

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Social Construction of Moral Discourse

by

Rita Giordano

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY


CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 1995

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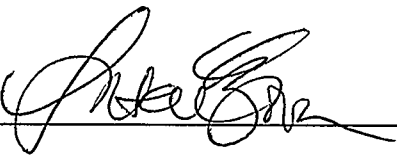
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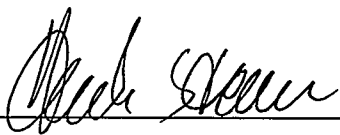
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Supervisor, Dr. M.C. Boyes, Department of Psychology



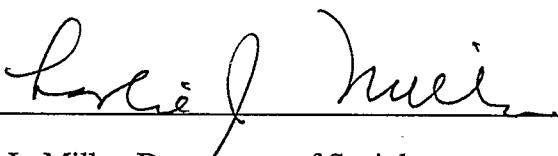
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Dr. S. Boon, Department of Psychology



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Dr. H.J. Stam, Department of Psychology



---

Dr. L. Miller, Department of Sociology

Sept 11/95

Date

## **Abstract**

Moral principles and moral deliberation are taken to be social, historical and cultural constructions. It is in language that we construct, maintain and perpetuate these moral understandings, for it is in communicative interaction that our subjectivity, that is, our sense of who we are is produced. This communicative understanding takes place within an ethical matrix. Ethics is understood as the assumptive guidelines which support all interaction. This perspective is in contrast with traditional psychological notions that regard understanding as a process that goes on in the head of an individual, and in which language is regarded as a mere representation of internal thoughts or description of external events. This tradition is typified in the methodology ascribed to in the theory of moral development and reasoning presented by the developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. The project involves a discursive analysis of everyday conversations to illuminate the social construction of morals that occur in a necessary ethical matrix.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisor Mike Boyes for his assistance and trust in my ability to blindly forge ahead in a new conceptual direction. He allowed me the space to challenge accepted ideas and procedures and for this I am sincerely grateful. I want to extend my thanks to the DACOR seminar group for providing an arena from which I did my thinking and theorizing. I would also like to thank Hank Stam, Susan Boon and Leslie Miller for taking the time to serve on my thesis committee.

I would also like to express my gratitude to individuals who have greatly impacted my work. First, I would like to thank Denise Bowman for her continual encouragement and support throughout my program, as well as for the helpful suggestions in earlier drafts of this manuscript. To Geri Robinson for the careful and hard work she put into proof reading my work for final preparation. I want to thank Karen Pasveer for her support and help as well. To Zackary Quinn for her love and affection during the course of the program, for the many years before and for those yet to come.

To my sister Lucia Andrushko for the many hours of discussion and love she has given me over the years. To my parents (Giovanna and Fiorentino Giordano) who have believed in me and aided me throughout my life in so many ways, especially in the years of my graduate studies. Their encouragement to achieve what they could not for themselves was a strong motivating factor in my life for which I would like to thank them.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and love to Richard Hale and Cory Johnson for sacrificing many hours of their time doing what I did not have time to do, and for understanding when I could not be there. As well, to Richard I am grateful for his unfaltering support and belief in me when I had none, and both he and Cory taught me what it is to feel and be in relationships. It is to both Cory and Richard that I would like to dedicate this work.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The present thesis discusses our moral understanding and moral being as a practical social phenomenon that exists between people in communicative interaction. This practical social phenomenon in which we implicitly act in acceptable ways in our everyday interactions with others is herein called ethics. Ethics is understood as the assumptive guidelines which support all interaction. To be consensually sensible requires mutual ethical understandings. Moral dilemmas and principles, and how we think about and deliberate over moral issues, are social and cultural products which are created within the ethical matrix.

Ethics is commonly defined as a system or set of principles in accordance with accepted principles governing the conduct of a group (Webster's, 1991). For the present thesis, this definition of ethics will be broadened. Ethics will be thought of as a project you have to live out in relation to others in which a space is created where hints or news of what other persons can or could be are implicitly noticed and necessary for interaction. While such an ethic is intended or needed to guide interaction, it is also produced and maintained by that interaction. Ethics are not external to persons, rather ethics mark a social project towards the possibility of individual being. Morality on the other hand is concerned with the discernment of what is good and evil; that is, being in accordance with established standards of good behavior (Webster's, 1991). Morals are the reified discourses about what is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, given the ethical nature in which they are constructed. Our moral standing is negotiated within the ethical realm in which being or the self is constructed.

Maxims for action are socially, culturally and historically constructed ways of thinking and acting that we constitute and reconstitute in our everyday talk. Our thinking and our beliefs are possible because of the dilemmatic ideologies that produce them and

which themselves are also social and historical products (Billig, 1987, 1991; Billig et al., 1988). These ideological meanings that guide how we live our lives are discursively produced, maintained, negotiated and perpetuated (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This perspective views discourse or language as a social and historical phenomenon rather than referential, that is, what we say, and how we say it, is tied to taken-for-granted ideological meanings about life and being. From the perspective of the present thesis then, language or discourse is not regarded as a mere representation of internal thoughts or a description of external events.

A social focus to psychological inquiry presents a different understanding of persons, and focuses on how we come to be rather than on what we come to know. This perspective is in contrast to traditional psychological notions that regard understanding as a process that goes on within the head of an individual. This is typified in the methodology ascribed to in the theory of moral development and reasoning presented by Lawrence Kohlberg, a developmental psychologist working in the area of morality (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). Specifically, Kohlberg treats morality as a necessity to be possessed by individual persons who live in a social world. Individual development comes first and social factors are treated as external variables that come to impact individual development rather than as a part of that development. Moreover, morality is regarded as an element of individual development that serves to demarcate mature versus immature moral individuals. This conception of development grew out of and is in correspondence with traditional models of developmental psychology. Kohlberg formed his theory of moral reasoning in the context of a scientific, endpoint-driven, individualistic, developmental psychology. As well, his theory was constructed in the post World War II period; a time in which the world was trying to recover from and explain the atrocities of the Holocaust.



Communication is the very heart of society and who we are as persons. Everyday discourse will be examined to bring forth the recognition that moral beliefs and codes that we live by are negotiated in discourse. How we communicate and what we can communicate is a practical ethical accomplishment. Given the ethical nature of interaction we are necessarily drawing on, maintaining, and negotiating ourselves as moral persons based in the broader ideological meanings that are part of the ethical construction of being. Explicating the position of the present thesis will entail: (A) a brief description of the formal model of moral reasoning explicated by Lawrence Kohlberg, (B) a review of the context from which Kohlberg did his theorizing, (C) a brief review of the construction of present day developmental psychology, (D) a critical analysis of the issues and problems with traditional methods of the types of developmental psychology espoused by Kohlberg, (E) an alternative conceptualization of moral reasoning, (F) a consideration of everyday life as a form of practical ethics, and (G) a qualitative research analysis depicting this new conceptualization.

### Formal and Discursive Perspectives of Morality

The theory of moral reasoning delineated by Lawrence Kohlberg has dominated the moral development literature since the mid 1950's (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine & Hewer, 1983). Kohlberg, building on Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, constructed a hierarchical, invariant sequence, stage model of moral development which establishes a standard developmental goal or endpoint which he equates with principled reasoning. This view is informed by Rawls's philosophical position on the rational development of moral reasoning (Crain, 1980; Kohlberg, Levine & Hewer, 1983). Rawls's position suggests that rational, autonomous individuals, when constructing a society, will adopt a moral position based on a principle of fairness, and produce a moral code where justice is the primary orienting assumption (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). The

moral focus thus produced is one that is based on *a priori* rights, duties, obligations and an objective moral stance.

Inherent in the construction of Kohlberg's formal model, his method of using hypothetical moral dilemmas, and in the meta-ethical assumptions that underlie his theory, there is a consistent failure to acknowledge the discursive practices of our ethical world and the part that discourse plays in the construction and maintenance of our moral codes. That is, in trying to locate an abstract, universal moral reality, the role of language in creating and maintaining morality has become subjugated to the pursuit of a higher level moral reasoning that is thought to exist within individuals. As well, acknowledgment that action is only possible within an ethical realm that is implicitly social is not considered.

The discursive perspective of being entails an alternative view of moral reasoning than that proposed by Kohlberg. Shotter (1993a, 1993b) discusses the nature of being as existing at the boundaries, that is, between people in social interaction, in an ethically and rhetorically responsive world. Shotter suggests that behavior is conducted in an ongoing argumentative context in which every argumentative move is a response to previous moves. What makes these argumentative moves possible is that as persons in a social community, we have dilemmatic or two (or more) sided themes in common (Billig, 1987, Billig et al., 1988) and the established common understandings of these themes exist before their possible criticism. We rhetorically negotiate and perpetuate these common understandings in our discourse. The importance of rhetoric is its persuasiveness and the ability to use appropriate forms of talk "to make it appear as if our everyday lives are well ordered and structured" (Shotter, 1993a, p. 14). In essence, Shotter describes the ethical realm from which being unfolds and in which moral issues are negotiated as existing in the socially constituted, and maintained interstitial spaces among individuals. From this perspective everyday life is based on a set of ethics and moral beliefs which are social and historical

products that are negotiated within this ethical space in which we live. Before I elaborate on this perspective, the traditional theory of Lawrence Kohlberg will be discussed.

### Kohlberg's Theory

Kohlberg's model of moral development consists of three levels of moral judgment based on justice reasoning: (1) the pre-conventional level (Stages 1 and 2) consists of rules and expectations as external to the self, (2) the conventional level (Stages 3 and 4) the self has internalized the rules and expectations, and (3) the post-conventional level (Stages 5 and 6) the self differentiates from the rules and expectations of others and defines moral values in terms of self-chosen principles (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1981). Each stage in the hierarchy represents an increase in correspondence with the model's telos or highest stage. As well, each stage represents a cognitive advance over previous stages (Kohlberg, 1973, 1981).

Kohlberg's model represents a structural description of moral development. According to Kohlberg "a structure is a system of transformational laws that organize and govern reasoning operations" (Kohlberg, Levine & Hower, 1983; p. 34). Kohlberg asserts that mental structures are neither *a priori* biological innates or habits that are passively learned from the environment. He states that they are active constructions based upon the same processes of assimilation and accommodation which underpin Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Kohlberg, Levine & Hower, 1983). Based on this assumption of cognitive foundationalism, Kohlberg claimed that individuals' moral reasoning will be found to develop in the same sequential manner (even if their specific values and beliefs differ), but that the level of moral reasoning ultimately achieved may be lower (i.e., below stages 5, 4 or even 3) in cultures that fail to provide sufficiently complex stimulation for advancement to higher moral stages. It is important to note, that although cognitive growth is stimulated or necessitated by environmental occurrences, for Kohlberg

this did not imply that social factors were the cause of moral understanding per se. Rather, Kohlberg's theory states that the individual is stimulated to 're-think' present ways of reasoning because of an inner conflict caused by a situation or event that does not fit into present cognitive structures.

A focus on individual development was important for the delineation of a non-relativistic model of moral reasoning, so much so, that any evidence suggesting that moral development was not universal needed to be re-integrated into the theory to ward off claims of relativism. Kohlberg and many of his students and colleagues spent the remaining years of Kohlberg's life revisiting and extending the project that had begun with Kohlberg's original dissertation in 1958. When Kohlberg's personal history is considered one may well understand the importance that a non-relativist theory of moral reasoning held for him. A look at Kohlberg's personal life and history will now be discussed to provide part of the context in which he did his theorizing.

### *Kohlberg's Life*

Kohlberg was born in 1927 to a Jewish father and a Protestant mother in Bronxville, New York. His parents divorced in 1931 and in 1941, because of a judge's ruling, Kohlberg was forced to choose which parent should have custody. Up until 1941 Kohlberg's parents shared custody of their four children. For whatever other reasons, Kohlberg chose to live with his Jewish father, who he ethnically identified with and from which he would have lost any inheritance had he chosen his mother (Reed, 1994). The latter concern may have been quite significant since Kohlberg's father was very prosperous. Being the son of a wealthy man, he went to prestigious prep schools and had special tutors. However, after high school he chose to join the Merchant Marines and ended up smuggling refugee Jews from Eastern Europe through the British blockade into Palestine in 1947 (Berkowitz, 1988; Noam & Wolf, 1991; Power, 1991; Reed, 1994;

Rest, 1988). The crew was eventually captured and imprisoned in a British concentration camp in Cyprus, where he experienced harsh treatment and violence (Power, 1991). Kohlberg was rescued to a Kibbutz in Palestine before returning to the United States (Power, 1991; Reed, 1994).

### *Connecting Kohlberg's Life and Theory*

Being Jewish himself, Kohlberg was vocally grateful about his good fortune that he was born in America (Noam & Wolf, 1991). His strong belief in the American constitution and the practices of democracy propagated in his theories of moral education attest to this fact (e.g., the moral discussion and the just community approach; Kohlberg, 1971, 1973, 1981; Power 1988a, 1988b, 1991). As well, his strong interest in moral reasoning resulted from his continued concern and reference to the horrors of the Holocaust (Kohlberg, 1971, 1981; Noam & Wolf, 1991; Reed, 1994; Rest, 1988). "The Holocaust is the event in human history that most bespeaks the need for moral education and for a philosophy that can guide it. My own interest in morality arose in part as a response to the Holocaust..." (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 407). The events of the Holocaust, and the fact that Kohlberg himself was Jewish, indicates the importance that a non-relativistic model of moral reasoning held for him. Kohlberg wanted to understand and curtail the banality of evil (Arendt, 1963) that was evidenced in the Holocaust by first delineating a universal model of moral reasoning, and second, by attempting to promote moral growth based on the model. An individualistic and internal cognitive view of development fostered a universal theory that would eliminate the type of relativistic thinking that enables acts of evil to be understood as acts of human nature. That is, it could curtail the belief that humans were inherently bad or evil.

Kohlberg proposed his non-relativist universal moral model in sharp contrast to behavioral and psychoanalytic theories that he was originally trained in and which he felt

neglected moral issues (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971, 1981; Power, 1991). He felt that the model of cognitive development proposed by Piaget was the key to understanding and down playing the influence of culture and social experience in the formation of personality and morality. Piaget offered an approach that gave the individual's reasoning in moral decision making a central place. Kohlberg, by placing the individual at the centre of moral deliberation, downplayed the view that the development of morality was influenced by one's social group; the proposition of behaviorist and psychoanalytic traditions (Kohlberg, 1981). Focusing on the individual struggle for moral deliberation would entail personal responsibility for the type of atrocities that had occurred in Nazi Germany. A man of his convictions, Kohlberg (1981) using his moral interview, measured the sample of subjects that were tested in Stanley Milgram's 1963 study of obedience. Under the guise of a learning experiment, Milgram's now famous study, involved ordering undergraduate subjects to administer what they thought were increasingly severe shocks as punishment to incorrect responses to a confederate who played the victim. In accordance with his moral developmental model, Kohlberg (1981) found that 75% of the subjects who refused to shock the victim morally reasoned at a stage 6 level, whereas, only 13% of all the subjects that measured at lower stages refused to shock the victim. This study, and many others (see Kohlberg, 1973, 1981), are evidence for the commitment Kohlberg had to delineating a formal model of moral development that could speak to the world. The importance of personal moral responsibility is evident in his personal history and the climate of the times (i.e., post WW2). This idea of personal responsibility was expressed in the underpinnings of his moral model and in his self-proclaimed interest in the study of morality.

Kohlberg's commitment to and emphasis on personal moral responsibility continued through-out his academic career. The model was the first step, but enhancing and promoting moral growth was, perhaps, the ultimate goal. Kohlberg (1971, 1973) extended his moral model to prison and school reform in the 1970's. First he instituted a

moral discussion intervention in prison populations in 1970, but much to his chagrin, persons who were able to move up a stage in moral discussions did not progress in their moral behavior. In response to what he termed 'situational regression', the fact that individuals were unable to progress or reason at higher moral stages in certain environments, Kohlberg (1978) developed the concept of 'moral atmosphere'. Moral atmosphere is defined as involving two related dimensions, (1) normative values of the group, and (2) a sense of community. Situational regression was found in places like prisons, where a person's moral behavior was caused to decline or to remain at the lower stages (1 and 2) as a result of the moral atmosphere of the group or environment (Kohlberg, 1973). The conception of moral atmosphere caused Kohlberg to move to the concept of the just community. The idea of the just community led Kohlberg to reconsider the focus on the individual development to the group context of individual development. The just community, modeled after the collectivist kibbutz tribes, was fundamentally a democratic approach to full participation within a community (Kohlberg, 1978, 1981; Power, 1988a, 1988b). Here, Kohlberg (1978) began to define moral behavior not just in terms of individual moral character, but in terms of the character or moral atmosphere of a group or community. The just community was created to promote moral growth within individuals through a community setting in which the common good was to be fostered through notions of democracy and the *gemeinschaft* community; that is, through a strong sense of common identity (Power, 1988a, 1988b; Power & Reimer, 1978; Kohlberg, 1978, 1981). According to Kohlberg and his colleagues, the community approach provided individuals with stage mismatch, or information that was incompatible with their present lower stage of reasoning. This new information, if sustained, would eventually cause a sufficient amount of cognitive dissonance that eventually led to stage development. By 1991 there were sixteen 'just community' schools (Reed, 1994).

Although Kohlberg's moral education project was meeting with success, some aspects of his moral judgment interview research became problematic. The findings of several studies revealed that there was moral regression in students from high school to college (Kohlberg, 1973), different cultures were found to reason at stage 3 or lower (Kohlberg, 1973, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983), very few stage 6 reasoners were found anywhere (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine and Hewer, 1983), and the popular critique made by Gilligan (1982) that the model fails to take women's moral voices into account. The concerns raised in these studies led to a questioning of Kohlberg's original suppositions (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1981, Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983). Kohlberg, his colleagues and students spent years re-evaluating and re-working the original stage model and scoring manual to incorporate these changes (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, Levine & Hewer, 1983). Again, Kohlberg expressed a strong commitment to his original suppositions. Although it will not be discussed in any detail here, others reasons having to do with the number of years, and the number of careers tied up with working on the project, may have made it difficult to abandon. As well, issues of power, prestige, respect, and how well it fit the American dream may have also played a role in Kohlberg's seemingly strong commitment to his formal model of moral reasoning. The point in rendering this account serves to illuminate that Kohlberg was a person enmeshed in social and historical circumstances, and whatever he and his colleagues put forth as a theory or model, was also enmeshed in these circumstances.

In summary, Kohlberg's personal history and commitment to his moral stage model and program for moral education suggest that Kohlberg took his theorizing quite seriously as a way to promote moral growth and foster a better world. His goal was to develop a science of morality so that immoral atrocities could be prevented. A non-relativistic universal model of moral judgment that was based on abstract principles that everyone could attain was well suited to this goal. This construction of moral reasoning allowed



three things to take place: (1) if the development of moral reasoning was understood, then one could intervene into immoral behavior and promote moral growth, (2) one could prescribe how moral reasoning ought to proceed, is a perspective without which one could not intervene into immoral behavior, and (3) one could focus on the individual in which case the influence of the group would be subjugated, that is, relegated to a secondary or inconsequential status. Unfortunately, Kohlberg's dedication to this goal, and the climate in which he did his theorizing, has resulted in a decontextualized theory that failed to take into account the complexities of moral reasoning as embedded in social practices. Kohlberg's personal and social circumstances are only part of the story; the historical and cultural background from which he did his theorizing is also important to consider and will be addressed next.

#### Developmental Psychology: The Theoretical Context of Kohlberg's Theory

Kohlberg's personal history has been important in understanding why he chose to strive for a non-relativistic, universal, individualistic formal model of moral reasoning. The context of his life alone is not sufficient for a complete understanding of his moral model of justice reasoning. The context of a scientific developmental psychology from which he conducted his work is, in some ways, more important to consider because social and cultural constructions form the matrix from which we think, act, live and simply 'be'. What is taken as the way to conduct research and what types of theories to construct are part of the axiomatic matrix of our scientific and academic world. Kohlberg's model was created out of, and within, this matrix.

Burman (1994) dates the origins of present day developmental psychology back to the late 19th century as a response to the demands of prevailing social anxieties that came with rapid industrialization and urbanization. Of particular concern was the quality of the population, where the primary focus was on the criminal and the pauper (Burman, 1994;

Morss, 1990; Walkerdine, 1984, 1993). Along with other more subtle and complex forces at work in this process, compulsory schooling was, in part, a response to a perceived need to manage this unruly population and, hence, the category of the child as separate from adulthood was constructed (Burman, 1994; Kessen, 1979; Morss, 1990; Walkerdine, 1984, 1993). The discursive production of the knowledge of the child created a web of constraining and enabling information about what was normal, and subsequently abnormal. This notion, based on a Foucauldian thesis, suggests that because of the implicit need to control and regulate the population an individual psychology was established that allowed for the measurement, classification, surveillance and subsequent standardization and normalization of children (the objects of study) (Burman, 1994; Kessen, 1979; Morss, 1990; Rose, 1985, 1990; Walkerdine, 1984; 1993). The point of illustrating these connections is not to suggest causal determinations, but rather to flesh out the social political matrix that theories of developmental psychology develop out of and into, as well as to understand the underlying suppositions of such theories given their context.

The main premise of current developmental psychology stemmed from the 19th century child study movement which drew inspiration from Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection (Burman, 1994; Bradley, 1993; Dixon & Lerner, 1985; Morss, 1990; Rose, 1985; Urwin & Sharland, 1992). This is the normative movement as described above which privileged a normal course of development conceived as a sequence of developmental stages based in biological processes. It is argued (Bradley, 1993; Morss, 1990; Walkerdine, 1993) that although it was Darwin's natural selection that was originally drawn upon, in psychology it was Haeckel's view of evolution (ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny) that ended up being the underlying force in developmental theories. More specifically, Haeckel's view states that an individual's development is caused by the evolutionary history of the species to which the individual belongs, and that the developmental history of an individual organism (ontogeny) is thought to recapitulate the

species history (phylogeny). It has been suggested that the Haeckelian view is deeply ingrained in developmental psychology and is what accounts for the conceptualization of mental development as biologically based, unidirectional, single-tracked, step-wise, and a progressive process towards an end-point in adulthood (Bradley, 1993; Morss, 1990; Walkerdine, 1993). Interestingly, the Haeckelian view of evolution is one that modern biology argues to be false (Gould, 1977 as cited in Bradley, 1993).

Kaplan (1971, 1984, 1992) argues that to study the process of development as a unidirectional, progressive process, requires that one accept or postulate a telos or end-point in order to know what to look for in ontogenesis. Specifically, Kaplan (1971) states;

"This is not to say that the telos is a kind of end state acting as a cause..., or that the telos need be conscious, or even actually operative, in the subject, or by the investigator. Rather at the very least, a telos must be posited by the investigator - and it is this telos that governs the reconstruction of the process of development." (p. 77)

Further, the concept of development was defined as entailing increasing differentiation and hierarchic integration; what Kaplan and Werner have termed the 'orthogenetic principle' (Kaplan, 1984; Werner & Kaplan, 1956). More specifically, the 'orthogenetic principle' was a way of characterizing changes as a means-end or form-function relation in an entity by distinguishing between parts and then subordinating these parts to the whole. This was the course that development was to take if something was thought to develop. This process was thought to underpin conceptions of development and made it possible to understand earlier 'immature' forms from later 'mature' forms. The point, however, is that nothing within the orthogenetic principle defines a telos; a telos must be posited in order to make assumptions of what is 'more developed' as opposed to 'less developed', as well as, what is inherent in the entity or species that is thought to develop in the first place. Therefore, depending on the telos posited by the researcher or theorist, explanations of developmental concepts can unfold along a number of different lines. In sum, Kaplan's argument suggests that developmental theories, because of implied teloi, are value-laden and suggest

processes that "may not be inherent in the nature of human beings but may be merely parochial cultural conventions" (1984, p. 15).

The supposition that developmental theories are value-laden has important implications when one considers that such theories are more than mere taxonomies, but actual prescriptions of promoting or retarding aspects of 'development'. Of relevance to the present thesis, Kohlberg was interested in promoting moral growth based on his moral model, which was based in turn, upon Piaget's model for intellectual growth. Not only do both of the theories imply the 'way' to develop in these areas, but also what 'should' develop in the first place is implied by their chosen topics of developmental investigation (e.g., intellectual logic for Piaget and abstract moral reasoning for Kohlberg). The poignancy of this argument is realized with an example provided by Kaplan (1984). The push for economic development in third world countries has resulted in the loss of cherished traditions that their 'primitive societies' allowed them to sustain. The development that was valued from an economic perspective was not valued from the other; the teloi differed in each case and were incompatible.

In sum, one finds that once notions of biological maturation and historical understandings of development are understood as social constructions, rather than a reading off of the facts of how development unfolds, concepts of development are not so easily formed or accepted. In light of Kaplan's argument, theorists need to concern themselves with the ethics of their theorizing. Defining ethical considerations will be difficult because of the invisibility of their underlying nature, and because we are all (as theorists or otherwise) implicitly bound in an ethical world. The very essence of human existence entails that we live in an ethical realm if we are to get along with each other in ways that we all find intelligible (this point will be expanded upon below). The fact that we come from a perspective and with an idea in mind whenever we conduct research or rally for a position suggests that whatever we say and do includes an implied value judgment.

Therefore, even if we try to decide what these value judgments are, we cannot escape the ethics of our perspective. We can never remove ourselves from values or ethics in our theorizing, we can only attempt to acknowledge their existence. Acknowledgment would be an improvement to having value judgments hidden, as they are in present theories of development. If we cannot escape the 'intrusion' of ethics or values from being entangled in theory, we can at least attempt to incorporate notions of ethical concerns in our theorizing and try to make these concerns visible. This is not to set up a dichotomy between what are traditionally considered values and what are considered facts, but the opposite; it is to suggest that what we decide or construct as facts are implicitly tied up with values, we cannot make any 'real' distinctions between the two.

Developmental psychology is made up of complex and diverse social and cultural human activities. It is not simply a neutral scientific enterprise that combines the unfolding of facts with theory and application. What is thought to develop and how it is theorized to develop are part of the social milieu out of which it arises, and conversely, what is thought to develop contributes to forming that milieu. Developmental theories are not neutral, nor can they ever be. Even so called natural and biological explanations are embedded in the social and cultural matrix that are implicated in the very fabric of our social, that is, total being (Lewontin, 1991; Oyama, 1993). Oyama (1993) indicates that the nature-nurture dichotomy is a false one and emphasizes that persons are made up of both 'natural' and 'environmental' forces, and therefore, the distinction between the two leads to inadequate and one-sided explanations of human existence. For instance, individual, biological persons are enmeshed in social environments; "Biology is then a matter not of organisms with fixed internal natures, but of changing natures that are a function of reciprocal relations with environments that are in part social" (Oyama, 1993; p. 478). How we think about persons is tied to our socially negotiated and sustained understandings of them. Thus, the biological or the individual is an understanding of existence that is part of the

social. Conversely, the social is made up of and is perpetuated by the individual. Therefore the point of Oyama's argument is that neither the social or the biological can exist or be understood without the other. Developmental theories, and scientific developmental psychology in general, are primarily based in evolutionary and biological conceptions of development, and are therefore, narrow in scope, missing the more complex nature of being (Oyama, 1993). The term 'development' itself has become synonymous with a progressive biological maturation. Hidden under the guise of the scientific unfolding of natural explanations are value judgments that are not as innocuous or scientifically neutral as they first appear. This is not to devalue science because that would be to sit back and do nothing, but only to approach science in a different way; a way that acknowledges hidden claims to value.

### Summary

Although the description of Kohlberg's personal history and the history of developmental psychology have been brief, they have served to indicate that persons and theories are inextricably tied to social and political matrices. The demarcation between theories and persons, or between theories and the cultural and social context from which they arise are illusory. Persons, social, cultural and historical life are all part of a living, changing nexus of being. To examine one component as a variable separate from the entire medium is to misunderstand that the functioning of one component, not only requires, but is tied to the entire medium in which it functions. Studying one component as separate from the whole does not make sense: How are we to know that this is how it would operate when it is originally enmeshed in a complex medium of interactions and forces? From such a perspective there is no such thing as a neutral science of any kind. With this in mind, the next section will step back and take a look at some of the assumptions

underlying Kohlberg's model of moral development before discussing an alternative perspective of thinking about morality.

### A Critique of the Underlying Assumptions of Traditional Cognitive Developmental Theories

Kohlberg's formal model, embedded in a scientific developmental context, represents an essentialistic and rational construction of moral development. It is essentialistic in that the theoretical position of the model suggests that moral reasoning is an individual process, and that individuals possess an inner structure in which moral reasoning unfolds; a structure that is necessary for the development of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg the structure is thought to be affected by environmental occurrences that challenge existing cognitive structures to promote stage growth (1978, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine & Hower, 1983). Kohlberg's model is also rational in that it represents a view of moral development as a single system and that all realms of moral reasoning can be explicated within that system. Thus, there are a number of assumptions underlying the theory that are of concern given the present thesis if being is best understood to be embedded in social relations. I will deal with five of the most relevant assumptions which themselves are interrelated. These include the belief that: (1) the self is stable, (2) we possess underlying cognitive structures, (3) language is a neutral mechanism for the relaying of information, (4) the interview context is a neutral space for data collection, and (5) development is progressive and universal.

#### *The Assumption of a Stable Self*

First, a major assumption that is central to most psychological research is that persons are considered unitary, static beings and the self is essentialistic. The self is essentialistic in that the self is thought to have real and necessary properties, akin to a

physical object, that can be discovered and understood. Therefore, a person is thought of as a stable and self-contained entity. Although much of the self is thought to be hidden, the idea is that given proper investigative methods the truth to an individual's competence or characteristics will be known. A person's true nature then is thought to be gleaned from controlled laboratory experiments. The possibility of multiple selves in multiple positionings is subjugated to finding a true self or stable qualities. How that self came to be is also subjugated to biological, natural explanations.

This traditional conceptualization of self may appear innocuous at first glance, and is usually treated as such in most contemporary research. To understand the nature of a true self one would have to be able to accept three things without question: (1) that a person can exist independently of others, (2) that when persons are in different situations and with others they are the same as what the findings of a study say they will be, and (3) that any explanations about self are of a biological nature. Even though we know that people do not live in isolation from other persons or the physical environment, it appears not to pose a problem to try and study them this way, or to acknowledge that the research situation is an environment of its own.

Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian theorist who rejected 19th century thought that assumed only isolated categories are valid for scientific study, provided a cogent example for understanding why selves cannot adequately be studied or understood as isolated entities. Bakhtin (1981, 1993) believed that to react to others was proof of being alive. He likened this to the study of microscopic organisms in which to determine if it is dead matter or living tissue that is being examined, the reaction to light is what is measured. Therefore, the criterion of shrinking away from light (i.e., reacting to the environment) is a test that these tiny organisms are alive (Clark & Holoquist, 1984). Responding to the environment is representative of life itself. In relation to the notion of a human self then, this is to say, that self has no meaning without being tested against, or thought of within, a social, or



environmental context. The conceptualization of persons as self-contained is, therefore, ill-conceived.

Studying persons as separate isolatable entities ignores that persons are created and studied within social contexts, and that how we think about ourselves is also mediated within these contexts; contexts themselves that are politically and historically constructed. The social conceptualization of self suggests that persons are not essentialistic, unitary, non-contradictory and historically continuous beings, but rather, the concept of self is a social construction that has emerged out of specific disciplinary practices (Foucault, 1988).

Traditionally in psychology the conceptualization of self as unitary and coherent is implicit in the methodology and the theoretical constructs that are described as representing psychological processes. This notion is played out in Kohlberg's moral theory; moral reasoning is regarded as an individual accomplishment that unfolds via internal mechanisms. For Kohlberg, the promotion of moral growth and accountability is also tied to the individual. But if persons and conceptions of self are regarded as social constructions, then our moral understanding and reasoning can also be thought of as part of social phenomena. Accountability then becomes a social event that impinges upon persons, but also as persons that perpetuate or maintain notions of the moral good, we are also individually accountable. Individuals and the greater social environment are inextricably connected, and it becomes prudent to study them as such.

### *The Assumption of Underlying Cognitive Processes*

A second assumption is that persons possess a hardwired set of cognitive structures that unfold via biological mechanisms. The construction of a person as a unitary and stable being allows for the supposition that persons possess internal sets of cognitive structures that enable them to function in the world. These cognitive structures are treated as though they are individually located and privately produced. They are thought to consist of a deep

structure of biological based processes where the unfolding of developmental maturity is thought to occur. The environment is thought to only influence this unfolding by causing one to re-think present ways of cognizising, which in turn leads to a re-structuring of present cognitive structures (Kohlberg, 1978, 1981; Kohlberg, Levine, Hewer, 1983). This conception of mind is regarded as a significant advance when compared to the absence of mind advocated by behaviorism. Cognitivists rejected the anti-mental position of behaviorism and sought to explain, predict and control behavior (as did the behaviorists) by going beyond behaviorism and into the mind. Cognitivists constructed a metaphoric discourse that enabled a formulation of questions and the supposed examination of mental processes; processes that were regarded as the basis for having knowledge about the world (Valsiner, 1991). The point of Valsiner's argument is that the cognitive revolution retained the behaviorists emphasis on the examination of empirical data over theoretical analysis, and thereby, also retained the status for psychology as a scientific enterprise. Talk of cognitive structures enabled this type of scientific investigation. It also allowed for an examination of what was considered a person's reasoning and action. The notion of 'mind', thus, became acceptable in the scientific discourse of psychology. However, the mind became a reified concept, a supposedly existing stable entity, rather than embracing the mind as *becoming*, cognitivism perpetuated the mind as object (the mind *is*).

In a cognitivist model, an individual's cognitive ability, or reasoning level, is equated with realistic internal representations of the external world. These internal individualistic cognitive representations are then posited as theoretical entities that underlie cognitive or psychological functioning. Again, the social aspects of being are not considered by such models (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1991, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). Vygotsky's notion of 'mind' is helpful in explicating the social underpinnings of what is thought of as our mental life (1978, 1986). Vygotsky

argues that our mental life is never our own; we cannot function as autonomous beings that live within our heads, but rather, we exist in the boundaries of social interaction.

Vygotsky (1978) wrote explicitly about the acquisition of what he termed 'higher psychological functioning' as something that has its origins in social processes and social relations. The development of 'cognitive processes' is not the case of the hidden becoming public, but conversely, where the public and intersubjective become hidden and private, or internalized. Being begins in the social plane in which words are used as a kind of tool by which a person internalizes an understanding of the world. This is an active process that is neither preformed nor constant; the relationship between thoughts and words is a "living process" where thought is born through words (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 255).

The conception of cognitive processes as internal and individualistic, as evidenced in Kohlbergian and other traditional methods of psychology, is decontextualized and asocial. The story that is told about such processes adheres to the scientific discourse in which we reduce and measure 'thoughts' and 'behaviors' in 'controlled' experimental situations. The construction of this discourse as producing knowledge about persons and things is hidden under the scientific guise of expertise. The tradition of cognitive psychology fails to acknowledge how talk about cognitions, or about things that are said, function as actions fitted to their occasion (Edwards, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Further, the ability to talk about mental processes as cognitively based is implicitly a part of the scientific discourse that produces them (Bowers, 1991; Shotter, 1991, 1993a, 1993b). Therefore, theories of cognitions are nothing more than part of a scientific discourse that has chosen to study mental life in a decontextualized way, and in so doing, has reified mind as the unfolding of innate structures called cognitive processes. Kohlberg is a central player in this view and embraces it explicitly to support his universalistic ambitions.

*The Assumption of Language as Neutral*

The third assumption is that language, or discourse, is a neutral mechanism for the relaying of inner mental representations. Discourse is treated as a window into mind; it is the avenue that an individual's level of cognitive competence is ascertained. The responses of participants in research data collection procedures are thought to be reflective of inner mental representations and stable ways of thinking. Discourse in Kohlbergian and other traditional developmental research, is not in any way regarded as constructive of persons or our understanding of events. Traditional forms of developmental research fail to take into account that responses to questionnaires, vignettes, or interviews are conceived within a particular perspective and particular context. Every context implicitly creates or forms an ethical arena in which we follow certain maxims of acceptable talk and behavior, and we do so by not having to consciously think about it (Wittgenstein, 1953, Shotter, 1993a, 1992, 1994). This must be the case if we are to get along together with any sort of understanding. When perspective and context are considered, language can only be subjective and not an objective depiction of mental representations of beliefs or cognitive competence. Language, or discourse, is subjective in that what we come to say or think is itself a product of social and historical constructions. Cognitive approaches take discourse as a realization and evidence of underlying processes of knowledge, which themselves derive from perception and action (Edwards, 1991). Discourse is assumed to be driven by cognition, a process that assembles representations for making sense of the world.

The view of language as a discursive accomplishment treats talk or texts not as representations of preformed cognitions but as forms of social action (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). There is a fundamental aspect of conversational interaction that has been eclipsed by cognitive and scientific psychology's focus on the possession of persons of inner mental representations. Instead of focusing immediately upon how isolated, self-contained individuals come to know and make sense of the world

around them through the expression of verbal responses (the classical 'epistemological project'), it is necessary to ask how people first develop and sustain certain ways of relating themselves to each other in their talk.

*The Assumption that the Interview Context is a Neutral Space for Data Collection*

A fourth assumption is that the researcher's and the participant's engagement in the interview interaction is of little to no consequence. The individualistic nature of persons, and the lack of considerations for the social construction of persons, causes the interview context to be regarded as a neutral arena for the collection of pieces of information that are treated as facts representing mental life. The social nature of conversational situations and power differentials are not considered as productive or constraining in any way (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

In his moral interviews, Kohlberg created the context and set the moral situation in two ways. First, respondents were provided with a moral story and subsequent questions that they were to respond to 'morally'. Respondents are not only aware that they are being 'tested' but also that particular responses are required or preferred. Therefore, this interview context does not represent morality in an everyday context nor does it take into account that the respondents are positioned by the research questions. They are positioned in that they are within a particular interactive context that has certain rules of conduct and expectations of what types of responses the subject assumes are preferred or legitimate (Davies & Harre, 1990).

Second, the research context does not represent an equal relationship between the participant and the researcher. There is a level of trust that is granted to the researcher as the 'expert' in the interaction and the subject is given the lesser role as a 'naive' participant. As a consequence the relationship between the researcher and the participant is anything but neutral, and any discourse that is produced from within it is necessarily influenced by the

implicit power differentials. The implications of this inequality in roles, suggests that participant responses are constrained by the interview context, and therefore, produce a particular kind of moral reasoning that may not be reflective of moral talk in other contexts or situations. Again, the ongoing constructive nature of talk or discourse as mediated in social relations (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993a, 1993b) is not considered in this type of traditional developmental research. The major point, however, is that moral reasoning, or more aptly, moral discourse, can never be defined conclusively. It varies as our context and interactions vary. This is not to say that certain moral ways of being are not perpetuated in conversation, only that the social nature of being necessitates that change is also possible.

#### *The Assumption of a Progressive, Universal Model*

The final assumption that I will deal with is that the developmental progression stressed in Kohlberg's model is the same for all individuals and is progressive. The value-laden nature of developmental models that have implicit end-points has already been mentioned (Kaplan, 1971, 1984, 1992). It is important to reiterate this point because these hidden values are then prescriptive across individuals and cultures. This prescription allows for persons and cultures to be labeled as less advanced (i.e., primitive or immature) or advanced (i.e., developed or mature). It is interesting to note that Kohlberg's intentions in constructing such a model of moral judgment may have meant to suggest just the opposite; that all persons were capable of reaching moral maturity and that therefore we could, through the promotion of moral growth, end up with a just and moral world. I do not believe Kohlberg intended for a demarcation between individuals or cultures that would be suggestive of elitism. In an effort to maintain a non-relativistic and formal model of moral reasoning, Kohlberg could not but adhere to an elitism of sorts that would prevent the kinds of atrocities that were evidenced in the Holocaust. What Kohlberg apparently did

not consider was the use of rhetorics, which he himself took part in by touting his own theory, and how this constructs our understandings and beliefs of the theories we propose. That is, that all theories are necessarily embedded in an ethical and moral perspective. This is not to suggest intentionality on the part of the theorist, but to illuminate the political nature of language and theorizing in general. We are all subjects and vehicles of political and linguistic practices; they are one in the same. Being grows out of and into the social nexus of discursive relations (Foucault, 1979).

From the perspective that we negotiate or socially construct who we are, it becomes evident that being, power, language, and our social and cultural world are all inseparable. Further, interaction is the very crux of being, whether it be with persons or the physical environment, and this action requires that we live in a ethically responsive world to interact at all. Thus, ethics is understood as the assumptive guidelines which support all interaction. Ethics is necessarily tied to our every action because it is ethics that makes action possible. Formal conceptions of moral reasoning and principles, such as those proposed by Kohlberg, are themselves negotiated and worked out in the social web of communication. Morality and the ways of deliberating over moral issues are also part of and products of linguistic practices.

The value-laden nature of what we say and do is part of what Kaplan (1984, 1992) describes as the problem with developmental models that do not realize the implied value judgment in teloi type theories. In regards to morality in general, it is also the case that to state that there are universal moral principles is itself making a value claim, and therefore, to suggest that there are reified moral oughts is to assume that one can rise above from which one stands and view thyself.

Kohlberg's formal, universal, progressive model of moral reasoning came from a particular perspective and was constructed within a particular context. It represents a construction of viewing persons and moral reasoning as stable properties that 'should' be

the same for all individuals. The concern with such formal models is their prescriptive, and therefore, constraining depiction of being. In sum, Kohlberg's formal model of moral development is limiting because it is a reified description of being. It is also incomplete because it fails to acknowledge that being is an ongoing process that needs to be studied in context.

From the constructionist perspective of linguistic practices, morality appears much more complex than a traditional theory such as Kohlberg's presents it as. To be understandable to each other we not only agree about meaning, but also about judgments (Shotter, 1993a) and it is these judgments that form the ethical realm from which we live and act. Further, we linguistically negotiate socially moral positions and codes within this living matrix, a matrix that is limiting because of its ethical nature.

In sum, human life requires that we live within an ethical realm to operate as a community, and within this community we negotiate moral positions. Negotiation is a process by which we produce, maintain and re-position each other through our discursive practices in an ongoing fashion. In accordance with Bakhtin (1993) there can be no formal set of morals - because to say 'you ought' you are already submitting to a value. This alternative perspective of viewing being and morality will be explicated below.

### An Alternative Conceptualization of Morality

To investigate moral judgment by examining what one person is doing or saying is to ignore that all action occurs in the whole of human actions. The whole of human action is the arena from which we see any action. Any one person's behavior is bound in the matrix of social life and cannot be separated from it without losing the very essence of its being. Kohlberg constructed a formal model of moral reasoning based on an universal form of human cognition found in the structure of the mind. This construction of moral reasoning can be contrasted to a sociohistorical approach in which the social context is the



centre piece of our understanding. When one considers issues such as abortion, gun control, euthanasia, and capital punishment, we realize that there are intelligent and reasonable arguments on both sides of the issues, and that most often, there are more than two sides to these issues. It appears that the content of such issues cannot be submitted to some universal standard as a basis for objectively sorting proper from improper positions. Submitting such an issue to the judgment of a court may result in a legal resolution, but the morality of a such a decision remains open for ongoing debate. For Kohlberg this was not a concern because within his theoretical framework one can ignore content and focus instead on the structure or form of an individual's moral reasoning. The focus on structure enabled the explication of universal moral maxims that emerged developmentally in a step-wise fashion. However, this step-wise progression implies that arguments in favor of a given position in a debate reflect morally inferior or superior ways of thinking. How the dilemmas arise is not questioned, suggesting that Kohlberg did not go beyond the narrowly defined situation of the carefully constructed hypothetical dilemma to probe the more general dilemmatic aspects of moral thinking (Billig et al., 1988).

Billig (1987, 1991) and Billig et al. (1988) argue that thinking is a social and historical phenomenon that is argumentative in nature. Argumentative themes ensure that there is a need for thought, and therefore, are what make thinking possible. A moral evaluation can only be made because a consensually sensible alternative could also have been made. Therefore, the very existence of opposing arguments whether they are words, images, maxims, values, etc., is crucial because they permit the possibility of social dilemmas and of social thinking itself (Billig et al., 1988). The absence of oppositions would entail an inability to argue about dilemmas or of understanding how opposing values or beliefs can come into collision. Moreover, these are the sorts of arguments that persons must have with themselves if they are to be able to deliberate about issues or matters at all. Without the dilemmatic nature of thinking there would be no awareness of competing

claims. The absence of competing claims may be suggestive of constraints on the ability to be deliberative, and therefore, the ability to choose between differing positions. Both the dilemmatics and the constraints are part of ideology, which itself is based on the wider social and historical context of its making. Ideology in this context does not refer to traditional notions that treat ideology as an elite integrated system of thinking that is imposed on societies in a consistent manner. That is, ideology in the present context does not refer to the belief that states or institutions are self-contained organizations that prescribe codes of conduct to the masses. Nor does it view individuals as blindly following the dictates of ideological systems. Rather, the perspective offered by Billig (1991) claims that ideologies themselves contain contrary themes, and therefore, are not reified belief systems but systems of thought that all of us perpetuate in our talk with each other. For the purposes of the present thesis, and as presented by Billig, ideology is better thought of, or conceptualized, as 'social rhetoric'. That is, ideology conceptualized as social rhetoric views ideology as discourses that we draw on in our everyday talk in a variety of ways. For instance, liberal humanist ideology suggests that persons should be free and self sufficient but not selfish and socially irresponsible. This dilemmatic notion of liberalism is played out in discourse depending on the context and purpose of how it is being discussed. In sum, Billig's view of ideology suggest that ideologies do not prevent thought, but issue constraints, as well as permit the possibility of thought because of their controversial nature.

In sum, people think within social systems of argumentation that are based in ideology. This perspective recognizes that everyday thinking is based on processes of ideology that are themselves cultural and social products which make up what we refer to as our 'common sense' (Billig, 1991). This common sense enables everyday thinking, which is an historical and cultural construction that is an ongoing, living and argumentative

ideology. No one (even theorists) can 'escape' the dilemmatic tradition in which we live, because this is what makes thinking, understanding and living possible.

Cognitive accounts or moral reasoning and thinking in general ignore the argumentative aspect of thinking, and along with it, the social aspect of being (Billig, 1987, 1991; Billig et al., 1988). In cognitive accounts the individual occupies central attention and any deficiencies are portrayed as being psychological properties, and are consequently viewed as the limitation of human nature or of individual agents (Billig, 1991). It is important to reiterate that from the perspective of the present thesis, persons are not viewed as victims of ideological systems or as self-contained biological individuals where the individual is the target of criticism. Rather, thinking and consciousness are from the beginning a social phenomena, and such social phenomena are part of living, dynamic argumentative ideology. This is not to say that there may be an imbalance of the opposing claims, but only that to claim a position necessitates that there is one or more counter claims to that position for it to be thought of as such.

If we make a claim, we do so against a counter claim or set of claims. If there are no opposing claims to an issue then the issue is non-problematic and will not be discussed or deliberated over, nor thought about. For example, gender is thought of as a bipolar construct because of the bipolar (dilemmatic) discourse we use to discuss it; male vs. female, feminine characteristics vs. male characteristics, aggressive vs. nurturing, etc. (Davies, 1989). If one could imagine a discourse that was relatively neutral as to the differences between males and females, that is, if we only had words that referred to humans as people rather than gendered persons, accepted notions of males and females as necessarily stronger or weaker, or this way or that way, may not even be conceivable. Outside of obvious physical differences, if we discussed person with gender neutral terms, it is imaginable that the dilemmatic and oppressive discourse surrounding gender talk would not be an issue. We would have no way to think about it as such. Constructs that

have no opposition are accepted without question and are not part of political or academic debate because they appear commonsensical.

The most powerful discourses are constructs that have no opposition and thereby are accepted as matters of fact. Because of the lack of opposing claims to a construct we have no need, or way, to think about them as controversial. For instance, not many would argue about the need for some type of education that teaches one to read and write. If we look back in history we find that this was not always the case. Certain arguments came into existence as a result of social and political conditions that enabled a particular conceptualization of education that for the most part is not presently contested. We have arguments and discussions about how to teach people to read and write but not about whether to do so in the first place (see Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1985, 1990; Walkerdine, 1984, for a detailed examination of the construction of compulsory education). Presently education is conceived of as a certain type, teaching community activism rather than learning to read and write in a classroom setting would not be acceptable. The significance of this rendition is to explicate the varied nature of social and political practices that construct what we come to accept and believe, and how this is all tied to moral taken-for-granted maxims.

It becomes clear that the concept of dilemmatic thinking is not so simple and straight forward, and it is within this complexity that the dilemmatic nature of thinking and being is discursively accomplished. The two or more sidedness of topics in everyday life are complex in that such discursive options may be either constraining (e.g., gender talk is oppressive to those that do not fit the stereotypes) or enabling (e.g., being able to choose to be homosexual in a heterosexual world). As well, lack of opposing claims can be both constraining (e.g., there may be no discourses to draw upon to maintain a sense of equality in certain situations; see Miller, 1993 for an illustration of this argument in regards to male-female discussions) and enabling (e.g., homosexuals can draw upon the discourse that

sexual preference is inborn, and therefore, not one's fault). The important point is that understanding thinking and being as dilemmatic allows for an awareness of the complexity and the contestable nature of taken-for-granted positions. We are always making value judgments in contesting positions, creating new arguments, or arguing for certain positions because anything we say and do is bound in a necessary ethical matrix; a matrix that enables interaction.

Acknowledging the dilemmatic nature of thinking permits the visibility of hidden moral claims, claims that are so entrenched in our everyday lives that we do not recognize them as moral claims (of course just stating this point is itself making a moral claim). Our actions and behavior can never become decontextualized from the evaluative nature of being. However, acknowledging that we are always tied to an ethical realm may open the door to others being participants in the discussions of what we choose our moral claims to be. It is not that other moral claims, perhaps ones that we have not thought of, will not be hidden, but only that as we acknowledge the hidden nature of moral claims we can continually challenge these claims as the need arises. We can never remove ourselves from this complex matrix of interacting and thinking, but we can acknowledge its complexity and reconsider our understanding of what we believe to be truisms. Acknowledging the dilemmatic nature of thinking should make us more accountable for the kinds of arguments we espouse and how these arguments position us as people.

According to Foucault (1988) subjectivity is always tied to social and historical practices. How we think about ourselves cannot be disentangled from the dilemmatic discourses that have socially and historically constructed us. From this perspective, the issue of the subject, that is, who is doing the constructing or being constructed, oppressed etc., becomes a non-issue. Conceiving of self as separate from social and historical relations is insupportable because how we think about self has grown out of these relations. It is impossible for anyone to step back and conceive of themselves as an

isolated entity, because if we try to do so, how we think is already tied to social, historical and political practices. That we do attempt to step back, is a reflection of current social and historical constructions.

The notion of ideological dilemmas as the very crux of our social and personal being has strong implications for morality. First, it is helpful in our understanding of the moral dilemmas that are presently occupying our talk and thinking. It suggests that these dilemmas need not be viewed as universal or static problems that we must individually come to understand, but in contrast, the dilemmas and our thinking about them arise out of social, cultural and historical contexts. From this perspective moral reasoning and moral dilemmas are thought of as a social phenomenon. The traditional scientific approach of psychology as practiced by Kohlberg treated people in a social, cultural, and historical vacuum in proposing a formal model for moral development. Traditionally, then, morality became another variable, an accessory to consider if we were going to be social beings. The awareness of social life was only acknowledged to the extent that we exist in communities, but not that how we come to think and be in the first place, is socially and historically constituted and reconstituted in our talk with each other.

The perspective offered in the present thesis suggests that moral dilemmas and how we think and deliberate over such dilemmas are social and cultural products. The second implication of this dilemmatic approach to thinking is that the workings of power are acknowledged as inextricably part of our everyday social life and personal being. Because how and what we think, and how we deal with such, is tied to the historical and social construction of ideology, we perpetuate, and ourselves are products of, power in our everyday interactions and life. This view of power suggests that it is not static or locatable in a single institution or person, but is everywhere and that power is an integral part of our knowledge and how we interact with each other and the world (Foucault, 1979). The morals that we live by and hold in high esteem are the center of our social being, and thus

what we come to think of as our personal being. Viewing morality as a social phenomenon in this way suggests that we are morally positioned moment to moment by the situations we are in, against an historical background, by those others around us. From this perspective morality becomes much more than a supplement to personal being, it is imbued in our everyday life.

### Everyday Ethics

In our everyday discourse we need to communicate in legitimate and understandable ways if we are going to get along in the world. If we did not rely on certain acceptable notions of everyday discourse we would need to explain every detail of what we were trying to imply. Explicating all details would not only be incredibly tedious but would also likely make communicating near to impossible. One only has to think about trying to communicate with someone from a different culture with a different language and different agreed upon cultural conventions. The sense that you are being understood is only achieved after you have learned both the language, as well as, the acceptable gestures and judgments of communicating. These judgments are the hidden, taken-for-granted, meanings of interaction. Learning one without the other is not sufficient for complete communication.

Garfinkel (1967) discusses the ethical nature of everyday life. He claims that our social world in which we think is implicitly ethical because the possibility of a common understanding is not simply based on a shared knowledge of social structure, but also on the enforceable nature of actions in assent with the expectancies of the ethics of everyday life. We live from within a particular form of life with particular discourses by which we judge our practical knowledge as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Wittgenstein, 1953). Because we are necessarily within this particular form of life we perpetuate the discourses of knowledge that construct and sustain it. Moreover, we are blind to other types of

knowledge or ways of interacting. One repeats countless times that this is how things are; "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing around the frame through which we look at it" (Wittgenstein, 1953; no. 114). We are held captive by this picture of the way things are and we can never get outside of it because it is implicit in our language and language repeats it to us inexorably (Wittgenstein, 1953; no. 115). This picture of the ways things are is maintained by the way we communicate; that is; we must communicate in an ethically responsive way to be understood and accepted (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994).

When we speak we do so with the anticipation of how it will be understood and with what types of responses will be given so we can come back with a response of our own. Bakhtin (1986) explains existence as the ability to interact in response to what has been said, to what will be said by those others around us, and to an invisible third person that emerges out of interactions and which makes options available or imposes limitations. This invisible third person described by Bakhtin is suggestive of the existence of the realm or space from which we interact that we are implicitly aware of in communicating with others to make ourselves understandable. Therefore, the invisible third person occupies the necessary ethical space in which we interact that exists on the boundaries between people in conversation, and which both enables and constrains everyday discourse. Words only have meaning in the context of their use; they recall earlier contexts and concurrently create new meanings in emerging contexts. New meanings are slower to emerge because the background against which we negotiate these meanings is that part of discursive interaction that makes communication possible by sustaining certain ways of talking. These ways of talking that sustain communication can be referred to as the ethical realm of everyday life, and what makes them difficult to change is the very essence of their ethical nature (i.e., without them we would not be able to communicate or interact in understandable ways).



Two events are taking place when we interact. First, our talk is negotiated with those around us in ways they find intelligible and legitimate (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). People mutually judge and correct each other as to the appropriateness or the fit of their actions (Wittgenstein, 1953). Garfinkel (1967) demonstrated in his ethnomethodological accounts of students challenging ordinary discourse with the use of a rational systematic discourse, that departures from sanctioned properties of discourse are rebuked or met with ambivalence.

"On Friday night my husband and I were watching television. My husband remarked that he was tired. I asked, "How are you tired? Physically, mentally, or just bored?"

(S) I don't know, I guess physically, mainly.

(E) You mean that your muscles ache or your bones?

(S) I guess so. Don't be so technical.

*(After more watching)*

(S) All these old movies have the same kind of old iron bedstead in them.

(E) What do you mean? Do you mean all old movies, or some of them, or just the ones you have seen?

(S) What's the matter with you? You know what I mean.

(E) I wish you'd be more specific.

(S) You know what I mean! Drop dead! (p. 43).

Garfinkel states that the method of discovering agreement by eliciting or imposing a respect for the rule of practical circumstances, is a version of practical ethics. Garfinkel (1967) provides another example to make this point; two persons were having a conversation whereby after a considerable time, one of the individuals in the conversation reveals a hidden tape recorder. Upon seeing the hidden tape recorder the other participant asked what the person with the tape recorder was going to do with the recording of the conversation, the point being that an agreed upon privacy was thereupon identified and treated as though it had operated all along (p. 75). These two examples suggest that much of our everyday interactive discourse takes place within an understandable and legitimate space. This space represents the everyday ordinary discourse as a practical ethics. It would be hard to imagine a social world in which we had to continuously explicate the

assumptions and terms of our interaction; this task would prove to be incredibly arduous that we would make our present, taken-for-granted way of interacting impossible.

The second event that takes place when we interact is that within the ethical space that maintains and sustains being we also negotiate new ways of being. The need for meaning only arises or takes shape when there is another; for we need some sort of shared expression to operate together with any sort of significance. Meaning takes shape in interaction and because interactions cannot be predefined; we are constantly creating new meanings within these spaces. An example proposed by Shotter (1993a) is helpful in understanding how meanings can be both constrained and created in interactions. Meanings that are maintained are likened to a riverbed. The water that flows through the riverbed is like the ongoing, moving and changing discursive interactions that we are constantly engaged in. The water, like interaction, slowly reshapes and changes the construction of the riverbed which is thought to represent the already constructed meanings that are maintained in everyday practical ethical relations. This example is useful in that it also reflects the nature of communicative interaction as a living, dynamic process. What is thought of as 'true' moral principles are then conceived as negotiated moral principles that have been worked out historically in communicative interaction.

### Summary

The nature of discourse, because of our need to communicate in intelligible and acceptable ways to interact at all, is fundamentally ethical. The work of Garfinkel, Bakhtin, and Shotter describe social interaction and being as ethically grounded in this way. We are embedded in an ethically textured landscape that both entails opportunity for actions and constrain other possible actions differentially according to the positioning of the context. The ethical nature of discourse is itself a historical and cultural product of ideological controversies that make thinking and deliberating possible. Kohlberg's formal

model of moral reasoning fails to consider the ethical nature of discourse and instead focuses on judgments. This focus on judgments ignores that the same actions or responses that persons use to comply with standardized expectancies are used to discover, create, and sustain this standard in the first place. Expected standards of behavior and action in moral situations are both entwined in the discursive matrix of ethical discourse that continue to constitute and reconstitute being.

The present project becomes an ontological one in which the construction of being is the focus. This is in contrast to an epistemological project that discusses what one comes to know. The epistemological project, by focusing on what one comes to know, ignores the social moment by moment ethical nature of being. Acting morally is not acting according to *justifiable principles* that exist out there somewhere outside of us. There are no principles or standards as such, standards are 'felt', sustained, and negotiated in the everyday discourse of our lives with those others with whom we share it (Shotter, 1992, 1993a, 1994). Discourse, language or communication is one of the vehicles or tools we use to sustain, create, and mediate being. It is this tool that will be used in the present thesis to examine the exigencies of our everyday ethical discourse and the negotiating and maintenance of our moral beliefs

### Discourse

Viewing persons as socially constructed focuses on the worldly and social, rather than on the referential nature of language. It calls into question the assumption of separate psychological entities and processes and the attempt to grasp, measure and control such entities and processes in their essential purity. The goals of the social construction perspective draws attention to textuality; the linguistic role played by rhetoric, metaphor and analogy in the constitution of a supposed psychological entity. This perspective is a form of a deconstructive strategy that serves to illuminate the discursive work necessary to

constitute these psychological entities and processes as upholding the impression of 'thinghood' (Stenner & Eccelston, 1994). Social constructionism enables a recognition that psychological processes are not neutral descriptions of pre-existing structures, but that discourse and the social matrix within which it takes place, serves to actively transform and produce their objects of inquiry. When we consider the description of Kohlberg's life, and the social context that formed developmental psychology, we can recognize that the model of moral judgment is a reification of how moral reasoning is thought to develop. Interestingly, from a social constructionist perspective, the traditional method of arriving at formal models of psychological processes can be thought to de-politicize and de-moralize conceptions of morality by stripping away the discursive textuality that allows us to consider them as such.

The discursive approach used in the present thesis embraces the social-historical view of discourse. With this view discourses are theorized as social-historical products of knowledge (McHoul & Luke, 1989). In the spirit of Foucault (1979; Sheridan, 1980) the production of subjects and the relations between power and knowledge is built into, and is part of the theory that underlies discourse analysis. From this perspective discourse becomes more than just language-as-representational. That is, more than the belief that language reflects and reveals pre-existing underlying thoughts.

Discourse analysis is a 'radical theoretical rethinking' of being that includes a reflexive involvement with political and ethical concerns and uncertainties (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this sense, and as any theory cannot help but do, discourse analysis and the position taken in the present thesis is making a moral claim about life and how to study it. No theory as such can ever be a final account of a particular construct or theory of life. This is the social constructionist point that is being made in the present thesis. The socially constructed ethical nature of being suggests that we are in an ongoing living matrix with each other, whatever we try and theorize is couched within this

matrix, and the matrix is always changing so that we can never grasp what it is, or will be. The problem becomes trying to talk about something with concrete words and images that has neither of these characteristics, and what we are left with is some sort of ability to be critical of the theories and truths we produce and what their possible consequences may be. The underlying moral claim is that we can at least attempt to be accountable for what we say and do within the ethical matrix in which we think and live.

As it applies to the present analysis, the ethical nature of everyday discourse will be examined to illuminate that ethics and morals are not fixed but negotiated parts of our being that are discursively produced and maintained. With this type of analysis there is the possibility for a reflexive survey of what and how things are said. This is possible because one can go back to the transcripts to examine the interpretations that are made rather than have people tick boxes to predefined responses and assume that these responses reflect what we have determined that they mean. This is not to imply that one is ascertaining the truth to persons or situations; it is to suggest that meanings and being is constructed in talk or discourse. A reflexive survey also entails the acknowledgement that we are all enmeshed in systems of thought and certain circumstances (e.g., I am a student in a University that has certain requirements, standards and expectations) that are part of the construction of knowledge and of selves.

## II. METHOD

The arguments presented in this thesis will be advanced in the following manner. The everyday ethically practical negotiation that we engage in will be analyzed discursively to elucidate the ethical nature of talk. The dilemmatic themes that are deliberated over will also be discursively analyzed to point out the controversial nature of thinking and of the moral dilemmas we discuss in our everyday life. This approach will illuminate the dynamic

nature of moral claims that are drawn upon in talk to make new claims, negotiate ourselves as moral agents and to perpetuate certain ways of being. Everyday talk will be analyzed to demonstrate that we interact within an ethical space to manage ourselves in talk and in which we negotiate ourselves in social contexts. The contexts themselves are social, historical constructions that impose their own moral constraints on what we can say and do to position ourselves as moral agents.

### Discourse Analysis

The definition of discourse analysis described by Potter and Wetherell (1987) is the analysis of all forms of spoken interaction (formal or informal) and written texts of any kind in an effort to get a better understanding of social life and social interaction. Discourse can also refer to nonverbal and paralinguistic cues, as well as symbolic and visual information that form part of our lingual world. Meaning about life and being are also entwined in these non-verbal but still lingual mediums. For practical and theoretical reasons the present thesis will focus on everyday verbal language to the greatest extent, and non-verbal cues to a much lesser extent to provide important information in making sense of the analysis. Discourse analysis views language as constructive of our social world and therefore of ourselves. Discourse is regarded as the place where meaning is negotiated, constituted, reconstituted, and maintained. Therefore, Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edwards and Potter (1992) argue that the present meaning of self as a self-contained entity is also constructed and maintained discursively.

Discourse analysis regards language as constructive and performative rather than as descriptive or referential (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The focus of discourse analysis is with the function and construction of discourse. Any consistency in talk is regarded as discourse that is serving the same function; it is not regarded as a description of some 'real' phenomena or event. The

function of discourse can be thought to represent the ethical positions that we adhere to and position others by. The function of discourse is not meant to strictly imply personal intention by any one speaker but is something that grows out of interaction. The ethical nature of everyday talk is suggestive of something that goes unnoticed and is taken-for-granted. It is this taken-for-granted nature of talk that allows a conceptualization of concepts as truths or facts that may appear static in nature. The dynamic nature of talk that serves to position and re-position us is what is traditionally not considered and which is the focus of the present thesis. Talk is not regarded as separate from the person who speaks it or from the interactions from which it arise. In the spirit of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), discourse can be thought of as a multileveled speech act in which more than one voice participates suggesting that no single text or utterance represents one voice alone. This conceptualization points to the social and constructive nature of talk. In this sense, discourse analysis is more concerned with the divergencies in talk and what the function such divergencies serve.

Examples of discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Mulkay & Gilbert, 1982; Potter & Edwards, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988) have pointed to the variability in talk by detecting the divergent discourses of a particular person from a number of contexts that attempt to serve the same function. Therefore, contradictory talk may be drawn upon to serve that same function. Conversely, these discourse analysts have also found that one person's consistent discourse is applied in a number of contradictory contexts. This means that what people say may not be consistent and non-contradictory as traditional methods of inquiry assume that it is. Together the concept of variation and function point to the constructive nature of discourse. Accounts of the world are built on pre-existing linguistic meaning, are selective of certain resources, omit others and are consequential to certain events or situations. Discursive psychology is concerned with bringing the peripheral and contextual phenomena into

analytical focus. In this sense people's talk is viewed as practical action not a description of disinterested truth as is done in the traditional method of psychological inquiry espoused by theorists such as Kohlberg.

### The Participants

The moral discussion of six focus groups of three to four friends (plus myself as the researcher) were discursively analyzed to elucidate the ethical nature of everyday discourse and the moral talk that is drawn upon when persons are debating over moral dilemmas. Groups of friends were chosen in an effort to create a context that was representative of everyday discourse. Although the focus group participants were obviously aware that their talk was going to be 'analyzed', this format of collecting discourse was, for my purposes and for the interpretation of discourse in general, preferable to one to one interviews or written questionnaires. However, the converse is also true; any type of discourse contains moral claims made within an ethical domain, therefore, the choice of focus groups of friends is in many ways an arbitrary one that enabled the acquisition of a type of everyday discourse.

The participants include individuals from differing occupations and age groups (see Table 1). All of the adolescents in the study were recruited from a shelter for homeless teenagers. Because the concerns of the present research is not with discovering theoretical axioms that describe or proscribe the canons of moral reasoning and development, the concerns that are traditionally quite important in contemporary psychology lack significance here. Therefore, no attempt was made to target a specific educational or social economical group, nor to have equal numbers of males and females, nor to have varying age groups so as to permit generalizable results and/or to control for possible confounds. The only significance that personal demographics holds for the present study is that these variables are important contextual and social cues for what the function that particular participants'



talk may be serving. The importance of context for discourse analysis is the broader social and historical practices in which we live that serve to form our being and in which we implicitly draw on in our talk with each other and ourselves. Thus, in the analysis context will entail (1) the context of the conversation, (2) the personal context of the speaker that they bring to the conversation (i.e., their position in society as a mother or an adolescent etc.), and (3) the broader ideological meanings that are tacit in our conversations.

Four of the focus group sessions were video and audio tape recorded in comfortable surroundings at the University of Calgary and transcribed verbatim. The two groups from the homeless shelter were only audio recorded. Each focus group discussion was approximately one and one half hours long. No standard questions were asked. The consent form that participants were asked to sign delineated that the project was an examination of everyday discourse about moral issues and that they, the participants, were free to discuss any issues they wished. I did participate in the sessions as well, however, and therefore my talk will constitute part of the discourse to be analyzed.

Table 1. Demographics for Participants Organized by Focus Group

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation
Janet	37	Part time teacher
Kara	29	Part time aerobic instructor
Nancy	23	Stay at home mom
Sara	29	Social Worker (B.Sw.)
Alice	29	Oil Industry - Engineer's Assistant
Marla	43	Social worker (M.Sw.)
Cathy	22	Undergraduate Student
Lisa	29	Free lance Actress
Silvia	26	Stay at home mom
Mary	31	Admissions Advisor
Gail	31	Admissions Advisor
Susan	27	Admissions Advisor
Carol	30	Admissions Advisor
Carl	15	Homeless Adolescent
Adam	14	Homeless Adolescent
Nick	14	Homeless Adolescent
Natalie	14	Homeless Adolescent
Debra	14	Homeless Adolescent
Ellen	16	Homeless Adolescent

### III. RESULTS

The group discussion excerpts that will be provided are examples of the moral discursive work that individuals necessarily engage in when interacting. The excerpts that were chosen for presentation here are a very small portion of the entire selection of the transcribed focus group sessions. Choice of presentation was again mostly arbitrary, except that I attempted to provide a variety of topics and discursive positionings, while at the same maintaining a thread of connection between the seven examples. The excerpts will not be edited in any way. They are out of context in the sense that I am unable to present the entire discussion, but the excerpts are extensive in that I have attempted to provide the bulk of the discussion pertaining to the issues that I have chosen to present. Where I felt it was important I have included pertinent information to fill in the context for the reader.

The purpose of retaining the conversations in verbatim form is to point out that often conversations are desultory in their execution and incomplete in terms of sentence structure or in the giving, of what may seem, important information in understanding what is being said. Nevertheless, persons in conversations do interact in this way and apparently understand what is being said quite well. This is particularly true of persons that have known each other for a long time (i.e., friends) as was the case in most of the excerpts that will be provided. In the transcripts it is usually myself who asks for clarification especially when it appeared that the other group members had a shared understanding that I did not possess. This understanding was partly in terms of content, not having the information of the topic that was being discussed, and also in terms of expressions and in ways of interacting. I would define this as one aspect of interaction that is part of our discursive understanding of interactions in general. I would argue however,

that this level of understanding operates between all people for the same reasons that enable these groups of friends to communicate in the first place.

The ability to understand what others are saying, especially when it is opaque to others, is evidence of the ethical nature of discourse in that we trust that others will fill in the gaps of what is meant by what we fail to provide. This gap filling goes on very quickly and unnoticeably, and as Garfinkel (1967) points out, cases in which students explicated every detail of what is meant or said are treated with skepticism. Therefore gap filling is a necessary event that goes on at an everyday level in all of our interactions, whether in text form or in conversation, and not just simply between persons who have known each other for a long time. Given the nature of everyday discourse, and as the following excerpts will suggest, a shared understanding necessarily entails that meanings saturate the way we interact and communicate. Words or actions have these implicit meanings attached to them that suggest certain things about events or persons. So although we may not be aware of it, what we say and do has huge implications for what we know and think, and consequently, for how we can 'be'. This is possible because these meanings, which are based in ideology, are perpetuated through interaction and because we need this shared understanding to interact at all.

Many of the excerpts that will be presented appear quite mundane, but this only emphasizes that even within mundane conversations that appear neutral and unimportant to our being, one discursively engages in moral work and makes certain moral claims that impact life and being. Therefore, even in mundane talk one is still perpetuating, maintaining, and constructing our moral beliefs about persons and events. We perpetuate moral beliefs because the ideological discourses that we implicitly draw upon in mundane talk, as in any talk, are imbued with moral claims that we discuss in a necessarily practical ethical manner.

Excerpt #1: Negotiation in an Everyday Conversation

The following excerpt emphasizes the moral work that is engaged in when a baby cries. A baby crying is a very distressing sound for anyone to have to listen to and is also the cause of many interruptions to adult life. Often the mother of the child is held responsible for the child, as well as any disturbances the child will cause to others in the vicinity. The following focus group session with three friends and myself as the researcher is interesting in that we all partake in moral work to lessen the blame or responsibility of the annoying sounds of crying to the mother and the child. In discursively abating and managing the event, moral ideologies are being maintained and worked out.

The group consists of Silvia, the mother of the seven week old infant Vera, two of Silvia's friends, Lisa and Cathy, and myself. The group is in the middle of a conversation in which Lisa is recounting an experience that we are all listening to and questioning her about when the baby begins to cry loudly after a long series of fussy squeaks and peeps. It is interesting that it is the members of the group, other than the mother, that initiate the conversation that draws attention to the crying, or more aptly to call the mother's attention to the crying which she has not acknowledged up to our mentioning it. Notice, the child had been making many sounds up to now, but the loud crying, something that cannot be ignored as the earlier sounds, provides sufficient occasion for a comment from one of the members of the group. Our practical ethics require that we not rudely blurt out 'shut that baby up' or even suggest something much more sympathetic if the incident doesn't warrant it (e.g., fussy squeaks verses a loud cry), or explicitly raise concerns about the mother's failure to appropriately meet her maternal responsibilities.

The following excerpt illustrates how talk is used to accomplish the function of managing the loud crying in a way that will not be offensive. This snippet of the extract begins with Lisa telling her story when the baby gives a loud cry.

(1) Lisa:        You know what he said to me, he said, you wait until you're married. And I said, daaad, what if I never get married? And he goes, well that's

your problem. (laughs) But I couldn't believe he was that narrow-minded. It really surprised me, in spite of my catholic upbringing and things.

**Baby crying loudly.**

(2) Rita: Hungry?

(3) Cathy: Oh, you crybaby.

The baby's crying is first acknowledged by myself (line #2) to suggest that perhaps the baby should be fed. This statement in regards to the hunger of the baby is a befitting concern given that babies are known to cry when they are hungry. My statement serves to acknowledge the interruption in an acceptable and caring way by suggesting something that will help the baby feel better, and consequently, possibly causing something to be done about the annoying sound of the crying and the interruption to my data collection. Cathy chimes in with agreement by making a joke about the crying in line #3. The joke serves to acknowledge the crying but not by inferring that there is anything unusual about the crying. Jokes are often made about every day common occurrences to point out that what makes them funny in the first place is that the content of the joke is so common and ordinary. Jokes can be a way of acknowledging something that occurs often that may be unfavorable in an acceptable tone because part of the discourse surrounding jokes is that they are entertaining; 'it's only a joke', and therefore, not to be taken seriously or offensively. The comments by Cathy and myself serve to draw attention to the crying, that has been building for some time, in an acceptable manner.

Once the crying has been acknowledged the excerpt continues with Lisa and myself quickly making statements (see lines 4 and 5 below) that infer that the baby is still a precious being and although the crying is annoying, the baby, herself is not. These statements by Lisa and myself also ward off any negative interpretation of Cathy's comment, "you crybaby". Thus, one can see how the issue of crying is being morally negotiated to position it in a certain light, as well as for those who are discussing it.

(4) Lisa: Ohh, she's so sweet.

(5) Rita: She's adorable.

(6) Silvia: Even when she's crying. Oh well, and that is like, you can tell. She just wants food. Something to eat. Ohhh, Ohhh.

- (7) Lisa: Her little lip.  
 (laughter)  
 (8) Rita: I love that little quiver.  
 (9) Lisa: Doesn't it make you miss Cory? Like when he was that little?  
 (10) Rita: Yeah. Actually, I have a friend who has a two-month old baby, and we baby-sat him on Saturday night? And feeding him, and like with, with a bottle, obviously. Silly. And it was, it was so wonderful to see them little cheeks, you know. They're going like this, sucking, it's so cute.  
 (11) Lisa: Was he okay to be without his mom?  
 (12) Rita: He's a really, yeah, he's a good baby. He had a little bit of a fussy time, but he was pretty good. I've been around him a bit, too, ...  
 (13) Lisa: so he knows you.  
 (14) Rita: ...so it wasn't a total. Plus he's not quite three months, so ...  
 (15) Lisa: That's still so little. And she's what, two months?  
 (16) Silvia: Seven weeks.  
 (17) Rita: When was her, birthday?  
 (18) Silvia: She was uh, January 18.  
 (19) Rita: Okay. Yeah, she was, so that little guy's a little bit older.  
 Baby crying.  
 (20) Silvia: I'm still pissed off (mimicking what baby would say? Obviously joking)  
 (laughter)  
 (21) Rita: Didn't, she didn't want you to forget.  
 (22) Lisa: What do you want to talk about now, girls?

Lisa quickly refers to the sweetness of the baby in line #4 with myself agreeing with "she's adorable" in line #5. There is a moral ethic that surrounds the notion of babies; they are wonderful, precious beings without malice or antisocial tendencies that we need to protect and love. Thus, the statements by Lisa and myself can be regarded as moral work to maintain this notion of babies as precious, and by doing so, we maintain ourselves as moral agents (i.e., we too like babies). This claim is further emphasized in the talk that follows that refers to the characteristics of babies (i.e., the lip quivering in line #'s 7 and 8) and is emphasized with a story about another baby who exhibits the same qualities (line #10 - 15). During this section Lisa and I describe babies in positive terms. In line #10 I characterize a common event such as feeding as "wonderful". In line #15 Lisa states how "so little" 3 month old babies are. Something "so little" connotes something that is precious and fragile that needs to be protected. As well, in line # 9 Lisa brings up when my son Cory was a baby to imply what a wonderful time babyhood is and don't I miss it because of this.

Lines #15 - 19 are inquisitive statements about the age of babies, probably the most often asked question to new parents. This type of questioning serves to invoke interest in the baby by the one who asks the question. Interest serves to position the person who initiates the conversation as someone who is caring and concerned about the matter being discussed. Therefore, by asking Silvia about Vera's age and comparing her to the baby I know, I position myself in a positive moral light. Notice, the discussion is for my research project, therefore I could potentially be annoyed. The comments in regards to babies and their ages serve to deflect a negative interpretation of my earlier comment that initiated the attention to Vera's crying and her subsequently being fed.

The discursive work going on in lines #7 - 19 is also suggestive of a kind of consensus described by Edwards and Potter (1992) in which independent events or stories creates a normativity surrounding the issue being discussed. As in regards to the present extract the independent stories about other babies and their behavior normalize the behavior of baby Vera. The implication is that all babies exhibit these types of behavior and so there is nothing unusual about Vera's crying, while also bringing up the wonderful qualities babies possess to offset the negatives affects produced by their crying and fussing.

Earlier in line #6, Silvia herself discursively normalizes the behavior of baby Vera by agreeing that she's cute even when she's crying, and you know she's just hungry, therefore, she's crying for a good reason. The crying is subsequently justified by the discursive work that attempts to normalize it and position it in a favorable light. The statement/joke ("I'm still pissed off") in line #21 made by Silvia is another example of the moral work needed to exonerate the baby for continuing to cry even after the problem of the outburst was identified and taken care of (i.e., feeding the baby). In line #22 I aid the situation by discursively positioning the baby in a morally good light by making a joke of my own, "she didn't want you to forget". This statement that I make re-directs the possible reasons for the continued crying as one that is not serious. Again, the crying gets justified



or managed as not being problematic and directs responsibility towards the mother ("don't forget").

The final statement made by Lisa (line #22) serves to negotiate a new topic for discussion. Notice that it was Lisa who was originally interrupted. Although not presented here, her comment successfully re-positions the discussion for her to complete the story she had begun when the talk of crying took over. By asking the group what they wanted to "talk about now" Lisa was able to re-position the discussion back to the recounting of her story in an acceptable tone that is not overly pushy or interruptive. By so doing, she successfully positions herself in an ethical manner and maintains herself as a moral agent as befits contemporary levels of decorum, while serving to re-position the discussion back to her story.

What's interesting in the above extract is that in an attempt to exonerate the baby we were all engaged in ascribing the baby's intent for crying; an intent that we morally positioned as acceptable and understandable. By positioning the baby, and the baby's behavior as moral, several other things were also being accomplished: (1) the mother was being exonerated for being the cause of the baby's crying; that is, babies cry for good reasons (e.g., hunger), therefore, it is not because the mother is a poor parent, (2) the group was maintaining themselves as moral agents by discursively positioning themselves as persons who like babies and find them precious even though the crying may have become annoying, and (3) there is a general attitude towards babies and mothers that was being maintained and negotiated.

The general attitude towards babies and mothers that was being maintained is that, first, breastfeeding is okay in public. The group continued to discuss babies as the mother was preparing to breast-feed. Continuing to talk gave the mother the needed privacy and time to begin to feed her baby and not be left out of the conversation that was going on before the baby began to cry. This behavior also suggests that persons may

become uncomfortable in the presence of breast-feeding, and talking about the baby served to deflect any talk or acknowledgment in regards to the activity of breast-feeding. Being uncomfortable draws on a discourse about bodies that says that they need to be covered up in public. The second attitude or issue in regards to babies and mothers, is that babies are special and wanted although they are a lot of work and can be disruptive to a 'normal' life. The normalizing statements made by the group in regards to the baby's behavior served to support the mother in what can be considered a difficult situation. In maintaining these discourses that position mothers and babies in a favorable light we also maintained ourselves as moral persons, that is, as persons who are caring and sympathetic towards mothers and babies. This general attitude towards babies and mothers is picked up again two pages later in the transcript.

- (1) Rita: Do you want to put a blanket, we can set her down here, or ... that way, I don't know ...
- (2) Cathy: then she's in the center of it all.
- (3) Rita: Yeah, and I can see her better.
- (Laughter)
- (4) Silvia: Come on over here.
- (5) Lisa: She's good, today, Silvia, she's quiet. Even when she, even when she cried she was quiet.
- (6) Silvia: She's always, that, that day at your place was just an awful day.
- (7) Lisa: Oh, she was, yeah, she wasn't having a good day that day.
- (8) Silvia: And then, and then uhm, like a week later I was at Tina's mother's place and she was the same way and so Tina's mom is convinced I have a colicky child. And phones me, you know, every other day with different cures she's heard of.
- (9) Lisa: Oh, well ....
- (10) Silvia: I'm like, my baby's fine. (laughter)
- (11) Rita: Babies cry. (laughter) I don't know where they get 'sleep like a baby from', because it's not true.
- (laughter)
- (12) Lisa: Sleep like a baby's parent. (laughter)
- (13) Rita: Like they want to.
- (14) Lisa: Yeah.

In the first three lines Cathy and I make suggestions to help Silvia with the baby now that she has finished breast-feeding. These statements are discursively positioned to again draw on how wonderful babies are (e.g., "she's in the centre" and "I can see her better"). In line #5 Lisa comments on how "quiet" Vera has been (even when she cried).

Again the discussion has turned to crying; the fact that there is so much discussion around a rather mundane event connotes the ideological and dilemmatic nature surrounding the issue of babies crying. The very transaction indicates that the participants are employed in the dilemmatic discourse that argues: (1) that there is something wrong with a particular baby (and therefore the parents) if babies cry too much or too often, versus (2) all babies cry, so therefore, crying is normal behavior suggesting that it is neither the mother or the baby's fault. The two sides of this dilemma get played out in the rest of the excerpt.

First, Silvia points out in line #6 that the one day at Lisa's house when Vera was crying was not Vera's usual behavior. Lisa confirms Silvia's rendition in line #7 indicating that yes, Vera was indeed not having a good day that day. Notice, Lisa only agrees that Vera was upset that day at her house not that the behavior was unusual. Given that Vera was also upset today but was able to be appeased Silvia is in a good position to explain the incessant crying that Lisa witnessed that day at her house. In line #8 Silvia relays another story about a day in which Vera cried often, as unusual. Silvia builds a story or sequence of events that allows her to position Vera as a normal baby who cries just like other babies by indicating that Tina's mother based her judgment about Vera's behavior on one unusual day is ill-founded. Silvia also draws on a discourse about 'wives tales' concerning cures for colicky babies. Silvia's reference to Tina's mom's cures positions these ideas as outdated myths, and therefore, serves to illegitimize the concern that there is a problem with Vera. As well, by drawing on this discourse Silvia discursively positions Lisa to inferring that the day at Lisa's house was also unusual. This discursive move by Silvia also positions the rest of us to infer that Vera's crying is normal; that is, there is nothing wrong with her baby or her mothering abilities. She gets support from Lisa and I in lines #10 - 14 where again we normalize Vera's crying by discursively specifying that all babies cry, therefore suggesting that there is nothing wrong with babies who cry because

all babies do it. Our jokes about this issue infer that it is silly to problematize the cries of babies.

Vera's crying became quite an issue as evidenced in all the talk surrounding it. In this talk the dilemmatic nature of crying was played out. Ideologically speaking it appears that crying was talked about in the first place because it is an issue. Crying is an indication that something is wrong. It could be that the parent (usually the mother when it comes to babies) is not doing a proper job. If crying is normal then the mother is exonerated; if not, then perhaps the mother is to blame in some way. Motherhood is considered to be natural, and if a mother does not know what is wrong then something is wrong with her natural instincts. Silvia draws on this discourse in line #6 from the first extract when she says in response to Vera's crying that "you can tell...she just wants food". Here, Silvia is indicating her natural abilities that help her detect what Vera's cries mean. Silvia positions herself as a good mother who can understand the cries of her seven week old infant. The notion of a good mother goes along with the moral sentiment regarding babies and children as precious beings who need our care. The ideology surrounding mothering is someone who is nurturing, caring and loving towards their offspring, part of which includes a certain amount of self-sacrifice.

The ideological picture of what a good mother is has been played out in the case of Susan Smith. Susan Smith was recently convicted of murdering her two children by drowning them. She strapped her 1 and 3 year old boys in the back seat of her car and then pushed the car into a lake. The public is outraged that a 'mother' could do such a thing to her 'own' children. In America terrible killings are committed everyday that do not receive near the publicity this case did. I believe that one of the main reasons this case was given so much attention was because of the strong moral ethic surrounding our constructed notions of motherhood. Susan Smith 'must surely be evil' if she could do such a thing. The other side of the dilemmatic argument that says she must not have known what she

was doing was thrown out given that it was discovered that she must have watched the children drown. I am making no attempt to exonerate Susan Smith's actions, only to point out how certain taken-for-granted beliefs permeate our lives. The public raising up of the case of Susan Smith emphasizes and maintains our ideological beliefs about motherhood, and allowed the positioning of the story the way it was in the media.

In the above excerpt about baby Vera we were all immersed in negotiating the meaning of a baby crying. In making sense of this event we were implicitly drawing on ideological discourses (i.e., a mother is responsible for the behavior of her infant) that made certain inferences (i.e., babies cry for good reasons; to be fed) that serve to maintain certain beliefs (i.e., babies need to be protected). The discourses that are drawn upon and how these are negotiated are morally positioned and ethically accomplished. None of the ideological meanings were explicitly stated, but nonetheless, the broader meanings of what can be said has these ideological meanings attached onto our discourse about the event in question. The same is true of the discourse about the case of Susan Smith. Things are said in a certain way that meet with conceptions of understandable and well established conventions (e.g., 'Is the baby hungry?' versus 'That baby is really annoying me'). Although, this may appear limiting, new meanings are negotiable, but they still need to be morally and ethically accomplished to be acceptable and understandable as worthwhile to consider. It is not that someone can be 'rude' and say 'I dislike babies', but to do so one is positioning themselves in a way that leads to certain consequences. The context, or the stake of interest in a situation, is part of the meanings that are negotiable to be positioned as acceptable or not from particular perspectives. There are numerous possibilities.

The moral ethic concerning babies or children in general is emphasized when we consider cases in which adopted babies are fought over by their biological and adoptive parents. Although the decision making process is different between the US<sup>1</sup> and Canada<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> In the US if one of the parents has not given up legal rights to the custody of the child after an adoption order has gone through they can legally fight and attain custody. The much publicized cases of Baby Jessica

in both cases the well-being of the child is what is addressed even though the final decision of where the child will reside may be different in each country. The detail to notice in all of this is that the well being of the adoptive parents is not considered in either country when deliberating over the residence of the child. We have a moral ethic around children that is quite strong in protecting them in regards to emotional and physical trauma. This level of protection is rightly justified in that children cannot do it for themselves. Adults on the other hand are held accountable for their own protection, although of course we have rights in place to protect them against other adults. These two discourses in regards to adults are part of a dilemma of their own (e.g., 'we have personal choice in what happens to us' versus 'we are victim to the ill behavior of others'). For the present example the point to notice is, however, that the moral ethic around children is so much a part of how we feel and treat children that our actions and beliefs, as emphasized in our laws, are enmeshed with the constructed notion of children as needing to be protected above all else.

The implied need to protect children is evidenced in both the excerpts provided and in cases of the legal rights to adopted children. The result of unquestioned beliefs is that, as a society, we fail to consider that there may be other important ways to view the events and the decisions that we make. It is conceivable that the emotional trauma leveled at the adoptive parents who have their child taken from them would be quite profound. It is often said that the death of a child is one of the most difficult losses to experience. A loss akin to death is the type of experience that the adoptive parents would meet with if their adopted child were taken away from them. Given the moral ethic surrounding children, the emotional trauma that would be experienced by the adoptive parents (which in many ways may be more severe than that of the child's) is something that is not even mentioned in the media or of grave concern in the legal deliberation in such cases.

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and Baby Richard are recent examples in which the biological fathers were unaware of their status as fathers before the adoption and thus were able to attain legal custody after a number of court battles.

<sup>2</sup> In Canada the legal rights of the biological child are suspended once the child has been with the adopted parents for a certain period of time.

The adoption example is meant to illustrate the strong moral ethic we have in regards to children that we do not even question certain decision making practices and other issues (i.e., the trauma to the adoptive parent) that we would in other circumstances. Although, in the US the biological rights of the parents are taken into account, in both the US and Canada it is the well-being of the child that is the main concern. This is not to suggest that this concern is ill-founded but only to point out how certain moral claims may position us to view events in a certain way and ignore others. Children eventually become adults and we are all human beings: Why in the case of adoption rights is it that the child's well-being is more important than that of an adult? Who decided that? Why is it justified? The point is that our conceptions about children and adults have been discursively constructed to be viewed in a certain way.

The mundane talk about babies and the situation of adopted children presented above, reflect how ideological conceptions of childhood get played out in our everyday talk. The implication is profound for who we are and what we believe and do. Acknowledging that events and beliefs are social constructions suggests that certain practices or understandings are not reified practices, and this acknowledgment creates a possibility for change. Viewing life and being as intricately constructed through and within language enables the possibility for understanding life and social problems in a different way. For instance, in the case of children with emotional problems, examining the interactive process that served to construct these problems could prove to be beneficial in the alleviation of such issues. The possibilities and opportunities are numerous.

Another discourse drawn upon in the moral work engaged in the talk about babies is that parents are held accountable for the behavior of their children. The case of Susan Smith also emphasizes this perception. Again the notion that parents are accountable for the behavior of their children is part of the moral ideology that says we need to protect children. Problems often arise, however, when children become adolescents and the

dividing line between adulthood and childhood becomes fuzzy. Attempting to decide who is accountable in the case of adolescents is much more difficult than that of younger children. This difficulty is evidenced in the Young Offenders Act and all the controversy surrounding it. The Young Offenders Act is itself, however, a construction based in social and historical circumstances that uphold certain ideological positions. Adolescence is often a turbulent time for parents as well as teenagers (e.g., the amount of literature about this issue attests to this fact), and is a time when parents and children may have a difficult time with their relationship. The situation and existence of Avenue 15 (where the two focus groups of homeless adolescents were conducted) affirm that adolescents is a difficult time for both parents and children. Avenue 15 operates as a safe-haven for teenagers with no place to go whatever the reasons may be. Analyzing the talk of teenagers illuminates the discourse about teenagers from Avenue 15, and the parents of teenagers, that serves to negotiate elements of accountability for teenage behavior. It should be known that it the choice of the adolescents to come to Avenue 15; a parent cannot make a child come or stay there, it is the choice of the young person.

Excerpt #2: Negotiation of Personal Culpability

The following excerpt involves three teenage girls, Natalie, Debra, Ellen and myself discussing what teenagers are into.

- (1) Rita: Well, what other kinds of things go on?
- (2) Ellen: There's a lot of things that's adults don't have a clue about. They hear, they hear through media, through newspapers, they think all teenagers are bad, it's always our fault. But what did I do to get hit in the morning when I'm brushing my teeth? I didn't do anything.
- (3) Natalie: And they don't know ...

I ask the question in line #1 after hearing them tell me some shocking stories about teenage actions involving violence, prostitution and drugs. My question in line #1 can be regarded as positioning the girls to justify teenage behavior given the context in which I asked it. The three girls quickly get into a discussion about the accountability for teenage



behavior. Ellen in line #2 turns to the discriminating information that the media presents that serves to position teenagers as the doers of evil; the ones that are at fault. She presents this information in a way that suggests that the media may accurately present what some teenagers do, (1) but not why they end up doing it or (2) that not all teenagers are like the reports that the media publicizes. Here Ellen provides two reasons to discredit the media's rendition of teenage behavior. Given that Ellen has already positioned herself as a teenager who has done 'bad' things (she has told me that she is on probation for theft, that she was expelled from her last school, and that she has run away from home) she discursively continues with the first example (i.e., the media does not report 'why' teenagers do 'bad' things) in rendering her account.

In this statement, however, Ellen never explicitly says what the teenagers do that is bad. This vague rendition by Ellen provides a barrier to having her story undermined while at the same time providing enough information for a particular inference to be made; 'the media is always blaming teenagers', and therefore, this is what society/adults ends up erroneously believing about them. Edwards and Potter (1992) describe this discursive strategy as systematic vagueness where rich detail can be useful in certain situations it can also provide leverage for initiating a rebuttal. Therefore, providing vague information wards off a rebuttal but allows for a specific inference to be made. The supposition that Ellen discursively positions the listener to infer (teenage behavior is not the fault of teenagers) supports her first statement in this extract; "...adults don't have a clue".

Ellen follows her statement about the media that infers that teenage behavior is not the fault of teenagers, with a personal example of her own that can explain her own behavior; "[W]hat did I do to get hit in the morning when I'm brushing my teeth?". This statement by Ellen does several things; (1) it is also vague; we don't know what Ellen may have done to precipitate this event, so again the vagueness deters any rebuttals while implying that her dad was physically abusive towards her, (2) she does provide enough

detail to suggest that she was involved in an innocuous activity at the time of being harmed which implies that she had not done anything to bring on the incident; this gives her leverage to complete her statement with "I didn't do anything.", and (3) she has described an occurrence that the media could have no knowledge of which serves to emphasize her earlier point; that adults don't know what goes on in regards to teenagers, and therefore erroneously blame teenagers for their 'bad' behavior. Natalie supports Ellen's argument in line #3 which encourages Ellen to continue with her rendition in explaining teenage behavior.

- (4) Ellen: What did she do to have her mother addicted, to stuff? (referring to Debra)
- (5) Debra: Yeah.
- (6) Ellen: Nothing. And people think it's the children that drive em, teenagers drive them.
- (7) Natalie: It's the parents that drive the teenagers to do the things. Like, I know it's like our fault too, cuz it's our choices? But, I mean, you know?
- (8) Ellen: Sometimes ...

In line #4 Ellen provides another example in which teenage actions were not the fault of the teenager. The problem that Ellen eludes to is the individual consequences of group statements or stereotypes that homogenizes all teenage behavior as problematic. She refers to Debra's situation which Debra has previously just described in cogent detail to provide an example of an individual case that does not fit the stereotype. By drawing on Debra's situation that was narratively rich in information and causal implications in reference to her mother's dysfunctions, Ellen's statement discursively positions the listener into making certain discursive attributions. These attributions are that Debra and other teenagers in similar situations are positioned to be 'bad' because of their parents' dysfunctions. Now that this causal implication has been made the girls are discursively set up to provide personal examples that are evidence to the fact that they personally are not at fault for the situation that they are in.

In line #7 Natalie comes right out and says that "it's the parents that drive the teenagers to do stuff". She tempers her statement by saying that it's the fault of teenagers

as well, and follows with "But, I mean, you know". The "you know" at the end of this sentence is another example of systematic vagueness; it represents an idiomatic expression that does not lend itself to critical decomposition while surmising a certain conclusion ('the ill behavior of parents makes us this way', and 'because we are helpless children we are at the mercy of adults and act out what they teach us'). So although Natalie says that teenagers have choices which suggests that they may be responsible for their behavior, she discursively counters this claim with the "you know?". This is an effective strategy employed by Natalie because she doesn't entirely deny teenage responsibility while repositioning the inference to imply that ultimately parents have as much, or more, moral responsibility for the situation facing teenagers. Although the above extract is in the middle of the transcript, at the very beginning of the focus group session I asked these three girls to tell why they thought kids ended up at Avenue 15. The following extract includes Natalie and Ellen's immediate response to my question;

- >Rita: So, what I was interested in is uhm, for one, how do you think, or why do you think kids end up on the streets and end up coming to places like Avenue Fifteen?
- >Ellen: Parents.
- >Rita: Parents?
- >Ellen: Parents drive em out.
- >Natalie: Everybody's here because of their parents. Everybody's always...
- >Ellen: Well there'd be no reason why we'd come here without the reason of parents.

So it becomes apparent that the discourse that they engage in, is part of negotiating their earlier claim. I would imagine that this is a discourse that they often are positioned to draw upon in other contexts (e.g., school, with other family members, etc.) given their situation.

The girls start to provide their own personal example in the remainder of the extract in which they are involved in negotiating the notion that it is "parents that drive teenagers".

- (9) Debra: My mom even used to tell me it was my fault that she was doing drugs cuz it was, she always used to get fed up with us and then we were too much to handle and everything, but we were always so good. Like, you wouldn't believe, like I, and, like I still want to go to school and everything and, you know, I've, I've been through sooo much. Like, you wouldn't understand. And I, I've never, you know, like, I've never, ever ran away in my life, I've never called

anybody on her, like, you know, it was always somebody else in the family who was ...

(10) Natalie: It's like my mom blamed me for drinking because she said that we were driving her crazy and she needed to get stuff off her mind and stuff.

(11) Debra: So, even for drinking she would say that. Like she'd go out and get drunk and she'd come back, and I'd be out late, and I'd come back and she'd be sitting in the living room and she'd go, I'm sorry. And I go, well why are you drinking, and she goes well, I got worried cuz you were out late and she, she even knew where I was. Like I was...

(12) Natalie: Well my dad...  
(everybody talking together, here)

Debra provides her own personal example in line #9 where she says how her mom blamed Debra for her addictions. Here Debra draws on a general discourse that children are helpless victims, and therefore, her mother blaming her for her drug addiction is illogical given the relation of children to adults (i.e., children are in the care of adults).

In line #9 Debra further emphasizes the illogical conclusions of her mother by listing all the reasons why it couldn't be her fault that her mother is addicted to drugs.

Here Debra constructs a three part list;

- >1. she still wants to go to school
- >2. she's never run away
- >3. she has never reported her mom as an unfit parent

The three-part list is a discursive strategy that serves to construct a description which is treated as complete and representative (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The completeness of the description promotes the inference that Debra has done nothing to precipitate her mother's behavior. In fact, in this three part list Debra presents herself as a non-troublesome young person who has actually supported her mom when circumstances could have dictated differently. This completeness of description serves to further enhance the claim that Debra's mother is in fact illogical in blaming Debra for her problems. The inference drawn by this conclusion is that Debra's behavior can be seen to be caused by her mother's inability to be a proper caregiver. Natalie picks up on the implication drawn by Debra in line #9 with her own example of how Natalie's mother also blames Natalie for her drinking problem. Debra continues with her rendition in line #11.

Both Natalie and Debra are able to discursively position their parents as poor caregivers because of an ideological discourse about children that says 'children are powerless, defenseless beings who are dependent on adults for their being', and that there is certain behavior that parents should not be involved in to be proper caregivers (e.g., drinking and doing drugs). These girls were able to position themselves as victims, and therefore as persons who are not culpable for their behavior. So one can imagine now how common discourse about what is good and bad are implicitly thought about without having to explicitly say them. As well, it becomes apparent that by drawing on these discourses we also position ourselves in a certain light depending how the discourse is managed. The belief that doing drugs is wrong did not have to be explicitly stated for the listener or reader to make this inference, an inference which became part of the negotiation of the topic being discussed; Who is at fault, or who is responsible for teenager behavior?

The issue at stake here is the moral discourse about parenthood that implies that parents are inherently responsible for the behavior of their children; a child's behavior reflects the parenting skills of the parent. This notion is reflected in the other focus group session between Lisa and myself during our discussion with Cathy and Silvia. Silvia has just asked me about my child (Cory) and Lisa comments about Cory's character given that she is a friend of mine and knows Cory.

>Lisa: He's a great kid. This is a great kid.

>Rita: Thank You.

Lisa compliments my child quite convincingly given that she repeats the statement by filling in "He's" with "This" in her second sentence. The "This" implies that it is not just her opinion but that he is generally thought of as a great kid. In effect she discursively externalizes the comment thereby giving it more weight. The relevant comment to notice in regards to the discourse about parents is that I thank Lisa for the comment about my son as if she has just complimented me. My reply is not unusual, I was able to give this reply because there is a discourse available that implicitly hold parents accountable for the

behavior of their children. By drawing on this discourse I also discursively positioned myself as a moral agent; 'I must be a good parent if Cory is such a great kid'.

There is another side to the dilemmatic that suggests that parents shape their children; this is, that a child's behavior or character is genetic and therefore whatever a parent does cannot forestall or curtail poor behavior or an ill character from expressing itself. I would imagine that had I talked to the parents of the teenagers from Avenue 15 I would have heard a different story in regards to the situation of their teenagers. It seems possible that some of this discourse suggesting that behavior is genetic, and therefore, not the parents fault, would have been drawn upon. Persons will draw on either discourse, depending on the context, to position themselves as moral agents. Our way of being, our subjectivity demands that we are moral persons, therefore, how we talk and interact will implicitly play this notion out.

The final story provided by Natalie (line #13) is detailed specifically to produce particular kinds of reality effects, which I appropriately acknowledge in line #14.

(13) Natalie: ...hit me with a belt when I got back, ooooh, I'd get it badly. One time my brother didn't do the vacuuming right. My dad beat him with the vacuum so bad, he was bleeding and everything.

(14) Rita: Oh, my god!

Natalie provides a narrative description that promotes an event description that produces a certain causal explanation. First, she describes how badly she was hit with a belt and then she describes how her brother was hit for not vacuuming properly. Natalie discursively constructs an inference that suggests that her brother was abused by her father (step-father actually) for no real reason (i.e., not vacuuming properly) and therefore neither was she. As well, drawing on the presence of blood ("he was bleeding and everything") serves to indicate the severity of the abuse for illogical reasons ("[he] didn't do the vacuuming right"). The "and everything" at the end of the line resorts back to systematic vagueness; the description has been offered in detail and now she discursively provides vague information that leads the listener to infer that it was even worse than she was able to

describe, and that it includes other aspects of abuse that she did not explain. This one statement by Natalie conjures up a rich narrative picture of the events (the presence of belts and blood) that leads one to conclude that Natalie's step-father is quite an abusive person. If Natalie's step-father is terribly abusive towards her then one cannot blame Natalie's actions totally on her. Natalie negotiates her character in a morally good light. The point in my rendering this interpretation of Natalie's talk is not to answer the question "Who is to blame?" for acts of abuse, but rather, to emphasize that talk can be discursively positioned to draw one conclusion over another. I will pick up on this point again in the discussion. Note, Natalie draws on and maintains a discourse about abuse that says it is very wrong and disruptive to a person's psyche.

These three girls were able to discursively position themselves as moral agents that were not totally accountable for their behavior or their situation. They were able to do this by drawing on the moral ideology surrounding parents; parents are to protect their children (not physically or emotionally abuse them) and be free of any dysfunctions if they are going to parent properly. They were also able to draw on the discourse that positions children and teenagers as defenseless creatures that are dependent on adults for their being. As well, this extract draws on the discourse concerning the accountability of adults. Adults are held accountable for their own behavior and therefore can be labeled as morally inferior if they engage in addictive behavior. Of course in other contexts this supposition in regards to adults is not as clear cut as it seems to be the case in this example (e.g., in situations involving abuse such as wife battery, the accountability of the person being abused is in question and not so easily defined). The lines between teenage and parent accountability for the ill behavior of adolescent activity is also not clear.

The lack of clarity between adolescence and adulthood encompasses an argumentative dilemma about the cause of behavior; is it innate or learned? The excerpts that were provided are an example of how persons accomplish a certain perspective of

events and actions that serve to position themselves in a morally good light. The negotiation and the ideological discourses that are drawn upon are imbued with moral and ethical claims that influence how something is taken up and positioned. As was emphasized in the analysis with the three girls, they discursively accomplished a certain take of events by drawing on ideological constructed notions about parents, children and the accountability of behavior. The side of the argumentative dilemma about the cause of behavior that they drew on to discursively position themselves morally was that behavior is learned. Given this conclusion, the cause of their behavior could not be attributed to something internal to themselves.

*Excerpt #3: Negotiation of Culpability in an Abstract Situation*

In a focus group of four women (Susan, Mary, Gail and Carol) and myself, three of the participants (Susan, Gail and Carol) attempt to make sense of the dilemmatic that suggests that a child's behavior is either a product of the environment or of innate factors. The following excerpt between Gail, Susan and Carol is an example of the struggle with making sense of the dilemmatic discourse surrounding the issue of accountability for behavior;

- (1) Susan: ...any parent will tell you, I have three kids, one fussed from day one, and it didn't matter what I did, you know, so there's a temperament. There is, it's there.
- (2) Gail: So where does temperament come from?
- (3) Carol: Well temperament, temperament's in, innate. But I mean someone that's really bad. I mean, a kid that fusses, a kid that does this and that, I don't consider that being bad. I consider being bad a kid who lights something on fire, a kid who ...
- (4) Gail: Yeah, and that's what I'm talking about.
- (5) Carol: I think something's gone wrong from birth to that point. I don't think they were just born that way. I don't think they were born evil. I don't think they were just born that way. I don't think they were born evil.
- (6) Gail: Evil thing to do, but like, to come back to the physiology, something's missing ...What you can't, like what if it is in a good family and there's like s, you say, there's three kids and they're brought up basically the same way in a loving family, for example. But one is so different from the rest. And does these evil things like lighting animals on fire and kicking kids and, and



whatever. Like, those are the things I struggle with trying to understand. You know, where does it come from? That's ...

(7) Carol: I think it'd have to, well I, I guess it all comes down to everyone's perception of what's going on in the family. Maybe that kid, you know, doesn't feel the love, doesn't feel this and that, does it to get attention. I mean, the parents

...  
(8) Susan: Or what if they have, uhm, there's something physiological that we don't, we're not aware of, yet. That science is not aware of.

The women in this extract go back and forth between suggesting that a child's evil behavior is either a result of the environment (poor parenting) or of physiological and innate factors.

In line #1 Susan presents the argument that children in the same family do not all turn out the same, even when the parents say that they treated all the children alike. Susan refers to this as temperament, a factor she implies is not learned given the inference of her first sentence that parents treat all their children alike and they still turn out different. The inference that different children from the same loving environment may turn out different (or 'bad' is what's implied) is delivered as factual information. No one questions the supposition made by this statement because the ideological discourse about behavior maintains that temperament is either a product of innate or learned factors. If children from the same environment (i.e., the same family) are all treated in the same loving way, then difference in behavior (i.e., a bad child) must be due to internal and not learned causes.

In line #2 Gail picks up on the connotation implied by Susan's statement and asks the obvious question of "Where does temperament come from?". In a sense Gail's question is discursively set up at this point in the interaction to produce the answer that it must be innate. Carol answers the question for Gail in line #3 in this way although upon reading the rest of her statements we find that Carol has a different view of this issue. In the other statements made by Carol we find that she argues that behavior or character is a result of learned or environmental factors. She does not explicitly state this point of view initially but makes her final conclusion in line #7.

First, Carol (in line #3) presents her difference of opinion by inferring that there is a distinction between children that are difficult to manage versus those who are evil. Carol's

statement implies that really the only difficult cases to understand are those where children are 'truly' evil. In line #5 Carol says that she doesn't think even evil children are born that way, but she does not provide any support for her conclusion other than it is her personal opinion. Therefore, Gail is easily able to counter Carol's claim in line #6 by using the distinction in line #3 and #5 to support the argument that some behavior (i.e., the evil kind) just cannot be explained by learned factors leading to the causal inference that it must be a result of innate or physiological factors. In line #7 Carol is discursively forced to return to the argument that it may be innate factors (i.e., temperament) that causes the child to view what parents do differently than their siblings, in essence agreeing with Gail that some children will respond differently. Carol re-positions the conclusion drawn by this inference, however, to suggest that parents are still responsible to deal with the reactions of their children in a positive light by shaping and guiding them onto the right path. The implication is that ultimately, even with different temperaments, behavior is still a product of parenting or of environmental and learned factors.

Carol has effectively managed to support her point that in the end it is the environment that is the most important in determining an individual's character. She is able to do this discursively because she agrees with Gail, that yes, some children turn out evil even if they come from loving homes. She re-directs the conclusion by drawing on the discourse that argues that parents are ultimately responsible to be sensitive to what their children need to have them grow up as good people. Parents are held accountable to respond to the different needs of their particular children.

At first glance Carol appears to have effectively re-positioned the discussion in favor of the view that environmental factors are ultimately what determine behavior. Susan counters Carol's claim in line #8, however, by suggesting that the cause of certain behavior may be something that has not been scientifically discovered yet. Susan's statements suggest that what Carol defines as environmental factors are just undiscovered

scientific explanations for the type of behavior they have been discussing. Susan's statement is difficult to rebut because of the discourse about science that says it discovers truths. Given this notion of science no one can tell for sure what is the cause of evil behavior, and therefore, Susan effectively re-positioned the discussion to consider innate or physiological factors as the cause of behavior. The conversation about this topic ends at this point with the idea that one day science may answer or explain the puzzling question about evil behavior (a discourse of its own).

There is a slightly different tone to this excerpt, what the nature and nurture question is and therefore how culpable are individuals with that issue, but they are talking about this in general terms given that they are discussing abstract or hypothetical situations. Still, people are struggling with ideological issues that constrain or limit how we think or talk about issues or events.

It is important to note that in this extract a variety of available discourses are drawn upon to make sense of the issue of evil behavior. These discourses include: (1) the argumentative dilemmatic about behavior that suggests that it is a product of learned or innate factors, (2) parents are responsible for the behavior of their children (Carol's final conclusion implies this), (3) science is the discoverer of truths (it will one day be able to explain evil behavior) and (4) something is unnatural when someone turns out evil (i.e., it is an anomaly that needs to be explained). What is important to note, is that any of these discourses do not have to be set in stone, but we discuss them as if they are. That is, they are never explicitly talked about as 'views' of life, but are taken as matters of fact (i.e., they are tacit to our conversations). The point being that (1) what we say and how it can be said, as well as what we don't say, has profound implications for our being and (2) that there are a number of possibilities that are imaginable for being that are not considered.

Excerpt #4: Negotiation of Personal Rights

This next excerpt actually focuses on the fuzzy line between what parents expect of teenagers and what teenagers feel they should decide for themselves. The issue being played out is when responsibility and choice of actions should be left up to the teenager. The group consists of three adolescent boys (Carl, Adam, and Nick) and myself discussing choice of clothing.

- (1) Carl: Like my mom's cool. Like she can be open-minded? But like, I was walking in a shopping mall and I was wearing my normal jeans, right? You know? And, I wasn't feeling comfortable, you know? Cuz this is, this is me right.  
 (2) Rita: So when you say normal jeans, you don't mean these kind of pants (referring to the very baggy pants he's wearing).  
 (3) Carl: Nooo. Best jeans, you know, Buffalo jeans. And, my parents, I have em too long, always. And my par, my mom and dad say stop. Wait here. I'm like, what do you mean? Well, we're too embarrassed to be with you. Like, you know, that hurts.

In line #1 Carl begins by explaining that his parents don't like the clothing that he likes to wear. He discursively sets up a rendition that suggests that his parents are unfairly wanting him to look or dress a certain way that appeals to them but not to Carl. Carl discursively positions an inference that implies that his parents are taking away his personal choice or 'freedom to be his own person'. He is able to discursively create this inference because of the ideological discourse that says persons should have the freedom and right to choice of expression. In line #1 Carl starts off by saying that his mom can be open-minded proceeding with "But". By using the word "but", Carl discursively sets up an implication that says his mother can be open-minded but usually isn't. He then talks about wearing "normal jeans", something that even his mother should have approved of given normal indicates something that is accepted by everyone (i.e., he wasn't being outrageous). He then follows with "You know?" suggesting that the implication is obvious, we all should know what he's talking about, and therefore, implicitly agree with him. He then tell us, although he was wearing normal jeans he wasn't feeling comfortable in them, followed by another "you know". He follows this statement with "Cuz this is, this is me right"

(referring to his non-normal clothing). The connotation is that he likes to dress a different way than what is perceived as normal, and therefore, implying that wearing normal jeans was done to please his parents. He ends with "this is me **right**" indicating that we again are to understand what he means and accept that. Carl is setting up a nice story that insinuates that he is just being 'himself', something our individualistic and autonomous ideology endorses.

In line #3 the description that he has been forming is brought to its final conclusion. His parents didn't want to be seen with him because they were embarrassed of the way he looked. He ends with "Like you know, that hurts". Another "you know" before he states "that hurts", insinuating that his parents aren't accepting him for who he is. Again, here Carl draws on and reinforces the ideology that says we are all autonomous beings. In line #3 Carl is also positioning his parents as acting cruel towards him because they hurt him by telling him they were embarrassed to be seen with him. The conclusion is that his parents illogically shunned him when he was even wearing normal jeans that he doesn't even feel comfortable in, suggesting that perhaps he wore the jeans in the first place to please his parents who reacted unappreciatively and hurtfully. He positions his parents in a morally inferior light, as persons who are irrationally trying to force their son into a mold. This implication about his parents is implicitly juxtaposed against the ideology that say parents should be loving and accepting of their children.

Nick renders his own story in line #4 about his parents throwing away his jeans because they didn't like them.

(4) Nick: Or else I just, my brother, he uh, he took off too, so uh, and I had a bunch of his jeans, they were a bit bigger. So, he cut em off so I cut em off a bit more, and then uh, I wore em, and then uh, after I put em in the wash and then never saw em again because I cut em off.

(5) Rita: Um hmm. So your parents got rid of them.

(6) Nick: Yeah. My parents didn't like it.

In this portion of the extract Nick is implicitly drawing on the ideological notions about 'freedom of choice' and 'right to expression' that Carl set up in line 1 and 2. Again, the

moral inference that is drawn is Nick's parents are being unfair throwing his jeans away just because they didn't like them. By throwing away his jeans they are taking away his personal rights. Both Carl and Nick position their situation as the fault of parents trying to impinge on their right of expression. Notice, freedom of choice and expression is never explicitly stated, but is tacit in their conversation.

As the conversation proceeds the three boys continue to negotiate their positions as free agents who are wrongfully being deterred by their parents.

(7) Rita: So, how does that make you guys feel? Like they're not respecting you?

(8) Nick: Yeah, like ...

(9) Adam: Well that's, my, my parents are like, they're like, if I don't wear, (pause) but basically if, if I was to please em, I'd have to wear dress pants or (unintelligible - two talking at once) really nice, nice jeans and like, maybe like a, a shirt and like a tie.

(10) Carl: No, I'd have to be a cowboy.

(11) Adam: Well, it's just like, it's just because my dad, it's just because my dad dresses in a suit and tie. It's wrong for me to grow up differently than he did.

(12) Rita: Uh hmmm.

In line #9 Adam begins to describe what his parents do not want him to wear but stops mid-sentence with a pause and then goes on to describe what he would have to wear to make his parents happy. We do not know exactly what he was going to say, but we are still left with the impression that they are unreasonable. He discursively draws this conclusion by stating that he would have to wear a shirt and tie, something extreme as far as dressing like a young person goes. In line #11 Adam re-enforces his statement that a shirt and tie would be what his parents would want him to wear because this is what his father wears. He ends with implying that his father thinks it is wrong for Adam to grow up differently than he did. It is not explicitly stated, but Adam implies that his father wore dress shirts and ties when he was a kid as well, and therefore expects Adam to wear the same. In line #10 Carl states that his parents want him to dress like them as well, but in his case it would be in western wear.

Both Adam and Carl are discursively presenting an unfavorable picture of their parents; as people who are being too demanding and unreasonable. Part of this picture includes the supposition that their parents are restricting their rights, being too hard on them in terms of expectations and generally not accepting them for who they are. This serves to position the parents as the ones who are unreasonable and the possible causes for why the boys are homeless. Both boys have been kicked out of the house and have stated, as did the girls, the reason kids end up at Avenue 15 is because of their parents. The difference in this extract as compared to the girls, is that both are positioning the blame for their situations on their parents but in different ways. For the girls they are drawing on the discourse that says parents are responsible for teenage behavior, whereas, the boys are indicating that parents are trying to unreasonably rule the lives of their children thereby pushing them out.

In the following lines Carl (#13 and #15), with help from Nick (line #14), renders a story that suggests he has tried in a rational manner to convince his parents to accept his choice of clothing. He discursively sets up the rendition as if this is a conversation that he and his parents have actually had. The use of relaying information in conversation style serves to set the inference that the conversation is factual in its occurrence and was delivered in a reasonable fashion. For Carl the conversation serves to suggest that Carl has tried in a logical and level-headed way to explain to his parents that he 'needs' to be his own person and still they do not understand. The implication is that he has tried everything to make his parents see who he is but to no avail. An effective discursive strategy that serves to position his parents as the unreasonable ones because part of our Western ideology contends that persons are autonomous free agents, and his parents should be able to realize this in terms of Carl's choice of expression.

(13) Carl: Like, I'm telling my parents, like the way I'm trying to get my parents across the way I'm dressed. I'm weird, I'm different. You know?

(14) Nick: I like the way you're dressed.

(15) Carl: Yeah, exactly. But (pause) I just turn

around and go mom, dad, are you comfortable in what you're wearing? And they'll go yeah, and I'll go, I don't feel comfortable when I wear that.

This argument used by Carl suggests that the rational reversal style of argument should work given that he implies that he understands the discourse of parents or of rational adults.

Excerpt #5: Negotiation of an Abstract Hypothetical Dilemma

Personal choice and individual rights is a common ideology that gets played out in our everyday talk. As was evidenced in the previous extract, the issue of accountability is a discursive accomplishment that draws on the ideology of individualism in which persons as self-contained entities should have the right to make decisions for themselves. In the case of adolescents this discourse was being managed because of the fuzzy line between adulthood and childhood. The following focus group discussion is another example of how ideological discourses concerning personal rights and individual choices gets discursively managed. The group involves four women friends (Mary, Gail, Susan and Carol) and myself discussing euthanasia. The participants are stating that persons should have the right to decide their own fate or that of a close relative if death is pending.

(1) Mary: .....I, I agree with euthanasia.....there's just no way that if this or that happened to me I would want to stay alive....I should be able to say, you know, uhm, pull the plug. Pull the plug on my husband or pull the plug on my mother. This isn't the way. But why do they fight you? Why does the government fight you on that? Look at, look at what's her name. The one that just died...

(2) Rita: Sue Rodriguez

(3) Mary: Yeah. Right. That was something that she wanted...

(4) Gail: Took it to the supreme court, yeah.

(5) Mary: she went all the way. She wanted that. Do we have the right to deny her to do that? Was that a moral reason?

In line #1 Mary offers her opinion about euthanasia as a necessary right to the individual involved. She supports her argument by giving her personal preference, thus, her agreement is not an off-handed remark, she believes it for herself. She draws on a personal choice and personal rights discourse in regards to her statement about the



government intervening into such cases. The personal rights discourse is couched in a larger Western ideology based on equality and fairness and which makes up our constitution. Therefore, Mary verbally positions support for her opinion by employing a discursive strategy which alludes to a well established common point of view (i.e., everyone is entitled to personal rights and freedom). She offers a publicized example (the case of Sue Rodriguez) to drive her point home. The example of Sue Rodriguez is potent in that Mary does not have to explicate all the details involved in such a scenario as we are all aware of the well publicized case. She is not even able to come up with the name herself but the group easily fills it in for her in line #2. As well, by drawing on the case of Sue Rodriguez, Mary has rhetorically positioned the argument outside of herself which serves to present the inferences as required by the events or actions themselves rather than desired by the speaker (Billig, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The function of externalizing the inference serves to guarantee it as based on the evidence rather than 'mere opinion'. This rhetorical strategy drawn upon by Mary serves to support her earlier claim in favor of euthanasia.

In line #3 Mary continues with "that is something that she wanted", she re-iterates the Western ideological discourse that outlines the personal rights of individuals. Repeating the same claim in different words can be regarded as a discursive strategy that serves to 'pile up the evidence' to support one's claim. In line #4 Gail supports Mary's supposition by implying the seriousness of Sue Rodriguez's conviction in euthanasia by stating that she took her case to the supreme court; the highest court in the land. The fact that Sue Rodriguez went to the supreme court suggests that she must have felt strongly that her personal rights were in violation. Drawing on the personal conviction of Sue Rodriguez is a persuasive argument in favor of euthanasia. This is so because Sue Rodriguez is someone who is about to die, and therefore, knows what it's like to be in such a position, something none of the participants in this discussion have personal

experience with. Drawing on personal experience in making an argument or relaying a position is a convincing strategy because it tells others that this is what it would be like if 'only you had experienced it for yourself'. In the present example, none of the participants have personal experience with decisions of euthanasia, so drawing on the case of Sue Rodriguez provides this sort of a discursive leverage.

In line #5 Mary emphasizes the point made by Gail by re-iterating what Gail has said in slightly different words; "she went all the way". Again, Mary has sufficient support or discursive evidence to repeat her initial point in favor of euthanasia. She does this by saying that if someone is near dying and wants to end their life they should be able to, and is it moral for us to stop them. Mary couches her statement in the ideological discourse about the importance of personal rights by emphasizing the moral precept of individual choice and freedom.

The conversation continues with Carol bringing up another issue that serves to challenge the personal rights argument offered by Mary that has essentially been agreed upon by Gail.

- (6) Carol: It's not that we had the right to deny her to do that, it's that somebody was helping her to do that.
- (7) Rita: Yeah, but she wasn't capable.
- (8) Susan: I think it's inconsistent.
- (9) Carol: ..her the, someone the power to do that, yeah.
- (10) Gail: But if she asked...
- (11) Susan: I think it's inconsistent with a doctor's function.
- (12) Carol: Doctors do it all the time...
- (everybody talking at once)
- (13) Susan: I have a hard time with doctors doing that.
- (14) Carol: Doctors do it all the time and you don't know it. When a person's in pain they give them tons of drugs and eventually they die. Do they die because of the disease they had or do they die because they were given so much drugs that they just shut down?

In line #6 Carol re-positions the discussion to suggest that euthanasia involves more than the personal rights of the person who is dying. Someone else other than the dying individual needs to be involved. It appears that the issue of personal rights is not so simple in the case of euthanasia. Here we have another dilemmatic that is being managed; 'the

personal rights of the individual' versus 'the harm that will be done to others involved'. In line #7 my statement serves to re-position Carol's suggestion by indicating that the Sue Rodriguez was not able to do it on her own. The implication is that it was essential that she have someone else do it for her in order to maintain her personal rights. My statement introduces another side to the dilemmatic that suggests that a person who is unable to do what they want is still having their rights denied if someone is not allowed to help them. So here personal choice requires assistance.

In line #8, #11, and #13 Susan counters the personal rights discourse, and therefore my statement in line #7, with the discourse concerning the role of doctors; "it's inconsistent with a doctor's function". Her statements, although not clearly explicated, suggest that the role of a doctor is to save lives and, therefore, assisted suicides, even in the case of euthanasia, is counter to that role. Susan's argument suggests that aside from the issue of personal rights in cases of euthanasia doctors are compromising their duty. In line #12 and #14 Carol challenges Susan's argument with a discursive strategy that Pomerantz (1986) refers to as 'Extreme case formulations'. This is a strategy that makes a report more effective by drawing on the extreme elements of the issue being judged; for example, if someone is chastised for carrying a gun - saying that everyone that day was carrying a gun makes the speaker's own gun toting entirely unexceptional. In this excerpt Carol points out that doctors are silently involved in euthanasia type activities all the time (e.g., giving patients "tons" of drugs), therefore, the case of Sue Rodriguez and other assisted suicides is entirely unexceptional. In this statement Carol also draws on information that is done in secret by doctors, therefore, the claim is difficult to rebut given that it is something that we cannot see or ever know for sure.

Four statements later Susan draws on another discourse that counters Carol's argument about doctors assisting dying patients as 'normal'.

(18) Susan: Going back to this thing about there's external, these morals, these, this code that everybody should live by no matter what race, religion, color, creed,

whatever. I think man has put himself, has, man has superceded that code by bringing in new technology.

(19) Mary: Yup.

(20) Carol: Roadside heroics.

Susan's remark in line #18 is a successful counter argument to the opinion that euthanasia should be allowed. She discursively re-introduces a concept that the group had previously negotiated in the discussion and which they all ended up deciding that they agreed with (i.e., that there are external codes that everyone should live by). This strategy serves to entice agreement for the issue being presently discussed because the listeners have already agreed to the concept in their earlier discussion. It is not that disagreement is impossible at this point, only that to do so would involve an extensive re-positioning of what was said earlier, and even so, the rebuttal is at risk of being inconsistent. Thus, although disagreement is possible it is made much more difficult by drawing upon previously agreed upon information. Susan's strategy has proved to be effective as both Mary (line #19) and Carol (line #20) agree with her statement when they both previously disagreed and were arguing for euthanasia. Both comments are short (Mary: "Yup" and Carol: "Roadside heroics") suggesting that Susan has successfully provided an argument that neither Mary or Susan can rebut at this time. Mary actually initially presented the argument in favor of euthanasia and seems to easily relinquish the position she presented quite vehemently.

Susan's last sentence in line #18 ("that man has superceded that code by bringing in new technology") draws a causal inference from her statement that there are external moral codes that everyone should live by. The causal inference is that human beings have broken the external moral code in situations such as euthanasia; we are going against nature by intervening with technology. The dilemma that is drawn upon here is natural versus unnatural causes. The implication drawn by Susan is that natural causes supercede unnatural interferences. Susan positions this implication to suggest that the personal rights of an individual does not take precedence over the external moral codes that we all need to

live by. So here we have the other side of the dilemma being played out; that is, sometimes we have to give up our personal rights to maintain the moral good.

Susan's next statement in line #21 provides an interesting argument that still draws on the discourse of personal rights.

(21) Susan: I resent even to be put in that. I think this comes down to biomedical ethics and how far medical doctors should be able to take this situation. If we didn't have the technology, we wouldn't have the decision to make.

Here Susan says that she "resent[s] even being put into that", referring to a decision of euthanasia. The implication is that in the case of assisted suicides, personal rights are being jeopardized because of technology. Euthanasia is an unnatural intervention into human affairs that is best left unto nature. This argument presented by Susan sets up another dilemmatic between natural and unnatural causes of death. The moral good of all is in peril because of the unnatural interventions of technology.

In the remainder of the extract below Carol provides agreement for the concern for the moral good of all (line #22), "How far should we go?" she says. The suggestion discursively positioned by Carol, but initially set up Susan, is that personal rights become incommensurate with the personal rights of others.

(22) Carol: That's right. How far do we go?

(23) Susan: How far do you go. I think, although it's a doctor's Hippocratic oath to preserve life and for that reason I, as a doctor, if I took that oath, I couldn't have killed Sue Rodriguez. If I was a doctor, I couldn't do that. And I think that most doctor's couldn't do that. Because of the oath that they take, and the time they invest in preserving life.

Now that Susan, with support from Carol and Mary who have discursively backed up Susan's original position that a doctor's role is inconsistent with euthanasia type activities, Susan is able to strongly re-assert her position against euthanasia as her own opinion (line #23); "if I took that oath, I couldn't have killed Sue Rodriguez". So here we have Susan morally positioning herself as someone that could not "kill" someone if an oath was taken that says one is to preserve life. Notice Susan's use of the would 'kill'. This is the first time in this discussion that anyone has referred to euthanasia as killing. The word killing is

associated with murder, therefore, another causal implication is set up to infer that euthanasia is like murder; an action that is illegal and unacceptable in our society. Therefore, the use of the word kill serves to add moral indignation to the act of euthanasia by doctors.

In the above extract the women were involved in the negotiation of a controversial issue. In managing the issue of euthanasia they drew upon the ideological dilemmatic discourse of personal rights versus the rights of all, as well as, natural versus unnatural causes of death. It becomes apparent in the discussion that maintaining the personal rights of any one individual is not so simple, others are usually involved that will be effected; which is to say that their personal rights will be violated. The issue of personal rights, which no one disagreed is important, was being compromised in cases of euthanasia. The ideological discourse about personal rights was never disavowed but re-positioned as in violation by the unnatural intervention of technology. It is important to notice that the final conclusion about the groups views concerning this issue grew out of the conversation between all the members of the group. As well, their final conclusion maintained several discourses: (1) individualism and personal rights, (2) humans should not intervene into what nature intended, and (3) one should not break commitments or oaths. Notice, however, that the good of technology was being challenged although not argued about. Attached to our everyday discourse are moral themes that are based in ideology that we continue to constitute and reconstitute in talk. As is evidenced in the above extract, people do discursive work around these themes to position and maintain themselves as moral agents. Everyone's views were tied to positioning themselves as moral persons who uphold the moral good in their decision making and opinions.

Excerpt #6 : Personal Negotiation in Conversation: Considering Context

We morally position each other and ourselves in our everyday interactions with each other. The short excerpt that follows provides an example of the discursive work that is engaged in to maintain oneself and those close to you as moral agents. This focus group consisted of myself and three women friends (Janet, Kara, and Nancy) who came to know each other as neighbors. The women are discussing teaching their children values. Janet begins by describing what she and her husband do with their eleven year old child to promote values.

- (1) Janet: Well with the, the eleven-year-old, we try to expose him to a lot of stuff, like goes to Sunday school, and, and that, and just kind of expose him to a lot of different things that and just kind of, to get some values from there and some from us and some from this, Kevin is more...He was brought more churchy than (pause) I was, so...
- (2) Rita: Who's Kevin, I'm sorry?
- (3) Janet: Kevin's my husband. Yeah. So he, you know, so he tries, with his different value, well we're kind of the same but he is brought, his are....
- (4) Rita: A little bit more religious, or, what would you say?
- (5) Janet: May, yeah maybe but not overly. Like not, you know, (pause) real stro, I don't know, I'm going to get myself into a corner here.
- Chorus of voices
- (6) Kara: Yeah, like you, you've brought him off it a bit and he's brought you into it so you can probably strike a nice even keel where it's not even extreme either way...
- (7) Janet: Yeah. Yeah, and to expose him to that, and also to different things like sports and stuff in,
- (8) Rita: Yeah, yeah.
- (9) Janet: instead of, you know, sitting in front of the TV, doing video games, you know, and that's all he ever does.

In line #1 Janet begins to list off the different things that she exposes her eleven year old to in order to teach him values. In her last sentence in this section she begins to describe the difference between her and her husband in terms of religiosity. There is evidence at this point, and more so in line #3 and in Line #5, that she finds explaining her husbands religious bent somewhat difficult given her hesitation and pauses. In line #5 Janet emphasizes her discomfort by exclaiming "I'm going to get myself into a corner here". In line #4 I attempt to alleviate the discomfort Janet appears to experiencing by defining a distinction that perhaps Janet's husband Kevin is "a little bit more religious" than she is. I

am careful here not to be overly pushy about my opinion, and therefore, temper my statement by asking her to explain it herself ("what would you say?"). In any case I have given her a way out of her apparent dilemma. In line #5 Janet re-positions my suggestion by saying he is not overly religious. Again, her hesitations and pauses are evidence of her discomfort and inability to position herself and her husband in a positive light. The chorus of voices suggests that we all are discursively aware of Janet's discomfort and appear to be attempting to help her out of her "corner" . Notice, Janet's admission or discursive positioning that she is in a corner elicits help from those of us listening. In effect what Janet has done is create a gap for us to fill for her. Janet draws on a discursive strategy that suggests she does not mean to imply that her husband or herself are 'too' religious but is not able to express this in words. This is an effective strategy in that Janet is able to let the group explain what she means which serves to position Janet as having this same understanding. Janet's views are then in moral agreement with what the group or discussants believe. She maintains herself as a moral person in this situation and context.

In line #6 Kara comes to the rescue with an explanation that suggests that Kevin and Janet have provided a nice balance for each other; as a result of being together neither of them is too extreme in either direction. Kara's discourse maintains that yes, Kevin 'was' religious but Janet's influence has changed him for the better. In essence Kara serves to maintain both Janet and Kevin as moral agents who have made each other 'better' people as a result of their union. Kara draws on a discourse that valorizes marriage in managing this event. This is interesting in that all three women are stay at home mothers with some part time involvements. A big part of their discussion revolved around the issue of marriage and maintaining their personal identities within that union, as well as describing the characteristics that make for a 'good' marriage. Even Janet's hesitation in describing the religious differences between her husband and herself can be regarded as a management of a certain image of marriage, that says two people should be compatible in terms of



values. In any case, the discursive positioning by Kara enables Janet to get back to listing off all the things that she and Kevin do to encourage values in their eleven year old son. Notice in lines 7 and 9 Janet not only gets on with her story but describes things other than religion that can promote values. This re-focus to other activities for the promotion of values by Janet serves to position her and husband as not overly focused on religion, that they are in fact not rigid religious people, and avoids having to describe the relationship between her and her husband.

This moral positioning around the issue of religion is relevant given that previously Kara and Nancy were discussing their experience with the Mormon religion. Both Kara and Nancy have recently been targets of a recruitment effort by Mormon missionaries. As a result of their experience they ended up positioning religion as a rigid hypocritical endeavor. Janet's discomfort with the religiosity of her and her husband is understandable given the context of the previous discussion. In the context of the conversation religion had been discursively positioned as a morally inferior posture. The extract that was presented here is then an example of the moral negotiation that was needed given the context. It is not difficult to imagine Janet having a very different discussion about religion and promoting values for her eleven year old with members of her church. Most likely religion would be positioned in a positive fashion and not become problematic as it did in the conversation with Kara, Nancy and myself. Moral claims and positions are discursively negotiated and maintained. Individuals are not autonomous prefigured moral characters but only become so in interaction.

*Excerpt #7: Negotiation of One's Moral standing*

The final example I would like to present is another exemplar of the discourse that necessarily takes place to position ourselves as moral persons. Again, what is important to note is that persons do not have their moral character pre-defined and worked out inside

themselves, but that it develops in the context of interactions where the moral meanings are discursively negotiated. The following excerpt involves three women friends, two of whom work as social workers (Sara and Marla) and another (Alice) who works in the oil industry and myself. The different vocational interests of Sara and Marla (and myself to a certain extent) versus Alice's creates a controversy that entails a management of one's position as moral. This following extract is from the beginning of the discussion where they began describing what is important to them. What I want to point out in this extract is the moral work that Alice engages in given that her occupational status has been indirectly challenged by Marla and myself.

(1) Marla: Well, I keep thinking that there's going to be hope. I mean, there's probably a natural kind of, uhm, (pause) or, order, and uhm, whether we believe it to be right or wrong, that uhm, things will work itself out, and that they'll, humanity will at least rethink and relook at what its doing and why its doing it, and how its doing it. And that's very simplistic, because I'm not so sure if I believe that when I think of the, the, I don't know, corporations, or whatever, that go in and literally just uhm, pillage and rip down and destroy. But, I'd like to think that they, out of that comes somebody or something that says, wait a minute, lets do a check and balance.

(2) Rita: Right. I mean, it makes me wonder how these corporations justify this. Because I don't think people think oh, well we're ruining these people's lives. Maybe some people do, and do it anyway. But I, I wonder about that. Its just something I've been thinking about.

(3) Alice: Well, I think, like for myself, working in the oil industry, like its uh, because we're dealing with the environment and everything, that uhm, its certainly become a lot more strict. Like the uh, the governing body, which is the ERCB, which is part of the, the **government**, and uh, you'd, you have to be a lot more careful on, on how you are towards the environment and make sure you put it back and, and the way it was before if not even better. So, I would say...

(4) Rita: So there are guidelines now...

(5) Alice: Yes, there's a lot stricter guidelines.

(6) Rita: And when did that come into play?

(7) Alice: Uhh, wel, I would say it's always been there but even, I think it's become stronger, I'd say maybe in the last, uh, I'm guessing it'd be five years where it's become a lot more stringent and, a lot more stricter.

(8) Sara: I think it, I think, as a world in general, the uh, the consciousness about the environment has certainly increased in the last, you know, few years.

In line #1 Marla directly states that corporations destroy the earth. In line #2 I support Marla's statement by asking how corporations justify 'the ripping down and pillaging' of the earth. What Marla and I have done is put Alice on the hot seat to explain or justify the

behavior of corporations given that she has been gainfully employed with one for many years. The crucial assumption here is that 'what you do says something about who you are', and that 'moral persons ought not to work in immoral jobs'. These tacit assumptions are part of the positioning of Alice as an immoral person that she subsequently works to justify or discursively make sense of. In line #3 Alice doesn't reply for all corporations, but only for her own in managing the event ("like for myself"). Alice makes it clear that she is not going to attempt to account for all corporations, only her own. She discursively sets up the accountability of the oil industry towards the environment in a positive light. She does this by referring to a governing body (ERCB) that monitors what goes on. The implication is that in the oil industry there is a concern for the environment given that they have a body to police such activities. She drives this inference home by saying that corporation have to put the environment back "the way it was before if not even better". Alice's statements treats the environment as a object that can be assembled and reassembled. One only has to reassemble what one has taken apart. Alice's positioning of the environment as object serves to draw an inference that the environment can be protected even with such activities as drilling for oil.

My statement in line #4 about the existence of guidelines re-positions Alice's statement that there are "stricter" guidelines to the suggestion that the concern for the environment is new. The implication of my statement is that the oil industry did not always concern itself with the environment. My statement positions the oil industry as morally irresponsible. Alice comes back in line #5 with "there's a lot stricter guidelines" suggesting that the guidelines were always in place, but now the concern is even greater. In line #6 I reiterate the implication that was formed in line #4 with "when did that come into play?". This question that I pose is not a direct statement suggesting that the oil industry has been irresponsible towards the environment, but serves to propose that again the oil industry hasn't always been concerned about the environment. Alice repeats her earlier statements

but is forced to be explicit about the situation; "it's always been there". Notice, Alice creates a three part list to attest the dedication of the ERCB;

- >1. stronger
- >2. stringent
- >3. stricter

The last statement given by Sara (line #8) re-positions Alice's description of the ERCB as not so special after all. Sara draws on a discourse that implies that the concern about the environment has been increasing in general, therefore, the 'supposed' concern about the environment by the ERCB is unexceptional. This is another example of 'extreme case formulations' that was described in the earlier extract with Carol discussing euthanasia. The implication of Sara's statement leads to the possible conclusions that perhaps the ERCB is a cover story to protect the workings of the oil industry. What's interesting is that Alice makes no further comments about this issue and only talks again several pages later. The fact that she is silent for a while may indicate that she has trouble with the moral negotiation of this issue and her standing within it given the context in which Marla, Sara and myself construct throughout the discussion (i.e., the concern for human and environmental welfare). This excerpt is an example of how persons morally position themselves and others to maintain themselves as moral persons.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The extracts were provided to illuminate how talk is managed to position our fellow interactants so that they will arrive at certain conclusions. Our discursive management and negotiation of these conclusions is done moment by moment in our everyday conversation in an unnoticed and taken-for-granted manner. This becomes evident in that the extracts that were presented took a very short time to be delivered and represented a relatively small portion of the entire one and half hour discussion session. What's more, is that the

accomplishment of discursive positionings was managed by drawing on ideological dilemmatic discourses. These discourses form the background against which we interact for they enable discussions to proceed at the pace and manner in which they necessarily must for us to interact at all. This notion is part of what has been referred to as the ethical realm of what makes interactions possible. To interact at all we must agree about judgments, as well as meanings. Part of this agreement entails that we live within a form of life that repeats itself again and again (Wittgenstein, 1953). Everyday practical ethics is what makes this possible.

The seven examples of discourse were not meant to be inclusive of all the types of interactions in which the participants morally negotiated their standing. As well, there was much overlap in terms of the types of strategies that were used, the ideologies that were managed, and the positioning that was accomplished. The first example in reference to the crying of baby Vera expressed the negotiation of moral maintenance in actual ongoing interaction. What is interesting is that this segment of the conversation was not considered by myself, or by any of the participants, to be included as part of the information for my research project. The understanding that the discussion was designed for a research project, however, formed part of the context that was negotiated in the management and negotiation of that event (i.e., the crying). Negotiating this event entailed drawing on ideological discourses (i.e., the background of the discussion) to position ourselves and others as moral agents. Thus, even this mundane conversation, that the participants and myself felt was an aside to the purpose of the focus group session, was also an arena for moral discursive work. The point being that everything we say and do is enmeshed within an ideological background that is productive of how we think and of who we are. Given that we are not explicitly discussing moral issues in mundane or everyday talk, the ideological discourses that we perpetuate and maintain in our everyday conversations are the most hidden, and therefore, the most powerful discourses.

The groups from Avenue 15 represent a discussion of personal circumstances but in a reflective nature. These young people were involved in making sense of their own situations and did so by discursively managing the event by again drawing on ideological discourses to position themselves as moral persons. The significant point to notice here is that it was important, or crucial it seemed, for everyone to position themselves as moral agents. The descriptions of the state of affairs and the discursive management of events was employed to position and maintain the participants morally. This seemed to be the underlying impetus for the discussions. Extracts 6 and 7 were also examples of the management of moral standing, although in these examples the management was required within the context of the conversation. That is, the participants moral standing was challenged in either a direct (Extract #7) or indirect (Extract #6) way and was subsequently managed as a result.

The two extracts that discussed abstract issues (#3 and #5) resembled the type of hypothetical dilemmas that Kohlberg used in his research. The participants in these discussions talked about larger discourses, particularly focusing on the dilemmatic nature of those discourses. These hypothetical issues with both horns of the dilemma they present clearly fixed for all who encounter them, as Kohlberg would think of them, are not at all clearly fixed, and are in actuality very much alive in the discussions of these people. Negotiating these issues was not simply a matter of mature (principled reasoning) versus immature moral reasoning (pre-conventional or conventional reasoning), but instead, involves the management of several discursive strategies to accomplish a certain take of events that made sense by drawing on and negotiating ideological themes. All claims are tied to broader dilemmatic ideological notions that enable us to think of these issues as controversial. For instance, considering cases of euthanasia becomes problematic in that the role of a doctor and the good of mankind are incompatible with the personal rights of the dying individual. Therefore, the dilemmas themselves can be regarded as social,

historical constructions as are our ways of deliberating over them. This perspective markedly contrasts with Kohlberg's where moral deliberations are a matter of choosing right from wrong by adhering to universal moral principles. Answering pre-defined questions to hypothetical dilemmas positioned the participants to explicitly discuss moral issues in a consistent manner. This method of inquiry enabled a classification of moral reasoning stages as defined by the moral model explicated by Kohlberg. A universal classification of moral reasoning would have been difficult to construct if Kohlberg had examined everyday conversations. The only thing that can be considered universal about this process, is that 'moral principles', moral dilemmas, and our ways of deliberating, are social constructions that are produced in discourse.

In general, being is problematic, we draw on discourses to position ourselves and occasionally we find ourselves discussing those discourses when talking about abstract or hypothetical issues.

The discursive analysis of everyday talk that has been provided stresses that contradictory themes do not appear to be the property of distinct belief systems or to constitute individual standpoints (Billig et al., 1988). In the extracts, the participants were negotiating contradictory themes in the management of the topics being discussed and in their moral positioning. The opposing themes in dilemmatic discourses suggests that moral oughts, and the reasons for the moral oughts have opposing sides that we also live by, they are not so easily separated. That is, both sides of a dichotomy serve us in some way. The problem becomes when a certain position becomes discursively positioned to an extreme place where it becomes so commonsensical that it is never questioned, in which case it becomes determinative and limiting. An example is the taken-for-granted belief that we are self-contained individuals. That is, we take for granted that we ourselves are self-contained autonomous individuals living in a world consisting of other similarly constructed individuals. What if we regarded persons as enmeshed in relationship? This is a

suggestion that I will make below in regards to doing research. In any case, our identities and subjectivities are not due to something intrinsic 'in' us, but rather are defined by the categories made available to us by the language we use, and the meanings and contents ascribed to these categories. Our sense of who we are, and who we can be are constituted by the language we use, through the many discourses which position us in the world. The teenage girls were effectively negotiating their moral agentic positions against a background about the role of parenting. How we take up these discourses and position ourselves and each other by them is tied up with practical ethics and moral claims, because part of our sense of ourselves and who we can be is based on a picture of an individualistic moral self. So our very subjectivities are inscribed with notions of moral worth; this notion is implicit in the statement of 'who we can be'. We cannot just be anyone without certain consequences, and even if we accept these consequences, given the definitive nature of language we are still encased within its limits.

Our ways of accounting for ourselves in our discursive practices, work both to create and maintain a certain pattern of social relations. As well, these accounting practices constitute us as being able to reproduce that order in all of our practical activities. This reproduction is possible because of the practical ethics we necessarily engage in to interact at all so we make sense to each other. Further, the ideological discourses that we vitally discursively position ourselves by are available because they present the taken-for-granted moral picture of how things should be. What we have is a complex and intricate web of interaction that makes up our sense of being and of life in general. Whatever we do or say is part of this web. Objective truths are a construction of discursive practices that enable that view of life.

This discursive approach has been helpful in pointing out that what we say is constrained by the background against which we say it. Kohlberg, along with other traditional perspectives and methods of psychological inquiry, does not acknowledge that



everything we say and do is tied to a constructed understanding based in social and historical circumstances. Thus, what is being produced or received in the way of information about psychological life from these traditional perspectives, serves to actively transform and produce their objects of inquiry. The construction of persons is that we are consistent, stable, autonomous beings. This reification of persons is part of the description of human development that traditional developmental theories presuppose and espouse. Assuming that persons are stable and self-sufficient has allowed for a demarcation between 'normal' and 'abnormal' behavior or development, as any real or apparent failures of stability or self-sufficiency are taken as causes for concern or intervention.

The constructed dichotomy of 'normal' versus 'abnormal' behavior becomes a political arena for the valuing of certain characteristics and behaviors over others. An example of behavior that is considered abnormal or problematic is children that are defined as having *Attention Deficit Disorder* (ADD). There are a host of characteristics that make up the description for ADD. Some of these characteristics include: high activity levels, restlessness, inattention and distractibility (Stevenson, 1989). Any, and all, of these descriptors could be a result of several issues pertaining to social and interactive factors, or simply represent a perspective of dealing with life that differs from 'normality' and is problematic to our system of doing things. This description of ADD is in a chapter entitled "Neuropsychological Problems in Childhood", in a book about clinical child psychology. Stevenson describes the 'disorder' as a result of cognitive deficits, something internal to the child that 'needs' to be treated with drugs, or discursively more appropriate, *medication*. Researchers are unsure of the causes of ADD (as Stevenson admits in the chapter) but proceed as if they do understand the disorder. This rendition of the causes of ADD is a product of the scientific, developmental, end-point driven assumptive discourse in which they study ADD. The consequences of this scientific approach to ADD is that if other factors other than internal deficits precipitate the 'problem' they are not addressed, or

worse. A problem may be constructed when there did not have to be one. The ability to label a child as having ADD is a result of the moral positioning of our sense that persons are self-contained, autonomous entities, and that there is a particular construction of successful versus unsuccessful childhood behaviour. Thus, even medical labels like Kohlberg's hypothetical dilemmas and stages strategically obscure more discursive latitude than one might first expect.

When we talk about ourselves we maintain notions of possessive individualism because we are trapped within this view. The implication is that we morally turn to this view when we are faced with describing or discussing our experiences (Shotter, 1989). I would argue that whenever we discuss anything we are faced with the moral implications of believing ourselves to be self-contained individuals. In all of the extracts, regardless of the type of discussion, the participants were constantly involved in negotiating their moral standing. Because we maintain this notion, therefore, it can be said that our very subjectivity includes the understanding that as individual, isolatable entities we are morally responsible for our personal position. How we talk and act plays this out. That is, we maintain this notion of moral individualism in our discourse and this in turn 'determines' the belief we have of ourselves.

The point to notice in the extracts is that none of the participants were able to simply relate themselves to others from their own perspective and stay within that perspective. The relationship was not, and cannot be one person facing another, with them facing back, always maintaining their individual status. The relationship was 'ours' where everything that was said, and subsequently thought about, was formed within that relationship. Even sitting by myself I am faced with an invisible third person (Bakhtin, 1986) through which I interact with my thoughts and writing. That is, I think and act in anticipation of possible responses. This is necessarily so because my thinking has grown out of relationships and the possibility of relationships. Communication is not simply the relaying of information

from one to another, but the understanding of what it means to be conscious as persons in a social world. It is in this way that we must agree on judgments as well as meanings to be understandable to each other. This agreement about judgments makes up our practical everyday ethics and constructs our subjectivity.

Another aspect to the extracts was the importance of context in what and how things were said in conversation. There were several examples in which what had already been discussed and agreed upon impacted the outcome of later discussions. If this occurs in ongoing conversations then one can imagine the importance of social and historical contexts to all our interactions. That is, what we say must fit with earlier contexts. This constrains and limits what we say and itself represents an ideology that maintains consistency and rationality as part of who we are as thinking humans.

The perspective I have presented here requires a re-thinking of psychology. Studying persons as isolatable individuals that simply relay internal, self-contained thoughts in experimental settings misses most of the story about human life. If we are to have an understanding of being, psychological research needs to acknowledge that human life and knowing occurs in communicative interaction. Language is not a mere tool for the relaying of internal self-produced thoughts or a simple description of external events: it forms the very heart of society and sense of ourselves. Thus, we need to study how persons *become* self-determining thinkers and how this is rhetorically accomplished in talk, rather than adhering to the traditional scientific approach of knowing by detached observation and objective discovery. As researchers and theorists we need to become part of the research that we do in the sense that we must feel through our words what are talk is accomplishing (Shotter, 1993a).

Words and discourse do things. Susan's use of the word 'kill' in the discussion about euthanasia was an example of the broader meanings that come with the use of a single word. The words 'disorder' or 'medication' also come with inscribed meaning that

do not have to be explicated, but that lead towards certain conclusions. Just as this is true with single words, it is also so with the way groups of words are orchestrated to provide a certain take of events or actions (e.g., discursive strategies like 'extreme case formulations').

The impact of viewing 'being' as a discursive accomplishment in which we ethically maintain and interact with each other is that our sense of who we are is enmeshed within this network. As well, our possessive individualism entails that we maintain ourselves as moral persons in all of our interactions. There is a problem, however, when the discourses or moral claims that one can make are limiting in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, and the like. The unavailability of alternative discourses and the inability to articulate them brings up the issue of power. Looking back at the extracts that were presented we find that commonsense accepted beliefs or ideologies were being maintained without question. The mundane conversation about babies is the most cogent example expressing taken-for-granted beliefs about motherhood. This view of power suggests that we are all vehicles of power in that we perpetuate it in our everyday, commonsense discourse with each other (Foucault, 1979). Thus, power does not exist in any one person or institution, it is every where and we are the products of that power. Power, or knowledge, cannot come down from any one person or institution without it being enmeshed in discourse from which it is produced (Foucault, 1979).

The Kohlbergian model and other traditional developmental theories are professional discourses that also perpetuate certain beliefs about life that are exclusionary of other ways of viewing development. This is especially relevant given the way the theories are constructed. The scientific, end-point driven, and universal suppositions touted by such models are discourses of their own that sustain and carry on particular views of development. Once a child or adult is targeted as veering off the proscribed course of development, a whole series of discourses come into play that serve to construct and re-

construct the problem (the case of ADD). It is helpful to return to Wittgenstein to make sense of this point. Given the scientific, end-point driven, progressive and universal model that psychologists view development from within, one is re-creating and sustaining that view. One thinks that this is how things are because we are tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, but one is merely tracing around the frame through which we look at it (Wittgenstein, 1953). Wittgenstein's analogy also can be applied to our everyday practical ethics in which we morally position each other based on ideological discourses. The ideological discourses are like the frame that we continually trace but which we believe represents reified moral principles or beliefs. Concepts of development are historically, socially and culturally constructed notions about how human life 'should' proceed.

The picture I have painted may seem grim given that it seems that we can never transcend the limits of our talk, especially if you assume, as Kohlberg appears to, that such transcendence is a fundamental necessity if a position is to be properly seen as moral. However, the awareness that the beliefs about self and life are discursive accomplishments enables an alternative conceptualization for being. In the moment of ongoing interaction there is always a moment of indeterminacy (Shotter, 1993a) in which new meanings can become negotiated. The uprising of feminist discourses is a fairly recent example of such a negotiation of new meaning. Although there are several feminist discourses that have a different perspective of the situation, as well as problems with these discourses maintaining the patriarchal discourse that they struggle against, they still provide resources for resistance and change.

This project has attempted to study human interaction in everyday context. The importance of doing research in everyday life is that this is where being is created. The present view of being is that one observes the external world (nurture argument) or is born already knowing (nature argument). What is ignored is how one comes to know, to think,

to listen, to perceive, to 'be', which I argue is through communicative interaction based in a practical ethics in which we necessarily construct ourselves as moral agents.

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