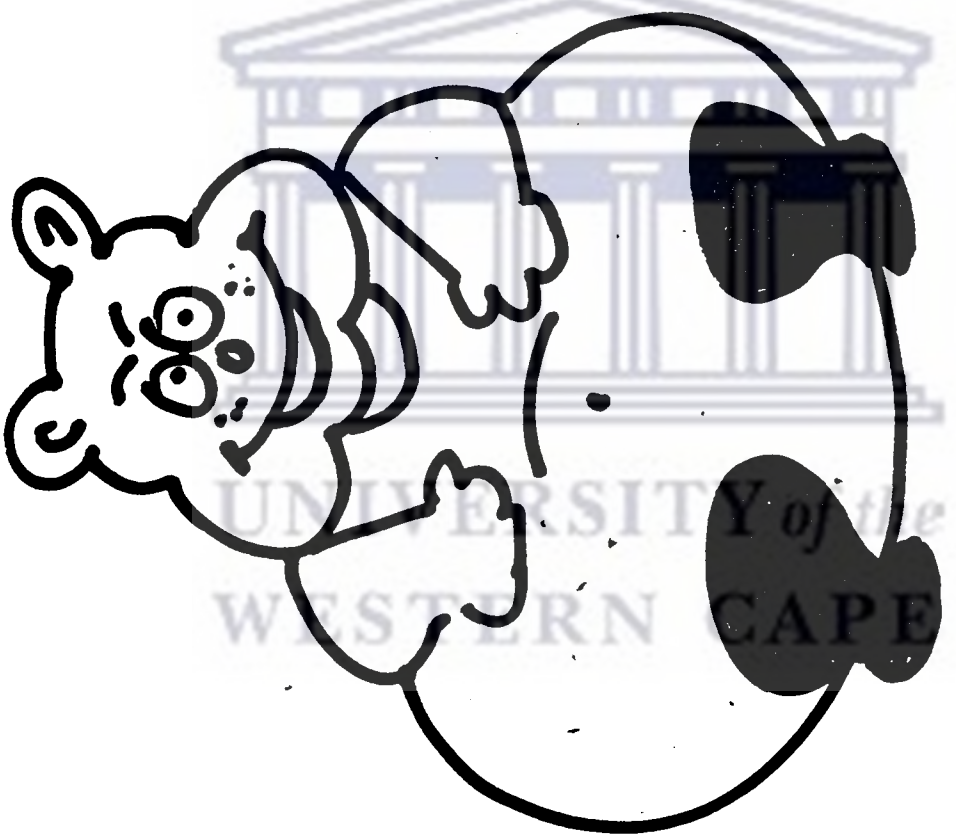
C2
(BROWN)

C3
(BLUE)

(LIGHT PINK



C6
(LAVENDER)

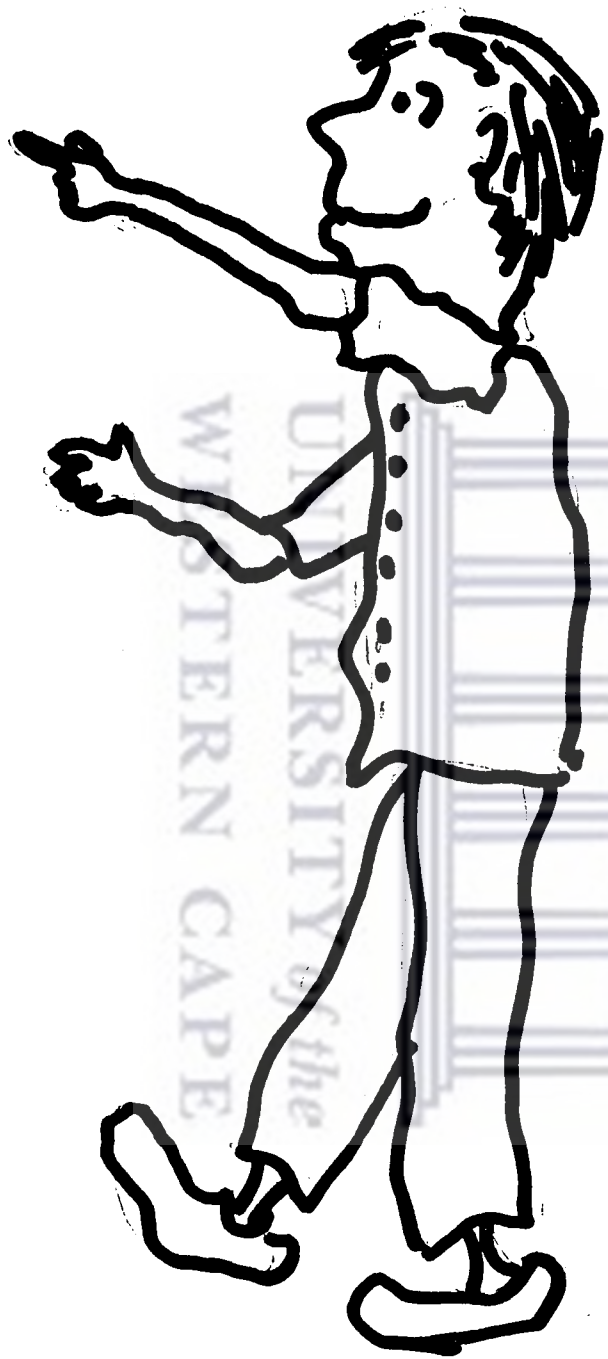


C2
(LIGHT PINK)

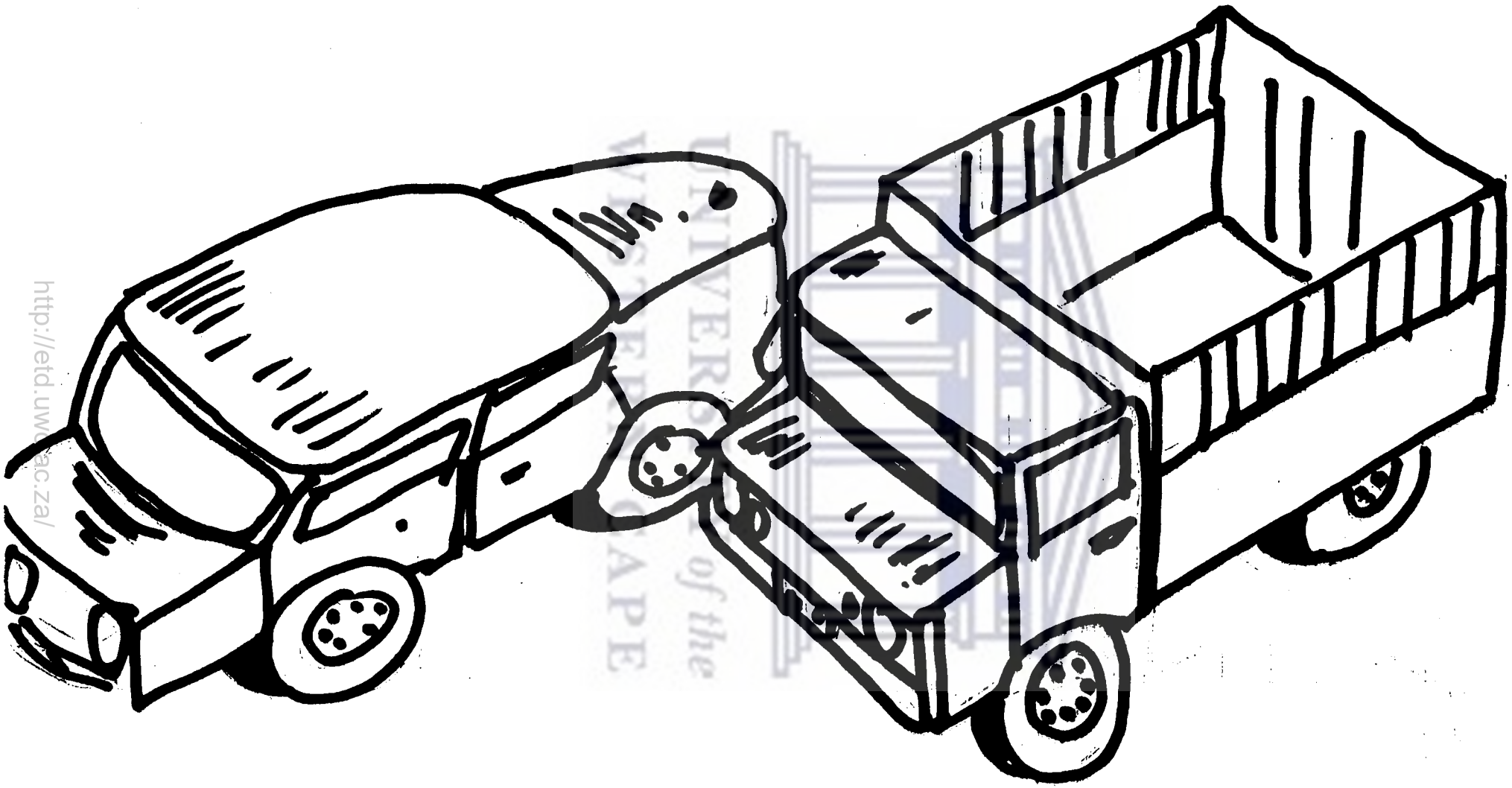
C2
(BLUE)

C2
(BLUE)

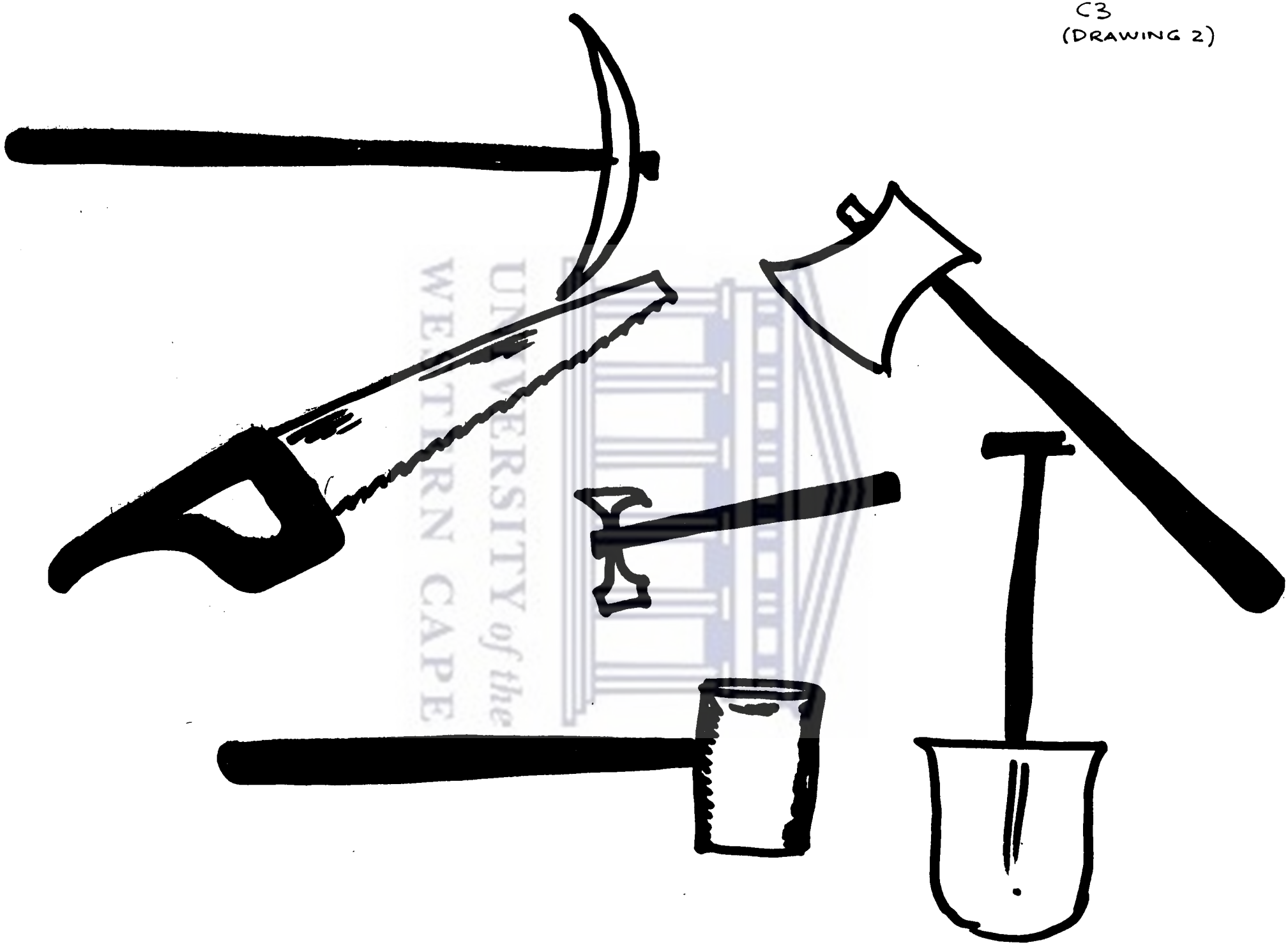
C2
(LIGHT PINK)



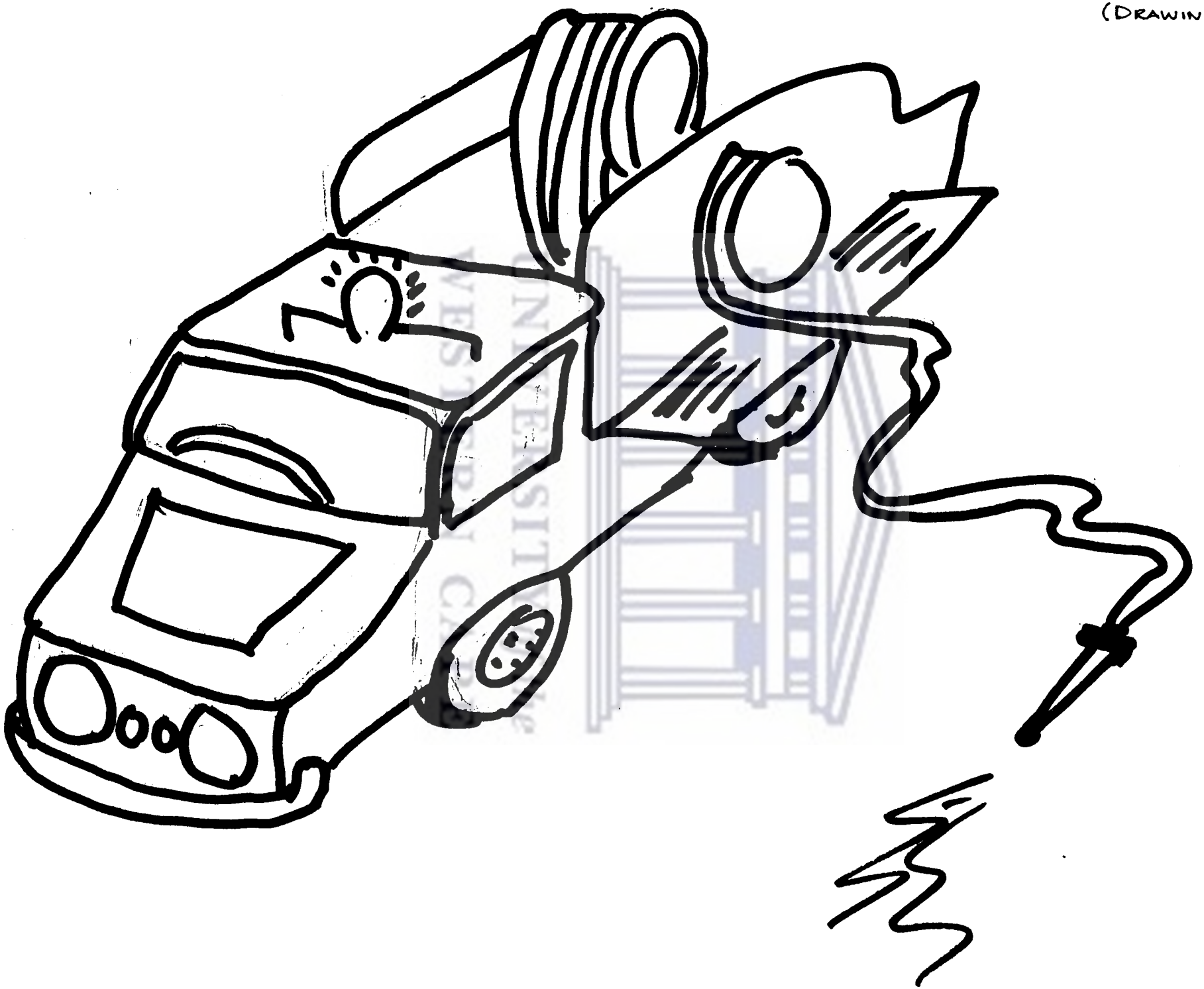
C3
(DRAWING 1)



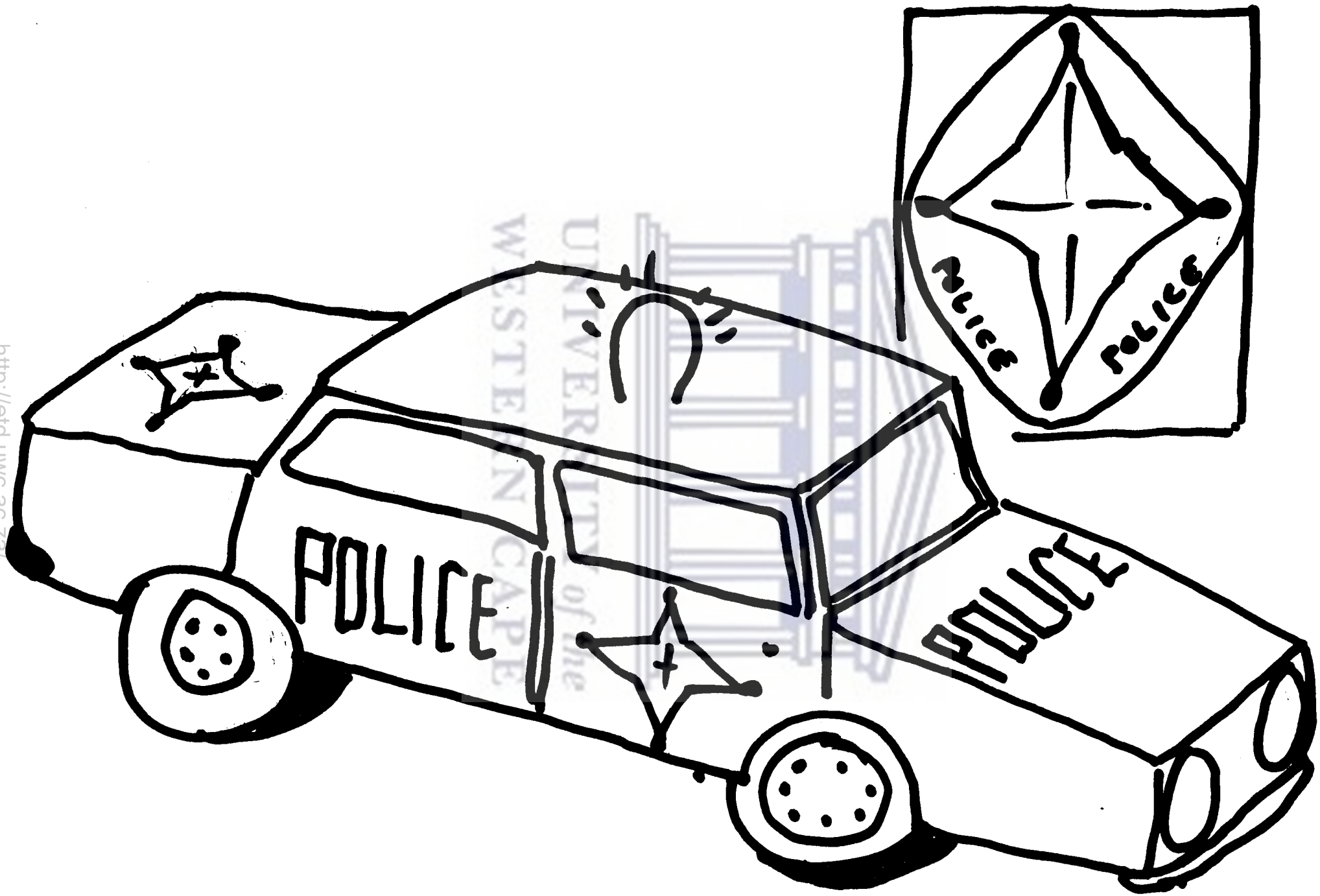
C3
(DRAWING 2)



C3
(DRAWING 3)



CS
(DRAWING 4)



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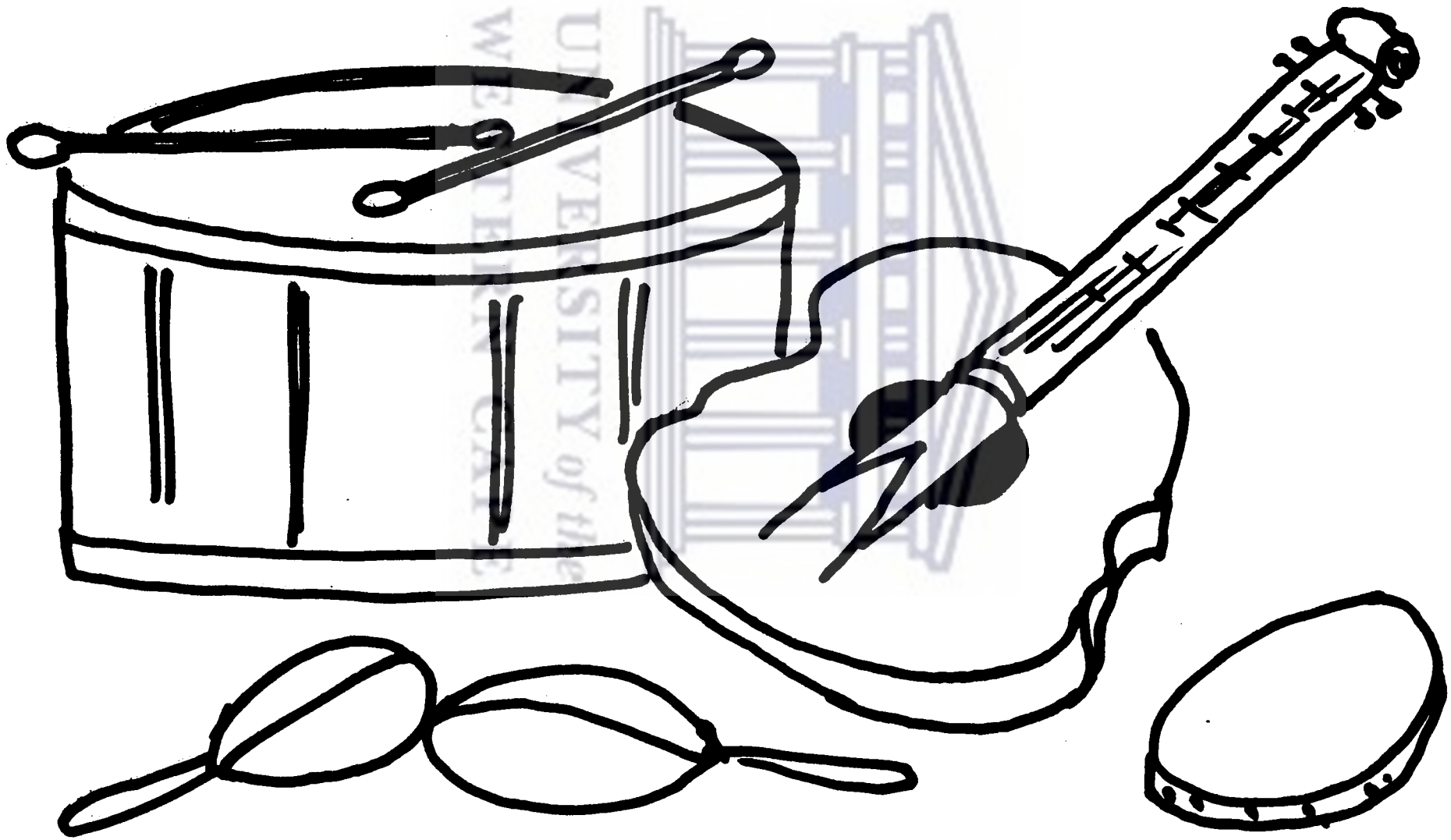
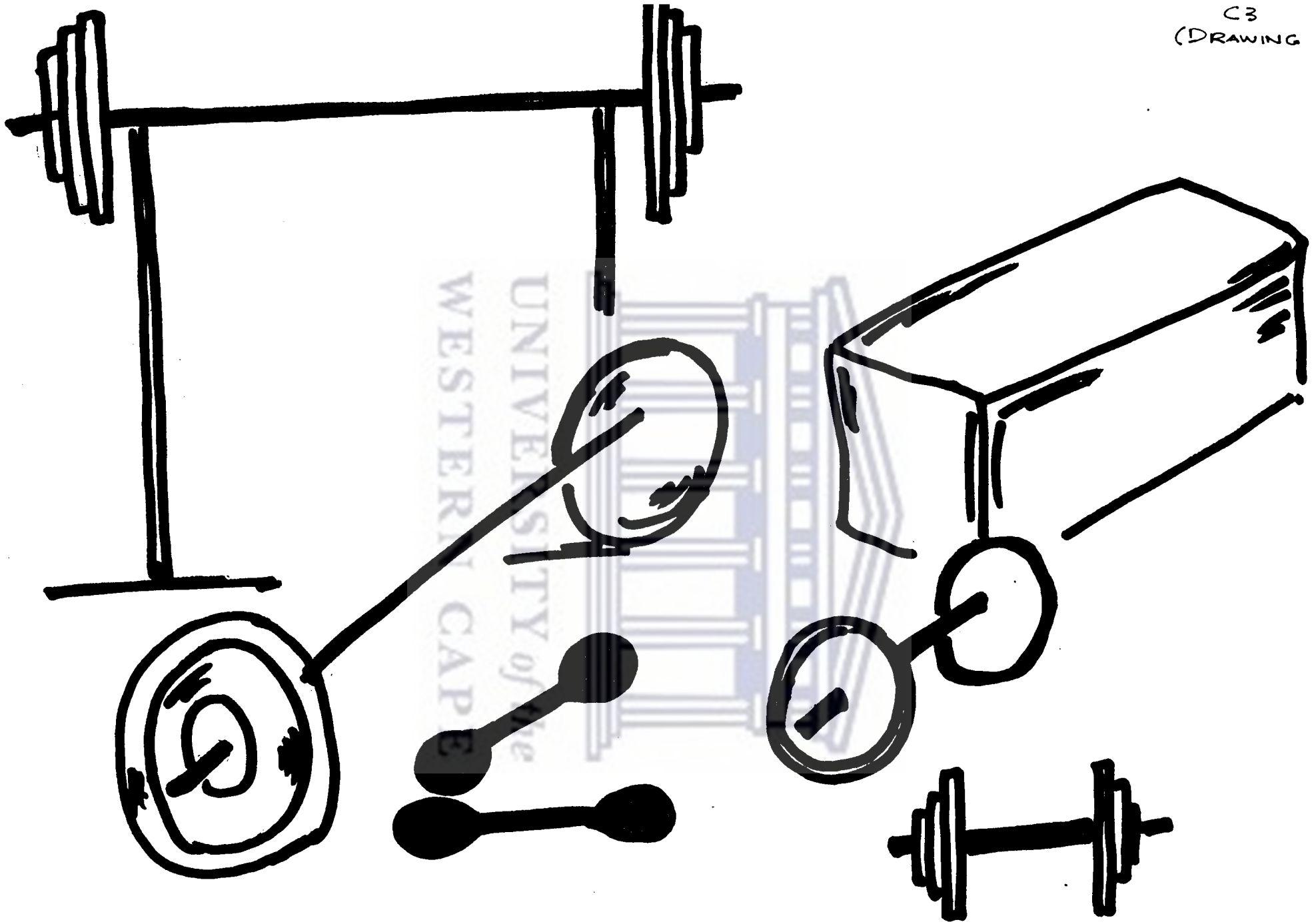
(DRAWING 5)



C3
(DRAWING 6)



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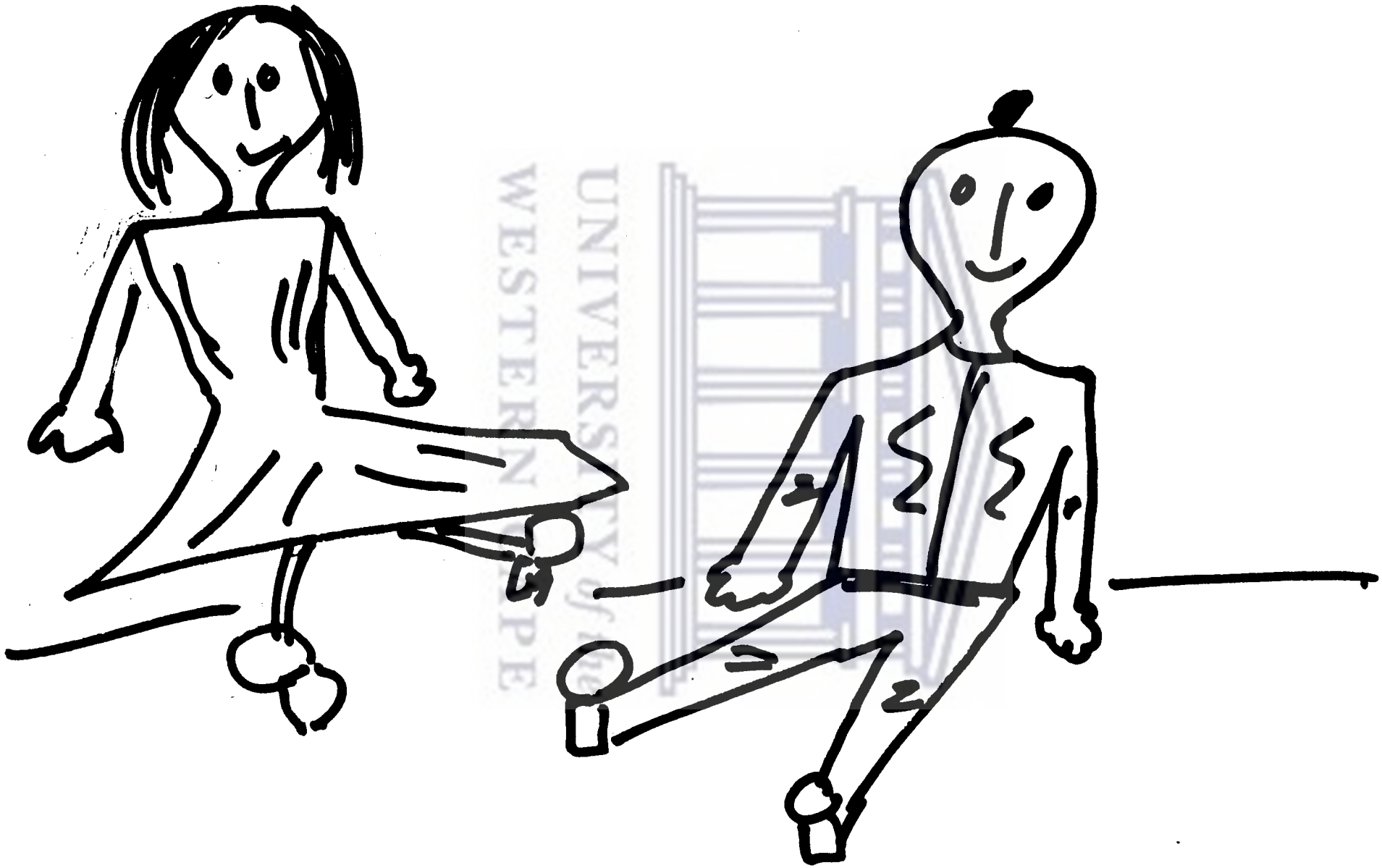
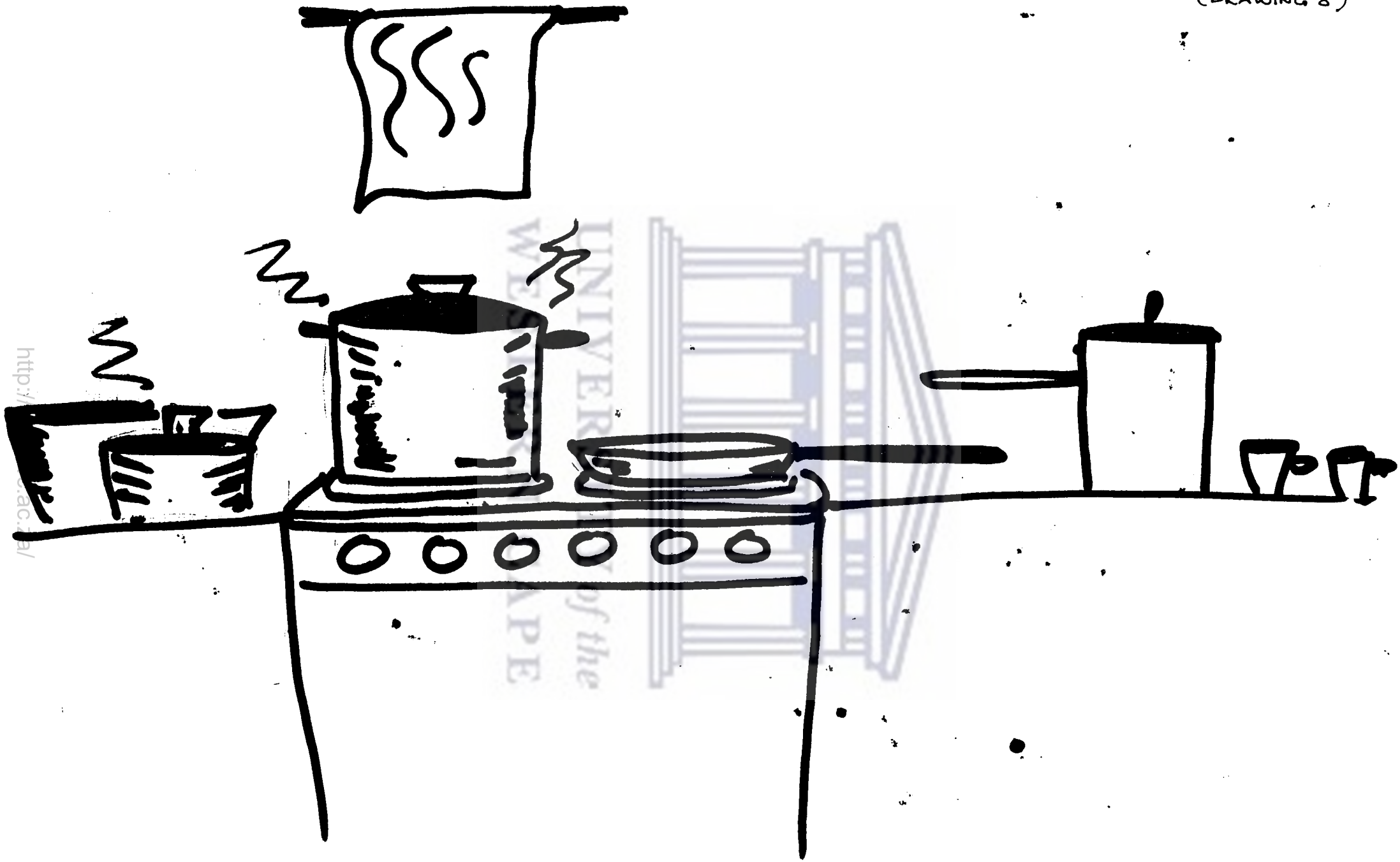
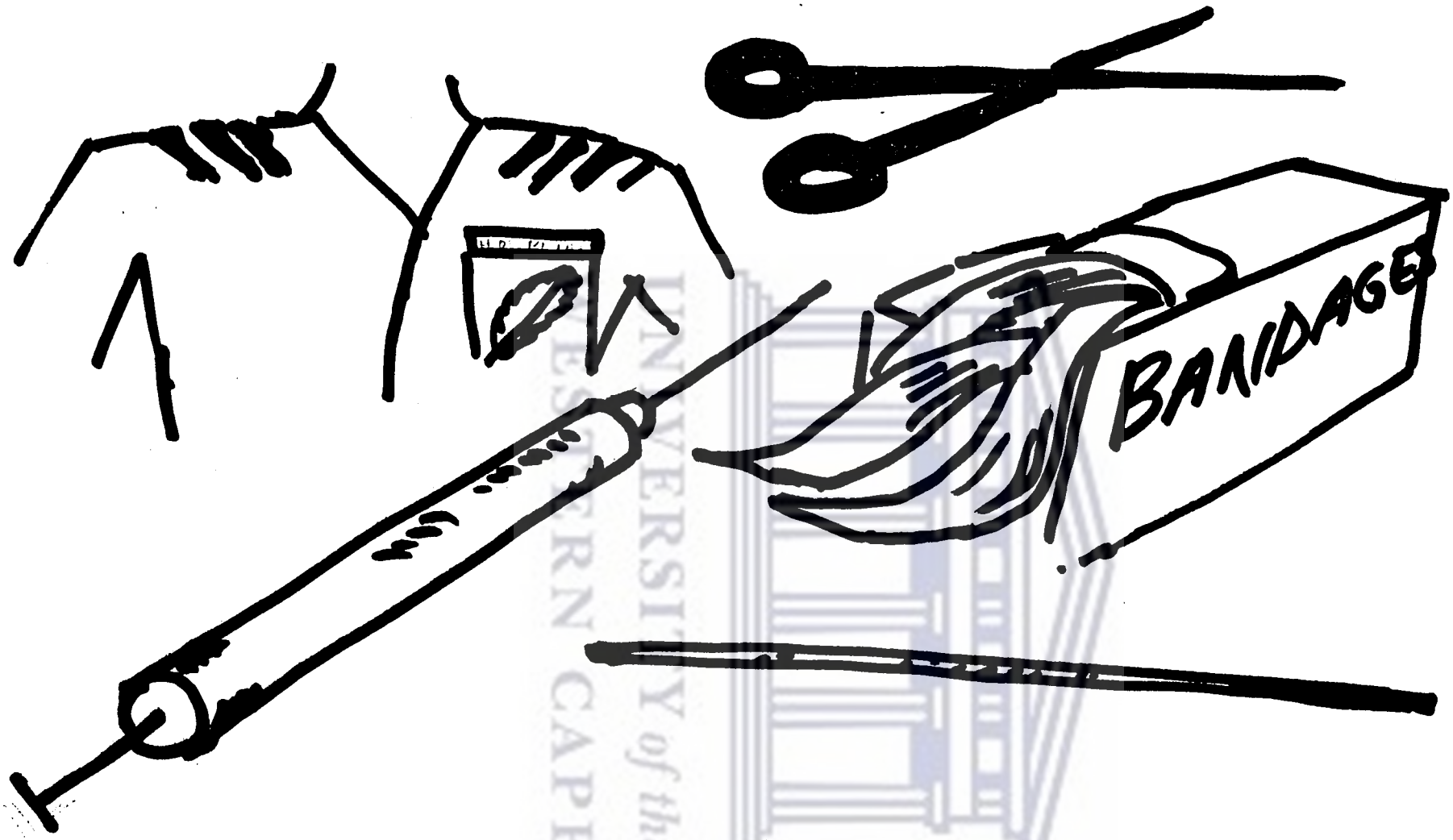
(DRAWING 7)

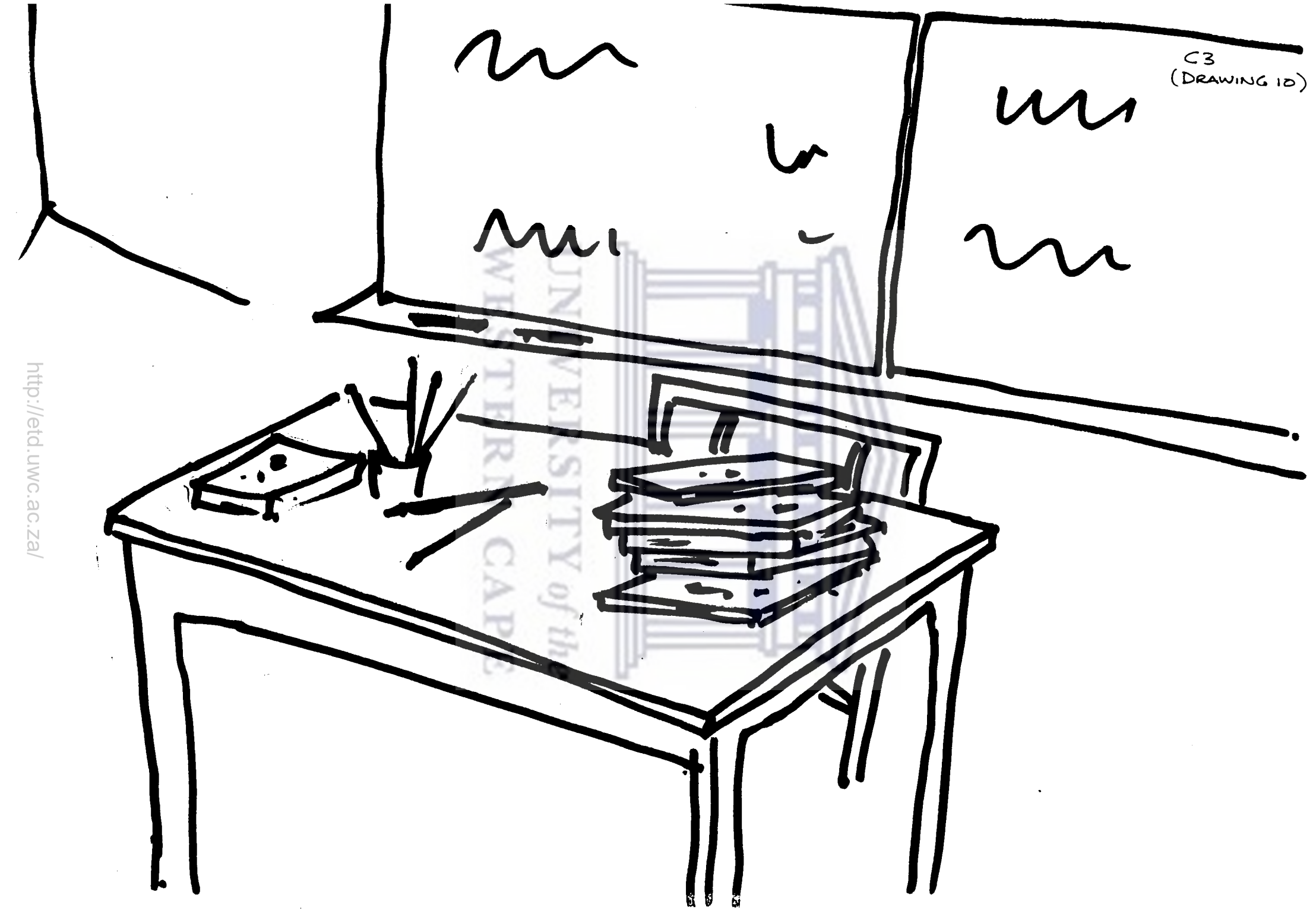


C3
(DRAWING 8)



C3
(DRAWING 9)





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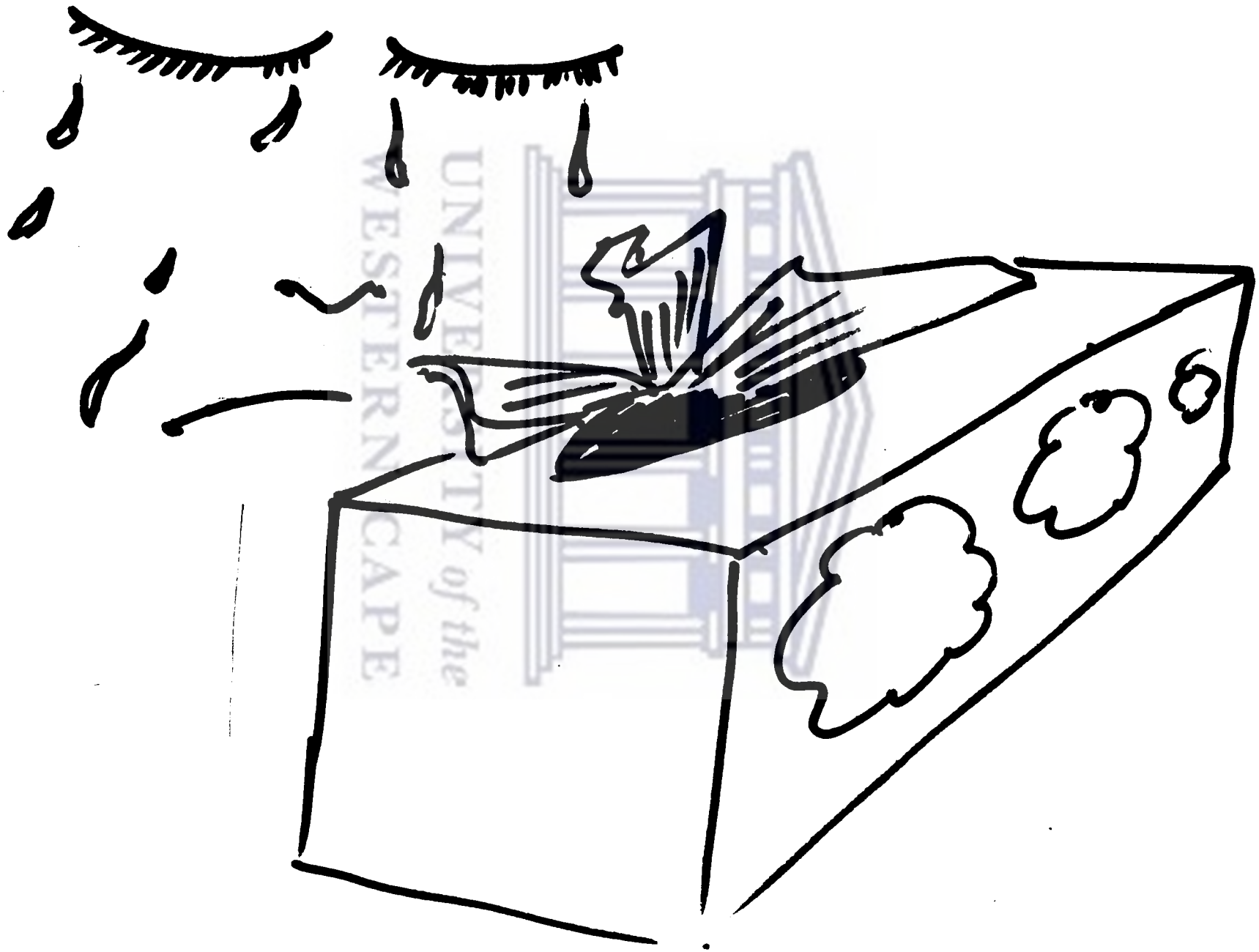
(DRAWING 11)



C3
(DRAWING 12)