

## Research

My current research looks at the provision and experience of pre-school childcare in Britain during the years 1939-1979. The research seeks to question how efforts to promote children's healthy development, and protect them from detrimental influences, were translated into the provision of pre-school childcare outside the home at this time.

Previously, my research has focused on motherhood in postwar Britain. As a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow I undertook a research project looking at attitudes and experiences of motherhood in Britain between 1970 and 1990. Women's lives were transformed during the period 1970-1990. Less than a third of married women were in paid employment in 1961; in 1991 it was over half. Women had fewer children, were less likely to marry and increasingly cohabited. Based on seventy oral history interviews with Oxfordshire women the project questioned how this new social climate challenged existing understandings of motherhood and what women felt about its consequences.

This Leverhulme funded research extended my prior doctoral thesis which was entitled 'Motherhood in Oxfordshire, c. 1945-1970: A Study of Attitudes, Experiences and Ideals'. Based on ninety-two oral history interviews with Oxfordshire women it identified the difficulties mothers faced during the period 1945-1970 and the ways in which women organised themselves to improve their lives. It also revealed that women thought significant changes took place in the lives of mothers after 1970, which inspired me to undertake the follow-up study.



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## Pre-school Childcare, 1939-1979

My current research project, funded by the British Academy, investigates how competing developmental discourses surrounding the under fives influenced the provision and organisation of childcare outside the home between 1939 and 1979. It will examine how theories which developed during the war about the psychological harm caused by separating an infant from its mother influenced the provision of childcare outside the family in light of the social, economic and demographic changes seen during the years that followed.

Focusing on 4 different forms of childcare - day nurseries, nursery schools and classes, playgroups, and childminders - it will consider how both individual families and wider society managed the care of young children in the context of dramatic increases in the employment of married women.

Through the use of oral history it will also examine the experiences and effects of care on those involved and the current policy implications raised. In order to see how the demand, type and availability of childcare varied in different localities 3 case studies will be employed - Coventry, Oxfordshire and Camden.

### Conference / Seminar papers:

- **Angela Davis (2008)**, 'Child development and the father / daughter relationship, Britain c. 1910-1960'; Gender, Health and Medicine in Historical Perspective; University of Exeter.
- **Angela Davis (2010)**, 'The influence of World War Two on European child psychology'; 8th Annual International Conference on History; ATINER, Athens, Greece.

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