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An ethnographic study of unmarried mothers.

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" AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF UNMARRIED MOTHERS ".

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Summary

This ethnographic study of a group of unmarried mothers from a socially deprived area and a newly built housing association estate in South Wales, explores how these young, working-class women became single mothers with specific reference to the social factors of gender and class. Their becoming single–mothers happened in a context of local, national and global changes and rising unemployment during a decade when there were also repeated calls for the reinstatement of the "traditional " family.

Evidence of the changing structure of families is presented in the literature review. Relevant feminist literature concerned with gender relations and the internal dynamics of families are discussed in order to contextualise the data which was collected over a period of nine months between April and November 1997. Methodological, epistemological and ethical questions are raised concerning the value of doing ethnography at home and an argument is made in favour of acknowledging the subjectivities of the women in this research and their invaluable contribution to the finished product, the ethnography presented here.

By exploring the notion that a certain form of the family is functional for society, this ethnography suggests that this normative view of the family renders other family structures as deviant or dysfunctional; single-mothers are a case in point. It shows the inadequacy of the idea of the "traditional" nuclear family as a means of explaining how families live in contemporary society, but also highlights the effectiveness of this idea of the family as a means of sustaining female subordination and gender inequality.

Declaration and Statements

Declaration.

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not

being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ....

Date................... 9/12/2002

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated .

Other sources giving specific references are acknowledged in brackets. A

bibliography is appended.

Signed...

Date 9/12/2002

Statement 2

I hereby consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and inter-

library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside

organisations.

Signed ....

Date................... 9/12/2002 .

I would like to dedicate this research to my grandchildren,

Daniel, Chloe and Dylan.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION

One of the most fundamental social changes in Britain since the 1970s, has been the vast increase in single-parent families. Britain now has the highest percentage of single-parent families and teenage pregnancy rates in Europe and "the number of one-parent families in Great Britain has increased considerably since the early 1970s, from around 600,000 to just over one million -- by more than 50%" (Haskey, 1991:21-2). Trends over time have, however, been different for different types of single-parent families. Thus the largest percentage increase between 1976-1986 was for both never-married mothers (up 77%) and divorced mothers (up 78%) (Haskey, 1991 cited in Fox-Harding 1996:65). Furthermore, in 1990, unmarried mothers represented 6% of all families with children while in 1971 they had constituted only 1% (Fox Harding 1996:65). In the late 1990s, 1.6 million -- or just over one in five families with dependent children in Britain were headed by a lone parent, almost invariably a lone mother, encompassing some 15 per cent of dependent children (Haskey 1998 cited in McRae 1999:14). Never-married mother families account for over 80 per cent of lone parent families in which the parent is teenaged or in their early 20s (Fox-Harding1996).

These developments have been denounced by previous Tory governments and right-wing political scientists (see for eg. Murray 1984) who argue that the single-mother phenomenon is one of, if not the most urgent social, moral and political problem in contemporary British society. Some on the right speculate that the increase in single-mother families is both due to, and cause of, the decline in the social institutions of marriage and the patriarchal nuclear family, whilst others argue the increase can be attributed to feminist politics whereby women are encouraged to drop

their dependency on men in favour of female autonomy. Many right wingers are said to deplore single-mother families because, in their view, children raised in single mother families, without the moral guidance and authority of fathers in their traditional roles as breadwinners, will inevitably become the next generation of poorly educated social misfits and welfare dependents. During the 1990s, society was urged by those on the right to go "back-to-basics" amid appeals for a return to family values and nostalgia for the "traditional" family as "solution" to the social and familial decline epitomised by single mother families. The right-wing "solution" to this perceived social problem is to reinstate the heterosexual, monogamous patriarchal nuclear family of breadwinning male and dependent wife and children. Thus John Redwood as Secretary of State for Wales was quoted *(The Times*, 3/7/1993) as saying that: "The natural state should be the two adult family caring for their children". However the socio-economic changes of recent decades have made this type of family an impossible ideal for many.

Conservative governments in the 1990s attempted to explain the alleged increases in single-mother families as due to state welfare and council house provision which enabled single women to live independently. For instance, Peter Lilley, then Secretary of State for Social Security is on record as saying: "I've got a little list of young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list" (*The Observer,* 11/10/1993). Earlier, in August 1992, when he was Secretary of State for Wales, he had revived the dependency culture debate, expressing concern about teenage pregnancies and the cost of single-parents to the state. These remarks were echoed in September 1993 by the then Treasury minister Michael Portillo, who feared that single teenage parents could be led into a life of poverty-stricken dependency by the state's provision of what he called "over-generous benefits" (Sullivan, 1996:241).

On a visit to a housing estate in South Wales in 1993, John Redwood, then Secretary of State for Wales, suggested that young women were becoming pregnant with no intention of living with the father of their child. In such a situation they knew, Redwood argued, that the state would take care of their social security and housing needs and they therefore chose to become single-mothers. The issue of choice for working-class women, however, is not so straightforward and this study will show that these women make choices which are constrained and limited by their social positions. Despite this, they allegedly epitomise the decline of the "traditional" family and the social institution of marriage.

During the 1990s single-mothers were often represented in the media as distinct social, moral and political problems. Such depictions were the immediate catalyst for my selection of this research topic and are illustrated in the following extracts: "What children need is two parents willing to set a good example and instil moral values into their children" (*The Telegraph,* 29/10/96). Headlines in the *Daily Mail* screamed "Clamp Down On Single Mothers" (18/5/1987). One of the broadsheets featured a historical slant on 21st century single–motherhood: "In the early 19th century illegitimacy rates were around 7 per cent -- nothing like the one-third of children now brought up without fathers. Nor did they receive extravagant state handouts. Today little stigma attaches to illegitimacy. Shame and stigma are denied in social policy with the result that millions of children suffer from being deprived of fathers" (*The Times,* 15/8/1995). The government was urged in this article to discourage lone parenthood by cutting support which, while inevitably having some stigmatising effect, could reduce single–motherhood. Shame and stigma were claimed to have achieved a reduction in Victorian single–motherhood with possibly the same results in the late twentieth century.

So since the early 1990s the demonisation of single-mothers by Conservative governments and fuelled by the media continued. Yet 1st May 1997 saw the election of a Labour government whose policies caused a furore when their attempts to cut benefits for

single-mothers triggered a back-bench revolt. I will now consider what course of action New Labour has taken with regard to single-mothers.

New Labour, single mothers and social inclusion: from welfare to work.

The New Labour government advocated a package of measures designed to assist single-mothers to end their dependency on the State and participate in society. The measures included the New Deal for single parents, the National Childcare Strategy, Sure Start and Supporting Families. In their opinion paid work was the most important way to end social exclusion and was perceived as the best form of welfare to lift single-mothers and their children out of poverty. However, this presupposes that mothering is not work and also does not take into account that many mothers of young children do not want paid work until their children are older. For many women, being with their children until they at least start school is the most important type of work they can do. However, under these measures single-mothers are invited to interviews with trained advisors to assist them in finding suitable employment and suitable childcare for those who want to return to work (Lone parent families: routes to social inclusion http:www. gingerbread. org. uk / lprtsi.html 25/ 6/ 00 p.1 of 37).

These initiatives have not proved as effective as the Government hoped and the situation of many single-mothers has not improved. The numbers of single-mothers finding paid work has been below Government expectations. At the end of October 1999 only a quarter (5,249 lone parents) of those who participated in the scheme in eight pilot areas had found work (http. www. gingerbread. org. uk / lprtsi. html. 25/ 6/ 00 p. 5 of 37).

Many single-mothers for various reasons cannot take or do not want paid work when their children are young. Gingerbread (the organisation for one-parent families) believes that although many want to work they face major obstacles such as a lack of information, a lack of

confidence, sole carer responsibilities, low rates of pay, lack of training or qualifications, and the lack of flexible working hours (these reasons are among those that my research uncovered and are discussed in chapter five). So since its launch the New Deal has not really had much impact upon helping single-mothers to improve their situation.

Why this particular research topic?

The reasons for this particular research are threefold and biographical. The initial impetus came from newspaper articles in which the previous Tory government and other right-wing commentators made what I considered to be inaccurate representations about single-motherhood. It was my theoretical assumption that these political explanations were unsatisfactory and ignored the relevance of social factors, especially gender and class, in the construction of single-mother families. I decided that a sociological analysis that gave this pathologised social group a voice was needed. The second reason was personal but relevant: during the life-span of this research I have had three grandchildren born into two different single-parent families. The third reason was what I describe as my discovering feminism and my own historical and biographical experiences. As Mills argued in the 1950s:
"You must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work, continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense, craftsmanship is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you work." (Wright Mills, 1959:196) .

I thought that a sociological analysis of the single-mother phenomenon was important to explore the experiences and lifestyles of a sample of working-class women whose subjectivities form the basis of this research. One of my objectives was to investigate /deconstruct the stereotype of working-class single-mothers as an homogeneous group of

5

feckless, promiscuous, irresponsible women who are parasitic on the welfare state. Another was to explore the interaction of gender and class and other variables in relation to the social construction of single-mother families. And a third was to test the hypothesis that single-mothers are evidence of the decline of the social institutions of marriage and the family.

I discovered feminist theoretical perspectives on the social world as a mature student and applied these perspectives to understand and make sense of my own life experiences; I had previously attributed my experiences to personal rather than social factors. Personal issues which I had previously analysed as personal inadequacies were now re-analysed in terms of gendered structures of oppression and patriarchy. My working-class background, my former educational experiences, my previous employment and marriage I now analysed in terms of the conceptual frameworks of gender, social class, gender ideology, structural inequalities and patriarchy.

From my enlightened perspective I became aware of just how different the social positions of men and women were. Prior to this I was just like the women described by Dorothy Smith (1984) who often do not realise they are oppressed, cannot see structures of oppression and their own experiences do not necessarily provide knowledge of these oppressions. But adopting a feminist perspective can raise awareness of structural oppressions of race, class, age and gender endemic to women's social lives. I will therefore briefly attempt to describe some of my life experiences in terms of the structural inequalities of gender and social class.

A brief autobiographical sketch

As a working-class child born in the area in which I am now conducting my own research I was perceived as bright in school and was ambitious. From a young age I enjoyed school, never missed lessons, and devoured all the available reading matter I could get my

hands on from the school library. After passing my eleven plus my academic aspirations seemed to be on course and my enthusiasm and commitment to education remained steadfast. This was despite friends who were not "academic" and could not understand my commitment to education rather than spending more time with them in the youth clubs or coffee bars which were becoming popular social haunts in the early 1960s. At the time I became a teenager, working-class culture among my peer group involved make-up, boys, fashion, smoking and under-age drinking, and despite indulging in some of the above I still pursued my academic aspirations.

Social class was not important to me when I was young despite an awareness of differences between myself and the "posh" people who lived in private houses and "snobby" girls in school who lived in Mumbles or similar areas. But this was the only way I ever thought of class difference, I had no conception of the interaction between gender and class and of how this could affect my life.

I was also aware of being different from my peer group with respect to education and I was always rather more conservative (for want of a better word) in behaviour and attitudes than them. I was made aware of these differences by being labelled "a swat" who, unlike my friends, was more interested in books than boys; because of this I knew I could never really be "one of them". With hindsight, it seems I was both an insider and outsider among my peer group, someone who partly but not totally belonged and someone whose values and aspirations could not be reconciled with those of my working-class friends. I was a working-class child who aspired to a university education and a career among friends who aspired to jobs, boyfriends, and marriages.

But at the age of fifteen I rejected all my priorities, values and prior aspirations and left school during my mock "O" levels in May 1964 to begin a clerical job. The head mistress was stunned by my decision to leave and attempted to change my mind, but I was adamant that I

was making the right decision. I had opted for a similar lifestyle to my friends because this was what working-class girls did wasn't it? I ignored the head's pleas to reconsider, "you can't waste a good education, you are throwing your life away girl!" yet little did I know how her words would come back to haunt me.

Although realising years later that she had been right and I had made the wrong decision, I explained it as a personal error of judgement as in my opinion people were in control of their life choices and opportunities and if, like myself, they "messed up" it was their fault. I summed up my life in terms of making the wrong decisions. I had been naive and impulsive and had paid the price in terms of having two jobs which were quite enjoyable but not well paid before marrying at twenty and finding myself in an oppressive, patriarchal relationship as I can now describe it but which I used to regard as more or less "normal".

It was only by studying feminist ways of theorising as a mature student that I learnt about female subordination, patriarchy, and how structural inequalities of class and gender interact and affect people's life chances, decisions and opportunities. I now re-analysed my life in terms of structural inequalities of gender and class and would like to mention a significant sociological study which also contributed to my enlightenment, Jackson and Marsden's *Education and The Working Class* (1962).

This study was especially significant for me because it highlighted the difficulties that academic, working-class children encounter on their journey through the education system. Working-class children with academic aspirations are often torn between their working-class roots and achieving their ambitions by having to tread an educational pathway which is imbued with middle-class values and is totally alien to their upbringing. Many relinquish their aspirations, as Jackson and Marsden discovered, in order to retain their working-class identity, whilst those who "succeed" have to abandon their identity. Whatever the option, there is a price to pay. I consider my price was abandoning my aspirations in favour of retaining my

8

identity but it is unlikely I could have had the best of both worlds. Social inequality, especially social class, is a bitter-sweet and emotive issue as far as I am concerned.

My third and final reason was also auto-biographical. As a working-class (divorced) single mother I was aware of certain problems encountered by single-mothers, which I had experienced and could empathise with, such as living on welfare benefits, bringing up a family on a very limited income, and a certain amount of social isolation. I also knew some of these women did not deserve the pejorative descriptions applied to single-mothers which made me suspect that neither did many others. And last but certainly not least, whilst in the process of drafting this actual research proposal in the summer of 1995, I became an unexpected grandmother to a grandson, Daniel, born into a single-parent family who was followed 18 months later by a sister, Chloe, who was special as she broke the male monopoly of births in my family. And just before the culmination of this research along came Dylan in March 2000 who weighed in at a whopping twelve pounds and one ounce and has already acquired something of a celebrity status by appearing in a national magazine when only a few days old. Dylan was born into a cohabiting family.

This research topic gave me the opportunity to incorporate all my personal interests such as women's issues, gender, and social inequalities whilst the births of my three grandchildren during the research process served to reinforce my personal involvement in the issues whether I liked it or not! Before I conclude I will describe how the dissertation is structured.

In chapter one I undertake a review of the literature on families and single-mother families to set the scene and discuss the complexities and changes affecting families and gender relations in the 21st century. This leads on to chapter two and how I conducted the research, the methods I used to conduct it and explanations for the chosen methodology. Because I have described this as feminist research I include a discussion of feminist research

practices and the problems that can arise from conducting social research. Chapter three describes the women and the localities and chapters four to eight (inclusive) are devoted to the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews and participant observation. In chapter four I focus on the social history of the women and their eventual transition to single-motherhood, in the next I focus on their family histories and issues related to family life, in chapter six I discuss the relationship between women's domestic and paid work, and in chapter seven I discuss changes in the working lives of men and discuss men's roles and responsibilities at home and work at the end of the 1990s. The following chapter concerns social changes which affect families, such as marriage, divorce and the increasing trend to cohabitation. In chapter nine the women respond to media and political critiques of single-motherhood and discuss their roles and experiences as single-mothers. In chapter ten I draw the research to a conclusion whereby the main themes and strands are identified and drawn together and theoretical and practical implications for single-motherhood are discussed. Throughout I use pseudonyms for both people and places.

CHAPTER ONE

STUDYING FAMILIES

In this chapter I examine the literature on families and single–mother families to provide a context for the ethnography that follows. I set out a framework of analysis to assist our understanding of how the nuclear family serves to shape popular conceptions of what constitutes a "proper family" and acts as a yardstick by which other family forms (or deviations) are measured. I examine historical, theoretical and empirical studies of families and single-mother families which attempt to explain how families originated, how they are structured around assumptions of gender roles and how families change or maintain continuity. Families need to be understood as an element within the wider social and economic formation of which they are a part (Allan 1999:5) therefore it is important to consider how macro social processes interact with micro social processes. Morgan (1985) for instance, says that a sociology of the family needs historical accounts that consider the interplay between macro and micro levels, that explore the linkages between a range of inequalities and that allow for the possibility of change through human agency.

I want to demonstrate the usefulness of applying sociological theories to an analysis of working–class, single–motherhood and in order to do this I shall draw on both structural and interactionist perspectives. In the first part of this chapter I assess the suitability of certain concepts for analysing the relationship between families and society. I attempt to develop a framework for analysing working–class, single–motherhood which also explains how the state supports the patriarchal nuclear family and single-mother families. I link theory and method by looking at issues of gender (ideology and inequality), families and the state. I wanted to explore the extent to which single–mother families were an effect of structural change and inequalities but were not necessarily evidence of changing gender relations in which women had replaced men as heads of the family. I also wanted to examine how (micro) processes

11

taking place within families affect the (macro) processes in the wider social formation. I propose to use the "traditional" gender division of labour as the linking concept between structural and interactionist perspectives in order to show why, in important respects, gender relations remain unchanged.

I intend to use the work of three theorists Althusser (1971) Barrett (1988) and Gough (1979) to develop the theoretical framework for my discussion. All three analyse the ways in which ideology assists in the reproduction of the patriarchal, nuclear family and how the nuclear family functions as a mode of social control, maintaining class and gender inequalities, and how other types of families, such as single-mothers, are marginalised within society.

In order to develop this framework I evaluate theoretical approaches to the family beginning with functionalist perspectives followed by marxist and marxist-feminist perspectives. In the second part of this chapter I evaluate the literature on single-mother families and discuss social policy towards single-mothers and, finally I discuss feminist contributions to theories of the state as gendered and as an agent of social control.

Sociology and the political debate over the family

As we have already seen, the recent political and moral controversy over the increasing numbers of unmarried mothers in contemporary British society has been interpreted by successive Tory governments and other right-wing commentators as evidence of the decline of the social institutions of marriage and the family, both of which are said to be fundamental to a stable and cohesive society. Much of the media pathologises single-mother families as deviant or dysfunctional families who have failed to conform to dominant reproductive ideologies in which children should be reared in patriarchal, heterosexual, nuclear families and conceived within, and not outside, marriage. In effect, single-mothers are perceived in important sections of the media as opposed to traditional family life (rather

than perhaps a variation on the same theme) and as a crippling financial burden on the welfare state and a threat to the social fabric. These ideas are linked to the concept of the "underclass" as it was developed in the US (most influentially for British social policy by Murray, 1984,1990). According to these accounts the underclass is composed of unemployed men and single-mothers who have no incentive to work or marry, and no motivation either to support their families or to help themselves out of dependency on the state. Murray argues that single-mothers and their children are excluded by lifestyle and welfare dependence from mainstream society (Allan, 1999:251). However Murray is more concerned with social behaviour in the sense of sexuality, work and crime than with structural determinants and has been criticised for his conceptualisation of single-mothers as belonging to an "underclass" (Klett-Davies, 1996). Single-motherhood has therefore become a highly contentious issue and has reopened debates in politics and sociology about the significance of the traditional family for the continuity of society: "the family" has regained its prominence on the moral, sociological and political agendas. This debate raises serious sociological questions as to whether the social institutions of marriage and the family are indeed in decline or whether gender relations are changing to accommodate modern socio-economic trends such as the restructuring of the labour market, the decline in manufacturing, increases in male unemployment, reductions in social expenditure, and the increased participation of women in paid employment. This raises further questions such as if there has been an exponential increase in the number of single-mother families is this a national and/or international phenomenon and what social processes have precipitated this? Is there, in reality, a rigid dichotomy between single-mothers and "traditional families"? And why have single-mothers become such a major political and moral issue at the turn of the century?

As a sociological issue I propose to test the hypothesis that a familial or kinship network of social support underpins single-mothers and to explore the relationship between single-mothers and the institution of the family. My hypothesis is that working-class, single

13

mothers do not reject the family, but rather depend upon it for material, economic and emotional support, and that most single-mother families are merely alternative family formations created as a result of the many socio-economic and cultural changes in recent years.

During the 1990s, pro-family theorists attacked working mothers, easy divorce, cohabitation and the apparent weakening of fatherhood (see for example, Dennis and Erdos, 1992). These theorists consider that "deviance" from the patriarchal, nuclear family is a matter of individual choice and seek to "reinstate" a family form which was perceived as more stable and socially beneficial -- the male breadwinner model of employed father and dependent wife and children. This was despite the fact that this model was always more appropriate to a middle rather than a working-class lifestyle. But herein lies the paradox: right-wing theorists, pro-family groups and politicians argue that the nuclear/breadwinner family is functional for society and "good" for its members and society in contrast to the dysfunctional type of family which is "bad" for its members and society and includes single-mothers. Yet many more people today live in what the right classify as non-nuclear or dysfunctional families than live in "functional" families. New right philosophy on "the family" is underpinned by functionalism which stresses the functional contribution of social institutions for the continuity of society but which, as a sociological theory, has been criticised for its failure to explain diverse family structures, for its assumption of a biological basis for the sexual division of labour and as only being applicable to white, Western middle-class family lifestyles thereby excluding much of the population. This model of "the family" cannot be applicable to working-class, cohabiting, step-families, unemployed families or two-earner families which make up most of contemporary society. Therefore the disjunction between right-wing ideologies of how families should live as opposed to the social realities of how many families actually do live is central to this study.

"An understanding of this disjunction between the economic organisation of households and the ideology of the family is essential for an analysis of the contemporary family" (Barrett, 1988:204).

In effect, we have to differentiate between families as various and diverse economic units and the ideology of the nuclear family which defines how people are expected to live despite financial conditions and socio-economic changes which will not allow them to. In order to explore these issues I shall be using the sociological theories of functionalism, marxism and feminism. However, before proceeding with a discussion of theoretical understandings of families, I deal with definitional and conceptual problems of the family: I unpack "the family" and its associated concepts to determine their relevance to this study.

Defining the family

The term "family" is often used by different theorists to mean different things, e.g. a group of blood relatives or a kinship group, and in some cases "the family" has been replaced by or combined with other units of analysis such as households (Walby, 1992). More fundamentally, the questions raised by some theorists include whether or not such a thing as "the family" exists at all (Bernardes, 1985b). Thus Scanzoni (1987) suggests that the concept should be abandoned in favour of a new image or paradigm necessary for the study of structured interpersonal relationships and he suggests the concept of "primary relationships". Morgan (1996) favours the use of the concept of family practices to capture the changing nature of families in contemporary society. As regards future re-conceptualisations of the family, I suggest that the idea of fluid family formations could be a possibility rather than attempting to use the conceptual straight jacket of "the family" to explain how families live in the 21st century. We need to consider that using a monolithic definition of "the family" implies the existence of one type of family; this is misleading and tends to marginalize or

15

undermine other types of families in contemporary society.

Furthermore, many definitions of "the family" rely on notions of male breadwinner and female dependent which excludes many family forms in today's society such as two-earner families, families with unemployed men, non-married or cohabiting families, step-families, ethnic minority families, families headed by widows/widowers, gay families, extended families and single-mother families. Indeed, it has been argued that the notion of a sole male breadwinner has always been "ideological" in the sense that it represented a view of social relations that did not correspond to the facts of economic and domestic life, and expressly served the interests of a particular social group, that of the skilled, male working class (Morris, 1990:7). The notion of the male breadwinner earning a "family wage" to support his dependents neglects the contribution made by married women and their offspring to the household income, the vagaries of the labour market, and the inability of low-paid men to honour the obligations implied by the "breadwinner" role, as well as the state's eventual intervention in offering some support (Land, 1981). For these reasons the role of male breadwinner is more ideological than real in relation to most working-class families. Indeed prior to recent socio-economic change, the idea of the family wage as sufficient to support working-class families was also untenable and many families found it necessary for the wife to make a financial contribution by her waged work.

Alongside the notion of the male breadwinner goes that of the housewife. Walby, however (1986:82) argues that the proportion of women doing the job of full-time housewife has decreased during the past two decades. It appears that the concept of housewife, as well as male breadwinner is ideological and neither has ever been sufficient to explain how working-class families organise themselves as economic units. Dual-earner families have probably been the norm throughout history and the contemporary world (Bernardes,1997:28).

16

Theorising families

Some theorists explain the family as a universal or natural institution wherein the roles of men and women are strictly demarcated as in the male breadwinner model; these theorists often justify inequalities between men and women by defining women as natural mothers and homemakers. Others recognise changes in family forms and the roles of men and women in recent decades and do not support a monolithic definition of the family. The family has also been theorised as the transmitter of bourgeois ideology which assists in the perpetuation of class divisions and feminist authors conceptualise the family as the primary location of women's subordination wherein gender divisions are perpetuated. In order to explore the differing perspectives I begin with functionalism which analyses the nuclear family as natural and universal.

Functionalism and the family

The earliest theoretical perspective concerning the relationship between family and economy was functionalism which analyses the family as an institution which performs certain specific functions essential to society's survival. In his book *Social Structure*, (1949) Murdock claimed that the family performs four characteristic functions, the sexual, the economic, the reproductive and the educational. He further argued that the nuclear family form of breadwinning husband and dependent wife and children was characterised by economic cooperation between the sexes based on a sexual division of labour. Murdock's theory is based on an assumption of gender roles, an assumption of heterosexuality, and assumptions that only the nuclear family can carry out these most important functions. However many other types of families reproduce and socialise children today and he does not seem to account for the diverse ways in which people organise their family lives, finances, and sexual relations often in response to wider social changes.

This view of "the family" was further developed by Talcott Parsons who identified

two essential functions of the family as being childhood socialisation and the maintenance of adult personalities (Morgan, 1975:66-7). This view became central to discussions of family life in sociology. Like Murdock, Parsons suggested that "the nuclear family" of married couple plus children is best suited to industrial society (Morgan, 1975 and 1985). Associated with this view were all sorts of ideal models of behaviour connected with mothering, gender, dependency, emotional and instrumental roles. Parsons considered that sex role differentiation within the family was necessary, as competition for occupational status between spouses would undermine the marriage relationship and, in modern Western societies, families had to adapt to meet the needs of the industrial economy. Parsons was concerned with the relationship between the family and the economy, and in his view, the nuclear family made it possible for the economy to operate unhampered by wide-ranging kinship obligations, whilst providing family members with a stable set of primary relationships within which children are socialised and adults gain emotional support. He argued that the nuclear family had become more isolated from the extended family and this isolation was better suited to the needs of an industrial society. Central to Parsons's argument are two assumptions: that an industrial economy requires high rates of social and geographical mobility and that such mobility weakens or destroys the solidarity of any kinship group (Harris, 1983). According to Harris, the failure of Parsons's theory to provide any means of analysing the various family types empirically found in industrial societies weakens his analysis. Functionalist theory has also decreased in credibility because it raises many important questions about unacknowledged assumptions and values underpinning the theory, suggesting that family life is typically happy, secure and mutually advantageous for its members. It gives an oversimplified view of gender relations and there is a lack of awareness of the tensions and problems that are often inherent in family life (Laws, 1971; Oakley, 1973; Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). A limitation of functionalist theory of the family is that it depends on the separation of gender roles for its credibility -- man as worker and wife at home -- and was never really appropriate as a means

18

of explaining working-class lives. Also it failed to deal with social inequalities.

In an influential critique of Parsons, David Morgan (1975) argued, in keeping with Merton's (1957) more balanced structural functionalism, that it was necessary to describe not only the functions performed by families but also their dysfunctions. He argued that while family structures might help to ensure the success of society as a whole they could also hinder the successful adaptation of individual members. In particular, he suggested that the successful functioning of the "breadwinner" family was often at the expense of the educational and occupational aspirations of women (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). And although Parsons acknowledged this, he argued that a division of labour in which wives stayed at home was better suited to industrial society. However I suggest that wives who spend all their time at home are more likely to undermine the marriage relationship due to the monotony and boredom involved. Parsons did not, in my opinion, understand women.

Despite its limitations as a means of explaining how families live, this model seems to have become integrated into common-sense ideas of post–war family life and still remains central to much modern theorising. Functionalist theory is relevant to this particular study because of the continued emphasis in right-wing rhetoric on "the family" as functional for society; therefore we cannot dismiss the theoretical contribution of functionalist sociology to this study and to contemporary debates about the family even if we do not agree with it.

Functionalist theories of "the family" were dominant in the 1950s and 1960s and were influential in research on families and community e.g. as in the first Bethnal Green study (Wilmott and Young, 1962). The concepts of community and family were later considered as too restricting to fully explore family lives. Family relations needed to be theorised in a wider context of family, kin, friends and neighbours and theories also needed to acknowledge the links between the home and the workplace. Feminist writers in the 1970s drew attention to the need to focus on inequalities within families and began to focus on gender relations within the home as opposed to previous theorisations focusing on the relations of families to external

19

factors such as the economy or the community.

Some studies focused on relations between spouses and the alleged growing involvement of men in domestic work and childrearing and some assumed that marital relations were becoming more egalitarian (Young and Wilmott,1975; Bott,1957). Other theorists of the family were concerned with the effects of socio-economic changes on families (Rosser and Harris,1969). Theorists such as Cornwell (1984) emphasised the importance of studies of the division of labour in women's lives. In her study of the East End of London Cornwell discovered that one of the effects of a sexual division of labour was how women zealously regarded domestic work and childcare as their responsibilities and were not prepared to relinquish these.

I now evaluate an empirical study concerned with explanations for changes in relations between families, the workplace and society because this study was a predecessor of mine and concerned the effects of socio-economic changes on family lives in South Wales. In their study carried out in Swansea in the 1960s, Rosser and Harris explored the effects of social and structural changes upon families. Much popular theorising at that time stressed the decline of the extended family and its replacement by the isolated and geographically mobile nuclear family which was better suited to the needs of industrial society. Rosser and Harris carried out an extensive study of families in Swansea who differed in respect of locality, occupation, number of children and their relations with their extended families. Swansea was an industrial urban area undergoing much socio-economic change during the 1960s and their study was similar to that conducted by Willmott and Young in Bethnal Green in the East End of London in 1957. Rosser and Harris were concerned with the effects of such changes on extended families which were said in the 1960s to be in decline, whereas much contemporary theorising in the 1990s assumes the decline of the nuclear family in the wake of the ascendency of single-mother families. Rosser and Harris's findings disproved theories about "traditional working-class" patterns of kinship and community as static and unchanging.

They documented changes in the relationship between processes of social and geographical mobility and extended families (1990:15). They also disproved that extended families had become more or less extinct, despite finding that the kinship relations of many families had changed over the years with some families not so close knit as previously or with less frequent visits by children to their parents because of geographical mobility. They found that gender divisions were firmly entrenched in Swansea and their study highlighted the centrality of women within kinship networks. Kinship networks focused on "The Mam"; most of the support was gendered and provided by the maternal grandmothers. Women were responsible for organising and orchestrating these support networks among families which is something I discuss in chapter 2.

Another important study which deals with changes in families' relations consequent upon women's changing participation in paid employment is that of Wilmott and Young (1972) who followed up their earlier studies of a working-class community in the east end of London with a more contemporary study entitled *The Symmetrical Family* (1972). This explored changes in married women's employment leading to more egalitarian gender relations within families. They argued for three stages in the development of the family, from the pre-industrial through the family of individual wage earners up to the modern symmetrical family which would be less patriarchal due to women having two roles -- in their families and in the work place

Young and Wilmott argued that in this family sex roles were less segregated and men would help more with domestic tasks as their wives now had two roles; furthermore this new type of family would diffuse from the middle to the working-class. However these theories were disproved by later studies which showed that inequalities between men's and women's roles within families did not decline to any significant extent and there was no trickling down of equality to working-class families (Gittins, 1984; Morris, 1992) and also that relations in middle-class families were far from egalitarian (Edgell, 1984).

Elizabeth Bott's (1957) study of social networks and family relations has provided an invaluable conceptual tool in my study. It not only enabled me to understand how social networks operate within specific environments but also her theoretical framework was significant with regard to my own particular study because I needed the help of a social network to generate my sample.

Bott found that marital relations differed in relation to types of social networks and social environments. For example, one would be more likely to find close-knit networks in working-class communities wherein some families and their extended families and old friends and neighbours had lived for years and knew each other well. There tended to be less social mobility and less outward migration in working-class environments and more contact between families and relatives, but there also tended to be a more rigid gender division of labour within these families. According to Bott, factors associated with the working class lead to sharply segregated gender roles in an area, notably limited geographical mobility, a limited range of work opportunities for men, and different limited work opportunities for women (Jones, 1999).

Pahl (1984) carried out a study on the Isle of Sheppey in order to explore changes in the workplace and their effects on family lives. He referred to other changes such as the growth of single-parent households, increases in women's employment opportunities, and the problems of attempting to sustain family life in terms of the male breadwinner and dependent housewife especially when male unemployment was increasing. Pahl's analysis is partially applicable to my study for its emphasis on survival strategies/changes in working-class family lives due to male unemployment and for showing how men and women use the informal economy. He provided insights into the changed nature of work which can no longer be conceptualised in terms of a separation between the home and the workplace and in terms of the male breadwinner family model. His concept of survival strategies applies to some of the single-mothers in my study and also to some of the working practices of their partners.

22

Other authors sought to avoid theoretical explanations of family lives in terms of a model of "the family" and, in his recent book, Morgan (1996) focuses on explanations in terms of "family practices" in the contexts of gender, the body, food and the home.(see also Charles and Kerr, 1988). Family practices may best be thought of as behaviours linked to family living which, in their very existence, demarcate family living from other non-family forms of living or being.

Marxism and the family

I now turn to a discussion of marxist analyses of families and their relationship with society. Whereas functionalism emphasises the degree of "fit" between the family and society, marxists have stressed the relationship between the family and the economy, focusing particularly on how working-class families produce and reproduce labour power and the relations of production thereby ensuring the continuation of the capitalist system.

Marxist theorists conceptualise the family as a mechanism for perpetuating class divisions and social inequalities and as the transmitter of bourgeois ideology; marxist feminists regard the family as the prime site of the oppression of women. Certain marxist theorists such as Engels and Zaretsky explain family lives and the sexual division of labour in relation to concepts of public and private or the separation of the home from the workplace. I begin therefore with a discussion of the concepts of public and private followed by a discussion of the main study drawn upon in marxist accounts of family life, namely Engels's, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* which is significant for its attempt to theorise the origins of women's oppression and gender divisions in society.

The privatised nature of the "cult of domesticity" in modern family living has been a prominent issue in marxist theories of the family and theorists such as Zaretsky, claim that male privilege and the private family are both outcomes of the capitalist mode of production. The ideology of separate spheres has identified women with homeliness and men with

23

worldliness and many feminists refer to how the relations of dependency in domestic life are linked to the social division between private and public spheres. It is said that male agency is sustained by the private labour of women and Barrett and McIntosh have argued in this sense, and with regard to how the private family assists in the perpetuation of patriarchal relations, that the family must be considered as "an anti-social institution" (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). They argue that familial relations reproduce gender identities which are oppressive for women and perpetuate inequalities within families to which women are subjected due to assumptions of their being dependents of men.

Zaretsky (1976) theorises the origin of the dichotomy between private and public as linked to the structure of industrial capitalism, specifically the dichotomy between "the family" and "the economy". He argues that capitalist development removed production from the privacy of families and centralised it in large scale impersonal units, such as factories. As a result human activity became divided between the new public forms of work and the private labour of women within the home, and women, especially as mothers, came to be idealised as the core of personal life. Hence the Victorian cult of domesticity was born and "the family" became the focus of personal life,

> "With the rise of corporate capitalism, the family became the major institution in society given over to the personal needs of its members" (Zaretsky, 1986:61).

Consequentially the idea grew that family life consists of "natural" functions which are performed in a realm that has no apparent connection to the rest of society. Other theorists have argued that there was always a sexual division of labour (Seccombe, 1992) and feminists argue that capitalism developed in a society which was already patriarchal (Richardson,1993:312). However a theoretical explanation of family life based on gender inequality is to be found in Engels, who locates women's economic and social dependency in the monogamous family and private property.

Basing himself on Morgan he traces the development of the family from pre-historic

24

times to the nineteenth century when he was writing. He argued that in subsistence economies gender relations were equal, no surplus was accumulated and the only division of labour was that based on the "natural" divisions of sex and age. The surplus arose from men looking after the animals which they then wanted to hand down to their children, but in order to guarantee the biological legitimacy of their children in times when relations between the sexes were egalitarian and women controlled their own fertility they instigated monogamy (but only for women) (Charles, 1993). Hence Engels equated the private family with patriarchal monogamy in which families as small groups (nuclear families) are separated into self-contained households. He referred to this as the "domestic slavery of the wife" (Engels, 1942:65) and argued that this structural separation had been created by men, for men.

> "The monogamous family is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity. Such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs" (Engels, 1942: 45).

Engels further postulated that this form of the family was based not on natural but upon economic considerations, that monogamous marriage meant the subjugation of women by men, and that household management had lost its former public character. It no longer concerned society, it had become a private service. He also addressed the issue of class inequality when he proposed that the inequality within monogamous marriage could be redressed by the working-class wife gaining employment outside the home which was not an option for middle-class women. Engels argued that middle-class women had "prostituted" themselves within their monogamous marriages. Engels also maintained that because there was no property in working-class marriages these marriages were more likely to be egalitarian and more likely to be based upon romantic rather than economic considerations.

Engels has been criticised on the grounds of assuming a natural division of labour whereby women worked in the home, yet in subsistence economies many women foraged for food and families were not discrete social units. O'Brien (1979) criticised the theory on the

grounds that working-class women's participation in the public sphere would not guarantee less subordination. This was one of the findings from my study in which many working-class families adhere to firmly entrenched gender divisions and gender segregated roles and many wives find that paid employment does not reduce inequalities within their family but rather adds to them.

Engels has also been criticised for his rather utopian views of romantic love as the basis for working-class marriages (Barrett, 1982). But I suggest Engels's theory has a feminist orientation because he is seemingly a critic of the monogamous family and advocates "liberating" women from their oppression through the medium of paid work. And, as Charles (1993) points out, the important theoretical point is that Engels links the emergence of gender inequalities to the emergence of other social inequalities based on differential access to the means of production. Engels's theoretical contribution to an analysis of women's subordination and family theorising cannot be overlooked for its attempt to theorise gender divisions despite its somewhat idealistic conceptions of egalitarianism and romantic love within propertyless working-class families. Although Engels theorised that the absence of property among the working-class would not entail women's subordination, I would disagree for in some working-class families women are regarded as the property of men: this is discussed in chaper five. Engels argued that socialisation of childcare would assist in women's liberation yet because Britain has a poor record of child care provision this has not materialised and women are often more oppressed by having to cope with a domestic burden as well as a working role. Due to assumptions of women's primary roles as mothers, women in paid employment often have to combine their childcare and domestic duties with paid work which for some, is unmanageable. I explore these issues in chapter three.

In *Weathering the Storm* (1993) Seccombe provides an analysis of working-class families from the industrial revolution to the present. He situates families within a historical perspective and attempts to theorise households at the level of the capitalist mode of

production, submitting that working-class family life changes in relation to changes in the prevailing capitalist mode of production. However his references to the working-class family seem to imply one such model when there is much diversity within the working class and family life changes in conjunction with other social, economic, cultural and gender variables and not just according to changes in the capitalist system (Barrett, 1988). Seccombe addresses the recurrent theme of "crisis in the family", illustrating how working-class families "weathered the storm" at various historical stages. He uses the decline of the "male-breadwinner norm" and the rise of dual-income families as evidence of such change within families yet says nothing about no-earner families. He refutes the predominance of the nuclear family unit, preferring "a variety" of family forms, rebutting also historical accounts of "natural" or universal families; thereby his position is at odds with the functionalist theoretical view of the family. For him, families are social constructs, and he disagrees with proponents of the nuclear continuity thesis, such as Lasch (1977), who does not acknowledge that families change their form As regards the changes of the past three decades being historically unprecedented, Seccombe suggests this is not so and it seems that the alleged increases in single-motherhood are not such a new phenomenon.

> "Although the means of marital dissolution have changed in the current period, the shortening of marital duration and the rise in conjugal uncertainty return modern populations to a more familiar instability. The incidence of children living with single-mothers and stepfathers has returned to levels which were normal in the past, after an episode of exceptional stability. The new trend towards informal cohabitation and subsequent marriage has many features in common with the old betrothal customs where conjugal compatibility was tested before the union was legalised" (Seccombe, 1993:208).

If Seccombe is correct then contemporary society is not experiencing a sexual revolution in terms of deviant single-mother families and/or cohabiting couples as many commentators would have us believe but rather a case of history repeating itself with no threat to the social order. As regards the "crisis in the family" Seccombe suggests that in contemporary society the nuclear family as an abstract ideal remains overwhelmingly

dominant -- and consequentially changes in family forms will be interpreted by many as family breakdown (Seccombe, 1993:98). But since the 1960s, throughout the developed capitalist world, family forms have changed in several far reaching ways.

I now turn to a discussion of Althusser's theorisation of the family as an ideological state apparatus (hereafter ISA) which functions to produce and reproduce class divisions and the social relations of production. I am applying Althusser's conceptual framework to my study because of his conceptualisation of the family as functional in the reproduction of the working-class. Althusser and Parsons both regard the family as functional for society yet Parsons says nothing about the family reproducing class divisions.

Althusser's concept of ideology is crucial to his theory which he defines not as a false set of ideas or beliefs but as rooted in material institutional practices and as functional in reproducing class divisions within society. Althusser sought to expound a theory that addresses the subjective element of compliance in ideological relationships and practices by explaining why individuals who are subject to structures of state power and ideology become subjects who comply with ideology as if voluntarily (Hewitt, 1995; Althusser, 1971). Althusser argues that it is within the family that individuals are reproduced in positions of subordination and domination but his conceptual framework was developed to account for the reproduction of class and not gender divisions. Children learn subservience or deference firstly to their parents and then to society at large and this ideology is reinforced by the media, the schools, the church and peer groups and reproduces socially acceptable citizens who "know their place" (or else their class position). He stresses that material ideological practices within families such as the division of labour and ideologies of domesticity for women and breadwinning for men contribute to the formation of gender and class identities.

Although Althusser has been criticised on the grounds that people, are able to resist ideology and be self-determining, I suggest that the significance he assigns to ideology should not be underestimated. Especially significant is his focus on the relative autonomy of

28

ideology as distinct from the economic and political structures of society and its ability to influence the social aspects of people's everyday lives. His theory is applicable to the working-class because although every member of the working-class does not remain in their original class position and a certain amount of social mobility between classes does occur, it is not easy for working-class individuals to achieve this mobility. The effects and interactions of class and ideology including the ideology of "knowing one's place" can be influential and constraining with regard to aspirations and future achievements.

In Althusser's theory of class reproduction the concept he uses is that of social reproduction; this must be distinguished from biological reproduction because marxist theorists use it to refer to more than just the reproduction of the population. The working-class is not reproduced through babies being born in overalls with paintbrushes or hammers in their hands and neither is the middle-class born with briefcases and dressed in pin-striped suits and bowler hats. As Althusser maintains, social reproduction is achieved through the ideological media of education, the family, the church, the media, peer groups and the political system. Social reproduction therefore refers to the reproduction of the relations of production and class reproduction as well as human reproduction.

Feminism and families

Michelle Barrett builds upon Althusser's theoretical framework to analyse the position of women within the family and the family's role in the production and reproduction of gender divisions. She (1988) applies Althusser's conceptualisation of ideology to women's oppression within the family and develops it to argue that gender is socially constructed within an ideology of the family. Her materialist analysis proceeds from a discussion of the sexual division of labour and is concerned with the work that women do. However she conceptualises ideology as a set of abstract ideas that not only influence behaviour but are expressed in everyday actions (Barrett, 1980:30). This is the way in which ideology is

reproduced and continually reinforced. For example, most people think women are the main childcarers but people also act on these beliefs in everyday situations. It is more likely that a woman rather than a man would comfort a crying child as this is her "natural" role. Barrett describes the family as:

> "the site of the oppression of women -- an organising principle of the relations of production of the social formation as a whole"(Barrett, 1980 : 211).

She distinguishes between a construction of gender within families and the social construction of gender within an ideology of familialism. She uses ideology in the sense of being both familial and gendered to explain women's oppression within the family and argues that it is through ideological beliefs in female subordination, acquired firstly in the family in the contexts of the biological and domestic division of labour and then later in the workplace, that gendered identities and female subordination are produced.

I shall draw on Barrett's analysis to explain how my sample were seemingly influenced by ideology "in the construction of gendered subjectivities which show how women (and men) reproduce the very familial structures that oppress them" (Barrett, 1980 251). By analysing ideology we can explore the oppressive myth of a "natural" family to which women are expected to conform and to understand how familial ideology and issues of identity are important to understanding the gendered division of labour.

I chose to apply Barrett's conceptual framework to my study to explain how ideologies of domesticity and maternity for women and of breadwinning and responsibility for men are strongly articulated in families in contemporary society and how these ideas about "proper" roles for men and women are internalised and acted upon and can influence the formation of single-mother families.

Walby (1996), whose analysis of gender relations is similar to Barrett's, argues that women are subordinated by six structures of patriarchy; in the home, in the workplace, through sexuality, in the state, male violence and culture. Her argument is useful as it

addresses the nature and significance of inequality in different areas such as the family and the state which are fundamental to this study, yet she differs from Barrett in that she does not consider the family as the primary site for the generation of gender inequalities. Walby identifies some significant changes around families and their relations with wider society such as a shift from private to public patriarchy whereby women are less subordinate in the family but more so in the workplace and the state.

This evaluation of family studies now moves on to include feminist analyses as many feminists view the family as an oppressive institution and the primary site of gender inequalities and women's subordination. Different aspects of family life have been theorised as important to an understanding of women's subordination; some have focused on male violence and men's control of sexuality and reproduction, others on domestic labour and its benefits to capitalism and/or men, others on familial relations and others on the state regulation of family life. Marxists and feminists alike focus attention on the family and its relationships with wider society and an important feature of feminist approaches to the family includes a critique of marxism for being so pre-occupied with capital-labour relations that it does not adequately address issues relating to women, the family, households and sexuality (Morgan, 1985).

The first study I discuss is that of Delphy and Leonard (1992) which is a materialist analysis focusing on the exploitation of women within families and the power relations within which they are subordinated. This analysis focuses on the family as an economic system and part of a web of labour relations in which women (and often children) are exploited by men, who tend to dominate the families or households of which they are members. They conceptualise marriage as a labour contract (in the same way as a labour contract between workers and their bosses) and families are theorised as hierarchically structured. They argue that housewives constitute one class and husbands another, there being a relationship of social and economic inequality between them. Housewives are the producing class, engaged in

31

domestic labour, husbands are non-producers who appropriate their wives' labour. Men and women live within a patriarchal mode of production and housework is a form of production like any other form of work. This theory is limited by maintaining that women are all members of one and the same class -- there are too many differences between women in complex modern society for this to be convincing and women can exploit other women. Also invoking the analogy of marriage as a labour contract suggests that women are relatively powerless whereas many women do exert some degree of power within marriage and dissolving a labour contract is often far easier than dissolving a marriage. However as a theory based on the exploitation of women within families it could, nonetheless, be an accurate analysis of many who are exploited within their marriages.

Some have argued that feminism and marxism cannot be reconciled to provide an adequate theory of women's subordination because marxism is too concerned with labour relations and has generally marginalised issues concerning women and the family. I believe that a marxist analysis which rigidly attempts to relate women's oppression to capitalism will be unsuccessful yet certain marxist concepts could be used to generate an analysis of women's oppression such as that conducted by Delphy and Leonard. Marxist-feminists were successful in establishing that housework was real as opposed to ideological but not so successful in establishing that capitalism, as an economic system, required women to stay at home to do the housework. Also they did not consider the benefits of domestic labour to men as the previous analysis of Delphy and Leonard (1992) attempted to do.

Having explored various theoretical and empirical works on families I now turn to a discussion of studies of single–mother families.

Studies of lone mothers

Single–motherhood is not a new phenomenon, there have always been single–mothers but what needs exploring is why unmarried single-mothers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have attracted so much socio-political concern whereby they are perceived to be a social and moral problem. Kiernan, Land and Lewis (1998:2) point out that demographers have attempted to describe and explain elements of family change – in particular the increases in divorce, cohabitation and extra-marital childbearing (Kiernan, 1996). The authors argue for an historical approach to an understanding of how we arrived where we are including post-war family change, the changing context in terms of ideas about marriage, divorce, cohabitation and unmarried mothers and changes in socio-economic policies and attitudes to single-mothers (1998:3).

I begin examining the literature with a study conducted in northern and southern England in the1960s in order to compare past and present conditions of single-motherhood. Dennis Marsden's study aimed to stimulate public debate about the inherent problems of fatherlessness and how society at large treated this particular group of the poor who depended for their survival on the state at a time of generally rising living standards. This research formed part of a larger survey of poverty in the U. K. and involved the participation of 116 women on national assistance (as social security was then known) between 1965-1966. Marsden found several kinds of deprivation among these women such as financial hardship, inadequate housing, social stigma and debts, and single-mothers were often perceived as socially threatening by their peers. The poorest were the unmarried mothers: their incomes were the lowest of all the fatherless families, but many received help from friends and families of origin. However some women claimed to be better off on assistance (albeit far from generous) than when they were married, as contemporary research such as that by Graham (1987) has also found. Therefore despite the thirty-year gap between the 1960s and the 1990s, there is not much difference (according to research findings) concerning the situations of unmarried mothers with respect to financial hardship and a lack of social integration.

A similar study entitled *All Our Kin* was conducted by Carol Stack in the USA in the 1960s as an ethnographic study of a poor black community. Stack was concerned to explore how kinship and support networks were used in order to survive; many of those she studied were unmarried women. There are similarities between this study and my own as regards poor, single-mothers and their support networks. Stack's study is notable for its non-conceptualisation of poor, black families as dysfunctional (or deviant as typified by the dominant culture). The purpose of Stack's work was to illustrate the collective adaptations to poverty of men, women and children within the cultural and social network of the black urban family. The findings showed that the negative stereotyping attached to poor, black families

34

was inaccurate. Many aspired to a middle-class ideal of the family and the domestic networks they devised to combat poverty and survive were highly organised and effective, the family networks and arrangements were significant and reciprocal. Stack found that unemployment was instrumental in determining whether or not a cohabiting or married lifestyle was effected (similar findings also emerged in my study). She found that many black American working-class males had little or no access to steady employment and, as a result, were rarely able to support and maintain families.

> "Couples rarely chance marriage unless a man has a job; often the job is temporary and low paid and the worker gets laid off whenever he is not needed. Women come to realise that welfare benefits and ties within kin networks provide greater security for them and their children"(Stack, 1972:113).

The findings imply that many women had to remain single because of their partner's economic inability to support a family, and I suggest that unemployment is a structural factor which also contributes to the number of single-mother families in contemporary society (see also McRae, 1999). The values and aspirations that people hold are often unattainable due to a lack of resources and people's life choices are constrained by such factors.

Black families have consistently been identified as problematic in both Britain and the USA (Phoenix, 1987, 1990, 1993). In particular, high rates of lone motherhood in black women have been blamed for problems ranging from educational underachievement to delinquency (see, for example, the report of the official inquiry into the underachievement of "West Indian" children in British schools, which focuses on high rates of lone parenthood among "West Indian" families, Swann, 1985). In the United States, concerns are expressed about the numbers of black lone mothers (Morris, 1994) and while lone motherhood was seen as almost exclusively a black aberration, it was censured, but constructed as due to cultural difference and the "Otherness" of black people (Phoenix, 1990,1991,1987). However Phoenix (1992) argues that there are socio-economic factors which contribute to black and white single-motherhood. Morris (1991) argues that the rate of single-parenthood among

35

West Indian women is much above the average (one in three households are single-mother households) though as a result of delayed marriage rather than marital dissolution. Jackson (1982:171) states,

> "Many West Indian women bear and bring up their young children with no stable support from a man. They are three times as likely to have to go out to work (as white women). However their earnings are so low that many black single-mothers who can claim benefit find that it makes little sense for them to work".

The relation between low earnings and a lack of incentive to engage in paid employment is also a finding of this study (see chapter three).

In a qualitative study of unmarried mothers which focused on 16-19 year olds and aimed to document their life histories and experiences from the birth of their children onwards, Anne Phoenix explored the negative social attitudes to young mothers and the consequences for their children, and also explored the reasons the women gave for marrying, cohabiting or remaining single. The respondents came from large, poorly educated families with unemployment being a regular feature in their lives. She found that early motherhood did not constitute cause for concern as the babies fared well. A variety of reasons were offered for why the young women became pregnant, and **none** was associated with state benefits or council housing, as suggested by right-wing politicians and others (see also Allen and Bourke-Dowling, 1999). Phoenix concluded that these young women coped well under difficult circumstances, did not deserve the negative stereotyping, and opined that deferred motherhood would not necessarily be a better option. However most of the babies' fathers were unemployed.

Wallis's study on the Isle of Sheppey (1987) concerning young people and unemployment, and also domestic and marital careers, found that not only was unemployment a discouragement to marriage but it was an incentive to motherhood in so far as it offered some means of access to adult status and also to state benefit and housing. It is no coincidence that in areas of high economic deprivation such as Merseyside and Cleveland,

36

the nuclear family household with a male breadwinner may no longer offer a viable model for sections of the young population (Morris, 1990: 164).

In her book, *Family, State and Social Policy* (1996) Fox-Harding writes that a feature of the early 1990s in Britain and the U.S.A. was the political criticism that young women were having babies outside marriage deliberately, in order to obtain public sector housing or other presumed material advantages, because it was a route to adulthood or an "independent" life on welfare benefits; or out of an almost perverse rejection of marriage. A relevant factor here, however, is the rising incidence of male unemployment, plus the depression of wages for some men. Where male income is low, or consists only of social security benefits, a live-in partnership may not be advantageous to a woman; poverty with autonomy can seem preferable to poverty without autonomy. The choice of single-parenthood may be a rational one, therefore, given the restricted range of options which face young, working–class women. Pregnancy may also not be intentional; for example, an article on pregnant care leavers (Rickford, 1992 cited in Fox-Harding 1996 : 87) comments:

> "Several recent studies of teenage mothers have found that the great majority of girls become pregnant accidentally, from a combination of naivety and ignorance, not, as some politicians claim, in a bid to get a council house".

However one author who would disagree with these findings and who takes a contrasting view of single-mothers in the late 1990s is the conservative sociologist, Patricia Morgan who argues, in her book, *Farewell to the Family*, that the traditional family of husband, wife and children is being replaced by mother, state and child. Her analysis is based on right-wing philosophy and is similar to that of Murray (1984) and Dennis and Erdos (1992). She argues that both the family and the institution of marriage are in decline, that government policies are undermining the family (writing in 1995 she is referring to the previous Tory government) that the economic base of family life has been effectively undermined by fiscal policy, unemployment has aggravated the situation, joblessness

correlates with unmarried status for men, and the two-parent family is discriminated against. A staunch proponent of the two-parent or nuclear family, she concludes that:

> "We seem to be on the verge of an unprecedented social experiment, the replacement of the family with the mother-child unit....Lone parenthood expresses a social factionalisation, rather than solidarity, and fragmentation, rather than integration.... As it is marriage which has always been used to build society's infrastructure, its social connectedness, and create moral sentiments of commitment and formal responsibility, we may find that the human costs of the continued erosion of the family become, socially, politically and morally unacceptable" (1995:142, 1995:150: 1995:153).

She criticises the state for providing too much support for lone parents, and sees diverse family forms as being responsible for encouraging male irresponsibility towards family life. She acknowledges the decline of the nuclear family but also acknowledges the continued existence of nuclear families which, for her, are eclipsed by all the attention given to lone-parent families.

Patricia Morgan is obviously convinced that there is only one proper way of bringing up children which is within a nuclear family unit; other families which have no father figures she describes as being "incomplete". She, like other right-wing commentators, is highly critical of single-parent families and believes that generous state provision assists in their formation and helps these families to multiply. She also attaches significance to men as heads of the family and to the institution of marriage as "having a civilising influence"on men and, in effect, being good for them and encouraging their greater involvement in family life and responsible parenting.

> "Marriages are the rivets of the social order. Marriage is the opportunity to establish a new identity as a bona fide adult." (1995:142). "Marriage confers autonomy on the individual because it also confers responsibility" (1995:150).

In response to Morgan's appraisal of marriage, I suggest that what marriage is supposed to do is often very different from what it does do. Marriage does not necessarily transform young men into responsible, hard working individuals or good role models for

children and many nuclear (married) families can be dysfunctional as regards bringing up children. Also a fall in manual employment and rising unemployment for men in the past two decades have ruled out marriage as an option for many working-class men.

Another point for consideration in her analysis is her contention that single-mother families are chosen as a deliberate way of life, this goes along with a denial of the possibility that many single-mother families are not deliberate creations. Many young women have been left literally "holding the baby" whilst others have aspired to bringing their children up in a two-parent family which for various reasons has been unachievable. Many young women in my study extol the virtues of the two-parent family whereas many decry them due to bad experiences of personal relationships; others have refused to live in oppressive relationships or refused to marry irresponsible men. However, even in divorced families instigated by women (of which most are today), Morgan is critical about issues of women's choice or autonomy. I suggest that her analysis of the replacement of the family by the mother-child unit as the basis of society is rather exaggerated; this is because many single-mother families are only a temporary stage leading to marriage and because many single-mothers are actually cohabiting, which in itself raises doubts about the alleged increase in the numbers of single mothers. For Morgan however single-mothers exist in opposition to, or as usurpers of traditional family life but I suggest there are underlying issues which need addressing. State provision and housing policies for single-mothers have changed since her book was written and, regarding her point about all the publicity surrounding single-mother families, I would say emphatically that most of this publicity is pejorative and antipathetic towards single-mothers. They are not being welcomed or heralded as replacements of the nuclear-family but rather denounced by the press and pathologised in the media as the social and moral scourge of family life in the 1990s.

State welfare is seen by many as having an impact on the incidence of lone motherhood. Thus Morgan, in common with other right wing commentators, argues that the

39

state is contributing to the increase in single mother families while the left argue that the state supports the patriarchal nuclear family. Because of these divergent analyses I think it is important to look at the role of the state and its social policies in order to establish how it relates to families.

The Family and the State

The welfare state and its relationship with women and the family is integral to this study so I shall review various theoretical perspectives on gender, the family and the state in order to develop a framework to examine this relationship. Drawing on theories of the state as agent of care and control I will attempt to demonstrate the ambivalence of the state to working-class women, the ways in which it provides for women, the ways in which it regulates women's behaviour and how the state supports the patriarchal nuclear family as the model for contemporary family life.

I begin with Ginsburg's (1979) analysis of the relationship between women and the social security system which involves concepts of gender and social class. Social policy and the state are his main foci and his analysis shows how the social security system oppresses women both economically and ideologically. Gough (1979) provides a marxist analysis of the welfare state to explain the state's contradictory nature of care and control and how welfare ideology functions to maintain class and gender divisions and to support the patriarchal nuclear family. I also discuss feminist theories for their contribution to explaining the gendered nature of the welfare state and its relationship to women and the family.

Women and welfare

Since the 19th century within social security policy, women and children have been assumed to be dependent on men's income and, in cases where women were left without men by desertion, or were widowed, divorced or unmarried mothers, the state substituted as a support system but in such a way as to encourage remarriage and support two–parent families by making single-motherhood a less desirable option. Women's dependence is therefore reinforced by social security which excludes them as welfare claimants when married and provides low levels of welfare to them as unmarried claimants.

State policy in the 20th century differentiated between single mothers such as widows who were classified as "deserving" of welfare and unmarried single-mothers who were "undeserving" and continue to be one of the poorest groups in society. Although entitled to state welfare, some (but not many) single-mothers are persuaded into taking paid work thereby removing themselves from state dependency. Single-mothers are expected to work under New Labour's policy of social inclusion as a way out of poverty which has been criticised thus :

> "Labour says the family is the most important thing but it is about to send the head of the most fragile families out to market and its kids to homework clubs and after school provision"(Benn, 1997).

Jane Lewis, (1994) argues that the British welfare state operates a breadwinner model of social policy based on the husband as head of the household whose duty is to provide for his wife and children and a wife who provides care for her husband and children. Women's entitlement to welfare is based on either their dependent status as wives within the family or as workers: "it has been as wives rather than as mothers that women have qualified for benefits in most social security systems" (Lewis and Ostner, 1991: 25-6 cited in Sainsbury, 1994: 168).   It seems therefore that welfare policies with regard to single–mothers are contradictory; the state provides for them as dependents yet also expects them to provide for themselves and their dependents. This theme is emphasised by Gough (1979) who aims to provide an analysis of the welfare state under capitalism.

> "In the 1960s, radicals and Marxists were analysing the welfare state as a repressive mechanism of social control: social work, the schools, housing departments, the probation service, social security agencies were all seen means of controlling and / or adapting rebellious and non-conforming groups in society to the needs of capitalism. Yet in the1970s, the selfsame people were rushing to defend the welfare state against the "cuts" and other attacks on it.   Left-wing attitudes towards the welfare state are however ambivalent; is it an agency of repression or a system for enlarging human needs and mitigating the rigours of the free-market economy? An aid to capital accumulation and profit or a social wage to be defended and enlarged like the money in your pay packet?" (Gough, 1979: 11)

The position advanced here is that the welfare state contains elements of both. In other words the welfare state is contradictory. It exhibits positive and negative features within a contradictory unity. It embodies tendencies to enhance social welfare, to develop the powers of individuals, to exert social control over the blind play of market forces, and tendencies to control and repress people, to adapt them to the requirements of the capitalist economy.

Feminism and the state

> "There is a debate within feminism about the ambiguity of state welfare for women. The state, while doing much that is helpful to women remains male controlled and can also oppress" (Fox-Harding, 1996).

As might be expected, different feminist theorisations of the state and family abound; radical feminists claim the state oppresses women in the interests of men, marxist-feminists claim state welfare serves the interests of capital, and socialist feminists, such as Barrett (1980) see state policies as outcomes of the intersections of both interests. Black feminists claim that the state is racist, patriarchal, and a class state (Williams, 1990). Feminists have different opinions of the effects of state welfare on women and the family ranging from those who see positive benefits from welfare legislation to others who consider that the state oppresses women and maintain that the state supports the patriarchal nuclear family (Wilson, 1977; Barrett, 1988; Walby,1986).

Wilson's study (1977) is concerned with the state organisation of domestic life and with how the state supports the patriarchal nuclear family. She considers that the welfare state relies on assumptions about femininity and women's role in the family: women, and in particular mothers, are the main clients of the welfare state. It is women who are expected to take children to and from school, to clinics, to social services and in this sense they are providing welfare which is based on assumptions of a sexual division of labour. Wilson argues that the state's assumption of women's dependence within a breadwinner family can

be attributed to an ideology of welfarism which is characteristic of the welfare state.

Marxist-feminists conceptualise the state as a class state upholding women's oppression because it serves the interests of capital. This was ensured by state support for a family form in which the male breadwinner supported his dependent wife and children. His job was to expend labour power in the public world of production, hers was to create labour power in the private world of reproduction. Thus women were oppressed by a capitalist state, not because that state was patriarchal but because women's domestic labour within the family was the cheapest way of reproducing labour power. Women's oppression was in the interests of the capitalist class rather than in men's interests (Charles, 1998).

McIntosh (1978) presents an argument similar to Wilson who theorises the state as a class state that functions to ensure the reproduction of the working class for capitalism She interprets the state and the oppression of women in terms of the logic of capitalism. Gender inequality is seen as derived from capitalism and the actions of the state as stemming from the needs of capitalism.

McIntosh and Wilson both argue that capitalism supports a patriarchal family which ensures the cheap production of labour and the availability of women as a reserve army of labour. But McIntosh differs from Wilson in emphasising the relations between the state, capital, and the family in which the state "shores up" this type of family through education and its policy incentives for the working class, i.e. child benefit and similar supplements for low income families. McIntosh has been criticised as being too functionalist, as accepting the distinctions between the spheres of the family, workplace and the state, tending to reify the relation between them (Walby, 1990). But criticising the model of the class state does not mean we can ignore the question of class, for there is undoubtedly a major class dynamic in the formation of the state which intersects and interacts with gender (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989: 23).

Walby offers an analysis of the state as patriarchal and focuses on women's

44

dependence on men and the relations this entails. She argues that women have a different relationship to the state and this is one of the ways in which Walby's shift from private to public patriarchy may be argued for (Walby, 1990). Women who are dependent on the state are, according to Walby's theory, subject to patriarchal control by the state as opposed to control by men. The state remains largely controlled by men at its higher levels and may be seen to operate in male interests and its assumptions and ideology remain patriarchal. However other analyses suggest that because state activity can have positive outcomes for women, it is a mistake to regard the state as essentially patriarchal, although state organisations may be dominated by men and in that sense be gendered in particular historical times (Connell, 1990).

It appears that the debate over single-mothers and the family is beset with contradictory issues. State policy is best described as contradictory with certain policies tending to privilege the nuclear family whilst others tend to assist single–mother families. The state can be said to assist single-mothers in helping them to establish autonomous households yet welfare is conditional and far from generous as many commentators have implied. State policy continues to differentiate between single-mothers as deserving of welfare and most single–mothers on welfare continue to live in poverty with their children. Social security policies serve to maintain the subordinate status of single–mothers through low levels of benefit and stigmatized and stereotypical attitudes which help to promote the patriarchal nuclear family as the norm.

So how do single-mothers experience state welfare under social policies which define them as deviant?

The majority of welfare recipients today are women because women are more likely than men to be poor due to low paid employment (the feminisation of poverty) and female headed families tend to have incomes below the poverty line (Smith,1984). Single-mothers who claim welfare for themselves and their children are to be found among the poorest groups

in society (Millar and Glendinning,1987). Welfare is provided conditionally and often under surveillance. Single-mothers who cohabit are likely to have their benefits withdrawn because of assumptions underlying policy that they will be financially provided for in their relationships by men.

As regards criticisms that single-mothers have priority in housing policy, research has shown they tend to be placed in the worst housing (Finer Report, 1974; Watson, 1987). And despite being regarded as a higher priority than a single person or couple without children, housing was rarely considered as a factor in pregnancy under a survey commissioned by the National Council for One Parent Families (quoted by Sexty, 1990).

If we consider childcare policies such as the Children Act it can be said to support original family units rather than the single parent and child. Britain does not have universal child care provision and consequentially many single-mothers are disadvantaged because many are unable to afford to pay for costly private childcare. This is suggestive of a policy which favours children being raised in nuclear families and in which women are assumed to be the main childcarers.

Millar (1989) argues that a key aspect of improving the situation of lone parents lies in the promotion of measures to facilitate their participation in the labour market. Yet according to Millar, (cited in Allan, 1999:252) the solution to the "culture of dependency" of lone mothers is not so straightforward. This is because there is considerable ambiguity over the way in which "the personal obligations and duties" of lone mothers are defined. This means that they should not necessarily be expected to work outside the home and indeed current policy does not require lone parents to work if they have dependent children under sixteen years of age. On the other hand, however, many mothers are now employed and nearly all the recent, and predicted future, employment growth has been among women (NEDO,1989). Should lone mothers be expected, or even compelled, to reduce their " benefit dependency" through employment or should they, as mothers, be expected to stay at home and care for

their children? Are they, as Lewis (1999) has put it, mothers or workers?

Conclusion.

I began this chapter with a literature review in an attempt to understand why the patriarchal, nuclear family is advocated as the "right" type of family in which to live and bring up children and why other types, especially single-mothers, are conceptualised as deviant and evidence of the decline of the social institutions of marriage and the family. The literature shows that some theorists favour the nuclear family as universal, functional and the "right"way in which to bring up children (Fletcher,1988; Parsons,1976), others regarded families as responsible for maintaining gender inequalities (Barrett,1984) whilst others view families as helping to maintain class divisions (Althusser,1971). Some theorists acknowledge the diversity in family lives in the 21st century and offer explanations for how these families have changed whilst we also found proponents of the continuity of the ideal of the nuclear family.

Engels theorises the origins of the family and women's subordination as due to the rise of private property and state protection of the property owning classes. He links gender inequality with social inequality (Charles,1993) and, despite criticism, I suggest he offers an adequate theory of the origins of women's oppression within the family in spite of his assumption that working-class marriages would be more egalitarian by not being based on the transfer of worldly goods or property ownership.

I did not consider that the view of nuclear family as functional for society is an accurate theorisation of how families live today; this family form is ideological and research shows that only a small percentage of families live in a married male breadwinner family. The male breadwinner family has always ignored the financial contribution made by wives' earned income but nevertheless, the ideology of this family is widespread in society. According to Stacey, (1990) "The entrenched ideology of the traditional family inhibits

47

efforts to expand legitimate modes of discourse about families". However it could be suggested that the nuclear family is functional for society in that this ideal of family life privileges men and maintains women's economic dependence upon men.

The feminist literature on gender relations highlights the limitations of theories of "the family" as a means of explaining how families live but helps us to understand how women are subordinated by gender and familial ideologies. They also point out the limitations of trying to understand women's lives from male orientated perspectives on the social world (Smith, 1984).

Many feminists attribute the formation of single-mother families to socio-economic changes such as decreasing male (manual) employment and rising unemployment, a rise in the popularity of cohabitation (despite often being a temporary life stage), oppressive patriarchal relations and marriage now being a less desirable (or unachievable) option for young people than it used to be.

We have learned that people are marrying later, divorce is increasing but so are remarriages, more women are going out to work, many families have no-one in paid employment and there has been a restructuring of the labour market which has had effects on family lives. We have also learned that family change is not merely a private issue but related to changes in wider society.

To conclude this chapter, I suggest that this review has shown the inadequacy of the concept of the family as a way of explaining how families live today and future theorists writing about families may want to discard it as a conceptual straight jacket. Its appeal is based on an ideology of working man and dependent wife which is inadequate to explain how families live in a post-industrial society. The effect of socio-economic changes on families means that the workplace cannot be conceptualised any longer in terms of being either male or traditional. There have been too many changes in the past few decades for family lives to have remained unchanged.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCHING AT HOME

I began this research proposing to test the hypothesis that a familial or kinship network of social support lies behind single-mothers and to explore the relationship between single–mothers and the institution of the family. I chose a qualitative ethnographic approach of which the principal methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews and participant observation, supplemented by secondary sources of information such as newspapers. In what follows I discuss the implications of my choice of an ethnographic approach followed by a discussion of feminist research methodology as I have attempted to conduct my study as feminist ethnography. In the next chapter I describe my fieldwork location and the social and demographic characteristics of the women I interviewed.

Why ethnography?

In order to write an ethnography about single-mothers I needed to be able to talk to them. This is because the basis of ethnographic research is oral communication and personal interaction during which the research subjects "tell it like it is" or paint a picture of their lives. I had read about conducting social research as ethnography (Stack, 1969) as well as other literature concerning social research which addresses issues such as establishing relations with informants, problems of researcher as insider and outsider, problems of power relations between researcher and researched and, in a nutshell, other problems related to social research especially those of researching one's own culture/community as I was about to do. This is a problem that other feminist researchers have faced (Wolf, 1996). Some have argued that ethnographic methods are ideally suited to research by women because of the closer involvement and sharing of experiences with one's subjects, which contrasts with the features of positivist approaches.

Positivism is the traditional, natural science-based approach which stresses detachment and objectivity on behalf of the researcher and in which the world is "out there" waiting to be analysed and explained by factual expertise. Positivistic research is characterised by objectivity, formality, detachment and the absence of social relations connecting researcher and researched. Feminist epistemologists have however argued that value-neutrality is a myth (Harding, 1986,1991; Hartsock, 1983) because the descriptions, interpretations, and explanatory phenomena in science inevitably involve social values. We are embodied and embedded creatures and these facts about us matter when making claims to know something. I decided to eschew the objectivity, value-neutrality, formality and factual basis of positivist methodology in favour of reflexivity which is central to ethnographic methodology.

Reflexivity and Social Research.

Reflexivity refers to a self-conscious reflection about the part one plays in the generation of knowledge (Mills, 1959) or else the impact of a researcher's awareness of self on the research process. One of the hallmarks of reflexivity is recognition by the researcher that he/ she is involved in the generation of knowledge rather than just reporting or recording knowledge. In other words each researcher needs to understand how they affect the research process through factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity amongst others. Davies (1999:3) argues that "all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research". Reflexivity is not, however, unique to feminist research. Male researchers can be feminists and can construct good relations with their research subjects, although they they can never be inter-subjective with women. They can never experience pregnancy, childbirth or other female physiological traits such as P.M.T; they can never share/empathise with "women's issues." They cannot use their life experiences in the research process or

50

experience the social world in terms of gendered structures of oppression as can women. We must therefore acknowledge the centrality of gender to the research process. I consider that my gender was instrumental to the production of my data and I feel that a male researcher would not have produced the same results. I feel that my sample would have reacted differently to being interviewed by a man because, as I said earlier, women and men have different perspectives on the social world and they understand and experience it in different ways. Men inhabit the dominant not the subordinate position; they would be unable to position themselves on the same plane as women or share their experiences. This is perhaps better illustrated by Oakley, who, in a widely cited article, argues that, "in most cases, the goal of finding out about people is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship". She later asserts that "a feminist interviewing women is by definition both inside the culture and participating in that which she is observing" (1982:41,57).

In contrast, however, to ethnographic research methods, postmodernist feminists reject the idea of substituting feminist theories for malestream ones, because they reject the possibility of true knowledge and argue that there is a multiplicity of truths. Postmodernists emphasise heterogeneity, multiplicity, and marginality and the production of knowledge as opposed to truth or else the existence of multiple realities. (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). They also take issue with ethnography's preoccupation with reflexivity and subjectivity. However I disagree with this aspect of postmodernist philosophy. I considered that issues of reflexivity and subjectivity were necessary to the quality of the data I obtained which is why I decided to replace my original positivistic approach with ethnographic methods. And although the formulation of hypotheses is usually associated with positivism, I began my research with a hypothesis to prove / disprove despite conducting my research as qualitative ethnography. It

51

seems therefore that definitions of positivism are contestable.

In conducting ethnographic research the researcher needs to spend time among the research subjects and I considered the quality of the social relations I established with my subjects would affect the quality of the data I collected. I believed that establishing a good rapport between myself and the women and possibly getting close to them could be beneficial in gaining insights and information into their lives, especially as I resided in this particular community sharing issues of gender, social-class and single motherhood with the women. This co-residency further reinforced my belief in inter-subjectivity whereby sharing experiences, trying to position myself on the same plane as the women and establishing friendly social relations were the best and most logical ways to lay the foundations for my research. It was also necessary to consider that certain issues involved in this research were quite delicate and personal and I do not believe my sample would have been so forthcoming if I had remained detached and formal in my attitude and approach.

Davies's analysis in *Reflexive Ethnography* (1999) convinced me I had chosen the most appropriate methodology to conduct my research. My reasons for doing the research were related to my own experiences as well as to my sociological concerns with gender, family relations, social class and social inequalities. Therefore it seemed highly unlikely that I could detach myself from the very issues that inspired me to carry out the research, especially as I hoped to use my indigenous status as "insider" to assist the research. I will briefly spell out what I intended to do and why.

As a working-class woman investigating how other working-class women became and experienced single-motherhood, I believed that ethnographic methodological techniques of oral communication and personal interaction would be suitable as I needed to obtain in-depth accounts of the women's lives in order to make a meaningful interpretation of their social situations. Some of my questions were quite personal and required a sensitive approach

therefore I attempted to de-formalise the interviews and conduct them as conversations in a relaxed and friendly manner, in order to acquire detailed data and also to diminish the inegalitarian relations between myself and the women. I did not want to encourage or maintain any sense of hierarchy or power relations between us at any time in our interactions. During the interviews I tried to establish reciprocal relations by giving the women opportunities to question me and by making some personal disclosures without being asked (contra postmodernist ideas). However I kept these disclosures to a minimum unless asked to elaborate, being aware that the women, not I were the focus of this study from which I did not want to detract. I considered these self-revelations were productive as they helped to locate me on the same plane as the women and dispel any preconceptions they may have had about me and my lifestyle as being totally different from theirs when, in many respects, it was quite similar. I would like to say that before I engaged in detailed conversations with the women many assumed I had nothing in common with them by virtue of my "status" as a university post-graduate. It was true to say I differed from them in this respect but, contrary to what many believed, I did not have a good job paying loads of money. Like them, I had lived on benefits and had financial problems which seemed to amaze them, so in this respect my lifestyle was the same and not different from theirs. I believe this was a major factor in establishing relations with the women; the fact that I had much in common with them which enabled me to fully understand and relate to the real problems of single-motherhood.

The second method of participant observation enabled me to observe and take part in the social lives of the women and it was in these situations that gender and my status as a mother often proved useful. Occasionally during interviews I would find myself changing a nappy or crawling around the floor looking for a lost dummy or favourite toy or trying to placate screaming children. My age, gender and being the mother of four grown up children had afforded me considerable maternal skills and experiences over the years which I also put

to use in my study. I often discussed with the women experiences and problems of raising children or coping with life on welfare benefits and these participatory interludes afforded me the opportunity to observe and critically reflect on scenarios besides forging more links between the women and myself. I consider that employing issues of subjectivity and reflexivity in my choice of methodology enriched and assisted my research.

Ethics in social research

With hindsight, I consider my main ethical dilemma was feeling I had used these women as a means to an end. I wanted any benefits deriving from this research to be mutual yet the balance was unequal and the scales were tipped in my favour. This was my dilemma which I needed to resolve. Despite having taken steps to clarify the research as best I could, in order for the women to understand it, and guaranteeing complete confidentiality with regard to the taped interviews I still felt I was exploiting and infiltrating an already pathologised and marginalised social group for my academic purposes. However, I would like to think I resolved my dilemma by looking at these issues from a different perspective which emanated from the sample. On reflection, I recalled how some of the women claimed to have enjoyed the interviews and agreed to take part if ever required to in the future. Four women said they felt pleased that someone had taken an interest in them and their situations and allowed them the opportunity to explain how things were and not how many people assumed things were. This sort of thing had not happened to them before but had made them feel valued, as did the emphasis I placed on the importance of their contributions to my study which would not have been written without them. Finally, I hoped my findings would demystify the single mother stereotype and portray these women's lives in a more positive and realistic way showing the hardships characteristic of single-motherhood. I consider these to be important outcomes of the research as well as reasons for justifying it.

I hope this brief summary has explained why I chose to use ethnographic research methods and their suitability to my particular study. These methods resulted in my findings revealing underlying issues which were not readily apparent; for example, why did some women in my sample define themselves as single-mothers despite cohabiting? The question of defining single-motherhood created problems which only became apparent when writing up the research and involved differences between my definition of single mothers, the previous government's definition of single mothers and the women's own definition of single-mothers (this is discussed in detail in a description of the sample).

However, as regards the merits or not of an ethnographic approach I must defend this method as best suited to my study despite the problems I encountered during fieldwork which I go into more detail at a later stage. I consider the social relations I entered into with my respondents were crucial to the findings of this study. My own life experiences and history, (my autobiography) were used in the research process and I have no doubt that my experiences of single-motherhood resonated with the women and, to some extent, I shared a part of their social world. This was achieved by using inter-subjectivity and biography as methodological tools to link my own social world with theirs. Being a mother enabled me to share experiences of childbirth, childcare and other "women's issues" with the sample therefore I believe both gender and social class allowed me access to these women's lives. As I said earlier, I described this research as feminist and will now explain the contribution that feminist research made to this study beginning with what defines and characterises feminist research. I will also attempt to analyse the issues and problems of defining and conducting feminist ethnography.

Feminist Epistemology and Social Research

To begin with there is no clear consensus as to what constitutes feminist research

although some themes are identified as being crucial to understanding the concerns of feminists currently engaged in research (Maynard and Purvis, 1994:2). I feel that feminist research should be acknowledged as that which starts from women's lives and makes analyses of women's lives a priority.

Feminist authors have long been critical of the ways that traditional theories tried to understand women's lives and of previous sociological definitions of women in relation to men. Feminist research has rejected the previous male framework of understanding the social world (Wolf, 1996) in favour of one that starts from women's lives and which emphasises subjectivity and emotions in social research. Therefore feminist research can be seemingly defined by its association with reflexivity, as starting from women's lives, as including rather than excluding subjectivity, as establishing social relations with the researched using the autobiography of the researcher, and ultimately its concern with gender.

All feminists agree that women are oppressed but how can knowledge of this subordination and inequality be produced and made convincing? A major problem is that feminism embraces a number of theoretical positions and perspectives which differ on the reasons for women's subordination. Radical feminism attributes women's subordination to men, liberal feminists claim that policy and attitude changes will liberate women, marxist-feminists attribute women's oppression to capitalism and others relate it to a combination of patriarchy and capitalism. Black feminists attribute their oppression to racism, class and patriarchy. Feminists are also divided over epistemology -- they disagree on the theory of feminist knowledge and on what makes it adequate knowledge. In Sandra Harding's view there are three stages in the development of feminist epistemology with the first being feminist empiricism which argues it is possible to remove sexist and other biases from the process of research. Another is feminist standpoint theory which argues that understanding women's lives from a committed feminist exploration of their experiences of oppression

56

produces more complete and less distorted knowledge than is produced by men. The third epistemological position is feminist post-modernism which is critical of grand theories, rejects the existence of an authentic self and focuses on fragmentation, multiple subjectivities, pluralities and flux (Maynard and Purvis, 1994:19).

I now briefly discuss these epistemological positions beginning with feminist empiricism. This supports the contention that valid knowledge of women's lives can be produced by eliminating androcentric and sexist biases from previous sociological methods or else improving the "doing of bad sociology" (Harding, 1996:111). Feminist empiricists advocate experience as providing valid knowledge rather than ideas but I would disagree with this. Although I explained in the previous section that I had put my gendered and personal life experiences to use as methodological tools, my epistemological position contends that experience can assist the research process by providing a vantage point from which to start but does not necessarily produce knowledge. Many women experience gender inequality albeit in different ways, such as being harassed housewives, or being dominated by men in patriarchal and oppressive relationships or perhaps experiencing domestic violence, but tend to believe these problems are personal rather than social. Experiencing these forms of oppression does not explain why they happen and I say this as someone who has experienced them. According to Maureen Cain (cited in Maynard and Purvis 1994:23) "women's experiences alone are insufficient for understanding the processes through which gender divisions, women's oppression and patriarchal control are organized". She argues that "we need to take women's experiences seriously, but we also need to take our own theory seriously".

Dorothy Smith (1986) argues, "women's social situation is organised and determined by social processes not knowable through the ordinary means through which we find our everyday world" (Smith, 1986:154). Therefore, according to feminist standpoint theorists

(Hartsock, 1987; Smith, 1974; Harding, 1991) one's positionality as a woman is crucial in gaining knowledge and understanding of other women. Drawing on marxist theory, Hartsock has argued (1987) that due to women's position in the sexual division of labour and sexist oppression in general, women would have greater insights as researchers into the lives of other women. In other words, one's positionality in the social hierarchy vis-a-vis other groups potentially limits or broadens one's understanding of others. Members of the dominant group will have view points that are partial and perverse in contrast to those from subordinated groups, who have greater potential to have fuller knowledge. This approach originated in Hegel's insight into the relationship between master and slave and later into the "proletarian standpoint" in marxist theories. This position contends that human life or material activity constrains and limits what we do and what we can know and that the perspective of the social world from an oppressed position will be very different from the perspective of those in a dominant position. This epistemic privilege or viewpoint of the oppressed has been said to enable those groups in a subordinate or marginalised position to provide less distorted accounts of their circumstances than those who occupy positions of power. I have chosen to analyse this study starting from women's lives but unlike a perspective, a standpoint is not merely a point of view, but something that is achieved through struggle, by being a member of an oppressed social group. Perhaps we can use Marx's analysis of capital to help us understand these issues. Marx wrote *Capital* from the standpoint of the proletariat or from the perspective of the workers who sold their labour power to capitalists for wages. However both groups would have different perspectives on their working relations because of differences in values and interests of both groups. In Marx's analysis the workers were exploited by not receiving full financial remuneration for the value of their labour power and this appropriation by the capitalists of what Marx called surplus value made them richer and the workers poorer. The workers were relatively

powerless to change their social/working relations even if they left one job for another because the same conditions prevailed throughout the capitalist system. Theoretically they had the choice of working or not working, they were not compelled to work, but in practice their "choice" was constrained by their social position and because they needed wages to survive they had to put up with being exploited or else be out of work.

But if *Capital* had been written from the standpoint of the capitalists they no doubt would have had a different perspective. The capitalists, being in positions of power, could probably not conceive of work in ways that workers did; from the standpoint of the workers work meant survival but from the perspective of the capitalists, work meant the generation of more wealth for them. Yet both viewpoints would contrast due to the differences created by the social relations between capitalists and workers. The workers had to work for one capitalist or another under the same social relations which denied them any real power over their circumstances and in which issues of choice were more illusory than real.

I chose to conduct this research from the standpoint of my sample because understanding gender differences between men and women necessitates starting from women's lives. I felt that women's views, especially those who are marginalised or working-class like my sample, are generally considered as less important and valid.

The third epistemological position is feminist postmodernism which is critical of standpoint theory for several reasons such as its commitment to essentialist assumptions, its belief in producing knowledge that is more true than previous male produced knowledge and the contention that oppressed groups have less distorted world views than those in dominant positions. Post-modernism is rather difficult to define but is a body of thought involving ideas about language, knowledge, reason and power and whilst some aspects are said to support feminist ideas others are said to be in conflict with them. Post-modernism is critical of Enlightenment ideals of truth and reason and freedom and seeks to deconstruct the subject

woman, so central to feminist theory. Some non-post-modern feminists take issue with this as they seek to liberate and empower the oppressed subject, woman, whilst also acknowledging that there are many differences among women by not advocating a monolithic category of woman. Post-modernists are sceptical of the concept of patriarchy and the terms "man" and "woman" suggesting that the meaning of woman derives from discourse rather than physical reality (Bryson, 1999:40), but critics such as Charles (1996:9) contend "that if there is no subject then there is no subject to be liberated". I consider that postmodern epistemology was not appropriate for my study because it is dismissive of the subject, woman, and also of the "intellectual tyranny" of grand theories such as marxism. My study was concerned with women who were the subjects of my research and relied on marxist theory and concepts as an explanatory framework. The study also contained my embodied subjectivity in which my own knowledge, and life experiences were crucial to the research process and helped me to understand the social lives of these women. As I said earlier in this chapter, my epistemological position supports using experience as a starting point but this requires the assistance of a theoretical underpinning to make sense of and produce reliable social knowledge.

I hope this account has explained some of the principles and differences in feminist theory and why feminism should not be conceived of as a unified theory of women's subordination but as differing perspectives attempting to emphasise and make sense of women's lives. I consider that feminist epistemology was invaluable to my study and in the next part of the chapter I discuss the problems I encountered during the field work process which raise important methodological issues.

Fieldwork dilemmas

The fieldwork for this research was conducted between April and November

1997 in two separate locations. I consider that the difficulties arose from several sources but primarily from my double–identity as a working–class single–mother or "insider" who lived among most of the sample as well as a university researcher or "outsider" who no longer belonged and was assumed to have little in common with the sample. These contrasting roles confused people who could not understand or reconcile these two different identities. As I was later to discover, their perception of university people was of affluent people who lived totally different lifestyles from themselves, yet I was a university person who was not affluent and who lived amongst them which they found hard to understand.

When this research proposal was first formulated I intended to draw a sample of about thirty young, working-class unmarried mothers from the many who resided on a particular housing estate in South Wales which, as we have seen, has been characterised since the late 1980s as a "sink" or problem estate because of high levels of unemployment, crime, vandalism, drug-taking, "joy-riding" and single-mothers. I was quite confident about generating a sample because of the high percentage of single-mothers who lived on this estate and because I also lived there and was a single mother myself. However, events did not turn out as expected and the sampling generation process was fraught with difficulties from the start. As a consequence I had to settle for half the desired number of respondents, had to recruit one quarter of them from a different location, and finally had to modify my original methodological approach (the snowball technique) as certain fieldwork problems, which I detail at a later stage, had rendered it somewhat inappropriate.

The Sampling Process and Associated Problems

I now discuss the problems of sample generation and the problems that arose from conducting research in my own community which will hopefully dispel any preconceptions such as I initially had that conducting social research in one's own community is less complex

than research conducted in other cultures or societies.

Being an insider

I resided on the same estate as most of the sample and believed that my indigenous staus and other social credentials such as speaking the same language, social class, gender, culure and my status of single-mother would prove to be advantageous and constitute me an insder. However my assumptions were wrong and during the fieldwork process I became aware of the disadvantages that accompanied my indigenous status, such as tensions between the locals' perception of me and my self-perception, different outlooks, values and lifestyles and also the generation gap. I was a child of the 1960s, the same age as many of my respondents' mothers and it seemed that these young women assumed that they would not be able to relate to me and that we had nothing in common.

Another factor I had not anticipated being problematic was my newly acquired feminist awareness. During some interviews and follow up conversations I had to be careful that it did not influence my responses especially with regard to issues of gender inequality and patriarchy about which I, unlike some of my respondents, was now aware. I was often tempted to "educate" them about these issues, especially one woman who regarded women as passive recipients who had no choice with regard to male domination and oppressive relationships. During some discussions I struggled to keep the values that were now so important in my life, such as an adoption of feminist principles, a rejection of male dominance, and female independence, from influencing these conversations especially now that these issues highlighted the gulf between myself and the women to whom I was talking. By this I mean that my sociological and feminist awareness acquired as a result of being a mature student illuminated issues of female subordination and gender inequalities which were not apparent to my sample. My acquisition of this knowledge was a distinct sign that I could no longer share their perspectives on social life, men and relationships despite being able to

empathise with and understand them. This difference only surfaced during the conversations with my respondents and, prior to this, was unanticipated.

Generating the sample

When this research was in its embryonic stage in late 1995 I placed an advertisement briefly describing the research topic and requesting respondents in the local newspaper, the South Wales Evening Post. However it did not appear verbatim in the paper and I was not particularly pleased with it. I decided to use the advert because I realised that otherwise I could only approach single–mothers whom I knew personally which was not many.

> **Single mums get
> chance of a say**
>
> A Swansea student is offering single mums the chance to hit back at what she described as a political witch hunt
>
> Carole Roberts, who is doing a masters degree in sociology, want mums aged between 16 and 25 to contact her so they can have their say.
>
> Their view will form the basis of research as part of an examination of feminist issues.
>
> She believes young single mums are vulnerable groups who have been singled out by politicians claiming they get pregnant for more social security money and a move up the housing list.
>
> Divorcee Ms Roberts said "I believe it is far too simplistic to say there are only two reasons for young women to get pregnant.
>
> "I want to test this by asking around 30 single mums, especially from the Westlands area, about the circumstances surrounding their own pregnancy. I am offering them a voice, but if they want to change their names for the purpose of the study, then that is fine".

After several weeks had elapsed without any contacts I realised this technique was ineffective and decided to try something else.

The snowball technique

After the initial failure of the newspaper advert I decided to get in touch with some preliminary contacts who had assured me of interviews. These young women were known to me which is why I approached them; in addition I had grown up on the estate with some of their mothers. It was for these reasons that I decided to use the snowball technique and did not anticipate any problems at the outset. This technique can, however, run into problems such as being slow and problems can develop when other people act as intermediaries or "gatekeepers" in establishing contact with respondents (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998:63). With hindsight, asking women to explain how they became single-mothers was a very private issue especially at a time when single-mothers were so negatively represented in the media, but I had assumed that this means of establishing a sampling network, beginning with relatives and friends, was a logical starting point. However the women I had initially approached were now decidedly unenthusiastic about being interviewed and declined to participate either by making excuses or indefinite postponements (which never materialised) although one gave an outright refusal. One young woman for instance had promised me an

interview in my home on several occasions (potential respondents were always asked where they wanted the interviews to take place) but consistently failed to turn up or contact me to explain her absence. She seemed rather sheepish when I ran into her some time later and I took the opportunity to ask why, despite having put a note through her mother's door asking her to ring me, she still had not got in touch. She told me:

> I was going to come up [to be interviewed] with my friend but she changed her mind so I wouldn't come on my own and my sister wouldn't come either. [Both these sisters were single mothers with one child each]. What it is we're afraid you'll find out too much.

She began to laugh but offered no further explanation and I realised that it was futile pursuing her cooperation. Little did I realise at the time how this phrase encapsulated what many single-mothers were thinking and how it stopped them from participating in the study. This particular problem affecting my sample arose from definitional problems of single-motherhood which I discuss at a later stage in the chapter. A further refusal came from another young local woman I knew who worked in a greengrocers. I had spoken about the research on several occasions as a way of putting out feelers but her response seemed to have ominous connotations as well: "Will I do an interview for you? Oh no, I'm not doing any interview sorry". I asked if she knew any other single-mothers who might be willing to talk to me but she said that this was unlikely. These reactions seemingly implied that they had or thought they had something to hide. The refusals continued. The third was from a woman I knew who did not turn up as arranged on several different occasions; my sister used to be married to her brother. She would send phone messages via my sister on different occasions that "her children were ill" which I later found out to be untrue. I did not hear from or attempt to contact her again but it would have been easier to have direct refusals as I could then have eliminated these women in favour of genuine respondents. Much time was wasted re-arranging interviews by phone or visiting women who never seemed to be in. I tried to recruit some respondents by asking friends of mine. One friend I spoke to at our local social

club told me "a few single–mothers live near me so I'll mention your research to them to see if any will take part but don't bank on it". She tried to get them involved but without success. Another woman who was not a friend but someone who I worked with told me, "Interview single–mothers in Westlands, you'll be lucky!" When I asked why she said this she went on to say; "these young girls are not going to tell you things about their lives -- they don't want people asking them questions especially people who they don't know". So it seems that many people (unlike myself) were sceptical about the research and anticipated problems in recruiting respondents from the very start. After some weeks attempting to generate a sample in this way I was becoming quite despondent and eventually reverted to different means which I hoped would prove to be more effective.

Contacting local schools

I now decided to contact the local nursery and junior schools of which there were three of each in this area as well as two family centers and two community centres which held mother and baby groups. I made numerous telephone calls to teachers or head teachers of these schools giving details of the research and asking for any suggestions concerning potential respondents. I wrote a "mini-biography" including details of the research with particular emphasis on confidentiality, and sent it to one local head teacher to show the single mothers in the hope that this act of reciprocity would initiate some cooperation from them. After some weeks elapsed with still no respondents, I realised this method was also unproductive. However, on a positive note, the conversations I engaged in with head teachers and other staff members had been productive as regards putting the difficulty of sample recruitment into perspective. They were convinced that I would have great difficulty interviewing unmarried mothers from this area and these difficulties could generally be attributed to the political context of the late 1990s. The reasons proffered ranged from a suspicion of strangers asking questions, the sensitivity of the research topic, the self-perception of single-mothers as somehow a different or stigmatised social group and because

there had recently been a purge on this area by D.S. S. officials who had been keeping vigil in parked cars outside local schools. Some women were followed after taking their children to school in order to see if they returned home or went to jobs which were "off-the-cards". Also a benefits hotline had been set up by Peter Lilley as Minister of Social Security which offered the public cash incentives "to shop a scrounger"or else to inform the D.S.S. about people working "off-the-cards" or about women who were claiming benefits whilst cohabiting or working or doing both. These revelations by some of the teaching staff are significant because they highlight the social as opposed to the educational role of the school in the community. This local knowledge relating to the situations of single-mothers was well known to them and seems to demonstrate how the school was involved in these issues and seemed to be looking out for the welfare of local single-mothers in the community.

These events probably contributed to the problems of sample generation and also showed that I had a formidable obstacle to overcome which was the state in the guise of its agents of social control or else its Social Security officials. Therefore at this particular stage of the research process I would describe my situation as analogous to that of David and Goliath. In the wake of these revelations it seemed that fear of state repercussions (for whatever reasons) was preventing single-mothers from participating in my research so perhaps a brief discussion of these issues is necessary.

The State and Social control

All the women in my sample depended upon state benefits for their economic survival, and benefits are provided on condition that women have no other source of income such as money from paid work, families, or men or partners with whom they may be in a relationship. And this is where the contradictions of the welfare state become apparent: the state provides for women and their dependents in its "caring" capacity but imposes economic and legal sanctions upon which this care is conditional. If conditions of benefit receipt are infringed, i.e. if anyone claims benefit and works informally they will be prosecuted by the state, as will women found to be

cohabiting. Therefore the repercussions of state control can be very serious indeed for women and children who depend upon the state for their material survival.

These difficulties made me concerned about ever being able to generate a sample or penetrating this wall of silence and, because of the failure of the schools to locate respondents, it became necessary to try the community centres. There are two local community centres in this particular area which hold mother and baby groups as well as a Family Centre so I thought it may be productive to pay them a visit. I made three or four visits to each and left a contact number but again had no response. After consultation with my supervisor about these persistent fieldwork problems it was suggested that I contact Women's Aid in order to see if any respondents could be obtained from this source. After numerous telephone calls and written correspondence I had to accept that I had yet again drawn a blank. It was further suggested that I contact a social worker for this particular area in the hope that she could possibly act as an intermediary as regards making contact with potential respondents. However, after several telephone conversations I was told it would be unethical of her to disclose information (which I never expected her to) and the single-mothers with whom she had discussed the research refused to take part.

I had spent several months trying in vain to generate a sample without which my study would be impossible, in the light of this I decided to modify the original methodology by using the snowball technique and my own social networks to generate a sample. This meant that each respondent I eventually interviewed was known or related to me or was recruited by people who knew me and were able to "endorse me" to single mothers from within their own social networks.

A very influential study of families and social networks was carried out by Elizabeth Bott (1957) who distinguishes between types of social networks and gender relations in families. She found what she calls close-knit social networks in working-class communities, wherein people have lived and developed friendships and relations over years, and distinguishes this type of network from what she calls loose-knit networks which tend to be associated with greater geographical mobility and less personal interaction among families. The community in which this study was conducted is characterised by close-knit social networks which proved to be

67

instrumental to my sample generation.

At this stage it had become necessary to visit local shopkeepers, local off-licences where I either knew proprietors or staff, and also the local social club to explain the research and try to obtain some respondents. I also telephoned relatives and friends, some of whom I had not seen for years, and spoke to neighbours and my own family members to tap into their social networks. I virtually beseeched people I knew well, young or old, male or female to produce some respondents. I even remarked to some that I would probably have had an easier time interviewing Tony Blair! I obtained some names and addresses from the proprietress of the local off-licence who seemed interested in the research and keen to help me although most women she put me in touch with declined to take part. But gradually I made contact with willing participants and ironically, as she did not live on Westlands, my son's girlfriend Pamela recruited my first Westlands respondent and also the last four from within her own social network in Parkview. I am indeed indebted to Pamela for her assistance

To summarise the major methodological significance of these fieldwork problems of sample recruitment I would say that I was guilty of a certain degree of naivety when I began my fieldwork by assuming that my preconceived "aces in the hand" or, in other words my social credentials of class, gender, kinship, locality and culture would be advantageous in generating respondents. Some people agreed to participate because they knew me whereas others refused to participate for the very same reason. The situation became somewhat paradoxical as exemplified in a quote of one single-mother: "The only reason I have done this interview is because I know you -- I would never have done it for anyone else". The paradox was that other women who knew me or knew that I lived amongst them refused to participate; my indigenous status could operate to my advantage or disadvantage.

The Interviews

My main research instrument was a semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 1). The areas covered in the interviews were the women's social backgrounds including residence, education and their working lives, their families (past and present) their social and personal relationships, how they became and experienced single–motherhood, and their opinions on marriage, divorce and cohabitation. The interviews end with the women's responses to government and media critiques of them and their children. I wanted the interviews to paint a picture of the women involved and I especially wanted to draw out their attitudes to their children, their relationships and family lives.

I had previously carried out a pilot study with a young mother of two children whom I knew well. She had been in a long term cohabiting relationship for several years but this relationship broke down in early 2001.

Problems of interviewing

Finding women who were willing to be interviewed did not mean my problems were over. Several problems arose in the interviewing process the first of which concerned issues of confidentiality. Some of the women were apprehensive about the use of a tape recorder therefore I had to explain that scribing the interviews by hand would be too time consuming which is why the tape recorder was necessary. I also had to reassure them that I would be using pseudonyms as another means of maintaining confidentiality and that only I would hear the tapes. Another issue that cropped up concerned two of the women's partners who did not want them to get involved in this study. One man in particular tried to dissuade his partner from participating but without success. Some of the women had a problem with my identity so I had to constantly reassure them that I was not a D.S.S. official because the prospect of this greatly alarmed them. Other problems concerned conducting interviews in the presence of young children. This happened on about five occasions. After a while the children became

bored and wanted their mother's attention; they began crying, or interrupting and some tried to play with the tape recorder and were reluctant to hand it over. In such circumstances, parts of the interviews were inaudible or else had to be prematurely terminated. On other occasions when several young children were present, they began to squabble over toys or dummies, and again some interviews were prematurely concluded or else parts were inaudible.

Some women had only a partial understanding of the aims of the research despite my attempts to explain it as best I could. Also I felt that certain questions, especially those relating to the women's families of origin, put some on the defensive; a few asked about the necessity of such questions as they, and not their families, were the focus of my research. I explained to them of the need to look for similarities and differences in order to make comparisons about past and present family lives and behaviours. The younger respondents seemed more apprehensive and eager to finish their interviews than those in the over twenty age group.

However despite all these problems there were many positive aspects to the interviews which I considered were achieved through my efforts to eliminate formalities and make the women feel relaxed by creating a friendly environment for those who came to my home to be interviewed. I used background music such as the radio or C.D. tapes plus numerous cups of coffee, tea and cigarettes which seemed to break the ice and put the women at ease. One woman came rather earlier than expected for her interview and as a result was interviewed by me in curlers and a dressing gown.

I tried to eliminate as much stress, tension and artificiality from the interviews as I possibly could because interviews are artificial / unnatural situations which invariably foster tensions and inhibitions between researcher and researched. I made a point of stressing the importance of the women's contribution to the research by constantly reiterating that I could not have done it without them. I wanted them to know how much I appreciated their cooperation. But in spite of all my efforts, some women were more uneasy than others about

70

the tape recorder so as a last resort to allay their fears, I often dropped a swear word or two during the interviews which seemed to do the trick and convince them that no one else would hear the tapes.

Although some of my interview techniques could be considered unorthodox and prompted a few to say, "You're not what we expected!" I feel that the quality of my data plus the quality of my relations with most women were accomplished as a result of these techniques. I consider that adopting these measures was successful as on several occasions I became involved in lengthy discussions after the tape had been switched off.

Power Relations

Before I conclude this section on the interviews I return to a brief discussion of power relations. One of the characteristics of feminist research is the attempt to address power relations between researcher and respondents. It is generally assumed that the researcher is always in a position of power as regards his/ her academic background, social class and having control and in-depth knowledge of the research project. But I suggest that this is not necessarily so; as a feminist researcher who attempted to eliminate the unequal or hierarchical relations between myself and my respondents I often felt powerless in relation to them. My feelings of powerlessness stemmed from the fact that I needed these women to conduct my study -- they did not need me. I was totally dependent upon them for information; inclusion in my research was not the priority for them that it was for me. Therefore I often felt vulnerable during the interviews (even if I never showed it) as I felt that the women held the balance of power. I felt that asking them something too sensitive or personal could result in them terminating the interview and I would be unable to stop them. I consider some interviews were challenging, emotionally and mentally exhausting but on reflection, I consider most were successful despite the interruptions mentioned earlier. Six women claimed to have enjoyed them; they found them interesting and thought provoking, whilst others

71

regarded them as somewhat of an ordeal and were glad to get them over with. Unlike middle class researchers I was unable to rely on social class differences to reduce my feelings of powerlessness because I, like my sample, was and am a working-class woman.

However I must point out that the concept of power is not fixed or immutable; rather it can shift and change. What I mean by this is that despite feeling powerless during the interviews, I found that during the transcription stage of the research, I felt in a definite position of power due to the nature of the disclosures made by some of the women. A few had entrusted me, a virtual stranger, with information which could have resulted in serious repercussions for them had I chosen to disclose it. I suspect that this is why a few women regretted their participation in the research; their disclosures had empowered me yet had disempowered them.

Discussion

Apart from my dual identity there were other factors which contributed to my fieldwork problems particularly the actual research process. Conducting social research in this particular area which for many years had been badly represented by the press and put under surveillance by the state had fostered suspicions in the community . And someone like me asking questions about personal and contentious issues was not considered as "the norm" by the locals. A woman university researcher such as I, although claiming allegiance to the working–class, was definitely not part of the culture of the community. It seemed as if many now possibly perceived me as "a cultural non-conformist" including some of my friends and associates.

This research was conducted with much difficulty in a social environment permeated by hostility, suspicion, anxiety, and distrust wherein numerous obstacles imposed barriers to the conduct of research. In a community with a high percentage of single-mothers I was only able to obtain a small sample with great difficulty. The local residents were, at first, unwilling

to participate in this most "unorthodox" social activity such as that constituted by the research. My identity became a central issue of the research as I was constantly having to renegotiate my status by submerging my student identity in favour of my working–class identity in attempts to show I was still "one of them". In this sense I felt I was simultaneously an "insider-cum-outsider" and someone who did not belong to the community despite living here. This situation made my task of gaining access to and participating in the social relations of the secretive worlds of single-mothers much more difficult than I had originally anticipated. I had to settle for half the desired number of respondents, had to modify the methodology, and undergo long spells of non-productive sample generation.

Yet despite the problems of fieldwork, I consider that my social credentials of gender, social class and my indigenous status cannot be dismissed as insignificant . All these factors helped me to conduct this study. The whole process was on times physically and mentally exhausting, disappointing and fraught with tension but eventually very rewarding. However it would never have been accomplished without the social networks of friends and family.

In several ways this research was a revelation in that many preconceptions about myself, my friends, my acquaintances and my family were dispelled and in retrospect, I certainly will not be making assumptions in future!

CHAPTER THREE

THE WOMEN AND THE LOCALITIES

Here I describe the area in which I conducted my research and then go on to describe my sample.

Westlands is one of the oldest, poorest and largest council estates in South Wales and, to quote a local councillor for the area, "one in which the whole fabric of society has broken down" (local paper, 29.7.1992). He refers to social and economic deprivation, environmental deprivation, high levels of unemployment, escalating levels of juvenile crime, under-age drinking and drug-taking, a lack of parental responsibility and control, and a decline in family life in general and he considers that the rise in single-mother families contributes to the many social problems on this estate.

A high proportion of the population of the estate are economically inactive. This is indicated by unemployment levels of 26.4% for men and 8.3% for women, 20% are registered permanently sick, 32.5% are retired and 4.3% are students (1991, Census data). The employed population are to be found in skilled, partly skilled and non-skilled manual work in social classes four and five; this is based on the Registrar General's classification by occupation.

Three-quarters of the housing stock is rented from the local authority and an analysis of the socio-economic profile of the ward using Welsh Office indicators ranks Westlands as the third most deprived area in Wales. In this part of Wales the official numbers of lone-parent households are amongst the highest in the country and, according to the 1991 census, in terms of the incidence of lone parents as a percentage of total households, Westlands ranks third highest in South Wales.

Although having its fair share of socio-economic problems in recent years, it seems that the media have contributed to the pathologisation of the estate as some of the following

74

newspaper reports demonstrate.

> "Unflattering labels come easy to Westlands: headlines have called it deprived, troubled, and even crisis torn. A core of residents have never denied its problems, but have always insisted they were nowhere as bad as reported" (local paper, 6/4/2000).

Other headlines included: "Estate likened to the Bronx", "Children as young as eight are sleeping rough on Westlands", "A senior police officer has promised to put more bobbies on the beat on Westlands" (local paper, 20/10/1999). But others have offered support for Westlands: "The area attracts so much attention simply because of its size -- it's not among the horrors" (a local historian quoted in the local paper in December 1995).

> "What people really need around here is work -- people need jobs and training to make sure they get jobs" (an executive concerned with turning the fortunes of Westlands around through European funding initiatives, local paper, June, 1999).

The estate of over 3000 houses was built between 1920 and the late 1930s. It previously housed a working-class population of skilled and semi-skilled workers but now houses some of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in Wales. In the last two decades Westlands has suffered from many socio-economic problems and I consider one of the biggest difficulties affecting the population to be unemployment and, until recently, a lack of financial investment in the area. I further consider that many Westlands residents and youngsters have low expectations of themselves. There are high levels of crime, car theft, burglaries and so on and, as we have already seen, the estate has the highest proportion of single–mothers in South Wales. This is the main reason why I chose to carry out my ethnographic study here. Single-mothers have not caused the social problems faced by the estate, the environment and the infrastructure have been gradually decaying for years. However research tends to show a correlation between unemployment, social deprivation and single–motherhood (McRobbie, 1990; Phoenix, 1990). Westlands can best be described as a casualty of age, under investment and structural socio-economic changes which have

significantly affected the social environment and the quality of many people's lifestyles. However in the 1930s, this particular estate was acclaimed "as the jewel in Wales's crown" and was highly publicised as an architectural triumph. So how did a "crown jewel" fade into a lack lustre and much maligned problem estate with much of its population socially excluded from mainstream society? Perhaps a social and historical analysis of past decades will enlighten us.

The Birth of Westlands

Seventy years ago Westlands was widely acclaimed as the best in British community spirit; solid brick houses and a prime site made it one of the most desirable areas to live in pre-war South Wales. The names of roads, streets and crescents were predominantly Welsh; i.e. Ceiriog, Islwyn, Pedrog, and so on. A local historian and native of the estate organised an adult education course on the early history of the area in 1992/1993 in an attempt to offer local people the chance to learn more about the area. "Westlands has a fascinating past," said Mr. Travers, "and at one time people scrambled to get houses in that part of Wales" (local paper,31.12.91). However Mr. Travers would probably find today many of the residents are scrambling to move away. But for three decades spanning the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s life on Westlands seemed good and fostered a community spirit among the locals. Two social clubs and three pubs served the leisure needs of the adult members of the community and children had the use of facilities such as three parks, one of which sported a tennis court, two community centres, a boxing hall and a gymnasium for the more athletic of the population. There was also a local cinema which doubled as a bingo hall and later became the local dance hall and a popular haunt for teenagers living on Westlands and other surrounding areas. It was in this particular dance hall that many famous groups made their debuts in the 1960s and early 1970s such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, Herman's Hermits and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates among others. However, life on Westlands has changed and in the past two decades

the environment, lifestyles and reputations of many of the residents have taken a media and political battering. So what exactly had occurred over recent years to drastically alter people's perception and make them reluctant to live in Westlands?

Westlands in the late 1990s

During the 1980s and 1990s considerable changes happened on Westlands which must be seen as correlated to structural changes in the economy and the labour market. The 1980s saw two recessions, the closure of many manufacturing firms, high unemployment, the sale of much council stock under the Tory government, and changes in social security policy for young people. This included the introduction of assisted Y.T.S. schemes for school-leavers and the withdrawal of benefits from 16–18 year olds. Many families were affected by these changes and unemployment became a regular feature of working-class life; as job prospects declined so did the social environment and much of the fifty-year old housing stock.

As a result of these structural changes the estate at the turn of the 20th century can be described as housing two communities; one comprising elderly, respectable community spirited families, many of whom have lived there since the estate was built with many members of their extended families living close by as it was not unusual for families in the 1930s to consist of ten or more children. The other community comprised "different types of residents" from the traditional old locals, such as unemployed school leavers, drug addicts, criminals and a high proportion of young, single mothers. The major difference between the younger inhabitants and their predecessors was that many had never worked since leaving school, never paid income tax and never had a stake in society. I describe them as children of the giro-generation. Therefore Westlands was experiencing problems with its crumbling infrastructure, high levels of particularly male unemployment and increasing difficulties with its young population.

In an attempt to improve these situations, beginning in the1980s much of the estate

underwent council funded improvements or a modernisation programme wherein central heating, double-glazed windows and doors and, for many, interior toilets were installed. The exteriors of the houses were pebble-dashed in a choice of colour schemes which greatly enhanced the appearance of these pre-war houses. However these improvements resulted in increased rents. And although they possibly contributed to raising morale they did not solve other problems such as high rates of unemployment, burglaries, vandalism, drug-taking/dealing and under-age drinking. I suggest these improvements have had limited success as, recently, much of this improved housing has been vandalised and neglected; houses with overhanging hedges and uncut lawns strewn with the contents of broken black bags dumped in gardens are an all-too-common sight existing alongside immaculately kept houses and gardens.

The estate consists of much owner-occupied accommodation purchased in the 1980s under the Tory government's right-to-buy housing policy and, in parts, "haves" and "have nots" live practically side by side. But certain areas of the estate in recent years have become residentially segregated being mostly occupied by single-mothers, the young unemployed, "problem-families", drug addicts, alcoholics and criminals.

Reasons for the conditions at Westlands were advanced in the press by the local councillor (South Wales Evening Post, 29.7.1992) and included social deprivation, unemployment and a lack of parental control. He also said single parent families had become a major housing problem and that while years ago being single and having a baby was a big thing now many of these girls couldn't care less. He had seen some "with about two or three children all by different fathers," knocking on his door for a house. "All we are doing on the estate is housing single-mothers" he laments. In contrast, a South Wales M.P. says money is desperately needed to regenerate the estate and restore people's pride in their homes. His views were reported in the local paper in (July 1995):

"Unfortunately Westlands is a casualty of its age as an estate. It is showing all

78

the signs of wear and tear and it will take enormous investment just to refurbish houses and bring them up to a modern standard." But he says money is not the only obstacle standing in the way of Westlands emerging once again as a showpiece estate. He believes that youngsters must be given an alternative to hanging out on street corners in their spare time and "that we tend to underestimate the importance of investing and providing facilities for young people then complain when they don't behave."

Although this M.P. attempts a more meaningful analysis of the problems of the estate, at the end of the day politicians and local authority leaders all agree on one thing; the estate needs a huge cash investment.

In contrast to Westlands, Parkview is a small, recently built housing association estate and is home to a generally young population comprising couples and single-mother families. Unlike Westlands it does not have a problematic social history due to the fact that it is newly constructed, but it is similar to Westlands in as much as it seems to have a working-class population. The estate comprises four parallel streets of smallish redbrick houses with small gardens surrounded by fencing and is reached by turning off the main road and going left up quite a steep stretch of road. The estate is small and neat and vastly different from the large sprawling estate of Westlands.

The Sample

For the purposes of this research the sample were all unmarried and specifically chosen from the age group of sixteen to twenty-six in order to be representative of the single mothers who were causing so much social and moral concern. However there are definitional problems in relation to single-mothers which need addressing before I proceed

The term single-mother is somewhat ambiguous or rather an umbrella term encompassing different groups of women such as divorced, separated, widowed, cohabiting and women who have never married and are bringing up children on their own. It is this latter category I am concerned with because it is this social group that was pathologised by successive Tory governments as deviant and dysfunctional because they bring up children without men as heads of

the family.

These definitional problems did not become apparent until I was writing up the research and was forced to consider how the status of single mother was being defined. All the women I interviewed defined themselves as single-mothers, but during the course of the research, it became clear that their living arrangements and relationships differed significantly and they were not a homogeneous group. At the time of these interviews seven women were cohabiting, one had returned with her young daughter to live with her parents and seven lived alone with their children. The ex-partners/children's fathers of two of these seven were in prison and the women told me these relationships were over but whether they have now been resumed I do not know.

When attempting to generate a sample I asked various friends, family and acquaintances to help me find some single/unmarried mothers to interview. At the time I made no distinction between these terms, as far as I was concerned single and unmarried meant the same thing. With hindsight this lack of differentiation was seemingly responsible for the type of sample I acquired. Half of the women were in cohabiting relationships or living as common law man and wife and were not representative of single mothers as defined by the state, i.e. unmarried women living alone with their children who depend upon state welfare. I intended to interview single mothers who lived alone with their children and not with men but now I was faced with a situation whereby these women described themselves as single-mothers despite living with a man.

At first I attributed the explanation for this in economic terms because the women were claiming while cohabiting and had to keep this from the Social Security for fear of prosecution. Women as welfare claimants are subject to the cohabitation rule which expects them to declare whether they are in a relationship. Some couples live together but claim benefits separately as they receive more money this way whilst others claim separately because when a cohabiting couple claim together, the benefits are usually paid to the man and the woman thus becomes dependent on him. This can be a most unsatisfactory arrangement if the man does not provide

adequately for his partner and child/ren (as some men do not); the woman is relatively powerless in such a situation. Indeed, after analysing the data on marriage and relationships it became clear that some women saw dependency upon men as a risk and they felt that they had to retain some control and independence over their lives; this was especially true amongst those who had experienced living with men who did not provide adequate financial support. I suggest that many defined themselves as single-mothers because technically they were single despite cohabiting, i.e. they were unmarried. These women were able to exert some control over their lives via their benefit book, a control which they would lose if they married or allowed their partners to claim for them as a couple.

It seems we have a situation where unmarried mothers are not necessarily single (in the sense of living alone with their children) and that even when they are cohabiting, they define themselves as single, as indeed I did. This of course reflects the juxtaposition of single with married -- cohabitation clearly does not alter marital status. However the state's definition of single–mother equates marriage and cohabitation and it could be argued that it is responsible for this situation in so far as it expects couples to act as if they are married with men being financially responsible for their wives. This assumption is not valid even for married men, many of whom are not good financial providers for their families, and the same can be said for men who cohabit as some of my sample disclosed. Indeed cohabitation, unlike marriage, may not depend on a man's ability to provide, and many amongst my sample, preferred dependence on the state to dependence upon irresponsible partners. Throughout I refer to the women as single mothers, reflecting their own understanding and definition of their circumstances.

To return to the sample, the women were all working-class as defined by residency and former occupations but they came from two different areas; eleven came from Westlands and the rest from Parkview. Prior to becoming single-mothers ten of the women lived with their parents, four had been cohabiting and one woman lived with her grandmother who had brought her up from a baby since her parents divorced. Thirteen of the women had worked full-time before becoming single-mothers in various jobs such as care-assistant, cleaning, shop-work and

81

waitressing but prior to single-motherhood none had claimed welfare benefits. Their jobs were low paid, low status and casual. Two of the women who conceived as 15 year old schoolgirls had never been in paid work, and although one of them had worked in a shop since becoming a single-mother the other had never done any paid work and was due to marry her child's father in the near future. The former was in another relationship and expecting her second child and was shortly to move from Parkview as her partner was buying a house in a different area. Most of the women said they had enjoyed their former work and missed the money and independence these jobs provided; six now worked part-time including three who worked in the informal economy. The part-time work included leisure centre attendant and shop work and the informal jobs included cleaning and waitressing. Others did not want to work as their children were so young or they were unable to work for various reasons, including there being no available jobs or a lack of childcare. One woman had tried working full-time while her mother looked after her child but had to finish as the wages were too low to run her household and because she was not spending enough time with her son (these issues are more fully discussed in Chapter three). Others had tried combining motherhood with part-time work but encountered problems in getting regular babysitters or felt that they were making nuisances of themselves by asking different people to care for their children so that they could work. In table I present a summary of the main characteristics of my sample. All names used throughout this study are pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality and the titles of specific newspapers have been omitted in order to preserve anonymity for the location.

Table 3.1: Respondents in order of interviews

Person	Age	Age at conception	No. of children	Sex of children	Age of children	Employed	Marital Status*	Housing*
Amanda	26	23	1	M	3	N	Single	Council
Mary	25	20	1	M	4	Y	Single	Council
Diane	20	17	1	F	2	N	Single	Council
Julie	26	17	2	M, F	9, 8	Y	C/H	Council
Anita	25	20	1	M	4	N	C/H	H/Assoc
Marion	26	17	3	M, M, F	8, 2, 4	N	C/H	Council
Violet	21	18	1	M	3	N	C/H	Council
Susan	26	20	2	F, F	6, 2	N	Single	Council
Mandy	25	18	1	M	6	Y	C/H	Council
Kylie	24	20	2	M, M	5, 1	Y	Single	Council
Katie	17½	15	1	F	2	N	C/H	Council
Tricia	20	18	1	M	2	N	Single	Council
Sheila	22	16	1	F	6	Y	C/H	H/Assoc
Maureen	26	20	2	M, F	6, 1	N	C/H	H/Assoc
Janet	24	19	1	F	5	Y	Single	H/Assoc

H/Assoc. = Housing Association   * All the women were single but some were also cohabiting. In this case they are described as cohabiting (C/H).

The women were all mothers of children between 1 and 9 years of age, and all depended on State benefits. All (apart from those who were cohabiting) described themselves as having financial problems as welfare benefits were not considered sufficient to live on.

CHAPTER FOUR

BECOMING AND BEING A SINGLE-MOTHER.

At the beginning of the 20th century, powerful social pressures dictated that women should expect to have children and that they should only have them within marriage. Marriage and motherhood were supposed to be synonymous, and they were regarded as the best achievements for women of both working and middle classes. Unmarried mothers were a special focus, their behaviour was considered immoral and the bastardy laws were harsh (Lewis, 1984:11). According to McIntosh (cited in Silva, 1996:148) in recent years the media in the U. K. have been reflecting a concern about lone mothers that amounts to a moral panic so nothing has changed in this respect. So why do some women become single-mothers when this is such an unfavourable status? What factors are relevant to single-motherhood?

In this chapter I attempt to find out by exploring the life histories of the women in the sample before and after their transition to single-motherhood. I wanted to know how and where they lived, I wanted to know about their educational and working lives, about the relationships which resulted in them becoming single-mothers and why some of these relationships failed. I wanted to find out the conditions under which they became single mothers and whether certain factors had influenced their careers as single-mothers. In the first part of this chapter I focus on the women's social backgrounds and their educational and employment histories, in the second I discuss their transitions to single-motherhood and in the third I analyse their subsequent lifestyles and experiences as working-class single-mothers. I also focus on the parenting roles of the women and their partners.

Contrary to much public speculation that single-mothers are evidence of the decline of the family, I intend to test the hypothesis that my sample is not evidence of family decline but of the importance of families as support networks for them and their children. I am also concerned with the effects of gender inequality on these women's lives. My findings show that the social and personal lives of the women in this study have seemingly been conducted within structural inequalities of gender and social class, beginning with their families of origin, and continuing through school, the workplace and later within their personal

relationships. The women explain their material situations and social realities which need to be analysed in the broader context of structural inequalities of gender and social class. To further illustrate this point, I paraphrase from Marx's famous dictum (albeit with a slight amendment to the original sex in question):

"Women make their own history but in circumstances not of their own choosing".

I now proceed to describe the social lives of the young women in the sample prior to single-motherhood status.

Working-Class Women

The fifteen women in this study did not as I had originally intended come from the same social environment. The common factor/ variable among them all was neither friendship nor locality but their status of single-motherhood. Eight respondents from Westlands were born there and had never lived anywhere else, two had moved there as young children and the other woman had moved there as a teenager. Prior to becoming single-mothers, six of the women lived with their parents in council housing on the estate, four lived with their babies' fathers and one woman lived with her grandmother; she became pregnant a few months after leaving school and starting her first job. Six of the women from Westlands had established relationships with young men from the same locality and none expressed a desire to move away from the area unless, as one woman said, "she won the lottery". There was no evidence of any social mobility among the Westlands women; all lived in council houses, none were homeowners and their partners if they were employed, had traditional working-class manual jobs except for one man who worked with computers and had been to college. All except one of the Westlands women had parents and other family members living nearby, and nine of the eleven women saw their parents at least on a weekly basis (I did not ask them to be more specific) especially their mothers who regularly helped them with child-minding, shopping, providing meals and lending money. The other two women saw their parents less often and said their mothers did not provide help on a regular basis. The other four women came from Parkview which, despite being housing association accommodation, cannot really be described as very different from Westlands apart from being recently constructed and much

smaller than Westlands. But what differed was the nature of family relations between the women in these two localities. Three of the four women from Parkview had lived in other areas as children and one had been brought up on a large estate like Westlands; three were not living near to their parents but only one of the four did not regularly see her parents (at least on a weekly basis). The woman who did not see her parents explained that they did not live near her and that she did not have a close relationship with them. One woman who still lived on an estate similar to Westlands where she had grown up and from where her child's father also came, was interviewed at Parkview in her cousin's home as were the other three Parkview women. (My son's girlfriend lived at Parkview and it was she who recruited the Parkview women, one of whom was her cousin). The other three women had come to live at Parkview in the last two years or so and established friendships / relationships with other young mothers and couples on the estate.

Summary

Eight of the eleven women born on Westlands still resided there (as did most of their parents) and nearly all had other family members living nearby such as siblings, aunts and uncles and nephews and nieces. One woman who came to Westlands as a teenager now lived there with her partner and young child and another woman spoke of having twelve aunties, some of whom lived on Westlands, and having regular contact with one aunt in particular. As I said earlier, three of the Parkview women had different social backgrounds and differing family relations from the majority of the Westlands women. They did not have other family members living nearby and tended to establish their social networks with other young people, especially other single mothers on Parkview. One single-mother of a six year old was shortly moving from Parkview into owner-occupied housing in a different area with her new partner by whom she was expecting her second child and they intended to marry in the near future. The nature of the social networks of the two groups of women is significant and can be linked to the empirical work of Bott (1957) on families and their associated types of social networks (see chapter one). She differentiates between close-knit social networks generally associated with working-class families in areas where people have lived for years and where everyone

knows everyone else, and loose knit social networks where families and relatives tend to be more spatially dispersed and have less regular contact between family members. This relates to my sample because Westlands was characterised by close-knit networks whereas the Parkview women tended to have loose-knit networks.

Education and Working-Class women

The educational achievements of the sample were quite minimal and only one of the women was in further education. Most of the sample were sceptical about the benefits of education whilst five had left school without any qualifications whatsoever. The yearly publication of G.C.S.E. exam results in England and Wales show that girls outperform, or are on a par with, boys in the majority of subject areas. Does this mean that schooling has fulfilled the aspirations of both first and second-wave liberal feminists who called in the 19th century for a "common standard" (Davies, 1986) and in the 1970s for an "equal" education (Byrne, 1978) for girls? The answer to this is no (Robinson and Richardson, 1999:303). Various theories that attempt to explain the differing educational outcomes of boys and girls can be found in Weiner and Arnot (1987). Differences in girls' and boys' educational experiences have been explored in a plethora of sociological research conducted on education and the working-class; central to these studies is a concern with what happens within the school to affect the educational experiences of working-class children (Jackson and Marsden, 1966; Willis, 1977). This research has attempted to establish links between the social background of the children and educational outcomes while other research has explored the interactions between race, class, gender and the school with regard to the educational outcomes of ethnic minorities (Weiner and Arnot, 1987). My study concerns working-class women therefore I was interested in comparing my findings with other sociological research on girls' education such as that of Mirza (1995) whose findings show that teacher attitudes can affect girls educational opportunities, and Lees (1994) whose study shows how working-

class girls leave school with expectations of motherhood. Gender socialisation and gender ideologies are influential factors with regard to the aspirations of many working-class women and Chris Griffin's (1986) study of young women from a variety of backgrounds leaving school indicates that "marriage and motherhood were seen as distant events which might occur ten years in the future, but they were also seen as inevitable for most young women. Few financially feasible or socially acceptable alternatives were available, particularly for working-class women" (1986:181). Similar findings emerged in Leonard, (1980) who conducted research on marriage in Swansea. These studies tend to show that many working-class young women do not perceive their futures in terms of academia or careers but rather in terms of becoming wives and mothers. McRobbie (2000), writing about a group of twelve school leavers in Birmingham all of whom became pregnant within twelve months of leaving school, found that all the girls were "non-achievers" and there seemed to be little or no difference between them and the groups of working-class girls described in all the classic studies of working-class life twenty or even fifty years ago (see, for example, Robert, (1971) and Hoggart, (1956). McRobbie found that "School qualifications were not deemed important because the kind of jobs they [her sample of working class girls] would pick up did not require paper qualifications". McRobbie, 2000:170. This was a situation they shared in common with their male counterparts. In her study, Sharpe (1976:122) found that:

> "girls' attitudes to school are affected by their backgrounds, personality and ability, and the sheer implications of being female. Working-class children in particular, whose social position has always influenced the kind of schooling they receive, see education as of relatively low value or relevance to the opportunities that are open to them. For girls, there is no relationship between academic and technical schooling and being a good mother".

My findings were similar to these studies with my sample having low or no educational qualifications and only three of the fifteen women expressing any interest in education. I first consider the Westland women's views and experiences of education followed by the Parkview women.

Nine of the eleven Westlands women had attended the local primary and

comprehensive schools and of the remaining two, one attended a Catholic school in a different catchment area from Westlands and the other woman had been educated in a different primary and comprehensive before coming to live on Westlands. These two women differed from the others in that both had briefly returned to education post G.C.S.E but gave it up for different reasons. None of the eleven women from Westlands had acquired any educational qualifications above G.C.S.E. and seven of my sample of fifteen had no qualifications at all. (see Figure 4.1 below). However, having done the same myself at the age of fifteen (which I discuss more fully in chapter two) I am aware of some of the factors which influence working class girls' educational experiences.

Figure 1   Educational achievements of the sample
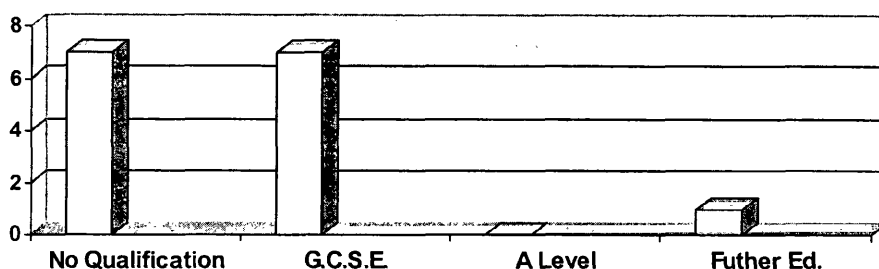
One of the Westlands women had conceived her baby as a fifteen year old schoolgirl and had no qualifications, she was almost eighteen at the time of interview and soon to marry her child's father. The majority of the women, apart from two who had briefly returned to education, did not appear concerned about having no qualifications and generally showed a lack of interest in education. One woman in particular was amused when I asked her about qualifications. Susan was a 26 year old mother of two and when I asked her whether she had any exams or educational qualifications replied "Exams! Me? No, no" (laughs to herself). When I asked her why she laughed she said she couldn't get qualifications or pass exams because "she was thick". She had left school to work in a factory making savoury snacks. Her reply is indicative of how working-class girls tend to act out the self-fulfilling prophecy in which they perceive education as not important for them. This perception is reinforced by a school ethos and (often) teachers' attitudes which tend to discourage rather than encourage young, working-class women (Mirza 1985; Lees 1987). There could be a link between the

educational experience of working-class girls and their subsequent lifestyles as highlighted by the example of Sally, a single mother of two young children whose partner is currently serving a prison sentence for theft and drug-dealing leaving her to bring up her children alone. McRobbie's (1991) research on single-mothers in Selly Oak found that the girls' unemployed partners often got involved in drug-taking and/or criminal activities and some men were violent to the women. Working-class single-mothers tend to have low educational qualifications and are among the poorest groups in society.

In my study I found a lack of enthusiasm for education as demonstrated by this response from Tricia, a 20 year-old mother of a small child aged two. When I asked her whether she had any qualifications her reply was: "Um, I dunno, I got a few G.C.S.E's, but I can't remember what ones". Tricia had only taken her exams four years previously but her inability to remember what she had achieved reflected a lack of interest. This was also the case with Mary, a twenty-five year old mother of one child. She had taken no exams in school and in reply to my question about whether she would like to resume her education in the future said, "To be honest, no. Because I mean there are a lot of people who have taken a lot of exams and can't get jobs can they?" Her reply was echoed by Diane, a twenty year-old mother of one child who said:

> Oh, I wouldn't mind a little job later on yes, a little job, better than college 'cos I hated school I know college is different but it's never really interested me to go back.

A similar response came from 26 year-old Katy, a single-mother of two children from two different relationships who sat some G.C.S.E.'s but never got her results after leaving to work in a shop.

However three of the women expressed an interest in returning to obtain qualifications and explained the various factors that prevented them from doing so. Two of them had not been educated at the local schools on Westlands and the third, Amanda, a twenty-six year old mother of one who had returned to live with her parents after living with her child's father for just over a year, had worked in an office for 8 years prior to single-motherhood.

> CR: Would you be interested in going back to education?
> Amanda: Yes, I would like to do Business Studies in the future perhaps when she's a bit older [she is referring to her daughter].

One of the women who had briefly returned to education was Anita a 26 year-old mother of one at time of interview, but who has since had another child.

> CR.: Would you be interested in returning to education?
> Anita: Yes, I went back to resit two G.C.S.E.'s but didn't sit them. I did the course, but since I'd been out of school about five or six years, you know that exam feeling -- it put me right off and I just couldn't do it. You know sitting there, I just couldn't write a letter. But I'd like to work with children with learning difficulties, Downe's Syndrome kids, things like that or do an NNEB, you can do it for special needs you know. I don't think I'd be capable of being in charge but I'd like to work as an assistant.

A third respondent who took no exams in school and had her first child at 17 and another at 18, said: "Yes, I might go back to education in time. Yes, I'd like to do needle work". Some of these responses implied a gendered orientation to work; the jobs they thought of doing involved things like working with children. This gendered orientation also emerged from the work histories of the sample as I discuss in the next chapter.

It seems also that childcare responsibilities affect educational experiences. Thus Violet, a 23 year-old mother of one who is expecting her second child by her partner to whom she is engaged, said:

> I started an Access Course when the baby was five months old but couldn't cope with it. It was too much, the work and seeing to the baby. He didn't like the creche, he'd scream every day when I left him and I'd feel awful then, you know, guilty.

This statement highlights the difficulty that some mothers face when attempting to combine motherhood with work or study; because of the assumption of women's primary roles as mothers the double burden of combining childcare and study/paid work is often problematic as women are expected to be first and foremost in the home. However in her situation Violet was fortunate to have access to creche facilities in order to study even though her child did not respond positively. Although Violet was unable to combine further education and motherhood her partner was able to hold down two different jobs, one day job and another night job.

Of the four women from Parkview, one had left school with no qualifications having become pregnant at fifteen and was now in another relationship and expecting her second child. Another was unsure about the few exams she had taken whilst another was in further

education doing a course in conversational Welsh which she hoped would improve her job prospects in the future. The fourth woman had some G.C.S.E.'s and had recently begun an aromatherapy course. They were therefore not really different from the Westlands women.

Summary

To summarise this section, the data suggests that education has not been particularly important to these women and only three of the fifteen expressed an interest in returning to education. The differences in educational attitudes within the sample could possibly be explained by the fact that those interested in further education had already acquired some qualifications at "O" level. Two of them were educated elsewhere from Westlands and one woman from Westlands had worked in a clerical job for several years and described herself as coming from a family "in which everyone always worked". It seems that the findings here support those of earlier sociological studies on education and the working-class.

Women's employment prior to single motherhood

The question of women's participation in paid work is contentious as women are traditionally assumed to be domesticated yet alternatively also expected to take paid work outside the home. Problems can arise when women with children want to take paid work but get accused of neglecting their children or, if they don't want to take paid work, of being lazy. Another contentious issue concerns the definition of work. It used to be defined simply as paid work, despite all the work that women put into childcare and housework which was generally dismissed as not "proper work" until studies such as Oakley's (1974) revolutionised perceptions of housework and the role of housewife. Issues relating to women and paid work are a central plank of the moral panic surrounding single-mothers and I wanted to explore the women's opinions on these issues and how they dealt with them. I began by asking what jobs the women had prior to becoming single-mothers.

Apart from two of the sample who had become pregnant while still at school, the

remainder had been employed in a range of jobs prior to becoming single-mothers. The jobs included waitressing, cleaning, clerical work, shop work and factory work. Nearly all of the women said they had enjoyed their working lives although they had been quite brief for some. A few expressed a desire to be able to relinquish their present status of single-motherhood in order to return to their single lives and previous jobs. However this could only be wishful thinking on their part. Although none of the jobs they had could have been considered well paid this was not a deterrent to these women. But what was significant was that all these jobs were what could sociologically be classified as gendered, working-class jobs. In other words they were jobs typically carried out by women and none of them could be classified as professional. Significantly none of the women were unemployed at the time of conception apart from two who became pregnant as schoolgirls; none had ever claimed benefits prior to single-motherhood. They were all self-sufficient and earning their way in life.

This section has provided an overview of the kinds of jobs in which the women worked, most of which are traditionally described as women's jobs or are low-paid, relatively unskilled and require no qualifications. However one woman worked in an office with computers and this was quite a skilled job. The woman who used to work in a nursing home before becoming a single-mother had earned £2 an hour and was realistic in her assessment of not being able to support her and her young son on these wages even if she wanted to.

Working class single-mothers

Although defining themselves as single-mothers, six of the women were in cohabiting relationships with their child/ren's fathers; two were in different relationships at the time of interview and the other seven had split up with or been abandoned by their former partners. Tina had been "dumped" after a few months, and Katy "dumped" her former partner for making another woman pregnant despite living with her for four years. Katy explained about them "trying for a baby" but when the baby was a few months old they broke up as a result of

her partner's infidelity. She said he had now contributed to the formation of another single-mother family. Two of the women's partners were currently serving prison sentences and other relationships had broken up for various reasons leaving the women responsible for the children. Only one of the men from the failed relationships paid maintenance for his child, the other women said their partners contributed nothing because they were unemployed. Four ex-partners had no contact with their children whatsoever but the others had access to their children generally on a once-weekly basis. Three of the women had been in relationships for several years until they broke down and nine had not expected their relationships to fail resulting in them becoming single-mothers.

In this section I discuss more fully the circumstances under which these women became single-mothers. Amanda had been in a relationship when she became pregnant and lived with her parents in council housing on Westlands. Several months after the birth, she and her child's father set up home in a council house not far from her parents but found this accommodation unsatisfactory for bringing up a child due to a steep garden which had been neglected/overgrown and the general condition of the house itself. They moved to a better house and Amanda lived with her child's father for about 18 months until they broke up and she and her child returned to live with her parents. When I asked her how she became a single-mother she replied:

> I don't know really. It wasn't planned, it just happened -- in the beginning I thought we would stay together but we didn't. Having a child really restricts your life, it really changes everything, it's hard when you want to go out, it's hard with the money to live on, and it's hard when you are both mother and father to it.

Julie, in contrast, became pregnant at the age of seventeen. At the time of conception she lived with her mother who was divorced (but cohabiting) and her two brothers and step-sister.

> CR: Can you tell me how you became a single-mother?
> Julie: I dunno really, it wasn't planned -- it happened so quick, I didn't think I would get pregnant. I met him, had Jimmy and that was that. And a year later I had Alice.
> CR: Can you describe what being a single-mother is like?
> Julie: It's hard yes, but it is rewarding.

> CR: Is it what you expected?
> Julie: I suppose it is what I expected but at times I think of all the time I am just stuck in here (the home). But yes, I do like being a mother.

What was significant about Julie was that technically she was not a single-mother although describing herself as one; she had lived with her children's father for almost ten years since her first child was born. She acknowledged that her experience differed from those of "proper" single-mothers in that she did not experience any social isolation or economic hardship. She told me her partner had worked as a taxi-driver for years and that she would never manage as "proper" single-mothers do without the financial assistance he regularly provided. Her relationship has broken up since I conducted the interview in the summer of 1997 and, contrary to what she told me about never intending to marry, she is now married to a man much older than herself, has had a third child and expects her fourth child in the spring of 2001.

Diane's situation is different in that she became pregnant at seventeen years of age whilst taking the contraceptive pill; she and her mother blamed her doctor for her situation. She was living with her parents at the time of conception in what she described as a casual relationship with someone who had a reputation with the ladies and was rumoured to have fathered other children. He seemed to be a "jack-the-lad" type who had never worked in full-time employment and made a living by hobbling. When I did this interview, Diane's mother and her 18-month old daughter were present; I knew both women before the interview and I consider that this is why Diane agreed to the interview. Diane's mother was very bitter about her daughter's situation especially with regard to how men can just get on with their life despite becoming fathers and about the financial hardship and isolation that her daughter was experiencing.

> CR: Can you tell me how you became a single-mother?
> Diane: My mother went on holiday and I went to the doctor about dieting and the pill I was taking and these antibiotics. I told him I was concerned about my periods but he just said "Don't worry, no, no, it's just your hormones, nothing's wrong." So I went back in a few weeks 'cos I was worried and then he sent me for a pregnancy test and I

was five months gone. I was crying, my mother was crying, I didn't want a baby 'cos I was happy in my job, I had money to spend, I lived with my mother -- I was only seventeen. But five months was too late for an abortion but if I knew sooner I would. I haven't got anything any more -- no money, no friends only ones with babies like me as my single friends can go out and spend their money on clothes but I can't afford to so I'm really stuck now aren't I?

Although I did not ask any of the women about contraception, according to Allan (1985:1991) "it has been demonstrated time and time again that ignorance of contraception is not an important factor among most women who have unplanned pregnancies". Diane went on to tell me how her partner did not want to be involved when he knew she was pregnant and denied paternity on the grounds that the child had different colour hair to him. However his mother acknowledged Diane's daughter as her grandchild and visited her but only at Christmas and birthdays. Diane's story shows the impact of single-motherhood on young women and I must confess to a certain sympathy for her. I knew her prior to the interview as she was in school with one of my sons and I had heard about her partner's reputation (he would typify some of the men in the study by Dennis and Erdos, 1992). Diane found it very difficult being a single-mother and without her parents' assistance, especially her mother who babysat, helped with money, bought clothes and shoes for her child, she said she would never be able to cope alone with single-motherhood.

Susan also became pregnant while in school when she was fifteen. "I was young -- it was a mistake, a big mistake and we split up when I was pregnant -- yes, I was four months pregnant so from then really. But that's how I became a single–mother because he left me really and didn't give me enough support. He wasn't working".

At the time of interview in the summer of 1997 she had a daughter of six and was expecting her second child from another relationship. She had another daughter now aged three and expects her third child in the spring of 2001. She moved from Parkview when her second partner bought a house in another area but she feels somewhat isolated from her friends and unsure of how her relationship with her partner's parents who will live nearby will develop and about the fact that her partner wants three or four children. Susan's case is another example of how some women describe themselves as single-mothers despite either

96

cohabiting or being in a relationship. When her child was born she was entitled to describe herself as a single-mother but still defines herself as such despite being in a cohabiting relationship. Janet's story was different.

> I was with her father, in a relationship but he was quite possessive and I was trying to get rid of him. But what it was I suffered a lot with migraine and I couldn't take the pill and drive or anything so I came off it and fell pregnant. But I wouldn't have an abortion 'cos I always knew I wanted kids. I've always been maternal -- I knew from a young age that I wanted a child, I knew I wanted to be a mother so I decided to have the baby. Well, he never lived with me anyway -- he was there at the birth but he wasn't supporting me -- he was living at his mum's and I was living in my flat. I was always on my own financially and emotionally but I didn't want him there anyway. He was a problem anyway -- he wasn't a very stable person to have around a child -- that was basically the situation. It wasn't a nice one to be in trying to make things work 'cos there was a baby on the way and knowing really that it couldn't work

> CR.: Can you describe being a single-mother?
> Janet: Describe it? I find it a struggle moneywise but I've got great parents though. If I'm really stuck with the phone bill or something they might throw twenty pounds at me sometimes I have to give it back, sometimes not. And I can't go shopping either 'cos I haven't got the money for food, so it's either something for Anne like a dress or something she needs for school like a uniform or I go shopping -- I can't do both. I'm on the breadline -- I'm really skint and I earn £12 from working and I could never give that up because it helps out so much. I couldn't be without it and some weeks we're living off the milk tokens I get for Anne and I cash them in the shop -- we're living on the edge and it's a tough struggle. I don't get any help off her dad 'cos he don't support her financially -- the only extra money I get is from my job for three hours a week when Anne goes to her grandparents to see them and her father.

Janet paints a graphic picture of the economic hardship experienced by single-mothers and without her three hours' wages which she earns legally (as opposed to off-the-cards) her circumstances would be considerably worse. What I also find interesting is the references she makes to "always knowing that she was maternal from a very young age" and considering and rejecting an abortion despite the fact that a medical condition had contributed to her becoming pregnant. For her it was clear that motherhood was something she embraced and in this sense she could be seen as subjected to the ideology of motherhood.

In this section I have discussed the different circumstances in which single-motherhood can occur. What is clear is that none of these young women took a conscious decision to become pregnant and indeed, one would have terminated her pregnancy but for a

97

misdiagnosis. This suggests that the argument so favoured by politicians and the media that single motherhood is a rational decision and a route to state benefits is based on scant evidence. Only two women said they had chosen to become mothers and they were in long-term cohabiting relationships and already lived in council housing with their partners. Nine of the women were in relationships at the time of conception (although three described them as unstable); and the others lived at home with their parents. Five women were cohabiting at the time of conception, two in non-council accommodation and three in a council house, whilst the last woman of the fifteen lived in non-council accommodation on her own.

Domestic divisions of labour

I also asked that women whether or not they agreed that "a woman's work is never done". I was concerned with the domestic division of labour and wanted to explore whether women spent more time on their domestic duties and childcare than men spent in employment. The responses I received were unanimous in that women worked longer hours than men.

> CR. Do you agree with the saying that a woman's work is never done?
> Yes I do agree 'cos there's always something to do. I mean like when a man comes home from work he's finished it, that's it for him, he can sit down and put his feet up but women are still doing something even when the kids are asleep. That's what it was like for me when I was in a relationship.

> Yes it's true. When he comes home from work and moans, "I've been working all day" I screams at him and says "What about me? I have too and I haven't stopped yet like you".

> No it's never done. Even if the physical work is done the mental side continues all the time doesn't it?

Only one woman took an opposing view: "No, I can't agree with that".

As these responses show most of the sample had experienced gender inequality in the sense of a sexual division of labour within their relationships and agreed that women's working hours especially women with children, are longer than men's. Some referred to how men finish

work at specific times whereas fixed hours are non-applicable to women's domestic situations. Others referred to perceptions of housework and childcare as undervalued in comparison to men's work despite the length of time women put into these tasks. A sexual division of labour as experienced by the sample was often unaffected by their partners' unemployment, some unemployed partners did not participate in domestic work. The data also revealed that unemployed partners (of whom there were five) were most likely to do the least in the home whilst those in full-time employment generally did the most. These findings tie in with the study of Lydia Morris (1990) concerning the effects of unemployment on families. In her study carried out in South Wales Morris found no real evidence of changes in gender roles due to male unemployment.

It appeared that as far as this sample were concerned domestic relations were far from egalitarian and it may be significant that among the couples whose relationships had failed, none of their ex-partners ever helped in the home and only helped minimally with their children. The next section deals with the experiences of being a single mother.

Working class single-mothers

Starting from an historical perspective may enable us to compare past and present perceptions of single-mothers. In his book, *Class, Capital and Social Policy*, (1979) Ginsburg describes how unmarried mothers were at one stage divided into two broad types, "the young innocent who needed sensitive help and the depraved or mentally defective who required punishment or incarceration" (Ginsburg, 1979:82). The general treatment of lone mothers under the Poor Law was notably punitive (Wilson, 1977). If we compare these descriptions to the general representations of single mothers by the media in contemporary society it is feasible to suggest that only the terminology has changed and not the underlying philosophy. Single mothers are negatively portrayed as socially deviant and threatening and when we consider suggestions of incarceration in the guise of mother and baby hostels by a former Tory Secretary of State it would appear that nothing much has changed. But apparently the conditions under which single-mothers live have changed because single-

motherhood, as oft reported by media pundits, is a desired and chosen status for many working-class young women in contemporary society and a passport to council houses and welfare benefits. Therefore such reports imply that in contrast to single-motherhood at the beginning of the century, single-motherhood at the end of the 20th century appears to be a desirable status exempt from economic hardship and financed by the state. However these assertions contradict the experiences of the young women in my study who explain single-motherhood as hard, stressful, socially isolating, economically difficult, stigmatising and vastly different from media accounts of single-motherhood. Therefore we have a contradiction between media representations of single-motherhood and the social realities of single-motherhood. I hope the following analysis will enable the reader to gain some valuable insights into the social worlds of these women and put their situations into perspective by demystifing the negative stereotype of single-mothers.

The most common problems experienced by the women I spoke to included financial hardship such as stretching their benefits to pay bills, social isolation, the stress involved in bringing up young children alone, social attitudes to single motherhood, health problems, and the monotony and frustration for many of being in a domestic environment all day instead of being at work. Three expressed resentment at being abandoned by their former partners or else being virtually "left holding the baby" and most said life would be extremely difficult without their family support networks especially that provided by their mothers. The women shared structural characteristics of class and gender but did not constitute an homogeneous group. However, one descriptive factor characterised their experiences of single-motherhood as most of the sample summed up single-motherhood as being **hard.** I now proceed with some of the actual responses of the sample in answer to my question, "Can you tell me what it's like being a single-mother?"

> Amanda: Being a single-mother made me grow up -- it restricts your life having a child to think about and look after -- especially when you are mother and father it really restricts your life. I don't really have any problems but I'm lucky as I'm back with my parents but if I was on my own I know it would be really hard.

> Mary: It's hard -- really hard. Some people are fortunate like me, I've got my mother, stepfather and my brother to help me, but it is hard. I mean people think it's great to have a kid, a house and benefits -- I did at first but when kids get older and they want

this and that --.

These women refer to the support they receive from their families, this support was gendered in that their mothers did the child-minding, and helped with shopping, provision of meals and emotional support whilst their fathers usually provided the financial help (cf. Finch and Mason, 1989). However some women's fathers occasionally cared for the children and took them to the park or to other leisure activities. The last respondent, Mary, had lived in various council houses with her partner before having a child and, at the time of interview, was waiting to move into a house near her mother with her five year old son. Her mother and stepfather cared for her son so that she could work and helped out by lending her money when necessary. For the last few months she and her child had lived in her mother's house until she got a council house which was presently being redecorated with help from her mother, brother and step-father. Mary is mainly concerned with the poverty of single–mothers.

> CR: Has being a single-mother caused you any problems?
> Mary: Yes I suppose. I mean it's like when people are married in families and they've got nice houses -- they can go on holidays, do this, do that -- they can buy designer clothes for their kids I mean I'm scrimping to a certain extent -- I can't go on holidays, you can just about afford to keep yourself going for the week.

It appears that Mary believed that married families were not poor and could afford all the things that she could not whereas the reality is that many working-class married couples would, no doubt, be able to identify with her own grim financial situation as many, like herself, are unable to afford holidays and designer clothes. The next quote is from Julie who has always lived with the father of her two children. He is employed as a taxi-driver. When I asked her about any problems relating to being a single-mother she told me that without her partner's economic support she would certainly have problems being a single-mother.

> Julie: I would definitely have problems if I was on my own. I often sit here and think to myself, Jesus, if he wasn't here you know I'd have nothing and then it would be hard.

Diane became a single-mother at seventeen and, like Mary, sums up the hardship in economic terms.

101

Well it's hard, -- I've never got no money. I can't go out -- I depend on my mother if it wasn't for her often I'd never have no food. That's it really -- by the time you pay your bills there's nothing left.

These and other replies highlight the gendered nature of support as it is generally the maternal grandmothers who provide the most support and alleviate much of the hardship of single-motherhood.

Different aspects of single motherhood are described by the next woman, Anita, who again is technically not a single-mother as she lived with her partner when she got pregnant and still does. She describes how a lack of confidence can result in social isolation; she joined a mother and toddlers group "but never fitted in as most women in the group were married and all talked happy families". She said she felt like an outsider because she was not married like the others. Before her pregnancy she had worked as a care-assistant.

CR: Can you tell me what it's like being a single-mother?
Anita: Boring -- you're stuck up here but when you go out then it's money and when he sees other kids with things it's hard to say no, it's a lot harder than people think. It's very mundane, the same thing day in and day out -- there's nothing to look forward to.
CR: Have you any problems since becoming a single-mother?
Anita: Any problems? Yes, I don't see my friends any more -- they haven't got kids and we've got nothing really in common now. They used to say "come down if you can find someone to mind Jack". They didn't want him around and only once I went down and all they talked about was work and going out. I felt like a stranger so I don't see them now. I did try a mother and toddler group but they seemed to be talking about their husbands and work, all happy family stuff, so I felt like an outsider so I don't go there anymore. And it's confidence as well isn't it? I used to get myself worked up about walking in that room and talking -- it was like, oh no, I can't.

Other women had problems with the bills and not being able to go out or to see their friends anymore and being a single–mother was stressful because "you have the baby with you all the time". Susan had problems due to her daughter's ill health -- the child needed a lot of hospital treatment which incurred travelling expenses and Susan had to rely on public transport which is not a cheap way to travel. She admitted to financial problems; to having had her gas cut off previously as the children needed things and she used the gas money to get them. The father of her children was in prison but she had left him prior to this (or rather told

102

him to get out) because of his drug habit and the domestic violence within the relationship which she didn't want her children to see any more as they were getting older. Another woman explained she "had become a bit withdrawn in public" since having her son at eighteen and would be nervous about going back to work with people. She had become "more of a worrier" since having her son and constantly worried about his safety because, "Today you don't know who anyone is even your next door neighbour!"

Katy, however who was a single-mother of two young boys fathered by different partners, one from an ethnic minority group, declared that she **preferred** living alone with her children as opposed to being in two prior oppressive relationships in which she was dominated by her former partners.

> CR: Can you tell me about single-motherhood?
> Katy: Well, I'd rather it, you've got your own independence and you don't have to answer to anyone. The two I've been with I've had to answer to them for everything but now I don't. Yes, I'd rather be single.
> CR. Do you have any problems being a single-mother?
> Katy: Any problems? Yes, I do get depressed sometimes but not as bad as when I had the first one, I was terrible then. And there are some problems because the boys have different fathers and one is coloured and the other is like me, so blonde, but my oldest who is five cannot understand about half-brothers and different colour skins and different names, but this could cause problems when they're older.

Marion, who has three young children, explains that being a single-mother was:

> Hard, very hard because you are responsible--you are the only person responsible for your children. Some people have help but I'm solely on my own the physical stuff, the domestic stuff, the organising, feeding them, clothing them. I think it's very hard. I wouldn't tell anybody yes go ahead -- be a single-mother 'cos it's really hard. Yes, there are some nice occasions you know when you have fun with them (about once a year) but no, it's not what I expected it to be like. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. Yes, it changed my life completely -- physically and mentally, everything I do all day everything I think about mostly concerns the children whereas sometimes I feel I'm still a child. I never had a chance to live coming out of school for a bit and then having a baby -- I'm still waiting to go out and have a life. But yes, it's changed everything, a proper eye-opener -- definitely.
> CR: Do you have any problems being a single-mother?
> Marion: Problems? Yes, you do, social problems. You feel that you're inadequate-- that people look down on you. I suffer from anxiety -- I get anxiety through the guilt about the children's circumstances [the children have different fathers)].

Marion had her first child at seventeen and thought her partner was marvellous until she discovered he was still seeing the mother of his child from a previous relationship. Her

103

second child was born into a relationship "that lasted a long time until things got violent and she had to make the break" and her third child was born into a relationship that deteriorated because of her partner's mental health problems, long-term unemployment and his failure to give any help in the home. She considered all the children were better off without fathers but added that "if my first partner had turned out to be genuinely nice maybe I would only have had one child instead of looking for this perfect family life which just isn't there". Marion was brought up by her grandmother from a young baby after her parents divorced. She felt she had a safe and happy upbringing and regards it as acceptable for children to be raised by one parent but alternatively admits to feelings of insecurity and cannot come to terms with feeling excluded from both her parents' remarriages in which other children were born. She has one friend who she describes as "practically a single-mother" despite being in a cohabiting relationship and explains this as due to the fact that her friend does everything in the home and for the kids. She relates to her friend as they have similar types of problems but says she would not have the time to be involved with other friends. Marion also described her mother as a single-parent "'cos she's always done everything in the home, with the children and worked as well" despite the fact that her mother was married twice. Marion described her friend and her mother as single-mothers in the sense that they received no help in the home from their partners. Single–motherhood for her was defined in terms of a sexual division of labour. Marion's interview suggested the possible effects of familial and romantic ideology; her search for Mr. Right and the ideal family had seemingly contributed to her becoming a single mother three times and she spoke of how she and her mother had experienced oppressive and violent relationships.

I hope this section has illustrated the kinds of problems encountered by the sample and the difficulties involved in bringing up children alone. I also hope it has afforded some sociological insights into the operations and effects of gender divisions within their families. The women have told us (with the exception of two) about the practical and emotional support

they received from their families, especially their mothers. Two women mentioned that their fathers helped them out with money but their mothers generally helped with their children and domestic issues. The next section is concerned to show how class and gender interact in the lives of these women in their position as welfare state claimants.

Experiences of claiming welfare: why are you single?

Single mother discourses include single mothers as not only a moral and social problem but also an economic one in that they consume vast amounts of state expenditure in their capacity as welfare claimants. I doubt if anyone is unfamiliar with the description of single-mothers as welfare scroungers due to media pathologisation of single-mothers throughout the 1990s. This section explores the relations between single-mothers and the benefits system and the effects on the women of this labelling process. Labelling theory is highly significant to research on deviancy (Becker 1984) and moral panics and since single-mothers appear to be the folk devils of the 1990s it will be interesting to see if this applies to them and why. To begin with I specify that all the sample, irrespective of whether or not they were cohabiting or in relationships, were claiming welfare benefits. I have introduced this section with the above quotation "why are you single?" because this was asked of one of the women by a Social Security official during an interview for welfare benefits. I consider this question to be highly significant to my study as it may be said to epitomise or encapsulate the philosophy of the Department of Social Security towards working-class women as single-mothers. If we take "Why aren't you married?" as the corollary of the above question the assumption seems to be that motherhood is acceptable only within matrimony for working-class women. This section concerns the experiences of the women with "The Social" as it is currently described in working-class terminology. The experiences described by the women will hopefully show how gender and class interact to reinforce the stereotype of working-class single-mothers as scroungers or undeserving. Ginsburg's (1979) analysis has shown why

105

single-mothers are classed as undeserving of welfare. The state provides welfare in ways which reinforce the ideology of the two-parent family as the norm and in ways that show that single-mothers are deviating from that norm. The state provides for these women in ways that regulate, control and maintain them in poverty whilst holding up the nuclear family as the yardstick by which "proper" families are measured.

All the women depended upon state benefits for their material survival; only one woman said her ex-partner contributed to his child's upkeep, so whether the Child Support Agency had information about the other fourteen fathers I am unsure. When I asked the women about their experiences as welfare claimants the majority spoke about negative, unpleasant and often distressing experiences with D.S.S. officials except for two women who declared that their relations were favourable. I suggest that the circumstances of these two women differed somewhat from the other thirteen in that one had been cohabiting for eighteen months with her child's father and had never claimed welfare prior to returning to live with her parents. In these circumstances her benefit would be lower than other single–mothers because of co-residency with her parents. This made her un-typical of the state's definition of single-mothers who lived without men and had children which the state supports. The other woman had maintained her relationship with her child's father despite conceiving at fifteen years of age and was soon getting married at the age of seventeen, so she also did not fit the stereotype of the undeserving single-mother which could explain why the attitudes of state officials towards them were less hostile than to the other women. I now proceed to include some quotations of the women regarding their experiences with the D.S S. starting with the two who had favourable experiences.

> Amanda: Oh, they've always been alright to me you know. I went down there when we split up and they've helped me a lot, they've been brilliant.

The other woman who is due to get married also said they were O.K. and had helped her.

Diane, who became a single-mother at 18 said, "I can't say really, I hardly ever see or bother

with them -- I just have my book (her benefits payment book} and that's that". However, she said her health visitor (another state official) was patronising and made assumptions that Diane could not cope with her baby as a single-mother.

> She'll say, "How are you coping? and one of my friends said, "There's clean Diana's house is" so those two think the same -- that 'cos I'm a single-mother I can't manage. But yes, I'm clean and I can manage my daughter but because I'm one-parent people do class me different; they expect me not to be able to manage or have a nice clean home.

The other women strongly disagreed with these accounts of the Social and described their differing yet similar experiences.

> Mary: Oh yes, the Social -- now they are different they are. They treat you like you had the plague 'cos you're a single-mother. You're not going to have this, you're not going to have that -- they don't really help you at all. Now if you was in a family and had somebody working yes, great, but if you're a single-mother it's hard to get help off the Social and I think it's only them that treats you differently. Oh yes, definitely, you're the scum of the earth if you're a single-mother. They look down on you, they judge you, and they haven't got the right to do it.

> Anita: The Social, yes, like if you have to phone them and they might want your book back, like that's the only thing I hated when I finished work. For six years I always had my own money and I never claimed anything and when I finished work to have Jack I hated all that you know, having to claim -- having to go down there with his birth certificate that really got me down. All the questioning too -- they want to know every minute detail about you. But at the end of the day I have worked and am entitled to something, but it's like as if they're giving you their money. God, no wonder they had to have those glass partitions put up there to protect them.

These accounts suggest that the women were subject to the stereotype of "welfare scrounger" as far as social security officials were concerned. The D.S.S. is supposed to assist the poorest in society but their policies and attitudes are discriminatory and seem more punitive than helpful and not very likely to assist the children of poor single-mothers.

I hope the reader is gaining some insights into the stigma of single-motherhood and of how class and gender seemingly reinforce this stigma as exemplified by two more quotations.

> Katy: Yes, the Social look down on you for being a single-parent especially if you tried to get money off them and also 'cos you're not working. Like in the forms you have to fill in -- say you wanted a grant or a loan for the house or something, they'll ask you "Why are you single?" But some people don't want to tell why they're single, they want to keep it to themselves, but yes, the Social do look down at you 'cos you're not working because you're on your own, it's like you shouldn't be on your own -- you should be with a partner.

107

This data suggests these women as welfare claimants are stigmatised by the D.S.S. as "undeserving" of welfare benefits by virtue of being working-class, unemployed and unmarried. These accounts tie in with one cited in Allan (1999:239) concerning another single-mother's interaction with a D.S.S. official whose attitude made her feel uncomfortable and somehow different from other people. She said:

> I explained about myself to the woman and she said, "Oh, you're a single–parent then?" and although I hadn't really thought of myself as that before she [the official] kept on about "people like you", you know, single parents. I think that changed my outlook because it was like having an official stamp say that you were not an ordinary person but a single-parent.

This lone parent's negative experiences of official treatment echoes other research findings (Collins, 1992). In general, lone parents are "singled out for more grudging and inferior assistance, and subject to more official controls over their credentials and honesty" (Lawson, 1987:93-4).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that none of the women intended to become single–mothers. They were all in relationships at the time of conception although three were described as unstable relationships; seven of the women were cohabiting and the others lived with their parents. Half of them are no longer in relationships with their babies' fathers; one woman has married a different man, two women are shortly due to marry and three are in different relationships. There is no evidence here that the women became pregnant simply to get council housing and benefits and they are not part of a national strategy to scrounge welfare off the state. These women became single-mothers as a result of various circumstances and all, except two, were in what they felt were stable relationships at the time of conception. Two women became pregnant who had been using contraception, two were schoolgirls, two admitted to "trying for a baby" and the others had no intention of becoming pregnant. .

The definitions of single-motherhood that have emerged show a marked difference between the women's perceptions of single-motherhood and the state's definition. Some

women who were cohabiting defined themselves as single-mothers. This could be related to the fact that they are unmarried but their circumstances did not correspond to the state's definition of lone motherhood as women with children living alone who are supported by the state and are the heads of their families. These definitional issues show the complexities involved in assuming that certain issues such as single–motherhood are straightforward or else common sense when there are underlying issues to be considered.

All the women (except those with partners) spoke of the financial hardship and poverty they experienced, while others considered that their single–mother status should be attributed to feckless, irresponsible, dominating and unfaithful men. Three spoke of how they had been left by their children's fathers, two spoke of their ex-partners' being in prison, one spoke of her partner who had fathered a child with another woman whilst living with her and all these differing experiences resulted in them becoming single-mothers. Three women explained that they felt better being on their own, more secure and less controlled, whilst others who lived with irresponsible men perceived themselves as being on their own even when cohabiting.

One woman however who left her housing association home on Westlands to live with her partner in owner–occupied housing in a different area now bitterly regrets her decision. She gave up her house and her benefit book (her independence) in exchange for dependence upon her partner who enjoys being in control and often keeps her without enough money especially if she upsets him. She feels powerless in this situation and perhaps her experience provides insights into why some of the women prefer not to depend upon their partners. Instead they prefer dependence upon the state.

This concludes this chapter and in the next I explore issues in relation to changing family structures, including gender roles, parental roles and responsibilities, and familial relations.

CHAPTER FIVE

"NORMAL" FAMILIES

In the 1990s "a crisis in the family" featured regularly in media accounts, which mourned the terminally ill family of wage earning husband and dependent wife and children: Political commentators and right–wing pundits cited the alleged increase in single-mother families as evidence of this decline. However the nuclear family of breadwinning male and dependent wife and children has never been really appropriate as a model to explain working-class families as this study will attempt to show. Barrett, (1988:78) argues,

> "The significance of this model cannot be overestimated. For although few families have in fact depended upon the male wage, the belief that they do underlies our present sexual division of labour in a fundamental way and has, furthermore, been influential in determining the attitude of the labour movement to women's waged work".

However media accounts failed to acknowledge that family life in Britain, (as well as in many other industrial societies) was characterised by change, diversity and often uncertainty; increases in divorce and births outside marriage have produced rises in the numbers of lone–parent families the vast majority of which are headed by women (see introduction for detailed figures).

In the 1970s and 1980s, marriage became steadily less popular. After 1972, first marriage rates for both men and women declined quite steeply, so that by 1987 the first marriage rate for women was only half the 1970 peak, and for men the rate had dropped even lower. This trend continued in the 1980s and 1990s as can be seen from table 4.1 overleaf.

It is not yet apparent whether all this means that young people are simply marrying later, or whether they are turning away from marriage altogether. As Elliott (1991: 89) says:

> "What is not yet clear is whether the recent decline in marriage rates in this younger age group is due to young people marrying at progressively older ages, or from an increased section of the population rejecting marriage altogether."

The divorce rate has risen since the 1960s and the increase in the number of divorces

has had significant effects upon family lives. Britain is distinctive for its high divorce rate. Thirty years ago there were two divorces for every 1,000 marriages. Liberalisation of the divorce laws in the 1970s led to a harp increase in divorce and, by the mid 1980s, about 13 in every 1,000 marriages ended in divorce, a rate which has persisted throughout the 1990s. Britain is currently at the head of the European league table of divorce (McRae, 1999:12).

. Other significant social changes in recent years include increased cohabitation and childbearing outside marriage. Cohabiting families have become more common since the 1970s and Kiernan and Wicks conclude that cohabitation provides a partial explanation for a decline in marriage rates. "Nowadays it is virtually majority practice to cohabit before marrying" (Kiernan and Wicks,1990:8). In 1961 38% of extra-marital births were jointly registered but by 1989 the percentage of jointly registered extra-marital births was 70% and by 1992 was 75%, this suggests that many births were to cohabiting parents although joint registration of births does not always reflect cohabitation. However, children born outside marriage are now more commonly reared in cohabitating families (Fox-Harding, 1996).

The switch to later/less marriage among the young after 1970 coincided with economic decline and rising unemployment (Fox-Harding, 1996). This, combined with a general movement of women, including married women with young children into the workforce, means that the "cornflake family" of wage earning husband and dependent wife and children is an increasingly small minority of all households (Bryson,1999:123). Therefore it appears that other factors are having effects on family lives and that deeper examination may show that single–mothers are an effect of socio-economic changes in society rather evidence of the decline of the family.

Table 5.1 Marriages and divorces, 1985-1998 (per 1,00 of the population).

111

	Total persons marrying per 1,000 population of all ages	Total men marrying per 1,000 un-married male population aged 16 and over	Total women marrying per 1,000 un-married female population aged 16 and over	First marriages of bachelors per 1,000 single male population aged 16 and over	First marriages of spinsters per 1,000 single female population aged 16 and over	Remarriages of men per 1,000 widowed or divorced male population aged 16 and over	Remarriages of women per 1,000 widowed or divorced female population aged 16 and over	Total persons divorcin per 1,0(married populat
1985	13.9	48.7	40.5	45.6	57.1	60.1	21.9	13.4
1986	13.9	47.7	39.9	44.6	55.7	58.9	22.2	12.9
1987	14.0	47.3	39.8	44.7	56.1	56.1	21.3	12.7
1988	13.8	46.0	38.9	43.1	54.2	55.6	21.8	12.8
1989	13.7	45.0	38.3	42.6	53.5	53.1	21.4	12.7
1990	13.1	42.4	36.4	40.4	51.0	48.9	20.2	13.0
1991	12.0	38.6	33.1	37.0	46.6	43.5	18.5	13.4
1992	12.2	38.5	33.3	36.8	46.3	43.7	19.1	13.7
1993	11.6	36.4	31.6	34.7	43.8	41.3	18.5	14.2
1994	11.3	34.8	30.4	33.1	41.6	39.7	18.4	13.7
1995	10.9	33.1	29.1	31.2	39.3	38.4	18.1	13.6
1996	10.7	31.9	28.3	29.8	37.3	37.7	18.4	13.8
1997	10.4	30.4	27.2	28.4	35.6	36.2	17.8	13.0
1998	10.2	29.2	26.3	27.5	34.6	34.0	16.8	12.9

Source: Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics (series FM2 no.27) O.N.S.
http: // www. statistics. gov.uk/.

Central to the argument of this study is the claim that single-mothers do not reject the family but depend upon it as a support network for themselves and their children. This chapter is therefore concerned with the opinions of the women regarding family relationships and their views and experiences of family life. Single-mothers rarely give voice to their life histories but this chapter aims to explore how these working-class families lived, and the roles of men and women within them. It analyses the women's families of origin, their family lives as single-mothers and what sort of relations they have with their extended families. This chapter will also explore any changes between the women's families of origin and their present family lifestyles and show that single-mothers neither undermine nor are they evidence of the decline of "the family" but rather they value family life and most depend on their respective families as support

networks for themselves and their children. The women's accounts revealed that certain factors were predominant in their family histories including a sexual division of labour, gender and familial ideologies, gendered childrearing practices, and an identification of masculinity with "men's work". I hope to show the relevance of these factors to the women's lives.

Gender inequality and families of origin

My first questions concerned the women's families of origin. Most of the Westlands women's parents were council tenants who had lived there since the women were children. Westlands at the end of the 1990s consisted of what can be described as mainly two social groups: families who had lived there since it was built over sixty years ago and young people who had moved there in recent years. My sample was drawn mostly from the first group. In order to establish whether the sample had grown up in families in which their fathers were regarded as the breadwinners and whether there was a traditional division of labour with regard to men's and women's work, my first questions were concerned with employment and who had been employed in their families when they were children. All except two women who could not remember their fathers being employed said that their fathers had been the main breadwinners. In nearly all cases their mothers worked in part-time employment when their children came of school age; they were employed as cleaners, care-assistants, barmaids, and factory workers. As for their fathers' occupations, the women described a range of manual occupations ranging from taxi driver, factory worker, builder's labourer and being in the army in Germany for a few years. The women acknowledged their fathers' employment as central to their families' upkeep and did not challenge their fathers' traditional breadwinning role. Most of them agreed that men were expected to provide for their families whereas women were expected to be responsible for children and looking after the home. These women grew up in families with a gendered division of labour of working (or unemployed) fathers and mothers who remained at home until their children went to school

113

when most began part-time work.

One of the main threads of this study concerns family changes in contemporary society and I wanted to find out whether the women had experienced any sorts of changes within their families since they were children and, if so, what these changes involved and what had brought them about. In response to my question about family change over the years, some women described family changes as their parents' divorce and, in some cases, remarriage; six women had experienced parental divorce as children and described this as a major family change, especially when it involved remarriages and the birth of other children. Four of the six remained with their mothers after divorce except one who went to live with her grandmother and described herself as excluded by her parents who both remarried and had other children. Others described family changes in terms of siblings getting married and the births of nephews and nieces, and one woman spoke of her brother who was cohabiting with his girlfriend and their young child and at present had no plans to marry. Other women spoke of their mothers moving into full-time work or fathers who had occasional periods of unemployment, or else siblings who had left the family home to live independently. Others described deaths in the family as changes whilst others spoke about how families were not so close-knit as families in the past had been and of how people then lived in marriages that lasted, "not like today."

One woman Violet, who was expecting her second child and was shortly due to marry her partner, spoke of how her grandmother "although never having said anything directly" was relieved to know that Violet was getting married as, according to Violet, older people didn't understand why young people today have children and live together instead of marrying. Some women felt that many of the older generation considered that having children and getting married was part and parcel of family life; it was traditional and expected.

I consider the sorts of changes the women mentioned to be significant because they

114

show that divorce, remarriage, step-families and cohabitation are regular features of contemporary society and have changed many people's lifestyles. This demonstrates the problems associated with discussions of "the family" because speaking of "the family" usually means "the family" as a social institution and not the forms of family in which people live because there is now so much diversity in family lives. Two women in particular mentioned changes in the male breadwinner model of the family such as how they believed that wives with a greater earning capacity should be the breadwinner and husbands should adopt the domestic role.

I asked the women whether they considered families to be important and all except one woman thought they were.

> CR: Do you think that families are important?
> Violet: Yes families are important -- um, for closeness, definitely. I wouldn't like to be in those sort of family that only see each other about once a year. I like the closeness and regular contact
> CR: Do you get any help from your family?
> Violet: Yes, I do get help from my mother and stepfather and they're just across the road. But I will say that if two people aren't happy together I wouldn't stay for the sake of being in a family.

A similar view was taken by Mandy who said:

> I do think families are important yes -- but if it's not working out in a relationship I think it's best to leave it there because at the end of the day the kids get screwed up and it affects them in later life with their own relationships.

She believed that children were better off being raised in stable one-parent families than by two parents in a bad relationship. Mandy spoke about how she and her siblings had experienced confusion as children as their mother had married four times and there was "always a lot of arguing going on". She said family life was happier and more settled and her mother lived alone and was "much happier now." She said her family lived near her and she saw her mother and sister every day.

> I see my mother, my sister and my aunties (of which she has fourteen) nearly every day. My mother helps me a lot -- with shopping and she'll watch Alex -- helps with my garden 'cos she loves her garden and if

115

she needs someone to paint I'll do it for her.

Her biological father was dead and she did not mention seeing any of her three former step-fathers.

Susan, came from a large family and stressed the importance of families and the support she had received from her parents, especially her mother. Yet her response was somewhat contradictory. She is a single-mother of two whose ex-partner and father of her two children was in prison at the time of interview.

> I always said your mother and father are your best friends -- appreciate
> them while you've got them.

However she had earlier admitted to arguing a lot with her father when she was younger and had only recently started speaking to him before he died. She received help from her mother with child-minding and money and said that most of her brothers and sisters lived nearby. It seems that Susan is saying that she thinks parents should be a child's best friends but her own relationship with her father may not have always been like this.

Another quote for inclusion here comes from Amanda, a single-mother of one who has returned to live with her parents.

> CR: Are families important to you?
> Amanda: Are families important? They are, they are, it would be a lonely world
> without your family. I lost my gran -- I was close to her and it hurt but I could never
> be without my parents -- oh no. They're important for me and the baby, they're good
> to her, they're close to her.

What is interesting from the above accounts (and nearly all the others) is that no-one considered families as unimportant. All except three of the women stress the support they receive from their parents, some from other family members such as brothers, sisters and aunts but mostly their mothers. Other respondents said families were important for the following reasons:

> You need someone there for you, don't you? Someone who will
> always be there when a boyfriend never will, well, some will I suppose,
> but families will always be there to help you.

116

> Yes, families are important yes, um for the baby's sake – 'cos it's a
> better environment -- it makes people happier, and a better environment
> for everyone.

It appears from this remark that this young woman has been influenced by the ideology of

happy families but it also shows the importance of kinship networks in providing support

which is reliable and unconditional. It's there because families are where you belong.

However some respondents had different views on the importance of family life and

drew upon their own childhood experiences as a way of explanation. One respondent who

took a view of her family as dysfunctional was Marion whose account ties in with earlier

research on families (Barrett and McIntosh; 1984, Laing, 1971; Cooper, 1971). Marion's

parents divorced when she was a baby and she was raised by her grandmother.

> Marion: I think families can be your worst enemies and a friend to you --.but in my
> experience they've been the root of a lot of angry things I've felt -- the downside of
> my life so I don't really think a lot of families. There's a lot of jealousy in families
> and watching and commenting.
> CR: Are families important?
> Marion: Maybe twenty years ago but not now. No, I don't think they're all that
> important. But I've only seen the downside of families -- maybe if I'd seen the good
> side I'd say yes, they're really important. But no, I don't think so, they're more of a
> burden and you tend to carry a lot of guilt for them and very bitter feelings -- no, I
> think they are a lot of people's downfall.

Marion's account of family life ties in with the work of Barrett and McIntosh (1982) who

provide a critique and an appraisal of family relations and the material ideological practices

that operate to maintain women's subordination. The authors do not expect women to

abandon families and childrearing but are highly critical of the inequalities within them.

They criticise gendered material practices in which gendered identities are

produced/reproduced firstly within families and then through education and the workplace.

Some women cited examples of such inequalities within their families such as a

domestic division of labour in which tasks regarded as "women's work" are carried out by

women and generally involve domestic work and childcare and "men's work" is associated

with the workplace and is unrelated to the home or childcare. I asked if Marion's family

117

lived nearby.

> Marion: Yes, my mother lives near me about five minutes walk away
> so I could see her often if I wanted to bit I don't. I'm twenty-five now
> if I was five I probably could have done with it, but twenty years on I
> don't want it.
> CR. Do you get any help from them?
> Marion: Any help from them? No definitely not! No, they're too caught
> up in their own lives and other children's lives and other
> grandchildren's lives. No it's only me and I know that for a fact.

Marion does not depend upon her mother/step-father for support despite them living nearby;

her biological father lives in England and has remarried and has children from this second

family. He visits occasionally and helps Marion financially. Marion's mother takes her oldest

son on holiday quite regularly, possibly because he is the only child who has no contact with

his father or his paternal grandparents. Marion however does not seem to consider this as

support or help from her mother. In answer to my question of whether her present family is

happy Marion replied she would say they were pretty happy, doing well in school, were pretty

sociable children, and that she never had any trouble with them bullying other children or

cheeking other adults (she has two boys and one girl). However in a later statement about

single-mothers she says that if she could turn the clock back she would not have had any

children. At the time of interview her relationship with her third child's father was practically

over.

Another respondent whose views on family life were both conflicting and interesting

was Anita, a single-mother of one child at time of interview, the summer of 1997, who now

has another child born two years later.

> CR: Are families important?
> Anita: They're important to the children and the bonding with your
> parents and it's all about communication -- if you haven't got that
> you've got nothing. Families should be encouraged to speak-- when I
> was young it was all this speak when you're spoken to and it shouldn't
> be like that -- they should explain why they don't want you to do
> something and not just say, "You do it because I've said so". We were
> a happy family in some ways, but the image I've got of a happy family
> is not the way we were, like being all together. We never did anything
> together -- perhaps when I compare it to my friends' families -- because

118

that's what you do -- compare it. No, it wasn't unhappy, I always had security -- I knew I was loved but I was never shown it. My father replaced the fact that he couldn't show us love by buying us everything, he could not show you he loved you unless he was steaming drunk -- nor my mother really. My present family is much more communicative.

Anita's account of "the image she had of a happy family" implies the importance she attaches to a family that spends time together, with family members doing things together. She is also very clear about the importance of communication in families and how she intends to be more communicative with her children.

Summary

A significant finding to emerge was that most family support came from the women's mothers and not from their partners' mothers. This echoes the findings of Rosser and Harris in the 1960's which showed how the maternal grandmothers held families together and were central to their families; "the Mam" was central to family life. Although half the women were cohabiting none referred to their partners' families when I asked about family support so I assumed the help received from them was either minimal or non-existent. Four women who were no longer with their partners spoke about their children visiting their paternal grandparents on a weekly basis if the children's fathers lived with their parents but this seemed to be the extent of the contact. The data implied little support from paternal grandparents unless their sons were still in relationships and even then it was the grandmothers who provided the most support. Apart from access visits, the children from failed relationships had little contact with their paternal grandparents as demonstrated by the following replies to my question about relations with the paternal grandparents.

> Janet: She sees her father once a week and twice the next. No I don't have any help from them.

> Julie: No, they don't have contact with their father's family; we see them sometimes if we bump into them but they don't come here none of them.

One woman said that her ex-partner's mother minded her son on weekends but also said that they did not get on well and there had been a lot of conflict in the past between this respondent and her partner's mother.

"Ordinary Families"

Although responses about the above issues were straight forward, they were not so with regard to questions about what constituted a "normal" or "ordinary" family. Here replies tended to be subjective in that each respondent defined their respective families as "ordinary" regardless of what went on in these families. One woman who had grown up in a family wherein neither parent had ever worked in paid employment accepted this as a normal way of life - in her opinion having both parents at home was preferable to families in which both parents worked. This respondent felt strongly that families in which both parents worked but were not at home when their children returned from school were not "ordinary/normal families."

Another respondent defined her family as herself, her daughter and her parents and said that in her opinion families could still be defined as families whether or not they consisted of married or unmarried people. She did not define a family as a nuclear or heterosexual, monogamous family as most definitions of a family tend to.

> I don't think you're not a family if you're not married to someone.
> Kelly, me and my parents, that's my family (Kelly is her daughter).

This is especially significant as it is the married family which is espoused as the proper type of family in which to live and bring up children today despite the proliferation of many other types of family. Marriage, according to this woman, is not essential for people to live together as families although her definition included a married couple (her parents) and spanned three generations (Rosser and Harris, 1965).

Another definition of family life came from Maureen, a single-mother of two children, the oldest of whom lives with her former partner because of a depressive illness she suffered

after childbirth and the eventual breakdown of her relationship. As a child she spent several years in Germany as her father was in the army and I asked her whether she had grown up in an ordinary family to which she gave the following reply:

> No, it wasn't an ordinary/proper family 'cos I hardly ever saw my Dad, he was always away on exercises or busy with something else like, we just saw him when we saw him. Like my mother was normality [she possibly meant that having her mother at home caring for the children was normal as this is what working-class mothers were generally expected to do] and it's not like a normal family when you don't see it like a normal family.

Although Maureen grew up in a nuclear family she did not consider it was a normal/proper family due to the continual absence of her father who was away in the army. I did not ask her what she thought was a proper family. The last part of her reply implies that perceptions of what constitute a normal/ordinary family are subjective and not readily definable. Another woman defined an ordinary/normal family as follows:

> I think a normal family is what you believe is normal, like my father working when we were young, my mother working when we were older, no problems with drugs or alcohol.

As these responses show, the women defined a normal family by their own experiences of family life and they do not consider one particular type of family as more proper or ordinary than another. One woman believed that a family could be normal when it consisted of three generations including herself, an unmarried mother and her child. Another woman regarded growing up in a family wherein neither parent worked as a proper family, another defined a proper family as one where there was no experience of drink or drug problems. These responses suggest that defining a proper/normal family is far from straightforward and relates closely to women's own experiences. Before I move on to discuss other aspects of family life I will include the four respondents from Parkview who all, except one, lived with their parents prior to becoming single mothers. Their answers were similar to the other eleven women about having grown up in families in which their fathers were the main breadwinners and their mothers worked part-time; their fathers worked in manual work

121

and their mothers worked in traditional women's jobs such as care-assistant and shop work. I have incorporated their opinions on family lives into the remainder of the analysis.

Summary

My intention was to find out whether the women had an idea of what constituted a normal/ordinary family. Yet their responses were based on their families of origin and only three out of fifteen women considered their family was not normal/ordinary. It appears that defining a family is a subjective experience and some women considered their families were "not normal" for reasons such as fathers spending too much time in work or else growing up in a family which did not spend enough time together. I suggest that these responses highlight the difficulty of defining a proper family and also highlight the diversity of families in today's society. Some seem to have been influenced by familial ideologies of what proper families **should** be like, especially Marion who had been brought up by her grandmother after her parents' divorce and, until the breakdown of her third relationship, had aspired to the ideal family and Mr. Right but in the process became a single-mother of three children.

Gender divisions

In order to find out if the women's views on the roles of men and women had been influenced by growing up in families where gender divisions existed, the next section examines material family practices and socialisation practices. I questioned the women about gender differentiation in childhood. In answer to my question about whether brothers and sisters in their families were treated differently as children, I received the following responses:

Mary: Yes, my brother was babied and spoilt. I was the wild one -- he was more timid.

Julie: Yes, there was difference -- the girls were more spoilt.

Kylie:Yes, Derek was a boy and he could go out and do things whereas
I would take charge in the house. Like if there was babysitting to do I

122

would have to do it -- because he was the boy he could go out and be with his friends. My brother did used to tidy up, but me and my mother did most things in the house.

Violet: My brother gets away with murder. He's the youngest and my mother does everything for him. He had health problems as a child so he was "mummied" and one day my mother was in the doctors' and he asked my brother a question and we all answered. The doctor said: "That's what's wrong with him -- he's got three mothers."

These responses demonstrate a contradiction; all show a difference in childhood socialisation processes but not in the same ways. Some refer to how their brothers were "babied" more than the girls, others refer to their brothers having more freedom to go out, whilst others refer to boys' lack of participation in housework unlike their sisters who were expected to do it. Other women gave accounts of their childhood in which male and female children were not treated the same; one described her brother as the "acting father" when her mother was not around and another said that her brother occasionally disciplines her son. One woman said that from the age of seven she had to clean but her brother did not clean although he may have done some ironing. I compared these responses with the results from other studies by McRobbie, (1991) Lees, (1986) and Griffin, (1985). In *Feminism and Youth Culture* McRobbie' found that for working-class girls school took second place to the family and domestic life. The girls recognised that home could be a site of conflict and even violence but this did not stop them being rooted in it and acquiring their domestic skills and a lot of information about pregnancy, childbirth and childcare there. What also seemed to be learned in the home was a domestic division of labour:

My brother doesn't do a thing in the house. He makes a mess and I clear up after him. He doesn't even make his bed. Waits for my Mum to make it when she gets back from work. (McRobbie, 1991:58/59).

In her chapter on marriage, Lees (1986) found, in contrast to Willis's (1997) findings of the material advantages to men that marriage offers, that the girls in her sample described marriage as offering a greater burden of domestic labour.

123

The wife has to stay at home and do the shopping and things, she has got more responsibility in life and they have not got much to look forward to -- we've got to work at home and look after the children till they grow up, you've got to go out shopping, do the housework and try to have a career. Then the man comes in and says "where's my dinner?" when we've been to work. They say "you don't work" It's because boys are brought up expecting us girls to do all the work. They expect their mums to do it and when they get married they expect their wives to do it. (1986:86).

Griffin (1985) found that domestic responsibilities i.e. housework and childcare were regarded as "women's work" which, however, is not real work. Real work was paid, and took place outside the home, and it conjured up images of hard manual labour: it was "Men's work." Griffin found (1985:39) that male involvement with housework was almost negligible and of the 104 young that she asked about domestic work, only eight said that their fathers did any housework or childcare.

My findings tie in with the above research and imply that the women in my sample and their brothers were socialised in different ways; boys were not expected to do housework unlike the girls. Two of the brothers were said to occasionally take on a disciplinary role in their mothers' absence and likewise in relation to their nephews and nieces. The girls however "became domesticated" and involved in women's work. The above accounts imply that male and female identities are learned within families and in this way a gender division of labour is effected. These accounts lend support to the theoretical works of Althusser (1971) and Barrett (1988) who emphasise how class and gender ideologies embedded within family practices, such as differences in socialisation practices and ideological assumptions of men's work and women's work, contribute to the social reproduction of the working class and the continuing subordination of women.

The decline of the family?

Single-mothers are often assumed to be evidence of the decline of "the family" therefore I wanted to explore the women's perceptions of themselves in relation to "the family". Did they perceive themselves as undermining or as evidence of the decline of "the

family"? Or if they disagreed with these descriptions how did they perceive themselves and what were their views on the family? In order to find out I asked, "Do you agree that families today are in decline?"

A few respondents had difficulty understanding this question and I made attempts to re-phrase it in ways such as "are families important today, are families different today or have families changed today?" I was unable to get responses from five of the women who replied that they couldn't tell me anything about these issues. However the replies I received referred to various social factors as contributing to a "decline in the family." Anita replied:

> There is decline in some families, in some areas -- I think it's a lot to do with money again. -- Yes, I see money as a factor contributing to family decline oh yes, and it's a way of life as well -- of attitudes, of values, they've all changed, everything that people valued twenty years ago they wouldn't give a hoot for today. Respect for elders and adults, children now aren't taught respect -- they should be allowed to express themselves but to have respect as well.   But it's down to the individual's parents isn't it, I can't criticise kids for having no respect can I? If you're brought up to respect people you'll pass it on to your kids. My father brought us up to respect and value people, but if you're not brought up like that it's hard to start showing it to your kids.

> Violet: Yes, in decline and different, 'cos the father don't always work now and bring the money in. It could be the mother bringing the wage in -- some are totally different now.

> Kylie: Yes, families are in decline -- it's like years ago if you was married you stayed married and that was that but today some blokes just go from one relationship to another -- they're not interested in relationships or families -- they just don't want to know.

> Janet: I think the perception of a happy family is totally different in these days now -- because I mean I think single-mothers get the brunt of it -- there's always been single mothers but it was less talked about and was more of a taboo than it is now. Like obviously my mother had a child out of wedlock and it wasn't talked about -- but now, it's the norm. But I think the government and stuff like that do sort of fall back on single-mothers and it's the wrong attitude 'cos single-mothers do pretty well. I do think the section of families is different, I don't think that it means you're not a family if you're not married. A married couple is not the only family now. Because there are too many people around now who are single-mothers, it's more talked of now, and that's why I think they put us down more than other sorts of family.

These women refer to various changes such as less respect for authority (although youngsters in other generations have always been accused of being disrespectful so whether this is a valid point seems questionable), changing patterns of employment and gender divisions of labour, marriage breakdown and an increased visibility of single-mother families.

One respondent described the increase in single-mothers as symptomatic of changes in family life and said they are now more acknowledged or visible and comprise a large proportion of families in today's society. She is also clear about different types of families.

The women quoted above agree that there have been many changes but not a decline in the family. Marion, however, regards single-mothers, amongst other factors, as symptomatic of family decline.

> Yes, it's right, definitely, some people see are proud of it -- being a single-mother but I'm not proud of it. But I can't go back and change it I just get on with it and do the best I can. Yes, it is declining -- 'cos um a lot of parents just want a peaceful life and have no time for their kids -- they tell them to go out and play and they don't spend time with them or things like that and those kids grow up into adults and what have they learned? I think things -- before long marriage will be in the past unless it becomes a new fashionable trend and that.

Violet's response was similar:

> Oh yes, they're not what they used to be, families, my aunts and uncles
> are still together, my mother and father are -- but today's generation is
> not what it should be. I prefer the old way and not like it is now.

These two responses described family decline in terms of poor parenting, a decline in the pularity of marriage, and an increase in divorce. Marion felt that some women were proud of being gle-mothers whereas she felt stigmatised. The last response on this subject comes from Mary:

> Well I'd say some of them are in decline, but then you've got to have
> others willing to step in and remake a family. There's always someone
> like single-mothers to remake a family. But then you've still got some
> who haven't got a complete family so I dunno, it's hard to tell if they
> are in decline really 'cos one couple could finish it and another one
> could start up again -- you can't judge it really.

Mary does not seem to interpret the decline of "the family" in terms of marital breakdown as

according to her, as one relationship ends another begins and so on. She refers to the temporary stage that many single-mothers go through before they enter into other relationships thus producing other types of families hence reducing the number of single-mother families. She distinguishes between "the family" as an institution and what individual men and women do.

Summary

It appears the single-mothers in this study do not perceive themselves as evidence of the decline of the family. Those who believed "the family" was in decline suggested various factors as responsible for this decline such as changes in society like increases in divorce, remarriages, and unemployment. Five women could not reply to the question of whether families are in decline but I now summarise the views of those who did answer. Most of the other ten women disagreed that families were declining and said they considered families to be important. Two women referred to the effects of money in relation to family decline or rather how the lack of money contributes to family problems and family relationships, another referred to the growing unpopularity of marriage today and its effects upon families, another referred to the increased number of different rather than declining families, whilst another referred to irresponsible parenting and differences in social attitudes between past and present society. However it seems that although the above factors can affect family relationships, as far as the women in this study are concerned, they do not necessarily mean that "the family" as an institution is in decline.

Family values

Before I conclude this chapter on "The Family" I turn now to another aspect of family life which caused considerable difficulty to the sample. This was the issue of family values. I wanted to ask about family values because of media references and right-wing propaganda

about the necessity of going back to basics and reinstating "traditional" family values. Was there a difference between present day family values and family values from the past such as families being responsible for their members, teaching children respect and right from wrong and bringing them up to fit into society and so on. I asked the women if they could tell me anything about family values. Some of the sample could not answer and their responses included:

I'm not sure about this -- can we come back to it?

What's that? I don't know what family values are.

Um no, I don't know anything about family values.

But others replied differently to this question such as Amanda, a single-mother of one:

Family values? Well it's always like this type of family in the paper--
mother, father and two kids but what about the other families in
between --'cos there must be others surely? But that's what the image
is, either the "ideal family" or the poor ones from one-parent families
on council estates smashing windows and getting into trouble (laughs)
Well, it is like that isn't it -- they never show what's in between -- there
are families with stepchildren or gay parents. What do you define as a
family now and what as family values apart from the image of the
"proper family" of Mam, Dad and two kids? Like I don't fit into either
of those types of family, so what about me?

This woman has a very clear understanding of this whole issue of family values and is aware that her particular family does not fit either of the family models she describes in her interview. Marion said:

Well yes, it does mean something -- the only values I've got really are caring and
schools -- you've got to do the best really for your children. Those are my only values,
my priorities, they've got to go to school, got to be clean, they've got to bath and
brush their teeth and stuff like that. I can't say much about values because I was never
surrounded by family values. But another value to me is not to worry too much about
money, talk to the kids, spend time with them, answer their questions.

Another woman told me it meant "Instilling discipline -- respecting one another really".

I suggest that the significance of these responses is that some of the women regard bringing their children up to know right from wrong and getting them educated as priorities; one woman spoke about respect and discipline while another referred to how we only heard

128

about two types of families in society despite there being a plurality of family forms in existence today. She spoke about depictions of the nuclear family as the "norm" for society and of dysfunctional working-class families but asked "where were the families in between?"

As regards the issue of family values, I suggest the responses of some women imply that their definitions of family values are not so different from the Right's definition of "traditional" family values, including instilling respect and disciplining children, educating them and making children's welfare a priority. Empirical work such as that of Dean and Taylor Gooby (1992:5) shows that "lone parents hold views that adhere to the mainstream values of work and family ethics".

These responses also show the importance of families to these women and do not imply the irresponsible attitudes to parenting that single-mothers are said to possess by the media. All of the women stated that they would not bring their children up within an unhappy or failed relationship because this could have negative effects on the children. The sample believed there was no right way to bring up children and that parents adopt different childrearing practices based upon their own subjective values, beliefs, morals and priorities. One woman said that if there was a right way to bring up children everyone would adopt this method and there would be no social problems with youngsters or any juvenile crime to contend with. About half the women admitted to having similar childrearing practices to those of their parents, whilst others had adopted different methods such as Anita who stated,

> Yes, I am doing it differently. I was never listened to as a child but I try
> to listen to what mine are saying.

Another finding relates to issues of stable relationships. It appears that the women in the sample who are cohabiting and whose relationships seem to be stable agree that having two parents around is good for children. Other women spoke of material and practical support provided by their families and these findings tie in with those of Finch and Mason, (1993) whose study is concerned with the practical and material support provided within

families and especially by women. On the issues of parental roles, one woman thought that children should know who their biological parents were but did not think that the biological father was necessarily the best one to bring up children. She said she would have "stuck it out with her daughter's father but decided that her child would better off without him because at the end of the day people don't change". This woman had been involved in numerous custody battles with her ex-partner and his parents and had been severely traumatised by these events resulting in her moving house to live near her own parents for security and support. In the same vein, another woman said that ability to father a child (to procreate) might make a biological father although it did not necessarily make a man a proper or social father who was ready to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood.

Conclusion

It seems therefore that contrary to media and public speculation and assumptions, this particular group of single-mothers do not regard themselves as opposing or undermining "the family". All except one woman stressed the importance of families and pointed out the differences in types of families today. However many of the women believed that the ideological family of breadwinning husband with dependent wife and children is the "proper" context in which to bring up children. It is very doubtful however that many working-class families (apart from a small minority which Barrett (1988) describes as "the labour aristocracy") have ever been able to conform to this model. By this Barrett means the skilled and better paid manual workers among the working–class. This section of the working-class could possibly conform to a male breadwinner model of the family. A few women were critical of some aspects of their prior family experiences yet still accepted the importance of families for themselves and their children. Defining families however proved to be a subjective matter because of the different experiences of the women and nearly all defined their families as ordinary regardless of how they had experienced family life.

Three-quarters of the sample were highly dependent upon their parents, especially their mothers who provided emotional, financial and child-minding support. A major finding was that childcare is definitely gendered. Some women acknowledged that their families had changed over the years due to divorce, deaths, marriages of siblings, remarriages of divorced parents and unemployment, but none regarded families as unimportant; this was even true of Marion who regarded herself as coming from a most anti-social family. One woman thought families were in decline as many parents today could not be bothered with their children and left them to their own devices; this she considered to be irresponsible parenting and not good for children. Another woman considered that a lack of money contributed to family decline. Two women were shortly to be married demonstrating that for them, single-motherhood was merely a transient phase and not a permanent way of life (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1994). These findings show the diversity of families in modern society and how different people define families in accordance with their own personal experiences of family lives. This happens despite constant subjection to social images of the cereal packet family of mother, father and two point four children. Some women were aware that this image of the family was ideological and not realistic as a model of family life while others aspired to it. Although the married family is held up as the ideal way to live, many families today comprise unmarried parents, which are still, nevertheless, families as three of my sample pointed out. I now proceed to the following chapter about women and work. This chapter intends to provide the reader with sociological insights into the lives of working-class women in order to explain the dilemmas in relation to single-mothers and paid employment.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN AND WORK

The assumption that single-mothers are work shy and irresponsible and prefer dependency upon welfare benefits rather than paid work forms one of the elements of the moral panic surrounding single-mothers in recent years. There are proportionately, more lone mother families in Britain than in any other European country but British lone mothers are far less likely to be in paid work than their European counterparts (Duncan and Edwards 1999). However, in contrast to what media pundits would have us believe, the issues in relation to single-mothers and paid employment are complex and cannot be reduced to the simplistic notion of to work or not to work. Duncan and Edwards (1999) point to the workings of "gendered moral rationalities" to explain the choices and motivations of lone mothers regarding employment. Their comparison of Britain, Sweden, and Germany indicates that moral beliefs about mothers and lone mothers in paid employment, and the moral acceptance of substitute mothering, are crucial for the uptake of paid work. Mothers in Britain are implicitly dependent on a male breadwinner unlike Sweden, where all adult women and men are regarded as workers. The implication is that the moral force felt by mothers to provide is greater when there is no assumption that they should depend on a breadwinner. These authors argue that understanding issues of lone mothers and the uptake of paid work needs to take into account that these women as mothers socially negotiate particular "gendered moral rationalities" that operate in particular settings and in ways different from individualised economic rationality. They mean that other factors besides money need to be acknowledged with regard to the situations of lone mothers and paid work, including understandings about their identity as mothers and lone mothers. Some lone mothers consider that the most important work they can do is to bring up their children whereas others may consider that paid work is one of their moral responsibilities as mothers. These differing views can be sustained

locally in their social groups and networks (Silva, 1996:121). This study has found evidence of "gendered moral rationalities" which is discussed at a later stage. In addition to this, many women are unable to take up (or can only take part-time employment) because their domestic responsibilities limit certain types of work in the labour market. The assumptions underlying women's primary role as mothers and the domestic ideology that "a woman's place is in the home" can have very real implications regarding the roles and life choices of many women. U.K. studies on women and employment such as Martin and Roberts (1984) report findings on the competing demands of home and work whereby women without children in full and part-time work found coping easier whilst full-time workers with dependent children found greater difficulties than women with grown up children (Morris, 1990:88). According to Pahl (1984) when women with young children take on employment it will usually be part-time and their domestic burden remains high (cited in Morris, 1990:88).

This chapter intends to explore the underlying issues in relation to single-mothers and paid work and is concerned with the material realities and subjective experiences of the sample in relation to domestic and paid work. The women who are the subjects of this study will explain how they live, work and bring up their children and why most of them have been unable to or do not want to take paid work since becoming single-mothers. It will also explore whether single-mothers can combine paid work and motherhood and, if so, under what circumstances.

I focus on the relationship between women as mothers and women as workers in an attempt to show how assumptions of women's domestic roles determine whether paid employment in combination with motherhood becomes a feasible option or not. I will attempt to show how a sexual division of labour in the home influences women's opportunities in the workplace and by using the concept of a sexual division of labour I hope to explain the relationship between women's domestic and working lives.

The chapter is divided into two sections: the first deals with the work histories and

133

family background of the sample prior to their transition to single-motherhood and the second deals with their experiences of single-motherhood and paid work.

Gender divisions and paid employment

This section focuses on domestic work and paid employment in order to explore how certain material and ideological practices in the home both produce and reproduce gender divisions in the home and in the workplace. The section begins with a brief description of the work histories of the sample and their mothers in order to compare the work patterns of mothers and daughters to look for continuity or changes in the lives of these women. The family is considered by Barrett (1984) as the primary site of the oppression of women and her materialist analysis focuses on the unpaid work that women do. My first questions concerned the women's mothers and the types of jobs they had. The data revealed that most of the mothers had worked but did not start work until their children started school. Their jobs included factory work, cleaning, shop-work and care-assistants and most of them worked on a part-time basis. One fifth of the sample said that their fathers had contributed to the housework when their mothers were in work and the types of jobs they did included putting the cleaner around, washing the dishes, decorating, gardening and one woman said that her father always did the ironing and still does it today irrespective of whether his wife is in work or not. Most of the fathers and brothers in the women's families of origin did not participate in housework to any great extent and only slightly more helped with childcare (see chapter two). When fathers helped out it was with specific tasks such as playing with their children, putting them to bed, or taking them out. One woman, Diane, whose father had been unemployed for years when she was a child said that he still never did anything in the home. Another woman, Mary, implied that she was confused about the roles of women; she sometimes believed that they should stay at home and bring up their children whilst alternatively believing that if they wanted paid work they should be able to work. However

134

the women's accounts reveal the underlying problems of combining the dual burdens of motherhood and paid work

One woman who had grown up in a family consisting of herself, her parents and four brothers said that she had never known her father to do any sort of domestic work apart from minding the children when his wife was in work. Even after thirty-two years of marriage she considered that "he doesn't know how to wash a plate even now". She described her father as always having been in full time work while her mother had always worked in part-time jobs such as cleaning in the evenings and had spent several years as a barmaid. In reply to my question of whether her brothers ever did any housework she replied quite emphatically; "No, Jesus -- did they hell!" In reply to my questions about her own family life as a single-mother of two children from two different relationships she replied that neither of her former partners had ever done any housework "for her" but they did occasionally assist with childcare such as playing with the children or putting them to bed. She said her former partners "justified" their non-participation in housework by describing it as "women's work". She also said that she had never done any housework as a child. She said that the only jobs her brothers and herself were expected to do was to tidy their rooms and run some errands. Her mother did all the domestic work and worked in part-time evening jobs when her husband came home from work to look after the children. She described her own experiences of housework as a shock to the system and said that she hated housework and wished she had done more to help her mother when she lived at home.

The young women grew up in families in which men were regarded as breadwinners and women as homemakers. Their mothers' paid work was considered secondary in comparison with their primary roles as mothers and the types of work they did could be described as extensions of their domestic work or else gendered jobs or women's jobs generally done by working-class women. The women believed their fathers' jobs were most important for maintaining their families. Significantly none of them referred to the economic

135

contribution to the household finances made by their mothers, implying that they did not regard it as of real significance. When I asked their opinions on combining paid work with housework and childcare, some thought this could be too much for some women to cope with or might constrain or restrict the types of jobs available to women. This seems to explain why many women take part-time work as it enables them to balance their jobs with domestic work and childcare. Women's choices are often made within socio-economic constraints and ideological assumptions that women should be in the home. I continue with an account of the working histories of the women prior to their single-motherhood status.

Work Histories of the sample

With the exception of two women who became pregnant as fifteen year-old school girls, the remaining thirteen had all been employed and nearly all professed to having enjoyed their employment. Most of their jobs were unskilled and not particularly well paid but many women stated that they missed them for reasons such as the money they provided, the opportunities to go out and socialise, for confidence building and the independence which these jobs had provided in comparison with their present financial circumstances. The data did not show any changes in employment patterns but rather a similar pattern to that of their mothers a generation before; mothers and daughters both worked in jobs that are classified in sociological terms as women's jobs which are relatively unskilled, poorly paid, require no qualifications and are generally done by working-class women. The women left work when they became pregnant but five had returned to part-time work since becoming single-mothers: three in the informal economy of which I go into more detail at a later stage. I now proceed to analyse their opinions, explanations and experiences of their working histories.

The opinions of the sample varied in relation to issues of women and paid work. Some thought it essential for women to be in paid work for self-esteem, to be able to make their own financial contribution because being dependent on a man's wage can be degrading, and for

136

other reasons such as being able to socialise and to have a break from the home. Others however considered the most important work women with children could do was to stay at home and raise their children. This ties in with research carried out in Bethnal Green by Cornwell (1984) who stressed the importance of the domestic division of labour in the lives of the working-class women she studied and how they perceived housework and child care as their job. Others considered that the pressures of raising children and combining paid work were often too difficult, especially for single-mothers or women who wanted to work but whose partner would not help with housework and childcare. Some women had partners who held strict traditional beliefs about the roles of men as workers and women as mothers and such attitudes did not make it easy for the women to take paid work. Other women spoke of similar incidents in which their partners refused to participate in what they described as women's work despite their being unemployed at the time. These accounts therefore show that men's unemployment did not necessarily alter the gender imbalance in the domestic division of labour. The ideology of "a woman's place being in the home" cannot be underestimated as a significant social factor influencing the opportunities of women in relation to paid work. I now proceed to analyse the data concerning women and work.

Women, mothers and paid work

Although in my questions about paid work I differentiated between women and mothers, most respondents regarded women as synonymous with mothers and made no distinction between these concepts. My first question was "what do you think about women and paid work?" Amanda thought it was important for women to work, "for money and for meeting people". She was a 26 year-old mother of one who, like the majority of the sample, was not in paid work at the time of interview. She had previously gone back to her former clerical job on a once-weekly basis when her child was a few months old (she had worked for eight years in a clerical job prior to becoming a single-mother) but gave up the job because of

137

a condition of Social Security policy known as the earnings disregard under which single-mothers are allowed to earn £15 a week besides their benefits but anything surplus to this is deducted from their benefits payment. Amanda criticised this particular policy for removing incentives for single-mothers to take up paid work because of the limited financial gain it afforded them. She differentiated between women and mothers believing it important for women to work in order to earn money and for the opportunities to socialise within a working environment but not important for mothers to be in work as they would miss their children growing up. She thought that children could benefit materially if their mothers worked but did not consider this to be as important as mothers being with their children in their early, formative years. She did not believe that access to childminders necessarily assisted single mothers into paid work because she would only allow her parents to mind her child and would not use childminders or creches. However she is in favour of the Government assisting single-mothers into work by providing more creches in the workplace although she personally would not use them but believes other single-mothers could benefit from their availability.

The next young woman, a 19 year old mother of one, worked as a waitress after leaving school and only gave up her job as a result of her pregnancy. She described herself as happy in her job but since becoming a single-mother had not been employed. She explained the reasons for her unemployment as due to the £15 earnings disregard by Social Security and as due to the fact that her former employers were not prepared to allow her to work just one shift but wanted her to work several night shifts which she could not do because of a problem with childminding. She went on to say that an official from Social Security had visited her and told her she would be better off on Income Support than working and claiming Family Credit (which was a top-up benefit to low paid workers but has changed under Labour to Working Families Tax Credit). She considered this advice was hardly an encouragement for her to return to work. She believed that mothers should have the option of paid work but should wait until their child/children started full-time school; she also believed it was

138

important for mothers to work "for the money and a break from the house and the children".

In her experience the difficulties associated with employment and single-mothers was related

to assumptions of women's responsibility for their children, a lack of childcare, inflexible

working hours and Social Security policy. Other views on the issues of women and paid work

included the difficulties of combining paid work and childcare, low-pay, part-time work,

feelings of guilt about using childminders and not being there for the children. Some

accounts implied the acceptance of women's economic dependence on men as in the

following example.

> CR: What do you think about women and work?
> Maureen: I think women who work and bring up kids work hard 'cos it is hard
> keeping your house clean, feeding the kids and having time for the kids as well 'cos
> some kids feel neglected if their mothers are not there. I think women with young kids
> are better with part-time work 'cos you've always got to be there with little kids
> haven't you. If I was working full-time and anything happened to my child I would
> feel guilty. I don't think it's important for women to work if they're in a relationship
> or their husband is working but if they want to work or don't want to work then it
> should be up to them.

Most of the sample thought women with children would be better suited to part-time

work as they could spend more time with their children, especially pre-school age children.

However, they did not discuss how single-mothers could take on the role of female

breadwinner in low paid part-time work and be able to earn enough to support their children.

Mary did not believe it was important for mothers to work.

> As long as they're doing what they're supposed to, being with their
> children. No, it's not important for mothers to go out to work

Mary believed women should only work if their husbands were unemployed because

"mothers are needed more at home with the children". She also believed it was not important

for single mothers to work unless they wanted to but acknowledged that certain factors made

it difficult for them to work such as a lack of childcare, low wages and inflexible working

hours. However because of the contradictions in this particular interview I have chosen to

include certain extracts as a case study. Mary is currently working in the informal economy

139

but used to work in full-time and part-time work prior to this as childcare had always been provided by her mother and step-father but mostly by her mother. At present she lives with her mother while decorating and improving a council house near to her mother and hopes to move in shortly with her five-year old son. Her mother had brought the child up for most of the five years as Mary had experienced many social and personal problems in the past which she now hoped to put behind her.

Case Study1

> I think um -- women like to work obviously, don't they? Like they work before they have kids then it's only fair that they want to go back to work after as well. But I've tried it and it doesn't work out at all, especially like me if you're a single-mother then it just doesn't work out at all -- it's hard to work and see to a child. Part-time work would be easier for women with kids as it's impossible you know what I mean to work full-time. I've done it and it's hard that's why I gave it up, I was feeling guilty leaving in the morning and thinking "Oh God, I won't be home till 5 o'clock and by the time he (her son) has his tea I won't be able to spend much time with him before he goes to bed". But now I've got two night shifts and I've got the days with him and I can take him to nursery and bring him home. But that's me, not everyone thinks the same, but for someone with kids who is in work part-time is easier.

In answer to my question of whether anything makes it difficult for single-mothers to

work she replied,

> The money, yes, the money. Some jobs I mean they don't pay enough for you to work, they don't and it's not only that -- it's finding someone to have the children for you and then you've got to pay them if you're not fortunate to have parents to help. And when you're on Family Credit they want everything out of you. I was working for £10 extra on my wages and that was bus fare as well, so at the end of the day I thought it's rent, electricity, gas, water rates, poll tax, food, clothes, so I was working for nothing -- for nothing. Basically it's hard for women to work. The Government think that when you're a mother you should be in the house with the kids. To a certain extent I do believe that sometimes but it would be nice if you can get a job to go to work but the Government doesn't give you the incentive to work
> CR: Why is that?
> The wages and the hours, certain hours I mean, 'cos not everyone can work flexi hours when you're a mother -- you've got to work certain hours and not many places are willing to do that for you, you've got to be flexi or nothing so it's the hours and the wages that have a lot to do with it definitely. I don't really think the Government likes the thought of women working -- it's like an all man's world isn't it? Men should work and women should stay in the house.

140

This respondent was quite clear about the problems working mothers, especially single–mothers face in relation to low wages, inflexible working hours and a lack of childcare, and she considered that economic reasons were the most important incentives for women to work. She explained how hard it was for single-mothers to support their families on low paid part-time employment although espousing part-time employment as more suitable as her own experiences demonstrated. However her mother looked after her son in order for her to work but some single mothers do not have this option. Others felt guilty about abrogating their parental responsibilities in order to work as explained by the next respondent. This single-mother of three seemed confused by the ideology that women should be in the home and the material reality that many women want or need to be in paid work (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). She said she believed women should be able to choose whether or not to take paid work but seemed to be referring to married women when she said that, "there would be no need for women to work if their husbands worked" thus implying the influence of the ideology of male breadwinner and women's economic dependence on men. However she does not seem to acknowledge bringing up children as work. I have chosen the following account because it provides evidence of gendered moral rationalities which made this particular young woman give up paid work; being a mother who worked did not fit with her perceptions of "proper".

Case Study 2

Marion is a single-mother of three children from three different relationships. The opinions she gives concerning the issues underlying women as workers and women as mothers are sometimes contradictory but reflect problems that can occur when women attempt to combine the responsibility of motherhood with paid work. She believed that,

> If women with children can jiggle it I think it's brilliant 'cos the kids
> grow up and you're still here and I think it's brilliant as long as the kids

141

are not like pass the parcel. I don't agree with that -- with children being left with just anybody. I decided I'd rather not work than put them at risk physically and emotionally. If women can do it and they've got the means to do it then great, as long as the child isn't neglected. At the end of the day if the man isn't around for them it doesn't mean that you should do the same to them and not be around either because they didn't ask to be born did they and still need looking after. I couldn't personally 'cos I don't like the thought of other people taking my kids to school, making them tea or doing their homework with them 'cos then I wouldn't be a mother to them would I? That's how I feel about it. I don't think anyone wants to work really, some have got to for the money but if they haven't got to then part-time work is fine. I wouldn't work full time, I'd rather be with the kids. I couldn't work full-time as it would be like giving my responsibilities to other people. Work can be important for women if it's something they need to do for themselves, it's important if they need the money, it can be important to have more money for your family but I don't think it's really important if you're financially secure, as sometimes working can be the breaking of families.

Although theoretically supporting the ideal of working mothers, "it's brilliant if they can do it" she cannot put this into practice in relation to her own situation as it conflicts with what she considers her maternal responsibilities. She believes paid work would mean relegating these responsibilities to others thereby negating her mothering role. Her reply suggests that her views may have been influenced by her own experience of being raised by her grandmother who aged seventy-two, took responsibility for Marion as a baby. Her grandmother fulfilled the role of mother twice over; she brought up her own children and also brought up Marion when she took charge of her as a baby. This lady still did her own decorating according to Marion, when in her eighties. It seems that family values of women as homemakers and mothers and not workers are strongly represented in this account. Marion's views were based on her experiences of part-time work cleaning in schools from four until six in the evening which she was unable to continue with because of a conflict between moral duties and maternal identity in which she felt she should be at home with her children.

In response to my question "What do you think about women who work and bring up children?" some of the views are as follows:

Amanda: It's hard to do both, to work and bring up children -- it would be easier to work part-time. Children can suffer if their mothers are not there. I think it's more important for women without children to work but more important for men with kids to be working than women. I'd say it's more important for men to work as it's expected of them -- perhaps I'm old fashioned, but I'd say women should be in the house and the men should go out to work.

Katy: I wouldn't like to work full time with a small child as you'd miss too much of them growing up but some people don't have a choice, they have to.

Anita: Yes it's important for women to work as you get a boost away from the house and the kids. But speaking personally, if I went back to work I'd go back part-time and full-time when he's older. I definitely think it's important for women to work, for self-esteem, for them to know they're contributing, even if it's not as much as him, just to know they are and that they're not just mothers as that's not a job is it?

Violet: Yes it is important. It shows the kids that their mother doesn't sit on her arse all day and that mothers work the same as their fathers do. It will give the kids a guide for when they are older and they have kids, it teaches them to be independent, to go out and get a wage. I think the Government expect women to go back to work, to pay the fees, to manage the children I think they expect a bit much and it's impossible for some people. But then some of them say that women on council estates who go out to work, well that their children will turn out to be rascals and get into trouble because their mothers are not at home to discipline them. But then if the mothers were at home they'd be called everything under the sun for sitting on their arse all day so they can't really win in some people's eyes can they?

This woman's response concerns ideas of housework as not real work and as undervalued and also points to the dilemmas women as mothers face regarding going out to work or else staying at home and fulfilling their mothering role. Mothers especially seem to be caught in a catch 22 situation; criticised for not working and criticised for working.

Summary

In this section the women have related the problems some of them experienced in attempting to combine motherhood and paid work. The jobs they worked in were not well paid and they would find it difficult to support themselves and their children even if they could work full time, which would not be possible without access to cheap or free childcare.

143

Much women's employment today is part-time, and although this may be more suited to women with young children, the wages in unskilled jobs are not good and the hours of work cannot always be adapted to suit women with children as some of the sample had experienced. Part-time work does not pay a living wage therefore it is suitable for women with a partner but not for those on their own.

Women's role in the workplace is often limited by their domestic and mothering responsibilities and the implications of social and ideological factors especially the ideology that "women should be in the home". Women are constrained by the contradictions between being at home with their children and being expected to work to provide for them and it is often too difficult to combine both roles. We heard Marion speak about the tensions in wanting to work but alternatively feeling she could not expect a childminder to assume her maternal responsibilities. We also heard from others who would not trust their children to the care of child-minders even if they had the opportunity to do so. Whereas it is socially accepted that men should be in paid employment the situation is not so clear cut as regards women, especially women with children and there are differences in the situations and opportunities in the workplace for men and women. It seems that fatherhood and paid work go together but motherhood and paid work do not and that there are moral as well as practical dimensions to this. I include comparative tables of the women's working histories prior to and after single-motherhood which show that prior to motherhood only two women who became pregnant as school girls were out of work yet after motherhood most women were out of work.

Figure 6.1

Comparison of work histories of the sample both prior to and after single motherhood

Before single motherhood   **After single motherhood**
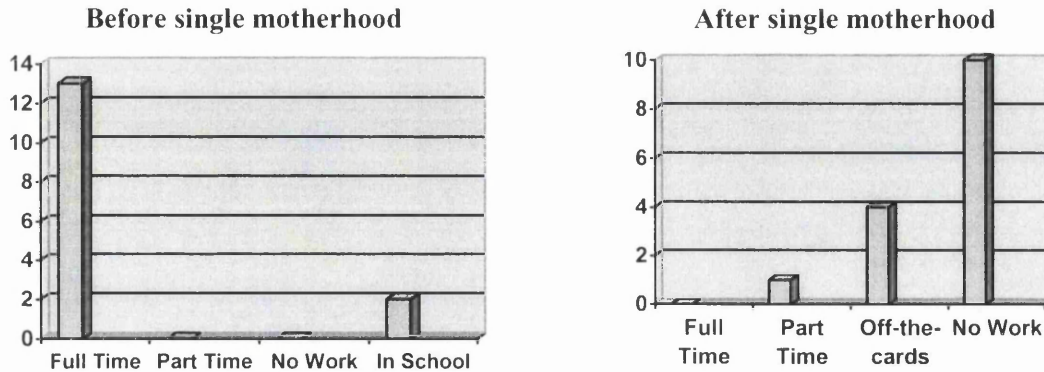
The findings also show mothers have more difficulties than single women getting paid work, especially single-mothers. Women without children do not require help with childcare or babysitters and neither do they have to worry about school holidays or taking time off when children are ill. Single-mothers need childcare in order to work and need to work full time to support their families as the wages from part-time work would not be adequate. The sample agreed that other social problems confronting women and work were a lack of childcare, low wages, and inflexible hours which limited the opportunities of single-mothers to get paid work. Some of them have taken up alternative methods of paid work such as working in the informal economy. This is the focus of the next section

Single-mothers and the informal economy

Some of the women in this study had resorted to alternative ways of overcoming the financial problems of bringing up children as single-mothers by working in the informal economy otherwise known as working off-the-cards. This practice involved a small percentage, one-fifth of the sample and relates to Pahl's (1984) concept of survival strategies. During the interviews three women stated that their ex-partners and two said that their partners currently worked "off-the-cards" so this practice is not gender specific although the

types of work done by the women can be described as gendered. What I found particularly interesting about this issue was that although most of the sample did not participate and despite being aware that it was illegal to work and claim benefits, all the women condoned it. They said they understood why men and women did it, and nearly all criticised the Government as responsible for its being practised. The main reason given by three women who admitted to working in the informal economy was, "because we could not earn enough money to support our families from being in paid work or alternatively from living on welfare benefits". The following are some responses on this subject.

Julie: I think loads of women today work off-the-cards to make ends meet 'cos there's no other way about it -- for their homes, to feed their children, to clothe their children, to give their children a comfortable life. They don't just do it for fags or drink, they work like this to make ends meet.

Mary: Yes, they've got to or they couldn't live by doing it on the books.
You're worse off working properly if you're a single-mother.

Anita: Yes, but only **unskilled** workers do it -- to boost their money up -- their benefits. They haven't got much choice if they've got families.

The only opposing view was:

Amanda: Um -- there's not many I know would do it, I think a lot are afraid to risk it. If the Social found out they'd stop your money but I think more men than women would do it.

Another factor which the sample considered to be problematic for working women was sexual discrimination and gender inequality in the workplace. Most of the sample believed that although theoretically women can take jobs which are traditionally classified as "men's jobs" i.e. building work, truck drivers, in practice this does not always happen and women are still segregated in the workplace. They also believed that the sexual division of labour allocating women to women's jobs like cleaning, waitressing and care work restricted women's work opportunities as did gender ideologies such as those concerning the physiology of women as excluding them from work.

Yes, women should have the chance of any job, but the statistics show

146

that men get paid more than women -- because they say that women have P.M.T. or get pregnant or whatever.

I couldn't see a woman being a builder, I dunno, no, 'cos men are stronger aren't they, but then again I don't think there should be any discrimination should there?

Another respondent believed low paid part-time work further restricted women's work opportunities as did employment policies whereby women as part-time workers are not entitled to sickness benefit or holiday pay. She also said part-time work did not provide women any sort of job security nor enough wages to live on yet men were not expected to work part-time unlike women. I include some explanations of why single-mothers are often unable to take paid work beginning with social factors such as inflexible working hours and low wages. The following are responses to my question about the problems facing single-mothers who want to take paid work.

Mary: The hours, yes, the hours and the wages make it difficult to work

Anita: The wages. My job as care-assistant only paid two pounds an hour so I could never live on that but as it's the only job I've ever had I haven't any experience of anything else and that's what all jobs want -- experience.

Susan: Babysitters stopped me. I started work when she was 18 months old and it was great, I was £25 a week better off but then I lost my babysitter and had to rely on others; I was always on the phone, "Can you have Lucy tomorrow?" and it was stressful for me as I didn't like to keep bothering people.

I also asked whether they thought that unemployment was a problem for women. The responses differentiated between groups of women; unemployment was considered important in relation to single-women but married women or single-mothers' unemployment was not. This was possibly due to popular assumptions of married women's economic dependency on men or because motherhood is seen as incompatible with paid employment.

None of the women in the sample considered their mother's unemployment as having any significant effects upon their family lives but their opinions about men's unemployment were very different. They believed it was more important for men as fathers to be employed

147

as it was their duty, it was expected of them, and father's unemployment rather than mother's, had more negative effects on family lives. About a third of the sample believed that as long as the man or woman was in paid work it was immaterial who worked as long as one of them did thus implying they did not subscribe to the male breadwinner/female dependent ideology. However this also shows they are assuming that one partner should be at home as opposed to both being in paid work.

Summary

To summarise this part of the chapter, the data revealed that certain social factors made it difficult for women and mothers to take paid work, these include a lack of suitable childcare, low-paid jobs, inflexible hours and gender and maternal ideologies that define a woman's place as being in the home. Some women mentioned a lack of creche facilities in the workplace. Another factor considered as limiting or making paid work problematic for women was sexual discrimination and gender inequality in the workplace. These issues were mentioned in the interviews but we did not go into great detail about them.

Three-quarters of the women agreed that the Government should offer more initiatives to help single mothers into work (the rest of the women had no opinions on this subject). One woman was critical of the Government's idea of homework clubs and after school clubs:

> Mandy: They're on about schemes where you can leave your children but they're employing people, I know it's coming back to perverts and stuff, but they're employing people and they haven't checked their background properly. Why go out and work if your child is going to be molested by some stranger? It has happened, so I wouldn't leave my son with no scheme but it is difficult. Even if your mother had the children, it's getting back to these interviews for jobs and there's so many people going for these jobs and it's having the confidence to speak up for yourself and be sociable with people 'cos I am shy anyway.

This woman felt strongly about leaving her child with strangers in order for her to work and also felt that she lacked the self-confidence to get a job.

Others criticised the Government for the creation of so many part-time jobs for women whilst others believed that part-time employment was more suitable for women with children. Only one respondent out of fifteen believed that a lack of educational qualifications placed limitations on women's opportunities in the workplace. The data showed that 75% of the sample believed it was more important for women without children to be in paid work and it was also easier for them to get paid work. They believed it was more important for mothers with pre-school children to be at home and that it was easier for single and married women to get paid work than for single-mothers to get paid work. The main social factors cited as making it problematic for single-mothers to work were low-paid jobs and a lack of childcare. However some respondents said they did not want paid work until their children went to full-time school as they did not want to miss their children's early years. They clearly did not see motherhood as compatible with paid work.

This section has hopefully shown how social factors and moral values have an impact on the opportunities of women to take up paid work. The next section will focus on gender divisions in the home in order to understand how the relationship between the home and the workplace can affect women's roles and opportunities in the workplace. In the following section I explore the domestic and familial relations of the sample as mothers with children of their own.

Domestic divisions of labour and single-motherhood

I now proceed to analyse the relationships within which single–motherhood occurred, focusing on domestic divisions of labour and inequalities in parenting roles and responsibilities. As we have seen, twelve of the fifteen women had been in relationships at the time of conception, five had been living with their children's fathers; the other three relationships were not stable and had broken down. At the time I conducted these interviews six women were cohabiting with their children's fathers, seven lived alone with their children,

one woman had returned to her parents' home with her child and one was partly cohabiting. Three of the women had never lived with their children's fathers. The seven women who lived alone fitted the description of single–mothers as defined by the state, i.e. women living without men and claiming welfare benefits for themselves as heads of the family and for their children. These are the single–mothers on whom I intend to focus in exploring the responsibilities and roles of parenthood and issues relating to the domestic division of labour. I wanted to explore the women's expectations of men as fathers and men within a domestic environment. My questions concerned the extent to which the women's partners were involved with childcare and domestic work and what this entailed. I wanted to find out whether men were involved with all aspects of childcare and domestic work, certain aspects only, or whether some men provided no help whatsoever and why. The principal findings on these issues were that the women's partners were more likely to be involved with specific aspects of childcare rather than domestic work. I began analysing these issues with the experiences of the seven women of the sample who were in cohabiting relationships at the time of interview.

Six of these women were cohabiting with partners who were in full-time work and gave favourable accounts of their partner's participation in domestic work in the home. They said that despite being in full-time work their partners helped at home and two of them said they considered that their and their partner's roles were "practically egalitarian" in that the men would help out with all household tasks. I asked what sort of housework they gave assistance with and the replies were that they would do anything at all.

The other two women who were cohabiting were not so positive about their partner's contributions to housework or childcare for that matter. One woman said her partner and father of her son only helped if it suited him and did not know the basic stuff such as where she kept her son's pyjamas, and as for doing housework, she described him as useless. Another woman said her partner would mind the children for her or take them out but only

ever did housework if she wasn't at home. When she was there he never did anything and the expectation seemed to be that this was her responsibility and not his. When I questioned the women whose relationships had broken down they told me that their ex-partners never participated in housework but used to help with certain aspects of childcare, i.e. playing with or occasionally minding their children. One woman told me that her partner (who later became her ex-partner) made more mess around the house instead of helping with housework but spent a lot of time with his young son partly due to the fact that he was unemployed. Another said that her former partner played with the two children sometimes but did not feed, wash or mind them at all despite being unemployed. She said he refused to watch them when she needed to buy things down the shop and told her "You're their mother, it's not my place to mind them. Take them with you". Another said her partner would "help out" if she nagged him whilst other men were described as useless, adding to the domestic burden or helping only when it suited them. Three women never received any help with housework from their ex- partners and three received no help even when their partners were unemployed. I include this quote from Mary, a mother of one who seemingly accepts the traditional sexual division of labour within the home. Her ex-partner who was in prison at the time of the interview had not helped in the past with housework despite being regularly unemployed.

> Mary: Men -- they're not interested in housework. But to be honest, from my point of view, I don't think it's right that a man should do it. I mean he could give a bit of help, but it's the woman's place to do the housework.

It appears that Mary's opinion on this subject may have originated from her childhood experiences of domestic life in which her mother did all the housework despite having a husband who was always unemployed. Mary's parents divorced when she was about ten years of age. Two women who were shortly to marry described their partners as willing to help with anything related to childcare or housework and these men differed from the other partners and ex-partners whose contributions to housework were minimal or non-existent.

151

Relationships in which there was a more equitable division of labour, at least in the women's eyes, were the most stable and were those in which the men worked in full-time employment.

In most cases therefore unequal gender relations existed in these women's relationships but some men participated more than others in domestic work and childcare. In differing degrees all the men helped with childcare rather than housework which mainly involved playing with their children, taking them out or minding them at home. But women's and men's roles were accepted as different and gendered; most women perceived women's work as associated with the home whereas men's took the form of paid work.

In order to find out more about traditional gender roles I questioned the women about the roles of housewife and what it meant to them and also what they thought about a male equivalent of a housewife. I asked them to define a housewife and whether they perceived themselves as housewives. I associated a housewife with a married woman as did some of the sample, while others, despite being unmarried, defined themselves as housewives because "they did everything that a housewife does". Four of the six who were cohabiting did not perceive themselves as housewives because they were not married implying that their definition of housewife, like mine, equated a wife with being married. All the women believed that women should be responsible for childcare but four believed that, although women were better than men at caring for children, it should not necessarily be their primary responsibility especially if they could be the main breadwinners. I include some definitions of housewife as given by the sample and their responses to the question of whether there is a male equivalent of a housewife. The first reply came from Mary, a 26 year old mother of a four year old child no longer cohabiting with her child's father as he was in prison, and who was temporarily living with her mother whilst decorating her own council house for her and her son to move into.

> CR: Can you define a housewife for me?
> Mary: Someone who stays at home doing the cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing. housewife is a wife who does things for when her husband comes home like tea on the

152

table, like doing everything for him. No, I don't consider myself a housewife because I'm not married.

CR. Do you think that there is a male equivalent of a housewife?

Mary: Male equivalent? To a certain extent yes, if the woman was working and he wasn't working, then obviously he'd have to do something around the house just to help.

I suggest her reply means that unemployed men should help in the home but only if the woman is in paid work. Working men are not expected to. Her choice of phrase "he'd have to" probably means that she believes unemployed men should help at home yet my findings suggest that unemployment does not necessarily affect gender roles or the sexual division of labour. These findings are similar to those of Morris (1990) in her study of unemployment in Port Talbot which revealed that most men do not participate in domestic work despite being unemployed. The next reply came from Diane,a 19 year–old single–mother of a 2 year old child.

CR: Can you define a housewife for me?

Diane: A slave tending to everyone else -- always finding time to do things for others before herself. Like me, my daughter comes first. I come last.

This view was largely based on Diane's experience of growing up in a family where her mother never received any help with domestic work. I then asked if she thought there was a male equivalent of a housewife. She said she did not know but she supposed that some men did it. The next reply came from Anita, a 26 year-old cohabiting mother of one.

CR: Can you define a housewife for me?

Anita: Someone stuck at home, looking after the kids, the home, doing everything like housework and **unpaid** as well.

CR. Do you think there's a male equivalent of a housewife?

Anita: Yes, there should be even though times have changed – people still assume it's always the women who will stay home but why? I think men could do it just as well. Say I had a really good job to go back to and I had a husband who didn't have such a good job, I wouldn't have any qualms about being the breadwinner and him bringing up the children. It depends on who can bring in the most money -- it's your standard of living that's important isn't it? And if you want to better it, why not?

This quote I find particularly interesting as it is the only one which refers to the unpaid nature of housework and the ideology of "a woman's place in the home". Anita referred to how

153

"times have changed" although not elaborating on this issue and to family changes wherein some women could become breadwinners in the 1990s. But this role reversal is a social change which has not materialised in Britain in the 1990s. Delphy and Leonard (1992) found that very few "role swap" couples have ever been located in sociological studies, despite vigorous hunts for them.

Another interesting response is from Marion, a single-mother of three children from three different relationships.

CR: Can you define a housewife for me?
Marion: Housewife or housebound? No, I don't think of myself as a housewife -- I don't give myself a title really -- I'm sort of doing what I can and making the best of what I can do and what I've got. I never think of being a housewife -- I imagine a housewife making tea for her husband when he comes home from work at 5 o'clock. I think a housewife takes care of the children and um, well basically the husband coming home at the end of the day. That's if the men are working and not laying on the settee all day. I think housewives are women with husbands in work I suppose, 'cos then they are in a position to do it, but it's not necessarily the woman's job is it?
CR: Do you think that there is a male equivalent of a housewife?
Marion: In some circumstances there's got to be because there are some kids who live with their fathers but um, we don't see that do we. And when you are the one left doing everything and you don't particularly like men any more because of the way they've left you lumbered. I've never really thought about men as housewives. Yes, I should imagine there are male equivalents as some women run off and leave kids don't they? I think a lot of relationships would last a bit longer if men could see the other side of what it's like as many men are brought up and they are mothered aren't they? When you are used to having it all done for you they assume that when they have a partner they're not going to be equal. Men don't think of women as their equals, as their wives, they're just always being mothered aren't they – when they are kids, when they are in a relationship, when they are married, they are still being mothered the whole time 'cos the woman is doing it.

I consider this account interesting as it refers to how women are oppressed in the home " you are the one doing everything" and to how men do not perceive housework as real work. But most significant is Marion's reference to how men are always being mothered which in her opinion, contributes to women's oppression. She refers to how mothers want to keep their children close to them even in adulthood and this ties in with the findings of Rosser and Harris (1965) and Leonard (1980) whose research on families in South Wales found similarities with this. Marion had lived with three different partners who were all

154

undomesticated and she explained this in term of males being socialised into not doing or thinking of housework as associated with men but were "mothered" instead. Marion regarded women as contributing to the reproduction of gender divisions by their active participation in ideological material practices and by treating boys and girls differently as children. But women would find it exceedingly difficult to change gender socialisation patterns as families are but one agency of socialisation in society besides schools, peer groups, the media and others. Another point of interest was Marion's response to the male equivalent question in which she agreed there were probably some around "as women as well as men run away from their families don't they?" She regarded men as male equivalents or house husbands only in terms of them being lone parents and did not seem to conceive of this happening in a two-parent family. She is assuming (as in popular ideology) that in a two-parent family the woman and not the man is responsible for domestic work. Other women agreed that men should help with certain things but seemed to accept as inevitable the fact that many partners didn't. The next woman is expecting her second child and is due to shortly marry her partner with whom she has lived for some years.

> CR: Can you define a housewife for me?
> Violet: Housewife? Yes, I've got no job description so yes, I'm a housewife and mother, there's no other way to describe it. Yes, someone who stays at home doing housework.
> CR: Do you think there's a male equivalent of a housewife?
> Violet: I don't think there's many but I suppose there can be some. I definitely think there should be. A couple of times I've said to him, "I'll go back to work and you stay at home" but I know he would be bored out of his tiny mind. But when we disagree I say you just think that I do nothing all day". It's the same argument all the time and he says "I know it's not easy" and I say "it's frustrating, it tempers you".

This response is another example implying that men do not perceive housework as "real work" and that these issues can be a source of conflict. Six of the seven women who live with their partners are at home looking after their children whilst the other woman works part-time as a cleaner.

Conclusion

The data has hopefully shown the existence of a gender division of labour in the families of origin of the sample and also within their later family lives with children of their own. The women have explained how gendered childhood socialisation practices contributed to a demarcation in conceptions of male and female roles. They described similarities in their mothers'and their own work histories and how women's opportunities in the workplace are often limited by assumptions of their primary responsibilities as mothers. These assumptions are reinforced by domestic ideology that a "woman's place is in the home". Other women described their experiences of attempting to combine motherhood and paid work which they were unable to do, whilst others explained their work experiences in the informal economy and justified this as necessary for economic survival. Most of the women had been in relationships in which gender inequalities within the home had made their lives more difficult. All described themselves and their mothers before them as primarily responsible for childcare and domestic work and nearly all believed that men's primary role was as the family breadwinner despite the improbability of this concept for working class family lifestyles. To conclude, it appears that all stages of their lives, from children to workers to mothers, have been influenced by gender ideology and gender inequality. There seems to be little doubt that men are traditionally acknowledged as workers in the family whereas women are traditionally acknowledged as mothers first and workers second.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MEN AND WORK

Sociological research has shown that working-class men have been traditionally regarded as the family breadwinners; they bring home the money whilst their wives stay at home and care for the children. Working-class men have traditionally been employed in manual work if we remember the miners, the steelworkers, and the dockers to give some examples. But in recent years much of this type of industry has disappeared (Pahl 1984; Morris, 1990), many manufacturing firms have closed or relocated and there has been a significant loss of manual employment due to these structural economic changes. The resulting increases in male unemployment and redundancies have affected many working-class men and their families. On the other hand there has also been a growth in the service industries. So what do these changes mean to working-class families? How have they been affected by industrial decline? How can it now be feasible to expect people to live in nuclear families whereby the man is the breadwinner when many men no longer have jobs? Are gender roles changing in working-class families due to increased numbers of married women moving into the workforce to mainly fill jobs in the expanding service sector? These are some of the questions that this chapter will address.

This chapter is concerned with working-class men because a fundamental aspect of the argument of this study is that the changes experienced by working-class families in recent years mean that they can no longer be characterised in terms of the role of men as breadwinners. In order to explore these issues this chapter is concerned with the men in the lives of the women I interviewed, namely their fathers, brothers and partners. I wanted to discover the women's opinions and expectations of the roles of men as workers and fathers. I was also concerned with the effects of unemployment on families as half of the women in this study had experienced either their father's or partner's unemployment.

This chapter is divided into three sections; the first concerns divisions of labour within the women's families of origin, the second concerns divisions of labour within their relationships with their children's fathers and the third concerns unemployment and families. I begin with the respondent's families of origin.

Working-Class families and gender inequality

In chapter three I discussed the type of work the women's fathers did and here I focus on the work their brothers did. At the time of interview in 1997, those of the sample who had brothers (nine out of fifteen) stated that they were employed in a range of manual labour including building labourers, scaffolding, security guard, butcher's assistant, the army; the remainder were unemployed. Their jobs showed a similar pattern to those in which the women's fathers were employed -- they were either semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers and most of the women's fathers and brothers had always worked.

When I asked the women their opinions about men's and women's employment, three-quarters regarded men's work as more important than women's especially when men had children. The reasons given were that men were expected to be responsible for the financial support of the families whereas mothers were expected to bring up their children. Another reason was that fathers worked full-time whereas women worked mostly part-time which was considered secondary to housework and bringing up children. Most of the women agreed that paid work was more important for fathers than for mothers. The following account illustrates how the role of the male breadwinner is seen as fundamental to the working-class family. Anita said:

> If you're a man and you're unmarried and haven't got children it doesn't matter if you're in work or not but if you're a father -- like it's the fathers who go to work to bring the money in. I know times are changing but I think it's important for the fathers themselves as well because if they're working they put more into

their children whereas if you're an unemployed father you lose all your spirit to do things -- you know self-esteem. But a lot of fathers they are sort of the back-bone, the ones with a family I mean -- if you choose to be in that situation, the mother, the father, and kids, the father is usually looked upon as the backbone even if the mother's got a job, he's still regarded as the backbone, it's traditional isn't it -- he's still the breadwinner even if the mother is earning a lot more money. He's still seen as the main one.

Another response came from Julie, a young mother of two children who believed it was important for men to work and provide for their families and seemed to accept the traditional roles of working men and domesticated women.

> CR: Do you think it's important for men to be in work?
> Yes it is important for fathers to work because that's expected of them well, I'd say anyway. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned I don't know, but that's what I'd say is expected of a man for a woman to be in the house and the man out to work, to provide isn't it?

Other responses included:

> Sheila: Yes, it is important for fathers to be in work for the money and for their families to have a regular wage. It's important for men to live properly for them to be in work.

> Marion: I think it's important for all men to work -- they should work, they should contribute something you know and if it's not work they should contribute something to making a better life at home. If I didn't have to be in this house looking after children then I'd work -- it's important because I mean I don't think you should take this (dole) money every fortnight if you could work. I don't like that you know, if I could work I'd definitely work. If mothers are financially secure then I don't think it's important for them to work.

This woman believed that her primary role was to be at home with the children and gave this as her reason for being unable to work. Her domestic role restricted her working role but she had an aversion to reliance on the state and, rather than being lazy or feckless, it seems that she is forced into welfare dependency. She believed all men, not just fathers, should work whereas most of the other women stressed the particular importance of fathers being in work. As we have already seen, this contrasts with ideas about mothers and work.

Another respondent had different views on the subject saying some men did not want to work preferring to live on the dole. She believed that a lot of men today, unlike in the past,

159

did not conceive of work as fundamental to their identity and did not feel stigmatised by claiming welfare or dole money rather than working to provide for their families. She saw this as a significant social change.

> Mary: Well I dunno really, if they want to work they'll work, if they don't they won't. I mean there's not a lot of people with working men of my age (twenty-six) young men, you know what I mean. They think it's easier to stay on the dole and sit on their arse all day and wait you know what I mean?

Her view was based on personal experience of living with a man who claimed benefits and "hobbled". She seems to be describing what the last Tory government referred to as the dependency culture whereby the welfare state had stifled the work incentive for many of the population who did not want to work preferring to let the state support them; these ideas are tied in with the "underclass" debate (Murray, 1984, 1990.).

Work is no longer seen as a necessity for some men and this view was echoed by four other women. A small minority (3) of the sample, were in favour of women being the main breadwinner especially if they could earn more than their husbands. One respondent referred to traditional gender assumptions saying, "it doesn't have to be the women staying at home does it?"

As regards issues of men, women and paid work, many respondents appeared to accept the ideology of the male breadwinner and see a father's paid work as crucial to the economic support of their family. Research however shows that most working-class families today are either two-earner or no-earner families and that women-headed families are much more vulnerable to poverty than others so their assessment is fairly realistic. Despite their own experiences, none referred to the need for working-class families to have two earners. In many instances the wife's wage is crucial to the economic survival of the family yet it seems the ideology of male breadwinner is so strong that the majority did not challenge this ideal as inapplicable to explaining working-class families in modern society. They did not conceive

of the material impracticalities wherein working-class men in low or moderately paid work could support a dependent wife and children.

In their view an unemployed man is a drain on resources of all kinds, but an employed man enables women to be mothers, to work part-time and not be dependent on the state.

Partners' paid work

This section is concerned with the working lives of the women's current (and former) partners. As I stated earlier, seven of the fifteen women were cohabiting at time of interview; two were living with unemployed partners whilst the partners of the other six worked as taxi-drivers, factory workers, building workers or were in the army. Only one man was employed in a non-manual job, and was described thus by his partner, "he went to college and everything, he's well educated, got brains coming out of his ears -- good job you know". This man was currently working with computers and was the only one who strongly objected to his partner taking part in this study. On the basis of the interview disclosures made by his partner, it seems he did not want her to take part in case Social Security became aware of their cohabitation whereby she claimed welfare and he worked (this is more fully discussed in chapter eight). This was not an isolated case as some of the women's ex-partners had been doing the same. Another mother of two whose relationship with her partner had broken up said he had never been employed since leaving school, he stole in order to feed his drug habit and never made any financial contribution for her and his two children when they were cohabiting. At the time of interview he was serving a prison sentence for theft. The other partners or ex-partners had either been employed in unskilled/semi-skilled manual work (three had never been employed and had "hobbled" since leaving school) in what are traditionally classified as low paid working-class jobs.

I next analysed the data with regard to the social meanings associated with issues of

161

men and work, I wanted to explore the women's expectations of men and work and whether they differentiated between men's work and women's work. I asked them for their opinions and experiences of men and work.

> Amanda: When I was with my boyfriend he always worked. Work is important for families to have a regular wage.

However an opposing view was:

> Mary: More often than not, and I was with him for ten years, he was not working. He worked for the council once and the wages were brilliant -- you could do something with the wages then but it's different now. Years ago men had jobs but today there are a lot more people who are just lazy and they think, "Oh I'll just wait a fortnight for my dole" and that's it, it's changed so much.

I include the following as a case study because of specific theoretical issues it raises in respect of men and unemployment such as the effects of male unemployment on women within families, poverty within families, and how some unemployed men choose to remain unemployed as a means of avoiding financial responsibilities for their children. This response is from Janet, a twenty-five year old single-mother of one in her second year of study on a language course.

> Um I think they should work if they have kids or not 'cos there are some lazy blokes around who won't lift a finger and want to be on the dole all their life. A lot don't have to worry about the rent and things as it falls on the woman more to see to things. I think it's important for men to work but I think a lot of men these days, if they have got kids or are with a new partner are more likely to stay on the dole not to pay child support. Sometimes they get away with not paying anything. My ex was on the dole and he got away with it. A lot of fathers don't support their kids and just have their circumstances reviewed every six months or so.
> CR: Is work important for their families?
> Yes if the kids gain they should, they could have more clothes or go to McDonald's 'cos it's all money isn't it so yes it is important in that respect for the kids to benefit. But then some men aren't too keen to pass money on are they so I suppose it depends on the individual man.

Janet refers to how some men deliberately avoid their financial/parental responsibilities by remaining unemployed or else going on the sick. She also mentions the effects upon women of unemployment whereby women are assumed to be responsible for the household budget and experience hardship as a result of trying to run a home on a small budget. She refers to

162

"the way some men aren't keen to pass on money" implying that some families do not necessarily benefit from men's employment as some men do not adequately provide for their dependents. Many women and children live in poverty despite their partner's being employed therefore poverty within families is not evenly distributed/experienced in the same way by men and women and several feminist studies have researched these issues (see, for example, Graham, 1987).

Summary

As we saw earlier, most of the women believed employment is important for men, especially for fathers. They considered it is the primary responsibility of a father to be the financial provider for his family and it seems that men cannot carry out their paternal role unless they have the money to do so. The data showed a pattern in male employment as regards working-class men's jobs and manual labour (or no labour) in the working histories of the women's fathers, brothers and partners. Several of the women believed that many working-class young fathers in contemporary society are content to let the state take on their paternal roles rather than work to support their children. Three women explained how their ex-partners used to claim unemployment benefits but also "hobbled" whilst their children were provided for by the state.

Unemployment and family relationships

During the 1980s unemployment began to rise steeply in the U.K. and other European countries and researchers began to explore the effects of unemployment on families as opposed to just focusing on the men who had lost their jobs. Allan devoted an entire chapter in Family Life, to the issue of "Unemployment and Family Life" observing that studies of usually male unemployment "treated the unemployed as individuals and paid relatively little attention to the domestic and family relations of the unemployed" (1985:149). Allan

assembled evidence that unemployment affects people unevenly, being most likely to happen to "those already disadvantaged -- those without marketable skills, those in low paid jobs, the old and the young in the labour force, those from ethnic minorities, the handicapped and the disabled" (1985:147). Elliott details the consequences of unemployment and sub-employment for (1) men (2) women and (3) young people. Elliott later links the impact of unemployment to what has become "the underclass debate" in which the media often portray a lawless underclass of families thus: "In Britain and elsewhere in Europe, the term is used to refer to groups of people "Black" or "White" living on run-down council estates or inner city areas -- who are disadvantaged in a number of ways and who have lost touch with the official world"(Elliott 1996:104). Whilst there is a very wide range of diverging views about the "underclass", even whether it exists, a frequent theme is that the underclass families are typically single-parent, poor, often from minority ethnic groups and often labelled as "deviant" (Bernardes, 1997:83).

I was concerned about the effects of male and female unemployment on the sample and whether it could be construed as a contributory factor to single-motherhood. Research has shown that unemployment has a marked impact on marital dissolution therefore it could also be a factor preventing marriages from taking place (Gallie: 1994: 128). Paul Willis, in a series of articles in *New Society* (1984:475:77) argued that male unemployment dashes the expectations of married life for working-class youngsters because:

> "The meaning of wagelessness for young working-class people is that it disrupts the whole life-cycle from adolescence to adulthood. It jeopardises the dream of a home of one's own and creates instead "a new social state". The consumer power deriving from the combined wages of the young working couple is replaced by a set of dependencies -- on benefits, on Y.T.S. programmes and on the support of parents and members of the family in work"

The findings of the above studies were consonant with the experiences of unemployment that I found in my own study. Four of the five women who had experienced their fathers'

unemployment as children, and later their unemployed partners, all described unemployment as having negative and disruptive effects on family relationships. Unemployment caused economic problems, a drop in living standards, a deterioration in communication between parents and children within families, and feelings of apathy and depression often culminating in rows between parents. Some of the sample said that another negative effect of unemployment was that it gave children the wrong images with neither parent being in paid work. Only one woman considered unemployment as normal and described growing up in a family where neither parent worked. She liked the fact that both her parents were at home when she and her brother returned from school and did not consider this to be unusual or problematic and went on to disparage two-earner families wherein both parents worked but whose children came home to an empty house. She considered the "latch–key" effects to be more detrimental for children than having two unemployed parents at home, in particular she believed that mothers should be at home for the children. Yet parts of her interview seemed contradictory so I have therefore chosen an extract about her childhood experiences of unemployment.

> Mary: Well we never wanted for anything, there was always food in the cupboard,
> we always had clean clothes you know -- things like that in general but we was
> always jealous about what other people had. You just had what you had and you
> was happy, you know what I mean?

This woman considered her parents' unemployment as positive regarding them always being at home for her and her brother but as negative regarding material deprivation within the family as often happens when unemployment occurs. She cited her parents' divorce in response to my question of changes in her family.

> Yes my family did change, my mother got divorced but that didn't bother me 'cos
> it was the best thing she ever done to be honest.

She implied her mother had experienced domestic violence besides years of her husband's unemployment but did not go into detail about it. Other significant facts emerged as the interview progressed including that when younger she had entered into a relationship with a

165

partner who only briefly worked "once or twice" during the ten years she was with him. She became a drug-addict and stole money and possessions from her mother to fund her habit and recently came out of a rehabilitation centre and was waiting to move into a council house near her mother. She said she had put her family through years of hell and wanted to put things right at this stage in her life (she was 26 at time of interview). She said she would never have got through things without the support of her immediate family of mother, brother and step-father but she was adamant about not having or wanting any relations with other family members including aunts, cousins and uncles. In her interview she spoke of life with a father who never worked and later a partner who hardly ever worked; her own experiences of paid work included waitressing, working in a casino and cooking in a café. She could only work as a single-mother because of the help provided by her mother and stepfather, especially her mother. I include her response on issues of men and work. "I mean there's not a lot of people today my age with working men, they think it's easier to stay on the dole". However she seemingly contradicts herself again in a later response on the effects of unemployment and family life:

> Of course it affects families, especially the men. Not so much for a woman but for the man 'cos some men think that they should be the provider in the house. Sometimes it can make a man ill to think that he can't get work. I know people like that. They search the town for jobs but no luck.

This woman is one of four I mentioned earlier who believe that many men today do not want to work preferring to live on state benefits [her opinion seems to be based on personal experience]. Yet alternatively she refers to the importance of work for men; work is important for their self-esteem and to fulfill their traditional / expected role of provider. She thinks that unemployment affects men's psychological well-being but not women's.

Like this respondent, three-quarters of the women in the sample did not consider that women's (or rather mothers') unemployment had any significant effect on family life; in their opinion, fathers' unemployment is the most important as fathers were expected to be financially responsible for their families. As Barrett argues (1988: 56) "the myth of the male

breadwinner is still firmly entrenched".

However a quarter of the sample had opposing views on the importance and effects on family life of mother's unemployment and rejected assumptions of women's primary roles as homemakers. In their opinion mothers' paid work was necessary for their self esteem, and making a financial contribution was seen as necessary for their morale even if not for the family budget. One woman described female economic dependency as "degrading for women".

The reasons proffered for the significance of mothers' unemployment were different to those for fathers' unemployment and I now proceed to analyse these responses. This extract is from the interview of Anita (a single-mother of one child at time of interview but who has since had another):

> I remember my father was terrible when he didn't work -- everyone could feel he was uptight. When we all lived home when my father was out of work he'd go round the house doing the cleaning like a man possessed; he's still like it now -- I thinks, why doesn't he calm down? He'd do the bathroom again he's done it four times lately to pass the time -- not out of enjoyment but out of frustration. Being unemployed affects families moneywise. There was always a pound everyday for us girls when my father worked it was for school but when I went on to the dinner tickets and having no money and everything and when you came home from school he'd be sitting there, it was like treading on eggshells. My mother would say, "Don't speak to your father now -- be quiet, he's a bit fed up". But when he was in work it was different altogether the atmosphere was better and materialistically yes -- then we were ruined, too much really. Yes, I do think unemployment has negative effects (pauses here) it's very hard to stay positive day to day if you're unemployed.

Anita had cohabited for several years but her partner had his own place; they spent about half the week together as they preferred this to living together on a permanent basis. Her partner was unemployed at time of interview (despite making a living by "hobbling"). She presents a graphic picture of her father's loss of self-esteem/lack of purpose in life due to being out of work and how this affects the other family members. She then refers to the money and the material and psychological benefits that employment brings to families, especially for men who can then fulfill their breadwinning role.

In other respects her account of her father's experience of unemployment seems to tie in with research conducted by Wheelock (1990), that some unemployed men are willing to help

167

with housework while their wives are in paid work (albeit out of boredom and a need to pass the time as in the case of Anita's father as she did not say that he liked doing housework). However, these findings are not confirmed by Morris (1984) in her research in Port Talbot, who found that unemployment had little effect on changing gender roles; most unemployed men did not participate in housework despite having the time to do so. My findings are similar to those of Morris (1990) who conducted her research in South Wales as I did.

Janet had lived with an unemployed boyfriend and described her experience as follows:

> Janet: Well it made me decide that I didn't want this for life 'cos I saw the way his outlook to life was and I saw I wouldn't progress I'd be held back so the unemployment decided it for me -- which path I wanted to take. I could see I would have been dragged down so I'd have to do something about it. I think unemployment is more of a problem if you're a woman on your own with kids.
> If two of you together are unemployed then it's like you both have a responsibility to get work and juggle things.

It appears that unemployment contributed to the breakdown of this relationship. Another woman said that living with an unemployed partner caused lots of arguments, a lack of money which led to her "scrounging off her mother" and made life in general hard. She said unemployment causes rows and poverty among families but did not consider women's unemployment to have the same effects on family lives as men's unemployment as men were expected to be in paid work whereas women were not.

Sheila had never experienced her father or partner being unemployed but had witnessed the effects of unemployment on other people's lives, her sister for instance and went on to say that "she could never be with somebody unemployed." She continued to say that her partner with whom she was expecting her second child, could become unemployed through no fault of his own but that would be a different situation, "'cos I know he's the type to get work but I could never be with someone who liked being unemployed and wanted to be on the dole and liked that kind of lifestyle". But then she said she was wrong to classify people as her brother was unemployed and:

> Sheila: There's nothing wrong with him but it's a stigma isn't it? Like if someone asks what does your boyfriend do for a living and you say unemployed then he's looked down on because everybody believes it's the man who should be working. But I would say personally it would be just as important for me to work as my

partner. I wouldn't say that women's unemployment is the same for families as men's because once you've become a mother you stay home all the time so it don't really change does it unless you've carried on working and get laid off because that would change things wouldn't it?

She seems to accept that when women have children they are expected to retire from paid work which comes secondary to their mothering role

Marion, considered it important for everybody to be in work. Her father always worked as did the women in her family and she described her experience of living at present with an unemployed partner as:

> Very disheartening, there's no prospects, nothing to look forward to, everything's the same day in day out, getting under each other's feet. Yes, I think it affects everyone in the family I mean the children don't get the idea of work then and they do pick up on things from a young age and people say things like this don't affect them but it does. If my boys were surrounded by a father who never worked at all they'd think this was normal and was all right for them, they only see what surrounds them.

Her partner had always been unemployed in the three years she had lived with him and did not seem to be trying hard enough to get work in her opinion. Shortly after the interview the relationship broke down and it also seemed that in this case, unemployment was a contributory factor.

The women considered that men's, especially fathers' unemployment, significantly affected family lives in negative ways as men are still perceived as breadwinners. Some of the women did not attach particular importance to single-men's employment but father's employment was seen as desirable for role model reasons, for self-esteem, and especially to maintain their families. Women's or mothers' employment was important in terms of self esteem, a break from the home and the children but not in terms of economic importance in the way that men's or fathers' was. The women considered paid employment was more important for single women than for mothers.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the ideology of working-class men as breadwinner is still firmly entrenched in working-class lives. Working class men are still regarded as traditional breadwinners within the family despite employment restructuring in recent years which has

169

left many without work. All of the women except one had grown up in families where their fathers did manual work and their brothers' employment tended to follow this pattern as well.

They grew up associating men with paid work and women with housework and this pattern was later reproduced in their relations with their children's fathers. The experience of men's unemployment had no effect on gender roles; men did not do more in the home or take over housework-childcare so that their partners could work. Like Morris (1990 :100) I found, "little evidence of male unemployment leading to major responsibility for domestic work, nor even to them taking an equal share".

The findings also showed that a small percentage of the women (3) believed that some men today do not want work and some preferred to claim benefits and work in the informal economy. These views support the "dependency culture" debate which was used to justify welfare cutbacks under the Conservative government of the 1980s. However the women thought that women's unemployment, and in particular, mothers' unemployment, unlike men's, was not considered as important for them or their families.

My next chapter is concerned with the views and experiences of the women on the issues of marriage, cohabitation and divorce.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MARRIAGE, COHABITATION AND DIVORCE

Over the past twenty–five years, major changes have occurred across the Western developed world in areas which lie at the intersection of demography and prevailing forms of living arrangements. Marriage rates have fallen and divorce and cohabitation rates have risen. Women are having fewer children later in life, and there has been a marked rise in childbearing outside marriage at almost all ages (McRae,1999).

Whereas in the past sex and marriage and especially pregnancy, were seemingly related, nowadays there has been a shift in the numbers of pregnant women who do get married. Sex and marriage have uncoupled in recent years and these changing trends have no doubt affected many families in the U.K. and other western industrialised societies. However, much popular opinion assumes that the decline in the social institutions of marriage and the family can be attributed to the increased numbers of single-mother families. Yet central to the argument of this study is that this assumption is incorrect and the objective of this chapter is to analyse the social meanings that the women apply to marriage and cohabitation. As we have already seen, half of the single-mothers I spoke to were actually cohabiting and although many professed to reject marriage, their accounts were often contradictory. Therefore I wanted to explore their opinions of marriage, what marriage meant to them, whether it was important to them or not, whether they rejected marriage and also their views on cohabitation and divorce. Some of the women gave accounts of patriarchal relationships and a desire to retain their own independence as reasons for rejecting marriage, others cited divorce as an inevitable corollary of marriage and some aspired to marriage and were influenced by ideologies of romantic love and fairytale weddings. Others believed that cohabitation is no different from marriage in contemporary society and as a living arrangement it no longer carries the stigma that it did in the past when cohabiting couples were described as living in

sin and their children were stigmatised as bastards. Whereas in the past marriage preceded childbirth and a married couple forming a nuclear family was the socially acceptable way to rear children, things have changed over the years and some of the women considered marriage was no longer required as a badge of respectability in which to live and bring up children. Some of the women considered marriage to be out dated, irrelevant to family life, unimportant for children, and oppressive for women at the end of the 20th century.

Marriage and single-mothers

My sample seemed to be divided on the subject of marriage; half were in favour of marriage whereas the other half were not. Two of the women were shortly getting married so I will begin with the views of those who were positive about marriage starting with Amanda, a 25 year old single mother of one at time of interview but who has since entered into another relationship and is expecting her second child.

> CR. Would you like to get married?
> Amanda: Yes I would marry if I met the right person I suppose, I would then, but not now. I wouldn't think that living together just me and my child would be better than marriage as you'd get lonely. But I'm lucky because I'm back with my parents or I would be really lonely.
> CR. Do you agree with the saying that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?
> Amanda: No I don't believe they do. Lots of people marry for the wrong reasons, they should marry because they love each other but I do believe that divorce is easier to get and it should be harder so that people really know what they want before, that's what I think.
> CR. Do you think women can be happy without marriage?
> Amanda: Yes women can be happy without marriage, they can be happy living together or cohabiting that's the posh name for it now isn't it? But as I said, surely they'd want somebody, somebody to cuddle or they would be lonely.
> CR. Can men be happy without marriage?
> Amanda: Yes I think they could, they could go out whenever they wanted to, out drinking.

Amanda's reply stressed that she thought that women on their own would be lonely and she believes that marriage is more important for women than men. She also believed

172

people should marry for love and not for other reasons.

The next respondent offered a contradictory opinion on marriage which I have included in some detail because of the issues and contradictions she addresses. This woman had been in a long-term relationship with her child's father who was in prison and the relationship was over.

> CR. What is your opinion of marriage?
> Mary: Marriage? I think it's just a silly bit of paper that when it's signed everything you've got is his and everything he's got is yours when there's no difference – nothing -- like if you were living with someone for years, is just like being married, you know what I mean, it's just a bit of paper.
> CR. Would you ever like to get married?
> Mary: Now to be honest yes, I'd like to get married, to have the big day, the dress and the bridesmaids -- but other than that I wouldn't want to get married. I'd just like the big day but that would be it for me.
> I think living together is easier if things go wrong, it's easier to finish things but if you're married there's all that shit of divorcing.
> CR. Do you agree that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?
> Mary: (laughs) No, not at all -- it would be nice in an ideal world but no it don't, no, not at all. I do think that love is the most important reason to get married, not for the kids, that's all wrong. I mean if you truly love each other then yes, why not get married, but I don't believe that love and marriage go together, no, I don't believe that at all. I don't think marriage is important for kids, it would be nice to have a happy family and home but it never happens, yes it would be important in my life. If I ever got married I would marry someone if I truly loved them and thought things were going well. But like I say, things would go wrong -- I mean it's natural isn't it?
> C R. Can women be happy without being married?
> Mary: Of course they can. I'm happy aren't I? (laughs).
> CR. Can men be happy without marriage?
> Mary: Yes, yes they can -- no commitments then and they can do what ever they want to.

However despite what they say, both these women do think that love and marriage go together -- both say that if you truly love someone you should marry them but not for other reasons. This is the romantic ideal. They also think that men can be happy without marriage because they would not have any responsibilities and could "do whatever they wanted to". The next response came from Diane a single mother of one who had previously been in a relationship with her child's father which she described as casual and non-committal on his

behalf. I asked her if she would like to get married.

> Diane: No I wouldn't intend getting married, there's no point these days is there? I dunno, if I met someone nice but I'd have to be with him for a few years to see what he's like first, I wouldn't rush into it and I just couldn't get married if I was pregnant, I know people who've done that but I wouldn't.
> CR. What is your opinion of living together?
> Diane: It could be better because there's no real commitment, you can just walk away and marriage is just a piece of paper that don't mean anything.
> CR. Do you agree that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?
> Diane: No, I wouldn't agree with that, for some yes, but for others no. I do think that women can be happy without marriage -- a man isn't everything.
> CR. Can men be happy without marriage?
> Diane: Yes they could, they like to go out you know.

Diane seemed to be sceptical about marriage by saying that there was no point in it and seemed to be cynical about entering a new relationship; the failure of her first relationship had probably made her mistrustful of men. She did not think that pregnancy justified getting married and thought that living with someone "involved no real commitment" and was easier to dissolve than a failed marriage. She, like the other women so far, said that men like to go out implying that their views on marriage included the belief that men felt tied down by it.

Sheila who has a 6 year old child and is expecting another from her second relationship, aspires to marriage.

> CR. What are your views on marriage?
> Sheila: Well I'd say a lot of marriages don't work out But I hope I'd only get married once. I think a relationship can work just as well without marriage as often a marriage can go wrong. But yes, I'd like to get married but not because of being pregnant. If we had the money we'd get married now but at the moment we're buying a house as well.
> CR. What do you think of love and marriage going together like a horse and carriage?
> Sheila: I've never heard of that, is it a song? I think you should marry for love not for the kid's sake, that's wrong, you should marry if you love someone. I don't think marriage is important for kids but it's nice for them to live with people who are close together. Marriage wouldn't really be important now as I'm young but I think it would be later on.

174

Despite research showing increasing numbers of young people opting to delay or eschew marriage, it is still taken for granted by most young women as a normal and inevitable part of their lives (Lees, 1993, Sharpe, 1994). Although there is some ambivalence here as "settling down" might mean losing out on freedom and dependence, and young women now hope for greater equality and autonomy in their marriages. Also there's an idea here that marriage is an event -- you marry for the "big day" which costs money. Yet the rest of the marriage package including houses, babies, parenthood, and other associated responsibilities are perceived as somewhat alienated or separate from the events of the "big day".

In her study of marriage conducted in Swansea in the 1970s, Leonard (1980) asked the girls in her sample when they had decided to get married and they said they could not remember a time when it had not been a consideration (cf. Lees, 1985:85). Leonard found that "love" was cited as the reason to marry and that the white wedding was cited as the only "proper" (albeit costly) way to get married. She goes on to explain that girls tend to marry due to the lack of alternatives; they are torn between marriage or "being left on the shelf". Marriage was hardly a positive choice, since no socially acceptable alternatives were available. It was expected to be an event over which young women would have negligible control: a spontaneous love relationship based on "true romance" (1980:54)

Some of my sample however thought that marriage was not the be-all-and-end all for women when I asked them, "Can women be happy without marriage?"

Susan: Yes a lot could be happy without marriage, most women could, all of us could.

Julie who had been living with her two children's father for nine years said:

> I would never get married. I don't know why but it's something I wouldn't do. I'm quite happy as I am. No, I wouldn't marry the kid's father, I'd never get married. I've never really thought about it but I just don't want to. Living together can be better in some ways as you've still got your independence, still your own boss. But some men think they own you as soon as you get married
> CR. What do you think of love and marriage?
> Julie: I suppose it could work for some people but not for everybody.
> CR. Is marriage important for children?

Julie: I wouldn't say it is now, perhaps when they're older but I wouldn't say so now. It's not important for me at all.
CR. Can women be happy without marriage?
Julie: Yes I'd say women could be a lot happier without being married 'cos like I said, a lot of men think they own you when you get married.
CR. Can men be happy without marriage?
Julie: Yes I suppose they could but most men look for a mother don't they?

Julie seemed to think that marriage implied an oppressive relationship in which men regarded women as their property and she gave this as one reason for not choosing to get married. She believed cohabitation was different in that women could still retain some independence which in her opinion was important. However three years after this interview Julie had formed another relationship from which she had another child. She married in December 2000 and is now expecting her fourth child.

The next account comes from Marion, a single-mother of three from three different relationships, who explained her three different relationships as attempts to find the ideal family so often depicted as the cereal packet family of mother, father and young children.

CR. What do you think of marriage?
Marion: I think marriage is lovely but it's funny 'cos when I think about marriage I automatically think of divorce. A marriage is supposed to be a commitment forever but I can't imagine ever being together for ever without getting divorced.
CR. Would you like to get married?
Marion: No, not now. I don't want to get married now or in the future. I'd like to see myself going to work in the future, no involvement with any man, the kids will see then and know that you don't necessarily have to have a dad around. I'd like them to be proud and not ashamed that they haven't got their fathers around and I don't even try and imagine that happy family stuff any more, all that nonsense went out of the window a long time ago. I often think people are foolish when they get married, I know it's not the same for everybody but no, I don't want to get married, it's not important for me.
CR. Could living together be better?
Marion: Yes it could, as it would give you a chance to get to know each other rather than jumping in at the deep end and causing each other a lot of emotional stress afterwards.
CR. Do you think that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?
Marion: Love and marriage? Well the horse can't have any shoes and the carriage can't have any wheels because marriage is all up and down like a roller coaster really. You can love each other without getting married nobody needs to get married now -- that's going back years to

176

the Catholic church, it's all down to the Bible that is 'cos it's not reality is it? Mary and Joseph didn't sign on the dole, things have changed like, it's important to the older generation but not to the younger generation.

CR. Is marriage important for children?

Marion: No, I don't think it is any more and it would be silly to think so when so many children are brought up now in single parent families whether by the mother or the father. It's not important to them, I know lots of married people who would be the same if they were living together, it's just a piece of paper and it don't make you happy.

CR. Can women be happy without marriage?

Marion: Yes I think they can and they could be happy without children but it's all put into your head isn't it that women are meant to have children but we're not. Because you're a woman it does not necessarily mean you've got to have kids. I wish I'd thought of all these questions you've been asking me when I was young -- I wish somebody had knocked on my door with information about single-parents and let me listen to their answers and I can honestly say I wouldn't have had any. No, I wouldn't have had any at all 'cos it's not fair on children is it 'cos people have children for the wrong reasons but only now I knows it.

CR Can men be happy without marriage?

Marion:Yes, as long as they've got their mother, definitely, 'cos they've got to be mothered haven't they?

CR Do you agree that it's a man's world?

Marion: A man's world? Yes it's true isn't it. That's exactly how it is, yes, a man's world. They have an easy life compared to women, they can always go out and it's not them that sticks with the kids. Yet if women go they are called everything, it's like with sex, if you're a man you're a stud but if you're a woman then you're a slag.

This ties in with lots of other research referring to the double standard in relation to women and men's sexual behaviour. Barrett (1988:70) argues that the question of the double standard is frequently perceived in terms of a link between sexuality and procreation and is more forcibly maintained in the case of women than of men. She continues by saying that although sexual activity has never been restricted to procreative ends the ideology that it should be restricted in this way has tended to vary. As far as women are concerned, sexual relations, pregnancy and marriage or a stable relationship, are all assumed to be connected whereas casual sex for men is not discouraged

In answer to my question of whether she would do things differently if she could turn the clock back, Marion stated that she would not have had any children. Marion summed up her life by saying she was a bitter woman who had been stupid in not seeing what she was

getting herself into when younger and interpreted her life experiences in terms of personal inadequacies rather than understanding them in terms of social factors such as gender and class. Dorothy Smith's study, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1984) would be ideally suited to understanding Marion's life experiences in terms of gendered structures of oppression and a feminist standpoint theory which begins with women's lives. Marion would no doubt then be able to reinterpret her life in terms of social and personal factors. She was critical too of gender socialisation in which working-class women are socialised into motherhood as a career, "it's all put into your head at an early age about having kids".My next respondent, Anita, was critical of how motherhood is portrayed as natural and instinctive throughout society and, until she became a mother herself, was susceptible to this maternal ideology.

> CR. Is being a mother what you expected?
> Anita: No it's not what I expected, no, 'cos you have this vision when you have your first child of what you're going to be like as a mother, you know of dressing your baby all nice and things being all nice but it's not you know. Sometimes I have these thoughts, like they say being a mother comes natural but I don't think it comes natural, it doesn't. Sometimes I think to myself I'm not normal because it's not all coming naturally I haven't got this instinct, something's wrong. But when I've said all this to my mother and said that this (motherhood) is not really for me and I often want to walk out that door she says, "Oh don't be so soft!"

These issues led to deeper discussions between Anita and myself about ideologies of motherhood and the practical realities of motherhood. Anita said she never realised how hard it was being a mother and also how hard it was to voice criticisms of motherhood as not being fulfilling and natural in a society in which women are assumed to be naturally maternal. I asked her what she thought about marriage.

> Anita: Marriage? To me it's just a piece of paper, it's just a technicality really of having the same name, you don't need it to give stability to your child. No I wouldn't get married (laughs) it's a waste of money, I'd rather spend money on a deposit for a house or some furniture if we ever did marry. No, we've never discussed it but no, I don't think I'd want to as to me it's a pointless thing and times have changed, there's no need to marry first now if you have children, it's not important any

more. It's just traditional that's all.

CR: Do you think that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?

Anita: Love and marriage? (laughs) No, I don't necessarily think they have to go together, you could love someone without marrying them no, there's loads of couples who have been together for years without marrying. Years ago it was the done thing but times have changed.

CR: Is marriage important for children?

Anita: Not now, not in this day and age, maybe 20 years ago when there was a stigma attached to children whose parents were not married, they called them bastards, but I don't think my son will come home and ask us why we're not married when he's older.

CR: Can women be happy without marriage?

Anita: Yes because you're your own person, you don't have to tell him where you're going all the time like married people do. Me and John are a couple but we don't live in each other's pockets, we're together but we have our own space [her partner spends some of the week in his own flat as this helps their relationship to survive]. He doesn't dictate to me nor I to him but this is what happens when people marry, it becomes **my** wife and **my** husband. I don't want this in my life.

Anita went on to describe her partner's parents' marriage as unhappy which she attributed to an oppressive relationship in which the husband dominated the wife who had to account to him for all her movements and had no social contacts outside of her immediate family. Anita said, "no wonder she was always on the booze". She said their oppressive relationship had helped to put her off getting married as she could never live like that. She was also influenced by the breakdown of many of her relatives' marriages.

CR: Do you think men can be happy without marriage?

Anita: Yes I think so, if they're gay they won't marry. No, I'm only joking. But look at my brother, if they have their own interests and careers they don't want to marry, I suppose it's up to the individual, but I don't think my brother will ever marry.

Another respondent, Kylie, when asked if women could be happy without marriage said

Yes I think they can be happy (laughs) I think they're happier, they've got control over themselves then.

It seems that issues of women and control are significant to this discussion about marriage and have cropped up often. Many women feel the need to retain some sort of control and independence in their lives, especially those who have experienced living with irresponsible men and now choose to live without them.

Cohabitation and divorce

In recent years cohabitation has become widespread in society and, according to McRae, (1993) rates of cohabitation have grown to encompass about 1 in every 12 couples, with the tendency being to treat cohabitation as no different from marriage. "The continuing growth of cohabitation in Britain -- before marriage -- between marriage -- and instead of marriage -- encapsulates the depth and breadth of changes in peoples behaviour and attitudes towards sexual morality and living arrangements" (McRae, 1999:16).

According to a recent study of men and women in six British labour markets, the large majority of women in all social groups begin to live together or get married because they are in love (the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative). Although various reasons were given for setting up home together such as pregnancy, or having enough money to set up an independent household or even a trial marriage, three quarters of S.C.E.L.I's (Anderson, Gershuny and Bechhofer, 1994) female respondents gave love as their main reason for cohabiting (which is the reason given by the women in this study). Half of the women in my sample were cohabiting despite defining themselves as single-mothers and I wanted to find out what cohabitation meant to them and what reasons they gave for cohabiting. I wanted to find out if these women had chosen to cohabit as an alternative living arrangement to getting married or whether their cohabitation was just temporary and a precursor to marriage. The majority of the women believed that cohabitation was no different at all from being married apart from the legal technicalities of marriage and that the marriage certificate was just a piece of paper which was meaningless. The women considered cohabitation to be a more favourable way of life than marriage as it no longer carried any stigma, involved no commitment and was easier to walk away from than a failed marriage was. However, contrary to the women who believed that cohabitation involved no commitment I consider that some cohabiting relationships can be likened to serial monogamy

180

and do involve commitment as research studies have shown. In 1993, Susan McRae carried out a study entitled "Cohabiting Mothers" to explore this major social change and found that cohabitation rates have increased across North Western Europe, with the highest rates to be found in Sweden and Denmark. She also found that many long-term cohabiting mothers are poor (the survey estimates that one-quarter live in households with no one working). Three particular reasons for not marrying emerged: the cost of the ceremony, a fear of divorce, and for some, the desire to remain independent. However the lives of cohabiting women were largely similar to those of their married counterparts and, over time, there was a steady flow into marriage. I now discuss the women's views of cohabitation. The following are some responses I received in answer to my question: can you tell me what you think about living together?

> Well I think living together is just the same as being married to somebody -- there's no difference apart from being legally married.

> There's no real commitment is there in living together. He couldn't go out with the boys if you were married but living together is different 'cos he's got no ties.

The next respondent however believed that cohabiting did involve the responsibilities and commitment of marriage:

> Marriage is only a bit of paper really and sometimes when you've got a ring on your finger they think they own you but no, living together has the same responsibilities, same things, kids and whatever, still living as man and wife, there's no difference.

Another woman favoured cohabitation in preference to marriage, having been influenced by her friend's and others experiences of oppressive marriages.

> With living together there's no real commitment, you can just walk away, marriage is only a piece of paper, it don't mean anything. My friend said it's the same, she's divorced now, he was too possessive and she had enough of "where you going?" You know what I mean.

Cohabitation is one dimension of changes occuring in contemporary family life; divorce is

another. In Britain, as in other Western societies, especially with regard to household and family formation and dissolution, there has been significant change in the divorce rate. In the late 1960s, there were some 50,000 divorces per year, which represented a little over four for every thousand marriages. The Divorce Reform Act, 1969, which took effect in the early 1970s, led to an increase to 120,000 divorces per year in 1972 (9.5 per 1,000 marriages). Since that time the rate and number of divorces has steadily increased, so that in the mid 1990s there were almost 160,000 divorces, a rate of 13.7 per 1,000 marriages. Given a continuation of these trends, it is likely that roughly half of all the marriages taking place in the late 1990s will end in divorce (Allan, 1999).

Although none of the women had been married and could therefore not speak from experience, three quarters were of the opinion that most marriages would end in divorce and this was cited as a major reason for being cynical of, or professing to reject marriage, in favour of cohabitation. Some women had experienced their parents' divorce, whilst others cited relatives' and friend's divorce as a basis for their opinions. Yet the parents of the four women who did divorce either remarried or began a cohabiting relationship. Divorce can be likened to the end of one relationship but the start of another (Fletcher, 1988).

Conclusion

The findings suggest that as far as half the women were concerned, the social institution of marriage has declined in popularity and importance at the end of the 20th century: many regard it as an out-dated concept and irrelevant to contemporary family living arrangements. It appears that the social meaning of marriage has changed because many women defined it as "just a piece of paper" which, according to them, conferred nothing special upon a relationship. Others defined marriage in terms of possession, "they think they own you" which implied inequality and male control of women whereas previously marriage seemed to mean a partnership, which offered stability and commitment. As regards "love

182

and marriage going together like a horse and carriage" and despite being criticised by many of the women, love is the major reason for getting married as opposed to pregnancy or rushing into marriage. Others however seem to agree that love and marriage have been replaced as bedfellows by divorce and marriage. One third of the women did not consider pregnancy as a sound basis for marriage, which contrasts with the numbers of shot -gun marriages of the 1960s and 1970s when many pregnant girls (and their families) felt that they "had to get married". I suggest this is an encouraging sign as I agree with the women who regard pregnancy as the wrong reason to get married. Some women stated they did not want to get married although the white wedding and all the trimmings appealed to them and they quite cynically expressed a desire to experience "the big day" but that was all. Others based their decisions not to marry on their own failed relationships, which made them wary about future relationships. Most of the women interpreted marriage as a meaningless/pointless piece of paper but failed to account for the advantages of marriage. For example, when marriages fail, the children's fathers are obliged to maintain them and women are entitled to a divorce settlement. However these arrangements give fathers more rights over their children than fathers in failed cohabiting relationships.

In cohabiting relations the circumstances are different and women are not so fully protected by the law. Some of the women considered marriage to be an unequal and oppressive institution for women, in which they did not want to participate. But similarly to the S.C.E.L.I. (Anderson, Gershuny and Bechhofer, 1999) findings that most women cohabited for love most of the sample, although professing to reject the partnership of love and marriage, agreed that love should be the basis for marriage. Cohabitation was considered by half the sample to be preferable to marriage in that it involved no commitment and was easier to walk away from than marriage if things went wrong. I have discussed these implications earlier on and will not repeat them. The findings showed that marriage is no longer considered important by these young women while cohabitation seems a more

preferable living arrangement although there are differences in the duration and the sense that some view cohabitation. For example, two young women out of my sample of fifteen, were shortly getting married, and one woman who declared she would never marry has done so since the interview showing that for these women cohabitation was only a temporary stage in their lives. Four of my sample thus remain in cohabiting relationships whilst seven remain as single-mothers living alone with their children. But for all I know, some of these remaining seven may be in different relationships now or some may even be married as it seemed that cohabitation, although favourable, was not advocated as a permanent living arrangement by the women.

These findings throw some light on why many of the women defined themselves as single–mothers. If they did not, the state would expect their partners to financially maintain them and their children which, as we have heard from some of the women, does not always happen, as some men do not provide for their children. It may be that some women who draw on bad experiences of men and relationships believe that having control over their own lives is necessary and in such circumstances, the state is their only option. It seems that the State's expectations that men will maintain their partners and children is a contributory factor in the increased number of single–mothers today. Many men cannot / will not maintain their families hence many women claim as single–mothers despite cohabiting in order to be in control of their own finances.

I now proceed to the penultimate chapter which concerns an evaluation of the lives of the sample. It includes their opinions on whether the assumption that single mothers are a social problem is justifiable and their reactions to media, social and political critiques.

CHAPTER NINE

WITHOUT MEN AND MATRIMONY

Single-motherhood is common to most western industrialised countries but there are certain factions within British society who seem unwilling to recognise this implicit family change and continue to denounce single-motherhood as an undesirable status and an unsuitable way in which to bring up children. Since the 1980s single-motherhood has allegedly increased and the numbers of children being brought up in families without fathers has been severely criticised by politicians and the media. Thus the number of never married mothers increased five fold between 1971 and 1992 and never married mothers represent about one third of all lone mothers (Allen and Bourke–Dowling 1999:311). However, these statistics mask the fact that about half of the recent group of never married mothers were in cohabiting relationships before becoming lone mothers. This ties in with my findings on single–mothers; many were cohabiting before (and since) becoming pregnant.

This chapter, therefore, is concerned with the women's responses to criticisms that single-mothers should not be bringing up children in families without fathers. In this chapter the women challenge political and media critiques of single-mothers as feckless and irresponsible and respond to right-wing ideologues who advocate that the "proper" family in which to bring up children is the nuclear family of male breadwinner and dependent wife and children despite this type of family being in the minority. In Britain, less than a fifth of women are wholly dependent on a male breadwinner (Charles, 2000:191). The women in this sample who live alone with their children explain why they are living without men and why they consider this preferable to living with a partner. They discuss how patriarchal ideologies, gender inequalities, and the irresponsible attitudes of men contributed to their decisions to bring up children without fathers.

In her research on the inner city riots of the mid 1980s in various parts of Britain, Beatrix Campbell investigates how anti-social behaviour, vandalism, racism and unemployed youths are involved in these riots. Campbell argues that the "irresponsible" behaviour of young, unemployed men who father children but do not care for them reflects the domestic absenteeism of "respectable", middle-class men: the only difference she says, is that whereas the latter can use their employment to sanction their absence, in areas where few are in work "Men's flight from fatherhood has no hiding place" (Campbell, 1993:201).

Lynne Segal (1990) has developed similar arguments. She claims that the criminal violence which characterises the behaviour of some groups of young men is a product of a society which "constructs masculinity around ideas of dominance, social power and control over others, but then denies to some men any access to such prerogatives" (Bryson,1999: 207). These authors do not share the views of Dennis and Erdos (1992) on the irresponsibility of working class youth and some of the issues that they discuss emerge in the findings of this study.

The first section of this chapter concerns definitional issues of patriarchy and the women's experiences of patriarchal relationships, the second focuses on fatherhood and women's reasons for bringing up children without fathers and the final part is an evaluation by the women of their lives as single-mothers, and their responses to media and political criticisms of single-mothers.

One of the reasons for the increased numbers of single-mothers, according to right-wing commentators, is that gender roles are changing and patriarchy is being undermined; in the good old days women knew their place (which was in the home) while men, and not women, were heads of the family or the breadwinners on whom their families depended. Yet according to most of the women in my sample patriarchy is very much alive and kicking and affecting their lives. So where is the evidence of the decline of patriarchy and a rise in women's autonomy, as seemingly epitomised by single-mothers?

186

In order to find out I asked the women about their relationships; their views originated from two sources -- from their own experiences and those of friends, peer-group and family members. I did not use the term patriarchy as the women might not have understood it, but in the light of their answers, the definition of patriarchy that I developed involved male domination of women and, in two cases, domestic violence. With reference to patriarchy as male domination of women, five cited it as a factor which influenced their decision not to commit themselves to new relationships after experiencing patriarchal relations with their first partner. Three women had experienced oppressive relations and two had experienced patriarchy as domestic violence (Walby, 1990). Many of the women spoke about the high incidence of patriarchal relations among their social circle and they considered that relationships tended to suffer and as a consequence women had two choices; they either remained in oppressive relationships or else could end them and live alone with their children. However I suggest these issues are not as clear cut as the women imply; theoretically women can walk away from relationships but in practice many are constrained by a lack of money and/or job, and a place to live and circumstances are especially difficult when children are involved. In order to explore further the theme of patriarchy I asked the women whether or not they agreed with the saying that it's a man's world; three-quarters of the women agreed as demonstrated in the following responses.

CR: Would you agree or not that it's a man's world?
Violet: Yes, definitely it's a man's world -- it's men who bring in the money
and the women who bring up the kids and it's the women who are undervalued.
I think that's the reason why men are thought of as the superior sex isn't it?

Mary: Yes, that's right. I wouldn't get married because they think they
own you, don't they? It's like it becomes **my** Mrs.

Kylie: Yes, yes definitely -- men have got it all ways haven't they
know what I mean? A man can leave a woman when she's pregnant
and she's got to get on with it. If they want to go they'll go -- they will,
there's nothing you can keep them with. Children won't stop them
going -- I don't mean all men, but I've experienced that haven't I?

Other women however disagreed with these views especially 18 year old Kelly who, despite calling herself a single-mother, was soon to marry her child's father who was in the army. "No it's not a man's world" and this view was echoed by 26 year old Anita, a mother of one child, "Not any more but it used to be -- maybe about 20 years ago, but not now". Other responses were:

> Marion:Yes, men are very selfish -- they can get away with more or less anything. Men play the field, well that's O.K. everyone just says "Oh he's a bit of a lad" but if women do it they are called slags. This is the way things are isn't it?

> Anita: It used to be a man's world but since Maggie Thatcher it's changing. It used to be the men who went to work and the women who did all the cooking and helping out and the women's things -- but no, it's changing now -- women are in Parliament, in Government, in education. No, it's changing -- it's all changing. Yes I'm happy about the change 'cos women should have equal rights and a say in what they want -- they shouldn't be the dogsbody for men to wipe their feet on. It used to be that men got paid more than women and probably women used to do twice as much as men. Maybe men don't like it now but there's nothing they can do about it.

Susan, a single-mother of two, drew on her own experiences of domestic violence from a former relationship with her children's father who was now in prison, to illustrate her answer to whether it is a man's world.

> Yes, I think so,'cos my argument to that question is that I think most of us women have only been put in this world to be abused by men -- I'd say used and abused.

Some respondents believed women were acquiring more equality due to women's increased participation in the labour market compared to years ago. They interpreted these employment changes in terms of women's freedom from the home but did not appear to conceive of gender inequality within the home such as the sexual division of labour which, combined with paid work, added to rather than lessened, women's work load (Morris, 1990).

Some of the women thought that things were changing in women's favour and most of them perceived men's and women's lives as both different and unequal. A few women spoke of their experiences of patriarchal relations which had made them cynical about getting

involved in new relationships. One woman said she preferred to be alone as her two prior relationships had been oppressive. It appears that some single-mother families can be interpreted as a rejection of patriarchy and male dominance rather than evidence of a rejection of the family (Roseneil, 1994).

I also wanted to explore the women's views of the media and political pathologisation of single-mothers as "deviant and dysfunctional families". Much public opinion generally shares the view that the children of working-class single-mothers will grow up to be the next generation of deviants and delinquents or else the next "underclass" (Murray 1990; Dennis and Erdos 1992). There is, however, little evidence that lone mothers make inadequate, irresponsible parents. For example, a study by Kinsey cited in Silva (1996:303) directly contradicted the Dennis and Erdos (1992) findings that fatherless children inevitably become criminals. Kinsey found that children from lone-parent households, dependent on welfare actually committed far fewer crimes than those from lone-parent households in employment.

So did the women think that such criticisms were justified? Should they be bringing up their children in families without fathers? What were their reasons for doing so? What did they have to say about fatherhood? What did they consider were important issues and priorities regarding their children's welfare? The responses to these issues are as follows and should provide more accurate insights into the situations of single-mothers than those provided by the media.

Do children need fathers?

A major critique of single-mothers is that they are depriving their children of the benefits of a father figure and male role model. Before proceeding, I should remind the reader that despite defining themselves as single mothers, seven women in this sample were cohabiting with their children's fathers which exempts them from accusations of paternal deprivation as well as exempting them from swelling the ranks of single mothers in society.

189

Of the remaining women, one was living with her parents, and the others were living alone with their children. These women did not consider that their children were deprived of a father figure because they were in regular contact with either their grandfathers and/or their uncles and considered that the children's (maternal) grandfathers acted as surrogate fathers which could only be beneficial to them. This supports the findings of other research on adolescent mothers which describes how various male family members act as surrogate father figures to children in single-mother families: "multiple fatherhood is the rule rather than the exception in adolescent–mother families" (Gershenson,1983:591) My research however tended to show that the children's paternal grandfathers generally saw their grandchildren on access visits only therefore contact with them was minimal, their mother's male relatives were much more involved with them.

I asked the women what they could tell me about fatherhood but several replied that they found this a difficult question and four admitted they could not answer the question. Charlie Lewis (1986) argues that we are in a period of reassessment of fatherhood. Fatherhood is not what it was and fathers are losing their traditional roles as authority figures, disciplinarians, the bridge between the outside world and the family, the breadwinner. In increasing numbers they are literally losing their place in the family, living apart from their children. This changed state of affairs is the product of a wider complex process of demographic, economic, social and cultural change. Other authors concerned about fatherless children, argue that "families without fatherhood are destroying communities and society" and they advocate the male breadwinner family as the proper way to bring up children (Dennis and Erdos, 1992).

However as far as the nuclear family being the best way to bring up children, some women pointed out that many children in two-parent families did not spend time with their fathers because many men worked long hours, worked away from home, could be in the forces, or simply did not spend any quality time with their children. They considered that

under these circumstances, and because in most families children usually spend most of their time with their mother, there was not really much difference between most two-parent families and single-parent families.

Others stated that children living in two-parent families had no guarantee that both parents would be committed and responsible parents and cited the high number of divorces in today's society as evidence of marriage breakdown (although there is a high rate of remarriage in today's society as well). Others went on to describe their experiences of living with irresponsible men who were not good role models for their children who were said to be better off without them. I asked the women how important it was for children to have their fathers in their lives. The following quote comes from Janet, a single-mother of one who works part-time and is currently doing a course in Welsh to improve her employment prospects.

> I think they [children] should know who their fathers are but in my case, in the situation I was in, if I'd stayed with her dad she [her daughter] would have been worse off -- I have progressed a lot more since I'm not with him and he wasn't supporting us anyway. They should know their fathers in case they put them on a pedestal -- they should know what they're really like in case some may resent their mothers for not letting them have contact with their fathers. I think it's right for them to know their fathers but it's not always right for them to live with them. Kate's father didn't want to know her before, it was me he wanted to see, not her, so it had to be sorted out legally. He now sees her once a week but in the beginning he didn't want to, know what I mean?

Another woman said:

> Marion: I think it's far better for us all especially the children that he's [the father of her third child] not living with us 'cos if you have two people who aren't the most confident and stable of people, well, as I said children learn what they live so they're better off without him. And maybe if he had been working things wouldn't have been so bad 'cos then he wouldn't have been here all day watching and looking at everything. It's important for men/fathers to be doing something and contributing something.

191

This woman explained how unemployment had affected her partner's ability to be a proper father as well as contributing to the breakdown of her relationship.

The next reply comes from Sheila, a single-mother of one who is in another relationship and expecting a child from this relationship.

> CR: Are you concerned that Fay's real father doesn't live with you?
> No, not at all -- he wouldn't have been a good role model for her at all.
> My boyfriend does things for her, he's like her real father.

Research has found that: "the biological father can be a disruptive force that hinders the young mother's attempts to achieve an ordered and stable environment for her child. These disruptions can be direct, as in the case of the drunken father, or indirect as in the case of the absent father who sends no child support" (Gershenson, 1983:597).

My next respondent has two children from two different relationships but her oldest child lives with his father whilst her second child lives with her and her current partner. "If the child's father is a good influence then he should be around but if he's a bad influence then no."

The next quote I have chosen to include comes from a single-mother of one who is not in any relationship but did live with her child's father for 18 months before returning to her parents. Amanda thought that:

> Well in some repects I do agree that children need a mother and father
> But until you bring them up on your own you don't know. You are
> mother and father to the child, know what I mean. Like I'm lucky
> because my father he's like her father really for although she sees her
> father once a week he doesn't play a big part in her life. But I dunno,
> they say children seem to thrive better when their mother and father are
> together, but then, if you're not happy together the child will suffer at
> the end of the day so I don't think a mother and father always
> necessarily make a happy family if they're not getting on so sometimes
> it has to be better for the child to live with one and not two parents. It's
> hard, but rows upset kids.

The evidence is conflicting. A.J.Halsey (cited in Dennis and Erdos 1992) believes that children of lone parents are more disadvantaged than children brought up in two–parent families: they tend to die earlier, to have more illness, to do less well at school, to suffer

192

more unemployment to be more prone to deviance and crime, and, finally, to repeat the cycle of unstable parenting from which they themselves have suffered. But Judith Stacey (1994:59) sums up the evidence very differently from Halsey and says that most children from both two-parent and lone-parent families turn out reasonably similar when factors such as parental resources, income, education, self-esteem and a supportive social environment are considered. When these are similar in both types of families, "signs of two-parent privilege largely disappear" (Stacey, 1994: 60).

Some of the women agreed that it was important for children to have a father figure in their lives such as grandfathers and uncles but did not consider it important for children to live with their biological fathers. They considered that men who were irresponsible or not likely to be a good influence despite being the biological father, should live apart from, but maintain contact with, their children. Two children however never saw their fathers at all. Most women believed that children were not necessarily better off in a two-parent family unless the relationship was happy and stable. They believed that living with two parents in an unhappy family was likely to have negative effects on the children.

My next questions concerned the problems and difficulties involved and whether the women could cope with the responsibility of bringing up children alone. The data on these issues was interesting for two particular reasons. Half the sample were not bringing up children alone as they were cohabiting with their children's fathers and second, they agreed that single-mothers were mainly capable of bringing up children alone with the exception of teenage mothers who, they considered, could be irresponsible. Some women had never experienced bringing their children up on their own so what was the basis of their affirmations? Perhaps the following responses will shed light on these issues.

This respondent is a 26 year-old single-mother of two children from two different relationships but at time of interview was living alone with her children as both relationships

had broken down. However she did not regret this and said she preferred the independence

from male control that she now had by living without a partner.

> CR: Can single-mothers bring children up on their own?
> Kylie: Yes, single-mothers can fetch kids up on their own. If a relationship
> ends I think the mother should have the children -- nothing against fathers,
> even if they've been good fathers, but I think a mother is more for the
> kids than a father. Like in schools when Mother's day comes, the kids
> make cards but they don't for Fathers day; they sell little presents at the
> school. The kids don't make cards so it's obvious that mothers are the most important.

This woman spoke of having regular support and help with childcare from her parents,

especially her mother whom she saw nearly every day. Another woman told me:

> Tricia: Yes they can if they're strong enough I suppose but then I
> couldn't see a problem if they were strong for their child. Like I said
> before, I would never stay in an unhappy relationship with a child. I
> would rather be on my own and happy -- as long as we were all happy.

This respondent was engaged to her child's father and expecting her second child.

The next woman is 27 year old Susan whose former partner and father of her two

daughters is in prison,

> Yes -- well I'm doing my best -- I know it's not easy, but at the end of
> the day I'm just like any other single parent, I can do things for the kids
> that their father can do and even though they are without him I still
> think I am doing good anyway.

This response came from a 27 year old who defined herself as a single-mother despite

cohabiting with her son's father.

> Mandy: Yes they can bring children up because the majority of single-
> mothers I know have got mothers and fathers so the kids look up to
> their grandparents anyway. Most kids I know call their Grandpas
> "Grandpa-dad". I've got my brother to keep Alex [her son] in line
> when his father isn't there so yes, I think single-women can bring kids
> up on their own.

This is a somewhat contradictory reply because although it implies that single-mothers can

bring up children alone they are reliant upon their families as support networks for them and

their children. Male kin are important to provide role models and discipline. Therefore men

are important and it is not only women who provide support for single–mother families. Anita, who was in a relationship at the time of interview and has since had another child said:

> I think single-mothers living on state benefits can bring them up but
> can't give them all the material things they'd like. But single-parents
> who work can give more financial things. Yet someone I know just
> buys her child loads of things but never hugs them or anything like that.
> She probably buys all those things to compensate but I think it's more
> important to show them they're wanted -- to express yourself.

This reply refers to the material hardship that single mothers face and also to this woman's views of substituting material possessions for emotional closeness.

My next question concerned whether fathers could contribute anything to parenting and childcare that perhaps mothers could not. The majority of women said there was nothing much men could contribute but considered that men were necessary for the following reasons.

> Mel: A man–to–man talk isn't it? The same sex tends to go to the same sex; the girl to the mothers and the boys to the fathers but a woman can do exactly the same. If my son wants to ask me things I'll tell him, "don't be shy 'cos I'd rather you know."

> Kylie: In some cases yes (pauses here). Like as I say Kevin goes to school and sometimes comes home and says, "My friend Jim's father takes him to the park to play football". But it's just school chit-chat isn't it, kids talking among themselves, but that way they do miss out, 'cos it's like so and so has a Daddy so why haven't I got one? I tell him that you don't need a Daddy 'cos you've got Grandpa but it's things like playing in the park with their father and fishing that they miss out on. But these two have been all right so far.

Summary

As the above discussion demonstrates most of the women believed single-mothers were able to bring their children up responsibly although several emphasised that they needed family support to do so. Other women considered that poverty, rather than the absence of men, caused problems. The women were unanimous as regards the mother being the most important parent needed by children and were not prepared to accept the accusation of not being responsible enough to bring up their children alone. They all agreed that their children were their main priority and that they were doing their best for them and one woman said she

had started saving for when her son goes to college. They received significant levels of support from male and female kin networks.

Stereotypes

The final section deals with single-mother stereotyping and assumptions about single motherhood such as political claims that single-mothers choose pregnancy as a route to welfare benefits and council houses. None of the women explained their transition to single-motherhood in these terms and they were all highly critical of these assumptions about the formation of single-mother families. These findings tie in with those in McRae (1999: 350). The following are a selection of responses to my question: Do you agree with what the press says about single-mothers?

> Sheila: No I do not agree that single-mothers are irresponsible – they are caring to keep the kids with them. They could give them up and put them into care and how much would that cost the Government? Many would like to work but it's not a viable option at the moment for many who want to be with their kids when they are young. And anyway where are the dads? Why doesn't the Government chase them up? What about the C.S.A -- what's that for? The Government doesn't differentiate between single-mothers, it pigeon-holes everybody. We're all the same to them but we're not. Some are not good mothers who don't look after their kids I suppose but we're not all like that. The Government does not treat us very well; I'd like to be out of the situation but it's not that easy. Lots of men out there don't support their kids but everything gets shoved on the mothers. And if some single-mothers are working then that's not always right. "What about their kids people say, is it fair for them to have mothers in work?"

The next response came from Marion, a single-mother of three whose relationship with her third child's father had broken down shortly before the interview. She was most annoyed with the media stereotype.

> It's disgusting really, rubbish, tabloid rubbish. Where do they get their information from? Children today don't all come from married families and not only poor kids go off the rails. People from all walks of life can be single parents and even people high up, their kids can go off the rails -- it's a cheek. And if they don't want the kids turning out like they say to be criminals, then leave them do more for single-mothers instead of slagging them off. It's a load of rubbish about council houses and benefits -- I don't think I'd go through childbirth and have a lifelong commitment to a child just for that. Are they taking magic mushrooms or what because I've never heard such

196

bullshit. You don't have to have a child to get a house, you can get a flat off the council or get a bed-sit somewhere or you could get a sugar-daddy couldn't you? Oh yes, I'm sure I got pregnant to have a house with draughts from every door, creaky floorboards in all the bedrooms, a kitchen so small you can't sit in it and a bathroom you can only go in one at a time.

This woman is referring to the condition of the council house in which she and her children live and, contrary to reports that single-mothers are easily provided with council houses, it seems that some of this housing allocated to single mothers can leave much to be desired.

Diane said:

If some women do have babies for houses and benefits then they are a tiny minority and have to be a bit thick.

Yet another said:

Anita: Anyway, what about single-mothers who do work? The government are saying we are all the same but I've got less money now since I had Jack -- I had more when I was working so I'm sure I wouldn't have had him to be worse off, would I? I'd love to be able to do a course on childcare if facilities were available, this is what they should help us to do -- they say all single-mothers don't want to work but some haven't got confidence -- I think Oh God I can't do that but some women go so deep into themselves -- they've got no confidence to do anything. And you don't regard housework and bringing your child up as working like when you're talking to people who are in paid work -- you just feel that yours isn't a proper contribution don't you? But when you're at home for years bringing kids up you do lose your confidence and I suppose some women haven't even heard of C.Vs. It's not as easy as they make out for women to go back to work

I have chosen to include the following extract in relation to women defining themselves as single-mothers despite cohabiting as it has implications for the argument of this study concerning the alleged increases of single-mother families in today's society and also explains why some women were reluctant to participate in the interviews. This woman is a 26 year old mother of one child aged six who has lived with her partner for the past few years.

Mandy: They're tarring us all with the same brush. There may be some women like that and men 'cos men are just as bad -- we may say white lies and tell them that we're living on our own but we have our boyfriends with us.My boyfriend tells me I may be claiming but I'm not a single-parent really. I'm not the only one who does it -- most of the population does it but um -- I didn't set out to become a single-

197

parent. I lived with my mother for a long time after Billy [her child] was born -- I didn't just drop into a house like that. I went to the homeless to live for five months with Billy, I didn't want my own house, I didn't want to move out of my mother's because I didn't think I'd be able to cope -- I wasn't old enough -- I broke my heart when I had to move. I didn't get pregnant thinking, "I'll have a house". I was working, I loved working. I don't think the government's description of single-mothers applies to me. I'm not promiscuous, I never have been. I don't invite blokes to my house willy-nilly and I don't jump in and out of relationships. I've been with Billy's father since a few months after Billy was born although getting pregnant was the last thing on my mind. But I think some get pregnant, some are living in unhappy homes or are in the homes [in care] and they may think the solution is to get pregnant and get a house to get out of it. They [the government] say we are all the same. I admit I am claiming but what they say about single-mothers does not apply to me.

This woman's account of claiming benefits while cohabiting is significant because it raises questions about the extent to which other so called single-mothers are doing the same thing.

The final section of this chapter deals with an evaluation of single-motherhood by the women and whether they would change anything about their lives. I asked the following question: What would you do if you could turn back the clock?

The responses were practically unanimous in that nearly all the sample said they would have had their children later in life if they could return to their former single-woman status. The women explained their responses as due to the discrepancies between the harsh realities of motherhood and the misleading maternal ideologies of motherhood together with their experiences of patriarchal, oppressive relationships. Nearly all agreed that motherhood was not an easy option and said with hindsight they would have deferred motherhood. So contrary to public opinion about single motherhood, although it may be gratifying in some respects, it is far from the bed of roses it is portrayed to be. These views however contrast with the findings of Phoenix (1991) whose study on young mothers found no wish amongst her sample that they had deferred motherhood until they were older.

198

Conclusion

Most of the women agreed it would be preferable for children to be brought up by two parents but there are often reasons why this cannot happen. The women explained why some of them are bringing their children up without fathers and their decisions were based on what they considered to be in the best interests of their children. One woman said she rejected and did not want to live with her child's father despite being pregnant, describing him as "unstable and unsuitable" as a father. She considered that it was in her child's best interests not to have this man living with them. Others talked about selfish and controlling men, men who did not take their paternal responsibilities seriously, men who did not work, one who took drugs and went to prison leaving his partner to care for their two young children. The women's accounts of why some of them prefer (or had no choice about) living as single-mothers suggest that their decisions were responsible and were not decisions made by feckless and irresponsible persons.

In response to the previous Conservative government's stereotype of single mothers as feckless, irresponsible, promiscuous and parasitic on the welfare state all the women declared that these assertions were without foundation and bore no resemblance to any of their individual circumstances. As I have discussed above, many women define themselves as single-mothers when claiming benefits due to the need to retain some financial independence because they are often unable to be, or do not want to risk being financially dependent upon men.

Most women thought that the stereotypical single mother who became pregnant for houses and benefits was nonsensical as were allegations that they did not want to live with their child/ren's fathers. On the contrary, we have heard that some fathers did not want to live with them, although five of the women chose not to live with dominating, or unfaithful and irresponsible men.

The women felt that the government merely tarred all single-mothers with the same brush instead of acknowledging that they were not a homogeneous group but individuals whose circumstances differed in many respects. What did characterise the situations of the women who were living alone with their children was poverty and welfare dependency. This was often the result of factors preventing them from taking up, rather than rejecting, paid work as I discussed in chapter three. One-fifth of the women believed that a small number of women might have become pregnant in order to escape unhappy or abusive family relations or because they were young and naïve. They thought that some single mothers could be irresponsible but explained these as most likely to be teenage, or younger single-mothers in the16-20 age group. They differentiated between categories of single-mothers unlike the media stereotype. Nearly all (three-quarters) of the women said that, given their time over again, they would have had their children later in life and had reached this conclusion with the belated benefit of hindsight, and the actual experiences, as opposed to the ideologies, of motherhood. All the women appeared to take their maternal roles and responsibilities seriously and all considered their children's welfare as their main priority. Other findings about irresponsible partners tie in with the research of Dennis and Erdos (1992) on irresponsible working–class youth who are not ready to be proper fathers. However, whether this is due to "ineffective socialisation" as the authors claim or other social factors such as unemployment and low paid work which prevent working–class men from acting out their role as "proper", social fathers, is debatable. According to Sean French cited in Moss (1995) "while what fatherhood was is fairly clear, what it might become is less so. The traditional model of fatherhood is part of a social and economic structure that is vanishing".

I now draw this research to a conclusion and discuss the main themes to have emerged from this study including the theoretical and practical implications for single motherhood in the 21st century.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

This study was concerned to test the hypothesis that single-mothers are not evidence of the decline of the social institutions of marriage and "the family" but rather depend on the family as support networks for them and their children. In order to test this hypothesis I chose to use ethnographic research methods of semi-structured interviewing and participant information because I considered this was the most appropriate way to explore the life experiences of the fifteen women in the study. I have discussed these methods previously and will not do so again but I would like to mention what I consider were the positive results achieved by these methods, such as the quality and depth of the data I collected, the establishment of good rapport with several of the women, and the ability to empathise with their situations as a result of social factors such as gender and class which I shared with them. Central to this study was a consideration of the idea that the male breadwinner family is functional for society and single-mother families are dysfunctional, therefore it was necessary to examine theoretical and empirical studies on families in order to explore why the ideal of the patriarchal, nuclear family is so dominant in our society.

A major theme of this study was the effects of socio-economic change on families so I explored the working histories of the women, their parents, their partners and I also considered the effects of unemployment on family lives which, despite altering the structure of families, did not seem to affect traditional gender divisions of labour. Another theme was how structural inequalities such as gender and social class had significant effects on the lives of these women.

One of my significant findings concerned the difficulties involved in defining single-mothers. Inadvertently this study has used three different definitions: the state's definition of single-mothers as women who are bringing their child/children up without men; my common sense definition of single-mother as synonymous with unmarried mother and the sample's

201

definition of single-mother as women who are unmarried despite cohabiting. These definitional issues highlight the problems of assuming we know what a single-mother is. There were similar definitional problems with the family which highlighted the difficulty in assuming that we know what a family is.

I now discuss the findings of this study and the main analytical themes which emerged. All the chapters show evidence of gender inequality in the lives of the women which began with their families of origin and which I now summarise. This will be followed by a discussion of theoretical and policy implications for single-mothers.

Family findings

A major finding of this study was that the male breadwinner family was not the typical model of family life in Westlands although it had been for many of the women's parents. The majority of the women explained how their fathers had always worked in manual labour and were considered to be the breadwinners despite the fact that most of their mothers also worked when the children reached school age. Some mothers who were unable to work in the daytime because of lack of childcare worked in the evening when their partners returned from work and were able to mind the children. A factor making the male breadwinner family inappropriate as a model for family life for some of the women was unemployment; five women lived with unemployed men who were unable to be the breadwinners. Although aspiring to this model of "the family", none of the women were able to achieve it due to their varying material circumstances.

Other findings to emerge related to similarities in the working histories of the women and their parents; their fathers, brothers and partners (except one) were manual workers whilst their mothers and the women themselves (except one who worked with computers) worked in jobs generally known as women's work such as cleaning, factory work and care-work. Along with the continuity of these work patterns, like their mothers, the women were assumed to be

responsible for domestic work as well as paid work Despite the inadequacy of the concept of the male breadwinner family to explain how families lived on Westlands there was evidence of a firm commitment to a "traditional" sexual division of labour in this working-class community. Most of my sample believed that men should be in paid work and women should be at home and it seemed that two factors in particular were helping to maintain the division of labour; ideologies of gender roles and ideologies of masculinity and feminity. Also there were moral issues to be considered such as whether mothers of young children should leave their children to go out to work. This study has found evidence to suggest that familial and gendered ideologies are passed on inter-generationally through families; women are largely perceived as and perceive themselves as doing unpaid women's work whereas men are perceived and perceive themselves as doing paid men's work. These ideologies and the acting out of these ideologies contribute to keeping many women at home, they also contribute to the perpetuation of gender divisions between men's work and women's work whereby "proper" men are not expected to help with domestic work as the accounts by various women in this sample have shown. Some of the sample thought that women were responsible for perpetuating these ideologies through gender socialisation processes in which their male and female children are generally treated, and expected to behave, in different ways. These gendered and familial ideologies contribute to legitimating or justifying the inequalities between men and women and the perpetuation of traditional gender divisions of labour.

This study has also found that attempts to explain family life in terms of "the family" are impractical for the above reasons and because of the many different types of families in contemporary society. Britain is a multi-cultural society with a wealth and proliferation of diverse family forms caused by divorce, by remarriages, by couples eschewing marriage in favour of cohabitation, and single-mother families.

The findings from chapters three and four about the working lives of women and men

have revealed that the sample have experienced gender inequality in their domestic and working lives. The women's fathers only participated minimally in domestic work and their mothers had to cope with a dual burden of domestic and paid work; only three of the women's partners helped in the home yet more help was given with childcare although three men never participated in this at all.

Before I discuss the findings on single-mothers I need to point out that rather than undermining the family, all of the women (except one) agreed that families were very important for them and their children and then could not imagine living without them. They stressed the emotional, financial and practical support that they received from their families especially from their mothers and most had regular (weekly) contact with their parents. Many of the women aspired to a nuclear form of family life although certain factors made this unachievable, such as the inability of their partners to support their families on the wages of manual employment which, except for the most skilled workers, are usually low. One woman explained how her partner had a day job and an evening job to support them while other women spoke of the negative financial and psychological effects of men's unemployment on families.

The women did not believe that families were declining but that families had changed in recent years due to divorce, cohabitation, and labour market changes in which more women than before were in paid work. These accounts relate to my hypothesis in which I suggested that family lives were changing in accordance with other socio-economic factors but family life was not necessarily declining. One woman, Violet, spoke of her grandmother's concern over one major social change which was cohabitation. She could not conceive of Violet being an unmarried mother who was cohabiting and expecting another child; Violet's grandmother believed in the importance of marriage and was concerned that motherhood without matrimony was not the acceptable or proper way to live.

Contrary to much public and media speculation about single-mothers being evidence

of the decline of the social institutions of marriage and the family this study found no evidence of this. Neither was there any evidence of single-mothers becoming pregnant in order to obtain social housing and welfare benefits. The women in this study were not an homogeneous group; their lives and circumstances differed in many respects, and pregnancy was not a rational strategy to scrounge social security and jump the housing queue.

In chapter one, the findings revealed varying reasons for the women becoming pregnant which ranged from not thinking about the consequences of unprotected sex: one woman became pregnant while taking contraception, another left off the pill due to migraine, another "could never imagine herself as a mother" and Marion became a single-mother three times as a result of being subjected to the influence of romantic ideologies of finding Mr. Right and playing happy families. Another woman, Janet, spoke of "always knowing she was maternal and wanting children from an early age" suggesting the effects of gender socialisation and maternal ideologies.

Some women became single-mothers as a result of being left by their former partners, two men were in prison, while another woman left her partner because of his infidelity. Other women became single-mothers because they chose not to live within oppressive relationships with controlling and/or irresponsible men and thought that they were better off without them.

The women did not consider that they were undermining the family and some pointed out that many families were unable to aspire to the male breadwinner model of family life. Furthermore it was not seen as typical of most of society despite being held up as the ideal type of family within which to live and bring up children. The women stressed that many different types of families existed in today's society besides the married, two-parent family.

In response to media and right-wing speculation that single-mothers prefer dependency upon the state to paid work this study revealed that certain social factors need to be considered in respect of these issues. The reasons given by the women for not being able to work include a lack of state provided childcare, low paying jobs, part-time jobs, social

attitudes and beliefs regarding the roles of mothers and a sexual division of labour in which assumptions of women's primary roles as mothers limits their opportunities to take paid work. Women are also segregated into low-paid gendered jobs and are constrained by ideologies of motherhood and domesticity which influence their decisions and attitudes to work and to working mothers. One woman did not want to work while her children were young believing that it was more important for her to be with her children and this again demonstrates the relevance of gendered moral rationalities to women's decisions about paid work.

Some women in this sample have/had partners who do not help in the home and are influenced by ideologies that women's place is in the home while men's role is in paid work; the ideology of the male breadwinner is firmly entrenched among these working-class men despite social factors which make this role unsustainable for many of them.

As regards cohabitation as a significant social change, half the women in this study were cohabiting and all were in relationships before becoming pregnant. Seven women however thought that marriage had declined in importance and was not relevant to their or their children's lives any more unlike in the past. Those who were not in favour of marriage described it as meaningless or oppressive for women whilst those in favour thought that love was the main reason for marrying as opposed to pregnancy or marrying for the children's sake. Cohabitation was regarded as no different to marriage by half the women and preferable because it involved no commitment and was easier to get out of than a failed marriage.

None of the women had intended to establish autonomous, female-headed families and the findings showed that they strongly disagreed with the media stereotype of single-mothers as feckless, irresponsible and promiscuous yet, as we have heard from the accounts of some women's relationships, this description could be applied to some of their partners. Most of the women believed that it would be better for children to grow up with two parents in a happy family but that the male breadwinner family did not necessarily guarantee this. None of the women thought children would benefit from being raised in unhappy families or

206

families where domestic violence occurred. The women took their maternal responsibilities seriously and considered that their children were their main priority, but all agreed that single-motherhood was not an easy option. They all believed that children needed their mothers more than their fathers although the help given by male relatives with their children was considered to be most important; the women were not dismissive of the roles of men in the family as much speculation has alleged. I now turn to the theoretical implications of this study.

A major finding concerns the number of women who define themselves as single-mothers while cohabiting with a male partner. This has implications for the alleged increase in single-mothers in society and also for assumptions that cohabitation or a marriage–like relationship "should" involve women's economic dependence on men. I discovered that despite all fifteen women defining themselves as single-mothers, half of them were not single-mothers as they were in cohabiting relationships and not living in autonomous female-headed households. This raises the question of how many single-mothers actually are living without men. It also has implications for the assumption that the increase in single–motherhood is evidence of family decline. It seems that we have a situation whereby for purposes of economic survival these women see themselves as single-mothers despite living with a male partner. Of course my sample is extremely small and these findings may not be generalisable, but at the very least they raise questions about the reliability of official estimates of the increase in lone-mother households and point to the importance of investigating the changing social and economic circumstances which lead women to prefer financial dependence on the state to dependence on a man.

A further implication for future family theorists concerns problems of defining the family in terms of male breadwinner and dependent wife. The analysis in this study has shown the limitations of this concept as a means of explaining modern families although, at the same time, it still has considerable power as the ideal or norm against which women

207

measure their family lives. I now turn to a discussion of the policy implications for single-mothers.

Gittins (1993) argues that "state policies are heavily influenced by patriarchal ideology presupposing inequalities between men and women, and they have reinforced the ideal of family solidarity, if not the reality". This raises questions about how the state, through the operations of the social security system, constructs social categories such as single–mothers: in order to survive and maintain their independence and ability to look after their children, many working-class women have to define themselves as single-mothers. It also questions the assumption that the "best" form of family is one where men provide for their wives and children; in the circumstances in which many of these women were living this was neither possible nor desirable. I suggest that the state contributes to the formation of single-mother families by expecting men to be financially responsible for women. Many women claim as single-mothers despite living with a partner because they cannot take the risk of not being in control of their finances due to their responsibilities for their children.

Many single–mothers are at present caught in the benefits trap. They want to work but for this to be financially viable they need to earn considerably more than their benefits which are withdrawn if they take full-time work; part-time work is not enough to sustain a living wage. The fifteen pounds earnings disregard could be increased which may provide more of an incentive for many women to take up paid work. The state could also provide more child-care facilities as a means of enabling more women into work and perhaps future policies should be more flexible in regarding women as both mothers and workers rather than basing policies on assumptions of women as being either mothers or workers. Many women want to combine both roles without feeling that they are neglecting their "primary" roles as mothers. Future policies should be women inclusive rather than exclusive and should consist of a series of initiatives or combined packages of state welfare and work to enable single-mothers into work; this is of course what New Labour advocates. However their policies

presuppose that women will be workers first and mothers second which does not take into account the moral rationality underlying women's decisions about mothering and paid employment.

To conclude this study I hope I have shown that the women in this study do not fit the media stereotype of feckless young women and that single-motherhood occurs for various reasons. The women do not perceive of themselves as undermining the family, indeed several hold family values very similar to those promulgated by the right-wing commentators who claim that single-mothers have rejected the family. The women stress the importance of families although half of them consider that marriage is no longer important in their lives. None considered single-motherhood as a permanent way of life, half are cohabiting, one has married, and if their plans have not changed, another two women have also married.

The diversity of families in contemporary society needs to be acknowledged but we must also distinguish the ideology of the family from the social reality of how families organise themselves today. Families are families whether they consist of one, two or three generations, whether partners are cohabiting or unmarried, whether they contain parents who work or parents who do not, or whether families are headed by single-mothers. I hope this study has shown the weakness of the patriarchal breadwinner family as a model of family life yet the strength of the ideology that sustains it, and the continuing importance of families to women who are bringing up children as single–mothers.

Appendix 1

Interview Schedule.

This interview is concerned with the lifestyles and experiences of single mothers.

As you probably know, there are often reports in the press about single mothers, but what I

want to do is give single-mothers "a voice", I want you to tell it like it is, because you are

in the situation, not those who write in the press. Everything you say will be completely

confidential, I am not interested in names and addresses, and if there are any questions you

do not want to answer then just tell me and they will be left out. If there is anything you do

not understand tell me and I will explain it to you.

I would like to start with some general questions about school, work and housing.

1.   First all, can you describe your accommodation for me?

> Do you live in a flat?
> Do you live in a house?
> Do you live in shared accommodation?
> How many rooms are in the house?
> How many rooms are in the flat?
> Do you share any rooms with anyone else? i.e. a kitchen or a bathroom?

2.   Is your accommodation owned or rented?

> If rented, is it rented from?
> A private landlord?
> A local authority?
> A housing association?

3.   How long have you lived here?

4.   How many people live here with you?

> Number of adults?
> Ages of adults, including yourself?
> Who are they?
> Sex of adults?
> Are any of them related to you, and in which way?

5.   How many children do you have? Are they all living here?

> Number of children?

Ages of children?
Who are they?
Sex of children?
Are any of them related to you, and in which way?
Do you have any other children who live elsewhere?

6. What sort of accommodation did you have before you lived here?

How long did you live there?
Did you live with anyone before you lived here?

7. Have you got a job?

If yes:
Explore what sort of job, what it involves, whether it is full or part-time, child care arrangements, length of time worked there, do you like it, have you done any other type of work

8. Have you had a job since you became a single mother?

If not, why not?

9. Has anything in particular prevented you from working?

10. Would anything have made it easier for you to get a job?

11. At what age did you leave school?

12. Did you have any qualifications?

13. What are they?

14. Have you taken any educational or training courses since you left school?

If yes:
What were they?
When did you do them?
Where did you do the them?
Did you get any qualifications?
If no:
Would you live to take any courses in future? What sort of courses and why?

Thank you for that information, it was very helpful.

1. Now, can you just describe to me what it's like being a single mother?

2. How did you become a single mother?

Prompt whether this had anything to do with a failed relationship, a desire perhaps to leave home, to be independent, first time sexual experience, ignorance/lack of

contraception, a desire to become a mother, a rejection of family life, or whatever other reason.

3.   Is being a mother what you expected it to be?

If not, why not?
What did you expect?

4.   Has becoming a mother caused any particular changes in your life?

5.   Do you encounter any problem because of being a single mother?

a) Any financial problems?
b) Any emotional problems?
c) Any problems coping with the children?
d) Any problems of isolation?
e) Any relationship problems?
f) Any family problems?
g) Any health problems?

6.   Is your boyfriend (or ex-boyfriend) the father of your children?
If no,

Do you ever see the father of your children?
Do they all have the same father?

7.   How do you feel about this?

8.   Does this cause any problems for you?
If yes:

In what ways?

9.   Have you any friends or neighbours who are single mothers?
If yes:

Explore whether there is any interaction between them, any socialising, friendship networks, childminding, financial or other sort of assistance.

10.   Do you consider this helpful?

11.   Do you depend upon it?

I'd like to talk to you now about your family. Perhaps you could tell me about your family

Who does it consist of?
Has it always been the same?

12.   Can you tell me who worked in your family when you were a child?

13. Explore who worked, mother, father, or both, brothers, sisters, who did what job,full or time-time, whether there were any different attitudes to mother and sisters working as opposed to father and brothers working?

14. Are there any other single mother's in your family?

15. Can you tell me who did the domestic work in your family? When you were a child. Prompt for whether mother or father did the following jobs.

Cooking
Cleaning
Shopping
Washing up
Washing clothes
Ironing
Bed making
Gardening

16. Did your brothers and sisters do any of these jobs?

Cooking
Cleaning
Shopping
Washing up
Washing clothes
Ironing
Bed making
Gardening
Running errands

If not, why not?

17. Were your brothers treated differently from you girls?
If yes, how were they treated?

17. Would you define your family as an ordinary/normal one?
Why/why not?

18. Would you describe your family as a happy one?
Why/why not?

19. Do any members of your family live near you?
If yes,

Who?
Where do they live?

20 How often do you see them?

21 Do you get any help from them?
If yes:

Explore what the help involves
Financial
Childcare
Domestic
Material
How often is it given?

22. Who gives this help?

23. Do you expect anything in return for this help?

24. What do you think about families?

25. Do you think they are important? To whom?

26. Do you think families are in decline?

27. There's a lot to talk in the press about children needing a mother and a father, what do you feel about this?

28. Do you think there is a right way to bring up children?

29. Are you bringing yours up like this?

30. Is there any difference between the way you are bringing your children up and the way you were brought up?
Why/why not?

31. Something else that is often mentioned in the press is family values. What do think these are?

32. Do you think these are important
Why/why not?

33. While we are still on this subject, can you tell me if you see any of your children's fathers' family?
If yes:

Who do you see and when?

33. Do you get any help from them?
If yes:

Explore whether it is financial
Childcare
Domestic
Material
How often it is given
Who gives what

34. Is this help given because you are still with him / or have any contact with him?

35. If you are not with your child's father and neither have any contact with him, do any of his family see the child/children or give any help?

And now to finish this section, can you tell me how your children are treated by,

Neighbours
Friends
Other children
Relatives
Teachers

And also how you are treated by,

Neighbours
Friends
Other women
Men
Family
Teachers
Doctors
D.H.S.S officials

Can we talk about housework now, and who does the housework?

36. If you live alone, does anyone help you with the housework?

    With cleaning
    Cooking
    Washing up
    Washing clothes
    Ironing
    Shopping
    Bed making

37. If you have a boyfriend, does he do any housework for you?
    Why/why not?
    If yes:

    Explore what he does and when he does it.

38. Do you think of yourself as a housewife?

39. What do you think a housewife is?

40. Is there a male equivalent?

41. Should there be?

42.	Do you agree with the saying, "a woman's work is never done?"

43.	What you think the term motherhood means?

44.	What do you think about women who work and bring up children?
	Women who work part-time
	Women who work full-time.

45	Can you think of anything that makes it difficult for women to work?
	Prompt for childcare arrangements, lack of provision, lack of jobs, low paying jobs, benefits would be affected.

46	Can you think of anything that makes it difficult for single mothers to work?

47.	What do you think the government's attitude towards women's employment is?

48.	What do you think the government's attitude towards mothers' employment is?

49.	Do you think that women are capable of doing any job?

50.	How important do you think it is for women to be in work?

51.	Is it important for their families for them to be in work?

52.	Do you think a lot of women today work "off the cards" and why?

Well, that's enough about that, now we can go on to talk about men and work.

53.	If you have a boyfriend is he working?
	If yes:
	Prompt for what sort of work, how long for, full of part-time.

54.	Does he give you any financial assistance?

	a) whether he is in work?
	b) Whether he is out of work?
	c) Regularly, sometimes or never

55.	If you have no contact with the father of your children does he still maintain his children?
	Prompt for how does he see the children, does he contribute financially?

56.	What do you think the term fatherhood means?

57.	How important do you think it is for men to be in work?

58.	How important do you think it is for fathers to be in work?

59.	Is it important for their families for them to be in work?

60. Have you ever lived with an unemployed boyfriend or father or brother?
If yes:
Prompt for what effects this had on their lives, and in what ways.

61. Have you experienced unemployment yourself?

62. How do you think men being unemployed affects families?

63. How do you think women being unemployed affects families?

64. Do you think that women being unemployed affects relationships?

65. Do you think that men being unemployed affects relationships?

66. What do you think the government's attitude is to men's unemployment today?

That's all about work; the next part is about relationships.

67. Are you at present in any sort of relationship?
If yes:
Prompt for what sort, sexual, platonic, how long for, with the child's father or someone else, how it finished.

68. Is your boyfriend living with you?

69. If your child's father does not live with you, how do you feel about this?
Prompt why/why not does she care, do the children care, any effects on the children

70. If your boyfriend lives with you, what does he do in relation to the children?
Does he take them out?
Does he wash, cook, feed or bath them?
Does he play with them?
Does he discipline them?
Does he leave it all to you?

71. Who is the main child carer?

72. Does your boyfriend just help?

73. Do you think it is important for children to have a father figure in their lives?
Why/why not?

74. Do you think that men can contribute anything unique to child rearing?

75. Do you think that single mothers can bring children up adequately on their own?
Prompt for whether children miss out in any ways, feel different or are made to feel different from others, get spoilt by their mothers, need a father figure around

That's all on this, now let's go on to the part about marriage.

76. I'd like to know what you think about marriage?

77. Would you ever want to get married?
Why/why not?

78. Would you ever marry your child's father?
Why/why not?

79. Are there any particular reasons you have not married?

80. Is living together better than being married?
Why/why not?

81. Is living alone with your child better than being married?
Why/why not?

82. What do you think about the saying, "love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage?"

83. Do you think marriage is important for children?
Why/why not?

84. Is it important for you?
In what way?

85. Do you think that women can be happy without being married?

86. Do you think that single mothers can be happy without being married?

87. Do you think that men can be happy without being married?

88. Do you think there is any truth in the saying, "it's a man's world?"

Well that's almost the end of the interview, but would you briefly answer these last few questions for me?

Is there anything you would do differently if you could turn back the clock?

How do you fell about the way the government describes single mothers in the press? i.e. as reckless, irresponsible, promiscuous and incapable of bringing children up properly?

Does this description apply to you?

Does it apply to anyone?

I would like to thank you for your time and cooperation and that's the end of the interview. Would you like to add anything?

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