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**'Working at it': context, relationality and moral reasoning in
narratives of fathering beyond couplehood**

**Thesis submitted for Doctor of Philosophy award
Department of Social Policy and Criminology**

31st March 2010

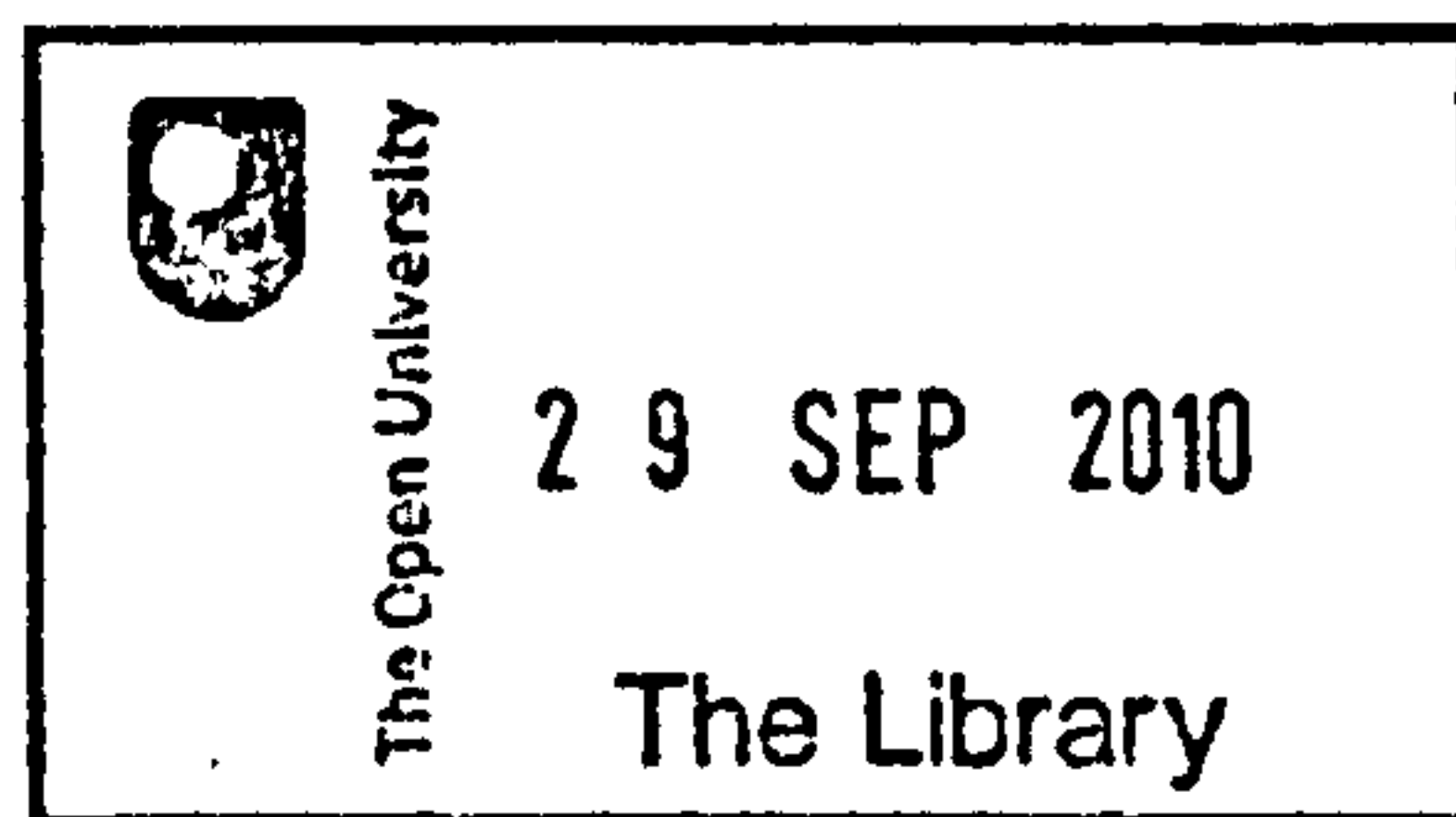
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‘Working at it’: context, relationality and moral reasoning in narratives of fathering beyond couplehood

Abstract

This thesis supports earlier research suggesting that new contexts of fathering can bring ‘transformative’ experiences of care. At the same time, however, it also demonstrates the persistent ‘pull’ of a gendered model of parenting, which can normalise different and unequal levels of caring responsibility without disrupting a sense of the equal moral status of fathers and mothers. The research involved a qualitative study of previously resident, biological fathers’ accounts of fathering after divorce or separation, focusing on 23 fathers who have maintained contact with their children over time and across households. The study entailed in depth interviews with fathers who were fathering in a range of contexts with a variety of caring arrangements in place. Taking a feminist perspective, the thesis presents post-couple fathering as a complex moral and relational process shaped deeply, though not straightforwardly, by gendered patterns of caring for children. It also makes particular use of the feminist ethics of care as an analytic framework and argues that this, together with the concept of relationality, can be used to think about autonomy, responsibility, gender and power in productive and insightful ways. The analysis showed that fathers perceive fathering beyond couplehood to occur in connection with others, and that it is particularly interconnected with mothers. It also revealed that the experience of post-couple fathering can produce an intensified focus on the quality of relationships and a heightened perception of the ongoing processes of moral and relational work involved. Further to this, three broader theoretical implications are raised: that a concept of fairness

is in play during the relational and moral work of co-parenting; that a gendered moral space exists in which such work takes place, and that gendered patterns of care continue to act as a powerful framework in the process of renegotiating parental roles.

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Introduction

Over the past decade academic and political attention concerning the roles, involvement and social position of fathers has steadily increased (Featherstone 2009). Key researchers such as Lamb (2004), Morgan (2002) and Lewis (2000) continue to argue that our understanding of men's experiences as fathers remains limited and more research is needed to chart the processes by which men perceive and negotiate their identities and activities as fathers, particularly after divorce or separation. Key starting points for this project were three central ideas present in recent research: divorce or separation as a transition in, or continuation of, family relationships; divorce or separation as a catalyst for re-thinking parenting relationships; and gender as a central influencing factor on parental identity and practice (Smart & Neale 1999, Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003, Doucet 2006). I chose to focus on fathers only, because I am deeply interested in understanding men's experiences and perceptions as fathers as part of a feminist analysis of family lives and the persistent gender differences and disadvantages in the organisation and valuing of care for children. Whilst recognising I would hear only one part of a bigger story of parenting beyond couplehood, I made the decision to highlight fathers as important participants in a complex process of sustaining parental relationships and responsibilities after divorce or separation. Setting these parameters means that, for example, the thesis does not discuss children's perspectives on fathering, whilst still recognising that children will actively shape father-child relationships. My focus on fathers' perspectives also produced an interesting and important tension within the analysis in that I have sought to explore the stories that fathers', in particular, tell whilst emphasising the relational aspects of their accounts and the connectedness and interdependence of their experiences of caring for children. I have

attempted to highlight fathers without presenting father-child relationships as dyadic or self-contained.

This thesis therefore uses a feminist perspective to present post-couple fathering as a complex moral and relational process shaped deeply, though not straightforwardly, by gendered patterns of caring for children. I offer a careful and critical consideration of the ways in which gender difference operates in relation to post-couple fathering, seeking, more widely, to explore cultural and structural norms around gender roles and relations (see chapter two for further discussion). I argue that fathering beyond couplehood occurs in connection with others, and is particularly interconnected with mothering, as fathers try to sustain roles and relationships with children, with mothers and 'others' (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007), such as extended family, other parents, peers, or formal agencies. The accounts of fathering examined here show that, with more or less willingness or resistance, fathers were involved in relational work, moral accounting, calibrations of fairness and considerations of the implications of gendered caring arrangements; part of a process I describe as 'working at it'. I argue that fathering beyond couplehood makes such considerations both possible and necessary and that these processes have at least the potential for questioning or changing gendered caring roles and responsibilities for children. Whilst my analysis reveals that new contexts of fathering can bring 'transformative' experiences of care, it also highlights the persistent 'pull' of a gendered model of parenting, which can normalise different and unequal levels of caring responsibility without disrupting a sense of the equal moral status of fathers and mothers. My thesis sets out to explore the processes of relational and moral work involved in sustaining fathering beyond divorce or separation, and to pursue a feminist analysis of the ways in which gender provides an important context for, and fault lines in, such personal and social negotiations.

An important theoretical argument, explored through the substantive chapters and discussed further in the conclusion, is for the relevance of the feminist ethics of care as a analytic framework for understanding fathers' narratives and that this, together with the concept of relationality, can be used to think about autonomy, responsibility, love, gender and power in productive and insightful ways. My theoretical work has also led me to consider the value of and differences between the concepts of care and of intimacy, as tools for understanding family/parental lives and relationships. Based on my empirical and theoretical explorations of fathering after divorce or separation, my argument is that intimacy does not appear to attend closely enough to the 'work' and relational processes of sustaining fathering relationships, nor to the idea of responsibility and the combination of powers and constraints it contains. I also believe that care may offer more in terms of understanding and challenging the complexities of gendered power relations and inequalities and moving towards gender equity, than appears to be the case with intimacy.

The thesis is based on a sociological, qualitative study of previously resident fathers' accounts of fathering after divorce or separation, focusing on fathers who have maintained contact with their children over time and across households. The study consists of in depth interviews with 23 biological fathers of children where the marriage or partnership with the mother had ended and who were fathering in a range of contexts, with a variety of caring arrangements in place. These fathers varied in age and occupation, all lived in a comparatively rural region of Eastern England and the majority were of White British ethnicity. The interviews focused on fathers' caring arrangements for children and how these had developed; on whether/how their working lives had changed with becoming a

father and with divorce, and on the emotional and practical aspects of their relationships, and time spent with, children.

The aims of the research were to produce a qualitative, grounded analysis of post-divorce/separation fathering, contributing to a growing body of reflexive empirical work on family lives and to a broader understanding of the social and political significance of fathering beyond couplehood. Initially my research questions were ordered in the following way:

- **Orientation to paid employment.** How do men perceive their working lives alongside their position as fathers?
- **Perceptions of caring.** How do divorced or separated fathers who have regular physical care of their dependent children perceive and sustain their roles and relationships, and what are the factors influencing their 'strategies'?
- **Experience and activities.** How do fathers describe being a father after divorce or separation? How do they understand their everyday relationships with their children?

However, this ranking changed as my early interest in how fathers felt about their working lives in relation to caring responsibilities was overtaken by a stronger preoccupation with the relational and moral aspects of the interview narratives. This shift was informed in part by the emergence and resonance of moral and relational themes from early interviews and also by my deeper engagement with literature on relationality and on the feminist ethics of care. As the interviewing progressed and my analytic approach developed, the rationale and motivation to prioritise the relational and moral dimensions of fathers' narratives grew stronger, leading to the final ordering and structure of the substantive thesis chapters.

Chapters one and two set out my review of relevant literature and my methodological approach respectively. The substantive chapters of the thesis then go on to deal with context, relationality and moral reasoning in narratives of fathering beyond couplehood. Chapter three lays out a broad map of these fathers' lives, focusing predominantly on more material or practical dimensions, but emphasising the relational qualities or symbolic meanings of these. It highlights four aspects of post-couple lives that were prominent and meaningful within the interview narratives: housing, work, money, and wider family and/or community networks. Chapter four begins the work of exploring relationality in father' lives and focuses on examining the characteristics and value of a concept of relational autonomy. It does this by discussing and illustrating the emergent themes of: a relational sense of self, contextual agency and relational boundaries. Chapter five presents the inductively developed concept of 'relational work'. I argue that the experience of fathering beyond divorce or separation can produce an intensified focus on the quality of relationships and a heightened perception of them as an ongoing process of sustaining or nurturing work. I identify and examine particular 'relational strategies', in relation to children and to mothers, which are visible across the interviews. Chapter six turns towards the moral aspects of fathers' narratives, focusing on perceptions of 'good fathering' and the processes of moral reasoning, deliberation and accounting involved. I identify two dominant themes of 'putting children first' and 'retaining paternal authority' and argue that the gendering of care for children continues to shape the moral space for fathering beyond couplehood, in ways which produce both gains and losses, opportunities and constraints. In chapter seven I argue that fathers' narratives can be considered in terms of attempts to sustain a viable moral identity, in relation to both wider cultural norms, and the dynamics of particular relationships and circumstances. I examine three significant moral themes for fathers' self-presentation: staying, providing, and being there, and go on to discuss two

particular threats to this process: the expression of aggression or violence, and the social suspicion of male sexuality, which are illustrative of the gendering of moral identity. Finally, in chapter eight, I draw together the key claims of my study and explore some of the theoretical implications of these, in terms of contributing to a feminist analysis of fathering and of care, and to theorising family lives and relationships.

Throughout this project I have worked hard to 'do' reflexivity (Skeggs 2002, Mauthner & Doucet 2003) and to acknowledge the intersections between my personal, emotional, intellectual, institutional and political investments, at every stage of the research process. This process is most explicitly discussed within chapter two and is also returned to in the conclusion. Adopting this approach, and supported by the feminist ethics of care literature, which has informed the thesis both theoretically and methodologically, has enabled me to be particularly attentive to the moral and ethical dimensions of fathers' narratives. In this way, I believe that I have produced a rich and rigorous consideration of accounts of fathering relationships and practice and opened up a context in which theoretical and moral philosophical ideas about family lives, care, and gender can be critically explored.

PART I

Background and context

Chapter one: reviewing the literature on fatherhood, post-divorce

parenting and the feminist ethics of care

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of research literature directly relevant to my thesis; setting out a number of significant theoretical and methodological points, identifying current or ongoing debates and indicating political or policy-relevant concerns. There are three main bodies of work discussed: fatherhood, post-divorce parenting, and feminist moral philosophy. More specifically, I have focused on father involvement and identity, co-parental relationships and contact arrangements after divorce or separation, and the feminist ethics of care. In addition I also briefly locate and discuss the particular conception of morality and moral reasoning which informs my analysis. Whilst my selection of the first two areas of research literature is more obvious, the third is perhaps less so. Research on fatherhood and on post-divorce parenting provided a central context for my research design and initial conceptualisation of fathering beyond couplehood, whilst the feminist ethics of care provided an important backdrop for working with the interview data and developing my theoretical analysis. I initially came to the literature on the feminist ethics of care, via certain sociological research on family lives (Duncan & Edwards 1999, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). I became increasingly drawn to it through the process of thinking about the moral aspects of fathering relationships and the workings of gender within these, where I found it to be a particularly insightful and rich resource. In terms of other related literature, I considered how the growing body of

research on children's experiences of family relationships might connect to my study. However, whilst literature on children's perspectives may provide a very useful future reference or point of comparison, it was not directly relevant to the aims and focus of this project as it developed.

In terms of timescale, I have looked at research spanning the past twenty-five years; in relation to the fatherhood and post-divorce parenting literature I have focused predominantly on UK research, together with some work from Australia, The USA and Canada, whilst in relation to feminist moral philosophy, much of the literature here is American, with some significant UK and Northern European work. The rest of this chapter is divided into three main sections with a number of subheadings within each. Through these sections, whilst I deal with each literature in turn I will also indicate connections or points of reference where they occur.

Section one: Researching Fathers, Fatherhood and Fathering

A consistent theme within literature on fatherhood spanning the last twenty-five years, is that of the need to recognise and accurately capture the diversity and complexity of men's experiences as fathers (Lewis & Lamb 2007). The trajectory of scholarship on fatherhood has seen its emergence as a socially and politically constructed institution, its phenomenological exploration as a lived experience, and its continued, critical evaluation and monitoring as a set of rights and responsibilities. Fatherhood has become increasingly seen as multifaceted and contradictory, both at an institutional and individual level, and

this has involved, not least, a rethinking of associations between fatherhood and concepts such as patriarchy and masculinity. Perceptions of the relative 'power' of fatherhood, or of men as fathers, can be seen to vary in different theoretical and empirical contexts, and arguably form part of its politicisation (Coltrane 1996, Smart & Neale 1997, Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, Collier 2005).

Morgan (2002) offers a particularly useful framework for understanding and mapping the construction and experience of fatherhood. He proposes a model which distinguishes between fathers, either as individuals or collectives, fatherhood, as the "cultural coding" (Morgan, 2002: 10) of men as fathers, and fathering, as a set of practices. He explores this in conjunction with an 'institutional triangle' consisting of state, market and family, and a 'domestic, relational triangle' consisting of husband, wife and parent-child relationships. The emphasis is on interconnection, interdependency and interrelations, and Morgan argues that his analytical distinctions between fathers, fatherhood and fathering are useful not least because of the 'constructed' rather than inevitable connections between men and fatherhood: "Men father but do not necessarily assume the responsibilities of fatherhood" (Morgan, 2002: 1).

Recognising diversity among fathers

Current statistical information specifically concerning 'who fathers' is difficult to find; the Office for National Statistics themselves state that "most national surveys in Britain have not asked men if they have ever fathered a child because of the innate validity problems" (ONS 2001). The ONS have published bulletins entitled 'Social Focus on Men' and these do offer some relatively recent data on, for example, fathering and age (based on jointly registered births only) which suggests that married fathers and lone fathers tend to be older

than cohabiting fathers (ONS 2000). In relation to divorce and separation, again official information is not regularly available on men who are fathers and who do not live with their children. Some data is available on dependent children and household type, which tends to indicate that the majority of dependent children continue to live in a married couple family (ONS 2008). However, this definition needs to be interpreted with caution, as it may include stepfamilies. There appears also to be an increase in cohabiting households and lone-mother headed families in particular, with a small minority of dependent children living in a lone father family (ONS 2008, FPI 2009). Overall, what quantitative data there is appears to support a general claim of diversity in terms of the relationship or family structure in which men become either (or both) biological or social fathers.

Given this sense of the diversity of men's routes into fatherhood then, one characteristic of recent research has been the development of more complex and nuanced ways of classifying particular groups of fathers. A contemporary typology would include ethnicity, age, class and sexuality as key variables and would recognise the different contexts of social fathering and of non-residency as producing varying personal and collective experiences of fathering. Identifying particular groups of fathers has contributed not only to social scientific understanding, but also to the policy relevance and politicisation of fathers and fatherhood. One example, discussed by Lewis (2000) in the context of British research, is that of 'vulnerable' fathers. This vulnerability is defined either in terms of social exclusion, or of non-conformity to certain social stereotypes. Lewis cites unemployed fathers, young fathers, cohabiting or non-resident fathers and stepfathers as examples, arguing that whilst there may be differences between such groups, what links them is their 'collision' with "society's concentration on fathers' traditional role as

economic providers, leading to an assumption that this is the only function men can, or should perform” (Lewis, 2000: 5)

This discussion of ‘vulnerability’ also points to the ongoing preoccupation within fatherhood research with the significance of the masculine breadwinner role. One trajectory of debate has centred on the extent to which fathers continue to align themselves with ‘breadwinning’ and the relative significance of economic provision alongside other forms of care and responsibility (Arendell 1995, Warin, Solomon, Lewis & Langford 1999, O’Brien & Shemilt 2003) More recent research highlights the complexity and indeed ambivalence of fathers’ experiences of and feelings about breadwinning, indicating that whilst this remains an important expectation placed on fathers, and an important aspect of being a father, it cannot be understood in exclusive or simplistic terms (Dermott 2008, Doucet 2006).

In addition to this focus on the significance of breadwinning to fathers, it is important to note the concern with both the constraining and enabling nature of the breadwinner role. Whilst it can be seen as a cultural and material ‘barrier’ to developing new fathering practices, it continues to offer certain advantages, not least making routine caring ‘optional’; therefore the breadwinner role remains highly significant in the division of domestic labour and responsibility. Lewis & O’Brien (1987) have suggested that economic provision fulfils both ‘individualistic and altruistic goals’ claiming that, on balance, adherence to a conventional practice of fatherhood brings more gains than losses to men as fathers. This can perhaps be illustrated by some of Esther Dermott’s (2008) findings, which indicate that middle class fathers, at least, may be able to retain the benefits of full time work without disrupting a sense of themselves as involved, ‘intimate’ fathers. My own work also illustrates fathers’ engagements with and ambivalence towards the male

breadwinner role, suggesting that at different times and in different contexts, fathers fell back on, or sought to distance themselves from this historical ideal of good fathering.

A second significant category of father, directly relevant to my thesis, is that of the 'non-resident' father; a complex and relatively recent term, arguably developed as a more constructive alternative to 'absent father'. Whilst the vulnerability of non-resident fathers, either in material or normative terms has been recognised, non-residency is increasingly seen as a feature of, rather than an inevitable barrier to, fathering (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin 2002). Clearly, concerns about the impact of divorce, and particularly fatherlessness, remain potent, but an interesting strand to such debates comes from researchers such as Smart & Neale (1999) or Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies (2003) who offer accounts of post-divorce/separation fathering as a transition rather than a tragedy. Fathers (and mothers) are presented as both engaged in negotiating parenting as a set of moral dilemmas and trying to manage changing identities, relationships and emotions. Strategies adopted by non-resident fathers will again be diverse (and will include disengagement) but it is no longer assumed that residency is an essential criterion for 'good enough' fathering.

The increasing focus on, and perhaps re-evaluation of, groups such as non-resident, and also stepfathers, is illustrative of a wider engagement with the characteristics, contexts and consequences of social parenting. Social parenting, whether seen in opposition or as an alternative or addition to biological parenting, arguably appears in an increasing number of both private and public debates, and social scientific studies of, for example, stepfathers are increasing (Lee 2008). Both legalistic and moral conceptions of the rights and responsibilities, whether formally or normatively attached to fatherhood, are increasingly required to reflect on the significance of biological paternity (Collier & Sheldon 2009). It

can be argued that such debates over the differences between and meanings of biological and social fatherhood, together with the rhetoric and realities of men in either or both of these positions, have significantly contributed to the politicisation of fathers in recent times (Collier 2005, Featherstone 2009).

Change and continuity in Fatherhood

Fatherhood, as a socially produced institution, is seen as a key source of mechanisms for 'making men into fathers' (Hobson, 2002); involving a powerful combination of social norms, cultural representations, legal and political conceptions, policy and welfare strategies. However the institution of fatherhood is neither consistent nor static; researchers from Lewis & O'Brien (1987) onwards emphasise its contradictory and complex nature, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Also highlighted in recent research are the variety and range of engagements between men and fatherhood, and its capacity to provide both opportunities and obstacles to becoming a father. Lamb (2004) suggests that fatherhood should be seen as being in transition (as opposed to 'crisis'), particularly when placed in a wider European context, identifying 'hopes' around the "democratisation of fathers' position in the family" and 'fears' around the "marginalisation" or limitation of father's contributions to family life (Lamb, 2004: 122).

It is also important to note some of the shifts in legal, political and policy conceptions and articulations of fatherhood. In Britain, Europe and the U.S both fathering and mothering have become increasingly visible in the public and political domain, in terms of debates around crisis or change, equality and difference, rights and responsibilities (Hobson 2002). General political 'fluctuations' appear to be primarily between attempts to

acknowledge and support diversity, father involvement and gender equality in family life and attempts to retain or re-establish more conventional, gendered models. In the UK, the New Labour government, through key documents such as 'Supporting Families' (1998) and the more recent campaign to encourage public services and voluntary organisations to 'Think Fathers' (DCSF 2008), has sought to both acknowledge fathers and to co-opt them into a wider project of 'good parenting' and personal and social responsibility (Featherstone 2003, 2009). The establishment of organisations such as the Fatherhood Institute and contributions to debate on fathers from One Plus One (July 2009) and the Family & Parenting Institute (2009) also illustrate a certain public interest in fatherhood. In legalistic terms, in Britain, fatherhood has arguably become both expanded and contracted. In response to fears about increasing father absence, there have been attempts to more formally bind fatherhood to economic provision. In particular, the initial Child Support Act (1991) and the more recent Child Maintenance & Other Payments Act 2008, have sought to enshrine in law fathers' financial responsibility for their biological children. As part of a response to concerns over rising divorce rates and the well-being of children, the Children's Acts of 1989 and 2004, the Family Law Act (1996) and the most recent White Paper, *Parental separation: children's needs and parents' responsibilities* (2005) aimed to recognise the ongoing importance of the father-child relationship, the rights of children to continued relationships with both parents, and the responsibilities of both parents to cooperate in facilitating this.

The current legal model for post-divorce life assumes that the co-parental relationship continues after divorce, despite the ending of a conjugal relationship (Smart 2004). Family law, particularly relating to divorce, has come under increasing scrutiny, from both feminist and now fathers' rights organisations, in terms of how to legislate for the allocation of rights and responsibilities with regard to children (Collier 2005, Featherstone

2009). From different directions and for different reasons, have come claims of gender inequality and discrimination. A growing body of work on post-divorce parenting is responding to some of these issues by documenting and analysing the experiences and 'coping strategies' adopted by both fathers and mothers, acknowledging the wider socio-legal context in which these are formulated (Day Sclater 1997, Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams 1999, Smart & Neale 1999, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Bainham, Lindley, Richards & Trinder 2003). In addition, there are also important developments within feminist moral philosophy, which present alternative frameworks for thinking about and legislating for equality and 'fairness' in relation to family and parental relationships (Sevenhuijsen, 1986, 1998) which are discussed further below.

Fatherhood in relation to employment is also an area where both change and continuity can be seen; the majority of fathers continue to work over 40 hours a week, but fathers' involvement in domestic labour has slowly and gradually increased (O'Brien 2005, EHRC report 2009). There has been continued debate over the extent and nature of fathers' participation in family life, in that despite greater father involvement being apparently demanded and valued, by both women and men, empirical work (Haas et al, 2002, Dermott 2008, Hauari & Hollingworth 2009) has consistently indicated that changes in men's behaviour or 'choices' are slow to develop. O'Brien & Shemilt (2003) in their literature review and exploration of the demand for, and uptake of, 'family-friendly' employment practices by fathers, suggested that the development of 'father targeting' policies in the Nordic countries serve as a more effective mechanism for increasing awareness and participation on the part of both employers and fathers than is the case in the UK. Dermott (2008) also locates the distinction between 'culture and conduct' in relation to fathers and family-friendly working practices, identifying the difference, or lag, between changes in attitudes, and changes in behaviour, again, within organisations and for individuals. Such

research helps to explain the processes by which fathers' more egalitarian or less conventional attitudes towards work and care (O'Brien & Shemilt 2003, EHRC 2009) do not straightforwardly produce great changes in the division of domestic labour, and highlights the intersections between structural, cultural and personal factors involved.

Theoretical and methodological developments in understanding fathering

A significant shift, not just in relation to fatherhood, but to researching family life more generally, has been to apply a more interpretive approach; to study what families actually 'do' (Morgan 1996). Within this framework fathering appears as a set of practices, a playing out of the father role and identity. Again, what appears consistently in research is the argument that fathering practices vary considerably, and are developed out of both conscious and unconscious encounters with structural and cultural or ideological factors. Methodologically, one suggestion by Lamb (2000), Morgan (2002), Marsiglio (2000) and others is that it is important to pay attention to the discursive dimensions of fatherhood in order to accurately capture the shifting and contradictory processes by which men come to act as fathers. In research terms, this indicates a shift not only towards more qualitative strategies, but also towards mixed-methods approaches, incorporating discourse analysis of popular cultural, governmental or policy representations of fathering (Lupton & Barclay 1997). Overall then fathering is increasingly defined as diverse, going beyond a one-dimensional model of economic provision, although the transition to new ways of both understanding and experiencing fathering is not seen as uniform or unproblematic (Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009). From recent, particularly qualitative, studies into fathering practices and experience, both in a marriage/partnership and post-divorce/separation context, a number of significant and interesting themes have emerged.

Two significant and broad theoretical directions within research on fathering are the conceptualisation of father involvement and of father identity. Attempts to theorise and measure father involvement have, again, arguably been motivated both by concerns to document what fathers 'do' and to consider what they 'should do'; the question of what is good enough fathering is a persistent one. As part of a synthesis and evaluation of research on father involvement, Lamb (2000) develops a general model using three main categories: engagement, defined as direct interaction, accessibility, defined as being available but not necessarily interacting, and responsibility, defined as considering, organising and/or anticipating children's needs. This model continues to be actively used, as illustrated by the most recent research commissioned by the JRF on understanding fathering by Hauari & Hollingworth (2009). At a theoretical level, the concerns of researchers have been to produce concepts which capture the material or practical, but also the emotional or subjective, dimensions of fathering. Lamb stresses the continued need for a phenomenological approach suggesting that without it "the motivational bases of fatherhood remain poorly understood" (Lamb, 2000: 38). In his later work with Charlie Lewis (2006, 2007) Lamb goes on to present a further developed, multi-faceted model of factors shaping father involvement, including biological, cultural and economic dimensions, social policy and the relationship with the child's mother. This recognition of fathering as interconnected with mothers and mothering is another theme picked up in sociological work on family lives, particularly following divorce or separation (Smart & Neale 1999, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003).

Methodologically, this means that a central and ongoing concern within empirical research on fathering has been how to appropriately operationalise concepts such as involvement and participation. In large part this has taken the form of a debate around the

relative strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research. Again, in his overview of research, Lamb (2000) suggests that early (1970's) studies tended to focus on quantifiable indicators, such as time-spent, whereas in more recent work greater attention is given to exploring the quality of father-child relationships (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Hawkins & Dollahite 1997, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin 2002). At issue here have been, not just questions of whether it is better to produce reliable or 'hard' data about father involvement, nor whether it is possible to accurately measure subjective perception and experience, but also the moral implications of researching what might count as good enough fathering. The debate around whether involvement is more about time or 'being there', direct activity or background presence, is a significant one, arguably featuring not just in an academic context, but also in many politicised or legal debates about equal or committed parenting (Featherstone 2009).

In relation to father identity, a theoretical model, notable for its relevance to understanding fathering beyond divorce or separation, can be found in the work of Marsiglio (1995) and Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley & Beuhler (1993). Attempting to explain patterns of father involvement, or disengagement, for non-residential, divorced or separated fathers, such researchers make use of identity theory, claiming that "the key element in father involvement post-divorce is the degree of a father's identification with the status and roles associated with being a parent" (Ihinger et al, cited in Marsiglio, 1995: 58). Ihinger et al also provide a review of concepts related to explaining the process of identification. One interesting example is that of salience; the importance attached by an individual to a particular status or role, within a hierarchy of often competing identities and ways of enacting them. Another is that of commitment, where the authors, drawing on a range of conceptualisations, offer an account of commitment both in relation to self and others. This linking of father identity, salience and commitment has some resonance with

contemporary sociological work on family relationships which highlights their moral dimensions and the dynamic processes of family obligations and responsibilities (Finch & Mason 1993, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003).

Another theoretical claim, often implied but less often directly explored within fatherhood research is that fatherhood must be understood in relation to masculinity. What can also be noted here is the apparent absence of direct engagement with fatherhood and fathering within literature on masculinities, making research on fatherhood appear somewhat separate from that on masculinity. Recognising the connections between fathering and masculinity again highlights both the social psychological and the discursive aspects of being a father, indicating that potent and persistent norms and expectations around maintaining an acceptable masculine identity profoundly affect men's fathering experiences and practice. Whether this is articulated, either explicitly or implicitly, in claims of new, involved fathering, or the reassertion of more conventional forms, it seems arguable that what is often at stake in fatherhood debates is masculine identity (Arendell 1995, Doucet 2006).

Arendell (1995) provides an early example of work which does directly engage with fathering and masculinity. Arendell developed a typology of orientations to 'traditional' masculinity and gender roles which, she argues, can explain different fathering strategies following divorce. Contrasting traditionalist and innovative fathers, Arendell proposes a continuum from "gender conformity to gender subversion" (1995: 15), arguing that traditionalist fathers experience the greatest conflict between the continuation of 'being a man' and being a father after divorce, particularly around issues of authority and control. From fathers' own accounts, she highlights themes of a sense of defensiveness, marginalisation and a lack of either cultural signposts or personal strategies for fathering in

new situations. From this she also suggests that the weakening of father involvement following divorce could be understood in terms of attempts to cope with perceived disruptions to a viable masculine identity: “Withdrawal was both an actual practice and a perceived option and was an emotion management strategy” (Ibid: 143). Innovative fathers, in marked contrast, were characterised by their sense of masculinity as flexible and expanded, and by what Arendell describes as a ‘child-centeredness’. She argues that this manifested itself in an active rejection of what they perceived as standard male behaviour following divorce, and higher levels of collaboration with mothers. Arendell describes such fathers as being: “absorbed in family relationships, their maintenance, repair and nurture” (Ibid: 17).

As a contemporary and highly significant example, Andrea Doucet (2005, 2006, 2008) has also focused attention on fathering and masculinity, in part to explore the tensions and challenges fathers may experience when their direct care for children takes them across ‘gender borders’, but also to understand the distinctive nature of male care and fathering practice. Doucet explicitly seeks to develop ‘feminist work on fathers’ in which fathering is recognised and valued in its own right, but which does not devalue women’s historical connection with caring and the persistent gendering of domestic responsibility. Her studies of ‘caregiving fathers’ (i.e. fathers who by a number of routes had taken on primary caring roles) present fathering as a material, relational and moral process, navigated in conjunction with mothers, other parents and wider community relations, and understood in relation to masculine identity. Doucet again sees fathering as complex and diverse, and draws out the ways in which men as fathers can embrace, resist and challenge traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. Her concluding argument is that “men are, in fact, radically revisioning caring work, masculine conceptions of care, and ultimately our understandings of masculinity” (Doucet, 2006: 238).

In relation to theorising the persistent gendering of care for children, the work of Lewis (1986), and later Lupton & Barclay (1997) is notable for its focus on the processes by which a division of caring labour is produced. Their studies of the experiences of first-time fathers draw parallels with women's accounts of early motherhood, in that many fathers discussed the emotional and bodily aspects of new-fatherhood, together with the contradictory nature of paternal love; involving a deeply felt sense of both pleasure and pain, a desire for closeness and a fear of dependency or need. Whilst both studies suggest that mothers and fathers have an equal capacity for intimacy, acquired through routine caring activity, they both also consider how men so often come to take up a supporting, and so more optional, caring role. Both refer to gendered notions of 'competence' and 'confidence' in parenting, but offer different accounts of what processes may produce or contribute to this. Lewis suggests that the physicality of early motherhood (plus childbirth and pregnancy) which is experienced as both restrictive *and* 'fulfilling', quickly establishes the mother as necessary or as 'expert' and places the father in a 'supplementary' position. Lupton & Barclay echo both this experience and interpretation, but are arguably more critical of mothers' role in 'asserting' the primary carer position, perhaps offering an early example of the, now much used, idea of 'maternal gatekeeping' (Allan & Hawkins, 1999).

This overview of the trajectory and developments in the field of researching fathers, fatherhood and fathering has sought to emphasise the challenges of attending to diversity and complexity; both in terms of capturing experience and in theorising the factors involved in shaping that experience. Most recently, Lewis & Lamb (2007) offer an analytical model emphasising and mapping multiple sources of influence on paternal involvement and argue for more research on 'understudied' types of fatherhood, such as non-resident fathers, and on 'family processes' such as "the status of parent-child

relationships after parents separate” (2007: 23). I have also pointed to the significance of gender and the persistence of gendered ideas and expectations, in terms of the connections between fatherhood and masculinity, and the division of domestic labour and responsibility. Both Doucet (2006) and Featherstone (2009) indicate that developing work which seeks to be attentive to the distinctive features of male caring and supportive of men’s greater involvement in caring for children, must equally be attentive to the historical gendering of care, and to mothers’ location within this. As I now move on to review recent literature on post-divorce parenting, and on the experiences of divorced or separated fathers in particular, the themes of process and of gender will be revisited.

Section two: Researching family lives after divorce or separation

The development of social science research on parenting after divorce or separation can be seen as indicative of societal, cultural and also epistemological shifts, in terms of how family life is conceptualised and ‘known’. Whilst families clearly continue to be seen as socially, politically and personally significant, over the last twenty-five years ‘The Family’ as a universal, reified and prescriptive social institution has been subject to much academic scrutiny and critique (Morgan 1996, Williams 2004, Smart 2007). Empirical evidence does present changing patterns in the UK, such as a consistently high divorce rate (although there has been a slight downward trend since 2000), the rise of cohabitation as a context for partnership and parenthood, and an increase in lone-parenthood, step-parenthood and same-sex partnerships (Lewis, Papacosta & Warin 2002, ONS 2008, FPI 2009). More recently still, there is the suggestion of further demographic shifts such as the growth of couples living ‘apart together’, non-sexual cohabitation, and the increased empirical reality of caring (frequently but not exclusively, parenting) across households (Williams 2004).

Alongside such apparent demographic diversity however, there is also evidence of the persistent hold and significance of ideas about 'family' within narrative accounts drawn from qualitative studies in particular (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Ribbens McCarthy in progress). McCarthy, in particular, suggests that the term 'family' continues to be meaningful in the everyday lives of individuals and that academics should be cautious of disregarding this in either an empirical or theoretical context.

Alongside such demographic changes, there have also been significant shifts in the legal and social policy frameworks relating to families. The Children's Acts of 1989 and 2004, The Family Law Act 1996, Every Child Matters (2003), The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, Every Parent Matters (2007) can be seen as particular pieces of legislation and policy which have both shaped and reflected changing attitudes towards family lives. In relation to divorce, cumulatively these have attempted to prioritise the needs and well-being of children; emphasise the ongoing parental relationship(s) and responsibilities; formalise in particular, fathers' financial obligation; legitimise the rights and responsibilities of non-married parents, and encourage the use of mediation and support services for families experiencing divorce or separation.

Equally important is a growing acknowledgment of shifts in cultural values around marriage, parenting, sexual relationships, personal and familial rights and responsibilities and so on (Williams 2004, Smart 2007). Social values are both notoriously resilient and difficult to research, producing, for example, a sense that the nuclear family as a normative power is both highly challenged and highly enduring. Perhaps partly in response to this apparent contradiction, sociological research (Smart 2004) suggests two things: that despite political anxiety about, and/or 'misunderstanding' (Duncan & Edwards 1999,

Bauman 2003) of family roles and relationships, people appear as “energetic moral actors” (Williams 2004: 41) and that part of this energy is spent in reconciling and negotiating differences between ideals and lived experiences of family life (Gillis 1997).

It is also useful to situate research literature on post-divorce parenting more specifically within a theoretical context. One interesting shift has been the increasing attention paid to family life, partnership and parent-child relationships, by social theorists such as Giddens (1992), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Bauman (2003) as part of their wider models of contemporary social life and social change. In particular the concept of ‘intimacy’ has taken hold as a means of theorising diverse family and personal relationships beyond any traditional boundaries of biology, heterosexuality, marriage or co-residence (Giddens 1992, Jamieson 1998, Gabb 2008, Dermott 2008). Alongside this, Carol Smart’s work around ‘personal life’ is also a significant contribution (Smart 2007). At the broadest level, the generalised thesis of the individualisation of family life, which proposes that it is shaped much less by traditional structure and experienced much more in terms of life ‘choices’ and democratic relationships, has been presented and critiqued robustly within and between social science disciplines (Jamieson 1999, Gillies 2003, Plumridge & Thomson 2003, Smart & Shipman 2004). My own analytical work has involved some engagement with and critical evaluation of the concept of intimacy alongside that of a feminist moral philosophical concept of care, and this is discussed most directly in the conclusion.

Another direction in sociological work on family lives has been to develop and champion qualitative research as an appropriate methodology for producing insightful knowledge about lived lives, relationships and values, and one which is particularly necessary for policy relevant work. Sociologists such as Smart & Neale (1999), and

Duncan & Edwards (1999) have used their research to develop critiques of generalised claims about family life, such as the individualisation thesis, and of particular policies, such as the 'New Deal for lone parents'. In connection with this, there have been particular engagements with feminist moral philosophy and political theory as a way of exploring both models of, and a language for, understanding personal and family lives as dynamic, interactional and moral. The frequent argument from those researching contemporary family and personal relationships is that these can be usefully understood as a process of negotiation (both conscious and unconscious) with, and orientation to, public discourses, material and cultural resources, and moral identity. Drawing very much on feminist moral philosophical conceptions of care, commitment, obligation and moral deliberation (Gilligan 1982, Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998) researchers such as Finch & Mason (1993), Smart & Neale (1999), Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards (2003) and May (2008), argue that such moral frameworks are particularly fruitful for understanding diverse and complex family lives.

Within this broader social, political and academic setting then, the body of research focusing directly on parental and family relationships following divorce or separation has expanded; emphasising, not least, divorce as a *transition* in relationships, unfolding over time and in relation to a range of structural, cultural and personal factors. Sociological research has highlighted the complexity of family relationships after divorce and emphasised the tenacity and creativity of family members to continue these (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Trinder, Beek & Connolly 2002, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). Such research is not claiming that post-divorce relationships between parents, and parents and children are always positive, or that divorce is not a deeply painful and traumatic experience, but argues consistently that it be seen as a transition in, rather than simply a collapse of, family life. Research in this area also emphasises the diversity

in post-divorce parenting, step-parenting or 'making families' (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003) and argues that policy and any external intervention should be sensitive and responsive to this (Smart 2005, Williams 2004).

A further general characteristic of much contemporary research on post divorce or separation family lives has been to acknowledge the ways in which family members perceive, present and attempt to resolve moral questions or problems that they see arising from their roles and relationships. This is perhaps most explicitly articulated by Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies (2000, 2003) in their analysis and discussion of issues of moral identity at stake in parenting after divorce, the moral tales told in interviews, and the presence of a 'moral imperative' which prioritises children's needs. To research post-divorce family lives then, has meant engaging with concepts such as commitment, obligation, responsibility (Finch & Mason 1993, Maclean & Eekelaar 1997), fairness (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003), rights and needs (Trinder et al 2002) and attempting, fundamentally, to analyse morality without moralising. In so doing, this body of literature has also produced equally important contributions to debates on methodology, qualitative interviewing, the analysis and presentation of qualitative research, reflexivity and the role(s) of the researcher (Mason 1996, Edwards & Ribbens 1998, Mauthner & Doucet 2003, Doucet 2008).

Measuring parenting after divorce or separation

An ongoing methodological concern within the literature is that of how to understand and operationalise parental care following divorce or separation. Some useful links can be made here with literature on motherhood (Backett 1987, Ribbens 1994) which has equally involved operationalising complex, often elusive aspects of caring for children, and which

sees mothering and fathering as deeply interconnected. There is a notable overlap here between research specifically on fathering and research on parenting after divorce or separation where there is often a focus on fathers, as non-resident parents and on father involvement. One common conceptual distinction made has been between quantity (of time spent) and quality (of relationships and interaction), producing a number of typologies of parenting activity or involvement (Lamb 2000, Lewis & Lamb 2007). This distinction continues to be challenged, or further examined, by studies not only of post-divorce or separation fathering, but also of fathering more generally (Dermott 2008), where the concept of intimacy as a measure of quality of relationship is seen not to correspond simplistically with quantity of time, at least from some fathers' perspectives. Intimacy has been conceptualised predominantly in affective terms; in relation to 'feeling close', to mutually shared knowledge and understanding, and for some theorists, such as Giddens (1992) refers to a more egalitarian or democratic form of relationship. In this way, achieving or sustaining intimacy, whilst it may involve effort or commitment, is not incompatible with a model of quality rather than quantity of time, or with an understanding of parents' lives as increasingly demanding or intensive (Hays 1996).

Within the literature on post-divorce parenting there are also a number of models offered for understanding co-parental interaction and contact arrangements. Simpson, McCarthy & Walker (1995) present a typology of 'no contact', 'parallel' and 'communicative' paternal parenting, developed from data on fathers' reported involvement and relationships with their children, their practical/material circumstances, and also their relationships with their ex-partners. Trinder, Beek & Connolly (2002), in their substantial study of how contact is negotiated and experienced by mothers, fathers and children, also offer analytical models: a typology of contact consisting of 'consensual', 'committed', 'faltering' and 'conflicted' (with several subgroups under each heading) and a model of the

determinants of quality and quantity of contact. Whilst such models are not presented as absolute or static, they do provide some qualified generalisations about post-divorce family lives, together with insightful evidence to support these. A common strategy within this literature, including studies focusing specifically on post-divorce fatherhood such as those by Bradshaw et al (1999) or Lewis, Papacosta & Warin (2002), is to operationalise or measure parenting in a number of ways, not least to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative aspects and to develop analyses of how these are affected by a number of variables including the material, such as housing or income; spatial, such as geographical distance; relational, such as interactions with ex-partners or the presence/absence of new partners; and emotional, such as feelings of loss, isolation or difficulties with role adjustment. Lewis et al (2002) also make analytical use of a model of gendered power relations between fathers and mothers, in terms of the perceived status differences attached to these roles, and the different access to material and cultural resources that these bring. Alongside other work by Smart & Neale (1999), Smart (2004) and Smart & May (2004), the idea of power relations demonstrates another key reference point for understanding the complexity of parenting after divorce.

A related research challenge is that of trying to 'hear', analyse and present, inevitably subjective, accounts of parenting, which are also in part shaped by structural and cultural factors such as gender, class, ethnicity and so on. In particular the gendering of experience is a recurring theme (Lupton & Barclay 1997, Smart & Neale 1999, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003) with researchers often suggesting that there exists "his and her perceptions of parenting" (Lewis, Papacosta & Warin, 2002: 34). Methodologically this has posed questions for research design and sampling, in that researchers must weigh up and declare the implications of studying fathers or mothers, or both (see the introduction and chapter two for my own discussion of this). Partly in response to earlier debates on

differences between mothers' and fathers' reporting of paternal parenting activity and a sense of absence of fathers' experiences, several studies have attempted to recruit 'clusters' or groups of family members (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Trinder et al 2002, Smart 2005). This has been in order to allow exploration and comparison of fathers' and mothers' perspectives (and also step-parents, or grandparents) and, importantly, to include children's experiences of divorce and post-divorce parenting (Smart, Neale & Wade 1999, Smart 2006, Neale & Flowerdew 2007). Interviewing clusters of 'related' (biologically and/or socially) individuals is also, arguably, a manifestation of the changes in conceptions of the family and of divorce discussed above (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). All of the studies discussed consider a range of variables that may shape the experiences and perceptions of mothers and fathers after divorce, such as occupation, income, marital status, age, or education. Yet on reviewing the literature, it is noticeable that gender appears to remain a constant and central influence on how individuals make sense of, adapt or defend their parental roles and identities.

Contact and the co-parental relationship

Having highlighted some of methodological challenges associated with researching post-divorce family lives, it is important to consider some of the debates or 'intellectual puzzles' (Mason 1996) to emerge from the literature. Throughout much of the literature under review there is a consistent concern with, and consideration of, factors which may support or inhibit post-divorce/separation parenthood, and here again there is a parallel with work on father involvement more generally. The predominant claim is that contact and co-parental interaction have to be understood as interactional, relational and subject to change (Trinder et al 2002, Smart & May 2004) and as being influenced by a complex

bundle of material, cultural, relational and moral factors (Lewis & Lamb 2007). In terms of offering an overview of the nature or experience of parenting after divorce, the emphasis appears recurrently to be on the effort and resources required to renegotiate and sustain parental roles and relationships together with the costs, as well as potential benefits of doing so.

For some couples, this transformation of role opens the way for both parents to derive benefits from post-divorce parenting arrangements. The contact-residence conundrum need not be a zero-sum game. Although this outcome clearly requires time, energy and resources to sustain, workable arrangements are possible (Simpson, Jessop & McCarthy, cited in Bainham, Lindley, Richards & Trinder 2003: 217)

One ongoing and emotive puzzle for parents, researchers and family law alike is that of how the relationship between maintenance and contact should be viewed. Whether 'paying for' and 'seeing' children are seen as separate issues or as fundamentally linked is a debate that can be highly charged within the co-parental relationship and is also highly visible within the legal framework surrounding divorce and separation. The Children Act 1989 and the Child Support Act 1991 are seen as early attempts to formalise the continuation of parental responsibilities after divorce and unconditional paternal financial obligation respectively. The Family Law Act 1996 attempted to reform the framework for child support partly in response to the sustained criticism of The Child Support Agency and the sense that many mothers and fathers considered this to be an unacceptable form of intervention into parenting after divorce (Featherstone 2009). The process of reform has continued with the Child Support, Pensions & Social Security Act 2000 and the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008 which has established the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (CMEC) as a replacement for the CSA. However, evidence also continues to suggest that co-parental relationships and contact fare better where private financial and caring arrangements are made (Trinder, Beek & Connolly, 2002).

In addition to examining the legal or institutional framework, researchers have also sought to explore how divorced or separated fathers and mothers themselves understand the financial obligations of parenthood alongside other aspects, most specifically contact. Bradshaw et al (1999) suggest that many fathers do not see financial obligation as absolute or static and believe instead that it is negotiable “in the context of their own personal, financial and family circumstances and those of the mother and children” (Bradshaw et al 1999: 226-227). This study also emphasises the relationship with the mother (and its history) together with the perceived legitimacy of her claim, as the key factor in fathers’ commitment to paying maintenance. Other studies also emphasise the importance of the quality of the relationship and communication between ex-spouses/partners in the negotiation of new parental roles after divorce (Trinder et al 2002, Sobolewski & King 2005, Hans 2009).

Perceptions of both mothers and fathers appear to hinge on ideas of ‘entitlement’ and the grounds for claiming rights and responsibilities in relation to children. One view can be that payment of child support as the fulfilment of an obligation constitutes entitlement to contact, thus the two are seen as fundamentally linked. Both fathers and mothers have been seen to use this logic to pursue a claim for either money or contact (Maclean & Eekelaar 1997, Bradshaw et al 1999). Conversely, the argument can be made that, if financial responsibility for children is treated as an absolute, then paying maintenance cannot be made conditional on contact. Again, both fathers and mothers have articulated this view in order to challenge assumptions of an automatic entitlement to contact from money and vice versa, on the grounds that these are separate issues (Smart & May 2004). Smart & May go on to argue that disputes over the relationship between maintenance and contact cannot be understood simply as conflicting interests of individuals or of mothers and fathers per se,

but are “more to do with the ethical perspectives of either gender” (Smart & May 2004: 353). The implications of this suggestion that gender operates as a lens through which moral reasoning and evaluation takes place are profound, and raise important issues for understanding and supporting mothers and fathers during and after divorce.

In their study of parental obligations across households Maclean & Eekelaar (1997) also draw attention to significant gender differences in attitudes towards child support, which they claim are related to the prioritising of either biological or social parental status.

The results show a strong attachment of mothers to a support obligation founded on natural parenthood, whereas the fathers relate the obligation much more closely to social parenthood (Maclean & Eekelaar 1997: 141)

These findings imply that mothers tend to make less allowance for subsequent family commitments and are more likely to subscribe to the principle of absolute financial obligation, while fathers are more likely to transfer or share their financial commitments between biological and step-children. This finding, in relation to fathers’ attitudes, was reflected in my own study, and is referred to in chapters three and six. Such suggestions are significant given the increase in stepfamilies which constitute combinations of biological and social parents and children, within and across households (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). If divorce and re-partnering involving both biological and social parenthood are becoming increasingly common, then this may necessitate shifts in both individual and legal frameworks used for establishing and negotiating parental rights and responsibilities (Smart & May 2004).

Research suggests, then, that in attempting to make post-divorce parenting arrangements, mothers and fathers are likely to draw on ‘gendered ethical perspectives’ (Smart & May 2004) about how roles and responsibilities ought to work, including the relationship

between financial support and contact. Another issue which presents similar problems and which is a visible and interesting theme within research on post-divorce parenting (Smart 1999, Lamb 2000) is that of the part played by pre-divorce roles and relationships in shaping post-divorce family life. A notable debate within the literature is the extent to which 'highly involved' fathers prior to divorce are more or less likely to maintain their involvement after it. Research over the last fifteen years suggests that, whilst non-resident fathers' involvement with children has somewhat increased, contact between fathers and their children often decreases over time (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Trinder, Beek & Connolly 2002). This has led to an interest in what factors help to promote or sustain contact, what may lead fathers to gradually withdraw, and what causes a minority of fathers not to pursue or to end contact with their children. In large part, the explanations offered, particularly in relation to the withdrawal of contact, have focused on the sometimes overwhelming difficulties of the transition to a post-divorce/separation fathering role, and the characteristics or requirements of this role. Simpson et al (1995) emphasised the need for adaptability and to some extent acceptance of a reduced role as a central element of more successful or bearable non-resident fathering. More recent studies such as that by Trinder et al (2002) equally highlight the differences between pre and post-divorce fatherhood, and also suggest that the extent and ways in which fathers can adjust or renegotiate their fathering are a crucial determinant of the outcomes. Trinder et al (2002) and Lewis, Papacosta & Warin (2002) also express the transition to post-divorce/separation fatherhood as a shift from a primary to a secondary role, involving a loss of daily interaction, knowledge about, and control over, children's lives and an adjustment to 'part-time full-time parenting'. The loss of routine interaction with, and knowledge of, children's lives is seen to have important consequences for fathers, and chapters five and six of the thesis explore the significance of 'dailiness' (Apthekar 1989) for fathers directly.

Smart & Neale (1999) argue explicitly that pre-divorce fatherhood does not prepare fathers well for fathering beyond divorce or separation. Again, drawing on the earlier work of Katherine Backett (1987), they suggest that the pre-divorce spousal relationship is often central to the way parenting is experienced and learnt, with wives playing a key mediating role between fathers and their children. Smart & Neale argue that legislation such as the Children Act 1989, which presumes the continuation of, and distinction between, parental and spousal roles and relationships,

pays little attention to the extent to which divorce removes most of the material and also much of the emotional foundation to the parenting project which is ongoing during a marriage (cited in Silva & Smart 1999: 81).

Smart (1999) discusses the potential difficulties, particularly for mothers, of separating their spousal roles from their parental ones, and the profound implications such a separation has for transforming both motherhood and fatherhood. She also provides an analysis of ways in which pre-divorce traditional, gendered divisions of material and emotional labour ironically produce certain opportunities and vulnerabilities for fathers and mothers after divorce. At the point of divorce, the assumed powers and responsibilities of the carer and breadwinner roles become almost reversed and can be experienced as a major shift in the perceived position and status of divorcing mothers and fathers (an argument further discussed below). This notion of the impact of pre-divorce roles and relationships on post-divorce family life has elsewhere been succinctly described as a “paradox of patriarchy” (Lewis & O’Brien 1987: 6).

Co-parenting relationships; powers, responsibilities and gender

Much of the research on how divorcing or separating parents perceive and present issues of money, contact and past roles and relationships, refers, more or less explicitly, to an idea of gendered power relations involved in parenting. As referred to above, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin (2002) develop an explicit typology of power differentials between mothers and fathers as part of their account of post-separation parenting experiences of ex-cohabiting couples. They cite housing, money, social support/networks and physical violence or intimidation as significant resources and expressions of power, in many ways similar to recent work on both fatherhood and family on lives more generally, using concepts of material, cultural and social capital (Morgan 2000, Edwards, Franklin & Holland 2003). Earlier work by Bradshaw et al (1999) also identified power relations in terms of 'parental competition' in post-divorce situations, with mothers and fathers competing, particularly, to stay close to their children. This study adopts a particularly empathic stance towards non-resident fathers, highlighting the difficulties they face, not least in relation to the social status perceived to be held by resident mothers. Once again, it may be that the concept of maternal gatekeeping (Allan & Hawkins 1999) has developed in part out of research focusing on fathers' perspectives and experiences (Bradshaw et al 1999, Lupton & Barclay 1997). More recently, Madden-Derdich & Leonard (2000) have provided a thoughtful and constructive discussion of gate-keeping behaviour, citing possible causes as mothers' feelings of "loss of control and threat to personal identity" (2000: 317) and emphasising again the need to better understand and be attentive to the complex nature of parental conflict.

The work of Smart & Neale (1999) also presents post-divorce parenting as an often painful renegotiation of power relations. They do this by considering the relative powers, status and resources associated with highly gendered, parental and spousal roles. As

discussed above, Smart & Neale suggest that divorce in many ways exposes the problems with enduring gendered divisions of domestic and emotional labour within marriage, and that such divisions ill-prepare, particularly fathers, for co-parenting after divorce or separation. Thus attempting to do so can produce situations where women as mothers may seek to defend their 'primary carer' status and men as fathers may seek to demand their right to share this. Smart & Neale use a feminist perspective in their research, and it is clear that they are particularly concerned with ongoing gender inequalities faced by mothers after divorce, who, they argue, will not only be expected to give up their primary carer status but also to (re)negotiate the labour market and become financially 'viable'. Smart (1999) develops this concern with the broader or more structural operations of gender power to argue that policy aimed at facilitating more involved fatherhood only *after* divorce is likely to produce a "form of disenfranchisement of motherhood rather than a new beginning of parenthood" (1999: 113).

Analysing post, and pre, divorce parenting in terms of the operation and exchange of powers and responsibilities, then, can be used to critique enduring gender norms, social policy, or family law. It can also generate insight into this highly significant relationship and produce a more sensitive, nuanced understanding of how and why mothers and fathers may invest in, defend, or challenge certain gendered roles and identities. Lewis, Papacosta & Warin (2002) in their analysis of post-separation fatherhood, identify the importance of the process by which fathers and mothers negotiate and define 'maternal authority' (2002: 27). They suggest that the experience and relative success of post-separation fatherhood is influenced in part by how fathers' perceive the status or power of mothers' claim to children. Their findings show that many fathers, despite holding more egalitarian views on parenting, and/or being highly involved prior to separation, assume the primacy of maternal authority, often expressing this in terms of this being natural or inevitable. The

extent to which ex-cohabiting fathers accept or challenge such assumptions which position (or relegate) them as secondary or supporting parents, alongside their knowledge of and engagement with family law, and the level of support/facilitation offered by their ex-partner, is seen in as a defining feature of their experience of fatherhood and one which “exposes and/or creates divisions of power between mother and father” (Lewis et al 2002: 30). As Bradshaw et al (1995) suggested, to some extent the acceptance of maternal authority appears to ease the process of co-parenting beyond divorce or separation, from fathers’ perspectives.

Trinder, Beek & Connolly (2002) also describe a process of negotiation over the relative power and authority of mothers and fathers after divorce. They too highlight the importance of the co-parental relationship and the extent to which fathers are willing and/or able to accept and adjust to a ‘new’ fathering role as being central to establishing more or less satisfactory patterns of contact. Trinder et al cite role clarity as one of their direct determinants of contact (2002: 25) and suggest that post-divorce parenting can be understood in terms of an, implicit, ‘parental role bargain’ (Ibid: 26) about the level and nature of the involvement of and the relationship to, the other parent. Where such a bargain is achieved it appears to involve acceptance of a non-resident parental role, and status on one side with an acceptance of a facilitating role by the resident parent on the other. Trinder et al claim, then, that contact which works, i.e. is deemed satisfactory by fathers, mothers and children, tends to be characterised by what they describe as this ‘gendered and conservative’ model, which none-the-less appears to leave each parent feeling reasonably secure: “Ironically...the parental bargain can result in low conflict but extensive contact resembling shared care, albeit with a different meaning for the participants” (Ibid: 28). Such a model may also be one in which the sharing of care is in moral rather than material terms in that non-resident parents (most often fathers) may spend less time directly caring

or being responsible for children, without feeling that their moral status and value as 'good' parents is under threat. In this way, caring arrangements for children may continue to be highly gendered, with fathers positioned as secondary or supplementary but also morally equivalent carers. Chapters six and seven of the thesis relate directly to these debates, through their discussion of fathers' sense of moral identity and of good fathering as a complex moral process.

One further issue within this discussion of gendered power relations between parents is the extent to which divorce/separation can be seen in part as a search for, or discovery of, personal autonomy. This arguably forms part of the assertion that divorce or separation constitute much more than simply a crisis or break-down of 'The Family' and should instead be recognised as potentially transformative, in both social and personal terms. However, the notion of autonomy is perceived, unsurprisingly, as different for mothers and fathers. For example, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin (2002) suggest that many fathers in their study described the development of direct, unmediated and sustained parental roles and relationships with their children in terms of establishing a form of autonomy, in relation to a sense of women's superior power in parenting. This is an interesting theme, not least because it again presents motherhood and the primary caring role as positions of power and advantage, at least in the context of divorce. It also presents autonomy as a form of self-direction which can be experienced through relationships and connections with others; most specifically children and mothers.

The achievement and benefits of autonomy have also been identified as part of mothers' experiences of divorce, but this time in terms of gaining greater independence, principally financial, and self-actualisation, alongside continuing but changed caring responsibilities (Smart & Neale 1999). What can be seen here though, and what connects this with the

feminist ethics of care is, again, a particular kind of understanding and conceptualisation of autonomy. Mackensie & Stoljar (2000) and Kagitcibasi (1996, 2005) specifically discuss and evaluate the concept of relational autonomy, where connection to others and self-direction are not opposed, and where relationships with others are constitutive of a sense of self and of agency. More broadly, the concept of relationality has become increasingly prominent in research on family and personal lives (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Smart 2007, Gabb 2008), in part as a means to highlight and attend to the processes and interdependencies of such relationships. This thesis also applies and develops the theoretical framework of relationality and the concept of relational autonomy through my analysis of fathers' narratives; most directly in chapter four.

Gender as an ongoing framework for care

Much of the analysis and theoretical discussion of post-divorce/separation parenthood engages with or emphasises the presence and significance of gender as both a structural and cultural framework through which lives are lived and articulated (Maclean & Eekelaar 1997, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). This also relates to debate over whether caring for children is best understood as sex specific, with the roles and competencies of men and women being seen as fundamentally different and unique, or whether it is both possible and desirable to pursue a gender-neutral approach in order to challenge longstanding assumptions and restrictions upon men and women. To some degree, and in some contexts, for example self-help literature, the term 'parent' is increasingly used as an alternative to 'mother' or 'father' in order to present these as equal and/or interchangeable in terms of their importance and competence. However, social scientific work has tended to argue that this obscures important differences in the

construction and experience of each role/identity, and underplays their interrelation (Smart & Neale 1999, Smart & May 2004, Doucet 2006).

Studies such as Smart & Neale (1999), Trinder, Beek & Connolly (2000) or Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies (2003) focus on how experiences of both biological and social parenting produce deeply felt and often defended identities and roles, which they see not as “gender specific in any essentialist way, but rather related to the socially gendered nature of parenting and daily responsibility for children in contemporary society” (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2000: 34). The literature generally also seems to suggest that divorce or separation often creates a tension between a desire to retain or revert to more traditional gender roles or arrangements and the need to adapt to changed circumstances. This tension can be understood in part as a coping strategy for insecurity, role confusion or feelings of threat to personal or parental identity, or that the marshalling of highly gendered notions of caring for children can appear almost as the adoption of readily available ‘fallback positions’. Chapters four, five, six and seven explore some of this ambivalence towards gender roles directly through the analysis of fathers’ narratives.

In the discussion of power relations above it was also noted that the terms mother and father carry particular cultural and moral currency in both personal and public contexts and so may become even more potent in the negotiation of parenting after divorce, where parents may each feel the need to assert and protect their own unique contribution and significance. Such struggles with gender, as both an empowering and debilitating force, is frequently presented as central to understanding the difficulties and distress of divorcing parents and also a key reason why forging new roles and relationships is so hard to do (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin 2002). Within the literature, there is a recurring sense of the particular ambiguity, and often vulnerability, of

non-resident fatherhood. Lewis et al (2002) illustrate this well in their recognition of the legal as well as social ambiguity particularly surrounding un-married non-resident fathers. There appears to be a general concern over the “lack of societal norms available to guide the redefinition of the father-child relationship after divorce” (Madden-Derdich & Leonard 2000: 316) and a growing awareness of the impact of gendered ideas and expectations in relation to caring for children, on the processes of co-parenting beyond divorce or separation. This is not to say that women as mothers do not also experience ambiguity over, for example whether to prioritise caring or breadwinning, particularly after divorce, but to make the point that not only will fathers’ and mothers’ experiences be different, but that wider social expectations of, or responses to, them may also vary.

Within analyses of ways in which divorce or separation can confront the gendered nature of parenting are also discussions of the potential for such disruption to produce (though never easily or inevitably) new experiences of mothering and fathering. Some studies, such as Bradshaw et al 1999), not least in their attempt to chart the potential positive outcomes of divorce, suggest the evolving of non-resident fathering roles, based around a greater identification with the relational aspects and responsibilities of parenthood and a paradoxical experience of closeness and distance; “more physically detached yet often stronger emotional bonds” (1999: 119). Others, for example Simpson, McCarthy & Walker (1995) present an emergent post-divorce fatherhood as characterised by a ‘letting go’ of a “traditional paternal role” (1995: 67) and the development of a relationship based on friendship and emotional closeness. Smart & Neale (1999) suggest that for some fathers divorce produces a shift in their parental identity leading them to feel much more responsible for their children. This notion of a different sense and potential enactment of responsibility is particularly significant as it has long been seen as a distinction between mothering and fathering (Lewis 1986, Backett 1987, Ribbens 1994), and could mean that

there is the potential for some redistribution of domestic responsibility (Doucet 2006). This is not to say that co-parenting beyond divorce or separation necessarily or easily produces 'transformative' experiences that may challenge the persistently gendered organisation of care, but it does not exclude, and maybe enhances the possibility that they might (Miller, forthcoming 2010). This argument is one illustrated through my own analysis and is discussed particularly in chapters five and six. As Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) point out, a contemporary understanding of a hegemonic gender order has to recognise or reconcile dynamic and contradictory ideas in a process of struggle. What sociological, particularly feminist, sociological work on family lives and post-divorce family relationships indicates is the need to be attentive and responsive to such relationships as a context in which this process is played out (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Doucet 2006).

This section of the literature review has dealt with the expanding body of sociological research on family lives following divorce or separation, with a particular focus on parental relationships. I have indicated that there is some overlap between this and work on fatherhood, and on family lives more generally; separation, divorce and the 'making' of families are increasingly recognised as part of the life course of many men, women and children. I have highlighted, in particular, areas of this literature which explore the co-parental relationship as significant and interdependent, and have drawn attention to the recurring theme of gender as a personal, social and political framework shaping the complex and difficult process of co-parenting beyond divorce or separation. I have also identified a certain engagement with feminist moral philosophy, more specifically the feminist ethics of care, as a set of theoretical and ethical arguments seen as potentially relevant to, and fruitful for, researching family lives. In the final section I now move on to consider this moral philosophical literature in more detail.

Section three: Family Lives and the Feminist Ethics of Care

The body of literature which defines, explores and defends a feminist ethics of care contributes both important critiques of established ways of thinking about ethics, morality, citizenship and care whilst also providing alternatives to them; operating at an epistemological and theoretical level but also at the level of practical application (Sevenhuijsen 2003). Spanning the last twenty five years, this literature might be loosely divided into two waves, with Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings as central figures in the early 1980's, and Joan Tronto and Selma Sevenhuijsen forming the core of a second wave from the early 1990's onwards (Williams 2004). In Northern Europe and the UK particularly, there has been a consistent empirical, sociological and feminist engagement with care and caring, with writers such as Hilda Ve (1989), Kari Waerness (1989), Hilary Graham (1983) and Finch & Mason (1993) being important examples. Most recently, Andrea Doucet provides a particularly clear engagement with the feminist ethics of care through her work on fathering (2004, 2006, 2008).

Many of the key thinkers within this literature, including Noddings (1984, 2003), Friedman (1987), Held (1987), Ruddick (1989) and Tronto (1987, 1993) include accounts of the particular relationship between women and the ethic of care, often also involving a consideration of the mother-child relationship as a specific and significant example of where ethics and everyday life are intertwined. In the main, whilst the embodied aspects of motherhood are fully recognised, it is the gendering of the social roles of women, and indeed of morality (Friedman 1987, in Larrabee, 1993) which is emphasised, producing accounts of moral reasoning which are grounded in, but not limited to, women's experiences of care, and from which care can be understood as a practice and as a way of

thinking. Attempts to develop a feminist ethics of care then, have sought to define care both in more precise or grounded terms, and at a philosophical or abstract level, aiming to reposition and stake the value of care as a basis for moral and political theory and also for social policy. More recent work, in particular that by Sevenhuijsen (2003), but also by Held (2006) and Doucet (2005), has explored the potential of a feminist ethics of care as a resource for issues such as caring for an ageing population, employment policy, globalisation and global power relations, masculinity and fatherhood.

Family Studies and the feminist ethics of care

Whilst historically it is possible to trace a sociological interest in the place of care, justice and ethical reasoning within families, outside of feminist moral philosophy (Graham 1983, Finch and Mason 1993), more recently there are examples of where the links between these two fields have become more explicit. A growing body of qualitative work on non-traditional relationships and households has rejected the preoccupation with family form/structure and emphasised instead that 'families' may be effectively understood as a collection of meaningful practices and relationships. Research on non-heterosexual partnership, friendship, lone-parenting, post-divorce and step-parenting has arguably explicitly sought to demonstrate and extend the range of contexts in which caring relations and responsibilities exist and are struggled with (Duncan & Edwards 1999, Smart & Neale 1999, Smart, Neale & Wade 2001, Thomson & Holland 2002, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003, Williams 2004). There are also clearly links with debates about justice and care, as the academic concern with diversity in intimate and family relationships has often been as much about challenging stigma and inequality as about straightforward recognition. Whilst sociologists of personal and family lives have

contributed to critiquing political and policy approaches, many have also frequently remained sceptical of the more 'militant' politicisation of, for example, some non-resident fathers (Smart 2004).

As referred to above, alongside the sociological focus on family practices, there has been a trajectory of acknowledgement and exploration of the moral aspects of family lives, and the 'work' involved in moral deliberation, moral responsibility, or moral accountability (Finch & Mason 1993, Smart & Neale 1999, Thomson & Holland 2002, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). Similarly there has also been critical engagement with concepts such as responsibility, obligation and so on, again echoing an interest within the feminist ethics of care field (Doucet 2006). Whilst there may be debate over the implications of using the term 'work' to describe family life (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards 2002) it appears often to be used in order to indicate, and perhaps to give credit to, individuals as active, and often reflexive, moral agents.

I would also argue that this direction in sociological research has produced another form of engagement with the feminist ethics of care, in terms of a shared interest in reflexivity and the place of value judgments in the process of knowledge production. Many of the researchers involved in qualitative studies of personal and family lives, particularly of parental relationships after divorce or separation, have adopted a self-consciously reflexive approach to their work, offering not only insights into how to research morality without moralising, but also arguably into the ethical treatment of others and of difference, within the context (or constraints) of social scientific academic disciplines (Edwards & Ribbens 1998, Mauthner & Doucet 2003, Gillies & Lucey 2007, Doucet 2008). Having set out the focus and scope of the feminist ethics of care literature and indicated its connections to

certain contemporary sociological work on family relationships, I will now review some of the theoretical contributions which have informed my own research and analysis.

Theorising Care

A central preoccupation of the feminist ethics of care has clearly been to critically examine existing conceptions of care and caring, and to develop alternatives, seeking to enrich and expand both the value and reach of care as a theoretical and political concept. As part of this process, a number of recurring issues or debates have emerged: the relationship between care and gender, between justice and care, and the potential of care as a basis for moral and/or political theory. Here, I will focus on the theorisation of care and the relationship between care and gender difference, as these debates are most directly relevant to the thesis.

Two of the most significant and thorough attempts to define care and caring relations can be found in the work of Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto (also with Berenice Fisher). Noddings (1984, 2003) is significant in the development of ideas around care and caring as a starting point for an alternative moral theory, and offers a detailed definition of care as a central, crucial and *human* practice. She presents, as do others (for example Ruddick 1989), care as a practice and therefore as learnt and importantly, as improvable, but also argues that early experiences of being cared for are definitively human, or “universally accessible” (Noddings, 2003: 5). This point illustrates a significant theme in feminist ethics, which is to highlight the commonality of human vulnerability, not just at the beginning and end of life, but as a constant and fundamental condition. This conception forms the basis for the recognition and valuing of care and caring relations, and provides

an important platform for the concepts of interdependence and a relational self (Ruddick 1989, Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998).

Noddings presents a central relation between the 'one-caring' and the 'cared-for'; arguing that while this relationship involves both parties, it is neither symmetrical nor equal. Here, Noddings illustrates another recurring analytical point within the literature: understanding the relationship between those caring, and those cared for, is seen to have important implications for developing a feminist moral theory which does not relegate or romanticise women's experiences of care, and which does not reduce caring to a selfless or self-sacrificial act. Related to this, Noddings distinguishes between 'natural caring', which she sees as spontaneous and most evident within the mother-child relationship, and caring as an 'ethical ideal', which refers to the process by which we struggle to reason, act and relate to others in an ethical way. It is here perhaps, where Noddings has been most criticised, for idealising or naturalising the mothering relationship (Tronto & Fisher, in Abel & Nelson, 1990). Noddings also makes a distinction between 'caring for', which she sees as involving caring activities and responsibilities experienced directly, and 'caring about' which involves a more indirect concern and potential for caring activity with those at greater distance. Noddings argues that there are always limits on who we can feasibly care for, and whilst she suggests that 'caring for' forms a foundation for caring about, she retains the distinction that "in one sense, caring refers to an actuality; in the other, it refers to a verbal commitment to the possibility of caring" (2003: 18).

Tronto and Fisher (1990) offer a slightly different, broader definition of caring:

A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world", so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Tronto & Fisher, in Abel & Nelson 1990: 40)

This definition illustrates Tronto's overall approach to the feminist ethics of care, which she believes will not be productive (or feminist) "until we place such an ethic in its full moral and political context" (Tronto 1993: 125). Whilst Tronto is clearly a feminist, she argues that a different ethical voice may come more from structural and social subordination, of which women provide one example, rather than stemming exclusively from women's experiences. In this way, she also argues strongly against any tendency to essentialise care as being innately feminine, and is critical of both Gilligan and Noddings for coming too close to doing so.

Tronto and Fisher (1990) set out what they describe as four aspects of care: caring about, taking care of, care giving and care receiving. Alongside these are corresponding ethical values: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness, each of which also act as evaluative criteria, producing both the possibility to consider good enough caring, and to define moral or ethical failings such as 'inattentiveness' or 'privileged irresponsibility' (Tronto 2004). Tronto, and Tronto & Fisher, also define these ethical values from the premise of a connected, relational and socially situated self, and of care as a practice, with both cognitive and affective elements, rather than by constructing or drawing on notions of abstract and formal moral principles. This concern with developing a moral theory grounded in context and practice, and emphasising the process of moral deliberation and decision making, rather than detached conformity to absolute moral rules, is again, a central preoccupation of writers in this field (Larrabee 1993).

In addition to seeking to enrich the conceptualisation of care, a central argument has also been for its development and potential as a moral and political theory (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998, Held 2006). Selma Sevenhuijsen is a highly significant figure here, and shares with Tronto an interest in “a search for an appropriate vocabulary for making care into a political issue from a feminist perspective” (1998: 6). The focus of Sevenhuijsen’s work, more specifically, has been to explore and argue the value of care in relation to citizenship; again seeking to critique traditional models of both the citizen and the nature of citizenship. For her, ethics and morality are intimately linked to citizenship as: “judging is a principle task of citizenship and thus of collective action in a democratic context” (1998: 15). Echoing Walker (1989), Sevenhuijsen also values (and asserts) the way in which a feminist ethics of care can offer, not only new ways of thinking about citizenship as an aspect of ethical life, but also about morality itself and the process of ‘judging’. Sevenhuijsen continues to develop this relationship between an ethic of care and a political theory of citizenship in her later work, and like Tronto, asserts care as a political concept, arguing for it to be fully transferred to the public sphere. In 2003, drawing on her work on Dutch social and family policy, Sevenhuijsen extended and restated her argument, suggesting that there is evidence (in The Netherlands at least) of a certain “relocation” of both politics and care, which offer important new possibilities for using an ethics of care “for judging with care, about care” (2003: 182).

Care and Gender

An area of debate, then, clearly related to the problem of defining or theorising care is that of the relationship between care and gender. Whilst Gilligan (1982) claimed not to be presenting an essentialist account of the ‘different voice’, she remains a focal point for the

question of whether the different voice is definitively female. The development of a feminist ethics of care has provided opportunities for fruitful and constructive discussion of gender difference and alongside this, a critical consideration of the risks and implications of attempting to theorise difference in feminist terms. Alongside the re-claiming or re-valuing women's experiences of caring, there is also the aim of critiquing the gendered, unequal distribution of caring labour and seeking to establish care as a central social and political issue. In this way then, the literature on a feminist ethics of care provides another example of a much wider and longstanding feminist concern with pursuing equality without equating this with sameness (Sevenhuijsen 2000: 28). This debate is also clearly shaped by the desire to re-position and assert the value and legitimacy of care in the development of moral theory, and to use women's experiences as a real context from which ethical relationships and moral deliberation can be modelled. The challenge is then how to present and make use of women's experiences without further consigning them to be natural or best carers for evermore, and without idealising or sentimentalising women as mothers.

Writers like Ruddick (1989) and Tronto (1993) explicitly state that they use women's caring experiences, particularly as mothers, in order to both make visible their deeply ethical, deliberative and relational qualities and to assert the value of such experiences as a model for ethical reasoning in other contexts. Ruddick's work on 'maternal practice' and 'maternal thinking' is an interesting example. She offers a careful consideration of what constitutes mothering, but argues that this forms a practical and epistemological model, rather than an exclusively female set of qualities or competencies.

Maternal practice begins in a response to a biological child in a particular social world. To be a "mother" is to take upon oneself the responsibility of childcare...In my terminology they are "mothers" just because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting the demands that define maternal work (Ruddick, 1989: 17)

Ruddick defines maternal work as the commitment to and practice of, preservation love, nurturance and training, in response to what she sees as the primary demands of childcare: preservation, growth and social acceptability (ibid). She then uses this model of maternal practice to develop her concept of maternal thinking, as a distinctive form of reasoning and reflection: "Maternal work itself demands that mothers think; out of this thoughtfulness, a distinctive discipline emerges" (1989: 24). Having rooted maternal thinking firmly within the experience of mothering, Ruddick's aim is then to demonstrate that it is not limited or tied to women as a group; the challenge is to value women's difference without losing sight of feminist goals of gender equality.

One implication of Ruddick's early work was the question of whether male carers for children could be described as mothering, i.e. whether recognising maternal work as a practice and form of ethics, could lead to a rejection of any distinctive characteristics or differences between mothering and fathering. Ruddick herself later returned to this issue, and discussed the ways in which her own views and hopes have changed over time (Ruddick, 1997). Making a key distinction between the ideal of Fatherhood which she sees as deeply problematic, and the complex and persistently gendered experiences of mothers and fathers, Ruddick argues instead for an acknowledgement of distinctive fathering and mothering, but within the context of an ethics of sexual difference; "an ethics which contests the longstanding misogyny and heterosexual bigotry, which resists the cruelty and coercion that have attended the idea of Fatherhood" (Ruddick, 1997: 218). More recently

still, Doucet's work on fathers and fathering (2006, 2008) engages directly with Ruddick's ideas, and most specifically the question of 'do men mother?' Doucet's response is that they do not; arguing that there remain gender differences in both the experience of caring activities and responsibilities, and that there are distinctive qualities to male caring which can enrich and expand our empirical and theoretical understanding of care. Doucet argues for the importance of a nuanced, grounded and more accurate understanding of male caring and gender difference, but again, from a feminist perspective which can attend to fathering without either simply comparing it to mothering, or disenfranchising mothers in the process (Doucet 2008).

The Feminist Ethics of Care and the concept of Relationality

A further central concept within the feminist ethics of care is that of relationality. Whilst not developed exclusively within this field, relationality forms an important backdrop for feminist conceptions of the self, agency and ethical reasoning. It is also significant as a concept which appears to have been successfully integrated into contemporary thinking about family lives and relationships (Mason 2004, Doucet 2006, Smart 2007, Gabb 2008).

Relationality appears as a persistent, cross-disciplinary concept, rooted in developmental psychology and psychoanalysis within the work of, for example, Carol Gilligan (1982, 1992), Jean Baker Miller (1976), or Cigdem Kagitcibasi (1996, 2005). In terms of its development, in addition to the sociological work identified above, there is also a strand of interest within some anthropological work on kinship (Janet Carsten 2000), and the psychosocial and psychoanalytic work on care by Wendy Hollway (2006). This thesis draws on the more philosophical and sociological understandings of relationality; in

particular the way in which it appears within the feminist ethics of care, as relevant to both theoretical work and to the practice of research. My argument is that the expanded concepts of caring practices and relations, together with the corresponding idea of the relational self found within the feminist ethics of care, are important and insightful for understanding the complex and difficult process of fathering and mothering beyond divorce or separation. Chapters four and five of the thesis discuss and illustrate this argument based on my analysis of narratives of fathering beyond divorce or separation.

The central characteristic of relationality is the defining, fundamental nature of connection to others, as the basis for human experience and agency (Noddings, 2003). This core premise produces particular models of the self, of agency, of relationships and for feminist moral philosophers, of moral reasoning, constituting a robust challenge to standard, post-Enlightenment, Western conceptions of the individual, and by extension, the moral subject and the citizen, as entirely independent, detached and governed only by instrumental reason. Relationality also highlights the complexity and powerfully felt nature of connection while recognising the asymmetry if not inequality of many caring relationships (Young 1997, Gabb 2008). As a feminist concept, another central claim is that relationality is neither essentially female nor reductionist, in the sense of either sentimentalising caring relationships or seeing them purely in terms of self-sacrifice or dependence. The wider argument put forward from feminist moral philosophy is that relationality and the concept of a relational self can and should be extended far beyond the 'private' sphere of personal relationships, as a political concept relevant to debates around the social organisation of care, family and employment law, citizenship and ethics. Writers such as Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2000, 2003) and Joan Tronto (2004) have continued to

champion the significance of relationality and a relational self, as a political as well as analytical resource.

Theorising the Relational Self

Within the feminist ethics of care there has been a consistent theorisation of the self as being in-relation or in-connection to others. Sevenhuijsen (2000) emphasises the idea that we are always, already connected to others in a web of relations and contexts, implying that this relational self is more than a simple result of the socialization process, or a theoretical replication of a symbolic interactionist model. Once again, Gilligan (1982) is an important early reference point, presenting a connected-self as an aspect of the 'different voice' of moral reasoning. However Nona Lyons (1983) is also relevant, as her work sought to provide an empirical demonstration of two distinct modes of describing the self in relation to others, and to test Gilligan's hypothesis that such modes are related to gender. The concept of the connected or relational self involves, and therefore treats as valid, love, emotion, affective ties, responsibility and the desire to preserve relationships; contrasting this with the model of the individual found within established political and moral theory.

While the moral subject in the discourse of individual rights looks at situations of moral dilemmas from the stance of the 'highest principles' and takes rights and obligations as a means of establishing relationships, the moral subject in the discourse of care always already lives in a network of relationships, in which s/he has to find balances between different forms of responsibility for the self, for others and for the relationship between them (Sevenhuijsen 2000: 10)

In this way, the approach taken by theorists of a feminist ethics of care, involves what Sevenhuijsen (1998) has described as a relational ontology, which asserts as founding premises the human condition of vulnerability and the need for care, the central place of caring in the formation of the self, and the self as always in relation to a complex network of others. Sevenhuijsen, drawing on Iris Young (1997), also makes an important distinction between self-sufficiency and self-determination, in order to restate the case that care can include self-determination and that caring relations are not simply a form of dependence. Sevenhuijsen uses the concept of relational autonomy (Kagitcibasi 1996, Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000) to capture this notion of the self-other relationship as fundamental, interdependent, and in which connection and agency are not seen as being in opposition. Chapter four of the thesis draws on, and explores the concept of relational autonomy, as it appears within narratives of fathering beyond couplehood.

Understanding the moral

Whilst the feminist ethics of care has clearly provided a key source for my interest in and emphasis on the moral aspects of family and specifically fathering relationships, it is important to also acknowledge other work on morality which has shaped my approach. As discussed, the ethical values of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness, outlined by Tronto and Fisher (1990) have informed my analytical work and my research practice, providing both a way of thinking and a language for my study of fathers' narratives. I have also drawn heavily on the understanding of caring relations and caring practice as a form of moral reasoning, and as a basis for responding to the complex

moral questions and dilemmas posed by family and parental relationships, particularly in the context of divorce or separation.

In addition though, or as a more general grounding to my understanding and working definition of morality, the work of Goffman (1969) and of Sayer (2005, forthcoming 2011) are key reference points. Goffman presents morality as an intrinsic part of everyday life, and as something that must be 'worked at'. Branaman (1997) argues that Goffman's conception of the moral is as a dimension of social interaction, rather than as either an internal psychic or subconscious mechanism or as an external structure of absolute principles. Branaman goes on to present Goffman's view of social life as one in which "morality is affirmed by means of everyday-life interactional rituals" (1997: lxiv) and this emphasis on the dynamic and routine presence of moral issues and on the processes involved in interpreting and responding to these, supports my own focus on the moral aspects of sustaining fathering and co-parental relationships beyond divorce or separation.

Andrew Sayer (2005, forthcoming 2011) takes a similar approach to morality, in that he too emphasises 'lay normativity' and argues the need to "take lay normativity seriously, particularly regarding the ethics of everyday life, and attend to its content and internal rationales" (Sayer, 2005a: 5). Part of Sayer's own approach to this challenge has been his sustained critique of the philosophical tradition of separating reason from values, and his insistence on the reasonableness of values and the evaluative nature of human beings and of human emotions (Sayer forthcoming 2011). Through his work on social class, Sayer has also sought to explore morality as part of everyday life and as a form of reason, not simply as something prescribed by "external forces or cultural scripts" (Sayer, 2005b: 3). Drawing frequently on the work of Nussbaum (2000), and her ideas of wellbeing and human

flourishing, Sayer defines morality in terms of “what kinds of behaviour are good and thus how we should treat others and be treated by them” (Sayer 2005a: 8), arguing that the most important questions people face in their daily lives are moral ones. Sayer’s approach to theorising and understanding morality, then, has also been important in the development of my own framework for thinking about the moral aspects of fathers’ narratives, and chapters six and seven deal specifically with this part of my analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the theoretical and research context for my thesis, providing an overview of the three main areas of literature that have informed my work, and defining certain key concepts, such as care, relationality and morality which form a major part of my analysis. As part of my discussion of research on fatherhood, post-divorce parenting and the feminist ethics of care, I have also sought to demonstrate the connections and overlaps between them; for example, the focus within post-divorce parenting literature on non-resident fathers, and the emphasis on moral aspects of family relationships within recent sociological work on family lives. In addition I have highlighted certain recurring themes; the ideas of transition and process, and the significance of gender as a structural, cultural and emotional framework through which family relationships are lived. After explaining my methodological approach in the following chapter, these themes are further explored in the remaining substantive chapters of my thesis, as part of my analysis of context, relationality and moral reasoning within narratives of fathering beyond couple hood.

Chapter Two: The methodological approach and design of the study

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an account of my methodological approach, my chosen method and the processes of data collection, analysis and representation. I will pay particular attention to discussing some of the challenges posed by my efforts to 'do' reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet 2003) at all stages of the project, and the value of adopting such an approach. I identify some key epistemological, theoretical and methodological reference points which have informed my research journey and influence, in particular, my attempts to think and write with rigour and care about the moral and relational aspects of this set of narratives of fathering beyond couplehood.

Epistemological and theoretical approach

My epistemological approach can be described as interpretivist, in that I assume that knowledge can be defined as an interpretive understanding of the 'experienced reality' of research participants, and that multiple realities exist. The research process therefore involves the researcher entering the participants' worlds, and re-producing "an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it" (Charmaz, cited in Gubrium &

Holstein, 2002: 678). My approach has some similarities with Charmaz's discussion of grounded theory, in that I also recognise the co-constructed nature of qualitative data, the iterative nature of research, and the 'fit' between grounded analysis and the symbolic interactionist focus on studying how meaning and action are actively produced. As a researcher then, a key aim was to "learn participants' implicit meanings of their experiences to build a conceptual analysis of them" (Charmaz 2006).

My interest in a symbolic interactionist perspective is also rooted in my use of Goffman as a key source for arriving at a working definition of morality. As discussed in the previous chapter I am assuming that morality, in terms of concerns over what is considered valuable, right or best, in relation to the well-being of ourselves and those we care about, is an intrinsic part of everyday life, rather than something which resides "within us or above us" (Branaman, 1997: xlvi). In presenting morality as a deeply embedded element of human social life, Goffman argues that sustaining a moral identity is a necessary or inevitable part of social interaction. Branaman (1997) sees Goffman's view of social life as one in which "morality is affirmed by means of everyday-life interactional rituals" (1997: lxiv) and my own approach within this project was to explore fathers' perceptions and accounts of the moral aspects of their fathering roles and relationships, in a post-couple context. This is in keeping with the interpretivist and constructionist understanding of data collection and analysis, outlined above. Using this approach enabled me to include consideration of 'how' as well as 'what' was said in an interview, and to draw on ideas of strategy, display, self-presentation and accounting, in my analysis.

My interpretivist epistemological position, which recognises the process of qualitative data collection as a co-construction, and as a topic for analysis in itself, is also consistent

with my interest in reflexivity (Rapley 2001). From the outset I have actively engaged with reflexivity as a research practice, rather than simply claiming it as a feature of my study. In this way, one intention has been to contribute to discussions on how to 'do' reflexivity (Skeggs 2002, Mauthner & Doucet 2003). Drawing on feminist writings in particular (Ribbens & Edwards 1998, Mauthner, Birch, Jessop & Miller 2002, Gillies & Lucey 2007), I have taken the stance that reflexive practice is possible and desirable at every stage of the research process, and broadly involves being prepared to acknowledge, examine and maintain a critical distance from, the relationships, ideas and assumptions which inevitably shape any research project.

Feminist theory also strongly orientates my research in that I am principally concerned with challenging gender differences and critically evaluating the cultural and structural norms around gender roles and relations. In the context of my study, this is specifically related to deeply embedded, gendered patterns of organising and valuing care; care of children in particular. However, following Andrea Doucet's approach, I also take the view that contemporary feminist analysis must engage with conceptions of both equality and difference, enabling greater understanding of when, and in what contexts gender difference amounts to disadvantage. Doucet (2006) cites Deborah Rhode (1989) in her expression of this idea as a consideration of "the difference, difference makes" (2006: 26). My approach has therefore been to apply a critical lens to post-couple fathering and on fathers' narratives, as one context in which gender matters; revealing ways in which gender differences and disadvantages may operate. Like Doucet, my feminist stance on fathering is

“one that works towards challenging gender asymmetries round care and employment, encouraging and embracing active fathering, while always remembering and valuing the long historical tradition of women’s work, identities and power in caregiving” (Doucet 2006: 30).

The theoretical challenge of asserting the value and moral philosophical status of care, whilst also critiquing the gender inequalities involved in its social organisation, has been a significant influence on my work. In addition, I have also been mindful of Doucet’s (2006, 2008) considerations of how to hear, understand and evaluate men’s accounts of fathering, without instinctively applying “maternal standards” (2006: 28) to them, and I return to this particular challenge below.

The shifting order of my research questions:

The overall aims of my research were to produce a qualitative, grounded analysis of post-divorce/separation fathering:

- offering insight into fathers’ own perceptions of their roles and relationships with children and mothers
- contributing to a growing body of reflexive empirical work on family lives
- furthering understanding of the broader social and political significance of fathering beyond couplehood

Initially my research questions were ranked in terms of fathers’ orientation to paid employment, their perceptions of caring for children, and their accounts of time spent, and relationships with, children. However, it is important to detail the shift in this ordering as my early interest in how fathers organised and felt about their working lives in relation to caring responsibilities was overtaken by a stronger preoccupation with the relational and

moral aspects of the interview narratives. This shift was informed in part by the emergence and resonance of moral and relational themes from early interviews and also by my deeper engagement with literature on relationality and on the feminist ethics of care. As the interviewing progressed and I began to develop my analytical approach, the rationale and motivation to prioritise the relational and moral dimensions of fathers' narratives grew stronger, leading to the ordering and structure of the chapters which now follow.

The process of recruitment & sampling:

Geographical context:

The participants involved in this study all live in a comparatively rural area of Eastern England. Eight fathers lived in or around cities, and the rest lived either in smaller market towns, or villages. The emergence of the specific locations primarily arose out of my focus on certain large local employers and on the family/father support services active and responsive in the region, together with my own local knowledge, working experience and social networks.

The decision to focus on fathers only:

I chose to focus only on fathers because I am interested in the experience of parenting beyond divorce from their particular perspective, and the ways in which men, as fathers, perceive the process of seeking to sustain caring roles and relationships. Whilst interviewing only fathers clearly gives a very particularly situated story, my aim was not to establish the 'truth' of, or judge between, stories of divorce, but to explore the accounts of, and moral and relational reasoning within, fathers' narratives of their experiences. Clearly I

am only hearing one part of a bigger story of parenting beyond couplehood, but I remain committed to and deeply interested in, the importance of understanding men's experiences and perceptions as fathers as part of developing a feminist analysis of family lives and the persistent gender differences and disadvantages in the organisation and valuing of care for children. In terms of recruitment, my decision to only interview fathers and to make this explicit in the recruitment literature may also have encouraged more fathers to take part.

In addition, in the light of the recent politicisation of, particularly, non-resident fatherhood (Geldof 2003, Collier 2005, Featherstone 2009) and the media interest in some fathers' rights organisations such as Fathers4Justice (Geldof 2003, Dyer, 2005), it seems important to acknowledge the range and diversity of experiences of fathering after divorce or separation. It is particularly important to recognise and explore the accounts of divorced or separated fathers who *do* claim to be sustaining their roles and relationships with children (and ex-partners), given the ongoing social anxiety about divorce generally and 'father absence' in particular. More broadly, any feminist analysis of the persistent gender inequalities in the conception, valuing and organisation of 'work' and 'care' cannot focus exclusively on the experiences of women. Without social scientific research, on both mothers' *and* fathers' experiences, the ability to understand, acknowledge and support post-couple parenting generally, and post-couple fathering specifically, is seriously limited.

Publicity and recruitment:

The preparation of recruitment literature, giving details of the project and how to participate, provided particular points for consideration. I had previously used terms like 'co-parenting' and 'regular contact' in academic writing about the project, but when

designing a leaflet and poster to use for recruitment, I had to think more carefully and reflexively about how such terms could be received and about the implicit assumptions they might contain. Whilst my focus was on fathers who did have contact arrangements and who spent time with their children on a regular basis, to impose formal or quantitative limits on what counted as 'regular' would have been impractical and judgemental, and in the end I did not use the word 'regular' in my publicity material. Instead I used the phrase "fathers who see and take care of their children" (see appendix one), which I felt would allow for the reader and potential participant's own interpretation. I also felt that the title of the study: 'Working At It' could convey a positive, non-judgmental tone for the study, which might encourage fathers to participate. In addition, as referred to above, my decision to only interview fathers may also have made participation more likely, as fathers may have felt that the project was specifically interested in them, or was not seeking to compare or corroborate stories of post-divorce parenting. The one criterion I did impose was that fathers needed to have been divorced or separated for at least one year, in order to take part. This is not to deny the ongoing challenges and painful emotions of co-parenting after divorce, but was an ethical decision taken to avoid interviewing fathers in the early stages of this process, and thus be attentive to the potential emotional impact of taking part in the study. The variety of forms of contact and caring arrangements within the sample suggests that these design decisions were constructive and helped to produce a fruitful and broad-ranging sample. The completed recruitment leaflet and poster was available either in hard copy or electronically and was distributed to 13 family support organisations and four local employers, as well as directly to individual fathers.

Accessing fathers:

I used three main access routes to fathers: local employers, family support services, including those aimed specifically at fathers, and my own social and professional networks. I will briefly discuss each in turn.

The first access route used was to contact employers across the region via their human resources departments or managers, or again where possible, using personal/social contacts. One such contact was within a large FE College, a significant employer within the region, and using both word of mouth and electronic communication, including emailing the information leaflet, I was able to reach a large number of potential participants across a range of academic, vocational, management and support areas within the college. In total, I recruited nine fathers, in a range of positions, through the FE College, and eight of these volunteered to take part by responding either to my emailed or verbal invitation; the ninth father was originally volunteered by his current wife, and then agreed to take part when I approached him directly.

Following this recruitment via the FE College I then attempted to access fathers working in manufacturing, to broaden the range of types and experiences of employment and to try and contact working class fathers in particular. I made direct contact with three large companies via their personnel or general managers and in each case was asked to email full details of the project. The initial responses were guarded and two of the companies did not contact me again. One manager of a haulage company did invite me to a meeting and agreed to distribute leaflets via wage packets. Whilst this did not result in any offers of interviews, the opportunity to discuss working practices, divorce, and attitudes

towards fathers as employees, with a male manager, was valuable in terms of gaining both a broader picture of organisational practice, and insight from a particular 'interested' individual. One other factory manager also agreed to put up posters advertising the research, but again this did not yield any offers of an interview. I feel that my inability to contact fathers in person, and the potential association between me and the employing organisation, may have been factors in the lack of response to either of these strategies. Whilst I did not succeed in recruiting working class fathers by this means, overall, my sample was diverse in occupational terms and I was able to develop other 'father-centred' access routes to contact potential participants directly (McKee & O'Brien, 1983).

In addition to negotiating with large organisations via their personnel or senior management, I also contacted the local Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses, and was invited to attend a business networking breakfast to informally discuss my research. This provided a very different context in which to talk about and 'sell' the project and gave me some access to small businesses and free-lance or self-employed workers. This meeting produced two offers of an interview, in response to my direct invitation to take part, and also expanded the sample in terms of types of employment as it gave me access to a lawyer and a financial adviser. In total, 11 fathers were recruited via their place of work.

The second access route to fathers was through family support organisations. I spent five months establishing contact with and visiting a range of family support organisations, with a view to either directly or indirectly gaining access to fathers. These included: family centres, Sure Start Children's centres, contact and mediation service providers, two fathers' groups and a family support service provided by the voluntary sector. I also had telephone

contact with, and sent publicity material to, a range of other voluntary organisations providing services to families and/or parents across the region. All the practitioners I encountered were helpful and interested in the project, offering to approach parents on my behalf, to take posters and leaflets, and offering other relevant contact numbers or groups. Whilst I valued the opportunity to gain insight into the level and nature of service provision and to add a more ethnographic element to the study, this initial work yielded limited direct access to potential participants and few actual offers of interviews.

The exception to this was my involvement with three fathers' workers in the region, which produced invitations to talk to groups of fathers, to attend events such as a play performed by young fathers, and to be directly included in future groups or activities. My first attendance at a Young Fathers Group resulted in four offers of an interview, and the facilitation of these interviews at a family centre by a male senior social worker. Indeed the, all male, fathers' workers I met acted more as sponsors than as gatekeepers, were committed to taking fathers' issues seriously, but were cautious of, or ambivalent towards, some fathers rights organisations; specifically Fathers For Justice. They were encouraging and responsive to my requests for information and access, and this in turn impacted on the way fathers themselves perceived and responded to me. Whilst such interest and warmth was welcomed in terms of allowing me to recruit participants, it equally became a point of reflexive consideration in relation to the implication of differing expectations and assumptions between these men and me. The fathers' workers in particular had an obvious enthusiasm to raise the profile of fathers and fathering, and may have assumed that my work would only be sympathetic to fathers. This provided a real context in which my feminist approach towards gender difference and gender equality had to be thought through and sometimes articulated, and I discuss this point further below. Overall, this means of

accessing fathers was the most time consuming and extensive. It again, provided highly valuable opportunities to extend my general knowledge of service provision and to gain insights into the worlds of practitioners, offering important contextualisation for the project. In total, I recruited eight fathers via this route; six from the fathers' group and two from other family support organisations. One of these two fathers was originally volunteered by his current wife, but again agreed to take part when I contacted him directly. I had no direct refusals, although two men from the fathers' group who originally offered to take part were not then able to commit themselves to arranging a time to do the interview. After two failed attempts with each, I took the decision not to contact them again.

Lastly, I also made use of particular professional and social networks as a mean of accessing fathers; a form of snowballing via colleagues or friends of friends. I eventually recruited four fathers by this means. In terms of my personal friends my more extensive knowledge of, and closer relationships with, often both parties in a divorce or separation, made both myself and friends more reluctant to take up the roles of researcher and participant and, again, whilst no direct refusals were made, no interviews were offered.

Sample characteristics:

It is important to consider from the outset that the primarily volunteer sample of 23 fathers, by offering to give an interview, may have seen themselves as having a legitimate and morally defensible story to tell, or at least explore. Some appeared to feel that their stories were tellable because they were tales of endurance, hardship, injustice or heroism, and in different ways, all the fathers made reference to, or defined themselves as being in line

with, current discourses of active fathering. This is not to say that all or any of the fathers presented themselves as beyond reproach or self assured about their experiences and behaviour; all of the stories were morally complex and contained often conflicting or contrapuntal accounts (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch 2003, Doucet & Mauthner 2008). My efforts at morally neutral language within the recruitment literature, and my exclusive focus on fathers, may have extended the range of men likely to see themselves as 'suitable' for interview, but the sample is still self-selecting, and therefore the issue of non-participation is relevant. Fathers may have chosen not to offer an interview because the topic was felt to be too personal, too sensitive or too intrusive. An additional question raised is whether it is possible to tell an 'amoral' story (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) of post-couple fathering, or whether the narration of this experience, in a semi-public context, is only possible within certain moral boundaries.

The 23 fathers were aged between 21 and 60 and all had at least one biological child where the marriage or partnership with the mother had ended; two fathers in the group had experienced the birth of a child and the ending of a partnership twice in their 'parental career' (Lewis & Lamb 2007). This means that the data consists of a total of 25 'cases' of post-couple fathering. The majority of fathers (16) had been married to the mothers of their children, whilst eight had cohabited and one had never lived with his partner, and just over half of all the couple relationships had lasted for ten years or more. The length of time since the couple relationship had ended ranged between one year and 18 years, with ten fathers having been divorced or separated for two years, and six for over ten years. In 13 cases the father claimed to have ended the couple relationship. Within this group there were two cases where the father said they had left the marital home unwillingly (under instruction from social services) but had subsequently ended the relationship. In ten cases

fathers' said it was the mother who had ended the couple relationship. There were no cases where fathers said that there had been a mutual or amicable decision to end the couple relationship. See appendix two for a brief descriptive summary of each participant.

The 36 dependent children in the sample ranged in age from two to 18; of these 17 were girls, and 19 boys. Whilst all the fathers had at least one biological child under 18, there were also a further eight non-dependent/adult children also included and discussed as part of fathers' narratives. Just under half the group had caring responsibilities for subsequent children, either as biological or social fathers, through forming new partnerships, and nine fathers were resident fathers to either biological or step-children at the time of interview. In terms of ethnicity, the sample contained one Black British and one Iraqi father, whilst the rest were all White British. In terms of sexuality, whilst fathers were not directly asked, all presented themselves as heterosexual at the time of interview. The one case where sexuality was more directly addressed was by a father whose marriage had ended because his wife had come out as a lesbian.

The sample is heterogeneous in terms of age, employment, type of contact arrangements and quality of co-parental relationship with mothers. In terms of employment, the sample includes fathers who work full time (13), part time (two), were self employed (three), registered unemployed (three), registered disabled (one) or studying full time (one). It also contains a range of both professional and non-professional occupations, and so does offer some insight into the experiences of working class fathers. The kinds of jobs included: lorry driving, shop security, plastering, financial services, teaching and family law. However, whilst I wanted to include working class fathers, class difference was not the main analytical focus of my study and therefore I did not

systematically operationalise or sample for it. From the outset, my interest was in the influence of gender on male caring, and my intention was to develop a diverse sample of fathers in a range of work and caring situations, so that I could explore their narratives as a context in which gendered thinking, expectations and assumptions might play a part. From my analysis, the only context in which class appeared to make a visible difference was in relation to fathers' material circumstances, particularly housing, and this is discussed further in chapter three.

The sample also contains a variety of fathering situations and patterns of contact, including three main-carer fathers (where children also had contact with their mother). As might be expected from the aims and recruitment literature, there were more cases where the parental relationship was amicable, and in some cases highly collaborative, but there were also cases where, whilst the father presented himself as committed to maintaining contact, the parental relationship was conflicted or was based on a minimal level of trust and communication. In 11 cases, the quality of the relationship between the father and mother could be described as amicable and cooperative. In six cases the relationship was fairly amicable with some tension, and within this group in three cases the relationship had developed from being conflicted to fairly amicable. In three cases the relationship could be described as fairly conflicted or distant and in five cases the relationship was highly conflicted, with ongoing disputes over contact arrangements. In the majority of cases (14), solicitors had been involved in the making of both contact and financial arrangements for children, but in eight cases there had been a higher degree of conflict which had involved family court proceedings, CAFCASS and children's services. In three cases all arrangements had been made entirely privately. In terms of contact arrangements, the most common form (15 fathers) was regular, staying-over, weekend contact and periods of

school holidays and this includes the three main-carer fathers, where mothers had weekend contact arrangements for their children. One father had a more formal shared-care arrangement, where he and his ex-wife each cared for their son for half of the week and alternate weekends. Two fathers whose children lived a long distance away had longer periods of (staying) contact during school holidays, together with regular phone/letter contact. Two fathers had regular supervised contact, either in a contact centre or with a 'chaperone'. Three fathers had unstable weekend contact, in a situation of ongoing conflict with an ex-partner. See appendix three for a spreadsheet of key participant characteristics.

Representativeness:

The claims to generalisability that can be made based on this sample are clearly moderate, and the aim of the project was to develop an insightful analysis of a series of in depth narratives, rather than quantify or present a typology of experiences. The heterogeneity of the sample in the ways I have discussed make the emergent themes and similarities across fathers' narratives important as this suggests common perceptions, relational or moral thinking which may be linked to masculinity and experiences of male caring. It is important though, to consider ways in which some sections of the sample may be atypical. In addition to the issue of self-selection on the basis of simply feeling able to tell an 'acceptable' story, I have also reflected on one further characteristic. As I have detailed, six of the fathers were recruited from a very active Young Fathers project, and I have considered whether the fathers I met via this route were unusual in terms of their level of awareness of certain discourses around both parenting (skills) and fatherhood (as important), or in terms of having a sense of themselves as 'spokesmen' for (marginalized) fathers. For example, the Young Fathers Group had been involved in a number of projects

which had brought them a level of public attention such as local radio and newspaper interviews, the production of a play and DVD, and some had also taken part in a previous (psychological) academic research project. This could have meant that they were more likely to do an interview, or to co-construct the interview in a particular, or 'rehearsed' way. However, neither my reflections on the interview process or my analysis of the data have led me to identify ways in which this sub-group stood out as different; for example, they were no more overtly 'political' in their views on fathers, and no more 'accomplished' in their construction and presentation of their narratives. Overall then, my sample constitutes a diverse group of fathers who have in common some experience of attempting to sustain contact and relationships with their children, and navigating ongoing co-parental relationships with mothers. In these terms, my findings could be usefully be extended or used comparatively with other studies of specific groups of fathers, or of fathering more generally.

The process of data collection:

Method:

My study is based primarily on a set of qualitative, in depth interviews; each lasting between one and two hours. A key reference point for the design of my interview questions was Jennifer Mason's work on qualitative researching (1996). I initially adapted her model of moving from a series of 'big questions' to specific topics for discussion and devised a semi-structured interview schedule which reflected the original ordering of my research questions. Following some early interviews, further reading on qualitative interviewing

(Gubrium & Holstein 1995, 2002, May 2002, Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman 2004) and the re-prioritising of issues (as discussed above) I revised my schedule to involve using topic or 'prompt' cards, rather than more formally structured and standardised questions. This more open, responsive style of interviewing allowed the participants more freedom to develop their own narratives, whilst still enabling me to ensure that all areas had been covered, and to probe or ask for clarification more sensitively. The adoption of this revised approach and research instrument, along with my increased level of confidence with the process, improved the quality and analytic value of the remaining 19 interviews (see appendix four for a copy of the revised interview guide). All the interviews were recorded on a digital Dictaphone and stored electronically. A reflexive account of each interview was written as soon as possible after each interview and these were used as part of the data analysis. Full transcripts, in which participants were anonymised and other identifying details changed, were made for all interviews and these were stored both electronically and in hard copy.

Ethical considerations:

My study was designed in line with BSA ethical guidelines and was given clearance by the Ethics Committee at the Open University (see appendix five for ethics approval documentation). I also registered the project with the OU data protection office. The main ethical issues involved in my research have related to the consideration of personal safety issues during fieldwork, the potential impact of taking part in the study, and relationships between researcher and participants, at all stages of the research. In terms of managing the practical issues of researcher safety and participant privacy, I was fortunate to be able to conduct many of the interviews in quiet but semi-public spaces: I interviewed nine fathers in a college tutorial room, six in a room at a Family Centre, four in their own work office,

and four in their own home (in three of these cases other family members were present in the house). This meant that my initial uncertainty over how to be flexible and responsive to fathers' work schedules whilst still finding safe and quiet places to talk at length was largely removed. During the interviewing stages, I always carried a mobile phone and ensured that details of my interview timetable and locations for any given day were known, with the contact details of the participant held by my 'reliable person' in a sealed envelope.

Asking men to articulate how they understand and account for their roles and relationships as fathers beyond divorce or separation brings with it a certain responsibility, as participation is likely to produce a range of experiences of the research process. Taking part in research can bring welcome or unwelcome self-knowledge, can be empowering or exposing, pleasurable or painful, or, of course, both. In addition to the standard requirements of good ethical practice, such as the assurance of confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw, I worked hard to be attentive to, and reflective on, the impact of the project as it progressed and built in certain safeguards to minimise or respond to the potential emotional impact of taking part. Firstly, as referred to above, I did not interview a father unless they had been divorced or separated for at least a year. Whilst clearly this is not to say that the pain of relationship break up is over after the first year, this criterion provided a pragmatic response to one difficult aspect of the project. All of the fathers were given time to think about the participant information and an opportunity to ask questions, before an interview was arranged. During the interviews, I took care not to pursue questions beyond the level that participants appeared to feel comfortable with, and was attentive to the level of de-briefing and control they wished to have over the interview material (two fathers accepted my offer of receiving a copy of their transcript once it was completed, and seven fathers have expressed interest in seeing a summary of findings). Two fathers did become visibly upset and cried during the interview, and in both cases I

stopped recording to give them time to recover and to decide when/if to begin again. In each case, the fathers took this opportunity to talk 'off the record' about certain aspects of their situation which they found particularly difficult, or had been reluctant to reveal. I later made a decision that whilst I could not 'un-know' what I had heard in such moments, that I would not include explicit details of this kind of information in the writing up of my analysis. At the end of each interview, as part of the debriefing, participants were invited to ask any questions about the project, and on a few occasions this resulted in further unrecorded talk about their own experiences or about my own situation and/or views. All participants were also invited to contact me again if they wished to add or ask anything, or withdraw from the study. No fathers took this opportunity.

The relationship(s) between me as the researcher and the participants have not been static or one-dimensional. One of my main concerns in terms of ethical practice was the process of negotiating an approachable yet professional relationship with my participants; not least in terms of being a female researcher interviewing men (see discussion below). I feel that, in the end, I did succeed in being perceived as both friendly and professional (or competent), but that this presentation and reception of self was shaped by the settings of the interviews and the collaboration of the fathers, as much as by my own research skills. One further ethical aspect of the research relationship related more to my role in interpreting and writing about the fathers I interviewed. My aim was to draw out fathers' accounts and to consider them, in part, as 'moral tales' (Ribbens-McCarthy, Edwards, Gillies, 2003). However, it is neither ethical nor valid to exercise moral judgment of such accounts, and the reflexive monitoring of my own responses was a vital and challenging part of both the data collection and analysis process. For example, I had to be attentive to instances where I felt more or less inclined to 'accept' an account, or to respond to a father

as more or less 'plausible', and consider critically the basis of such responses. In addition, three fathers, one in particular, were prepared to share what they felt to be very sensitive or 'risky' information, in relation to their moral and/or professional identities, and I had to take particular care with whether and how best to include this. Broadly speaking, this information related to either alleged or actual violent or abusive behaviour, by themselves or, in one case, by their partner. In two cases this information was only shared as part of a deliberately requested 'off the record' period of the interview. In the third case an explicit discussion took place between myself and the father concerned, regarding managing his sense of 'exposure' and also exploring my own reasons and motivations for conducting the research. A fuller discussion of violence in relation to masculinity and moral identity can be found in chapter seven. A key ethical dilemma here was between the value of details which furthered my analysis or contextualisation, and my felt sense of responsibility to protect or take care of individual participants. I hope that the chapters which follow demonstrate that I have responded to this dilemma in a rigorous and thoughtful way.

The process of interviewing:

Qualitative interviewing is clearly much more than a straightforward transfer of data. The interviews conducted, or rather 'artfully' co-constructed (Rapley 2001), are revealing on many levels, and my study is as much about the performance and presentation of stories of fatherhood, moral identity and masculinity, as it is about the content of those stories. Equally, my own involvement in the telling, hearing and interpretation of such stories has been an important part of the analytical process which has required a reflexive approach in which I recognise myself as, at different times, powerful and fallible.

I found the process of reflexive, responsive interviewing complex, tiring and fascinating, in that I had to simultaneously be attentive to the story being told, the way in which it was told, my own visual/verbal responses and interventions, the interactions between us, and so on. However, I am convinced that the more open, less 'scripted' style of interviewing, whilst more demanding of me, worked better in terms of allowing a richer, more insightful story to unfold. I also had to evaluate my judgment of when, and how, to intervene or prompt, and when to allow silence and time to think (a particular challenge for me). There were times when I felt able to ask for clarification or even justification of responses, and was prepared, even excited, to take the risk of doing this, and others when I may have appeared too interrogative or challenging (see the discussion of my interaction with Tony, below). Initially I found it difficult to overcome my gratitude or deference to participants for their apparent openness, in order to be a little more probing or less passive in my hearing of their stories. Later on, I found that at times I responded much more actively to fathers' more pessimistic or critical accounts of co-parental relationships in particular. For example, towards the end of Tim's interview, he has been talking about how he feels he will never be able to have a cooperative relationship with his son's mother. My empathic response is to gently encourage him not to exclude more positive developments, and to reassure him about his own achievements:

Tim: Hmm, well, early days but, y'know, I don't think I'm ever gonna be that cheerful about it, but y'know-

GP: Mm, but again y'know, you're already able to see, (pause) what, Adam needs, y'know, and what you might need to put aside for his sake (Tim: yeah, yeah)

This kind of response or interactive strategy appears in several other interviews and while my journal notes show that I had some awareness of it at the time, my experience of analysing the data and my epistemological position have led me to recognise this as one example of where an “autobiographical ghost” (Doucet, 2008: 3) may have touched the research process. Doucet uses this evocative term to describe one way in which aspects of personal biography can, unwittingly or unexpectedly, make themselves felt in the process of research. In this case my own, relatively positive, experience of growing up with separated parents, and my ongoing desire for a more productive co-parenting relationship with my son’s father, may have produced this tendency to look for signs of positive development or growing trust between fathers and their ex-partners. My engagement with this and other feminist analyses of the inevitable and complex relationships and power dynamics within the research process (Ribbens & Edwards 1998, Gillies & Lucey 2008) has added a valuable dimension to my ongoing consideration of the practical as well as ethical question of when/whether/how to intervene or respond in a research interview.

On being a woman interviewing men:

In relation to being a female researcher interviewing men, I remained highly conscious of this throughout the research process and tried to incorporate consideration of the subtle and complex gender dynamics involved; to ‘take gender seriously’ (McKee & O’Brien, 1983).

In general terms I have found my own experiences of interviewing are closer to that of Gatrell (2006) than to those of McKee & O’Brien (1983); I found it reasonably easy to access and engage fathers, I found them predominantly co-operative and articulate, and did not experience anything that felt personally threatening or inappropriate. In terms of responses to me as a middle class, academic or professional woman, again, these varied. In the case of the college employees, there was often an implicit sense of shared experience and status, which positioned me primarily as a colleague. In one or two other interviews,

with fathers accustomed to dealing with social workers or other family support practitioners, I felt I was sometimes equated, albeit positively, with this role, or that assumptions were made about me as being a professional interviewer or expert on fatherhood, although none positioned me as someone who could or should give advice.

With some of the main-carer fathers in particular, and the one shared-carer father, I was also struck by the sense of recognition and familiarity I felt when hearing their stories of caring for children; here, it was my position as a woman, mother and lone mother for a number of years that allowed me this insight into a *lack* of gender difference in such accounts of intense caring in a 'non-couple' situation.

There were equally moments where fathers either performed masculinity in more conventional ways or made explicit reference to 'how men are'. For example, on a number of occasions, fathers commented either on the fact that men tend not to talk to male friends about personal matters, or the fact that they valued the interview as a context in which to 'get things off their chest'. Jimmy provides a good example here:

I get really wound up about stuff sometimes y'know, and you don't feel that anybody's that interested, so (laughs) having somebody listen while you rant is quite good...if I'm out with my friend, you want to talk about sex and drugs and rock-n-roll, y'know you don't want to talk about, my kids particularly, so, in some ways I think perhaps women (pause) almost have an easier time with that, because, y'know they'll have a coffee morning or whatever

Jimmy's closing comments also illustrate the subtle ways in which fathers' sometimes commented on, or generalised about women to me, sometimes consciously and at other times apparently less so. I did not tend to challenge fathers when they made generalised comments about women, principally because none of them spoke in overtly sexist, sexual or derogatory terms; clearly I cannot know for sure the extent to which fathers moderated

their tone or views for my benefit. However, there were instances where a father would apparently suddenly become more self conscious about trying to make a point about gender difference and gender disadvantage, to a (middle class, academic) woman. For example, towards the end of Tony's interview, he struggled to articulate both his (recurring) feeling that men struggle to know what is expected of them, with his sense of greater gender equality as a progressive development.

I'm not saying women are 'for' divorce, don't get me wrong but, they have more independence - what is right, y'know they can do anything now, where, twenty years ago, women stayed at home and looked after the children, waited for their husband to come home, and however the husband acted, was fine, they'd put up with it, and now they won't- what is right, and its now, men have to learn that, and that's what I've tried to...

Interestingly, my response on this occasion is to challenge him, which I did, on reflection, quickly and without too much thought, by reminding him that he had told me that his second wife had given up work since the birth of their first child.

G: Although, did you, did you say, your current wife (pause) has given up work?

My assumption was that he had more power in this decision than his wife and that therefore his views on gender equality and his actions are contradictory, and although Tony went on to account for this as very much 'their' decision, until the children were at school, he may well have felt that I was critical of him. This example demonstrates how gender relations and gendered thinking infused the interview situation and how I, as the researcher, was not always consciously in control of how and when it touched my

interactional encounters with fathers; I feel I was somewhat unfair on Tony in this instance.

I had anticipated another dimension through which gender difference might impact on the interviews in that I might experience defensiveness or even hostility, from some fathers. I had imagined that for fathers in highly conflicted relationships with mothers and/or courts, my position as a woman (and possibly as a professional) might be viewed more negatively, by association or generalisation. However, I found instead that whilst a general theme is that of 'dads having it tough', of being treated unfairly, or disadvantaged (in comparison to mothers), this view was not overtly directed at me; there was no sense of an accusatory "you women" as experienced by McKee & O'Brien (1983: 149). Where the idea of obstructive or manipulative mothers was employed, I did not experience any sense of being included within it, nor did I experience any robust challenging of my own views or political stance on, for instance, the issue of fathers' rights. This could be because simply by talking to them and them alone, I was placed in a different, (supportive) category of women, alongside perhaps new partners, friends, relatives etc or that the fathers interviewed did not uncritically identify with the political rhetoric of the Fathers' Rights Movement and instead viewed their difficulties in a more personalised way. As I have pointed out, my introduction to fathers via a fathers' group is also likely to have positioned me as a 'sympathetic' woman, and while this may have smoothed the way for obtaining an interview, I was often concerned about whether and how I should deal with the potential discrepancy between their perception of me, and my personal views on the politicisation of fatherhood. Whilst I see fathers' perspectives as crucial to debates on gender difference and disadvantage, and am supportive of active fathering as an aspect of increased gender equality, I am highly sceptical of the attempts by certain fathers' rights

groups to position fathers as marginalised victims, and mothers as inherently obstructive. On the (few) occasions on which I was asked, I was open about, and did discuss my own views with fathers, and with one father in particular, I did have a longer, and very interesting 'off the record' discussion about fathers' rights and family law. However, in general, I took the decision that, for example, to declare my own stance on fatherhood at the outset of each interview, would be inappropriate and unnecessary, and that this issue would be better managed at the level of my interpretation and analysis of the data, as an aspect of reflexive research practice.

One further context in which gender difference made a difference, or posed challenges for me as a researcher, was in relation to the few instances where fathers exhibited either more aggressive or overbearing behaviour or language, or gave accounts of their own violence. I am not saying that I felt personally threatened at any time; I did not, but there were occasions where I felt more uncomfortable about possibly colluding with certain ideas or behaviours. Alongside this, it was in these moments where the sharing of information could be deemed threatening to fathers' sense of moral identity, that the tension in the relationship between them as participants and me as the 'audience' was heightened, and this is discussed further in chapter seven. One example is Tim, a main-care father of a four year old son, who was very hurt by, and angry with, his ex-wife. On a number of occasions, he talked about wanting to 'bash her brains in' or 'meet her in a dark alley' and whilst my strategy in the moment was to laugh such comments off, my internal researcher voice (Ribbens & Edwards 1998) questioned whether this was an acceptable way to respond. In this exchange, towards the end of the interview, I made my only attempt to challenge him, and whilst my intervention is subtle, it is interesting to note that

it did produce some accounting from Tim (again, see chapter seven for more discussion of fathers' accounts of violence).

What advice would I give myself? invite her back in the house, crack both her brain cells together (GP laughs, then both laughing) no, I (Tim still laughing) (GP: I'm going to take it that you are joking) no, I am joking...when I say to you about, bashing her brains in with a hammer, I'm not gonna do it, but, by, (pause) venting that emotion, or that thought out of my brain it then quiets it, calms it.

Another example is Clive, also a main-carer father of two sons (aged five and nine) and a very tall, physically imposing man. At first I found Clive very overbearing, in terms of his physical presence, his loud and assertive tone, and his tendency to take control of the conversation. Initially I heard some of his (many) stories of encounters with his ex-wife's family and with social workers as examples of intimidation or at least a lack of sensitivity. However, as the interview progressed and the details of his marriage break-up and struggle to care for both his mentally ill ex-wife and his sons emerged, he became visibly upset and began to cry. This exposure of vulnerability and emotional distress was completely unexpected, and I believe uncalculated, and changed the interaction between us, and certainly my understanding of, and insight into, his narrative considerably. Later analysis of his interview confirmed that while I still found his approach to some issues difficult, I could recognise the themes and perceptions of 'battle' in his narrative and also that there were moments of self-reflection about this

I mean I don't like using the word fought, or fight or anything, but, you do have to fight for things, you have to stick up for yourself d'you know what I mean...some people, I spose, look at that as a bit of a, not a threat, but 'oh, a bit intimidating' kind of thing...it's like, when you're sort of battling for

things, you get to the stage where you think, 'I'm just tired of this' y'know, it's like putting a load of armour on again

In the process of interviewing then, there have been times when I have had to directly address my own prejudices and assumptions. I have sometimes changed my perception of, or the way I 'see' (and internally respond to) a man, during the course of an interview, and this has been an important, constructive and at times chastening experience. Whilst I feel that such emotional and/or initial responses are an inevitable part of the interview encounter, I would again stress the importance of a reflexive approach in order to attend to these and turn them, as far as is possible, into another analytical resource. Overall, I have been moved and intrigued by the stories I listened to. I was repeatedly struck by the intensity and humanity of the stories, which does not preclude them being full of contradictions, partial or self-serving accounts, or views very different from my own.

The process of data analysis:

The analytical approach I developed has a number of characteristics and key reference points. At the broadest level, I have used a sociological framework, involving concepts such as self-presentation, symbolic interaction, narration and accounting; I do not take the view that interviews are either 'transparent' reflections of experience or windows to the internal self. I would also describe my experience of analysis as iterative in that there was an ongoing, active conversation between the processes of generating and analysing data

(Mason 1996, Charmaz 2002), which not least informed the prioritising of relationality and moral reasoning, as discussed above. My interest in relationality developed both inductively and from my engagement, with the feminist ethics of care, whilst my focus on the moral aspects of the interviews was there from the outset, informed by the work of, in particular, Finch & Mason (1993), Smart & Neale (1999) and Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003). Particularly useful was the feminist ethics of care literature (Tronto & Fisher, 1990) as discussed in chapter one. I used these ideas as an interpretive and analytic tool, to explore these fathers' accounts but also wider issues around gender and parenting and found that they provided an appropriate theoretical backdrop, a reflexive method, and a language for my analysis.

A key source for my method and approach to coding the transcripts was the technique first developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992) in their work on gender and moral development. This involves the 'Listening guide' (Gilligan et al 2006, Doucet & Mauthner 2008); an approach requiring multiple readings of interview transcripts, including for the researcher's own responses, in order to acknowledge and explore interviews as narratives and to attend to the multiple 'voices' or layers within such accounts. I adapted this method in order to undertake readings for self-presentation, or the narrated self (Doucet & Mauthner 2008), for my own responses/role in the story-telling, and thirdly for what Gilligan et al (2006) call, the 'contrapuntal voices' within the narrative. This third reading allows the researcher to attend to their particular research questions as well as to emergent voices or positions present within the narrative. I found the concept of counterpoint and contrapuntal voices particularly interesting because of the way it moves beyond notions of 'contradiction' or 'inconsistency' and allowed me to attend more carefully to tensions, complexity, ambivalence etc within the stories. For example, the ambivalence or

differences between expressed values and what I was told about actual circumstances, different aspects of a presented/narrated self, uncertainty over how/whether to act (either in relation to children or ex-partners), and so on.

In practical terms, my analysis began with the repeated listening to, and making a full transcription of, each interview. Following this, and in conjunction with the notes and commentaries written in my research journal, I began developing a system of coding using different colours for each different reading of the transcript. I also drew a visual representation of the 'caring network' as described by each participant; a map of all the named people involved in or sharing the care of children (see appendix six for an example). These maps became necessary in order to accurately understand and represent the strong sense of fathering in connection with others, which emerged from the interviews. Initially my coding was a more open process (Glaser & Strauss 1967) and then as the analysis deepened, I refined codes or reassigned them according to developing themes or emergent terms. I also explored the data for negative cases and used these to qualify my arguments or provide contrasting examples for consideration (see the discussion of Micky in chapter five). I made some initial use of the Hyperresearch data analysis programme; entering some of the transcript data and experimenting with how codes could be assigned, stored and retrieved. I acquired important skills here, together with the practical advantages of electronic data management, and did compile collections of quotations relevant to or illustrative of particular themes. However, ultimately I returned to manual methods for working through my developing ideas and mapping analytical relationships because I found this was more dynamic and enabled me to 'see' the interpretive account I was developing more productively. Gradually, I moved towards a

series of organising concepts, which in turn have become the framework for the substantive discussion in the chapters which follow.

In terms of using quotations from the interview data as evidence to illustrate or substantiate an analytic point, I have tried to maintain some sense of which fathers have been included and how often. Overall, the majority of fathers from the sample appear consistently across the analytic chapters, being quoted a number of times. Occasionally, due to the overlap between some of the relational and moral aspects of the narratives, I have used similar quotes (from the same passage of a transcript) because they serve to illustrate either a relational or moral point, depending on which analytical lens is being used. A smaller number of fathers (five) appear less often, being quoted as part of a particular point, or providing examples of atypical or unusual responses. However, one father (Ivan, the young Iraqi refugee), despite being referred to or including within some discussions, has not been quoted directly. This was not because his narrative or perceptions were significantly different from the other fathers, but more because his responses tended to be very short, and were sometimes more difficult to interpret due to his limited spoken English. In the process of analysing and drafting chapters, I revisited his transcript several times, but in the end could not find quotations which were strong or clear enough to include as illustrative points.

My engagement with the listening guide also led me to other work which focuses on the interview as a (co-constructed) narrative. I wanted to include a consideration of the 'process of telling' to think about *how* a story is told, and the rhetorical or narrative strategies involved. Analysing interviews as narratives also recognises the interactional relationship between teller and listener, and so includes the need for a reflexive

consideration of the interview process, in keeping with my general reflexive approach. In relation to narrative analysis, I found Catherine Reissman's work on 'divorce talk' (1990) very useful. Her emphasis on narrative style and on the, often moral, problems or dilemmas, or 'untold stories' that accounts of both divorce, and of post-divorce parenting frequently involve, resonated with the stories I heard, and informed the ways in which I thought and wrote about the interviews.

The listening guide approach was also particularly useful in helping me to consider and code the interviews in terms of their moral and relational aspects. In this regard my work is closely aligned with Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003), seeing interviews about parenting as constituting 'moral tales'. In listening for the moral in fathers' narratives, I had to develop a form of operationalisation of the sociological and largely symbolic interactionist understanding of morality I had used. This involved searching for instances of moral self presentation, perceived and/or explicitly expressed threats to moral identity and also narrative strategies for dealing with or managing such threats. My sense was that, in accounting for their fathering, fathers would seek to maintain a viable moral identity. I also identified moments where fathers made some kind of moral claim, in relation to being a 'good' father, or where they expressed, either explicitly or implicitly, a value about family life and/or parenting. Lastly, I focused on the ways in which fathers' described and considered what they saw as moral dilemmas in relation to their children and/or other family members. Such perceived dilemmas were often expressed in terms of (the difficulty of) weighing up what was 'fair' or 'best' in a particular context, in relation to particular people or particular relationships. This analytic process enabled me to eventually develop the subheadings used in the two chapters on moral aspects; good fathering as a complex moral process and moral self presentation.

In terms of analysing for relationality, I used a distinctively sociological and feminist moral philosophical understanding of the concept, rather than taking a psychological or psychoanalytic perspective (see chapter one for further discussion). My analytic framework involved the ideas of a connected *and* autonomous self; caring relations as a manifestation of connection; care and relationships as both labour and love; and caring as a process of moral and ethical reasoning. Coding the interviews using these concepts, and attending to the emergent themes and participant terms associated with relationships, revealed the salience of both quality relationships to fathers, their perception that such relationships need attention or ‘work’, and examples of, what I have called ‘relational strategies’. Again, the process of analysis resulted in the development of the central organising ideas of relational autonomy and relational work, which structure the content of chapters four and five, dealing with the relational aspects of fathers’ narratives.

Working with the personal and writing about fathers:

In presenting an account of aspects of my reflexive research practice, I am mindful of Beverley Skegg’s robust critique of certain techniques of reflexivity, in which she rejects an interpretation of reflexivity as ‘confessional’, calling for “accountability and responsibility in research, not for self-formation and self-promotion” (Skeggs, 2002: 369). In addition, Doucet (2008) highlights three key sets of relationships through which researchers construct knowledge: relations with oneself (and personal biography); with research participants; and with readers and audiences (actual & potential), and I have

sought to be attuned to these as my work has progressed. Mauthner & Doucet (2003) also recognise that many of the influences on academic research may only become possible to 'see' and to articulate with "time, distance and detachment" (2003:425). With this in mind, I will identify, as far as I am able, how certain aspects of my personal biography, intellectual and emotional investments in the project have shaped its development, particularly the processes of interpretation and representation of fathers' narratives.

My sociological work and achievements have progressed alongside profound changes in my personal and family life, shaping both a trajectory of interests and producing a powerful and dynamic relationship between my intellectual and emotional engagements with theories of moral philosophy, families, care and gender. In particular, the experience of becoming a mother, and soon after a lone mother, developed my intellectual curiosity (Doucet 2008) in moral philosophical concepts of responsibility and rights, and in the meanings and value of care, and how these play out in contexts of parenting after divorce or separation. More broadly, my own early experiences of motherhood and lone motherhood, in the late 1990's, also occurred during the period of particular media attention to fathers' rights campaigning in the UK. Whilst my original interest in contemporary qualitative research on family lives came via studies of lone mothers (Duncan and Edwards 1999 especially) my shift towards focusing on men's perspectives as fathers was influenced by two 'ghosts' (Doucet 2008) in particular. Firstly, my memories of my parents' un-conventional (in the late 1970's) separation, in that my mother left the family home and my father took on much greater caring responsibilities for myself and my sister, and then, much later, the breakdown of the relationship with my own son's father and his withdrawal from our lives. Together, these have produced two potent and contrasting insights into fathering which have ebbed and flowed throughout the process of

this research project. More recently, my experience of the growing relationships between my son, myself and my new partner have again provided an intensely rich and challenging lens through which to consider moral philosophical theories of care in particular.

My alignment and reflexive engagement with feminist critical analysis of gender relations within couple and parental relationships has been tempered, constructively I believe, by both personal feelings of disappointment, sadness and anger with my son's father, and by my memories and acquired insight into my own father's experiences as a main-carer. Both of these biographical contexts contributed to the process of listening to and interpreting the accounts of fathers in my sample, reminding me in different ways to attend to distinctive features of male caring and moral reasoning. These two dynamic and indeed contrapuntal 'voices' became particularly pertinent during the process of analysing, and writing about, fathers' narratives. I found myself frequently weighing up, or checking my responses and interpretations in terms of whether I had been attentive and 'fair' enough, but then also whether I had been distanced and critical enough. As described earlier, my aim was always to offer a careful and grounded insight into fathers' perspectives whilst presenting this within the context of a persistently gendered and unequal distribution of domestic responsibility and care for children. The emotional presence of my own father and my son's father, as almost polar opposites, acted as a 'monitoring' mechanism on my thinking, which whilst often painful and poignant, ultimately contributed positively to this difficult analytical process.

As the interpretive process moved into that of writing and making claims about the interview narratives, these autobiographical ghosts continued to shift in and out of view. An early challenge was simply to remember that I was dealing with and talking about

fathers' 'stories' and presentations of self, and that any claims about their experience had to be made in these terms. Whilst I was not calling the truth of such stories into question, I had to make my epistemological position clear in my writing. Equally, I found it important and useful to be attentive to where and when I felt more sceptical or critical of fathers' accounts and to try and acknowledge the moments where such scepticism came from my personal experience as a separated mother. I also saw this reflexive process as related to another challenge identified by Doucet (2006) as the need to "provide space for men's narratives of caregiving and to resist the urge to measure, judge and evaluate them through maternal standards" (2006: 28). I have tried hard to consider fathers' narratives in their own terms, without constant comparison to my personal and collective experiences as a mother, and to notice and acknowledge similarities as well as differences, in men's stories of care-giving.

Finally, as I produced and reflected on the substantive chapters, I had to become more attuned to the difference between my authorial, feminist voice and the voices of the fathers' I was representing, and to be careful to make the distinctions between these both fair to the fathers, and clear to the reader. This was again, part of the process of trying to provide a detailed, insightful account of particular fathers in particular circumstances whilst also considering and making certain feminist arguments about the gendering of care and of the 'moral space' in which this takes place. Ultimately, the reader will judge for themselves how far I have succeeded in taking the attentive, responsive and responsible approach I aimed for, but this chapter offers both some insights into my attempts to work constructively with the personal, and a guide for contextualising those which follow.

Chapter three: Context and connection in fathers' lives beyond couplehood

Introduction

This chapter provides an important backdrop for the analytical work presented in the four chapters which follow it. It begins with a broad overview of these fathers as a group, and goes on to critically discuss four aspects of their post-couple lives that were most prominent and meaningful within their interview narratives: housing, work, money and wider family and/or community networks. The chapter therefore focuses predominantly on more material or practical dimensions of fathers' lives, but frequently highlights the relational qualities or symbolic meanings of these, within the context of narratives of post-couple fathering. In this regard, alongside such contextualization, the chapter also engages with the complex relationship between masculinity and fathering, and points to the ambivalence towards ideals or expectations of masculine identity and gendered caring roles, expressed by fathers through their accounts of fathering after divorce or separation. The, often simultaneous, acceptance of and resistance to gendered ideas about masculinity and fatherhood resonates with the idea of a dynamic and always contested 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) which also includes "recognising internal contradictions and the possibilities of movement towards gender democracy" (2005: 829). In different ways, or at different moments, these fathers fell back on, or sought to move away from, gendered models of caring for children.

Fathers, contact, couple relationships and children

As I have discussed in chapter two, the 23 fathers who participated in this study, by volunteering or agreeing to give an interview, may have seen themselves as having a morally defensible story to tell; or as being in line with current discourses of 'involved' fatherhood. At the same time, they constitute a heterogeneous group on a number of levels including: age, employment and occupation, type of contact arrangements and quality of co-parental relationship with mothers. All the fathers had at least one biological child where the marriage or partnership with the mother had ended, and all had some form of regular contact with their children, but as discussed in chapter two, the nature of the publicity and recruitment literature allowed me to reflect diversity in terms of the form of contact with and caring arrangements for children. This created particular opportunities to consider common experiences and processes of attempting to sustain such arrangements and relationships with mothers and children. The dominant pattern of time spent with children was regular weekend contact and periods of school holidays. Other arrangements included longer periods of all school holidays, regular weekday contact, forms of shared care, unstable weekend contact and regular supervised contact. A further general point to emphasis though is that whilst much of the interview discussion was about co-parental and father-child relationships, all of the fathers' narratives presented fathering as taking place within a wider network of care. Accounts of the roles and significance of extended, and/or second families, fathers' perceptions of themselves as part of work and local communities, or of their encounters with institutions or professionals, all serve to emphasise a sense of fathering done in connection, though not always collaboration, with others.

In terms of the quality of ongoing relationships with mothers, the majority of fathers described their relationship with children's mothers as amicable or civil (see chapter five on 'the working relationship'). In a minority of cases co-parental relationships were described as highly conflicted, with ongoing disputes over contact arrangements, or as tense and consisting of minimal communication. Overall, within the context of the interview, fathers did not take up an explicitly politicised view around 'fathers' rights' or mothers as 'obstructive'. What many of them did share was an ambivalence towards women as mothers, often according them a certain status in relation to children's lives, whilst equally expressing a sense that 'dads have it tough' or are not offered the same support or respect as mums. Across the interviews, what this revealed was the interplay between fathers' engagement with, or awareness of, wider discourses and rhetoric around fatherhood, gender and divorce, and the complexities of these within the context of their own personal and emotional lives as men and fathers. In general terms then, the fathers in this study represent a group of self-selected 'committed' fathers, who share certain experiences and perceptions of post-couple parenting as a process in which mothers, children and others are involved, and who have all, in different ways, encountered challenges to the material, moral and relational circumstances of their fathering. In terms of the more material and broader social contexts of these fathers' lives, analysis of the interview narratives revealed four prominent aspects; housing, work, money and wider family and community relationships, and it is to these that I now turn.

Houses and homes

Existing research on post-divorce fatherhood (Simpson, McCarthy & Walker 1995, Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams 1999, Bainham, Lindley, Richards & Trinder 2003) suggests that housing is a factor affecting levels and quality of contact between fathers and children; the significance of having a suitable place where “the routines of eating, sleeping, playing and simply being around” (Simpson et al, 2003: 207) cannot be underestimated. Housing is also relevant to debates around potential disadvantages faced by fathers after divorce, in that fathers who leave the marital/family home without the material resources to rent or buy property, are not seen as a priority for limited social housing, regardless of having regular care of their children. Within this group of fathers, just over half owned the houses they lived in at the time of interview; either themselves or jointly with a partner. Of those who did not own property, six were living in privately rented accommodation, three were in council properties and one was staying with his own father while on the council waiting list. Property ownership also appeared to be related to occupation, in that with the exception of two self-employed builders and a main-carer father on welfare benefits, all the fathers who owned houses were employed in professional jobs such as F.E teaching, management, financial advice and family law.

At the time of separation just over half of the fathers said they had moved out of the family home, though this was not always dependent on whether they had instigated the ending of the couple relationship. In terms of geographical distance, there were four cases where fathers lived a long way from their children because mothers had moved to a different part of the country. The rest had remained in the same locality or lived an easy drive away, and presented this either as a conscious choice or as something agreed with

mothers. Not all fathers had moved out willingly, and in two cases claimed they had been 'asked' to leave by professionals already involved in their family lives, in order to minimise conflict within the home. As described above, whilst most fathers were able to rent or buy alternative accommodation, some had had to go into temporary housing, to wait for council housing, or stay with relatives; one of these fathers had also spent nine months in the YMCA as part of this process. For these fathers, striving to obtain suitable and secure housing was an important element in presenting themselves as 'good' fathers as well as in enabling their fathering practice. More generally, attitudes towards owning property varied, in that whilst many fathers saw this as relevant to both their 'success' as fathers and as men, not all fathers aspired to home ownership. Among those who did not own property at the time of interview, some attributed a certain freedom to renting, some saw private ownership as absolutely beyond their means, and only one, young, father explicitly expressed his intention to rejoin the property ladder.

In four cases the mother had moved out of the family home with the children, either into a house with a new partner or into housing bought or rented from the sale of the original family home. This means that in the main, family homes were either sold to finance the provision of two separate houses, or were maintained by the earnings of either one or both parties. Not all fathers gave exact details, but in some cases (six) where property had been previously jointly owned, fathers were contributing to mortgages on houses in which children and their mothers lived, in addition to their own housing needs. In three cases, the mother had moved out without the children, though in different and sometimes complex circumstances, with one mother having been hospitalized for mental health problems for a substantial period of time. In another instance, the father and mother had both spent periods of time away from the family home, attempting to share it, along with care of their

son. This mother also then spent time in hospital and the father and son eventually moved back into the original family home.

In addition to the material and practical circumstances of changes to housing and living arrangements, what was evident across the interviews was that fathers attached particular meanings to such changes and accounted for them in certain ways. For example, fathers often expressed the view that children need a 'home' as part of a more generally perceived need for 'stability' or 'security'. The significance attached to home was further illustrated through fathers' talk of attempts to reconstruct 'home' in the context of parenting across households, and the challenges this brought :

one thing they've always had, they've always had a bedroom in any house I've lived, they've had their own room, but they never leave anything, y'know everything leaves the house. (Tony)

I sort of felt in my heart of hearts, that there needed to be a balance between them having a kind of main residence, which was the one where they'd always lived, and they sort of have their pets there...but they also obviously need to know their mum and have time with their mum. (Dan)

In relation to ex-wives or partners, aside from the obvious practical and material value, houses also carried symbolic meaning and attachments. Moving out, or selling homes, was often associated with 'moving on' and acted as a marker of the ending of the couple relationship, with both painful and positive implications.

she moved out in the January 2000, and I stayed there till the May, when we sold the property and everything went through, and, for me that point was, although we still had the children, was the time to get on with my life, cos we'd got no financial ties. (Gary)

However, whilst changes to housing could form part of a symbolic separation of the couple relationship from the co-parental one, such a distinction was not always so easily made. For some fathers, particularly where they were continuing to contribute to mortgage payments on their original family home, the needs and interests of children and mothers could be conflated, or become very hard to untangle. This sometimes added to the challenge of dealing with feelings about women as ex-wives or partners, as different from their roles and value as mothers. Managing the costs of financing and supporting two households from one can be seen as one among a number of fault-lines within gendered (heterosexual) family life in that it exposes conflicting ideas of dependence and equality, and can produce tensions for both men and women, as fathers and mothers, in relation to their ongoing caring roles and responsibilities. Many fathers in this study expressed ambivalence or uncertainty in relation to traditional ideas of masculine 'provision' or presented these alongside views about equality between men and women and between parents. Housing then, provides one context in which these fathers' lives can be understood; moving house, selling up, sharing proceeds, buying or aspiring to own property, trying to secure a 'home', moving on, all formed a significant part of the backdrop to post-couple fathering. The opportunities and constraints experienced by fathers in relation to changes in housing are also part of the wider gendering of social and family life, and highlight one way in which material resources and labour market position affect the process of sustaining fathering roles and relationships.

Working lives

A second prominent theme within fathers' interview narratives was that of their working lives. All of the fathers were asked to describe their work history, particularly since becoming a father and since being divorced or separated, and in different ways, fathers used this opportunity to talk and reflect on the relationship between paid employment and fathering, and on their feelings about the male breadwinner role. Again, this means that the data is useful for exploring the connections between masculinity and fatherhood, as well for its focus on the relational and moral work of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood.

In terms of employment the sample is again heterogeneous in that it contains fathers in a range of occupations, who work full time, part time, are self employed, or who are unemployed and in receipt of benefits. The group included fathers doing working class jobs, such as building, lorry driving and shop security, as well as more middle class professions such as law, teaching and financial services. However, allocating class position to these fathers via their occupation is not straightforward because through their accounts of work history it was clear that most had moved in and out of occupational categories; for example, many of the F.E lecturers had worked as electricians, plumbers or car mechanics before becoming employed by their local college.

From the group as a whole, four fathers claimed to have actively made changes to their working lives as a direct result of becoming a father, and another six as a direct result of their divorce or separation. Such changes involved, for example: changing jobs (to be more

available or closer to home), altering hours, or obtaining more flexible hours, moving from employment to self-employment (and vice versa) or leaving a job to become a full time carer for children. This means that the majority of fathers had not felt the need to adapt their working lives in the light of their fathering responsibilities, a finding which is in line with other recent studies such as Dermott (2008). However, in the context of understanding post-divorce fatherhood, it is important that a significant number of fathers *were* both willing and able to make changes; indeed some of them felt that this was morally necessary in order to sustain both their fathering and their moral identity as fathers. This finding is also relevant to questions over whether the structure and culture of paid work for men obstructs fathers' attempts to actively care for children, or whether fathers' lack the motivation to take up 'family friendly' policies, in that, for the ten fathers here, it had been possible to achieve changes to their working lives. None of these fathers described this process as difficult or onerous, but presented it more as a matter of particular workplace environments and individual managers, than as a result of general shifts in attitudes or policy.

The comparison between being employed or self-employed was also a common feature of fathers' talk about work; just under half of the fathers had spent periods of time being self-employed during their working lives. For these fathers, the decision, or as one father put it "*the driver*" to either become self-employed, or become an employee, appeared to have been linked to their sense of being a good father and 'family man' (Coltrane 1997). The data shows that fathers do not straightforwardly associate good fathering with the masculine ideal of 'providing' through the 'breadwinner role'. Fathers did frequently value breadwinning and financial provision as an important aspect of being a father and a man,

but alongside this, there was also a recurring concern with the need to be available to the family, to spend time with children and with wives/partners.

I think, being employed is much easier, and probably better for the family, depending on what sort of person you are, whether your conscientious or not, but basically, when you're employed, you can finish work at five, you come home, switch off, and then you've got the time, with the family, whereas if your self employed, it's 24/7. (Bill)

Self-employment was often weighed up in terms of the opportunities it offered for flexibility and for potentially earning good money; both of which appeared to correspond with fathers' perceptions of what was expected of them as fathers. In the context of fathering after divorce or separation, a number of fathers commented on the importance of, or their felt need for, flexible working hours in order to facilitate time with children, or to allow them to maintain or take on caring responsibilities. In such cases fathers appeared to have opted for flexibility over financial security, and could account for this through drawing on ideas of 'involved' fatherhood and presenting themselves as morally responsible and committed fathers.

that's another bonus about being self-employed, you can work when you like, and so, usually when she's here, I don't book any work in, or I'll book a small job, do a day here and a day there. (Jonathon)

This process of 'weighing up' or attempting to reconcile the expectation of financial provision with that of time, was not seen as easily settled; for 3 fathers the decision to leave self-employment for the security of becoming an employee was driven by the additional responsibilities of second families and subsequent children. Here again, it is

possible to see the playing out of gendered expectations for fathers which do not necessarily sit comfortably together; fathers may be expected to provide a secure income but equally to share in the care of and responsibility for children, within the context of both 'intact' and post-couple families. It is, of course, also noticeable that this tension between financial security and time to care is not dissimilar to the concept of 'juggling' often attributed to women as mothers, but this similarity should not be mistaken for parity of responsibility. Drawing attention to changing demands on men as fathers and on the tensions within and limitations of male caring roles, does not detract from the ongoing gender inequalities in family life, the provision of care and the distribution of domestic responsibility (Doucet 2006).

For a number of fathers in this study, working life was also linked to the story of the ending of their marriage or partnership; not necessarily a causal factor, but part of a tale of diverging or conflicting interests, of increasing emotional distance or as part of the backdrop to either party 'meeting someone else'. This meant that in some fathers' narratives, considerations were made of their pre- and post-separation work life, or accounts given which contrasted old and 'reformed' attitudes to combining earning and caring responsibilities. Across the interviews, there was a theme of continuity in fathering activity and caring work, where the idea of 'doing my bit' was drawn upon to claim that from the outset fathers had shared in the care of babies and young children.

I was working long hours, and I was out of the house at seven, and back at six or seven at night and then evenings I'd work, or be at college or whatever, so yes, very early on, I, I put the input in, that I could at the time, like any father could put in...I did my bit y'know, I think. (Clive)

'Doing my bit' was frequently illustrated by examples such as bathing, dressing, reading stories, doing bottles; routines associated particularly with going to bed or with getting up at night/in the morning, or by references to going out and doing things at weekends. Such examples arguably reflect both the patterns of male full time work but also fathers' sense that this particular contribution was legitimate given the time available to them. Some fathers described 'doing their bit' in terms of working in shifts with mothers, who also had jobs, presenting both a story of 'teamwork' but also often one of 'ships passing in the night', again often linked to the deterioration of the couple relationship. Overall, for many fathers, continuity of care for and involvement in their children's lives was important to highlight, often acting as a means by which to explain and affirm the quality of their relationships with children since being divorced or separated. Paid work was presented as important and time-consuming, but something that did not prevent fathers from 'doing their bit', contributing to family life and bonding with children.

However, alongside such claims, and sometimes within the same narrative, fathers often appeared to be reflective about how their pre-separation work life had impacted on their fathering and also on their couple relationship. Within such reflections, there were moments of awareness of the gendered nature of family life and caring roles, and for some fathers at least, a recognition of the more 'optional' nature of parenting afforded to them by conventional gender roles.

I was able to concentrate on work, I didn't have to deal with very much, I was quite a, y'know, not an emotionally distant, but in terms of time, quite a distant character. (Dennis)

I suppose I was perhaps too tempted to say 'oh I've got to go the study' and prepare this lecture, and if I'm honest, there was the temptation to do that, because, when you're in the middle of a family situation, y'know you're there all the time, there are constant demands on you from the children, inevitably, even that little bit of time that you can steal away from them, you look for it.
(Chris)

Such recognition, both of their own optional involvement in caring for children and of the implications this has for the roles and responsibilities of women as wives and mothers, was an issue both within the context of fathers reported lives and that of producing an interview narrative. Both Dennis and Chris presented themselves as somewhat transformed fathers; Dennis in particular gave an account of repentance and reform in relation to his fathering practice and his sense of self as a father. Since their divorces, both had had very different experiences of caring and having sole responsibility for their children, (for limited periods of time) and this had also caused them to reflect on the past, on fatherhood and indeed on care. Chapters four, five and seven return to these themes of the transformative potential of care and to the relational and moral work taken up by these and other fathers, in the process of sustaining and accounting for their fathering.

Overall, across the narratives of working life and fatherhood there was evidence of mixed and often complex or contrapuntal feelings about the male breadwinner role. Whilst, as I have discussed, work and financial provision was important to fathers, and paid work and fathering were interwoven in many of their accounts, breadwinning was rarely spontaneously offered when fathers were asked to define what being a father involved. Nearly all (17) of the fathers had had wives or partners who worked and often, mothers' financial contributions, and their commitment to their jobs, was positively acknowledged. Most fathers also expressed, more or less explicitly, the idea that both fathers and mothers

had a responsibility to support their children financially, suggesting that they did not perceive breadwinning as an exclusively male role.

Given that exclusive male breadwinning is a conventional or traditional masculine ideal, it might be anticipated that age would be a factor in the extent to which fathers identified with it. Interestingly, my analysis showed that it was in fact younger fathers, such as Paul (26), Micky (30) and Jason (30) who most explicitly or positively embraced the idea of good fathering as financial provision, and presented themselves as breadwinners in their accounts of fathering practice and identity. Micky talked about his response to his girlfriend Laura's pregnancy and the arrival of their daughter Megan, associating breadwinning with responsibility and maturity:

for me personally, it was about, the most mature decision that I'd ever made y'know, it was a case of, 'right I know that we need to have, this certain amount of money and stuff like that so, because Laura can't work, I have to, I've got to put in the hours. (Micky)

Jason also identified strongly with the idea of being a successful, as a father and as a man, through financial provision and material affluence. What was also interesting in his account was that his concept of provision was extended beyond his daughter Katie, to her mother Lucy. Within his narrative, Jason presented an idea of male responsibility for women, which could only be relinquished if another man was present to take over. This implicit connection between male breadwinning and female dependence again points to certain inherent inequalities within gendered social and caring roles, and whilst Jason is exceptional within this sample, as a young man and father his account is significant.

I pay out for a lot of stuff, most of it, benefits Katie, occasionally it benefits Lucy but, she doesn't work full time, y'know, she hasn't got a boyfriend...if there was a boyfriend there then that is no longer my responsibility. (Jason)

Other, and older, fathers expressed a greater and more explicit sense of ambivalence and reflexivity towards the male breadwinner role, often acknowledging or reflecting on the gains and losses it brings in terms of relationships with children in particular.

I was playing football, riding motorbikes, trying to get a career, everything else and- they didn't suffer, I was always there, we had the holidays, but children, when you're a young man you've got so much more you want to achieve, you think you can conquer the world yeah, now I'm older, I realize that time, goes so quick, before you know it, they're going to be 18, so I do try to spend more quality time with the younger two. (Tony)

It appeared that, with the passing of time, the experience of having been divorced or separated for longer, or from having older children and/or new families and more children, fathers had had cause or opportunity to reconsider the implications of conventional gender roles. Whilst not all fathers went as far as being critical of their own behaviour or choices, across the sample there was a broad sense of acknowledgement that gendered caring roles could be problematic. A conventional providing role might create, both literal and moral, space for optional caring, but potentially came at the price of more mediated relationships with children and more detached relationships with partners. In a similar vein, Smart & Neale (1999) have suggested that gender roles within marriage ill-prepare men for post-divorce family life. Ironically, it seems that the ending of a marriage or partnership can be the catalyst for such reflection or reconsideration, as part of the process of attempting to

sustain parent-child and co-parental relationships; a process which is not necessarily welcomed or transformative, but which did at least have the potential for challenging persistently problematic and unequal gendered caring roles.

Money and the meanings of child support

Another important aspect of these fathers' lives, and something which formed part of all the interview narratives, was money; more specifically the payment of maintenance for children. All of the fathers except one, whose young son was in public care at the time of interview, had some kind of arrangement with children's mothers about the payment of child support, though the type and level of formality of such arrangements varied. Two main-carer fathers received payments from mothers and the two shared-care fathers shared the financial support of their children with mothers without formal payments being made to either parent. 13 fathers all said they had private arrangements with mothers, and again the nature of these varied; for example, from regular monthly standing orders, monthly or weekly cash payments, paying for Christmas, birthdays, clothes, or other large expenses, to offering practical support such as DIY, home & car maintenance.

Five fathers said they had formal arrangements through the CSA, and of these five, three were in the process of negotiating payment or awaiting decisions on a monthly amount at the time of interview. The fathers who had involvement with the CSA also varied in their responses to this. The three who were in the process of negotiating their payments, Jonathon, Micky and Richard, all expressed the view that the CSA, whilst a last

resort, could also put an end to conflict over money; they appeared to see the 'public' or formal, and indeed bureaucratic, nature of the process as useful to them, in that it could settle disputes and be seen as a final ruling. It must be said however, that all three felt mothers were being antagonistic over money and that the CSA involvement was likely to result in a fairly low monthly payment, thus acting as a form of 'justice' for their unreasonable demands. Another father in this group, Martin, had made regular CSA payments for six years, since his divorce, and whilst he felt that the amount must be negotiable and fair (in relation to, for example, the cost of visiting or collecting his son, who lived a long distance away) also valued the formality in terms of the 'proof' of his commitment it provided. The last father in this group, Will, who was involved in ongoing legal proceedings over contact, was the only father in the sample as a whole who expressed feelings of resentment and frustration at having to pay maintenance; he felt it unfair that his ex-partner was so resistant to his relationship with their daughter, yet so insistent that he pay.

Overall, and including Will, described above, all of the fathers indicated that they agreed with the principle of financial responsibility for children, and that this was a moral, not just material issue. Yet this principle was seen as contextual or negotiable, and as something which applied to mothers as well as fathers; here again there is the suggestion that these fathers did not subscribe straightforwardly to the masculine ideal of sole provider or primary breadwinner. Whilst fathers did feel a moral responsibility to support their children financially, they also did not want their role or involvement to be 'reduced' to money, often drawing on an expanded idea of provision to talk about how they supported or were involved in their children's lives. Using a broadened notion of provision could also allow fathers to contextualise or justify limited financial contribution, and to

talk about this in a morally defensible way. Fathers also seemed to feel that financial support could legitimately be adjusted or renegotiated in the light of changed circumstances, as long as decisions were seen to be fair, to children in particular. In the main, fathers talked about this idea of flexibility in relation to themselves, in terms of trying to 'compromise' or balance multiple demands and commitments, most often in the form of subsequent partnerships and children (either biological or step-children). Some fathers also felt it was fair to increase or decrease payments in the light of changes to mothers' circumstances, although there was a good deal of ambivalence towards the arrival of new partners and step-fathers (see chapter seven for further discussion of this, and of providing).

In addition to the obvious material or functional significance of paying for children, what emerged from my analysis of these interviews was the importance of recognising the symbolic meanings of money and the moral ideas and feelings attached to it. I argue that, in large part, money can be understood as relational, that is to say it is meaningful within the context of particular relationships, forms part of the emotional and moral connections between people, and can have a constructive or destructive impact on relationships. Across the interviews a number of themes emerged around money, which can best be presented as a series of questions or dilemmas.

Firstly, there is the issue of who benefits from maintenance paid, and how far the needs and interests of children and ex-wives/partners are seen as related. This is very much part of the difficult process of untangling the couple relationship from the co-parental one, where some distinction or detachment may have to be made between a woman's position as an ex-wife or partner, and her position as a mother, in order for an ongoing co-parental

relationship to be emotionally and practically bearable. Such a process is linked to money because of the different meanings and feelings that can become bound up with the payment of maintenance. Just under half (11) the fathers did appear to be relatively comfortable with paying maintenance for children to their ex-partners, and this seemed to be related to their ability to acknowledge these women as (good) mothers, and to be reconciled to the fact that mothers not only receive money on behalf of children but may also benefit from it. Some fathers talked about markers of such a distinction between ex-partners and mothers, for instance in making lump sum divorce settlements as distinct from child maintenance, or by seeing the sale of property as an ending of joint financial ties. Often it was as much an emotional adjustment and process of emotion management, frequently described in terms of focusing on the child, which enabled fathers to be able to begin to develop co-parental relationships, in which the negotiation and paying of money is a key part.

it was always William was first, regardless, and fortunately that was clear in both our minds, the fact that, y'know, despite, our anger or our hurt or the situation, who was living with who, Will was still there, he obviously still needed to be- he was, the primary thought. (Paul)

In cases where there was antagonism or tension over money it seemed, in part, connected to fathers' perception of ex-wives or partners benefiting personally from money paid to them for children, and, importantly, that this was unfair. Again, these aggrieved feelings were linked to a struggle to accept or separate the ex-partner from her position as a mother and indeed manager of, and provider for, children's routine needs. This was also related to, or affected how fathers felt about, their ex-partners' competence as mothers; in two or three cases, being angry with an ex-partner appeared to make it more difficult to

validate her as a 'good' mother during the interview. For some fathers in this situation this sense of unfairness came from their negative feelings or suspicions about ex-partners' interests or motives, or from claims that they were in fact better off than fathers themselves; provided for either by their own earnings, by a new partner or by the state. Again, the tendency was to perceive the ex-partner as being the direct beneficiary of money paid, so that there was a much weaker sense of money being for, and being given to, children.

'I'm giving you money for Megan for food, and clothes, and toys and this that and the other, and you're not using it for Megan', which means that Megan's now suffering- well, not suffering, in general, but, y'know she's not getting what the money is there for. (Micky)

This idea of 'what the money is there for' illustrates a second issue around the relational and moral meanings of money; that of whether fathers can or should expect any control over how money is spent. Clearly, much of the antagonism over money could be read in terms of issues of power and control, and again can be seen as connected to gendered ideas about dependence and provision. There was an apparent difference across the interviews between fathers who accepted or were comfortable with the idea of paying money into a household, or to mothers, which was then spent at the mother's discretion, and those who were not.

I have to accept the fact that I pay her mother maintenance every month, and I realize that whatever I've paid has gone in the pot towards either au-pairs or to education, or y'know, however it's spent, it may not necessarily be that I can see, or ask for a receipt, 'oh that's been spent on food or clothing for my daughter'. (James)

the last couple of wages that I got, I was like 'right, there's £300, give Megan whatever she wants' sort of thing, whatever, and then I find out that actually that £300 had gone on a new LCD T.V and a new sofa, and stuff like this.
(Micky)

The extent to which fathers felt they were entitled to a certain level of control over how money was spent, or to 'evidence' that it had been spent 'legitimately' was clearly also directly related to the quality of the co-parental relationship. The more conflicted this relationship was the less trust existed between fathers and mothers over both the amount of money paid and how it was spent. I am not saying that all fathers were trying to assert patriarchal authority over women through retaining control over money, but in the context of post-couple parenting, money can become a struggle over power, through the exposure and more marked distinction between the positions of provider and manager/spender. Such distinctions and tensions undoubtedly exist within intact families but can perhaps be more easily managed by the emotional and relational work that often serves to conceal them. A further qualification is to remember that most mothers were also providing financially and were not solely in the position of recipient. However, despite this, mothers were still more often perceived to have more power in terms of their ability to decide how money was spent and on what.

A third and final issue which brought into question the symbolic meaning of money is that of the relationship between money and contact; again, this is explored within contemporary literature on post-divorce parenting (see for example, Trinder, Beek & Connolly 2002, Lewis, Papacosta & Warin 2002, Hans 2009). In the context of legal disputes over contact or maintenance, whilst financial support is presented as an absolute obligation, arguments often arise over whether money and contact are then viewed as

separate or conditional. There are implications for both fathers and mothers from either position. Given the nature of the sample, the majority of fathers felt that they had achieved a level of contact and a co-parental relationship that was at least bearable; because there were arrangements for both money and contact, there was less reason to openly question the connection between them. Nonetheless, within certain narratives there were occasions where the interdependence between money and contact was acknowledged, or where fathers had considered this as an aspect of their developing co-parental relationship. A relevant example here is Martin, whose co-parental relationship with his son's mother had been very difficult and had developed slowly over a period of six years. Martin felt that his CSA payments were crucial because of the financial stability they offered his son, and as a symbol of his moral commitment to fatherhood, but he also suggested that he saw the provision of money as a condition of contact with his son Tom.

That financial commitment I think is, important, and I think, if I didn't do it, I wouldn't get as much access and so forth with him...I'm paying in a couple of different ways, for that stability and that contact, with my son. (Martin)

As referred to above, Will had also considered the relationship between money and contact since his highly acrimonious separation from his youngest daughter's mother and their ongoing disputes over contact. Will's story was complex; he presented himself as having a strong moral commitment to involved fathering, and had experienced a previous collaborative shared-care arrangement with the mother of his oldest daughter for 17 years. Alongside his expressed agreement with the principle of paying maintenance, he also felt a deep sense of unfairness about the very limited contact with his youngest daughter Keisha. Whilst he was reflexive about his own responsibility for the volatile relationship with her mother, he felt strongly that his ex-partner was obstructing contact and in addition

struggled with his own feelings of resentment about paying. In this situation, Will does seem to suggest that contact should be a condition of money.

I have to sort of stop myself thinking about it, cos it doesn't seem fair, if she doesn't want me to be involved in her life, why should I be involved, to pay, why- I mean I know that's wrong, y'know, I, I can hear myself saying, well she's so determined to exclude me, but then she still wants me, to pay, but on what basis. (Will)

Overall then, the discussion demonstrates that in the context of parenting beyond couplehood, financial provision for children constitutes difficult moral and relational terrain. Money cannot simply be understood in functional and material terms, but as also symbolizing moral responsibility, care, commitment and power (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003). Outside the context of marriage or cohabitation, and in circumstances of non-residence, the powers associated with providing money may become detached from taken-for-granted contact with children, making the relationship between the two much more tenuous and open to challenge and reflection. The process of negotiating financial support for children, in relation to both the providing and spending of money, appeared to involve these fathers making some kind of symbolic and emotional distinction between ex-partners and mothers. To some extent this often meant relinquishing some control over money or accepting that, to a degree, children's needs and interests were linked to those of (resident) mothers. These findings would be useful to compare with research on non-resident mothers and their experiences of making financial provision or paying maintenance.

Extended family

Having considered the contexts of these fathers' lives in terms of housing, employment and money, this final section moves on to explore the significance of wider family and community relationships and networks. As I have stated, the fathers in this study saw their fathering as occurring in connection with others; most prominently mothers and children, but also wider family and sometimes professional agencies or support organisations. All of the fathers included wider family, in particular their own parents, in their accounts of the 'caring network' for their children, and almost half had formed a second family involving either biological or step-children. More generally, across the interviews, the use of the term 'family' and the sense of this word being meaningful and important to fathers (and for their children), appeared routinely. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the thesis to pursue this extensively, the point is important to note in the light of current debates concerning how best to develop the conceptual and theoretical understanding of family lives (Rethinking Concepts, BSA Families & Relationships Study Group Colloquium, 2009). Extended family was often presented as a valuable source of practical and emotional support, and often of validation, to fathers, and as occupying important positions in children's lives and hearts. Also significant was the complexity of who could be included as extended or wider family; as well as paternal and maternal relatives (which could themselves be extensive through separation and repartnering), fathers and children could also be connected to one or more additional family networks, as second or subsequent partnerships and households were formed. In fact, fathers' accounts very much painted a picture of the potential accumulation, rather than reduction, of family members and networks as a consequence of divorce or separation.

Just over half the fathers talked about the roles their own parents, particularly mothers, had played in both supporting them as fathers (and indeed as adult sons) and supporting or facilitating their relationships with children. Sometimes such support was practical, in terms of offering a place to stay or visit, offering financial help, or domestic help with cooking, cleaning or DIY, and in other cases family members had simply been there to talk and listen and help with the emotional impact of a divorce or separation. In fact it was noticeable that family members, and in particular parents, were often cited as the main or only people fathers talked to or shared emotions with.

We've always been close to them, and the grandparents have been y'know, outstanding really, really valuable, y'know with meals, helping out with money... yeah, so I mean it has been, the family have been a major support, and it would be much harder without them. (Jimmy)

Extended family support was not restricted to paternal relatives alone, with several fathers giving positive accounts of ongoing relationships with ex-in-laws, most often in terms of their continued involvement as grandparents. In addition, fathers' siblings and cousins featured in around one third of narratives, as well as children's cousins, uncles, aunts and so on. There was a general sense across the sample, that fathers felt it was important to try and sustain children's contact with paternal relatives, and often talked about ways in which they did this, including sharing in birthday and Christmas celebrations, going on holidays, making routine or special visits, exchanging presents and cards, and also acknowledging gifts. Fathers felt that such wider family contact was important for children to feel included, to sustain relationships and a meaningful sense of (paternal) 'family' for both children and fathers, beyond the ending of their original household. Tony illustrates this idea when he talks about an extended family ritual involving tea and birthday cake, which he sees as an important way of ensuring that his

two teenage daughters continue to feel part of his family, since his remarriage and the birth of two younger daughters.

we do this for all our family y'know, if it's their birthday, we always have a birthday cake, so we do the same for my girls and all my family will come to ours, and, y'know its only a bit of cake and a cuppa tea, but they are part of the family and they are involved. (Tony)

Alongside such stories of extended family support and integration there were also a small number of poignant tales of the tensions between fathers and their extended family. In addition to rifts between fathers and their ex-wives or partner's relatives, most commonly produced by perceptions of fault or blame for the ending of their couple relationship, five fathers also gave examples of problems with their own parents or siblings. For some this involved disapproval, or a perceived lack of understanding, at their decision to end a relationship or for moving away from children. As discussed in chapter seven, such disapproval from close relatives could be experienced as a potential threat to fathers' moral identity. For other fathers, tensions were linked more to the pressures of daily life and relational dynamics, in circumstances where fathers had become more reliant on their own parents; often perceived as a form of return to childhood. The clearest and most obviously difficult example of this was Richard, who after moving out of his family home, had had to stay with his elderly father while on the council waiting list. Richard had four children, who visited at weekends, and his narrative was dominated by the difficulties his housing situation produced and the tense relationship between him and his father.

It's just me and him which is, not an ideal situation to be in y'know, he's 70 years old, he's not a well man, and he's brought his kids up, he don't want his

40 year old son living in his house and his three grandchildren at the weekend as well... it doesn't take much for him to blow a fuse and so I'm sort of treading on eggshells. (Richard)

In general terms then, my analysis suggests that the practical and relational work of being part of, and sustaining an extended family network, particularly in terms of maintaining relationships between children and paternal relatives, was prevalent, and often experienced as a new or additional fathering responsibility.

New partners and children

Another area of challenging relational and moral terrain was the formation of new partnerships and second or subsequent families. Of the group as a whole, 12 fathers were living with or married to, new partners at the time of interview. Ten fathers had gone on to have more biological children, three had step-children and one had both biological and stepchildren at the time of interview. Generally, fathers spoke of these 'new' families warmly, often describing them as 'second chances' or as opportunities to put into practice things they had learned from their divorce or separation. Sometimes fathers also talked in terms of feeling more responsible for children, more committed to family life, taking fatherhood more seriously and having a stronger sense of the fleeting nature of childhood; often such ideas were expressed in terms of their sense of increased maturity as well as age. As discussed in chapters five and six, fathers' accounts tended to express or support

the idea of a 'moral imperative' (Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2000) which involves adults prioritising the needs of children in their care, for whom they are responsible. The interesting exception to this tendency was Jack. Jack had a son and daughter of 14 and 12 from his first marriage, which he felt increasingly less involved with, and at the time of interview he was remarried with two teenage step-children. He expressed criticism and resentment of his step-children and of the role he felt he was expected to play in relation to them. Jack is notable for his frankness here, as well as being the only father to express strong dissatisfaction with his second family life. In his account of post-couple fathering he also frequently expressed resignation to a much reduced role in his biological children's lives and a certain amount of regret about his decision to end his first marriage.

I've got no time for them, I don't wanna talk to them, maybe deep down I resent them being there, when I can't have mine, and why should I, why should I do all this stuff, and then my wife's saying 'oh well, you're their dad, act like it' y'know, but how does a dad act, y'know, somehow you act, as you feel fit, and if they don't listen to you, it can sometimes grind you down.
(Jack)

Jack appears to resist a sense of responsibility for his step-children, or to accept the moral imperative, despite his wife's attempts to position him as responsible for 'their' children.

Second families often acted as another powerful context and catalyst for relational and moral work, sometimes prompting complex 'caring dilemmas' for fathers as they tried to sustain their fathering across more than one household. One father, Martin, described this feeling as 'having to share and be shared' and this analogy works well in relation to the

material or practical and also the relational aspects of fathering biological and step-children within the contexts of both residency and non-residency. Fathers talked in terms of having to consider and deliberate over how their financial, practical, emotional and relational resources were shared, and this process highlights, once again, the moral or ethical reasoning which is bound up with family relationships. In making such deliberations, fathers frequently drew on ideas of fairness as both a thinking tool and a language for their efforts to sustain fathering roles and relationships across households and family members. Again, the tendency was to prioritise children's needs and feelings, but fathers also included new partners and ex-partners in their accounts of trying to be fair. Being fair in relationships was understood predominantly in terms of material provision, the allocation of time and attention, and the giving of gifts and treats. Considerations of fairness were highly contextualised in that both practical and relational factors informed both the process and the outcomes, and whether they did so with more or less reluctance or difficulty, fathers appeared to be acknowledging or being attentive to, the circumstances and feelings of others.

A significant Other in this process of sharing and being shared, was the second/current wife or partner, and fathers' perceptions of them, as either or both mothers and step-mothers, were interesting. For many fathers there was an expressed sense of 'investment' in such relationships, in relation to them having been through, and learnt from, a divorce. Current wives or partners were considered, and were often presented as an active party in decision making around fathers' sharing of time and money, but were sometimes, more implicitly also seen as a source of tension or guilt.

I think sometimes she takes it for granted that I'm there, I think she forgets that I'm not there for my son, every day, reading a book, or sorting his maths out or whatever and that, can be difficult...and it's been difficult for my wife for a long time cos she knows I've got to be shared, with her daughter and my son. (Martin)

For some fathers, a great deal of relational work seemed to be being undertaken in order to maintain goodwill and trust between their children's mothers and step-mothers, and to share their fathering involvement across two households. One father, Jason, who was particularly actively involved in managing the relationship between his daughter's mother and his new wife, described this process as one of 'juggling emotions'. Jason is perhaps unusual in this particularly active mediating role, but James also described a similar process of directly negotiating the tense relationship between his child's mother and step-mother. Whilst other fathers differed in the extent to which they were involved in, or their approaches to, such a process, in general they accounted for it in terms of a form of diplomacy, to 'keep the peace' and manage, often difficult, feelings and tense relationships between women who each held a position in their children's lives and hearts (see chapter five for further discussion of 'keeping the peace' as a relational strategy).

Managing emotions and working at relationships is also relevant to fathers' responses to the presence of an ex-wife's new-partner and (potential) step-father, and in this context sharing their fathering with another man. In general, fathers expressed ambivalence towards 'other men', they could be perceived as both a challenge to their masculine identity and fathering role, but equally as 'relief' in terms of financial and/or emotional responsibility for mothers. A small number of fathers (five) gave accounts in which they acknowledged or claimed to 'accept' or respect a new partner (including in cases where this had contributed to or caused the ending of their couple relationship) whilst also

recognising that there was work to do in maintaining this goodwill. Some fathers spoke in terms of not wanting to disrupt their children's lives within their mother's household, but that this also meant trying to balance this with concerns they might have over the step-father's behaviour and their own fears about being replaced. In other cases fathers' expressed empathy with step-fathers, for the challenges posed by caring for their children.

Simon might shout at them and obviously, the normal thing is 'you're not my dad you can't tell me what to do' and things like that, and I try to explain 'no he's not, but, he's living with your mum, in a house he built, he's older than you, so you've got to respect what he says'. (Tony)

Overall, fathers' responses to and accounts of new male partners within their family networks were not straightforward. Within the context of the interview at least, fathers did not simply express jealousy, anger or ridicule; other men could be allies as well as threats, and could also be included in fathers' expressed collective idea of it being "*harder for blokes*" (Jimmy). Fathers did not describe being 'mates' with stepfathers but in a few accounts did suggest that their relationship bordered on friendship. Second families and cross-household relationships then, also form an important context for the process of fathering beyond divorce or separation. Such relationships can be enabling and constraining, a help and hindrance; forming a significant part of fathers' considerations in terms of both practical fathering and sustaining fathering relationships and identities. Whilst such considerations may be a new challenge or responsibility, and not be welcomed or easy, they are present within fathers' narratives, and appear to be both a consequence of and a requirement for, post-couple family lives.

Community relations and networks

The final part of this chapter deals with the broader context of fathers' local communities, in terms of friendships, social or support networks and other forms of community involvement. Once again, all of the fathers made reference in some way to some aspect of their wider community, as both a physical and moral space in which their fathering took place. It was also a context in which the gendered embodiment of fathering (Doucet 2006) was relevant and where fathers described being more or less aware of themselves as men and as male carers for children. This was most strongly the case for the main and shared-care fathers.

In general, fathers referred to friends or peer groups as part of their routine support network, although the nature of those friendships varied. Some fathers' accounts were more in line with stereotypical notions of male friendship, involving an absence of intimacy or personal disclosure and a tendency to focus on certain, generic conversational areas and/or physical activity. However, other fathers described emotionally significant and 'disclosing' friendships, often with women, but also men, through which feelings and experiences were shared, and as noted above, saw family members as important sources of support here. For one or two fathers, peer support groups had arisen as a direct result of becoming fathers, again, sometimes with other fathers, and sometimes through their participation in more conventional and feminised contexts.

it was just people I knew, who were involved in doing, y'know, some major active parenting, either they were the stay at home dad, or they were doing it like me, part of the time and we'd sort of, well, like dads and toddlers group.
(Will)

we go to playschool three times a week, we go to dads group, without fail, we go to a couple of playgroups, which I've been going to virtually for the last two years. (Tim)

Four of the fathers in the sample had attended a young fathers group, run by a voluntary organisation, which they said had offered them both emotional support, advice and parenting skills. This group was very active and successful in the area and so these fathers may have been unusual in their experience of this kind of peer and professional support. The fathers I met who had had involvement with the group and/or its key workers, spoke very positively about it, and suggested that it had given them new or different kind of experiences with other men as well as increasing their confidence and sense of identity as fathers. In addition to the ongoing direct support offered by this group, two fathers, Will and Jonathon, had had some contact with larger fathers' organisations, Fathers Direct and Fathers for Justice. Jonathon had in fact received advice and practical support from Fathers for Justice in taking legal action to prevent his ex-wife leaving the country with their, then eight year old, daughter. Overall, there was a general awareness of such organisations as potential sources of support, and of a more collective sense of fathers and fatherhood, but not a strongly expressed identification or preoccupation with fathers' rights or with fathers as politically marginalized.

Following Andrea Doucet's work on fathering as a gendered and embodied practice (2004, 2006), these men's experiences and identities as fathers were not only played out in

the more private settings of homes and particular parent-child and co-parental relationships, but also in more social or public contexts. Fathers' often expressed a sense of engagement with their local communities, and this was linked to their caring roles and felt responsibilities for children. One frequently referred to setting where fathers appeared to feel it possible and desirable to enact their parental and paternal responsibility was that of school. A number of fathers talked specifically about parents' evenings as a context where the co-parental relationship could, and ought to be demonstrated, although it was notable that mothers were often presented as taking the lead in managing fathers' involvement.

I'd ask Jill, and if she invited me to go then I'd go, and obviously she felt comfortable with me going, if she didn't want me to go, she didn't invite me, I didn't force myself on her. (Tony)

The exceptions to this tendency were the main or shared-care fathers, such as Dan or Gerry, but also two fathers, Richard and Brian, who had more conflicted relationships with their ex-partners, where part of this conflict concerned the quality of their mothering. Both Richard and Brian claimed to have had more contact with schools than mothers, prior to their separation, and that they continued to be involved with, and seen as reliable by, their children's schools, as non-resident fathers.

sometimes we'll get a letter each, but usually that's just one letter, so what I'll do is I'll read it, and I'll take down any dates, for trips or whatever and then I'll put them back in their school bags, and then my ex can read them, but then a lot of the time she don't, but that's down to her. (Richard)

Fathers also talked about their involvement with school life in terms of helping with homework, talking to teachers or attending meetings if their child was in trouble, or going to school events such as sports days, concerts or assemblies. Generally fathers seemed to feel that school was related to their sense of self, moral identity and social status, as fathers (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007). Dan, as a main-carer father, expressed more explicitly this idea of school as a setting in which fathering could be not only displayed but also judged:

I think giving off messages is quite important sometimes and, I like to feel the school, see me as a parent who, y'know, is fairly much, sort of, there with things and makes sure they don't go to school with the wrong stuff and dirty clothes on. (Dan)

In addition to school, fathers also talked about their involvement with a wider network of other parents and with their local communities, through their children's social lives and friends, but this could be understood and experienced in different ways. For many fathers, non-residency meant that they felt more detached from their children's social lives and this was often perceived as a challenge to sustaining familiarity and emotional closeness. This loss of 'knowledge' about children's activities and friends can be seen as one aspect of a wider perception or realisation of the significance of routine caring or 'dailiness' (Apthekar 1989) in the maintenance of relationships, which is further discussed in chapter six. Some non-resident fathers did talk about continued sharing and/or supporting of leisure activities with their children; most typically sports, such as football, cricket or swimming. This illustrates another context in which the gendering of both childhood and parenting is visible, in that whilst fathers may have facilitated activities for both sons and daughters (for example driving them to lessons or clubs), the sharing of interests appeared to occur

more often, or more easily with boys (again, see chapters six and seven for further discussion of this point).

Not all non-resident fathers described a sense of detachment from children's social networks, but in general it did mark a difference between these, and the main or shared-care fathers, who gained increased responsibility for children's social lives. Fathers such as Dan, Gerry, Clive and Tim who cared for their children for most or much of the time, gave accounts of their involvement with children's social lives in terms of the ways that this related both to their sense of father identity and their 'exposure' as fathers in more public settings. These accounts often contained elements of both increased confidence, but also self-consciousness about caring for children as a man. Gerry and Clive spoke with obvious enthusiasm about the activities they facilitated and participated in with their children. Gerry's narrative was strongly infused with the pleasure he took and the unexpected sense of freedom he had begun to enjoy through his increased responsibility for his ten year old son Sam, and his friendships with other divorced fathers.

I really, really, enjoy it, I mean y'know, doing the football training with the kids and- I get a lot- it's like come on, we'll get in the car, we'll go off swimming, we'll go to the beach...and it wouldn't have been done in that way, y'know, it used to be 'couple things' and now it's more like, Sam and his mates and Dave mucks in, and Steve and what have you, cos they're in the same situation as I am. (Gerry)

Clive was also enthusiastic in his accounts of generating and enjoying the benefits of an active social life for his two sons Keiran and Jake, and described his particular

involvement with the scouting movement, seeing it as satisfying to both him and his sons, but also bringing with it some social, and indeed moral status.

*I got involved and I really enjoyed it, having two boys it was ideal really and Kieran is the Cubs now and he thoroughly enjoys it, Jake's due to start, in January, but, scouting is another big thing, it's a voluntary thing, it's a very focused and dedicated thing, you get a lot of very dedicated people doing it.
(Clive)*

Alongside such apparent pleasure and confidence taken from caring for children through facilitating their social and physical development, there were also instances in which fathers demonstrated a certain self-consciousness in relation to caring as men. This was particularly the case for Dan, Will and Jimmy who all had experience of being solely responsible for the care of daughters. These fathers appeared more attuned to the risks as well as the pay-offs of active fathering within the contexts of wider parent and community networks. One perceived area of social suspicion around men as carers was related to having children's friends over to play, or to stay the night, particularly if those children were girls.

I wondered how, other parents, whose kids my two are friends with, would be about them coming over? Cos I had this idea, which I don't think is unrealistic, about 'oh yeah, y'know, single bloke', friends coming over, 'oh that's a bit weird' type thing. (Dan)

In addition, fathers were conscious of their physical presence as men, in the often female dominated settings of childcare and play, and of the ways in which the physicality of caring and expressing love for children could be interpreted very differently when

performed by men (see chapter four and seven for discussion of these concerns in terms of relational boundaries and threats to moral identity). Such concerns are similar to those found by Doucet (2006) in her research with stay-at-home and single fathers, and there are also similarities in relation to how fathers may respond to them.

In general terms then, all the fathers in my study saw fathers and fathering as different from mothers and mothering; shifting, often within the same narrative, between a 'different but equal' idea of mothers and fathers, to a 'different but complimentary' conception, in which mothers could still be given a primary or 'special' role or status. Such conceptions, together with the moral and relational work by which they could be implemented and justified, appear to allow fathers some room to manoeuvre, not just in terms of how they managed their personal circumstances and relationships but also in relation to conforming to and challenging gendered caring roles and responsibilities. These kinds of more abstract ideas would often be revealed through talk about how women/mothers responded to them as fathers, how they managed in public and/or feminised settings for parenting, or how they felt fathers ought to be treated, supported or recognised. For Dan and Tim, as main-carer fathers, the approach taken was to 'get on with it', involving elements of emotion management, time, familiarity and trust, and in this way such fathers can arguably cross or unsettle gender borders (Doucet 2006: 172) dividing fathers and mothers.

I get on really well with all the mums, there's no big problem...but I think that's maybe because of the way, the way I am, I've just sort of got on with it, and I haven't been too shy about it. (Dan)

the first year I would come and I was very insular...but, most of them've known me so long now, they just treat me like another mum if you know what

I mean...well, they treat me like an equal parent, I think that's probably the best way to say it. (Tim)

In addition though, many fathers, and again particularly the main or shared-carers, expressed their active participation or interest in activities which could either serve to reinforce an acceptable or conventional masculine identity, such as sport and fitness, cars or computers, or those which had the potential to confer some kind of social or moral approval. For example, both Tim and Clive did voluntary work; Tim as a home help, and Clive as part of an organisation supporting adults with learning difficulties. In both cases this activity and time commitment appeared to be important as a source of social status, linked to their moral identities, validating them as fathers, and indeed as non-earning men.

Overall then, fathers' narratives of their role and position as fathers within broader family, social and community networks indicate the complex and dynamic ways in which gender shapes the experience and understanding of caring for children. This wider relational context is shown to be meaningful to fathers, producing opportunities and constraints, support and challenge. The expectations, assumptions, ideas and innovations of significant others, both particular and generalised (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007), constitute important resources for the process of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood, and contribute to the physical, relational and moral space in which this can take place.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out a broad map of these fathers' lives, illustrating not only the material circumstances of their fathering, but also the complex relational and moral terrain through which they travel. I have indicated that many of the practicalities of sustaining fathering and co-parental relationships, such as housing, work and money, have also to be understood in terms of their symbolic, relational and moral content. All of the fathers had experienced significant changes in their lives as a result of the ending of their couple relationships, and many had adapted to, or made changes in order to try and sustain their fathering roles and responsibilities. Whilst I am arguing that gendered conceptions and patterns of care provide an important backdrop for fathers' responses to the changed circumstances of their fathering, I am not suggesting that the gender 'script' for masculine and feminine caring roles is static or absolute. As these fathers' narratives show, there is room to manoeuvre, fathers appeared to embrace some aspects of gender norms and to challenge or resist others, demonstrating ambivalence rather than contradiction in relation to conventional notions of masculinity and fatherhood. Fathering after divorce or separation also provides another context in which 'gender borderwork' (Doucet 2006: 172) is visible, as fathers find themselves in new or different settings of care, have to renegotiate or reassemble the organisation and responsibility for care of their children, or reconsider the gains and losses of gendered caring roles. Such transitions or renegotiations, whether welcome or not, appear to act not least as a catalyst for some level of reflection on the past, on what it means to be a 'good' father and on how fathering could be sustained between households, among often increasing and increasingly complex family networks and across geographical distance.

The following chapters examine in greater depth some of the contours of this relational and moral terrain, through close analysis of fathers' narratives. Using the theoretical framework of the feminist ethics of care and concepts such as relational autonomy, relational work, moral reasoning and gendered moral self-presentation, fathers' accounts of the complex process of working at fathering beyond divorce or separation will be explored.

PART II

Relationality

Chapter four: Relationality and narratives of fathering beyond couplehood

Introduction

This chapter will explore the ways in which the concept of relationality is relevant to, and sheds light on, stories of fathering beyond couplehood. As discussed within the literature review, I have drawn on the moral philosophical and sociological developments of the concept of relationality; in particular the way in which it appears as a component of the feminist ethics of care, presented as a central and defining feature of human experience and agency. This is because I believe that, within this framework, the concept of relationality sheds particular light on, or provides a language for, noticing and discussing the focus on, and concern with relationships, bonds and connections within these fathers' stories. It is important, in itself, to notice and explore relationality in men's lives, as it contributes both to an understanding of male caring, and to any critical analysis of the persistently gendered way in which care is conceptualised, experienced, valued and organised. In what follows, I demonstrate how relationality informs a particular analysis of my interviews with divorced/separated fathers. This analysis highlights the salience of both 'quality' relationships to fathers, and their perception that such relationships need attention or 'work'; thus shedding further light on paternal practices, feelings and perceptions around love, responsibility and care. It therefore also offers some insight into the relationship between gender and relationality; and into how connection and 'relating practices' (Gabb 2008) are perceived and experienced by men as fathers.

Using two central organising ideas, relational autonomy and relational work, I explore the interview narratives through a number of emergent themes: a relational sense of self, contextual or compromised agency, relational boundaries, and relational strategies. I also discuss how emotion work and reflexivity can be seen as significant aspects of both relational autonomy and relational work. I argue that it is important and constructive to explore the challenge of post-couple parenting in terms of a process of 'relational work' in which the sustaining of quality, emotionally close, meaningful relationships with children relies so heavily on the ability to forge a co-parental relationship which is emotionally distinct from the spousal/couple one. Clearly there are a whole range of possible outcomes or bearable solutions to this challenge, but despite the diversity in their contact and caring arrangements, what these fathers share is an expressed sense of relationality, and a preoccupation with preserving their position as fathers through their relationships with children, and their mothers.

In taking a more sociological and feminist moral philosophical understanding of relationality, I have focused on the ideas of: a connected and autonomous self; caring relations as a manifestation of connection; care and relationships as both labour, (or work) and love; and caring as a process of moral and ethical reasoning. Out of this sociological and moral philosophical perspective comes the important concept of a connected or relational self, which does not present connection in opposition to autonomy, but can instead question existing conceptions of autonomy and reconfigure them from a feminist perspective. For example, Mackenzie & Stoljar (2000) define a concept of 'relational autonomy' as a broad term which sees "that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender and ethnicity" (2000: 4).

Drawing on their work, and on that of Iris Young (1997), Sevenhuijsen (2003) also uses this idea of relational autonomy as part of her development of a feminist ethics of care, highlighting the distinction between self-sufficiency and self-determination, in order to argue that a relational sense of self includes self-care, or self-determination, and therefore can contain autonomy with connectedness. In addition, Kagitcibasi's (1996, 2000) work on the 'autonomous-relational self', whilst coming from a cross-cultural psychology perspective, offers a valuable and thorough interrogation and reformulation of autonomy, which again finds it compatible with relationality. Relational autonomy then can be understood as a model of self and agency which does not force relatedness and self-determination into opposing corners; it takes connection to others as fundamental, and autonomy as both enabled and constrained by social context and relationships. Much of the work on relationality and relational autonomy has developed out of feminist research and theorising of women's experiences as mothers. Here, I explore the ways and extent to which these ideas can be applied to men's accounts of post-couple fathering.

A relational sense of self

The first theme which enables an exploration of relational autonomy is the presentation, through talk, of a relational sense of self; a sense of self as being perceived, felt and enacted, through and because of connections to others. All of the fathers interviewed presented themselves as part of an, often complex, network of people and/or organisations, involved in different ways, and at different levels, in their children's lives (as discussed in chapter three). The narratives produced were very much about the importance, emotional

impact, complexity and difficulty of these lived and felt relations most specifically with children and mothers, but also other relatives, new partners, other children, teachers, or social workers. In this way, a general theme is that of fathering done in connection though not necessarily collaboration, with others. For example, Dan, a main-carer father to his eight year old daughter Isobel and six year old son Max, expresses both a felt sense of connection to his children through his personal pride in positive comments about them, and an acknowledgement of the significant others in his caring network:

when you hear really good reports, and the teacher saying, 'oh you've got delightful little children' and all this sort of stuff, and you do feel, y'know and it's not just me, y'know, their mum's played a part in that and my parents have played a part in that, so it's not just me doing all of that, but I do feel sort of very good about that obviously.

Dan provides a particularly strong example of a relational sense of self, as he produces a rich, positive and enthusiastic account of his fathering, and often emphasises how important his close relationship with his children is to his sense of father identity:

just DO stuff with them, get out and give them time, energy I dunno, I got this, the last page from 'Danny Champion of the World' I've got, up on the wall, which always sort of reminds me, not that I even need reminding, but, in the story, it says a message to all parents and it just says, 'a stodgy parent is no fun at all, what a child really needs is a parent who is sparkey' and I think that says it all.

The idea of 'just doing stuff' with children can be seen as a way of expressing a sense of connection and relationality; in terms of the personal or mutual pleasure to be gained from fathering, but it could also be seen, certainly for Dan, as a kind of responsibility.

Other fathers also expressed a sense of connection to their children in terms of responsibility, but what is important to note is their perception of responsibility, not simply as 'duty' but as a form of care which includes, or does not discount, mutual satisfaction or reward. This type of thinking is much more in line with feminist moral philosophical theories of caring, which neither romanticise care nor reduce it to self-sacrifice (Ruddick 1989, Tronto 1993).

It's an internal feeling of, of, justice, for the fact that, it's not an obligation but, it needed to be done, and it was then part of my life. (James)

he knows, that I'm there and his mother knows that I'm there for him, and I know that he's gonna be there as well, so it's a kind of two way thing, so I've tried to set that as a routine in his life, as much as I can do, I've obviously missed an awful lot, but as much as I can, I keep that in there so that he knows he can talk to me. (Martin)

Gerry, a shared carer father for his 11 year old son Sam, adds another dimension or complexity to the idea of a relational sense of self: that of the potential for guilt induced by a strong feeling of connection. Whilst Gerry's account is very similar to Dan's in terms of the consistently expressed sense of joy and pleasure gained from fathering, and his emotionally close relationship with his son, he also presents his sense of responsibility for Sam as also producing more difficult feelings:

I'll tell you, the biggest problem for me, and it's my problem, not anybody else's, and it's that I feel guilty- if Sam's in the house, I feel guilty if I'm not doing something with him I feel that I should always be doing something with him.

This illustrates the complexity and multifaceted nature of 'relatedness' and the ways in which love, care, responsibility and moral identity are interlinked. Whilst within some psychological or psychoanalytic theory there are the concepts of, and tendency to pathologise over-connection or over-identification, as damaging to both the self and the 'other', I would agree that a richer and more nuanced understanding and appreciation of connection and relationality is vital to such debates (Baker-Miller 1976, Gilligan 1992, Jordan 2001).

Another way in which a relational sense of self is expressed is through talking about emotions. Some fathers, most particularly Tim, discussed both the depth and power of their feelings in relation to their children and also to their ex-partners, and their struggle to manage these. Tim, a main carer father of his four year old son Adam, talked several times about how he felt his own emotional wellbeing was closely linked to that of Adam, and to his ability to enact his fathering relationship:

I mean, obviously for a while, I was off-loading to him, and that, was a very bad thing to do, not bad, it wasn't the right way to off-load, I was y'know, my emotional state was being reflected in his emotional state, so that was very difficult.

when my emotional state's good y'know, I can, lay on the bed for half an hour, and watch him falling asleep, reading him a story and, do it all really very nicely and its lovely, but then when my emotional state is down I'll put him to bed, give him a quick kiss, tell him I love him, put the tell- put his DVD on for him, bugger off downstairs.

James, father of 12 year old Chloe, whom he cared for at weekends and school holidays, also expressed his sense of connection with his daughter, through remembering his feelings of loss and fear at the ending of his marriage:

I was more torn up and upset when I separated, at losing Chloe than her mother, to the point perhaps that I could have been looked at in the role, of the more maternal parent at that time, so needing to regain that, to establish that and get it back was essential, it was just crucial, it wasn't an option not to have it.

What is equally interesting here though, is the way in which he appears almost surprised at his emotions, and explains them in terms of him reacting 'as if' he were a mother. This 'gendering' of feelings, and indeed of connection, is significant, both in relation to understanding how men as fathers perceive their fathering roles and relationships, and in relation to wider research which suggests that the persistently gendered pre-divorce family life ill-prepares fathers for sustaining father-child relationships after divorce or separation (Smart & Neale 1999).

Other fathers also seemed to express a relational sense of self through their perception of something either actually or potentially lost from their relationships with their children. Chris, who has alternate weekends with his three children, 13 year old Gerry, ten year old Oscar and six year old Sally, expresses a more general worry across the sample: that as children grow up, their already limited opportunities to sustain relationships and share time will become even scarcer.

I can imagine that as they become teenagers, it may become less attractive to them to spend weekends with me and that - worries me y'know, I don't know how I'll cope with that.

Tony, who has regular weekly visits from, and lots of phone-calls with, his oldest daughters, 16 year old Jess and 18 year old Sam, and who has been divorced for seven years, talks more in terms of his sadness at a loss of 'closeness' between them. His account of post-divorce fathering is threaded through with this sense of loss, his attempts to sustain connection and closeness with his daughters, and to retain a coherent sense of father identity:

because they've got older and they don't live with me, I don't know their friends so, it's, it's not like, I would imagine the relationship would be like if I still lived with their mother and we all lived together, because then you know their friends.

you get their tea, you do everything you can for them, there is the bond there, because they're your daughters and they, or one looks like me and one acts like me as well, but there isn't, anything else, and that really does go and, that's the hardest part.

This idea of 'recognition' or identification of self within a child is present in other accounts and appears to be another way of expressing a sense of connection and relatedness: *"the main thing that I've got to hang on to, is believing that he's a little bit like myself"* (Martin).

The above examples demonstrate that a relational sense of self was present, expressed and valued within many of these fathers' narratives; this could be identified through talk

about feeling personal pride in children, investing in and enjoying fathering relationships, feeling (and gaining from) paternal responsibility, being conscious of changed or diminished emotional relationships with children, or through 'seeing' themselves within their children. It also seems that an expressed relational sense of self is particularly strong in the cases where fathers were either the main carers or had shared-care arrangements (Dan, Clive, Gerry and Tim). This raises the issue of the emotional and relational impact of new or different contexts for fathering, and in particular, the experience of more intensive caring for children. This transformative potential of caring relationships is discussed further below. The analysis presented here suggests that the experience of separation can reveal, or create a greater awareness of, the relational and connected nature of self and parental identity.

I have focused on father-child relationships as a powerful context in which a relational sense of self may be expressed, and part of my argument is that in the process of sustaining or refiguring such relationships after separation, the emotional, personal and social significance of connections, bonds, ties and feelings may be thrown into sharper relief. Indeed it may be that a certain consciousness of and reflection on relatedness and connection is necessary for parental relationships to continue beyond couplehood. However, this is not to say that recognising and living with relationality is easy or comfortable, and fathers' sense of their relationships with mothers, illustrate a more challenging experience of connection. Firstly, it is important to note the overall salience and significance of relationships with mothers, to fathers. Children's mothers remained central figures in the process of negotiating parenting after divorce or separation and were recognised as important, to children, but equally to the fathers themselves. Even in cases where co-parental relations were at their most hostile (Will and Brian) and certainly across

the range of other levels of conflict, civility and amicability, it is fair to say that all fathers did acknowledge that their fathering would take place in relation to mothers. Alongside a real sense of ambivalence, rather than deference, mothers were accorded value, and were considered as valuable, for their roles and relationships with children and an ongoing connection with them was seen as an inevitable part of the deal of continuing being a father:

there is the fact that he is, half and half, of each of us, there's nothing that either one of us can change with that one. (Brian)

All of the fathers, even if they struggled to do it in practice, seemed to recognise that their ability to move forward in co-parenting after their separation relied heavily on their ability to detach their couple relationship from their parental one; to refigure or sometimes drastically alter the nature, terms and limits of their still emotionally based connection to one another. So within fathers' narratives, a relational sense of self was expressed through their talk about mothers, but their accounts of this negotiated connection were complex and tense: often their sense of themselves as fathers appeared more precarious when considered through their relationships with mothers. Again, for fathers such as Brian or Will, who had the most conflicted relationships with mothers, their sense of themselves as good enough fathers was expressed with a consciousness, and often resentment, of the way their ex-partners' views challenged this. The connection was acknowledged, but so too was the difficulty it presented in terms of both fathering and father identity.

Will provides the strongest example of this. Will had separated from his youngest daughter Keisha's mother eight years ago but there was still ongoing conflict over contact

arrangements and their relationship was very tense. Keisha's mother had made serious allegations against Will, resulting in a lengthy court process where all of the allegations were rejected. This experience was in total contrast to the constructive, co-parenting relationship he described having with the mother of his eldest daughter Rachel for 17 years. His sense of himself as both a 'good father' and a 'good man' had been seriously challenged by the conflict with Keisha's mum, and much of his talk, and his presentation of self, seems to recognise or be concerned with this tension.

She, in the face of all other things, that's her attitude so she has just completely demonized me.

it is obviously part of my identity to see myself as an active father, in whichever way I can and I still do think that, being there for her [Keisha] y'know, her knowing that I am somehow there is important and it is going to be important for her, whatever she does with that, later on.

In every case, the co-parental relationship was also deeply linked to the circumstances and story of the break-up, and in every interview this story was told, although not always in a linear or detailed way. There were no stories of a mutual agreement to end a relationship; being either the 'hurt-er' or the 'hurt-ee' alongside the specific context and events, shaped the ways in which fathers could represent themselves in relation to mothers. For example, fathers gave accounts in which they presented themselves as forgiving, repentant, gracious, selfish or humble or having justified anger or 'the moral high-ground'. What makes these relationships even more complex though, is that mothers were very often also still loved, spoken fondly of, or considered friends, in addition to the tensions, grievances and conflict, making the navigation of the co-parental relationship still more challenging and emotionally charged. Often (clearly most often in longer relationships) the

narratives would convey a strong sense of shared history and of 'knowing' and being 'known', which was powerful and difficult to reconcile with the ending of the couple relationship, the developing co-parental one, and as part of this, a shifting sense of self.

I mean that's the worst thing about it, cos I mean I've never really loved anyone apart from her, so, otherwise I wouldn't have married her, I certainly wouldn't have had a bloody child. (Tim)

I mean I do get on well with Lucy really, y'know, she's a very good friend of mine and, we, I, I know exactly what she's like. (Jason)

I have demonstrated how a relational sense of self, as an aspect of relational autonomy, is present in accounts of fathering beyond couplehood, and that father-child relationships and relationships with mothers are particularly potent contexts in which this can be experienced. Relationships with, and felt connections to, other relatives, new partners, subsequent or step-children, were also salient to fathers, but tended to be discussed more in terms of the process of sustaining and 'managing' family lives and fathering across households. For this reason, the presentation and dynamics of these relationships will be explored as part of the later discussion of relational work, in chapter five.

Contextual or compromised agency

The second dimension of relational autonomy, and another emergent theme from the interviews, is that of contextual or compromised agency. The concept of contextual agency

(Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) presents human agency as 'bounded' in that "fathers make choices within a context of influence from a variety of factors" (1997: 20). All of the fathers lived with particular circumstances and in relation or connection to particular people. In this way, their narratives were accounts of limited agency; shaped either by others (often mothers), by other external factors such as money, work or housing, or by their own moral and relational reasoning about the likely consequences of particular actions. The interview narratives were of fathering in context, of attempts to sustain a role and relationship with children as constrained and enabled by that context, and of different responses to their 'context of influence'. This conception of agency as bounded or compromised is significant because it not only offers an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding these fathers' accounts, but also because it is in keeping with the refigured idea of autonomy presented within the concept of relational autonomy. In this way, contextual agency, alongside feminist moral philosophical and psychological critiques (Noddings 2003, Gilligan 1992) also challenges assumptions of individuals as entirely 'free', detached or self-sufficient.

For some fathers, the main factors influencing their scope for agency in fathering were external or largely beyond their control; lack of suitable housing, limited or formally controlled physical access to children, limited finances or geographical distance. Richard, who had regular weekend contact with his four young children, was living with his own father while waiting for council accommodation, and his narrative was dominated by the way this constrained both his practical fathering activities but also his paternal authority and his relationships with both his children and his own father:

without having me own place, there in't a lot I can do really for em... I only have em at the weekends, y'know, and that's my opportunity to provide them with a little bit of protection, a little bit of security a little bit, y'know, a bit of play or whatever...I try to provide, what she can't, but I have a limited time to do it, I have two days in which to do that, and that's a lot to cram into two days.

Brian, Will, Micky and Ivan also had very limited opportunities to father their children, or to exercise much agency or 'choice' over how they did this, through limited time, and/or the constraints of supervised contact or the legal system. What is revealed both across and within the interviews though, are the differing and complex responses to such limitations, or the ways in which fathers appear to reconcile or rationalise them. For instance, Micky, who had only recently established regular weekend contact with his three year old daughter Megan, and who had experienced protracted court proceedings, a period of time living in the YMCA, doing parenting courses and having nine months of supervised contact, expressed a combination of resignation and resistance to such institutional regulation of his fathering:

if they're looking at my file and they're seeing that I've done this, done that, y'know, it just shows you that I am actually more independent than what they need me to be, so, the quicker they can get me out of there, the better, and again, it's all, in my head, it's all Megan, and seeing her, and the sooner I can get out of there, the sooner I can get better contact with Megan, so that's how it was.

This quote illustrates a certain ambivalence expressed through Micky's narrative, towards the various organisations and professionals he had encountered since becoming a father, and particularly a separated, non-resident father. He recognised both the constraints and the resources offered by external agencies, and also sought to maintain a sense of his own

agency in pursuing contact with his daughter. This ambivalence towards external agencies was also present in Brian's narrative, where he talks about both his 'connections' with and knowledge of social services as well as being highly critical of them. Brian had three sons; 12 year old Luke, ten year old Alan and eight year old Josh. Alan is disabled and is currently in foster care. Brian visits Alan as often as he can and has regular weekend contact with Josh, but has not seen Luke for four years, in part due to the conflict between him and the children's mother. In his account of his attempts to sustain a fathering role, Brian appears to, almost simultaneously reject, and seek support from social services, presenting himself as at times passive/helpless and at others heroic:

in the case of all of them, I have never been consulted, I was not consulted about, him going into foster care, I was not asked to take him instead of him going into foster care, I have not given my permission for him to be in foster care, I have not given my permission for him to change schools.

having all them, to deal with, is sort of like, a way of saying how strong you are, how those years have, put certain things in your way that you just like, ok, well that's easier to deal with, that's not so easy to deal with that's a damn big obstacle, but we'll find a way over it, even if we have to lessen it down first, and you can't get much bigger obstacle than social services and courts.

So, in the process of accounting for external limitations on their capacity to enact and display their fathering, fathers such as Brian, Ivan or Micky, did not present or conform to a straightforwardly 'masculine' story of action, control, or indeed autonomy. Whilst there were moments where they found ways to claim some agency, there were as many where they spoke more in terms of 'being told' or 'having to' do certain things, or presented a more 'resigned' acceptance of limited fatherhood (Simpson et al, 1995). It may be that a sense of father identity, particularly in a post divorce or separation situation, is less tied to

conventional norms of masculinity, and is, in fact a good deal more relational and contextual than has previously been recognised.

Alongside more external constraints, fathers also spoke in terms of relational factors being part of their context of influence. In describing decisions they felt they had either actively taken, or had accepted as bearable, fathers often cited issues linked to the quality of relationships, or the impact of certain actions on relationships, as part of their reasoning. One example of this is Martin, father of 11 year old Tom, who discussed the fact that Tom and his mother had returned to the marital home, in another part of the country, whilst he and his second wife remained in East Anglia. Martin talked about the process of accepting and rationalising the geographical distance between him and his son, including both concerns for his son's welfare, and his perceived responsibilities to his second family as relevant factors.

he was back in, another school, down in Somerset and, it, it, I think it would have been more unsettling for him, really, than, than up- y'know, than transferring back again so, I tried to think along the lines of continuity.

I've had to again, made that decision for various reasons, I mean I've got a house up here as well so it's, so y'know, and plus we've got a daughter now, and that adds a big factor to it, so I've got to sort of think of a few other people, y'know.

For James, who has had regular weekend and holiday care of 12 year old Chloe since she was a baby, the relational impact of any decision to try and formally or informally arrange for her to live with him and his second family full time, was presented as a key factor in what he saw as a 'caring dilemma'.

my daughter would then start to look at me that I took her away from her mother, not that I'd ever change things about access and friendship and relationships but I, I suppose I was always scared that that was something that could be held against me in the future, I suppose it could be worked in reverse and my daughter could say to me in the future, well why didn't you ever come and get me, so, y'know it's a bit of a gamble.

James expressed a number of concerns over his ex-wife's mothering of Chloe and the stability and quality of her home life and relationships, yet felt that drastic intervention (i.e. applying for residency) was 'risky' in relational terms. James appeared to have opted for an acceptance of the status quo, whilst acknowledging that there was still a risk involved in terms of his daughter's future understanding of and feelings about this strategy.

For other fathers, such as Tony or Paul, there was a sense of compromised or contextual agency in relation to how they enacted their paternal authority and their sense of responsibility for their children's well being and behaviour. Both spoke of their uncertainty and frustration about how to act within the context of their fathering situation. Tony produced a detailed and complex narrative of what he saw as his diminished role and relationship with his two oldest daughters, and of his attempts to sustain a loving, comfortable relationship with them, and some authority over their behaviour.

up until, I spose six months ago, they could, within reason, act however they liked round mine and I wouldn't really say a lot because, I didn't want to offend them, I didn't want them storming out...I always felt threatened, that I had to, every weekend I had them, it had to be so focused on them, and on what they wanted, to keep them wanting to come and see me. (Tony)

Tony's perception of the fragility, or vulnerability of his relationship with his daughters, illustrated in the quote, was consistent across his narrative and his struggle to maintain both emotional closeness and some kind of paternal authority appeared to trouble him deeply. Paul, who had his three year old son William to stay three times a week, presented himself consistently as having 'moved on' and 'accepted' his ex-wife's new husband Dan, and did appear to have a very collaborative co-parental relationship. Yet he still acknowledged that his influence or authority was limited in the context of William's 'other home'.

it's difficult, the fact that I don't have control over that y'know because. I'm not fussed about what he [Dan] does on his own, but in the presence of my little boy, I'm quite defensive about that y'know. (Paul)

This quote illustrates not only Paul's sense of compromised agency in relation to William's life with his mother and new partner, but also the ambivalent feelings fathers often revealed towards other men, as discussed in chapter three.

Through the above examples, I have shown that relationality can act as a mediator for agency; that father's actions, or accounts of actions can be understood as closely linked to their relational context. Again, whilst there may be a number of responses to such relational limits or settings for agency, including resentment, frustration, uncertainty or sadness, fathers still gave accounts of their fathering as influenced by, and negotiated with regard to, other relationships to which they attached significance (including seeing them as negative or painful). It is possible that such accounts are more a form of justification or that they offer a solution to what would otherwise be difficult questions over the sharing of

care, time and responsibility, but this kind of evaluation is not possible or appropriate here. The extent of talk about the significance, dynamics and challenges of family relationships, together with the frequent attentiveness shown to trying to maintain or improve them, would suggest that justification of self is not the only purpose or interpretation of such accounts.

As I have indicated, responses to or strategies for, contextual or compromised agency may appear in terms of expressions of the difficulties or frustrations of 'constraint'. However, also present within the interviews is the story of potential and actual transformation of fathering as a result of divorce or separation. This is particularly, but not exclusively, visible within the accounts of main or shared care fathers, and points to the need to recognise the enabling aspects of fathering within particular practical and relational contexts. The work of both Ruddick (1989) on 'maternal thinking' as a gendered but not essentialist process, and Doucet (2006) on male caring, are relevant here, as both are interested in the transformative potential of intensive and routine caring for children, in terms of its impact on ways of thinking, feeling and relating to others. An important qualification here is that 'intensive' caring does not only apply to full-time caring responsibility; a number of the fathers in the sample had physical care of their children at weekends or for periods of the week or school holidays. The intensity seems rather to come partly from feeling solely responsible, but also from the context of limited time itself. For Chris in particular, the experience of having his three children to stay at the weekends had dramatically changed both his feelings about, and practices of, fathering. Whilst he also struggled with his sense that being divorced was somehow a 'deficient' form of family life, he nonetheless spoke explicitly about the qualitatively different relationship he had with his children and his feeling of being transformed by his changed fathering circumstances:

when you're with them, it's absolutely full on and hyper intense emotionally, I mean, even if you're not doing anything, even if you're just going to the park with them, or, y'know, just playing a game or, having a meal with them, or, or nothing y'know, it's still emotionally very intense.

I'm quite happy to go swimming every Sunday afternoon because they love it and because they love it, I love it, and you just do, it really does genuinely change you I think, in that sense to all intents and purposes, you do become different.

Other fathers, such as Dennis, were also openly enthusiastic about the positive relational impact their divorce had had on them; Dennis, who had regular weekly contact and informal time/communication with his 13 year old daughter Anna and nine year old son Craig, consistently presented himself as a repentant and transformed father. With some reflexivity and expressed sadness, he gave an account of his pre-divorce fathering as distant and highly mediated by his wife. He then described a process by which both his divorce and his non-residence led him to realise both his need and responsibility to build direct relationships with his children, resulting in a very different perception of what fathering meant to him.

I took the photographs of the children down, cos they actually they used to make me incredibly sad, they were maybe two and three, and I thought 'I didn't really know them' y'know, I never spent enough time with them, and for two years, I was working in London and only coming up at weekends and it was just a, time where, I had children but I didn't really know who they were.

you've got to spend time with them, nothing happens without that and, that-even in that small change, and I don't spend as much time with them, as I

would like, or I should, but even that small change has made such a difference and, I have, I now have my own relationship with them and I really don't think I did before.

Also important to note are Dan, Gerry, and to a lesser extent, Clive, who, as main or shared care fathers, included elements of transformation in their stories of post-couple fathering. Here, the common thread was an expressed sense of having embraced their increased responsibilities and time with children, acknowledging both the intense level of 'work' and joy that this brought. For both Dan and Gerry in particular, this greater level of sole responsibility also led them to see themselves as having a certain 'freedom' to father in ways which they enjoyed, or which were new or different from standard or traditional models. Gerry, whilst also noting the changed intensity of his shared care arrangements for his son Sam, also took great pleasure in fathering in the context of being with friends; other (separated) dads and their children.

it's a strange thing, because it's intensive being a dad, and then not being a dad, for a few days, and it's that thing I find the hardest.

it used to be 'couple things' and now it's more like, Sam and his mates and like, Dave mucks in, and Steve, so, cos they're in the same situation as I am.

In this way then, it is possible to identify the transformative potential of post-divorce/separation fathering contexts, particularly in terms of a form of freedom as well as responsibility that main or shared caring can produce. This is not to understate or discount the enormous and painful emotional impact of divorce or separation on fathers in this situation. Their accounts also contained talk about powerful feelings of grief, anger or hurt and about their relational work to get beyond these. Yet, whilst these fathers did have

working co-parental relationships and caring arrangements with their children's mothers, and did see themselves as acting within a certain relational context, they still appeared to enjoy the opportunities their situations allowed, for exploring and often enriching their fathering experience:

when it's just you in control, then you can just basically, just, don't have to answer to anybody, it's really nice actually, y'know...you don't have to start passing it through someone else or start, y'know and they can say 'oh well I was gonna do this, or do that' y'know, yeah, it sort of gives you a lot of freedom really. (Dan)

Relational boundaries

The third dimension of relational autonomy I will examine is the emergent theme of relational boundaries. By this I mean the ways in which fathers expressed some awareness of limits, expectations or criteria for certain relationships, and how they felt about, or reflected on, these. Such a sense of boundary could be either perceived as self-imposed, or as more normative, or as both. It is not to say that boundaries are understood as impermeable because sometimes, as described above, fathers spoke in terms of having ventured beyond the standard (and gendered) model for fathering. Relational boundaries as a theme emerged not only through fathers' expressed recognition or construction of them, but also through different responses to boundaries, including ways in which fathers' talked of trying to 'manage' them. Relational boundaries were present in many fathers' accounts,

appearing alongside, not in opposition to, their expressed sense of relatedness to others and this idea, of a connected yet bounded self, is resonant with the concept of relational autonomy within the feminist ethics of care (Sevenhuijsen 2000).

One expression or example of this sense of connected yet bounded self is through the valuing or asserting of the importance of 'care of self'. A number of fathers included their own expressed need for time/space for themselves as part of their understanding of being a committed or involved father. This could be accounted for in terms of being part of the 'pay off' of co-parenting, in that there are periods of time without children, or as part of an understanding of fair co-parenting, where fathers expected time to themselves.

on the weekends when I haven't got the children, I sort of do this thing where I lay in till nine and then I sort of go out for a run, and then I like to lay in the bath, and read a sort of film magazine for two hours. (Dan)

I am quite conscious of the fact that I need time off as well, y'know I have my nights off where I go and play squash and socialize and I think it's fair. (Paul)

Two interesting exceptions to this more confidently expressed or straightforward sense of care of self as part of being a father, were Chris and Jimmy. Chris, who described his relationship and time with his children as transformed and intensified by the experience of having them to stay alternate weekends, also discussed the impact this had on his feelings about having time for himself. He again seems to suggest that although he no longer lives with his children full time, his sense of connection to them is stronger, making the boundary between his sense of himself as a father, and as a person, more difficult to

understand and enact. Following a question about whether his time without the children could be described as 'freedom' compared with the constraints of family life he had previously described; Chris discussed his changed circumstances further:

Well, it does feel like freedom yes, but the problem is you're kind of lost as to what to do with that freedom, and everything feels very arbitrary, and y'know, before, when I was living at home with the kids and Alice, you were fighting for time for yourself, and having to negotiate and compromise, which is what normal family life is like y'know, largely, but now ok I have infinite freedom, but I don't have the will power to use it properly, I don't have the enthusiasm that I had for things that I thought I wanted to do.

For Jimmy, who had been the main carer for his 16 year old daughter Jess for the past two years and also had routine informal contact with his 18 year old son Jake, the boundary between taking care of his family and taking care of himself was perceived as much more troubling and difficult to navigate. In fact this tension dominated his narrative, alongside his strong tendency to be self-deprecating or self-critical:

you do get fits of guilt about it sort of thing cos you do think well should you be this sort of super dad, y'know, who's keeping everything lovely at home, or should, should you be thinking about yourself, and it's always like a constant sort of battle to try and y'know, co-ordinate the two y'know, you try and do your own things and to try and hang on to keep this family together.

So, with varying degrees of explicitness and/or ease, fathers' spoke of making some kind of distinction between themselves as men and as fathers, a boundary which could be experienced and accounted for in different ways. Despite the tensions and painful feelings this produced for some fathers, caring for children does not appear to be seen simplistically

or exclusively in terms of self-sacrifice or 'duty'. Caring relations appear to include care of self as an important or necessary dimension.

Relational boundaries were also visible within talk about father-child relationships. I will focus on two examples, both of which concern contexts where fathers feel that their relationships with their children could, or have been, called into question. The first recognisable concern, present most strongly within the narratives of main or shared carer fathers, but also among some who were the fathers of teenage daughters, was an acknowledgement of a social or cultural 'suspicion' of men as carers for children and, more implicitly, of male sexuality.

y'know, what would people think about me being with the boys all the time, y'know it's like, really, the boys come around with me all the time, they're with me all the time, y'know. (Clive)

I wondered how, other parents who, like who are like, my two are friends with, would, be about them, coming over? Cos I sort of had this kind of- idea, which I don't think is unrealistic, about 'oh yeah, y'know, single bloke', friends coming over, 'oh that's a bit weird' type, thing. (Dan)

Neither Clive nor Dan appeared to have been strongly inhibited by such gendered public anxieties, and indeed at other moments spoke with pride or ease at having been 'accepted' by other parents. However, the raising of the issue in itself indicates some level of self-consciousness about their fathering and father-child relationships and their recognition that the limits of such relationships may be more subject to question. Will had had his relationships with both his daughters challenged in a most extreme way, due to the accusations made against him by the mother of his youngest daughter. Whilst all the

A more extreme instance of this feeling can also be found in the case of Brian, who had very limited opportunities to act as a father and to sustain his relationships with his three sons, due to ongoing contact disputes, the animosity between him and his ex-wife, and the geographical distance of his middle son's foster home. Brian presented himself as a committed father despite the circumstances and as trying to retain some kind of parental and paternal role. Brian described as very painful, his perception that, in the case of his youngest son, the boundary between parent and child was being eroded. Brian was very concerned to try and retain some sense of 'normal' father and child relationship, and so his focus appears to be on the delineation between the two.

I was trying to make him feel, like he was a normal child and like he could, be a child, and not be, like a, adult because I find that, my child, the youngest one, is more of an adult, than his mother and when I see it in him, especially, when he's got his, older brother with him that's disabled, he's trying to be, the father when, I'm the father, and it's my responsibility.

The last context, in which a relational boundary was articulated, relates to the difficult process of developing a new co-parental relationship as distinct from being a couple. As discussed above, relationships between fathers and mothers were highly salient to the fathers in this study. However, in talking about how their relationship had changed, or was changing, from a couple relationship to a solely parental one, there were particular moments where a sense of some of the delineations between the two was more apparent. In the course of their narratives, fathers often identified or alluded to ways in which they saw their responsibilities to wives/partners as different from their responsibilities towards mothers. For some fathers, there appeared to be a boundary which differentiated the pre and post separation relationship in terms of financial responsibility; and which was seen as different from providing financially for children. Paul, father of three year old William,

and Gary, father of 21 year old Hannah and 18 year old Danny, both perceived the ending of certain financial 'ties' as a kind of marker for a changed relationship, where fathers felt connected to mothers as co-parents but not as partners.

for me, that point [selling the house] was, although we still had the children, was the time to get on with my life, cos we'd got no financial ties, yeah I know, we'd got the children and they were always gonna be a tie, and they still are. (Gary)

I'm more focused on my career, I'm looking out for me now, it's me and my boy, as opposed to, y'know, Rebecca, I mean I still have great affection for her but, she chose to go where she's going therefore its someone else's responsibility now. (Paul)

Paul in particular, appeared explicit in his sense that he had taken financial responsibility for his wife during their marriage, but that with the ending of this marriage, that responsibility now belonged to his ex-wife's new partner.

For others, such as Jason, who has regular weekend contact with his seven year old daughter Katie, this relational boundary was presented as being much more complex, but again tied in with the presence or absence of a new partner. Jason claimed to provide a good deal of financial support to Lucy, Katie's mum, but did seem not make such a clear distinction between his parental responsibility towards Katie and his sense of responsibility for Lucy herself. This much less clear boundary seemed to be the source of tension between Jason and his new wife Sam, and Jason talked of engaging in a substantial amount of relational work to manage this situation, including concealing some of the details of his financial support for Lucy and Katie (such as paying for them to go abroad on holiday).

What is also interesting though, is that his ongoing sense of responsibility is seen as dependent on Lucy being single; Jason states on a number of occasions that if/once Lucy re-partners, than his "*prerogative to support her*" will end and only the support for Katie will remain.

where she gets upset because she's got no money for food or whatever it is, but she's clearly gone and got her nails done and her hair done, I think, I know where it goes but, y'know, it's just one of those things, if there was a bloke, then it's his responsibility but y'know, my daughter, yes, I sort out and pay for.

The ways and extent to which fathers make some kind of demarcation between their sense of responsibility towards their children, and towards their ex-partners may then shed some light on how the couple and co-parental relationships begin to be disentangled, and how difficult this is to do. It also reveals how this process is deeply shaped by gendered ideas about men and women and male and female social and parental roles. Many fathers either talked explicitly about, or alluded to the idea that men were (or felt) somehow responsible *for* women. To some degree this notion, with its sense of a reduced economic pressure, was perhaps a strategic way of thinking which allowed them to accept as bearable the presence of new partners and step-fathers. However, this is not to discount or detract from the powerful and complex emotions equally associated with acknowledging the ending of a couple relationship through the arrival of 'someone else'.

Conclusion

Through the emergent themes of a relational sense of self, contextual agency and relational boundaries, I have attempted to explore fathers' narratives of sustaining fathering roles and relationships beyond divorce or separation and to consider further the characteristics and value of the concept of relational autonomy. Within these narratives, fathers presented a sense of self as both connected and bounded; as having deeply felt connections to, and caring relationships with, others, and in which care of self was included. The negotiation and balancing of different relationships, needs and interests was not perceived as straightforward or easy. This is related to the theme of contextual or compromised agency and, of course, to the discussion of relational work in chapter five. To some extent fathers appeared to accept, or be reconciled to, the idea of limited agency, or at least articulated a sense that their fathering was done within a certain relational and practical context. This was often illustrated by awareness or an apparent weighing up of the likely impact of particular actions on important relationships. Contextual agency does not mean a dislodging or negating of autonomy in terms of the capacity to act, it instead attempts to understand that capacity as both constrained and enabled by our relatedness to others. In these narratives, relationality can be seen, not as opposed to autonomy, but as an important mediator through which agency is formulated and enacted.

The fathers in this study produced accounts which made claims, not just about their agency as fathers, but also about how practical, relational and moral factors had shaped such agency in both positive and negative terms. In addition, the interviews revealed certain moments in the process of fathering beyond couplehood where a sense of relational boundaries were disturbed and brought to the fore. Challenges and dilemmas such as how

to balance care of children with care of self, how to navigate changing father-child relationships, and how to disentangle the couple from the co-parental relationship, all revealed and called into question, both personal and social understandings of how to 'do' and 'feel' family. The navigation and maintenance of relational boundaries can thus be seen as a dimension of relational autonomy, as part of a process of living and acting in connection with a range of significant 'others'. From this analysis and discussion of the interview data, the concept of relational autonomy can be seen to capture much of these fathers' perceptions of and feelings about their fathering. It is important to recognise the relational nature of their presentation of self and the ways in which their accounts of agency are contextualised through not just practical circumstances or constraints, but also relational and moral considerations. In the next chapter I turn to the second major concept to emerge from and be applied to the interview narratives, in order to explore more specifically, how such relational considerations can inform and mediate fathering practices.

Chapter five: Relational work as a feature of fathering beyond couplehood

Introduction

The concept of relational work has been developed inductively from my analysis of the interview data. It is linked to existing research on emotional labour (Hochschild 1983, Duncombe & Marsden 1993) and I discuss such links further below. I am using the concept to identify and explore the ways in which fathers talk in terms of attempts to think about, actively promote, preserve, or restore, positive or constructive relationships with their children. This also, almost always, occurs with mothers or with other relatives, new partners and so on. Much of the interview data can be read in terms of considerations, or strategies, either more or less successful, but tried or weighed up by fathers as part of trying to sustain relationships and stay emotionally close to their children. Again, this relational focus, and the process of deliberation and judgment involved, demonstrates the close association between relationality and moral reasoning as explored within the feminist ethics of care (Ruddick 1989, Tronto 1993).

In my analysis, I have made use of such feminist theories of care, and of the ethical values drawn from these: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto & Fisher 1990), as a means of hearing, making sense of, and articulating the relational aspects of the interview narratives. I am arguing that the process of sustaining parental roles and relationships after divorce or separation can induce ways of thinking and

acting, which can be defined as 'relational work'. Possible actions or decisions are weighed up in terms of their impact on relationships, or responses are controlled or modified in order to preserve goodwill (however fragile) or at least avoid/minimise open conflict. In what follows I identify and examine certain significant 'relational strategies' which are visible across the interview narratives, and explore this process of 'working at' relationships in more depth.

Relational work within father-child relationships:

'Getting the real dad experience'

Across the interviews, fathers placed an emphasis on the *quality* of relationships with their children, usually expressed in terms of wanting to feel emotionally close to, or at ease, with them, and sharing mutually satisfying time and activities. They also emphasised the importance they attached to preserving an active role for themselves in their children's lives; a context in which they could 'be' fathers and 'do' fathering. Fathers consistently demonstrated an awareness of, or concern with, the dynamics and complexity of family relationships, which seemed also to be connected to their sense of themselves as a 'good' father. Such concerns and preoccupations produced talk which suggested that achieving the goal of sustaining close and active relationships involved a certain amount of relational work, in addition to the practical aspects of caring for and spending time with children. One particularly salient example of this relational work is what one of the fathers described as 'getting the real dad experience'.

The interview narratives demonstrated fathers' preoccupation with the quality and nature of the time they spent with their children, not just the amount. Specifically, they sought to retain some sense of a 'full' or 'normal' fathering relationship, which they saw as enabling them to continue fathering children they felt at ease with and emotionally connected to. For example, for Chris this meant that having physical care of, and responsibility for, his three children was crucial:

I can't know how you could sustain, anything like, proper fatherhood, without having the experience of looking after them, y'know, wholesale, for regular spells. You couldn't, I mean you just wouldn't be, you wouldn't be involved in their conversations, you wouldn't know the people they were talking about.
(Chris)

All of the fathers were asked about how they spent time with their children, and almost all introduced the issue of trying to combine or balance the 'special' with the 'ordinary', as an important part of sustaining their role as a father. The significance of the routine or mundane was often highlighted as necessary or desirable for retaining the same sense of 'closeness' they felt they had had with their children in the past, even though they may not have appreciated this at the time:

when you're in a marriage and you've got kids, you see them all the time, y'know you see them when they go to bed y'know, you take it for granted, it becomes a part of your life y'know, to have them around, and interacting, and initially, it was very, strange, not having him, not seeing him all the time it was quite distressing at some points. (Paul)

I used to sit in their bedrooms after the weekend, that I'd had them, and just sit there crying and, even now, that's something you never come to terms with

because as I say, I don't know, you become a babysitter, you just don't have the same, because you're not seeing them daily. (Tony)

This perceived problem of how to avoid becoming 'just a babysitter' or "*the supplier of treats*" (Chris) seemed to also instigate reflective talk, about fathering and father-child relationships, and making comparisons between 'normal' (intact) families, living in one 'home', and their own situation.

in a home relationship, you don't have these special events all the time because it's not possible and then you almost feel like you're obliged to do them, coz they're expecting it, whereas if you just, y'know, spend normal time, just perhaps try and go and do one thing y'know that they can interact with you with, even if it's like washing the car. (Paul)

Such comparisons were sometimes the source of anxiety and guilt for fathers, most often related to a view of the nuclear family as inevitably 'better/best' but also in terms of their ability to stay close to their children and be 'proper' fathers. Paul, father of three year old William who he saw three times a week, and Chris, father of Gerry 13, Oscar ten and Sally six, who he saw alternate weekends, seemed particularly concerned with this:

you have to, look at the time which you're spending with them and then make sure that you're giving them, a reason to come back and see you, but also, so they look forward to it, but also y'know, be consistent with whatever's going on at home, so you provide the, real dad experience if you like. (Paul)

I am a sort of much more hands on father than I was and I'm happier, to, dedicate myself to the children, for the spells when they're with me, but then on the other hand you don't want to dedicate yourself, y'know, too much to them, because that really does make it artificial and silly, I do constantly feel

as if I'm walking on a knife edge y'know, and constantly agonising about it.
(Chris)

For both Paul and Chris, too much focus on the 'special' was seen as relationally as well as practically problematic, in that they it could diminish their role as fathers or damage the quality of relationships with their children. Paul, whilst acknowledging his fears about giving William a 'reason to come back', felt it was also important "*that the dad feels like they're wanted for them, not their wallet, or what they can buy them*" As illustrated above, Chris consistently returned to his concern with 'artificiality' and his comparison with fathering and father-child relationships which he felt to be more 'natural'. For these, but also for other fathers who either had less frequent time with their children (such as Martin or James), or those who had other restrictions on their caring arrangements (such as Richard or Brian), the need to achieve something like the 'real dad experience' was seen as equally important. Their accounts suggested that, since their divorce/separation, they had come to recognise the value of the ordinary, or the 'non-planned' and that their efforts to make this happen, in both cognitive and practical terms, can be seen as relational work:

that was quite upsetting cos I didn't have that, daily contact, normal daily contact so, I had to make up for it, by just communicating on the phone a couple of times a week and obviously talking to the school, via phone, and obviously writing letters, and when I went down to see him. (Martin)

I'm trying to be, like a, playful father, with the child...I was, wanting him to be, ahh, like a normal child, who was seeing their father, on a normal basis.
(Brian)

In practice then, for the fathers in this study, efforts to incorporate the ordinary as a way of sustaining the 'real dad experience' included things like thinking about how to spend time together, monitoring the amount of special activities and money spent, trying to do routine things, such as cooking and eating, household tasks or more mundane leisure activities like watching television. The preoccupation with retaining their ability to father in a way which felt right or satisfying to them, produced narratives of both reflection and often an account of adapting to the changing context of their fathering relationships, and to some extent learning to do 'nothing'

I want our relationship to be as natural and normal as possible, and they like it like that, they're quite happy to sit on the sofa, y'know, and chat, for an hour or, playing silly, playing hide and seek around the house, or, just do what you might call nothing, but it's not nothing y'know, it's the real, its, that's the better times really. (Chris)

The one, interesting, exception to this pattern was Micky. Micky was father to three year old Megan, and had just achieved regular weekend contact after protracted court proceedings, involving significant challenges to his status as a father and scrutiny of his fathering practices. Micky was enthusiastic and expressive about his relationship with Megan and enjoyed his time with her. He often presented himself in a different way to many of the other fathers: "I'm a play-friend yeah, I'm not, a dad, sort of thing, because I'm not there 24/7" and did not seem to share the preoccupation with having a fully-rounded experience of fathering, which includes the routine and the ordinary:

I think, it's been more easier on me in a way because me and Laura did split up, sort of thing y'know, and so every time I do see Megan it is all about play

time...which is, exactly what I want to be doing at the minute, y'know, I just wanna be, be a big toy. (Micky)

The fact that Micky had only just achieved staying-over contact and regular weekend time with Megan may explain the prominence of the pleasure of playing and having fun with her within his narrative. However, despite this difference in focus, he, like the other fathers, attached particular significance and emotions to the quality of the father-child relationship, and had engaged in relational work, not least through his 'play' to build and sustain this.

'Staying close'

A second and very closely linked, relational strategy within the fathers' narratives is that of trying to 'stay close' or sustain a mutually rewarding, emotional and loving relationship with their children. The notion of 'closeness', though evocative, can be difficult to define as well as to achieve, and whilst they shared the preoccupation with trying to achieve or sustain it, fathers did interpret or articulate the idea in various ways. There also appeared to be a link between fathers' sense of, or confidence about, the quality of their father-child relationships and their perception of their pre-separation fathering. Many fathers gave an account of what they saw as well established bonds with their children, achieved through 'hands on' fathering from the start.

I never shied away from nappies, or clearing up sick or anything like that, I, y'know, I did my bit, I mean at the end of the day, I got up in the night and I've done the bottle y'know. (Clive)

Fathers who worked full time or long hours when their children were very young, such as Clive or Gerry, often emphasised the point that they 'did their bit', seeming almost to pre-empt any potential contradiction between claiming to have shared caring for children, and their working lives. Others, such as Tim or David explained their post-separation active involvement in terms of having been the majority carer during their child's early life. Tim had in fact given up work when Adam was born, as his mother had a more secure and better paid job. He was the one father in the sample who had been the recognised main carer prior to his divorce, and remained so afterwards. So, for fathers who talked about having being actively involved from the start, including David, Dan, Clive, Paul, Martin, Tim and Will (in relation to his first daughter), there was a tendency to then see their emotional relationship with their children since their separation or divorce more in terms of continuity and as established through some experience of more intensive, routine caring.

However, this sense of established emotional bonds with children was not taken as a guarantee of staying close after separation, and indeed a powerful theme in some fathers' narratives was their great sadness and often confusion about having lost some important yet almost intangible quality of their relationships with their children. The clearest example of this is Tony, whose story focused on what he saw as a diminished relationship with his two teenage daughters, in terms of their emotional closeness, his knowledge and understanding of them, and the 'ease' of their interactions together. Whilst his account was contrapuntal in that he also did talk about them still getting on well, and that they still confided in him, he still felt that, since living apart from them, the quality of their emotional relationship had suffered.

you just lose, all that, I don't know what it is, closeness really, that goes soon after you split up and that was the hardest thing, to understand.

Alongside such reflections on the emotional quality of their father-child relationships following their separation, fathers also talked about what 'work' might be necessary to either sustain or improve a sense of closeness. One aspect of this is the issue of familiarity and consistency, related directly though not simplistically to the amount and the context of time spent with children. Many fathers felt that regularity of time spent with children was a factor in maintaining a good, close relationship and indeed in enabling the 'real dad experience'. Following a question regarding how the caring arrangements for William had been decided upon, Paul's responses indicate his association between familiarity and the quality of his relationship with his son:

so how often would I need to see him for him to still realize y'know that I'm his dad?

the fact that I can see Will three times a week, I think it benefits William a lot more than if I was to see him once a week or once a fortnight or, and I think that way, it's more stable and its y'know its regular, as opposed to y'know, he comes and sees his dad, once every fortnight, for a weekend, and it's 'we go out, oh we go to Centre Parcs, and it's all intense y'know, and then it's like nothing, whereas if it's, y'know its three times a week it's, habitual enough.

For the majority of fathers, establishing caring arrangements which, though varied, could produce this sense of being 'habitual' had been possible. However, fathers such as Martin or Jonathan whose children lived a long distance away, and who had their children to stay during school holidays, but for longer periods, felt they had had to work harder at trying to create and sustain familiarity. In this way, regular phone calls, text messages, letters,

postcards etc can all be understood as a form of relational work, designed to maintain or develop emotional connection and a sense of closeness between father and child. Martin, in particular, commented on the relational difference that had occurred through not being able to talk to his son, Tom, easily or routinely, during the early and acrimonious stage of his divorce. Martin and his ex-wife agreed that he would phone their son twice a week at an arranged time, and Martin talked about how, throughout the six years since, this had become highly important for his relationship with Tom, but also for his co-parental relationship.

he knows, that I'm there and, his mother knows that I'm there for him, and I, I know that he's gonna be there as well, so it's a kind of two way thing so I've tried to set that as a routine in his life, as much as I can do I mean I've obviously missed an awful lot, but as much as I can, I keep that in there so that he knows he can talk to me.

Martin also illustrates another more general point about the importance of regular talk in sustaining close relationships, which is the significance attached to mobile phones for children. It appeared that, very often, mobiles were seen as important, not just because they facilitated direct or less mediated contact with children, but also because they could enable more mundane, routine 'chat' which arguably forms an element of relational familiarity and 'ease' *"It's good because he's got a bit more freedom and if he wants to talk about the football he can just ring me"*.

Another aspect of sustaining closeness with children was expressed in terms of having shared interests or, as Dan described it, *"common ground"*. Again, whilst many fathers acknowledged the relational importance of sharing and enjoying activities and time

together, their accounts of putting this into practice with children revealed some of the challenges, in the relational work that this involves. A key distinction made was between a perception of mutually shared interests which are easier to do and more easily enjoyed by fathers, and the idea of actively doing or trying something in response or with attention to, a child's particular interests. For some fathers, (in particular two of the shared care fathers, Dan and Gerry), the idea of sustaining 'common ground' through mutually enjoyable activities, was embraced with great enthusiasm. Dan's fathering was shaped very much by both his sense of closeness to his children and the pleasure he appeared to gain from fathering. He also attached great importance to the idea of working hard at fathering and making his time with his children fun, or as he put it "*top notch stuff*":

sometimes I say, we can have a campfire for tea, so, and, and when you've done it, you like really, really enjoy yourself y'know, I think you do have to sort of, go for it.

I would say I've become more aware of the fact that, when they're at mine, I wanna make sure that, um, that they get a lot out of, their time, and that I get a lot out of it.

Gerry also expressed this sense of staying close through being very child-focused, and spoke in terms of both the effort and the emotional pay-offs of such relational work. Another aspect he included was the way in which the changed circumstances of his fathering gave him more scope for sharing and encouraging his 10 year old son Sam's interests in sport, and again, to sustain a bond through having fun:

I know it's a bit of a cliché, but you sort of relive your childhood a bit, I'm a bit of a kid when it comes to it, like, I bought this table tennis table, and like

it's, scrap the dining room, y'know it's 'right, dinner parties, or play table tennis?' and it's like, 'no, wanna play table tennis every day' so, the kids come round and do it.

The issue of how or whether to actively respond to children's interests as a route to common ground was shaped by both the age and gender of children, and was often more explicitly discussed in relation to being the father of teenage children and particularly girls (see chapter six for further discussion of gender in relation 'putting children first'). Some fathers, (such as David and James) explicitly identified 'girlie' things as distinctive, and as less easily enjoyable, yet they also presented themselves as having attempted to respond to their daughters' interests.

The bits that I really didn't like were playing with Barbie dolls, having to watch Walt Disney films over and over again but, I never been a huge shopper, so having to go round shops for girlie things, is not a hugely enjoyable experience. (David)

The key point here then, is not to say that fathers did not, or would not respond to children's changing interests as a way of staying close to them, but more to recognise the ways in which fathers found this more or less hard to do, and saw it as more or less salient to the quality of their relationships with their children. As discussed above, for some fathers, such as Chris, but also, here, Paul, the process of doing things that children like can bring surprises or emotional 'pay-offs'; it can be transformative in that it perhaps offers new insights into the experience of giving and receiving care. For others, such as James, the idea of finding common ground through responding to his daughter Chloe's interests is perceived as more of a challenge.

the time I spend with William is quality time, y'know, you don't necessarily make the effort but y'know, you, you find things to do, and in some ways to look forward to...when you're just seeing him for two or three hours you actually have to, to do something because you're, because they need more attention than that. (Paul)

if I need to go to the tool shop to buy some tools, she'll have to come and do that with me, and then, y'know we might go and have a curry for lunch, or take the dog out for a walk and stuff like that, but I haven't really ventured towards looking at things that I should be doing with her, like rollerblading, or stuff like that. (James)

Nonetheless, James, in reflecting later on sharing a sense of humour with his daughter and enjoying making her laugh, summarises well the feeling of relational comfort, and emotional closeness, which so many of the fathers spoke of wanting to sustain with their children. This is one of the few instances where the concept of intimacy could be seen as applicable to the interview narratives, through the father-child relationship James describes:

because you can't do that with a stranger can you...but someone you're close to, you're interacting, at a certain level y'know, which is enjoyable for both of you, it's pleasurable, gives you warmth, gives you confidence, reassurance, y'know all the things you need in that kind of relationship. (James)

Relational work within co-parental relationships:

'Keeping the peace'

Having explored relational work in the context of father-child relationships and identified some particularly pertinent examples, I now move on to consider how relational work can be seen as present within the process of developing co-parenting relationships. Children's mothers remained central figures in the process of negotiating parenting after divorce or separation and were recognised as important to children, but also to the fathers themselves. In every case, even where co-parental relations were at their most hostile, it is fair to say that fathers acknowledged mothers as mothers and often, sometimes implicitly, accorded them a certain status or consideration. This is all the more interesting because of the way that many fathers also rejected and were openly critical of the idea of deference to mothers when it came to family law, social services and other external agencies. Whilst none directly allied themselves with fathers' rights organisations (in these interviews) many raised the subject of mothers being favoured by the legal system, or by society more generally, in terms of being the 'natural' or rightful carers for children. A consistent view, though often expressed more tentatively than stridently, was that there are disparities between the way mothers and fathers are treated and valued and that generally 'dads have it tough'.

I think that, generally society, it still expects that, y'know if couples part, y'know, then, the mother is the main carer, and y'know, this business, that the dad that can only get involved every other weekend, I just think that's awful, I'm not criticising people, I'm just saying I think that's partly the way, the way it is, but I think it's changing, and I think it needs to change. (Gerry)

In general, alongside a real sense of ambivalence, rather than deference, mothers were accorded value, and were considered as valuable, for their roles and relationships with children. When talking about mothers and fathers more broadly, there was a tendency to see fathers and mothers, fathering and mothering as different. Drawing on a 'different but equal' conception allowed for a number of possible positions to be accounted for or defended. Examples were; the notion of unique and 'complementary' contributions from men and women, the acceptance of a gendered primary/supporting model of parenting, and also the retaining of a normative ideal of two (heterosexual) parents.

I mean obviously it's the yin and yang isn't it, I mean, with the mother and the father, you get the father's side and you get the mother's side and then they balance each other out don't they? (Tim)

Alongside this salience of the relationship between fathers and mothers, there is equally the sense that the co-parental relationship is 'fragile' or contingent, that it may need nurturing, repairing or redefining; that it is a relationship which requires 'working at'. A key part of such relational work was presented in terms of 'keeping the peace', which was then explained or described in a number of ways.

Where the co-parental relationship was already, or was becoming, reasonably amicable, there was an expressed desire to avoid potential conflict, for example, over changes to arrangements, money, parenting decisions and so on. This approach seemed to stem both from fathers' desire to present themselves as reasonable and/or fair, but also from their recognition of the particular mother-child relationship and, to some extent, the status of this relationship more generally. Martin had described a lengthy period of conflict, and

minimal co-operation from his ex-wife, for the first two years following their divorce, but equally acknowledged her status as a resident mother:

I've got to appreciate that, she is looking after him 24/7, and so she should have- y'know she's got that responsibility, that ownership and I haven't, so that's fair enough I think, so, it'd be nice, if she did talk to me about it more, but she doesn't.

Some fathers also rationalised the fact that they were either very flexible or had accepted certain conditions, expectations or demands from mothers (such as always collecting and returning children, not having them on Christmas day or birthdays, or not being fully involved in decision making) in terms of active choices, designed to preserve good will and cooperation:

it still is hard, to y'know, completely swallow a lot of what I believe in, because y'know I mean in theory, she should be coming over here and dropping Katie off and it shouldn't all 'oh, she's your daughter, if you want to see her, you go and get her' and it shouldn't be, y'know, if things aren't going her way, she takes it out on me, but unfortunately it is...but I don't think anybody can understand, unless you're a dad and you, you want to keep the peace, and, have a good relationship there. (Jason)

In addition, fathers consistently expressed a commitment to be supportive to, and not undermine mothers, in relation to parenting decisions. This often, but not exclusively, seen in terms of their position or level of responsibility as main carers for children. This did not exclusively correspond with non-residency, as fathers such as Gerry, who had shared care of his son and who had also remained in the family home, equally expressed his concern to respect and avoid conflict with his child's mother.

as his father, as his mother...by convoluted means, we have a duty to one another, not to undermine each other's responsibilities and care of Sam, and to be fair and decent towards one another, not to say bad things about one another (Gerry).

she's much more involved in their day-to-day care than I am, I never criticise her um, care, or her approach to the children in front of them, I might do it in a discussion with her afterwards, but not in front of them (Dennis).

Where such a strategy became more difficult or created more uncertainty and ambivalence for fathers, was in situations where they did not actually agree with, or approve of, some aspect of their ex-partner's mothering. Here, the relational work of sustaining co-operative and amicable relations with the mother, became more fraught with moral and relational thinking about what might be 'best' or fair, for all those involved. For example, James talked about a number of ways in which he disagreed with, or felt concerned about his daughter's education, her discipline and her stability at home with her mum. Some of these concerns could perhaps be understood to be as much a reflection of perceived class differences, in both material and attitudinal terms, but James frequently spoke in terms of not intervening, and rationalised this as strategy for keeping the peace:

I personally don't really agree with private education and I certainly can't afford it, but I have to accept the fact that I pay her mother maintenance every month...if her mother is going to fund that, and I mean I'm partly funding it anyway, with my maintenance payments and it's going to benefit my daughter in the long run, then, I don't suppose that I've really got the grounds to grumble about it.

Tony, Jason and Martin also demonstrate this sense of ambivalence towards, and differences between, themselves and their ex-wives, in terms of parental values or attitudes, for example around smoking, drinking, diet and manners. Yet they, too, give accounts of working hard at keeping the peace despite such differences and despite the challenges of trying to be attentive to many people's needs and feelings:

a lot of the decision making, I've had to make with my present wife as well and we've had to talk things through and a lot of things have had to avoid confrontation, I've had to think about decisions and think about, well what are the consequences of saying something, and weighing that up to see if it's gonna do any good or not, cos I think sometimes you can do more damage by making an issue out of it, than, letting it go, or monitoring it, to see if it gets any better (Martin).

Where relationships between fathers and mothers were conflicted, or particularly fragile, fathers often talked about a felt tension between their wish or attempts to change things, and their fear of greater animosity or separation from their children. Here, keeping the peace seemed both more important, but also more difficult to do. Two fathers, Will and Brian, felt that their ex-partners were actively obstructing their fathering, and were strongly critical of them for doing so. However, even in these most conflicted cases, fathers still felt they needed to try to reconcile or negotiate keeping the peace, alongside their resistance to perceived obstruction, and still presented themselves as engaged in the process of building a co-parental relationship. For these fathers, and for others such as Tim, Richard and Micky, where relationships with mothers were very strained, the process of rebuilding co-parental relationships was often made more difficult because of the strong emotions they felt, in relation to both mothers and children. Again, they would talk about relational work as, in part, involving the management or control of such feelings, in order to either

minimise or avoid potential conflict, or to behave or communicate in ways they saw as more constructive:

I used to have four cans of beer, on a Friday night, before she come, not to get myself worked up, to get myself half cut, so I could deal with that bit, without having any emotion. (Tim)

Ultimately, for fathers like Brian, and perhaps Will, faced with what appeared to be very limited opportunities either to be routinely involved with their children, or to rebuild collaborative relationships with mothers, the only other account to offer was one of waiting or 'hanging in there'. Here, the relational strategy of keeping the peace could also mean not taking further legal steps, or even, for Brian, not pursuing contact with his eldest son Luke. To talk of 'biding' or 'investing' time for the longer term, perhaps enabled fathers in this situation to retain a sense of father identity and moral commitment to their children.

I got to bide my time, and find out, how my son is going to react, whether I'm going to see my oldest one again when he turn sixteen how he's going to react to me, when he finds me, if he finds me (Brian).

Maintaining the 'working relationship'

A second significant theme within fathers' accounts of the relational work involved in the process of developing co-parental relationships, is that of maintaining, or trying to achieve what was often described as a 'working relationship':

We're not at each other's throats or anything, it's not that sort of relationship, it's more like a sort of, working, business relationship I suppose.
(Dan)

I have to do all the proactive stuff, but she will cooperate, up to the degree of saying 'yeah you can have him for that period of time, and we can work on, and compromise on that' so, it's a good working relationship. (Martin)

Whilst this of course meant slightly different things to different fathers, and was felt to be more or less easy to accept emotionally, in general this definition was used to describe a co-parental relationship which was bearable, offered enough communication to facilitate caring arrangements and was based on enough mutual trust and respect for both parents to feel acknowledged or not excluded. However, this kind of relationship was presented as having been negotiated, sometimes hard won, and often developed over a long period of time; regardless of whether a particular parent was perceived as at fault or 'difficult', it was very much seen as something which had had to be worked at in a number of ways.

Whilst there are clearly a whole range of practical considerations and issues involved in negotiating co-parenting beyond divorce or separation, it is important to recognise how many of these also have a strong relational and emotional element. This means that the process of achieving such working relationships requires attentiveness and responsiveness to particular people and relationships, and that this kind of relational thinking can be understood as a form of work in that there will be costs as well as gains, with some level of responsibility for, and management of behaviour and emotions involved. For many fathers, attempting to make the transition from a couple to a co-parental relationship meant changing the means by which they communicated; again often for relational as much as practical reasons. This could be through using answer-phone messages, phoning at

designated times, writing letters or drawing up timetables for caring arrangements. During the very painful early period of his separation, Tim described how he could not talk to, or make arrangements with, his ex-wife directly and instead used written notes: *"I've given her notes, she gave me notes, but then for a long time I wasn't, I was just saying goodbye to him and giving him to her, without any communication at all"*. Will also gave an account of the process by which he and the mother of his oldest daughter had worked out how to avoid arguments over any changes to their shared caring arrangements, by agreeing that he would write to her with his request in advance and that she would reply within an agreed time. This was presented as a bearable or workable solution which could acknowledge her emotions and his need for some flexibility.

she didn't have to, deal with me asking something, she could just read it, she could deal with how she felt about it, she could come back to it when she felt 'ok, I can respond, to this' and I knew that I had to tell her two weeks before I needed to know and it worked fine.

Whilst many fathers talked in terms of negotiating a new or different context in which they and their ex-partners could communicate, some, such as Chris, Paul, Gary or Gerry who had all had relatively amicable divorces with minimal or no legal intervention, did describe talking with their ex-wives directly, but often highlighted the idea that for both their sakes, this had been informally 'mediated' in some way, either through the location, or the presence of other people

in the early weeks and months of the separation, before we actually divorced, we, we met occasionally, in a neutral territory, we met in a hotel in Newmarket, and talked about the practicalities, the things we had to talk about y'know. (Chris)

I went and visited Maggie at her parents' house, with her parents present, and I said 'look, this is everything here, you can, you can, read it, at your leisure, if you're happy with it all, then, I'll send it to my solicitor, and then he'll, draw it all up? (Gerry)

As an extension of this notion of a mediated context in which fathers and mothers could act as co-parents, there was also a tendency for fathers to talk about going to parents' evenings, hospital appointments or other more public settings where the need to 'display' (Almack 2008) parenthood might be felt more keenly. Once again, negotiating and attending such events was often presented as important but also as requiring some emotional effort.

I go to parents evenings, we go together and try to show up together even though we're not, and it is hard for her, and it's a bit awkward for me as well cos we're different people, but generally we get on. (Tony)

In addition to working out how to communicate in order to minimise conflict or be attentive to one another's feelings, developing the 'business relationship' also seemed to involve setting limits on what could be talked about. In fact this can arguably be seen as an important part of disentangling the couple from the co-parental relationship. For most fathers, the limits for the co-parental relationship on one level were presented as relatively straightforward; as co-parents, there needed to be some sharing of information, responsibility and activity in relation to the practical care of their children.

I'm still on good terms with Alice, as far as we need to be on good terms, y'know, to collaborate on bringing up the children. (Chris)

even though the marriage dissolved it has always been fairly, focused, on the fact that Will was the most important thing and that, as much as possible, we weren't going to let that affect him in his upbringing and we, every, every decision we make together, we both contribute towards a savings fund for him, and any decision we make, for schooling, we make together. (Paul)

However, in practice, it seemed to be more difficult, or at least to require more effort, to monitor and 'bear' this more proscribed and more distanced relationship. Both Gerry and Tim gave accounts of the difficult and painful feelings they continued to have about their ex-wives and gave a sense of the work involved in regulating these and attempting to manage the co-parental relationship along 'business' lines. Gerry's narrative here is particularly interesting as at other points he describes his relationship with his ex-wife Maggie in terms of being more amicable, equal and fair, often talking fondly of her and presenting her in very positive ways; thus illustrating the complexity and ambivalence of co-parental relationships.

there's a massive amount of animosity, I mean, you try and put it to bed, y'know, but, the rift between, Maggie and I, and my family and Maggie is, is we try not to let it show...Maggie went to his school report evening a couple of months ago, and then she phoned me and gave me some feedback on that, so, y'know, there are certain day to day things that we can talk about but, I don't feel that it's possible or practical for us to talk about wider aspects of his, upbringing. (Gerry)

Tim, who had a more conflicted relationship with his son's mother, also gave an account of struggling with the powerful negative feelings he had about his ex-wife and the ending of their couple relationship, alongside his acceptance, in principle, of the parameters of their ongoing co-parental one.

I loathe her now but I hated her then y'know, I don't think there'll ever be a point where I can be more than, more than just civil to her, and I'm only ever civil for Adam's sake y'know, cos he, that's the most important thing to me...well, yeah, y'know, when parents do split up then they're still that, I'm a parent, you're a parent, we've both got this joint responsibility but, y'know.
(Tim)

Alongside limiting communication to a minimum, or to only concern 'day to day' or practical matters (a process which Will described as a form of "compartmentalizing"), another dimension of the working relationship seems to involve establishing some level of mutual respect and trust. There is clearly an overlap here, with the relational work of 'keeping the peace' and again, the goal was to maintain or improve relationships between fathers and mothers. Within the context of both more and less amicable co-parental relationships, fathers' frequently perceived a need to be united, to try and back each other up, or at least not undermine each other over parenting issues such as children's behaviour.

Jane and I have sat down and we've said 'look although we're not together anymore' umm, I feel that we should be united as far as the children are concerned and we're agreeable on that y'know. (Clive)

In addition, Dan provided an example of where he and his ex-wife had taken steps to preserve a sense of cooperation and equal recognition of each other as parents. Dan described a discussion over whether his ex-wife Liz could take their children out of school without his permission. He gave an account of a process of negotiation, involving the mediating role of the head teacher, in which whilst he seems to have initiated the action, both he and Liz emerged with a 'workable' solution which he, at least, perceives as fair.

I arranged for us both to see the Head Teacher, and then it was arranged that we'd both- if they ever came out of school, at a time y'know, non-break time, then we'd both need to sign, to say that, so there's things that we've agreed, sort of 50/50.

This type of mutual acknowledgement was also seen to be necessary, in terms of trying not to involve children in arguments and not talking negatively about the other parent to their children. This is not to say that all the fathers found this easy or managed to achieve it, but almost all expressed the view that it was a desirable and necessary part of forming a working co-parental relationship. Dan again illustrates a sense of commitment to this relational strategy and the presence of ambivalent feelings about both this, and his children's mother.

I don't sort of put their mum down, I don't sort of say 'oh god, your mum this, and she's crap at that, and she's a bad mother, she left you' I, I never said anything like that, and that would just be horrendously, emotionally, bad for them, so I've always steered clear of that, but I don't see it as my job to sort of big her up either.

Lastly, in relation to trying to develop and sustain a 'good working relationship' there is the challenging issue of managing emotions, or especially relational conflict. As I have suggested, the ending of their couple relationship, even where fathers had instigated this, was seen to have massive emotional consequences:

I've heard a lot of people explain it, y'know as mourning for a situation, y'know your mourning because the whole situation has changed, and I would say, the most dramatic experience I've ever had in my life. (James)

Powerful feelings of personal hurt, loss, anger, guilt, shame, humiliation, jealousy and so on, were perceived as incredibly difficult to control or set aside, in the process of making practical and legal arrangements for the separation of property, money and caring for children. Yet all of the fathers, even though they struggled to do it in practice, seemed to recognise that their ability to develop a working co-parental relationship after their separation relied heavily on their ability to detach this from their feelings about their children's mother as a partner:

And I think in the end, it all comes down to, if you can accept that you split up, even like, at one stage I did love Jill more than she loved me but, if you come to terms with the fact that it is over, and can focus on the children then you can move forward. (Tony)

In some cases fathers felt that their ex-wife or partner was at fault, or was behaving unreasonably because of an inability to see beyond their own personal hurt or anger. Here, the view was often expressed that prolonging such feelings produced 'bitterness' which was obstructive and less legitimate in the context of a co-parental relationship:

Just, bitterness really which was, understandable, to a degree, but bitterness can be punishment in my- I mean from my angle, it was just punishment 'you left, it's your problem, it's your fault', 'you left us' y'know, its 'lump it' really. (Martin)

In this way, whilst they were sometimes empathic or remorseful, fathers tended to expect mothers to take responsibility for putting aside personal feelings in order to rebuild or continue parental relationships. In relation to themselves, it is fair to say that there was a similar expectation, but with a great deal of contextualization or rationalization of why this was so difficult to do. However, among the fathers who had for example been 'left', some had been apparently much more successful at moving forward than others. As described, Tim struggled very much to control his anger and hurt, in order to communicate and facilitate contact between his ex-wife and their son. A striking contrast is Paul, who appears as a confident, committed father, who consistently presented himself as having mastered his own personal feelings and achieved a positive, working co-parental relationship with his ex-wife:

it starts off as something but it's evolved as the anger subsided and the absence subsided and its, y'know because you do get over, you do move on, you do, there is life after, y'know although it doesn't seem it to begin with, y'know, we are good friends and therefore the decisions are easier.

All of this suggests that a major part of this relational work contains an element of emotion management. A sociological understanding of emotion (Duncombe & Marsden 1993) already points to the gendering of such a process, and indeed of emotions themselves, yet is important to note that the fathers in this study did not demonstrate any straightforward conformity to masculine norms around the expression or regulation of feelings. These interviews also did not suggest that fathers, as men, were likely to find emotion management 'easier'. Many of the fathers spoke explicitly about the huge emotional impact of their divorce or separation on them personally and also felt that, more generally, this was something 'people' or 'society' overlooked:

very few people actually realise what it means for a man to go through that emotionally, I really do think a lot of people do not understand, and, and, way underestimate the, the impact on you emotionally. (Chris)

I did a lot of crying, a tremendous amount of crying really, for a grown man, I didn't think I could cry so much really, but I did all my crying when I went to bed, y'know when I'd got the children sorted out. (Clive)

In the process of working at an effective co-parental relationship then, fathers often described moments or contexts in which they actively regulated their personal feelings, producing some poignant examples of the costs and gains of this relational strategy.

I try to block it out, and just get on with it, I think if I, loitered on it too long, it would be too upsetting and it was, I mean the first couple of years, was a nightmare leaving him, dropping him off, and it was tearful, I used to be driving in tears, cos it was just heart wrenching y'know. (Martin)

you need to just try and focus on the future, I have erased, everything, from my mind, as far as possible, I only go back to three and a half, four years really, and I try to only remember the good things I've done with Sam or in my life, that Maggie hasn't been part of, ah, cos it's only really now, after nearly four years, that we're starting to get on with our lives. (Gerry)

Conclusion

I have developed the idea of relational work from my analysis of the interview data and as a means of exploring the sense and practice of 'relating' within fathers' narratives. My argument is that the experience of fathering beyond divorce or separation can produce an

intensified focus on the quality of relationships and a heightened perception of them as an ongoing process of sustaining or nurturing work. The concept of such relational work can therefore be seen as linked to Ruddick's (1989) theorisation of 'maternal practice' in as much as it constitutes a way of thinking and a form of "disciplined reflection" (1989: 24) focused around the preservation of relationships and in turn care-ful action. However, like Doucet (2008) I recognise that men's experiences and perceptions of caring practice cannot simplistically be equated with, or measured against, those of women as mothers.

Whilst the fathers in this study revealed their efforts to engage in relational thinking and relational work, this is not to say that such a process is welcomed, easy or successful. Part of the 'discipline' of relational work seems to be a certain level of self-awareness or reflexivity, and fathers arguably varied in their embracing of, or resistance to this. Alongside reflexivity, emotion management has been shown to be another key element to much relational work, in that certain feelings may need to be concealed or 'segregated' and others 'performed' in the process of disentangling a past couple relationship from a continuing co-parental one. Again, this is no easy or welcome task as the fathers' accounts of the emotional impact of their separation and attempts to sustain their fathering relationships showed.

Lastly, the significance of gender as a central influencing factor cannot be understated in terms of how norms, assumptions and expectations around the social, emotional and caring roles of men and women shaped both the pre and post-separation experiences of the fathers in this study. Whilst they did not straightforwardly or consistently conform to any masculine stereotype, assumptions about gender difference did permeate fathers' narratives of parenting, fathers, mothers and children. Equally, although they were rarely explicitly

acknowledged, except in more detached, generalised terms, there are arguably gendered power relations involved and revealed in the struggle to renegotiate care and responsibility for children after divorce or separation (Smart & Neale 1999). To conclude, my argument is that the concept of relational work can operate as an appropriate and insightful framework for understanding narratives of fathering beyond couplehood. A careful and attentive analysis of such narratives highlights their relational qualities and concerns, and reveals something of the dilemmas, challenges and pay-offs within the complex process of working at fathering and co-parental roles and relationships. In the following chapters I turn to the moral aspects of the interview narratives, and explore some of the complexity of good fathering and of moral self-presentation. Once again, I will highlight ways in which gender enables and constrains both this process and the moral space in which it takes place.

PART III

Moral reasoning

Chapter Six: Good fathering as a complex moral process

Introduction

Being attentive to the moral and ethical dimensions of family lives can be productive in a number of ways: it can produce a rich consideration of everyday family lives and relationships; offer constructive insights into processes such as the 'making' (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) of post-divorce parenting and stepfamilies; open up a context in which moral philosophical ideas can be explored and evaluated, and provoke a more reflexive approach to the research process in that the researcher is required to attend to morality without moralising. In this chapter I draw out moral aspects of fathers' narratives of attempting to sustain their relationships with children and mothers. Even on first conducting the interviews, my sense was that they were full of moral and relational stories, dilemmas and claims, and in this regard my work is closely aligned with Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003. These interviews can be seen as constituting 'moral tales' which are shaped, not least, by social and structural factors such as gender and class. Researchers such as Finch & Mason (1993) Duncan & Edwards (1999) and Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies (2003) suggest that family life is better understood as a series of complex moral dilemmas to which there are few generic or off-the-peg answers. Such researchers also stress the significance of moral identity and presentation of self, in relation to both living and talking about family lives and relationships. I argue that in talking about, parenting, particularly after divorce or separation, moral identity is at stake. To take care of, and have responsibility for a child involves a process of moral deliberation and judgement, which takes place in a particular practical but also relational context, and this is

informed by an already gendered experience of social and personal life. In this way, I am emphasising the point made by Ribbens McCarthy et al, that “the significance of dependent children to the work needed to sustain morally adequate identities is often overlooked” (2003: 57).

My analysis and discussion for this and the following chapter is based on a form of operationalisation of the moral content of fathers’ narratives. My starting point, (as discussed in chapter two) was to recognise that the sample constitutes a group of fathers who, by agreeing to be interviewed, may have felt they had a viable or morally defensible story to tell. Whilst they will have had to perform and accomplish the telling of this story, and within it, establish their own moral position as fathers, their participation perhaps implies that they felt this was possible to do. In this chapter, I have focused on instances of moral self presentation, perceived and/or explicitly expressed threats to moral identity, and also narrative strategies for dealing with or managing such threats. I am taking the view that in the practice of, and accounting for, their fathering, fathers will seek to maintain a viable moral identity. I have also identified moments where fathers took up a moral position or made some kind of moral claim, in relation to being a ‘good’ father, and where they expressed, either explicitly or implicitly, a value or belief about family life and/or parenting. In what follows then, I examine and illustrate what appear as significant moral dimensions of the interviews: perceptions of good fathering practice, and gendered moral self presentation. I will also demonstrate the links between the moral and relational aspects of fathers’ narratives and argue that relationality forms an important part of the context for such moral deliberation and accounting.

'Good fathering' as a complex moral process

As I have suggested, being a father will involve considerations about what counts as good fathering. These decisions may be presented as more or less conscious, and will be mediated by a number of factors, some of them outside fathers' control, but fathering can still be understood as a form of moral deliberation or as 'a way of thinking' similar to the 'maternal practice' described by Ruddick (1989). The examples I present here come from fathers' expressions of moral ideas or beliefs about good fathering, and about childhood, children and their needs. I have also listened to the interviews in terms of expressed moral values, either specific or more general. The discussion concerns what constitutes good fathering, not parenting, as a neutral or generic term, and not mothering; and my analysis provides a context in which what is moral for men can be explored.

Across the interviews, fathers consistently expressed ideas compatible with the 'moral imperative' presented by Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003) in their study of stepfamily relationships. This moral imperative involves making a distinction, in terms of responsibility and accountability, between two moral categories of 'Adult' and 'Child' and consists of the belief that "adults must take responsibility for children in their care and therefore must seek to put the needs of children first" (2003: 57). This imperative is linked to the process of sustaining a viable moral identity as a father, as in order to do so, he must demonstrate that he has at least tried to live up this moral requirement; this is in part why statements such as 'I did my best' or 'I did my bit' can be read in terms of their moral content. As part of this moral valuing and prioritising of children, fathers expressed

particular ideas about what children need or what is 'good' for children. The fathers in this study offered a recognisable contemporary view of children and childhood, indicating that children needed stability and routine (particularly young children), a good standard of living, time and attention, 'boundaries' (in terms of acceptable behaviour) love and fun. Worth noting, and further discussed below, is that in relation to meeting these needs, fathers did express some ambivalence about both the disciplinarian and providing role, appearing unsure, either about the exclusivity of these to fathers, or about the costs or losses which they might involve in terms of fathers' relationships with their children. With perhaps the exception of Jack, (discussed in chapter three) children also tended to be presented in terms of being innocent, in need of protection and with fewer, and different, moral responsibilities. For example, Brian talks of his frustration and sadness at not being able to prevent his youngest son from taking on caring responsibilities when he is at home with his mother; demonstrating his positioning of children as morally distinct from adults, and making an implicit moral evaluation of his ex-wife at the same time.

he's trying to be the father, in the way that he's taking responsibility for his older brother, and it upsets me in that way, I don't like it one bit, because he's only eight years old, he's a child, he shouldn't have those responsibilities.
(Brian)

At the same time, alongside such positioning of children as 'vulnerable' and of childhood as a 'special' time of life, there is also the tendency to draw on ideas of resilience and adaptability in relation to separating parents. This may be because being divorced or separated remains a moral problem, or a potential threat to moral identity in itself. The following quote from David illustrates this contrapuntal sense of children's vulnerability and resilience, and the moral anxiety about fathering beyond couplehood.

my main regret, about being divorced, is that you invariably don't spend as much time with your child as you could, but by the same token, because your time is short and your time is precious together, it- she's had more attention, I've created time for her, and so I sometimes justify it to myself, that I've probably had more time with Amy, than your average father. (David)

'Putting children first'

From my analysis of fathers' perceptions and accounts of 'good fathering', two central themes can be identified. The first of these, clearly connected to the moral imperative and the moral positioning of children, is the concept of 'putting children first'. I discuss a number of dimensions of this ethical principle, and consider the ways in which it is shaped by gender and gender relations. In the first instance, putting children first can be linked to the idea of 'staying' (discussed in chapter seven) in that it can be drawn on to indicate an overall moral commitment to children, either through making some kind of moral contrast, and/or through explicitly stating that sustaining contact was morally significant. It was also possible to make a moral statement around putting children first in terms of hypothetical actions, a kind of 'I would if' position. For some fathers, this appeared to offer an opportunity to attach a moral, and in a sense unassailable, claim to an arguably 'optional' quality of their current caring responsibilities, but for others, such as Brian, with highly limited opportunities to 'act' as fathers, this kind of demonstration of moral commitment was perhaps the only one available to him.

I feel that I could cope, not only with the disabled child, I could still cope with the youngest child, with the disabled child there, and the oldest child, as well. I could probably turn around, the damage that he has been put to, in the last four years, by my ex, and by what social services have caused him. (Brian)

if they all turned round and said well we want to be here then, y'know, I wouldn't work, cos like I say, my kids come first. (Richard)

Putting children first was also frequently expressed in terms of adding a moral dimension to the process of working at a co-parental relationship; most often in terms of a recognised need to put aside personal differences and disputes, or to separate the history and dynamics of the couple relationship, from the ongoing parental one.

it was always William was first, regardless and fortunately that has remained clear in both our minds, the fact that, y'know, despite, our anger or our hurt or the situation, who was living with who, Will was still there, he obviously still needed to be the primary thought. (Paul)

we were both sacrificing, and do sacrifice, things in our personal lives to, make sure that the children have regular contact, neither of us was saying 'I must have that time to do this, or I must have that much money'...we both felt that it was worth anything really, to avoid court battles and so on. (Chris)

Even for fathers such as Tim or Micky, who described a high level of animosity between themselves and their children's mothers, and found it hardest to contain these difficult feelings, there was still an expressed sense that, at least in theory, children's interests had to be placed before their own personal grievances and that they continued to share certain moral responsibilities as parents of the same child.

I've always sort of known that Adam comes first y'know, his interests, his emotional importance is more important than mine. (Tim)

I mean, it is down to the pair of us...we do have a general idea of like, y'know, we do have to keep the same sort of rules for Megan. (Micky)

Another interesting expression of this sense of moral commitment to putting children first came from Gary, who extended the idea to include the two sons his ex-wife had had from an affair during their marriage. To Gary, whose overall narrative contained a strong demonstration of his commitment to both biological and social children (he also had two stepdaughters from his second marriage), putting children first meant positioning them as innocent or blameless, and including them within his sense, and practice, of 'family'

even Billy and Alex, the two little boys she's got now, we still buy em Christmas presents, birthday presents, Easter eggs, they've been round here for Barbeques so-o, I mean I don't, y'know, they're a couple of lovely little boys and- I got a picture of them in me wallet. (Gary)

As in the preceding example, putting children first could be expressed both as an idea and also evidenced or 'displayed' (Finch 2007) through accounts of particular decisions and actions, so that it can be linked to 'good fathering' as a practice. In different ways, fathers often gave accounts of particular decisions in terms of having acted from the principle of putting their children's needs and interests first. For example, (and further discussed in the next chapter) prioritising children could make either working or not working a morally defensible, indeed laudable option for fathers. While Dan derived a sense of moral worth from his ability to continue with his job, Clive consistently

emphasised his decision to leave his job as an expression of his moral responsibility for his sons.

I feel like really, really proud that I basically got down to it, that I didn't sort of allow myself time to, fall apart, and I just sort of ran the house and made sure everything was really good. (Dan)

I had to do a juggling, and balancing act there, so in the end, in my wisdom, I decided to, to resign from work, and look after the children, because I felt that, things were starting to slip, and I wasn't in control of things. (Clive)

Interestingly, Clive also presented his decision to finally divorce his wife Jane, who had suffered serious mental health problems and had been hospitalised, in terms of putting the children first. Clive also talked of his commitment to facilitating contact between Jane and the boys, and whilst they appeared to have built up a reasonably cooperative co-parenting relationship, Clive still felt justified in making his children his moral priority.

I then decided that I couldn't cope with Jane anymore, the way she was, and I needed to think, well I had to concentrate on the children, so I instigated divorce proceedings, and um, I felt that I need to move on with my children because they needed the stability.

Also, in terms of fathering practice, some fathers such as Dennis and Chris expressed the idea of putting children first through their, to some extent newly discovered, sense of becoming more focused on the quality of their father-child relationships. Both fathers, but particularly Dennis, produced an overall narrative of being a repentant and 'transformed'

father, and stressed the moral importance of spending time with, and being attentive to, children in order to be 'good' father.

I had ended this other relationship and had said, y'know, I cannot sacrifice my relationship with my children and actually, there is effort I have to put in there, there's damage I have to repair

it wasn't enough just to pop in, cos that's what I was doing, I was popping in. I would just, on my way home, I would pop in, now that's not spending time with the kids, that's just popping in and saying hello...you've got to spend time with them y'know, you can't- nothing happens without that.

As well as drawing on a moral principle of prioritising children in order to account for particular actions, it can also be linked to the concept of 'active passivity' (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003); putting children first could equally mean *not* doing certain things. For instance, where fathers described avoiding, or not getting involved in arguments either with mothers or between children and their mothers, withholding certain information from their children, or not intervening in mothers' parenting decisions, such decisions tended to be described in terms of being considered 'better for the children'. In chapter five I described this kind of active passivity in terms of being a relational strategy, i.e. a way of working at and sustaining relationships, and the concept of putting children first is largely what gives such 'keeping the peace' its moral content.

One of the strongest examples of this kind of moral and relational deliberation can be found within Tony's interview, where on a number of occasions he expresses his desire to protect his daughters' wellbeing, through taking a decision not to intervene. This is the

case even where the strategy carries some moral 'risk', such as being seen as 'uncaring' through his reluctance to assert himself in parenting decisions.

I've always just tried to support and be there, and not get involved because, if you get involved in arguments see you always drag the kids into it and then, they don't need that in their life, it's enough heartache.

Other fathers, such as Brian, Gary, James, Robin and Martin, also described decisions they had made, which involved a form of non-intervention, carrying certain moral risks, through which they believed they had put their children first. Such decisions included not applying for residence orders or not challenging contact arrangements (or mothers) and this presents two more general moral questions or issues. One is whether the 'moral space' for the enactment of parenting after divorce or separation is different and perhaps greater, for fathers than for mothers, given that it seems possible to construct a morally defensible position and identity through fathering at a distance; although this distance is perhaps seen as more legitimate in a literal or geographical sense, than in a relational one. Secondly, it again raises the issue of ways in which fathers and mothers, men and women, may have different expectations of one another, and may interpret each others' efforts at parenting in differently. For example, non-intervention or 'keeping the peace' could also be interpreted as a lack of care or responsibility.

After divorce or separation, and despite certain legal shifts and political discourses of 'equal parenting', it also appears difficult for both fathers and mothers to relinquish the primary and supporting model of gendered parental roles, which arguably does allow moral space for a more optional sense of fatherhood. I would argue that it is this gendering

of care for children that can produce, after the ending of a couple relationship, a certain realisation and inversion of the gains and losses of stereotypical parental roles. In addition, the painful process of giving away and taking on, different caring roles and responsibilities is also deeply linked to that of trying to sustain an acceptable moral identity as a mother or father.

A final dimension of 'putting children first', which particularly illustrates some of the complexity and ambivalence within the concept, concerns how time is spent together with children. Put simply, the key moral question here is 'should putting children first include doing things you don't like?' All of the fathers were asked about what they did when they spent time with their children, and many fathers brought up the subject of common interests; shared and enjoyed, lacking or lost, but always with a sense of the importance of quality time for the sustaining of emotional relationships.

just like try and do really cool things with them, sort of get to know them y'know, for me, like I said before, I just want to sort of feel the children can talk to me...I'd say common ground's really, really important cos if you're not careful, they're just like strangers I spose. (Dan)

In this way, the moral value of putting children first overlaps with the relational strategy of attempting to 'stay close' to children (and with the discussion of this in chapter five), again, giving it its moral content. However, the way in which fathers understood the moral responsibility involved in putting children first in terms of spending time and doing/choosing activities, varied. Some fathers, particularly Dan and Gerry, felt very strongly, that spending time with children meant focusing on and embracing the things which children themselves enjoyed and were interested in. Neither saw this in terms of

self-sacrifice or obligation and both gave enthusiastic accounts of the, sometimes unexpected, pleasures that this form of caring gave them.

I really, really, enjoy it, I mean like y'know, doing the football training with the kids and- I get a lot- I'm always, Sam and his mates, it's like come on, we'll get in the car, we'll go off swimming, we'll go to the beach. (Gerry)

I mean I will admit sometimes, like once a month I'm absolutely exhausted... and you come back and they want to go out for like, a really long bike ride and stuff, and you have to dig, quite deep in yourself to do that, but I can't think of anything better really. (Dan)

It should be noted that both Dan and Gerry were the main carers for their children for at least half of the week, and this experience of caring responsibilities had shaped, and as Gerry put it, 'intensified' their fathering practice. This raises the possibility that, for some fathers at least, the expectations for good fathering, both internal and socially imposed, could be subject to a similar intensification process as has been argued to be the case for motherhood (Hays 1996). Gerry in particular explicitly expressed his deeply felt sense of moral responsibility around spending quality, and also what he saw as productive time with his son Sam, through taking part in sport, playing games, sharing hobbies and so on.

If Sam's in the house, I feel guilty if I'm not doing something with him...I think it's from a number of reasons, partly because we're separated, partly because, I just feel that, I should do it, from a sense of responsibility I guess. (Gerry)

To some extent it could be said that the issue of doing what children want is easier when they are younger; where their desires and needs are perhaps more easily seen as

intertwined or equivalent. It is also the case that fathers of teenage children seemed to express more difficulty, and more ambivalence around focusing on children's interests or desires. This was often accounted for in terms of children becoming more independent, wanting their 'own lives', developing their own social lives and so on. However, some fathers, (Dan, but also Chris and Will) seemed to take the view that they had a moral responsibility to sustain common interests and 'common ground' and that this meant continuing to find '*really cool stuff*' to do, and time to do it in.

so I'm thinking that in the future y'know, there may be quite a lot of kind of, going to High Lodge, with mountain bikes and doing that, as, as a family.
(Dan)

We would sort of, y'know set special time aside...we had these sort of daddy-daughter days, which we, y'know days when we'd do outings and things.
(Will)

For other fathers, such as Dennis and James, the issue of whether putting children first necessarily involved doing things because their children wanted to was slightly more complex or problematic. James expressed the view that within his second family, where he had two young sons, putting children first did not always have to mean prioritising their desires. However, James still accounts for this as being a morally acceptable position, which does not exclude or ignore children and which is a unified stance, taken by he and his second wife as key representatives of 'the family'.

we're a family, we believe in- as much as you can implement it, that if you have children, they don't change your life, children integrate into your life so, we'll plan what we're doing, and then, the children are involved in that, so

then, obviously at the same time we look at activities of, involved in that, that the children will want to do. (James)

Later in the interview, when James is talking about how he spends time with his 12 year old daughter Chloe, he acknowledges that he may have to reconsider this moral position, and that in order to 'put her first' he may need to do things which she likes, but he doesn't. His ambivalence is revealed in the quote, and he also poses the problem rhetorically, as if to test it against the potential responses of 'others', not least me as the immediate audience.

Chloe will be the first to admit she wants a bit more excitement now, so yes, we are having to adapt to the fact that she's now looking for that, whereas, to be honest, I'd prefer to go on a dog walk and have a pint, y'know, obviously, that's not what she's going to want to do every single time...I haven't really ventured towards looking at things I should be doing with her, like rollerblading, or stuff like that, perhaps I should. (James)

It is not just age of children which may have a bearing on the degree to which fathers feel they need to put their interests first, but in the case of both James and Dennis, the fact that they have daughters also seems to play a part. Dennis provides a significant illustration here, through the contrasting way in which he talks about spending time with his 13 year old son Craig and his 14 year old daughter Anna. What is noticeable is the way gender plays a part in shaping Dennis's developing relationships with his children; the easy pleasure he describes in sharing sport with his son, contrasted with the difficulty he has both with finding common ground with Anna, and with talking about this with me. As with James, Dennis makes a statement about the limits of his moral responsibility to put Anna first, considers and then counters this, as if to pre-empt potential moral evaluation and to protect the moral identity he has built up through his narrative.

sitting there with Craig with, I dunno, him drinking juice, me drinking beer, eating crisps, watching football or rugby or, any other sport that takes our fancy really, I mean it's just blissful, I couldn't be happier doing that.

I struggle to think of things actually, that we would both enjoy, because, in some ways, I don't- it sounds a bit selfish maybe, but I don't want to do something, just because she would enjoy it, to have a shared experience would be nice but equally I do, I do things I don't enjoy, because she enjoys them, but it would be nice to actually have, found some, common interests as well, but we haven't done that, Anna and I.

Other fathers, including Tony, David, Jason and Dan also talk about their experiences of having daughters, and the ways in which this presents the moral question of 'having to do things they don't like' in terms of putting *girls'* interests first. The recurring idea of having to do 'girlie things' and fathers' differing responses to this, reveal the added complexity which gender can add to the general moral principle of putting children first, as it can make the practice of sharing and sustaining common pleasures more of a challenge, or indeed, draw attention to the moral qualities of playing with dolls or going shopping.

I think I'm quite good with my little girl, in like, her girlie ways and- like she's into these Bratz things at the moment and I know all the names of all the Bratz- and she wanted all these fairies painted in her bedroom so I done all that...I think probably a lot of dads are, for some reason it's not actually as hard as you might think. (Dan)

Whilst the presentation of their daughters' interests is perhaps stereotypical or oversimplified, fathers were still conscious (sometimes self-conscious) of daughters as having particular needs. In this context, as a father, sometimes the morally responsible

thing to do was to ensure and support the mother-child relationship; which could still be accounted for as a way of putting children first:

I don't think, as a father, I could give what daughters need- I forget when they have their hair done, I don't notice and I get moaned at, so now I try to remember to look at their hair...but, I think, they needed a mother...I thought I can't teach them about make up, I can't teach them about them sort of things, and go shopping and that, so it was most probably the right thing for them to live with their mother. (Tony)

Overall then, the moral claim to be putting children first could be interpreted and enacted in a number of ways; it could legitimate action or non-intervention, it could require fathers to step in or step back, to take on new or different forms of child-centred activities, or provide a means of absolving themselves of at least some of the responsibility for this. In terms of defining a moral space for fathers, it would seem that there is room for manoeuvre. Putting children first could still make non-resident fathering morally 'legitimate' as long as fathers were seen to be attempting to avoid relational and emotional distance. They did this through trying to spend meaningful time with children, taking children's interests into account and attempting to foster a co-parental relationship. Fathers appeared to have some ambivalence (suggesting again, that the moral space exists in which they can express this) over the lengths to which they will go to put children first. This can be related to both the gendered nature of parenting, and to contemporary debates around its intensification. None of the fathers in the study openly rejected or contradicted the idea of putting their biological children first, and of the five who had stepchildren, four explicitly extended this sense of moral responsibility to them. This therefore supports the argument that a moral imperative does operate in relation to dependent children, and that putting children first can be seen as an expression of this.

Retaining paternal authority

The second recurring theme in terms of fathers' attempts to consider and articulate 'good fathering' is the idea of retaining and exerting some kind of paternal authority. Whilst this was related to their ability to influence, or have some level of control over, their children's lives and care, it was also inevitably linked to the co-parental relationship too. In terms of presenting this as a moral aspect of the interviews, I do so because, in different ways, all the fathers in the study expressed the idea that having some kind of paternal authority was either something they 'deserved' and wanted to retain, or was something fathers 'should' have (and use), or that it was something that children 'needed' from fathers. As with 'putting children first', such ideas were produced through a combination of using specifically personal contexts and examples, and by drawing on more abstracted normative ideas or references to either particular or generalised others (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2007) as a means of both expressing but also considering some of the moral issues involved in being a father. Maintaining paternal authority, then, can be understood as an element of fathers' felt sense of moral responsibility for children, and was discussed predominantly through three related areas: discipline, decision making and advising or teaching. I briefly explore each of these in turn, and in addition point to the ways in which the gendered nature of parenting shapes both the experience of, and moral space for, fathering after divorce or separation.

The subject of discipline, in terms of managing behaviour, appeared frequently within fathers' narratives, but not in straightforward or simplistic ways. When asked directly about what being a father involved, it was not often listed explicitly or spontaneously, yet within accounts of their attempts to sustain both father-child and co-parental relationships,

issues of whether, when and how to deal with children's behaviour were highly visible. Fathers' perceptions of and feelings about, being responsible for disciplining children demonstrate again the complexities and ambivalences around what may still be recognised as a conventional fathering/male role. Some fathers, and indeed mothers, appeared to see paternal authority, in the form of instilling discipline, as something fathers could and should be expected to do. Jason, Bill, Jonathon and James all saw part of their fathering in terms of being actively involved in discipline, both before and since splitting up with their children's mothers, and all appeared to be happy to try and retain that role. James provides a particular example here as, after describing an incident where his 12 year old daughter Chloe had lied to her mother about staying at a friend's house, he then gave an account of how both he and his ex-wife positioned him as responsible for dealing with this.

it was left to me to sort of go and get her and, tell her sort of exactly what was going on and the fact that things were going to change, and that was a very difficult thing to do, but it possibly has dealt with things that had been left too long, and got a little bit out of control.

her mother will stress that because she's the primary carer, she has to play many roles, as y'know, mother, friend, father, and she finds it difficult to play all of them, so in a situation like this, y'know I accept and I'm quite happy to, y'know standing up and doing what needs to be done.

What is also interesting is how, within this story, both James and his ex-wife appear to attach some moral status to their parental roles; James makes a subtle moral evaluation of Chloe's mother alongside presenting himself as morally responsible, and his ex-wife reportedly asserts herself as the main carer who is entitled to support from him. James's case is also interesting because, whilst he and his ex-wife appear to agree that he can and should be called upon to exercise discipline in certain contexts, James seemed to see any

assertion of authority over other aspects of Chloe's life, (about which he did express concern), as being much more difficult, and more in terms of moral dilemmas:

if I actually took control, it would be to the point of saying, y'know, she really needs to live with me, so that means I would have custody and whether that would mean new court orders, and then my daughter would start to look at me that I took her away from her mother- I suppose I was always scared that that was something that could be held against me in the future.

This related but broader sense of paternal authority, in terms of a more general or ongoing decision making about children's welfare consistently appears as complex and challenging moral and relational terrain for fathers. This was not just in terms of considering what they felt the 'best thing' to do for a child might be, but more in terms of how parental decisions, over matters such as schooling, health or social life issues, holidays, the giving or spending of money on children, could legitimately be made between themselves and their now ex-wives or partners. This is not at all to suggest that making caring decisions for children is easy or entirely collaborative within the context of coupledom, but more to highlight that fathers did express a sense of awareness that without the practical, emotional and symbolic elements of their marriage or partnership, exercising paternal authority was no longer any kind of given. As discussed in chapter five, fathers often described a tension between wanting to maintain a viable 'working relationship' with mothers and also to retain some level of control over their children's lives and behaviour. Apart from the fathers who had become main or shared carers for their children, the ready availability of a gendered model of fathers taking up the 'secondary' or 'supporting' parental role could be drawn upon, by fathers and indeed mothers, as a way of accomplishing some kind of bearable and morally coherent solution. In a post-separation and/or non-residence context however, the costs of such a position seemed more apparent

to fathers, in that they often felt that they had to work harder to stay close to their children and that their ability to exert any influence over their lives was weakened.

*it's not like I would imagine the relationship would be if I still lived with their mother and we all lived together, because then you know their friends, and also, I think as a father you do become, a babysitter, more than a father does that make sense? I try hard to get to know who they are, but I don't know them that well, and that's the hardest part, I don't understand them that well.
(Tony)*

Directly related to this, within their narratives, many fathers expressed a sense of realisation or reconsideration of the importance of mundane or 'ordinary' family life, because of the way it contains so much information which is then the basis of both a power and a legitimacy to assert authority over children. A loss, or interruption of everyday knowledge about children and their lives, whether mediated through mothers, or acquired directly, can have a huge impact on both fathering identity and practice. The significance of such routine knowledge or dailiness (Aptheker 1989) for facilitating parental authority and influence is arguably something which has been overlooked in previous academic research. It can also be understood as part of the process by which the 'powers' associated with gendered caring roles appear to become inverted at the point of divorce or separation.

In this way then, fathers may feel a sense of moral responsibility and a desire to discipline their children, but depending on their caring arrangements and the quality of family relationships, may find that in practice this is much harder to do. It may also require a different kind or level of consideration and moral deliberation. Tony, in particular, saw his ability to discipline children as being greatly reduced after divorce, illustrating this

through an account of his teenage daughters' own changing responses to him as a non-resident father.

I think one of the biggest things they said to me once, when I was trying to tell them off, I think they must have been about 14 and 16, 'you can't tell us off, we don't live here' well, it's, it's, honest really, cos I can't ground them, and I can't, y'know, and that side of things, it's quite hard.

Whilst fathers such as Tony expressed their desire to retain and exert paternal authority, there was also recognition that this could not be taken for granted, that it had to be renegotiated with mothers and sometimes with children themselves. Where fathers had young children, such renegotiation tended to revolve around trying to agree or cooperate with a shared set of rules for behaviour, as co-parents, but with older or teenage children, any such renegotiation often had to directly include or at least be responsive to them. This is another context in which the connections between the moral and relational aspects of post-couple fathering can be seen, in that the ability to exercise authority over children becomes much more dependent on the quality of relationships and the work invested in sustaining them. There are clearly a whole range of possible responses to, and strategies for, this renegotiation of paternal authority, but what the narratives showed was an awareness of shifting perceptions of both moral authority and responsibility. Dennis provides a useful illustration here, as he talks about an incident involving his 14 year old daughter Anna, where he felt responsible for managing her behaviour but also that he had to be attentive and responsive to his changed circumstances and to both Anna and his ex-wife's feelings. This incident concerned the fact that Anna had got her mother's permission to go to a party without consulting Dennis.

we worked it out, it was still very difficult, but I wasn't dismissive of her wanting to go, and in turn she wasn't dismissive about my concerns about her going and also, I felt I asserted myself in as much as 'look don't make decisions directly with Anna like that, y'know, it does involve me, and I want to be involved and told about it.

Dennis's account demonstrates both his desire and attempts to 'work at' retaining some influence and control over his daughter, which he sees as his responsibility as a father, but also, once again, the complex ways in which fathering and mothering are interconnected. It is also important to recognise the way in which fathers (including Tony, and Dennis, but also James, Bill and Jonathon), framed this idea of paternal authority morally; not in terms of absolute power, or the ability simply to punish or forbid, but most often in relation to a sense of responsibility for, and anxiety about, what might happen to children, how children would develop and be able to function in an adult world. Fathers were concerned about moral or normative issues such as manners, politeness, respect for others, moral values, not being 'spoilt', being safe, dealing with sex, drugs and alcohol, and being able to 'grow up' or be independent. An important question here, is how far these concerns might be similar to or different from, those of mothers, and also whether the fact of divorce or separation increases, or intensifies (Hays 1996) a sense of moral responsibility for fathers in terms of feeling accountable for how children 'turn out' (Ribbens 1994).

Before turning to a final aspect of fathers' attempts to exercise paternal authority, it is important to note one or two exceptions to the tendency to associate good fathering with authority, particularly in the form of discipline. Micky is again an atypical example, because of the way in which he appears much more ambivalent about taking on a disciplinary role, and openly expresses his preference for being a 'playmate' for his three year old daughter Megan, enjoying their 'messiness' and 'naughtiness' together. Micky, on

several occasions, made a distinction between his and Laura's roles and responsibilities, and sees Laura as having "*all the horrible serious bit*". It is not that Micky sees himself as having no moral responsibility for Megan's behaviour, but within his narrative he does not strongly associate his moral identity, or fathering practice, with exercising discipline.

Robin is also an interesting example as he, too, is much more willing to question any assumed connection between good fathering and discipline. Robin also openly expressed his ambivalence towards gendered thinking in relation to the 'breadwinner' role, and in many ways he had led a much less conventional life than most of the other fathers in the study. Robin had spent some years travelling in Europe, as part of a theatre group, playing music, and doing painting and decorating work. He had also spent time living as part of a commune, where he had met his current wife. Again, it is not that Robin rejected any sense of moral responsibility for his children's behaviour and welfare, but his approach to exercising this responsibility was noticeably different; echoing in fact, his self-defined 'relaxed' approach for sustaining contact arrangements with his daughter Helena.

love is always at the heart of a relationship, and anything that stifles love is bad, and discipline is one of those things that can stifle it, I think, positive guidance, y'know guiding her in the right way, giving her good advice, but letting her have the freedom to develop, and then just being there for her and giving her lots of love. (Robin)

Robin's moral reasoning here, in relation to discipline, also connects with one further way in which fathers described attempting to retain paternal authority as an aspect of good fathering. As discussed above, many fathers, (including James, Bill, Tony, Jonathon, Jimmy and Robin, who all had older or teenage children, but also Micky with his three year old daughter) explicitly presented themselves as having both the ability and the

responsibility to teach, advise or guide their children, either through practical instruction or through talking. This could perhaps be seen as a more 'benign' form of authority, particularly in the cases of Micky and Robin, who were most ambivalent about being 'disciplinarian'. Again, such an advisory role could be understood as a relational strategy for sustaining emotional relationships, communication and common ground, but it also has a moral value attached to it in terms of being a way to exercise influence over, and a form of care for, children.

I mean, something really simple, and really weird, but crossing the road, yeah, I've actually managed to teach Megan, y'know, 'when you get to the end of the road, you stop, y'know, and you wait for daddy' y'know, and I've instilled that into her, I've done that y'know, that's something I've managed to achieve with Megan. (Micky)

I think she sees me as someone she can talk to, and I mean my Scottish girls do too, they phone me up and talk to me about things that they can't talk to their mum about, like relationship problems or personal problems, they do talk to their mum about different things as well, but, I'm a good listener. (Robin)

However, there was still a certain ambivalence about, or differing responses to, this position as advisor, or moral guide. For some fathers (such as Tony or Bill) it was tinged with a sense of loss or regret in that they felt their ability to exert authority had been diminished by their divorce, whilst for others, such as Jimmy, it was part of adapting to both their changed fathering circumstances and their children's growing independence. In the quote below, Bill in particular demonstrates his sense of moral responsibility for teaching his son Mark, and his feelings of guilt that somehow his divorce had interrupted or stalled this process.

I feel that he could have learnt more, y'know, I'm an engineer, and he's that way inclined as well, in his restoring vehicles, and I feel that he could have been better, had I spent that time with him when he was younger, I could have taught him a bit more, and I find that I'm teaching him now, things that, he would have known, y'know, so, in a way, I've failed him. (Bill)

Through stories of discipline, decision making and advising, then, fathers expressed a sense of good fathering through the exercise of paternal authority. In changed practical and relational circumstances, brought about by their separation from children's mothers, fathers had had to consider or rethink the terms of such authority, and this constituted a form of moral deliberation. In general, fathers expressed a desire and a sense of moral responsibility to retain some level of influence and control over their children's lives, but the process of achieving this had become more complex and more demanding because of the ending of their couple relationship. Whilst I am not saying that fathers in co-resident families have easy, automatic, or egalitarian experiences of parental authority and decision making, it would certainly seem to be the case that after divorce or separation, some of the gendered patterns of caring for children become fault lines for the renegotiation of roles and responsibilities. In this study, fathers frequently shifted between accepting and resisting gendered thinking about parenting and care; sometimes seeing it as a way to preserve a sense of the 'unique' nature of fathering, and sometimes recognising it as limiting or untenable for fathering across geographical, temporal or relational distance.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified key moral aspects of narratives of fathering beyond divorce or separation; highlighting the extent, complexity and richness of moral talk. The chapter has focused on moral self presentation, perceptions of good fathering, and the processes of moral reasoning, deliberation and accounting involved. Through my analysis I have presented good fathering as a complex moral practice, identifying two dominant concerns or dilemmas of 'putting children first' and 'retaining paternal authority'. I have also shown that the gendering of care for children continues to shape the moral space for good fathering in ways which produce both gains and losses, and that the process of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood necessarily involves some engagement and/or negotiation with this. My broader argument is that such processes, perceptions and feelings can be effectively understood from the perspective of a contextualised, connective or relational concept of ethics, found within the feminist ethics of care. A focus on care and caring practices and on relational ethics can capture both how fathers are trying to work at family and fathering after divorce or separation, and also allow an analysis of the gendered dimensions of this. The next chapter continues the discussion of moral aspects of the interview narratives, but focuses on the process of moral self-presentation.

Chapter seven: Gender and moral self-presentation

Introduction

Another central way in which moral ideas and moral reasoning appear within fathers' narratives of their experiences of fathering after divorce or separation is in relation to presenting and preserving a viable sense of moral identity. I am taking a sociological perspective here, in that moral identity is seen as formed and maintained largely through the responses and evaluation (either actual or potential) of others; both particular and generalised (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007). I am also including myself in this process, as the 'audience' and 'co-constructor' (Rapley 2004) for the production of such narratives. It is important to acknowledge, again, that all of the fathers, in choosing to talk to me, apparently felt themselves and their actions to be morally defensible in terms of a demonstration of committed fatherhood. This is not to say that some of the narratives did not contain elements of self-reproach, but where these occurred they tended to appear as part of a bigger story of repentance or transformation (for example, Dennis, or Chris).

An initial, general point to make is simply to note the amount and frequency of statements which assert a sense of moral identity and moral worth as a father. The interviews all contain claims which present fathers as 'good dads' but such claims cannot be understood in isolation from ideas of masculinity. However, the connection between the two is not straightforward. Across the interviews, whilst there are commonly expressed concerns or recognisable ideas, there is no sense of consistent conformity to stereotypical masculine roles. Instead fathers seem to call on, accept and resist certain ideas around

masculinity or what is accepted/expected for men, at different times and for different purposes, as part of the process of accounting for and asserting their responsibilities and relationships with their children. In the course of their narratives, fathers would both distance themselves from, and identify with, being 'blokes' in order to morally account for their own behaviour and circumstances; but almost always making some reference to the way that being a father was also about being a man.

I'm a different sort of dad, to a dad who sees his child at the weekend, because obviously I've got him a lot more of the time and, I don't really consider myself to be a normal man. (Tim)

generally I do feel that guys do tend to get, y'know, a rough deal, financially-wise, ah financially and just, sort of support-wise, I don't think there's a lot out there particularly for blokes. (Jimmy)

Being morally responsible as fathers is therefore always an expression of gendered thinking and experience, which included feeling responsible not only for children, but sometimes for mothers too. This sense of moral responsibility included, but cannot be reduced to, financial support or breadwinning, and the following discussion is organised around three identifiable themes: 'staying', 'providing' and 'being there'

'Staying'

One frequent source of claiming a viable moral identity as a divorced or separated father seemed to be the very fact of having demonstrated some commitment to contact with

children. Attempts to sustain contact and relationships with children, and a co-parental relationship with their mother, were often seen to constitute moral acts in themselves.

I mean it's my responsibility, it is my duty, and I don't shy away, I've never walked away from it, I've made that clear, to my wife now, I mean she's already known that from day one, I said, well I've got a daughter that comes to stay and stuff, and I was proud of that. (James)

I mean y'know I sort of feel that I'm going it alone, as a guy who is actually bothered about his kids really... I don't know anybody who has the kids as much as I do, I certainly don't know anyone who's got the children living with them. (Jimmy)

This raises interesting questions in relation to both moral philosophy and to gender. It may be that some acts are considered moral because they are seen as laudable, or deemed to go beyond expectation, whilst others are moral because they simply fulfil an expectation. In the context of post-divorce parenting, it is arguable that fathers and mothers are subject to different moral criteria in relation to the level or nature of commitment to both children and the co-parental relationship, that they are expected to show. Whilst all of the fathers in the study expressed ideas of a moral commitment to their children, this was not presented straightforwardly in terms of obligation or duty. The fathers in this study certainly appeared able to lay claim to a moral identity, as men who had not 'walked away' even though it was often seen as an *option* available to them. This optional quality to fatherhood has been noted elsewhere (Backett, 1982) and is significant here, because of the way it contributes to making fathering after divorce or separation possible to present as moral act in itself. As part of such moral self-presentation, fathers often contrasted themselves with 'other' fathers, whom they saw to be irresponsible, selfish or indeed amoral. Sometimes such moral contrasts were made explicitly and directly alongside claims about their own

fathering, as a narrative device, and at other times moral evaluations of 'other' fathers appeared as more generalised statements:

I'm proud that I've been consistent and been there for him, I've never, ever once thought, I'll cut the relationship off, and I do know of fathers who have done that and I think what they've done is bang out of order really, totally, even when they think it's better in the long run. (Martin)

However, making moral contrasts was not done simplistically. In fact fathers' positioning of themselves as moral, in relation to other men, appeared to be a complex and contrapuntal process. Despite their readiness to make strategic or narrative use of moral distinctions between responsible and irresponsible fathers, across the interviews fathers often expressed a sense of solidarity or collectivity with other 'blokes' and other 'dads' (as discussed in chapter three). One example is that these fathers consistently expressed the idea that 'dads have it tough' and share common struggles in trying to care for their children in a society which undervalues or is suspicious of male caring. This was further complicated by the perceived moral status of particular other men, such as the new partners of ex-wives, the ex-husbands of new partners, their own fathers or fathers-in-law. Fathers' sense of their own moral identity, as a man, was often bound up with their responses to, and accounts of, such particular men. These included being gracious or forgiving, being self-righteous or justified in anger, being respectful of a step-father's role and caring responsibilities, or seeking to make some moral distinction between themselves and their own fathers. In complex ways then, other fathers or other men could serve as narrative and moral reference points for producing and presenting a viable moral identity:

I guess a lot of my anger was directed towards him because, he'd come in, he'd stolen my wife he'd y'know, stolen, my family, and he'd taken my money from my house and there I was setting up a sort of love nest for them. (Paul)

When I was younger, me dad was never around, so I've always said that I'm always gonna be there, maybe that's spurred me on. (Gary)

Whilst maintaining contact and relationships seemed to carry a certain moral status in itself, the idea of 'staying' also contained more specific elements. In presenting themselves as morally responsible, fathers tended to emphasise their consistency and reliability, along with a sense of having lived up to the expectations, either in more general moral terms, or in relation to mothers in particular. For instance Gary offers the following response to a question over whether he is proud of how he has managed his post-divorce family life, and Martin describes why he feels his relationship with his ex-wife has steadily improved:

the continuing of the relationship with my children, because they was only children at the time, that was obviously down to me. I'd pick em up, if they wanted something for school I'd get it for them, I know money isn't the answer, and you don't buy people, y'know, but I was always there, I'd go to their school. (Gary)

I have also been sort of constant with the relationship, I've made sure I've rung him twice a week, so I'm demonstrating an interest, she is happy that he's getting a father albeit by contact now and then, and the phone calls so I'm doing my, everything I can do, I will do it. (Martin)

In addition, some fathers, such as Dennis and Chris, presented their moral identity through an account of developments or transformations in their fathering, rendering themselves to some extent more morally responsible, or 'better' fathers than they had been whilst

married. For both these fathers the ability to sustain their fathering roles and relationships, or to 'stay' with their children, was seen as connected to this new or adapted fathering practice. In both cases, the change involved becoming more focused on, attentive and available to, their children; clearly this is linked to spending (limited) time with them, but is much more to do with the relational and emotional quality of that time, and the unexpected consequences of caring, or being solely responsible, for children, outside the context of their marriages.

*you've got to spend time with them, nothing happens without that and even, that small change, and I don't spend as much time with them, as I would like, or I should, but even that small change has made such a difference and I now have my own relationship with them and I really don't think I did before.
(Dennis)*

Such comments reveal something about the gendering of caring for children within heterosexual couple relationships, as well as about the experience of continuing parenting beyond divorce or separation, and both these fathers were explicit and open about having actively sought (and been able) to avoid looking after their children whilst they were married. This indicates the more optional nature of certain parenting activities or caring responsibilities for many men, and illustrates how, during the process of separation, the gains attached to this can suddenly be felt as disadvantages and the 'taken-for-granted' nature of relationships with both children and mothers can be strongly challenged.

'Staying', or being seen to be committed to maintaining contact, as an aspect of moral identity for fathers, was not only expressed within the context of private contact arrangements and co-parental relationships, but could also be presented through accounts

of engagements with external or public agencies, such as Children's Services, CAFCASS, the Family Court and so on. For fathers such as Brian or Micky, who had very conflicted relationships with the mothers of their children, had experienced protracted court proceedings and had very limited time with their children, it was very important and potentially difficult to retain a morally adequate father identity. For Brian, this was accomplished by presenting himself as having persisted with what little contact he had, despite the interventions he had experienced. Brian claimed he had been told to move out of the family home by Children's Services in order to minimise conflict within the home, and he felt very resentful of this.

I don't call it, separated, like walked out, I was requested out by the courts so, to me that's different, I didn't walk out on them...I do the best I can, with the money that I get, with the situation I find myself in, with the lack of help from social services, with the stress put on me from that point of view. (Brian)

For Micky, who had experienced a long period of supervised contact and then unsupervised contact through contact centres, preserving a sense of moral identity as a father seemed to have involved compliance with external agencies. Micky gave an account of his "journey" through courts, contact centres, the YMCA and parenting classes in terms of being willing and able to both 'expose' himself to professional or external scrutiny and to 'prove' himself as a responsible father, to his daughter's mother, and to the various agencies involved in their family life.

I actually stayed an extra six months in the YMCA, to guarantee that I was gonna get, a two bedroom flat because me getting a one bedroom flat was a waste of time, because at the end of the day Megan needs to have her own space, yeah, so I stayed, another six months in that flaming place just to

guarantee myself to get that sorted, and, once again, I fulfilled everything that the courts wanted me to do. (Micky)

For both these fathers, 'staying' was presented in terms of having shown some moral courage and determination, in the face of obstacles to their fathering which they saw as not of their own making. Their demonstration of perseverance was a key mechanism through which a sense of moral identity as fathers could be sustained. Interestingly, Micky also offered some reflective insight into his motives for 'staying' with his daughter Megan, suggesting that his moral identity had become progressively more bound up with fatherhood, and that his initial reasons for making a legal claim for contact were more to do with a sense of personal grievance.

At first it was because someone had taken something away from me that belonged to me but then later, I started to feel like I'm doing the right thing, to stand by my kid.

Staying in contact, and maintaining relationships with children then, can be seen as one important aspect of these fathers' moral self presentation. 'Staying' as a moral act could be demonstrated through quantity or regularity of time spent with children or through consistency over time, but could also be presented in relation to minimal or highly constrained contact arrangements. 'Staying' could involve seeking to increase contact arrangements, but could equally involve *not* doing this, if it was presented in terms of being attentive to children's needs or to maintaining the co-parental relationship. 'Staying' therefore often seemed to be about patience or persistence, and compromise, together with some moral evaluation of the costs of staying, which outweigh the potential gains and risks

of not staying. In the following quote Jason appears to illustrate both the 'pull' of his sense of moral responsibility and his relational, connected self:

I can actually understand why people do just say, 'd'you know what, I've had enough, sorry, I love my kids, but, I can't be doing with this- I don't mean it in a horrible way, but I would sometimes like- that part of me- where people can just walk away from their kids and just not give a monkeys...because it would be a lot easier, and not as stressful, but I can't do that, I can't. (Jason)

'Providing'

A second recognisable theme within fathers' moral self presentation is the idea of providing for children. This constitutes an engagement with the idea of the male breadwinner role, but again, this is not straightforward, consistent or stereotypical. The diversity and complexity of fathers' accounts of providing is interesting, not least, in the light of political and legal discourse which has formalised, parental (paternal) financial provision as an absolute obligation (Child Support Act 1991, Child Maintenance & Other Payments Act 2008). Whilst some had private arrangements and some through the CSA, and while some arrangements were more erratic or informal than others, all the fathers in the study apart from one whose son was in care at the time of interview, were making some form of financial provision for their children. Chapter three explored some of the meanings attached to money, the uses to which fathers felt it could (legitimately) be put, and the extent to which fathers felt they could or should be able to control or 'know' how money is spent, and here some of these issues are revisited in relation to fathers' moral reasoning around provision.

Many fathers did make an association between breadwinning and being a good parent, but this was not always seen as an exclusive role for fathers. Fathers often presented this more in terms of a responsibility and capacity of both mothers and fathers. Also, the majority of fathers in the study had wives or partners who were in paid employment before and since their separation, and whilst very often wives had worked part time, or had stopped work to care for small children, in four cases the mothers had higher paid and/or higher status jobs. Some fathers (such as James, Martin, Tony and Micky) did view financial provision as a key part of being a morally responsible father. As discussed in chapter three, other fathers, such as Martin, who had had an acrimonious divorce and whose contact with his son was also limited by geographical distance, felt that the significance of his CSA payments lay in what they symbolised to his ex-wife about his commitment, as much as in their material contribution, to what he termed the 'stability' of his son's household.

Interestingly, two of the younger fathers, Paul aged 26 and Jason aged 30, who were both in professional jobs as a college lecturer and financial advisor respectively, were the most explicit about financial provision and good fathering. Both fathers saw this as important not only for the present, but also in terms of securing the future for their children (Paul's son was three and Jason's daughter was seven). What also appears in both their expressions of commitment to financial provision is a sense of actual or potential responsibility for women; Paul speaks of a potential future partner, and Jason, throughout his interview in fact, talks in terms of providing not just for his daughter Katie, but also for her mother Lucy.

I'm providing for Will, and I'm also bettering myself, because, I've always been quite ambitious and I always sort of seek to improve, and I'm not fussed about earning y'know hundreds of thousands of pounds, I mean I just want enough to be able to live comfortably and support, me, whoever I'm with and my little boy. (Paul)

I pay for everything to do with Katie, so, whether its clothes, ballet, anything, and obviously I pay her maintenance as well, which is about £160 a month, so y'know, she gets everything sorted out...I just wouldn't want her to think that whoever Lucy decides to live with, is better at being her daddy, than her daddy, I want their life to be a lot easier than mine, y'know, I never got given anything, so I want to be able to pay for things like, driving lessons. (Jason)

A notable exception to the tendency to include financial provision as part of claiming a moral identity as a father, is Robin. Robin had two grown up daughters from his first marriage, a 15 year old daughter from his second partnership and a nine year old daughter from his current marriage. He described warm relationships with all his children and amicable relationships with their mothers. He had lived in a commune and worked as a painter and decorator and as a musician for much of his life, and might be described as liberal and alternative in his lifestyle and outlook. Robin was the only father to explicitly question breadwinning as desirable or entailing a higher moral status, and instead saw his moral identity as a father to be much more rooted in the active care and the informal, practical support he provided for his children and their mothers. Whilst this did include informal financial support, his sense of moral identity does not seem to stem from a sense of responsibility to primarily provide money, and his frankness about this also suggests he did not feel his moral identity to be under threat during the interview. In this way, Robin appears to challenge certain gendered ideas about fathering, to draw on 'family' as a moral idea, and to illustrate an expanded notion of what providing might mean. He also uses the term 'we' to refer to himself and his current wife, and demonstrates their commitment to what they perhaps see as an alternative moral criterion:

we have always preferred to work as little as possible, and y'know, we're not overly ambitious, we haven't got any career- y'know, if we can't manage to put the kids on the school bus and take them off the bus again, we're in the wrong job, y'know, so, yeah, that's always been the main thrust for us, 'family'. (Robin)

In relation to breadwinning being understood as a distinctively male role, and therefore important in terms of what might be seen as moral for a man, a number of fathers had had to reflect on their behaviour as sole or main breadwinners, in the light of the ending of their couple relationships. This had presented, both in the development of their post-separation co-parental relationships and in the course of the interviews, some interesting and sometimes difficult moral terrain to negotiate. Many fathers, including Dennis (a solicitor), Tony (a factory manager), Bill (a self-employed builder), Micky (a security guard) and Gerry (a financial advisor) all acknowledged that their working lives had had an impact on their marriages and experiences of early/first-time parenthood, and that this in turn had been a factor in the breaking down of those couple relationships.

I had to do a lot of college courses and everything else so I didn't see the children so much, in the evenings cos I was working, either doing homework, or my job, and I always had in my head that, being a provider- with all the things we used to have, the two week holiday abroad and everything else...I know it's her fault, she had the affair, but there was a reason why- I was putting maybe too much effort into work, I can't say I was totally innocent, I wasn't putting the right things in at the right time. (Tony)

These fathers arguably illustrate the tension between more traditional notions of being a good father (and husband) through breadwinning, and the emergent ideas of active or involved fatherhood (Lamb 2004, Lewis & Lamb 2007), as well as revealing something about gender relations within heterosexual couple and parental relationships. Again, there

is a sense of the unanticipated costs of the male breadwinner role, which have come to light as a result of fathers' separations and, for many, the process of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood had involved some painful reflection about what was, and is, the 'best' thing to do as a father, and as a man.

In terms of preserving and presenting a sense of moral identity, it is important to note a recurring idea within fathers' accounts of their early experiences of fathering, within marriage or partnerships. In recalling their children's early years, there were frequent references to particular forms of care; bathing, reading stories, getting children ready for bed, alongside accounts of time spent together at weekends. What appears is the idea of 'doing my bit' as a moral statement about good fathering within the context of full-time work and/or working very long or antisocial hours (for example through being self-employed).

I always made an effort with him, and I always did all the bit- the bathing him and the reading the book in the evenings, and we'd do football in the evenings, and took him away, we did things at the weekends so, we still did heaps and heaps of really good stuff. (Martin)

Given the ambivalence around breadwinning as the morally right thing to do as a father, and the context of ex-wives or partners having some form of paid employment, the association of moral identity with financial provision after divorce or separation was mediated by a number of factors. One significant circumstance which shaped fathers' moral self presentation was the experience of becoming either a main or shared carer for their children. Dan, Tim, Clive, Will and Gerry were, or had been, in this situation and to different degrees they all gave an account of having to re-consider their ideas of

'provision' and good fathering. Such reconsideration was due, not only to obvious practical or material changes in their lives, but also because of moral beliefs about what was 'best' for their children, and this supports the idea of moral rationality put forward by Duncan & Edwards (1999) in their research on lone mothers decisions around providing for children. In circumstances of being lone or main carers (as discussed in chapter six), it was possible for fathers to express or assert a sense of moral identity through either working or *not* working

I knew I had to keep earning money, to pay for, y'know, the house and the children and, it makes you feel- I dunno, I quite liked the idea of going to work and, maybe it had like a 'worthy' element to it. (Dan)

I felt I needed to focus on the children because I needed to know that, whatever happened, that I was there for the children, and, the only way, was to say, well if I give up work I can be there for them. (Clive)

For fathers like Clive and Tim, caring for children full time was presented as a form of morally important and viable provision, where provision was expanded to mean providing through meeting children's routine physical and emotional needs. Their reduced capacity to provide financially was accounted for either in terms of 'entitlement to support' as morally deserving fathers through their caring responsibilities, and/or through a perception of the temporary nature of their 'absence' from paid employment. But both laid claim to a moral identity through their commitment to full time caring rather than breadwinning:

I wasn't prepared to have a child without having a full time parent for it, I wasn't going to do that, have a child and then, like nurseries or day-care that sort of thing...I'd already given up two years of my life to be a full time dad,

why should I have him taken away from me when she didn't want to be with me anymore? (Tim)

A second important mediating factor on fathers' moral understandings of providing for children was that of the financial situation of mothers. As I have identified, many mothers worked, and/or had new partners who were financially secure. Within fathers' narratives this sometimes produced a sense of mothers being 'better off' than fathers and often contributed to the more generalised idea of 'dads have it tough'. Whilst many fathers did not begrudge mothers' financial security, or were relieved (materially and morally) by it, presenting mothers as 'better off' also offered a "moral bypass" (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) in narratives which were more morally ambivalent or in which fathers' moral identities in terms of providing for children were more difficult to sustain. For example, Richard, Micky and Jonathon had all been involved in disputes over the payment of maintenance and had all reached a point where they felt CSA involvement had actually worked to their advantage, either by delaying the process, absolving them of responsibility for it, or by setting a very low monthly payment. By either presenting mothers as already provided for, and often favoured, by the state, or as being manipulative or greedy, these fathers were able to deal with the potential threat to their moral identity of not paying, or paying very little, maintenance:

I hurt her in the way I can, she hurt me, by taking my daughter away, and giving me, minimum access I would call it, so I thought right, sod you, I'll hurt you in the way that I know I can, because I know that money is everything to her, it's sad isn't it. (Jonathon)

However, such moral identity work was not always enough on its own, and Jonathon, for example, went on to explain how he had increased his financial contribution, in ways which he felt were morally justifiable or 'fair' within the context of his relationships with his daughter and ex-wife.

I feel a bit guilty about it, but I know her mother's got enough money to look after her, she will not be short, and when Alice comes down, I'll often buy her school clothes, or clothes, I'll buy her stuff when she's down here.

Providing for children in relation to their mothers' financial situation was therefore also bound up with whether fathers felt a distinct moral responsibility for their children, or whether they extended that sense of responsibility to mothers-and-children, as a collective unit. This was not easy to untangle, either analytically or for fathers themselves, but across the narratives many fathers seemed to perceive mothers as having an 'entitlement' to a certain level of support which came as an inevitable part of fathers' financial responsibility and provision for their children. This was particularly the case where couples had been married, and this sense of entitlement came from women's positions as wives as well as mothers. For example, continuing to live in, or taking a share of the equity from, the marital home, or, in the case of married parents, having a share of a salary or pension. In this way, a sense of moral identity could be sustained through being seen to be being honourable or fair, through putting children's needs above their own and/or accepting that mothers may benefit materially from the financial provision made for children.

Like when I left y'know, I took nothing, except my telly, I left everything with her, because I thought well whatever I take away with me, I'm taking away from the kids, and it ain't the kids fault, so she had everything. And like when

we split the house, I was entitled to half the equity but I said 'no I want her to have more, because I want the kids to have more'. (Jack)

A third mediating factor on fathers' sense of moral responsibility for providing was the presence and nature of second or subsequent family and parental commitments. Ten out of the 23 fathers in the study had formed new partnerships and had either more biological or stepchildren and these changed practical and relational circumstances also produced new moral spaces and dilemmas for fathers. In obvious ways, additional family commitments mediated financial provision in terms of how a finite resource could be allocated across households, but the deliberation over *how* this should be done and the nature or extent of responsibilities towards resident and non-resident, biological or stepchildren is clearly moral territory.

you can't penalise a child, based on their parents' decisions y'know, so she has the same clothes that, her brother has, or benefits the same as her brother does, from, the way I work, and everything else. (Jason)

I've tried to be consistent, and I tell him that I love him, and I've tried to be there as a father figure as much as I can, but I've also had to run a different family up here with another child- I've had to make a lot of compromises along the road as you do, and I've had to try to keep everybody happy and, that's obviously been very difficult. (Martin)

For the most part, fathers appeared to feel that it was morally legitimate to adapt or be flexible about financial provision, in the light of, or in response to, changed family circumstances (which included the arrival of new partners/stepfathers) as long as they could be seen to be operating with an idea of fairness and consideration. Such a process could and did have various outcomes, but none of the fathers had stopped 'providing'

because of new or added family or parental commitments. In general, for fathers such as Martin, Tony, Gary, Jason, James and Jonathon, their sense of moral identity could be preserved through their accounts of working at trying to balance and compromise over, often competing or morally complex demands on their material and emotional resources. In the following quote, Tony provides an illustration of this attempt to provide, by spending both money and time with all of his daughters:

*we don't do so much just the three of us and I'm in a dilemma with it, because, I only see them for three, four hours a week- occasionally we go out just the three of us, and we've been out for a couple of meals just the three of us, but, because they've got two little sisters that adore them...I don't maybe sometimes spend as much quality time just the three of us cos, I want them to get to know their sisters, and it's knowing what's right, and I still don't know.
(Tony)*

'Providing' then, is an important and recurring moral theme within fathers' narratives of their post-divorce or separation roles and relationships. Provision is an aspect of claiming a viable moral identity for men as fathers, but the process of moral self presentation in relation to 'providing' is to some extent negotiable. Providing is also directly linked to the gendered idea of breadwinning, but fathers' engagements with this are diverse and complex. As fathers talked more about providing, and through their accounts of pre-separation couple and parental relationships, and subsequent new partners and children, it became clear that their conception of provision should not be seen as limited to financial support alone. In the contexts of a reduced capacity to provide money, of highly conflicted relationships with mothers, where there is not least dispute over the relationship between money and contact, of additional and/or multiple family commitments, or of an attempt or desire to reject stereotypical gender roles for fathers and mothers, an expanded idea of provision could be seen in play. Indeed, some fathers expressed the idea (also taken up by

some fathers' rights organisations) that it may be unhelpful or unfair to reduce fathering to breadwinning in terms of fulfilling moral and parental responsibility.

essentially I think all kids want is someone, they can trust and go to if they need help and just be there for them, and then also that the dad feels like they're wanted for them, not their wallet, or what they can buy them or, d'you know what I mean? And that they can provide for them emotionally and physically, and y'know, mentally. (Paul)

'Being there'

A third significant theme in relation to fathers' moral self presentation is that of 'being there' (Ribbens 1994, Simpson, McCarthy and Walker 1995, Lamb 2000) which continues to appear as a concept (and participant term) for trying to capture some of the more subtle or nebulous aspects of parenting. In relation to fathering more generally, the term 'being there' can also be related to the idea of accessibility (Lamb 2000) where fathers may be available to, but not necessarily directly interacting with, children. Here, I highlight and discuss ways in which the concept of 'being there' is related to moral ideas about good fatherhood, and which is drawn on as part of the process of accomplishing a viable moral identity.

There are two initial points to make about the ways in which fathers' used the idea of 'being there'. Firstly and similarly to the notion of 'staying', it could simply express consistent and reliable involvement over time; so fathers such as Martin or James, who had

both been divorced for more than five years and both felt they had been actively involved in their children's lives, used this idea in part to explain how they had demonstrated their commitment to mothers and/or others. This is a meaningful moral statement or claim in itself, and indicates the importance of gaining approval or recognition as part of a process of sustaining moral identity.

I've made a really sustained effort to keep it up, I mean we've been doing it now for, nearly six years I spose, so, cos he knows that I'm there and his mother knows that I'm there for him. (Martin)

Secondly, it is important to recognise that the concept of 'being there' contains the element of *potential* as well as actual involvement or engagement with children; fathers could present themselves as a potential or hypothetical resource, and this was also significant as part of presenting an adequate moral identity, particularly for fathers whose access to, or time with, their children was very constrained.

Alongside their descriptions of time spent with children at home, or when they came to stay or visit, fathers also gave accounts of other things they did in order to 'keep track of' or stay involved in and informed about their children's lives. Almost without exception (for example where children were under school age) fathers talked about attending parents' evenings (very often with mothers) and communicating with the school; asking to receive school reports, going to special events or talking about their child's progress. Fathers also described going to, or facilitating sports events outside of school, attending hospital appointments, and also often gave accounts of trying to maintain some level of contact between children and paternal grandparents or other relatives. In addition, most of the fathers talked about using newer communications technologies, such as mobile phones,

email and instant messaging, as ways to keep in touch with children independently. Whilst in moral terms, any or all of these things could serve as a marker for fathers' commitment to, or sense of responsibility for, their children, it is important to note that for some fathers these kind of activities constituted a major part of their contact with children, rather than being an addition to regular periods of time spent together. For fathers such as Brian and Will, whose time with their children was highly contested and constrained, their ability to say that they communicated with schools or went to meet their children's teachers, was a vital as a means of demonstrating and being able to make claims to an identity as a responsible and active father. Brian's contact with his eldest son Luke was the most disrupted; he had not actually seen him for four years, and so Brian's only means of enacting any kind of fathering was through attending Children's Services meetings and communicating with the school. Will also had experienced several years of contested and disrupted contact with his youngest daughter Keisha, had very limited time with her and a very tense, fragile co-parental relationship with her mother.

It's just a matter of now me hopefully, making contact with the school prior to September and arranging for me to go in there, and make them aware, that I am, his father and that, I am interested in what he, does, and also, the fact that they need to know that, his father is wanting to talk to them. (Brian)

well I write to her in between, I do now, she kind of told me where she went to school once, I just hope that she didn't get any backlash from that y'know, and so I made contact with the school, I went to see them...and they know that I've got parental responsibility, they've been quite happy to see me and if I ask, they send me the report, and they're very polite. (Will)

In circumstances like this, or where time spent together is limited by geographical distance (Martin and Jonathon), activities which might constitute fathering 'behind the scenes' or

which did not necessarily involve direct interaction with their children, could be presented as a form of being there. In this context, 'being there' offers a way of preserving some sense of moral identity in the face of a highly restricted or diminished role and relationship with children.

Related to this, the concept of 'being there' could also be drawn on where fathers had found themselves faced with difficult issues or decisions in relation to their continuing role in their children's lives, and where their response had been to *not* act, not intervene, or 'not get involved'. Clearly this is connected to the discussion of 'keeping the peace' as a relational strategy; here, the moral content of such relational work can be considered. In this context, 'being there' can be understood as another form of "active passivity" (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003: 61) in that, for fathers, it still constitutes a morally defensible form of involvement with children, even where in practice it may mean stepping back from some aspect of their lives. One interesting example can be found in the case of Robin. Robin described the initial period of contact with his daughter Helena as problematic, with a good deal of tension and disagreement between him and his ex-partner. Robin made a decision to put aside the formalised arrangements for contact and say that Helena could visit whenever she wanted. He offers a moral 'case' for what could potentially be seen as an abdication of responsibility, and goes on to describe how his relationships with both Helena and her mother, improved. For Robin, 'being there' meant remaining available to Helena, but, for a period of time, not actively initiating contact arrangements:

I had to just back off... and it worked out much better, y'know, by not pressing for 'oh it's supposed to be my weekend, I'm supposed to have her' I mean, it, there was a part of me, y'know I would get angry, if I couldn't have

her that weekend, but in the end, I could see that was doing her more harm, by being pushy about it, so, I just relaxed, about it. (Robin)

James, and to a lesser extent Jason, also drew on the idea of 'being there' as part of a moral account of non-intervention in their children's upbringing. In both cases fathers felt concerned or worried about their children, but had decided (at the time of interview) that to step back or not get involved in actual or potential disputes with mothers, was the best thing to do. For James, the issue was his concern over his daughter's stability due to her mother moving house, changing schools and not setting boundaries for Chloe's behaviour; in Jason's case it was ongoing concern and disputes over his daughter Katie's eating habits, which had spilled over and created tensions between his new wife, Sam, Katie and himself. For both these fathers, the dilemma involved their desire to demonstrate responsible fatherhood, to consider or prioritise what was 'good' for their children and to maintain, or minimise tension within, the co-parental relationship.

I've always been torn, I suppose for the last six years, about whether I've stepped in, with a very heavy hand and put my foot in the door to take control, of my daughter's life, education and upbringing... I don't know how to judge, the decision, of whether I should have done that, or whether it's been best that I haven't done it. (James)

I've almost washed my hands of it, in a way, it sounds bad but I was getting so wound up with it, y'know, us falling out, me and Katie, and Sam over it, and it's not her fault, she's just a seven year old little girl, she doesn't know anything about, different foods and everything else, so all you can do, is do your best, while she's there. (Jason)

Ultimately their 'accounting' suggests that they felt stepping back but continuing to 'be there', in terms of either maintaining the status quo in terms of caring arrangements and

parenting decisions, or by remaining 'accessible' as a potential source of support (material, practical or emotional), was a morally acceptable course of action. In this way, drawing on the idea of 'being there', either to demonstrate actual or hypothetical involvement or responsibility, could confer a certain moral status to non-intervention, or being actively passive. Narratives often contained, not only a hypothetical 'I would if' element, but also a future orientation where certain actions, either by fathers or (older) children themselves, could be anticipated.

I think there's a lot to come in the relationship, that will, cement the future, and those things perhaps, will happen over the next few years of, y'know, Chloe's life, and, and how that develops and what she achieves and where she plans to go, and y'know I'd like to think that she would consider me constant and that I was there and available, and, y'know, approachable, and would do my best to help and deal with things and, be a dad I guess. (James)

A final, and related, use of the idea of 'being there' in the production of a viable moral identity, is within accounts of fathering older children and teenagers. Fathers' sense of their children growing up and away from them was a recurring preoccupation, and it is important to acknowledge (as some fathers did) that this kind of concern is not exclusive to non-resident or separated fathers; to some extent it forms part of a developmental model of adolescence, and of parenting. However, not living full time, or having limited time with children seemed to exacerbate this worry, as these fathers had already become more focused on the quality of relationships with their children and the work which might be required to sustain them. Having said this, another emergent theme from fathers' talk about their changing relationships with older children since the divorce or separation, was that they often saw themselves as taking on an advisory role, which could be comparable with friendship, but was not (and should not) be equivalent to it.

Chloe will ask me questions, and she'll ask me questions that perhaps she wouldn't be prepared to ask other people including her mother...she realizes that I'll be honest and straight and tell her as much of the truth as she needs to know, but y'know won't shy away from that either, at the same time y'know, can't be diverted and, whether that's a good relationship to have with your daughter, I think it is. (James)

This advisory role, as well as being a relational strategy by which fathers could try to 'stay close' to their growing children, could also be constructed as moral in a number of ways. Firstly, it could be used as a way of demonstrating a capacity to 'let go' and do the right thing by allowing children their independence; this could be important to cast as a moral act because of the risk, particularly to non-resident fathers, of appearing to 'lose interest'. Jack, who describes seeing less and less of his young teenage children, particularly his daughter, presents 'being there' in an advisory capacity, in this way.

they do their own thing anyway, y'know, they're pretty resilient, as long as I see them, and they know where I am, and if they need me, y'know, I haven't got a problem. I'll always say to them right, and I've said this from the beginning, 'you can have as many dads as you want, but you'll only ever have one father, and that's the difference, and I'll always be there for you, I'll listen to you, I'll offer you advice, although it may not be what you wanna hear. (Jack)

Jack's, rather elusive, but apparently moral, distinction between, perhaps transitory, 'dads' and the continuity of 'one father' does illustrate the sense in which this shift towards an advisory role, or to seeing themselves in the position of offering guidance, can be understood as an attempt to retain some paternal authority over children; albeit much more contingent or negotiable. There appears some similarity here with Gabb's (2008) work on

intimacy in families, in relation to parents' attempts to use talk as a means to make both "emotional connection and to gain information about children's private lives" (2008: 100). This sense of fathering through offering both practical and moral guidance then, can again be presented as the act of a morally responsible parent, and even more so, where fathers saw themselves as being appropriate for or good at such a role.

When she seeks guidance, in that she knows that I am probably the least judgmental person she knows, so, if she wants a simple, honest opinion about something, or someone, or someone's behaviour, then I think she sees that in me. (James)

In different ways then, the concept of 'being there' appeared within narratives of fathering beyond divorce or separation, as part of a process of presenting a viable moral identity. It could form part of an account of fathering in 'reduced' circumstances, of having, or choosing, to adopt an active passivity in relation to their fathering, or of needing to adopt or develop an advisory role, as a way of both allowing independence and staying close to older children and teenagers. One final point worth noting here, is that 'being there' in this advisory capacity, or through settling for being a potential or hypothetical resource, can also have the effect of shifting some of the moral responsibility from fathers to children, or can at least include (older) children as having some responsibility for their lives and relationships. If advice and guidance is available but not asked for or listened to, or indeed if contact becomes less frequent because children are 'doing their own thing', then it could be argued that fathers cannot be held accountable, and that children are at least partly responsible for any relational damage or negative consequences. Whether this is seen as fair or morally justifiable will depend largely on how, or whether, particular

fathers make a moral distinction between the categories 'Adult' and 'Child' (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) and how these are applied to their particular circumstances in terms of who is seen as responsible and for what.

Perceived threats to moral identity

Whilst the preceding discussion has highlighted the ways in which a gendered moral identity is presented within fathers' narratives, it is also important to take note of what is perceived to be potentially threatening to this. There are structural or external, as well as social, cultural or relational factors involved; money, housing, work, social expectations for men and for fathers, cultural norms and beliefs around masculinity and male behaviour, particular dynamics and emotions arising from personal relationships and connections. Because of my specific interest in how gender and gender relations shape both couple and co-parental relationships, I will focus here on two examples of perceived threats to moral identity which are common across the interviews, and which can be seen as particularly gendered: the expression of anger or violence, and social suspicion of male sexuality. I will consider each in turn, and also examine the narrative and relational strategies used to manage such threats both in their family lives and within the context of the interviews.

A recurring theme within the interviews was the powerful and difficult emotions associated with the experience of splitting up with a wife or partner. Many fathers described being surprised by the extent or intensity of the emotional impact of their separations but also often felt that this aspect of the experience was not recognised or was

overlooked for men. In the following quotation, Clive makes direct reference to gender, in relation to talking about his struggle to deal with his emotions after getting divorced.

I thought I could cope with anything, I really did, I mean I played rugby for twenty odd years, and I worked in the construction industry, and as far as work and play are concerned, you can't get much tougher than those two, I think, personally, and how can I put it, that was a walk in the park. (Clive)

A number of fathers (including Micky, Will, Dennis, Richard, Jason Robin and Tim) also talked explicitly about feelings of frustration, jealousy, hurt, helplessness or resentment, which were difficult to contain and which could be expressed through anger towards, or disputes with, others (most often mothers). It was these expressions of anger, for some accompanied by violent or aggressive acts, which were seen as potentially threatening to fathers' moral identities. This seemed to particularly be the case for fathers who were already in dispute over contact with mothers, and whose moral identities as responsible fathers were already under scrutiny via the legal and/or child welfare process. Suggestions or accusations of domestic violence were perceived to have moral consequences as well as affecting the practicalities of access to and contact with, children. Whilst feminist groups have argued that contemporary child welfare discourse tends to underplay the implications of male violence in favour of promoting contact (Reece 2006, in Featherstone 2009), fathers in this study tended to feel that being presented as violent called into question a man's moral responsibility as a father. Worth noting is also the fact that two of the fathers, Richard and Jack, talked about having experienced domestic violence from their now ex-partners and claimed that this violence was not mutual. In both cases, they had left (or been asked to leave by Children's Services) the family home, while their children remained with their mother. This could suggest that being violent to a partner, whilst still morally

problematic, is less of a threat to a woman's moral identity as a mother, and this perceived gender difference in the way mothers and fathers are 'judged' seemed to form part of the general sense that 'dads have it tough'.

The perception of the risks attached to being seen as violent, is part, illustrated by fathers' direct reference to the term in order to make some sort of moral contrast. This was done either by stating explicitly that they were not violent, or making some moral claim in relation to violence, even though they might go on later to explain and contextualise a situation which had involved violence:

I'm certainly not a violent man, I never did any of that. (Jonathon)

I mean, I would never actually, I'd never hit my kids, I've never had to. (Jack)

I wouldn't hit a woman. (Richard)

It was also possible for fathers to be concerned that 'others' (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007) might assume them to be violent, in the context of being a main carer father where the mother had left the family home. For example, Dan who was a highly committed and enthusiastic main carer for his Daughter Isobel and son Max, and who had a reasonably amicable and cooperative co-parental relationship with their mother, still worried about what people might think about him.

I do sort of think that sometimes people think 'God you must've been a really awful bloke for her to have walked out on you like that or for her to leave-God, y'know, she must-you must've been threatening her. (Dan)

This also suggests that social responses to single fathers can be understood as both gendered and variable. Alongside the sense that fathers actively caring, and being responsible for, their biological children can be deemed morally laudable in itself, some fathers may still perceive their moral identity to be under threat as men who have been 'left'.

Despite the legal shifts towards the principle of 'presumed contact', or that contact between children and their biological fathers is desirable even where there has been domestic violence by fathers to mothers (Featherstone 2009), being cast as potentially 'dangerous' to either women or children was still perceived as a risk to a father identity. This could be understood in terms of showing a lack of control, or for expressing anger in front of children, or in terms of having broken an important masculine norm around not being violent to women.

I picked up a paving slab, and threw it on the ground, I didn't throw it at anybody, or like at the window or anything, but I threw it on the ground, and it broke, and, as soon as I did it- and she was quite frightened, I felt just awful, it was like, the rage had just gone, by that point, I remember going off to the garage at the back, to get another one and putting it back, and she's saying 'just leave it, leave it' y'know, but I just felt so-o bad. (Dennis)

I thought I'd crossed the Rubicon, I'd never done that [hit a woman] before y'know, and I wasn't an advocate of- you just, you didn't do that kind of thing, so I was totally shocked, and ashamed of having, y'know lost it. (Will)

In these examples, fathers were prepared to discuss their violent behaviour with me, but each did so within the broader context of their overall narrative of fathering and using

particular narrative strategies or devices as part of the telling. Both Dennis and Will could speak about behaviour which they found difficult and 'shaming' to themselves, largely because it was seen as out of character, or part of a larger story of repentance and development, either as a father, as a man, or both. Dennis's narrative was very strongly one of a transformation in his fathering practice and emotional investment in his children, and this incident was used to illustrate a turning point: "*it was at that point, I thought, bloody hell, you've got to sort this out, this is madness*". Dennis felt it was after this episode that he fully appreciated both the emotional impact of his divorce, and the need for him to develop direct (unmediated) quality relationships with his children. Will was also perhaps more able to discuss his violence towards his ex-partner because of his expressed remorse and his overall narrative of being a feminist man and having been a committed, active father to his first daughter Rachel for 17 years. The context of the interview also produced some reflexive thinking around his experiences of both fatherhood and masculinity, which again reveal something of their moral content.

I had to look at myself, and obviously, the fact that I'd lost my cool with her and had hit her, and I felt, y'know that whole perception of myself and coming to terms with that I'd done something like that, was shaming enough...I feel I'm much more sensitive to where men are coming from, y'know, without letting go of some, some basic principles around, what's proper, to do. (Will)

Micky's case was slightly different in that he appeared to find it much more difficult to account for some of his behaviour in ways which did not contradict or challenge his overall narrative of a journey to successfully prove himself a responsible and capable father. Within his narrative, Laura his ex-partner was often positioned as being accusatory and unreasonable with regard to Micky's requests for contact and they had gone through a

protracted legal process involving a long period of supervised contact. Micky appeared to be quite ambivalent about violence, and certainly drew some moral distinction between violence against objects (which was presented almost as a form of military discipline) and against people.

I can sort of lose my temper, yeah but I only ever lose my temper at sort of, inanimate objects y'know, never at a person or something like that and that's something else that the army training did for me, y'know you go and hit a wall or something, so yes, I have sort of, picked up a table and chucked it across the room and kicked over a bin, chucked the dishes into the kitchen sort of thing, and that's where Laura got the whole violent and dangerous thing from and I'm like, 'no, I'm not, I'm trying to explain to you' I mean, I don't really explain things very well. (Micky)

Micky seemed to see his (contained) violence in terms of frustration or an inability to communicate with Laura, and therefore perhaps as morally understandable, but he clearly felt his moral identity to be under threat later in the interview, when he inadvertently referred to another incident. After talking about having his overnight contact with his daughter Megan temporarily suspended, Micky revealed that this had been the result of him kicking in Laura's front door. He then stopped the interview, asking to go to the toilet. On his return, he said he had decided to tell me the 'full story' behind the incident, which involved a lengthy and personal argument between him and Laura, which I did not tape. My own role as a, potentially evaluative, audience and questioner, perhaps led Micky to devise a strategy for giving himself time to think, and to decide how to account for this violent act within his overall narrative. His responses also suggest that the incident constituted a threat to his identity as a 'proven' morally responsible father. Overall, Micky was not overly defensive, and returned to familiar themes within his story; of his developing bond with Megan and the pleasure he took from being and playing with her,

which suggests that he felt he had accomplished adequate moral self presentation, at least to me, as an interested but detached 'other'.

In addition to feeling that acts of violence, particularly towards mothers, could be a threat to moral identity, there was also a concern with expressing anger or other negative feelings towards children. Whilst there was the tendency to draw some moral line between the need to discipline children (and to continue this role as fathers after divorce or separation) and physical punishment, and/or the distinction between 'smacking' and 'hitting', for some fathers, particularly Tim and Jason, there was a concern that their negative or angry feelings could threaten their moral identities as good fathers. For Tim, it was more the way in which he felt his hurt and anger with his ex-wife had affected his ability to interact with his four year old son Adam; Tim refers here to his negative feelings as 'a kind of darkness'.

I can't sit and play cars in the park with him all day because I'm not emotionally, able to, y'know, before it all went wrong, emotionally I was able to, cos my mind was free of all this darkness, but now it's not, so it means my parenting now, is not as good as it was. (Tim)

In Jason's case, his views on discipline and fathering were complex, and contained contrapuntal voices of wanting to assert authority over his daughter Katie; presenting himself as more capable of discipline than Katie's mother, but also wanting to detach himself from his own father and worrying that discipline could also bring fear.

I don't want her to be scared of me, like I was with my dad, so I mean if we- if I do shout she will take me seriously, but we're friends again, straight away after, cos I don't ever want her to be scared y'know, and think that things get dragged on.

I don't like my temper with her, if I'm honest, I'm- as quick as I am, to turn round- it does annoy me, it, that really cuts to me, I hate it because, I will lose my temper some days, and it's very bad, and she will get in a right state, as quickly as I turn round, I find that she'll remember it, y'know, and I don't want her to be scared of me in any way or remember that, y'know, I shouted at her that badly, that it upset her that day.

For both Jason and Tim, the perceived threat to moral identity, and the potential for regrets and self-reproach, came predominantly from the potential responses of their children. Their strategies for dealing with their feelings or their tempers appeared to be a challenging process of self-control and emotion management. In terms of narrative strategies for dealing with these risky issues, again, they emerged within a more dominant overall narrative of committed and morally commendable fatherhood; Tim as a main carer father, Jason as father who took, particularly, his financial responsibilities very seriously. Their talk about these more difficult aspects of their fathering arose later in interviews, often more as 'admissions' or drawing on, what Ribbens McCarthy et al describe as, a more "confessional style to demonstrate their current moral integrity" (2003: 62).

For fathers, then, one particular source of potential threats to a viable moral identity came from the perceived risks associated with views, feelings and actions, around violence, aggression and anger. Three fathers discussed specific instances of their own violent or aggressive behaviour and five described losing their temper with children or mothers, or talked about hypothetical violence, or aggression directed at them from mothers. Violence or anger were often present and contextualised within narratives, and

were not straightforwardly presented as absolutely morally unacceptable. Instead, male violence had moral boundaries or containments, it could be accounted for, or made sense of, in certain circumstances, not least as part of the intensely emotional experience of separation and divorce; the closest thing to a moral imperative (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) being that it is morally unacceptable to be violent towards children. But the risks of being cast as violent, by mothers or others, remained pertinent to fathers, and in different ways, or to different degrees, many had had to reflect on and manage their own behaviour and emotions, in order to both maintain fathering relationships and to account for these in the interview.

The second example of a perceived threat to fathers' moral identity, which was associated specifically with being a man, was a general social suspicion of male sexuality in relation to children. Many fathers, particularly those with daughters and those who were main or shared carers for their children, demonstrated an awareness and, often, self-consciousness of this wider social or cultural attitude. In the quote below, Clive used the word 'complex' in the context of describing himself as someone who thought about or analysed things.

I wondered how, other parents who, like who- my two are friends with [their kids] would, be about them, coming over? Cos I sort of had this kind of- idea, which I don't think is unrealistic, about 'oh yeah, y'know, single bloke', friends coming over, 'oh that's a bit weird' type thing even though they know me, they- well, you never know do you. (Dan)

I spose, because I am, sort of a, what's the word now, complex I spose in a way, y'know, what would people think about me being with the boys all the time, y'know it's like, really, the boys come around with me all the time. (Clive)

In part, this perception that 'people' might question their position as main carers for children was related to their apparent competence as carers, but in the main it was associated with an implicit suspicion about fathers as potential sexual abusers of children. Jimmy, who for the past 18 months had been the main carer for his 16 year old daughter Jess, also expressed this concern in relation to a generalised fear of male physical as well as sexual abuse.

I think that's one of those things that as a bloke, I believe that people are out to clobber you sort of thing, it's society, y'know, if it's a single guy, well what's he doing looking after a young girl, y'know, I mean, y'know, the slightest hint of an argument and then everybody imagines that you've been beating her up, or throwing her down the stairs all the time. (Jimmy)

In fact, Jimmy was particularly self-deprecating and ambivalent about his fathering and his sense of responsibility for his children (his daughter in particular); he tended to shift between expressing his moral identity through the fact that he had remained committed to his paternal responsibilities for the past 11 years, and then questioning his own abilities as a father, and reflecting on the costs of that commitment in relation to his personal life.

the only thing is that I'm p'raps not the best equipped person to actually, y'know, take care of her really, because trying to juggle work life and trying to hang on to some sort of a social life and everything else, y'know doesn't always leave a lot of time for family life. (Jimmy)

Jimmy had become the main carer for his daughter Jess because of rows between Jess and her mother. Whilst he did not explicitly acknowledge any resentment over being positioned

as responsible for her care, Jimmy's ambivalence towards being a 'lone father' might indicate that he did not necessarily welcome or enjoy the role.

By contrast, Dan, Clive, Tim and also Gerry, as main or shared carers for their children, whilst having an awareness of the potential threat of social suspicion, all expressed a more confident or self-assured sense of their fathering practice. Acknowledging that their changed circumstances brought them more frequently into feminised spaces such as nurseries, school playgrounds, family or health centres, and meant that they interacted more directly with other women as mothers, these fathers also expressed a sense of having "got on with it" (Dan) and becoming 'accepted'.

most of the time they treat me like- most of them've known me so long now, they just treat me, treat me like another mum, if you know what I mean. (Tim)

Such a process seemed to have involved building up familiarity, or trust over time, demonstrating or 'proving' their competence as fathers through their organisation of family life, their children's appearance or behaviour, and also being involved in other activities within their communities which had, amongst other things, some moral value or status. As discussed in chapter three, Tim volunteered as a home help, Clive was involved with the Scouts, and volunteered as part of a befriending service, and Gerry was very actively involved in his sons' sporting activities. It can be argued then, that fathers who care for their children full time, or for increased amounts of time, may develop different social networks and do experience what Andrea Doucet describes as "gender borderwork" (2006: 172) in that they may both seek to maintain and challenge gender distinctions between mothers and fathers.

For other fathers, the threat to moral identity posed by social suspicion of fathers was experienced much more directly and dramatically. Jimmy gave an account of a serious argument between him and his daughter, which resulted in a meeting involving the school and a social worker. Jimmy did not go into great detail about the content/causes of the argument, saying just that it related to Jess's behaviour and his attempts to manage it. He acknowledged his own part in the escalation of the row, and that they had both become very angry. However, Jimmy also felt that his moral identity as a responsible father would be almost instantly 'spoiled' because of the assumptions (and judgements) that would be made about him as a man caring for a teenage girl.

we had a big, big row one night, and she called the police, I mean although there hadn't been any sort of physical contact or anything like that, but you just think, 'oh well that's the end of that job then' y'know and Christ knows what else and you think right that's your life wiped out, um, especially being a bloke. (Jimmy)

Again, whilst at previous points during the interview, Jimmy was unsure and self-deprecating about his abilities as a father to Jess, in the recounting of this incident he was indignant, and saw such gendered moral evaluation as unfair and unjustified.

Will had experienced the most extreme challenge to his moral identity as a father, and as a man. Since separating from his youngest daughter Keisha's mother, Will had undergone a lengthy legal battle for contact, involving a Children's Services investigation and a voluntary psychological assessment, as a result of allegations made by her. Will saw himself as highly committed to active fathering and held strong egalitarian views about

women and parenting; he had also successfully co-parented his first daughter Rachel for 17 years. Through his job as a support worker, Will had some professional knowledge of family law, parenting, and men's issues, and this combination of personal and professional experience seemed to have brought particular challenges to the process of dealing with and narrating the conflict with Keisha's mother. In his account of the experience of the court process, the investigations and subsequent rejection of all allegations, Will appeared to have found ways to align himself with the 'professionals' in order to protect and preserve his moral identity.

what was useful for me working with these psychiatrists- once I realised they weren't out to get me, it, it grew into a process where I was actually able to kind of really benefit from some of their ideas. (Will)

This alignment helped Will to develop his narrative of committed fathering against extreme unreasonableness and unfair obstruction, and his ability to present 'evidence' that the allegations had been unfounded and rejected made the story 'tellable'. Nonetheless, the decision to talk to me, and to give an account of this experience of post-separation fathering, was morally risky. Whilst Will had no doubt considered what he would tell, and how he would tell it (this would also not have been the first time he had done so), it seemed that he worked at asserting his moral integrity throughout the interview. This included presenting his overall narrative of committed (and gender equal) parenting, occasionally adopting a confessional style, or at least emphasising his remorse for his own behaviour and discussing the ultimately constructive insights he felt had arisen from his experiences. Will was also reflexive during the course, or possibly as a result of, the interview; here he acknowledges the vulnerability of his moral self as a consequence of talking to me

I know what this will leave me with, is that I feel incredibly exposed...because y'know, I've gone through a very difficult experience, I've been accused of things I haven't done and, and I've done some things I'm very ashamed of, and I shouldn't have done. (Will)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified and discussed the processes of moral self-presentation which form part of these fathers' narratives of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood. I have argued that it is possible and necessary to consider these narratives in terms of attempts to sustain a viable moral identity, in relation to both wider cultural norms and values, and the dynamics of particular relationships and circumstances. I have also demonstrated ways in which gender and gender relations inform and shape this process, bringing with them both particular gains and losses or 'risks' to men as fathers, and in a sense, defining a certain moral space in which fathering can take place. The analysis shows that fathers held ambivalent or contrapuntal views about gendered or stereotypical roles and assumptions about both fatherhood and masculinity; trying at different moments to hold on to, and to shake off 'old' ideas in an effort to be both good and often different kinds of fathers. I have examined three emergent and significant moral themes for fathers' self-presentation: staying, providing, and being there, which, in different ways revealed something of how fathers defined good fathering and worked to accomplish a viable moral identity in the context of their family lives but also to me as an interviewer. I have also

highlighted two particular threats to this process, which are illustrative of the gendering of moral identity. The expression of aggression or violence and the social suspicion of male sexuality are both issues that fathers may find themselves having to engage with as part of the 'work' of sustaining parental, family and community relationships and enacting fathering in changed circumstances.

PART IV

Conclusions

Chapter eight: Key findings, theoretical implications and future directions

Introduction

Fathering, particularly in a post-divorce context, remains a complex and contested issue and one which continues to appear high on political and policy agendas. Politically, concerns have shifted from questioning fathers' involvement in and commitment to their children's lives, to positioning them as an underused or under-rated resource; exhorting individuals and institutions alike to 'Think Fathers' (Featherstone, 2009, DCSF 2010). Debates over how separating couples should make provision for and take care of children remain highly pertinent in personal and public contexts, as an ongoing expression of anxiety about 'the state of the family', moral values, and questions of financial liability. Whilst the prevailing child welfare discourse continues to set the tone for parental conduct, the needs and rights of children are not so easily separated from those of mothers or fathers, as both some fathers' rights and feminist/anti-domestic violence organisations have demonstrated (Collier & Sheldon 2008). In theoretical terms, fathers and fathering have been linked to or implicated in wider theses of social change such as the individualisation or democratisation of family life (Giddens 1992, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995), or to the more specific concept of intimacy (Jamieson 1998, Dermott 2008, Gabb 2008). Researchers such as Doucet (2006) and Dermott (2008) have also raised questions of whether fathers' experiences constitute particular theoretical and political resources, or whether fatherhood is experiencing some kind of intensification (Hays 1996), in terms of both personal and cultural expectations, demands and desires.

The preceding chapters have mapped the contexts and contours of a particular set of fathers' lives and explored relationality and moral reasoning as they appear in their narratives of fathering beyond couplehood. I have used the concept of relationality as it appears within the feminist ethics of care, and sought to understand and interrogate it afresh through its application to my data. My broad argument is that relationality can and should be more than just a general term to describe connectedness. It can do more work than this, and can be used to think about autonomy, responsibility, love, gender and power in productive and insightful ways. In my research, relationality provided a means of shedding light on and providing a language for discussing the concern with relationships, bonds and connections within these fathers' stories.

In terms of morality, I have used a sociological, largely symbolic interactionist perspective which sees moral issues and deliberations as an intrinsic part of family and social life. I have also aligned myself with Sayer's (2005) understanding of lay morality and of the reasoned and reasonable nature of moral and emotional commitments and investments (2005: 39). My general argument is that moral identity is at stake in the practice of parenting after divorce or separation. To take care of and have responsibility for a child, involves a process of moral deliberation and judgement which takes place in a particular practical but also relational context and is informed by an already gendered experience of social and personal life. My analysis focused on identifying fathers' talk about and perceptions of 'good' fathering practice, and on their moral self-presentation, and my overall position is that such processes of moral reasoning and accounting are gendered, and take place in a gendered moral space. In addition, my discussion has pointed to the links between the moral and relational aspects of fathers' narratives arguing that

relationality forms an important part of the context for such moral deliberation and accounting.

Relationality and connection within narratives of fathering beyond couplehood

In exploring relationality in fathers' narratives, I used two central organising ideas for my discussion: relational autonomy and relational work, developing the latter inductively from my analysis. Relational autonomy is a model of self and agency which does not force relatedness and self-determination into opposing corners, taking connection to others as fundamental and autonomy as both enabled and constrained by social context and relationships (Mackenzie & Stoljar 2000, Kagitcibasi 2000, Sevenhuijsen 2003). I have explored relational autonomy through the more specific ideas of a relational sense of self, contextual agency and relational boundaries.

Overall, the fathers in this study shared an expressed sense of relationality, both through their preoccupation with preserving their position as fathers through their relationships with children and mothers, and their sense of self being perceived, felt and enacted, through and because of connections to others. All of the fathers interviewed presented themselves as part of an, often complex, network of people and/or organisations, involved in different ways, and at different levels, in their children's lives. Such networks were presented as important and meaningful to these fathers, and in this way fathering must be understood as something done in connection, though not necessarily collaboration, with others.

The concept of contextual agency (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) defines agency as existing within 'contexts of influence' which include relational, moral and emotional elements. Relationality is seen as an important mediator through which agency is formulated and enacted. In relation to the interview narratives, whilst they varied both in the range of particular contexts of influence and in their perception of and responses to these, all the fathers expressed a sense of both limits and opportunities provided by their changed fathering circumstances. This was one way in which the theme of transformation appeared, in terms of talk about new/different, direct and often more intense emotional relationships with children, having sole responsibility for them, the impact of having limited (and 'designated') time, or having more freedom in parenting or caring practice. Post-couple fathering can therefore create opportunities for men to have different experiences of and reflections on what intensive caring and responsibility mean, what caring relationships involve, and what constraints and opportunities they bring. My analysis also suggests that the experience of separation can not only produce different ways of thinking and doing fathering but can also require a greater awareness of, or level of reflexivity about, the relational and contextual nature of fathering identity and practice, which may be more, or less, welcome.

I used the emergent theme of 'relational boundaries' to identify ways in which fathers expressed some awareness of limits, expectations or criteria for certain relationships, and how they felt about or reflected on these. Such a sense of boundary could be either perceived as self-imposed, or as more normative, or as both, and is not to say that boundaries are understood as impermeable. Relational boundaries emerged not only through fathers' expressed recognition or construction of them, but also through different responses to boundaries, and ways in which fathers' spoke of trying to 'manage' them.

Across the narratives, an expressed sense of relational boundaries appeared most commonly in terms of including care of self as part of a father identity; in relation to notions of propriety and a perceived social suspicion of male sexuality; and to co-parental relationships, particularly in relation to personal feelings and financial responsibility. Overall, my conclusion is that the navigation and maintenance of relational boundaries can be understood as part of a process of living gendered lives (Doucet 2006) and acting in connection with a range of significant 'others' (Holdsworth & Morgan 2007).

Alongside these various aspects of relational autonomy, I developed the concept of relational work to identify and explore the ways in which fathers talk of attempts to think about, and/or actively promote, preserve or restore positive relationships, particularly with children and with mothers. My argument is that the process of sustaining parental roles and relationships after divorce or separation can induce ways of thinking and acting, defined as 'relational work', where possible actions or decisions are weighed up in terms of their impact on relationships, or where responses are controlled or modified in order to preserve goodwill (however fragile) or at least minimise open conflict. Across the interviews, fathers placed an emphasis on the *quality* of relationships with their children, usually expressed in terms of wanting to feel emotionally close to and at ease with them, sharing mutually satisfying time and activities but also maintaining some ability to exert influence over their lives and/or behaviour. Fathers emphasised the importance they attached to preserving an active role for themselves in their children's lives, as a context in which they could 'be' fathers and 'do' fathering. They also consistently demonstrated an awareness of, and concern with, the dynamics and complexity of family relationships, which was also connected to their sense of themselves as a good father. In the context of my study, then, relational work appears to be associated with positive relationships, but further work is

needed to explore the extent to which this may always be the case, and the ways in which a model of relational work might also be useful for understanding negative, conflicted or abusive relationships.

Getting the real dad experience and staying close

In relation to sustaining relationships with children, I identified two recurring relational strategies, which I called 'getting the real dad experience' and 'staying close'. Getting the real dad experience can be understood as an attempt to reconcile or adapt to a changed fathering context, often in terms of limited or more formally designated time, and to retain some sense of 'normal' fathering. Many of the fathers demonstrated a heightened awareness of dailiness (Apthekar, 1989) which was significant in a number of ways. It appeared to generate a certain reflexivity about both the meaning and consequences of routine caring, and for some, their pre-separation fathering practice. It also generated talk about what constitutes good fathering and about what children need. More widely, this awareness of the significance of routine knowledge was also linked to accounts of transformed fathering, and perceptions of new or different fathering identity and practices.

'Staying close' appeared in terms of accounts of attempting to sustain a mutually rewarding and loving relationship with children. The understanding of 'closeness' was rather nebulous but it appeared consistently as something that was meaningful and important to fathers. It is also here that fathers' talk could be most directly related to the concept of intimacy (Jamieson 1998, 1999, Gabb 2008). Most fathers felt that regularity of time spent with and caring for children was a key factor in maintaining a comfortable, emotionally close relationship and indeed in enabling the 'real dad experience'. Whilst the

idea of quality time was present, many fathers did see quantity and consistency of time as related to good and satisfying fathering. Having (sometimes) accepted that their time was limited, fathers still expressed the feeling that 'enough' time was needed to be available to enact fathering in a meaningful way and to sustain relationships.

Sustaining closeness with children was also expressed in terms of having shared interests or common ground. A key distinction made was between a perception of mutually shared interests which are easier to engage with and more easily enjoyed by fathers, and the idea of actively doing or trying something in response to a child's particular interests. This distinction was related to age and gender, with fathers often describing or highlighting the challenges of staying close to older or teenage children, and/or attempting to engage with daughters' interests. Having limited time with children seemed to exacerbate worries over staying close, as these fathers had already become more focused on the quality of relationships with their children and the 'work' which might be required to sustain them. Overall, whilst fathers expressed more or less ease or discomfort with the process of sustaining common ground as a route to emotional closeness, all demonstrated forms of relational and moral thinking within their narratives.

'Keeping the peace' and achieving a 'working relationship'

Relational work was also highly relevant to fathers' developing co-parental relationships with mothers. Overall, but particularly in cases where the co-parental relationship was either described as 'civil' or reasonably amicable, there was an expressed desire to

minimise potential conflict with mothers. This was expressed as both a desire and a responsibility to 'keep the peace', often presented in moral terms as being 'best' or 'fairer' for children, and in practice was frequently enacted through forms of active passivity (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003). These included: not seeking to either challenge or negotiate mothers' decisions, positioning or accepting mothers as holding certain responsibilities or skills, not getting involved in disputes between mothers and children or positioning older children as having some choice and responsibility over how relationships developed. This perception of a need to keep the peace seemed to stem both from fathers' desire to present themselves as reasonable and fair, but also from their recognition of the particular mother-child relationship and, to some extent, the status of this relationship more generally. In this way, relational work is connected to the gendering of both moral self-presentation and the care of children.

The 'working relationship' with mothers was generally defined as one which was bearable, which could be distinct from good or friendly, contained enough communication to facilitate caring arrangements and was based on enough mutual trust and respect for both parents to feel acknowledged or not excluded. Fathers described this kind of relationship as having been negotiated, sometimes hard won, and often developed over a substantial period of time. The process of achieving such working relationships requires attentiveness and responsiveness to particular people and contexts and my argument is that this kind of relational thinking can be understood as a form of work, in that there will be costs as well as gains and that some level of responsibility for, and management of behaviour and emotions will be involved.

Moral reasoning in narratives of fathering beyond couplehood

My discussion of the moral aspects of fathers' narratives was focused around good fathering as a complex moral process, and fathers' moral self-presentation. Across the interviews, fathers consistently expressed ideas compatible with the 'moral imperative' presented by Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003) which positions 'Children' and 'Adults' as distinct moral categories and adults as morally responsible for children in their care. This meant that in their moral talk, and as part of this moral prioritising of children, fathers expressed particular ideas about what children need, what is 'good' for children and indeed about the nature of childhood. My argument is that these fathers' narratives can be understood in terms of attempts to present an account of good fathering, and to sustain a viable moral identity, in relation to both wider cultural values, and the dynamics of particular relationships and circumstances. Gender and gender relations inform and shape this process, bringing with them both particular gains and losses or risks to men as fathers, and defining a certain moral space in which fathering can take place. Expressions or presentations of moral identity were connected to ideas of masculinity, though not in any simplistic or stereotypical way. Fathers called on, accepted and resisted certain ideas around masculinity or what is accepted and expected for men, at different times and for different purposes, as part of the process of accounting for and asserting their responsibilities and relationships with their children.

Good fathering as a complex moral process

My analysis identified two dominant themes in relation to perceptions of good fathering: 'putting children first' and 'retaining paternal authority'. The idea of putting children first was most commonly drawn on to indicate an overall moral commitment to children. It was also linked to narratives of transformed fathering, where putting children first was presented as both morally necessary and as having brought unexpected gains or opportunities to fathers, including strengthening their sense of themselves as good fathers. The factors of age and gender appear to play a part in the processes of moral reasoning over putting children first, in that fathers of teenage children seemed to express more difficulty, or more ambivalence around, focusing on children's interests. Fathers of daughters also often talked in terms of the moral question of 'having to do things they don't like' in terms of putting *girls'* interests first. The recurring idea of having to do 'girly things' and fathers' differing responses to this, revealed the added complexity which gender can add to the general moral principle of putting children first.

Putting children first was also sometimes linked to the concept of active passivity (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003); it could equally mean *not* doing certain things, such as not getting involved in arguments, not challenging mothers', not seeking to change or increase caring arrangements. I have also described this kind of active passivity in terms of being a relational strategy, and the principle of putting children first is largely what gives such 'keeping the peace' its moral content. Overall then, the moral claim to be putting children first could be interpreted and enacted by fathers in a number of ways; it could indicate commitment, legitimate action or non-intervention, it could require fathers to step in or step back, to take on new or different forms of child-centred activities, or provide a means of absolving themselves of at least some of the responsibility for this.

In relation to paternal authority, almost without exception, fathers expressed a desire and a sense of moral responsibility to retain some level of influence and control over their children's lives, but the process of achieving this had become more complex and more demanding because of the ending of their couple relationship. In different ways, most of the fathers in the study expressed the idea that having some kind of paternal authority was either something they 'deserved' and wanted to retain, or was something fathers 'should' have (and use), or that it was something that children 'needed' from fathers. However, it is also the case that after divorce or separation, some of the gendered patterns of caring for children become fault lines for the renegotiation of roles and responsibilities.

Fathers' perceptions of, and feelings about, being responsible for disciplining children demonstrate the complexities and ambivalences around what may still be recognised as a conventional fathering/male role. Many fathers expressed ambivalence about a disciplinarian role; appearing unsure about the exclusivity of this to fathers or about the costs it might involve in terms of fathers' changed relationships with their children. Where fathers had young children, the renegotiation of paternal authority tended to revolve around trying to agree a shared set of rules for behaviour, as co-parents, but with older or teenage children any such renegotiation often had to directly include or be responsive to them. Here again, connections between the moral and relational aspects of post-couple fathering are highlighted, in that the ability to exercise authority over children becomes much more dependent on the quality of relationships and the work invested in sustaining them. Many fathers who had older children explicitly presented themselves as having both the ability and the responsibility to teach, advise or guide their children; either through practical instruction or through talking. Such an advisory role can be understood as a relational

strategy for sustaining emotional relationships, communication and common ground, but it also had a moral value attached to it in terms of being a way to exercise influence over and a form of care for, children.

A broader sense of paternal authority, in terms of more general or ongoing decision making about children's welfare, in connection with children's mothers, consistently appears as complex and challenging moral and relational terrain for fathers. Fathers often expressed awareness that, without the practical, emotional and symbolic elements of their marriage or partnership, exercising paternal authority was no longer any kind of given. They also frequently described a tension between a desire to maintain a viable working relationship with mothers and to retain some level of control over their children's lives and behaviour. The ready availability of a gendered model of fathers taking up a supporting parental role could be drawn upon by fathers as a way of accomplishing some kind of bearable solution. In a post-separation and/or non-residence context however, the losses or costs of such a position, as well as the potential gains seemed apparent to fathers.

Fathers shifted between accepting and resisting gendered thinking about parenting and care; sometimes seeing it as a way to preserve a sense of the 'unique' nature of fathering, and sometimes recognising it as limiting or untenable for fathering across geographical, temporal or relational distance. In relation to this, many fathers expressed a sense of realisation or reconsideration of the importance of mundane or 'ordinary' family life, not least because of the way it contains so much information which is then the basis of both a power and a legitimacy to assert authority over children. I argue that a loss of everyday knowledge about children and their lives, whether mediated through mothers or acquired directly, is highly significant for both fathering identity and practice. It can also be

understood as part of the process by which the 'powers' associated with gendered caring roles appear to become inverted at the point of divorce or separation.

Fathers and moral self-presentation

A key source of claiming a viable moral identity as a divorced or separated father seemed to be the very fact of having demonstrated some commitment to ongoing contact with children. The fathers in this study appeared able to lay claim to a moral identity, as men who had not 'walked away' even though it was often seen as an *option* available to them. For fathers in more conflicted co-parental relationships, 'staying' was presented in terms of having shown some moral courage and determination in the face of perceived obstacles to their fathering. Their demonstration of perseverance was a key mechanism through which a sense of moral identity as fathers could be sustained. Some fathers also presented themselves as moral through an account of developments or 'transformations' in their fathering, rendering themselves to some extent more morally responsible, or 'better' fathers than they had been whilst married.

'Staying' as a moral act, could therefore be demonstrated or enacted in a number of ways indicating that there is some moral space in which fathers could move. 'Staying' could be presented in terms of quantity or regularity of time spent with children or through consistency over time, but could also be presented in relation to minimal or highly constrained contact arrangements. 'Staying' could involve seeking to increase contact arrangements, but could equally involve *not* doing this, if it was presented in terms of being attentive to children's needs or to maintaining the co-parental relationship. 'Staying'

therefore often seemed to be about patience or persistence, and compromise, together with some account of the moral status of the costs of staying, which outweighed the potential gains and risks of not staying.

A second recurring moral theme within fathers' narratives of their post-divorce or separation roles and relationships, was that of 'providing'. Here the process of moral self presentation appeared complex and to some extent negotiable. Many fathers did make an association between breadwinning and being a good parent, but this was not always seen as the primary or exclusive role for fathers; fathers often presented this more in terms of a responsibility and capacity of both mothers and fathers. In general, fathers operated with an expanded sense of 'providing'; it was not restricted or reduced to, financial provision alone. For some fathers there was a sense of the unanticipated costs of the male breadwinner role, which had come to light as a result of separation and, for many, the process of sustaining fatherhood beyond couplehood had involved, often painful, reflection about what was, and is, the 'best' thing to do as a father, and as a man.

The association of moral identity with financial provision after divorce or separation was mediated by a number of factors: working and caring responsibilities and commitments, the financial, work and marital status of ex-wives/partners, the presence of subsequent biological or step children. Generally, fathers felt that it was legitimate to adapt, or be flexible about financial provision, in response to changed family circumstances (in relation to both themselves and to ex-wives or partners) as long as they were seen to be operating with an idea of fairness and consideration. Providing for children was also bound up with whether fathers felt a distinct moral responsibility for their children alone, or whether they extended that sense of responsibility to 'mothers-and-

children'. For a small minority of fathers, the interests or needs of children and mothers were conflated, sometimes positioning women as dependent, and as being the responsibility of men. This perception also contributed to the ambivalent feelings and responses to the re-partnering of mothers, in that other men could relieve financial responsibility but also threaten fathering relationships and paternal authority.

A third aspect of presenting a viable moral identity was the idea of 'being there', as an expression of fathers' perceived involvement in children's lives. It appeared as related to but different from 'staying' in that being there was used more to describe participation or parenting decisions, rather than a general moral commitment to ongoing contact with children. They also had a different temporality, in that 'staying' usually implied commitment in the long term, whilst 'being there' was more often of the moment. However, being there could be accounted for or enacted in more or less active ways. It was often used as another way of expressing consistency and reliability over time, but it is important to recognise that being there contained the element of *potential* as well as actual involvement. Fathers could present themselves as a hypothetical resource, and this was particularly significant, as part of presenting an adequate moral identity, for fathers whose access to or time with their children was very constrained. The concept of being there was also drawn on where fathers had found themselves faced with difficult issues in relation to their co-parental relationship and where their response had been to *not* act or 'not get involved'. Clearly this is connected to the relational strategy of keeping the peace. In relation to older children or teenagers, fathers also saw themselves as being there in an advisory role, or as being available, but 'in the background'. In this way, being there could be used as a way of morally defending or emotionally reconciling reduced time or direct involvement with them.

Lastly, being there was related to trying to 'keep track' of children's lives: many fathers talked about attending parents' evenings (very often with mothers) and communicating with the school; asking to receive school reports, going to special events or talking about their child's progress. Fathers also described going to, or facilitating, sports events outside of school, attending hospital appointments, and also often gave accounts of trying to maintain some level of contact between children and paternal grandparents or other relatives. Such activities could form an extension or addition to time spent together with children, but for some fathers they constituted the only means of contact and were therefore even more morally and relationally significant.

Perceived threats to moral identity

As part of the process of presenting themselves as good or morally acceptable, fathers also often revealed where and how they perceived threats to their moral identity, including in relation to taking part in an interview. My analysis highlighted two examples of perceived threats to moral identity which can be seen as particularly gendered: the expression of anger or violence, and social suspicion of male sexuality.

In relation to expressing views, feelings and actions around violence, aggression, hurt and anger, a minority of fathers felt able to give an account of their own behaviour in a 'confessional' (Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003) or self-reproaching style. This suggests that

there is some moral space in which fathers can manoeuvre. Violence or anger were contextualised within narratives, and were not straightforwardly presented as absolutely morally unacceptable. For the fathers in this study who discussed it, male violence was seen as having moral boundaries or containments. It could be accounted for, or made sense of, in certain circumstances, not least as part of the intensely emotional experience of separation and divorce. However, this is not to say that these fathers did not feel that implied or explicit accusations of domestic violence could call into question a man's moral identity as a responsible father.

The second commonly perceived threat to moral identity concerned anxieties surrounding propriety in father-child relationships and relates also to the embodiment and physicality of fathering. Many fathers, particularly those with daughters and those who were main or shared carers for their children, demonstrated awareness and self-consciousness of what they understood to be a wider cultural suspicion of male sexuality in relation to men as carers. In part, the perception that 'people' might question their position as main carers for children was related to issues of their capability as carers, but in the main it was associated with an implicit suspicion about fathers as potential sexual abusers of children. Issues discussed included physical touching or showing affection, bathing and getting changed, having other children to stay or play, and dealing with discipline and/or conflict. Fathers also often referred to strategies for avoiding or minimising such anxieties and negotiating the, often feminised, social and public settings in which their fathering took place. Such a process seemed to involve building up familiarity and trust over time, 'proving' their competence as fathers through their organisation and management of family life, their children's appearance or behaviour, and also being involved in other activities within their communities which had, amongst other things, some moral status. In this way,

my research supports the argument that fathers who care for their children full time, or for increased amounts of time, can develop different social networks and experience what Andrea Doucet describes as “gender borderwork” (2006: 172) in that they may both seek to maintain and to challenge gender distinctions between mothers and fathers.

Having summarised the main findings and themes emerging from my analysis of narratives of fathering beyond couplehood, I now move on to consider some of the wider, and more theoretical implications arising from my research, and to identify some of the questions these raise. I conclude with some reflexive evaluation of the study, its contributions, and indications of how it might be developed further.

The value of Care and the limitations of Intimacy

In terms of attempts to theorise family lives and relationships, my research has brought me into a particular critical conversation with the concept of intimacy. Intimacy has increasingly been accepted as fruitful for theorising personal and emotionally meaningful relationships in an inclusive, non prescriptive way; an additional debate, not explored here, is whether intimacy could or should replace family as a theoretical category. Intimacy continues to be critically explored in terms of its theoretical and methodological possibilities for researching family lives (Jamieson 1998, 1999, Dermott 2008, Gabb 2008) and my work suggests that alternative concepts may be equally appropriate and productive. Through my exploration and application of a model of care and caring relations, specifically drawn from the feminist ethics of care, I feel that there is much to be gained

from considering both the value of care and the problems with intimacy as concepts. Whilst intimacy has been applied to fathering within the context of marriage, through the work of Dermott (2008), my own work identifies differences in experiences and raises issues about the limits of the concept of intimacy for understanding fathering beyond couplehood. A key question is whether care and intimacy are assumed to be interchangeable, or whether care may be subsumed or sidelined by intimacy.

One shared focal point for both care and intimacy, as I have discussed in chapter seven and acknowledged above, is that of embodiment. The concepts of care and intimacy can arguably both shed light on the embodied or physical aspects of fathering relationships and practices. Intimacy does also foreground the quality of relationships and so can include relational and emotional dimensions of family lives, but it arguably prioritises 'knowing and understanding' (Jamieson 1998) and 'mutual disclosure', over other, more practical or mundane aspects of parental relationships. This implies a separation or conceptual distinction between 'knowing and understanding' and 'caring for' children, and arguably risks neglecting some of the processes by which such knowledge and understanding can be achieved. As Jamieson points out "It is difficult to spend time with young children and not be engaged in practical caring and knowing and understanding take time" (1998: 166). A focus on the significance of mutually satisfying emotional relationships without a full acknowledgement of the labour and, importantly, time involved in these, is both theoretically and politically limiting, in that, for example, the persistent gender differences in domestic responsibility and caring work may be understated.

Intimacy is also associated with claims of a greater democratisation of family relationships, where ideas of mutuality and reciprocity are emphasised. In relation to both

couple and certainly parental relationships, differences in position and the presence and workings of power in such relationships cannot be so easily ignored. My research has led me to question the extent to which intimacy can really grapple with the differences and inequalities within parent-child relationships and father-child relationships in particular. Whilst Gabb (2008) points to the usefulness of Iris Young's (1997) concept of 'asymmetrical reciprocity' as a means of recognising power and difference in intimate relationships, in general intimacy does not appear to attend closely to these things, nor to the idea of responsibility and the combination of powers and constraints it contains. Based on my empirical and theoretical explorations of fathering after divorce or separation, my suggestion is that the concept of intimacy is limited in two important ways: the problem of 'labour' and the problem of power. Sustaining relationships with children does involve practical and routine caring. It requires time and it requires work, in physical, relational, emotional and moral terms. Maintaining a sense of being a father, and of a fathering relationship, for these fathers, also involved retaining some level of authority and control over children's behaviour and lives, and therefore engaging in power struggles with mothers, children, and often others. In this way, research which focuses on fathers may offer particular opportunities for unpacking and evaluating the concept of intimacy further.

Through my engagement with and consideration of the conceptualisation of care within the feminist ethics of care literature, I have argued that it can more adequately respond to these issues and is highly appropriate for understanding fathering and co-parental relationships after divorce or separation. Care, as theorised by writers such as Ruddick (1989), Tronto (1993) and Sevenhuijsen (1998), is founded on a relational sense of self and of autonomy, positioning interdependence and the need for care as a fundamental human condition. Care is both labour and love, involving practical and emotional dimensions, and

theorised in this way can contain or at least acknowledge the complex and ambivalent feelings caring for and caring about can produce. Caring relations are not perceived to be equal, or in any simple way mutual, and care of self is not excluded from the equation; again the idea of asymmetry is compatible here and appears in the literature. The practice of care is theorised as a form of moral reasoning and has been used to generate ethical principles through which to deliberate and evaluate in everyday relationships but also, potentially, in more social or public contexts. This expanded and enriched conception of care, which is fundamentally grounded in an understanding and critique of gendered experience and women's caring practice, has proved a valuable theoretical resource for exploring care, relationality and morality in men's lives as fathers after divorce or separation, and has much to offer analyses of family lives and relationships in other contexts. It may also offer more in terms of understanding and challenging the complexities of gendered power relations and inequalities and moving towards gender equity, than appears to be the case with intimacy.

Fathers, mothers, families and fairness

The second implication raised by my research arises from the focus on the relational and, particularly moral, aspects of fathers' narratives, and from this, the appearance of ideas of 'fairness'. I have emphasised that fathering is seen as a relational exercise; taking place within particular contexts and networks of care and support (Duncan & Edwards 1999, Doucet 2006). The presence and significance of such networks, including paternal

relatives, second families, ex-in-laws, friends and work colleagues, formed a consistent backdrop and reference point for fathers' narratives, often implicated in the processes of both relational work and moral accounting. In turn, fathers' presentation of and talk about moral issues or dilemmas was not done in a detached, absolutist or rights-based way; in this study there was very little evidence of an ethic of justice model of moral reasoning in play. Instead, my analysis revealed that fathers tended to operate with a highly connective and relational form of moral reasoning and that an idea of fairness was used as a working guide for finding bearable solutions to complex moral problems, often involving multiple sets of needs or wishes. Fairness appeared as a participant term connected to the processes of moral reasoning and accounting. Ideas of fairness also demonstrated the continual presence and influence of gender as a mediating factor, bringing both particular opportunities and constraints for fathers in both their actions and their accounts of these.

Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003) define fairness in terms of beliefs about what is both 'just' and 'good' for children in particular; based on an understanding and prioritising of children's needs, but also in relation to ideas of inclusion and equality within a family network. Importantly, the concept of fairness is linked to, and highly compatible with, a relational and contextualised understanding of moral reasoning, as whilst it incorporates moral principles it also operates as flexible or responsive, in that, aside from the privileged moral status of children, rights or obligations appear as ascribed or negotiable rather than static or absolute. I argue that fairness is also concerned with questions of responsibility, and moral accountability, as much as with rights, making it arguably less binary or adversarial and highly applicable to the complexities of family lives and relationships. Ribbens McCarthy et al highlight the use of fairness as a practical guide for applying moral

reasoning; to achieve fairness, or at least a perception of fairness, is a complex moral and relational accomplishment, central to the practices of 'making families' (2003).

In my study, fathers' use of the term fairness in accounts of 'working at' their family relationships suggest that contextualisation is an important and necessary part of the process of deliberation, implementation, and for the telling of moral tales in an interview. In relation to both children and to mothers, being fair was broadly connected to the allocation of resources: money, time, material resources (including property), attention, and to a lesser extent, consideration of or responsiveness to feelings. Considerations of fairness were highly contextualised in that practical and relational factors informed both the process and the outcomes and, whether they did so with more or less reluctance or difficulty, fathers appeared to be having to pay some level of regard to the circumstances and feelings of others. What fathers often claimed to have achieved, or be working towards, was some kind of bearable solution. Fathers often described their family situations as 'the best of a bad job' or 'as good as it could be' and saw their co-parental and fathering relationships as part of an ongoing process, in which time and effort were involved.

At the same time, my analysis and consideration of the gendering of care for children and the interconnection of fathering and mothering, suggests that fathers may have to do less than mothers, in terms of both practical and accounting work, to be accepted as moral and fair. Fathers may be able to deploy the relational strategies of 'keeping the peace' or of allowing mothers to retain the lion's share of responsibility as a way of being seen to be fair to them, as mothers. This presentation of fairness through stepping back, or at least not taking on more, caring responsibility, illustrates the moral content or status fathers may

seek to give to a comparatively distanced or limited role. Conversely, it may be that, particularly non-resident fathers, feel that they have less bargaining power or may be 'unfairly' expected to compromise, or step back, in the face of mothers' elevated moral status and responsibility. Responsibility contains both obligations and powers which appear to be revealed and experienced in new, and painful, ways during divorce or separation and process of parenting beyond this. Being fair to each other as co-parents can perhaps be understood as something which involves fathers and mothers in both giving up and taking on, different kinds of responsibilities. While I have not made fairness a primary focus of my systematic analysis, I present it here as something which may have implications for further theoretical work on moral reasoning within family relationships.

Fathering in a gendered moral space

Through my consideration of these moral narratives of 'good fathering' after divorce or separation, I have been able to explore something of what is moral for men, and of the shifting and complex moral terrain in which men as fathers can operate. I have used the term gendered moral space to describe this terrain, where space includes expectations, rewards or sanctions, limits or boundaries, but also room to manoeuvre. The fathers' stories provide insight into not only what fathers may think and feel about what constitutes good enough fathering, but also what they consider 'tellable' in the context of an interview. My analysis was able to capture some of the narrative strategies and devices by which morally viable accounts of fathering could be constructed, and it was through this attention

to 'how' stories were told, as well as to their content, that the sense of gendered moral space emerged.

I describe this moral space as gendered not just because men as fathers appear to be subject to different evaluative criteria, from both particular and generalised others (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2007), in relation to their roles and responsibilities for children, but also because they involve engagement with particular normative and potent ideas about masculinity, such as 'breadwinning' or 'providing'. My data revealed complex and ambivalent responses to masculine roles or norms, with fathers apparently aware of, or strategic about, some of the constraints as well as opportunities they offer. Overall, the gendering of moral space does offer fathers room to manoeuvre, in ways that are not so apparent for mothers. Claims of an intensification of motherhood (Hays 1996) and research on the processes of 'making' families, such as Smart & Neale (1999) or Ribbens McCarthy et al (2003), which discuss gender differences in moral reasoning and caring practice, bear this out.

Fathers made reference to the moral imperative of prioritising children's needs, and drew consistently on ideas of 'putting children first', 'staying', and 'providing', but in each case, these ethical principles could be enacted in a variety of ways. Thus fathering roles such as 'providing' or 'being there' appeared to be negotiable and broad. In particular, forms of active passivity in relation to *not* acting or intervening in children's lives, avoiding conflict with mothers, following mothers' lead (or invitation) in determining their level of involvement, were all presented and accounted for in terms of being morally acceptable, justified and/or fair in the context of post-couple fathering. What is revealed is that a certain optional quality of caring and responsibility remains available to men as

fathers, which is also compatible with morally acceptable fathering (see also Miller, forthcoming 2010). Put bluntly, it may be that fathers have to do less than mothers, in both practical and relational terms, to be validated as good or laudable parents. However, this greater, or more elastic moral space does not necessarily or exclusively bring gains to fathers, nor am I saying that fathers do not reflect on the complex moral questions raised by attempting to sustain fathering and co-parental relationships after divorce or separation. As discussed across the substantive chapters, having limited time with children, and having to re-negotiate co-parenting in new ways and in different contexts, can impact on fathering relationships and father identity in a range of challenging and painful ways. My analysis suggests, then, that in the processes of fathering beyond couplehood, the constraints and losses of a more optional role are more likely to be felt and that this can produce changes in the ways fathers think about and enact fathering. This raises broader questions over the ways and extent to which parenting beyond divorce or separation can lead to opportunities for both fathers and mothers to rethink, or change gendered patterns of parental care.

The ongoing impact of gendered patterns of care

A final set of questions raised by my research concern the ongoing impact of gender on caring for children. Throughout my analysis I have focused on the ways in which an already gendered experience of family life and parental care influences the challenging process of co-parenting after divorce or separation. The data reveals that, across the interviews, fathers held ambivalent or contrapuntal views about gendered or stereotypical roles and assumptions about both fatherhood and masculinity, trying at some moments to hold on to, and at others to shake off, 'old' ideas in an effort to be both good and often different kinds of fathers. Such tensions and possibilities are illustrated through the way in

which my study presents both the transformative potential of new or changed forms of caring for children, and equally the persistent pull of an established gender order.

The notion of transformed fathering involved becoming more focused on, attentive and available to, children. This was linked to being able to spend (limited) time with them, but was presented much more in terms of the relational and emotional quality of that time, the 'work' involved in producing it, and the unexpected consequences of caring, and being solely responsible for children outside the context of marriage or partnership. Such changes appeared to have led fathers, in different ways and to different extents, to reconsider or re-evaluate both their pre-divorce fathering and, more broadly, what being a father or a mother meant, in both personal and social terms. What may previously have been taken for granted or was unremarkable can become 'visible' and so more open to reflexivity. It is important to recognise though, that transformed experiences of care did not necessarily equate to greater amounts of time or overall responsibility; the most common form of caring arrangements was that fathers had children to stay for weekends, overnights during the week, and/or periods of the school holidays. So while fathers may feel differently about caring for children and may gain an awareness of the opportunities and rewards it can bring, this is only one step in changing or challenging arrangements whereby women as mothers continue to manage the bulk of the material, emotional and relational labour and responsibility.

I am arguing then, that alongside, or despite, the transformative potential of direct care and caring responsibility, a gendered model of parenting often appears as a default position. This model, which tends to place mothers as primary and fathers as morally equivalent, but secondary carers, is recognisable in public discourses around, not just

parenting but also work-life balance (Gatrell 2005) and is not incompatible with promoting father engagement (Featherstone 2009). Within fathers' narratives, this model was also often accompanied by ideas of the 'different but equal' qualities and contributions of fathers and mothers; here again, equality can be presented in terms of moral worth, rather than a division of labour. This conception was drawn on, not just by non-resident fathers, but also main carer fathers who sometimes used it as a vehicle for discussing their recognition of, and ambivalence towards, mothers. My analysis suggests that the tenacity and ready availability of a gendered primary/supporting parent model retains an optional yet morally adequate quality to fathering. However, the implications of such gendered caring arrangements following divorce or separation are often unanticipated and can be experienced as a form of 'inversion' of the powers associated with caring roles. This point can be illustrated by fathers' realisations about, the significance of 'dailiness' (Apthekar 1989) and routine caring as a source of information about children and their lives, a means to emotional closeness with them, and as an important source of moral legitimacy of authority over them, and in relation to mothers.

My research illustrates how fathers may continue to benefit from the optional aspects of fathering contained within and validated by gendered caring arrangements, in that mothers may continue to carry the bulk of care and responsibility for children. However, during the process of separation, fathers (and mothers) may also re-assess what such responsibility carries with it, in terms of opportunities for sustaining relationships and retaining parental (and co-parental) authority. In this way, I am arguing that gendered patterns of caring for children become fault-lines for the renegotiation of parental roles and responsibilities following divorce or separation. Whilst clearly my data does not include mothers, it may still be that both fathers and mothers may reconsider or appreciate the 'power' that comes

with responsibility only at the point of seeking to sustain their caring for children after divorce or separation. Both may also struggle to acquire and to give up certain gendered aspects of their roles and responsibilities in which there are significant emotional, personal and social investments.

Reflections and future directions

Some of the original motivation for this study came from my earlier interest in ideas of 'moral rationality' (Duncan & Edwards 1999) and how this might operate in men's lives as fathers. I also became increasingly drawn, both personally and intellectually, into seeking to understand the complex and painful process of mothering and fathering beyond couplehood. A key intellectual puzzle (Mason 1996) driving my research has then been how to explore fathering as distinct from, but interconnected with, mothering; attending to the ways in which gender infuses the practices, emotions and moral work involved in caring for children, without setting fathers and mothers up as being always in opposition or competition. This last point is also linked to the 'epistemology of reception' (Doucet 2006) in that whilst I have stated at different stages of my work that I have taken a particular perspective on the topics of fathering, gender and care, I am also aware that I have to navigate the "political and theoretical traps that may await feminist work on fathering" (Doucet, 2006: 20).

Having reached this point in my research journey, there are inevitably lessons learned and evaluations to be made. Whilst the decision to interview only fathers has allowed me

to highlight and explore their experiences and may also have been helpful in recruitment, it has, in addition, produced a tension in relation my desire to offer a relational picture of fathers and fathering. I have avoided presenting father-child or co-parental relationships as dyadic or exclusive, and to demonstrate fathers' perceptions of wider networks of family and kin, together with the importance attached to these as part of the process of fathering beyond couplehood. However, because I did not make such wider family networks a primary focus of my analysis, these relational contexts could not be explored in any depth. This means that further work could usefully be done to give more sustained attention to the roles and significance of extended family and friendships, and to the ways in which fathers are attentive and responsive to these as part of their fathering practices.

It is also important to reflect on the strengths and limitations of narrative research. Whilst I found that it was appropriate and valuable to analyse the interviews as narratives, particularly as a tool for exploring their moral dimensions, this approach does place certain limits or qualifications around what can be claimed or known. My data clearly consists of things which fathers felt were 'tellable' or which could be said within the boundaries of prevailing discourses around, for example, family, fathering, masculinity and childhood. Inevitably, there will have been aspects of these fathers' experiences, perceptions or emotions which could not be revealed in the context of a single interview. On balance, treating the interviews as narratives offered more gains than losses, but I remain interested in the value that more longitudinal and ethnographic approaches might bring to research on fathers and fathering.

One further area of evaluation concerns the process of sampling and recruitment. I had been mindful from the outset about the perceived problems with recruiting men into

research and was interested in developing 'father-centred' access routes (McKee & O'Brien, 1983). As discussed in chapter two, I developed my sample via a number of contexts. In addition to work settings and family support organisations, I had originally been interested in exploring sports and leisure settings as a context in which men might be present and accessible. However, in the end, I only visited one such site and did not systematically pursue this route. I was uncomfortable with what felt like 'cold-calling' and realised that much more time would have been needed to establish myself within the setting and to build relationships with regular members and staff. On reflection, this kind of access route could be very valuable for future research involving men, and a more sustained and ethnographic approach would develop the potential of such sites most appropriately.

Whilst the number of participants was relatively small, I believe that key strengths of my study lie in the heterogeneity of the sample, and the rich theoretical and analytical framework used to explore this diverse set of narrative accounts. I have extended some of the existing ideas around the moral and relational dimensions of family lives (Finch & Mason 1993, Duncan & Edwards 1999, Ribbens McCarthy, Edwards & Gillies 2003) by applying and developing them specifically in relation to divorced or separated fathers. I have made particular use of the feminist ethics of care, and of the concept of relationality, and in this way, contributed to the development of conceptual work around family lives and relationships (BSA Families & Relationships Study Group Colloquium, 2009). I have also been able to identify common preoccupations, perceptions and concerns, for fathers in often very different working and caring circumstances, and through this to consider some of the pervasive dimensions of male caring and the process of maintaining both fathering relationships and a viable moral identity for the fathers in this sample. From this, my

research makes grounded suggestions about the gendering of care and of the moral and relational work involved in sustaining relationships, and so offers insights relevant not just to those with an interest in fathers, but equally to those researching mothering or with a more general interest in gender and family life.

I have also worked to manage and maintain a critical distance between the more personal and the intellectual, social scientific processes of conducting this study, and to reveal this reflexive practice through the writing of the thesis. In particular my initial engagement with the feminist ethics of care literature, alongside my own family and caring responsibilities at the time, provided a highly potent context in which I had to reflect on the impact and place of the personal in academic work, and has produced additional writing which informed, but could not be included in the thesis itself (Philip, 2007). Ultimately, attempting to 'do' reflexivity (Mauthner & Doucet 2003) has involved being selective in that, whilst I sought to build reflexive consideration into every stage of the research project, the requirements of the thesis inevitably limited how much space could be given to detailing this process. In addition to the places where I have offered explicit discussion of my own research practice, my intention has been to demonstrate my reflexive approach through my interpretations of, and conclusions about, fathering beyond couplehood. In this way, the study also engages with methodological debates about reflexivity; about studying the moral aspects of family relationships and about being a woman studying men and masculinity.

In the end, across all of the various political and academic representations of and debates over fathers, fatherhood and fathering (Morgan 2002) there hangs the question of gender, or as Doucet (2006) has framed it: the difference gender difference makes in

specific contexts and relationships. Attempts to value, engage, evaluate, understand or empower fathers and their experiences of caring for children can be done with or without an interest in gender equity, and can too easily produce yet another adversarial context for mothers and fathers, or problematise women as a barrier to fully involved fathering (Featherstone 2009). There remains a need for more 'feminist work on fathering' (Doucet 2006) which theorises gender relations and the gendered power struggles that shape the personal and social organisation of care for children, without disregarding the constraints and opportunities these produce for both fathers and mothers, and in particular without ignoring the domestic and caring responsibilities women continue to bear.

My research, through its exploration of men's experiences of fathering as interconnected and relational, and with its sustained critical focus on the gendering of such experience, offers constructive insights to this kind of enterprise. My study, with its poignant, partial, narrative accounts of the process of 'working at it' offers both a cautious optimism and a considered warning. Fathering beyond couplehood can produce new or different contexts of care, which have the potential to change personal, social and political understandings of male caring practice and responsibility. Against this, however, is the pull of a model of parenting which may lay claim to greater gender equality by positioning fathers and mothers as morally equivalent, and yet does not substantially alter either understandings or expectations of fathers in terms of caring labour and responsibility. The need for a nuanced, careful appreciation of the ongoing gendering of care for children is relevant to a whole range of policy areas. Most specifically, it may be particularly important to policy making in relation to divorcing/separating parents and mediation or support services, in order to be attentive and responsive to the investment and work involved in sustaining family relationships and to avoid simply imposing or reworking an

adversarial gendered positioning of fathers and mothers. In relation to this, the insights produced from my research, together with the overarching theme of working at caring arrangements and relationships that are 'bearable' have much to offer, and constitute a policy relevant aspect of my work that I look forward to extending in the future.

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List of Appendices:

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Appendix one:

Information leaflet and poster used for recruitment

If you know someone else who might be interested in taking part, please pass on this leaflet or the contact details.

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet.

For more information, questions about the leaflet, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Working At It

A study of men's experiences as fathers after divorce or separation.

What is the project about?

Jobs and family life are changing and many parents face the challenge of bringing up their children after a marriage or partnership has ended. This research project is about the experiences and views of divorced or separated fathers.

Why are you being asked to take part?

The project aims to explore men's experiences of being a dad after divorce or separation, and how this fits in with their working lives. The research will involve single interviews with divorced or separated fathers in a range of different jobs, who see and take care of their children.

What are the aims of the project?

The overall aim is to better understand how fathers adjust to being a dad after divorce or separation. It will focus on the experiences of being a dad, and men's own views on their lives as fathers. It also aims to offer some more general insights into what makes this easier or harder and how different types of work may affect the experience of being a dad after divorce. More specifically, the research will explore:

- What, if any, changes fathers have had to make to their lives in order to look after their children
- The extent to which being a father after divorce or separation has affected their work lives
- Whether, and in what ways, fathers feel that divorce or separation has affected the kind of dad they are

What will the project involve?

The research is being conducted throughout Norfolk and Suffolk. The interviewer is Georgia Philip, a researcher with the Open University. The interviews are with fathers only, not with any other family members. If you would like to take part you will be given more information about the project and have an opportunity to ask questions.

The interview will be arranged to fit in with you, and is likely to take about one hour. It will be recorded and transcribed. Any information you give will remain confidential and anonymous. You will also have an opportunity to discuss the interview afterwards. When the project is finished you can be sent a summary of the main findings if you would like it.

Working At It

A study of men's experiences as fathers after divorce or separation

Jobs and family life are changing and many parents face the challenge of bringing up their children after a marriage or partnership has ended.

This Open University research project is about divorced/separated fathers who see and take care of their children.

Would you be willing to give up one hour of your time to take part in this important study? Would you like the chance to talk confidentially about your own experiences and give your views?

For more information about the project, questions or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Georgia Philip 07717 194500 or email:
gp2435@student.open.ac.uk

Appendix two:

Interviewee profiles – a short descriptive summary of each participant

Interviewee profiles:

Bill

Bill is in his late 50's; he had a long marriage and has now been divorced for 20 years. He has three children, all now grown up, and he has grandchildren from his youngest daughter. He and his ex wife have had an amicable and co-operative relationship for many years and Bill feels they still do lots of things 'as a family'. They used solicitors to manage their divorce but there were no legal disputes. Bill has always had regular contact with all his children, and continues to feel close to them all now. Since leaving the marital home, Bill has lived in private rented accommodation, and has worked for many years in the building trade. He was self employed for a long time, but is currently an employee at an F.E college.

Brian

Brian is in his early 30's was married for six years and has now been divorced for nearly six. He and his wife have three sons, now aged 12, ten and eight. Brian lives in the same city as his ex-wife and two of their sons but the middle child is currently in foster care in another town about 35 miles away. Brian and his ex-wife have had a long and conflicted experience of separating and making contact arrangements, with extensive involvement from social services and the family court; part of this intervention has been in relation to his ex-wife's mothering. Brian sees his youngest son every weekend (though he describes this as an unstable arrangement) and visits his middle son at the foster home whenever he can. He has not spent time with his oldest son for the last four years. Brian lives in council accommodation, is registered disabled, and is in receipt of benefits.

Chris

Chris is 45, and has three children: Gerry who is 13, Oscar who is ten & Sally who is six. Chris has been separated from his wife Alice for nearly two years and divorced for one. His children stay with him and his new partner Pauline every other weekend. Arrangements for contact were made privately between he and his ex-wife and he describes their relationship and their separation as amicable. Chris joint owns his home with his partner and works as a full-time senior lecturer in an F.E college; he has worked there for 13 years.

Clive

Clive is 39 and in the past two years has become separated, then divorced from his wife Jane, and is now the main carer for his two sons Jake, five and Kieran, nine. Clive was married to Jane for about 13 years and their marriage broke down as a result of Jane's serious mental health problems. Jane was in hospital for some time but now lives quite near to Clive and the boys and has regular contact with them. Clive and Jane have a reasonably amicable relationship, although there have been legal proceedings in relation to the divorce and contact arrangements. Clive had worked for a long time in the construction industry, and during this time obtained a degree. The family moved to the area about three years ago, when Clive took a college lecturing job. When their marriage ended Clive resigned from work and has since been in receipt of benefits as the main carer for his sons, both of which are diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum, though are both in mainstream school. He has remained in, and continues to own, their family home. Clive has also been involved in voluntary work via scouting and an organisation working with people with learning difficulties and is about to start a second degree in social work.

Dan

Dan is 38 and has two children: Isobel, eight and Max, six. He was in a relationship with their mum Liz for about 15 years (they were married for the last four). They have now been divorced for three and a half years. Dan has continued to live in the marital home, which he owns, and is the main carer for the children. Liz lives quite nearby and has the children for five nights out of every fortnight (including a long weekend). Dan describes their relationship as amicable, although they did have two periods of mediation (one via CAFCASS) and court proceedings as part of their separation and divorce. Dan works a flexible four days a week as a lecturer at an F.E College, and has worked there for about 12 years.

David

David is 47, and has two daughters: Amy, 17, from his first marriage and Molly, nine months from his current partnership. He was married for 14 years and became separated and then divorced when his first daughter was six. He ended the marriage for a new relationship and formed a step-family, which lasted for about five years. He then spent three years living alone, before forming his current partnership two years ago. He has his daughter to stay from Wednesday to Friday evening each week and then the last weekend in every month. He also spends roughly half the holiday times with her. These arrangements have been in place since the divorce. He describes his relationship with his daughter as very close and his relationship with his ex-wife as amicable. They used solicitors during the divorce, and have maintained private arrangements for child support. David is a full-time lecturer at an F.E College, where he has worked for 17 years.

Dennis

Dennis is 45 and was married to Lynne for 14 years; they have now been divorced for nearly eighteen months. Dennis has two children; Anna, 14 and Craig, 13. The children live with Lynne in the family home, and Dennis has bought a smaller house very close by. Dennis sees the children regularly on a Tuesday evening, and has a lot of informal contact the rest of the time; they also continue to visit relatives or go to certain events together as a family. Dennis's relationship with Lynne is now amicable, although there was a good deal of conflict during the early stages of the separation. They used solicitors to manage their divorce, but there were no legal disputes. His relationships with Anna and Craig are improving, although his relationship with Anna can be difficult. Dennis works full time as a family lawyer and is a partner in the firm; he has worked at his current firm for nine years.

Gary

Gary is 43 and has two children, Hannah 20, and Danny 18 from his first marriage to their mum, Mandy. He was married for 15 years, but the last five had been very difficult and unstable; Mandy had had an affair and had two sons with another man. They finally split up eight years ago and have been divorced for five. They used solicitors to manage their divorce but there were no legal disputes. Gary has now been with Cathy for seven years and married for four. They live together with her two daughters, Beccy, 13 and Carly, 11. Gary also sees himself as a committed step-father. Relationships across the two households are amicable, and Gary feels very close to, and involved with, both his children. He has always had regular contact with him, and this has continued through their teens and their increasing independence. Gary had previously done factory work but for the past five years has worked as a self-employed plasterer.

Gerry

Gerry is 43, has one son, Sam who is ten, and has been divorced for nearly four years. Gerry was married to Maggie for 17 years and they had known each other since secondary school. Maggie left their marriage and the family home, in part due to a new relationship, but Gerry sought a divorce after Maggie developed alcohol and mental health problems. Gerry and Maggie have always had a shared care arrangement for Sam, although Sam has spent extended periods of time with Gerry when Maggie has not been well. Maggie now rents a house and has a job near to where Gerry and Sam live and things are more settled. Gerry and Maggie now have a reasonably amicable working relationship in relation to Sam, but their parting was very acrimonious. They used solicitors to manage their divorce and there have been no legal disputes, although some police involvement due to Maggie's behaviour whilst ill. Gerry was in the Royal Navy when he was younger but has now worked for many years in financial services. He currently commutes to a large city where he works for a major bank; full time but with flexible hours.

Ivan

Ivan is 21, and is an Iraqi refugee who has lived in the UK for just over four years. When he arrived in the UK he was alone; he has no other family in the UK. He has one son, Robert, aged nearly three and a daughter, Kelly who is two. He was in a relationship with Tina, Robert's mum for nearly a year, but they separated when Robert was a baby. Tina and Robert lived in hostel where Tina was receiving support for a drug problem, but Robert was then taken into foster care, where he remains. Ivan has been having supervised contact with Robert, at a family centre, for the past six months and is making an application for residency; a decision was due to be made in a few months. Ivan is currently in a relationship with Kelly's

mother, Sue, and although they don't live together he sees her and Kelly every day. Ivan lives in social housing and is not currently employed.

Jack

Jack is in his early 50,s and has been married three times. He has two grown up sons from his first marriage, who he has had sporadic contact with over the past 20 years, and a son and daughter (now aged 14 and 12) from his second marriage which ended six years ago. He has since re-married and is stepfather to his wife's teenage children. Jack's first marriage ended because of his wife's violence towards him and he broke contact with his sons for about seven years. He had had contact with them since, but it has not been particularly successful or consistent. Jack's second marriage ended when he began an affair and decided to leave the family home. Solicitors were involved to manage the divorce and selling of property. Although their relationship was difficult at first, Jack had his children to visit and stay regularly. He now sees them about once every three weeks for the day, but sees his son more than his daughter. Jack communicates regularly with his ex-wife and their relationship is amicable, but this causes tensions between him and his current wife. Jack also has a difficult relationship with his stepchildren, particularly his stepson. Jack has worked in the automotive trade for most of his working life and now teaches automotive engineering at an F.E College.

James

James is in his 40's and has a 12 year old daughter, Chloe from his first marriage. He was married to her mother for a very short time and the marriage ended when Chloe was a baby because his wife came out as a lesbian. This caused a great deal of emotional and practical difficulties for James and he sees this time as very traumatic. Solicitors were involved to manage the divorce. Chloe stayed living with her mum, but James has always had consistent

contact with her, having her to stay regularly at weekends and school holidays. There have also been short periods where Chloe has lived with him and his second family. James remarried about seven years ago and has two sons aged five and two. Relationships between Chloe and her brothers and step-mother are good, but there is often tension between Chloe's mum and James's current wife. James teaches at an F.E College, where he has worked part-time for the past three years. He has also worked as a free-lance and then self-employed cabinet/furniture-maker.

Jason

Jason is 30 and has two children; Katie, aged seven, from his first long-term partnership and Ryan (five months) from his marriage to Sam. Jason and Katie's mum, Lucy were together for about eight years and lived together; Lucy ended their relationship when Katie was nearly two. He met and moved in with Sam and they married in 2005 and have since had their son, Ryan. Jason has always had Katie to stay every weekend, and for parts of the school holidays; he also speaks to her each day and has regular contact with her school. His relationship with Lucy remains close but sometimes volatile, and Jason provides a good deal of financial and practical support for Katie, but also currently, for Lucy also. There is some tension between Lucy and Sam, and Jason to some extent conceals the level of his support to Lucy, remaining highly committed to taking an active role in Katie's life. Jason has always worked as a financial advisor.

Jimmy

Jimmy is in his 40's and has been divorced from his wife Pam for about 11 years. He has a son, Jake, 18 and a daughter, Jess, 16. His ex-wife initiated the divorce as she had met someone else. Jimmy and Pam have negotiated all their financial and contact arrangements

privately and have an amicable relationship. Jimmy has always had regular, weekly contact with his children, having them to stay at weekends and spending part of the school holidays together. For the past eighteen months Jess has been living with Jimmy full time, due to rows with her mum, although their relationship is improving. Both Jimmy and Pam came out of the marriage owning property; Jimmy initially stayed in the marital home, but has moved once since. Jimmy is an electrician by trade and has worked in a number of different settings. He has worked for the council, had periods of self employment, and has now been employed at an FE college for the past three years as a lecturer and technical demonstrator.

Jonathon

Jonathon is in his mid 40's and has one 13 year old daughter, Alice, from his marriage to Vanessa. They were married for a number of years, and they split up when Vanessa had an affair. They began divorce proceedings and were separated for nearly three years, but then got back together just as the divorce came through. They stayed together for another two years and then, after another affair, finally split up about seven years ago. Jonathon now lives with Dawn and her two children in a jointly-owned house, and they were expecting a baby very soon. Jonathon and Vanessa went through protracted legal proceedings, where Jonathon had obtained a prohibitive steps order, and applied for residence. He had support from F4J during this time. In the end he was not awarded residence and Vanessa and Alice moved to Wales to live with her partner at the time. The court awarded Jonathon six weeks contact a year, across all the school holidays and this has been the situation for the past four years. The relationship between Jonathon and Vanessa is still very tense, but with some communication over practical arrangements. Jonathon works as a self-employed carpenter, and tends not to work when Alice comes to stay.

Martin

Martin is 40 and has two children; Tom, aged 11, from his first marriage and Harriet, aged four, from his current marriage. Martin was married to Tom's mum for 12 years, and during this time was in the RAF; they have now been apart for six years and divorced for four. They owned a house in the South West of England but moved to different RAF bases with Martin's postings. The marriage finally ended when Martin met Juliette, although the relationship and broken down prior to this. After a few months of continuing to live separately but both on the RAF base, Tom and his mum moved back to the marital home. Martin remarried, bought a house and left the RAF about four years ago. Martin and his ex-wife had a very conflicted and lengthy divorce process, including disputes about money and contact, although their relationship and communication has now improved. Martin has always paid maintenance via the CSA and has had regular contact with Tom, visiting him every five weeks and having him to stay for longer periods of every school holiday. Since leaving the RAF Martin has worked as a full time lecturer at an F.E college.

Micky:

Micky is 27, is Black British, and has one daughter, Megan who is nearly three. He was in a relationship with Megan's mum Laura for about two and a half years and they lived together but were not married. Micky and Laura's relationship broke down after Megan was born, and they split up when she was about six months old; Laura ended the relationship and moved back to her parent's home, with Megan. For the past two and a half years, Micky and Laura have been in conflict over contact arrangements, and have been involved with solicitors, mediation and the court system. After the separation, Micky lost his job and had to move out of their flat. He then lived in the YMCA for about nine months, and had first supervised and

then unsupervised, contact with Megan via contact centres. During this time, he also attended parenting classes and other development courses offered by the YMCA and has continued to pay maintenance for Megan through the CSA. Micky has also received a lot of advice and support from a voluntary organisation supporting young adults, and has been a key member of a young fathers group. He finally got his own flat about six months ago, has a job, and has had regular weekend contact with Megan. He has also now just agreed staying over contact with Laura, via the court, and has Megan to stay every other Saturday night. Micky has always worked as a security guard and also spent a short time in the army.

Paul

Paul is 26, was married for four and a half years, and has a three year old son, William. Paul sees his son three times a week, with frequent over-night stays. The marriage ended after his wife had an affair, which has since resulted in her re-marriage and recent pregnancy. Paul did own property but since the divorce has been in privately rented accommodation. He and his ex-wife managed their divorce, child support and access arrangements entirely privately and have a relationship described as very amicable and with a high level of co-operation and trust. Paul has some family in the area and was brought up a Jehovah's Witness. He has worked full time as a lecturer in an F.E College for the past two and a half years.

Richard

Richard is 40 and has four children: Shane, nine, Kelly, eight, Haley, five and Tyler, 18 months. Richard was in a volatile relationship with their mother, Kirsty, for about nine years, during which time they had split up and got back together; they have now been separated for just over 18 months. At the time of the separation, the family were involved in a Police and Children's Services investigation because the children made allegations of physical abuse

against their mum. During this process the children were removed for two periods of time, to live with Richard's mum and dad. They were also placed on the Child Protection Register. In the end, no action was taken against Kirsty and the children were returned, but Richard was asked to leave the family home. Richard is still living with his dad, while he waits for council accommodation. Richard's mother died recently, but his family, particularly his father, continues to be a crucial support to him. However, Richard's relationship with his elderly father is under strain and he is desperate to move into a place of his own. Richard now has the children to stay at his dad's every weekend, and also has them, one-at-a-time, for weeks during the school holidays. His relationship with Kirsty is reasonable and they do talk/see each other regularly, although things can flare up quickly. Richard works as a lorry driver.

Robin

Robin is in his mid 50's and has five daughters. He had three daughters, who are now in their 20's, during his first marriage, his daughter Helena, now 15 from a long term partnership and his daughter Esme, now nine, from his second marriage. He also has step-children through his second wife, Jenny; he and Jenny have been together for ten years and between them have a large extended family. Robin's first family was formed in Scotland and his daughters and their mother still live there. He has continued to visit them two or three times a year, and they come and stay sometimes. His relationship with their mother is amicable and cooperative. His daughter Helena lives close by and he has always had her to visit and stay regularly. Initially his relationship with Helena's mum, Anne, was difficult and conflicted, and this affected Helena's feelings about Robin's second wife and their family. No solicitors were involved as a result of the separation and contact and financial arrangements have always been made privately. Over the years things have improved and Robin feels Helena is much more settled as part of their family, and his relationship with Anne has also improved. Robin and Jenny

and their dependent children live in council accommodation in a small village. Robin has worked as a carpenter, a painter and decorator and as a musician; he has traveled and lived in communes in England and Europe. He is currently a full time student.

Tony

Tony is 45 has been divorced for seven years and has two daughters, Jess and Sam from this marriage, now aged 16 and 18. He was married to their mother, Jill for over ten years. His first wife initiated the ending of the marriage as she had met someone else. Solicitors were involved in managing the divorce and the selling/buying of property. Jill has remained and lived with Simon and the girls since her divorce from Tony. Tony lives within 15 miles of his daughters and they currently visit him once a week for tea, stay over occasionally and speak on the phone most days. He has extended family nearby and they have been an important and consistent source of support. He has an amicable/co-operative relationship with their mother, and with her partner. He remarried about four years ago and has two girls of three and one from this marriage. Relations between all his daughters are good. Tony works as a factory operations manager in an industrial components factory and has worked for his company for 26 years.

Tim:

Tim is in his late twenties, had been married for five years and has a four year old son, Adam. He split up with his wife two years ago, when she left him for another man. They went through a fairly acrimonious divorce, involving court hearings to decide on residence and access arrangements. Tim is now the main carer for Adam during the week and he stays with his mother and her partner every weekend. Prior to their divorce Tim had already spent two years looking after Adam full time, as they had made a joint decision that he should leave work

because his wife had a better job. Adam's mum suffered with post natal depression for some time after Adam's birth. She left the marital home shortly after the split, which was later sold and they both now live in rented accommodation, in different towns. Tim has some support from his mum, his Nan, and his brother, but is not close to his father; he also attends a local family centre and is very positive about the help/advice he has gained from staff and other parents. He and his ex-wife do not have an amicable relationship and Tim still feels a lot of sadness and anger about the ending of their marriage. Tim receives benefits as a lone father, together with some maintenance from his ex-wife (via the CSA) and also does some voluntary work for 'Help The Aged'

Will

Will is 50 and has two daughters; Rachel, aged 23 and Keisha, aged ten. He has had two very different experiences of fathering after separation. Will separated from Rachel's mum Karen when Rachel was three, and after a short period of using mediation and solicitors, they established a shared care arrangement and have been amicable co-parents ever since. When Rachel was 16 she decided to live with Will full time; she has spent less time with Will since going to university, and is now away traveling. Will met Keisha's mum, Sarah, about 11 years ago, and from the start there were tensions over Will's co-parenting commitments to Rachel. Sara and Will continued to have a volatile relationship and they finally split up when Keisha was about a year old. For the past nine years they have had protracted court battles over contact, and during this time Sarah made serious allegations against Will, which resulted in an investigation by Social Services and a voluntary psychological assessment. All the allegations have been rejected, and whilst contact arrangements are regular, the relationship between Sara and Will remains highly conflicted. Rachel's mum, Karen has been supportive to Will during this time, and he has also received a lot of support from his current partner, and

from Rachel. Will now sees Keisha about once a month, and has some contact with her school.

Will works part-time for a voluntary organisation providing support and advice services to young people.

Appendix three:

Spreadsheet to provide an overview of the sample in relation to certain key characteristics

| Participant | Age | Occ. & Employment status | No. Children | Age(s) | Sex | Contact arrangements | Legal/S. Service? | Rel. status with mother | Initiation of split | Time div/sep | Ref. with mother now | Current Rel. status |
|-------------|------|----------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Will | 50 | Advice/support worker, pt | child 1 child 2 child 1 child 2 child 3 | 23 female 9 female 31 female 29 male 27 female | regular (resident since 16) regular supervised regular w.e & informal | mediation court & s.s | cohabited partner | father father | 17 years 8 years | amicable & collaborative highly conflicted | partner | |
| Bill | 50's | F.E Lecturer ft. cars | child 1 child 2 child 3 | 8 female 6 male 13 female 9 male | main carer (contact with mum) regular w.e (& informal) | solicitors solicitors | married (14 years) | mother mother (joint) | 18 years 18 months 18 months | amicable & collaborative fairly amicable, some tension (conflicted) to amicable | single girlfriend single | |
| Dan | 38 | F.E Lecturer pt. Art & Design | child 1 child 2 | 10 male 3 male 1 female 14 male | regular supervised-unsupervised regular sc.hol stays & phone resident | court, s.s & police court & s.s N/A | married (long) cohabited cohabiting | mother father N/A | 4 years N/A | (conflicted) to fairly amicable/civil conflicted/distant N/A | single cohabiting | |
| Dennis | 46 | Solicitor (family law) | child 1 child 2 | 12 female | regular informal (child-led) | solicitors | married (long) | father | 3 years | fairly amicable, some tension | remarried (stepCh) | |
| Gerry | 39 | Financial Adviser/Banker | child 1 child 1 child 2 child 1 child 2 | 13 female 12 female 10 female 7 female under 1 male | regular sc.hol stays & phone resident (step) every w.e & Sc.hols resident | court (& F4J) N/A N/A | married (long) cohabited cohabiting | father father N/A | 6 years N/A 4 years N/A | highly conflicted N/A amicable (close) N/A | remarried (stepCh) married remarried | |
| Jonathan | 43 | Self-employed builder | child 1 child 2 child 3 child 1 child 2 | 3 female 10 male under 1 female over 20 female over 20 female over 20 female | regular supervised-unsupervised regular sc.hol stays & phone resident | court & s.s solicitors N/A | cohabited married 2nd marriage | mother father N/A | 1 year 6 years N/A | highly conflicted conflicted to civil N/A | single remarried | |
| Jason | 30's | Financial Adviser | child 1 child 2 | 16 female 9 female 9 male 8 female 5 female 2 male | regular w.e (& informal) resident unstable w.e contact | none solicitors N/A | cohabited cohabited cohabiting | joint father N/A | over 10 years 10 years N/A | amicable & collaborative fairly conflicted - to amicable N/A | cohabiting (stepCh) | |
| Micky | 30 | Security guard | child 1 child 1 child 2 | 3 female 10 male under 1 female over 20 female | regular supervised-unsupervised regular sc.hol stays & phone resident | court & s.s solicitors N/A | cohabited married 2nd marriage | mother father N/A | 18 months | highly conflicted | single | |
| Martin | 40 | F.E Lecturer ft. public services | child 1 child 2 child 1 child 2 child 3 child 4 | 4 male 17 female under 1 female | main carer (contact with mum) regular weekly & informal resident | court solicitors N/A | married married cohabiting | mother father N/A | 1 year 10 years N/A | conflicted amicable N/A | single cohabiting | |
| David | 40's | F.E Lecturer ft. SEN | child 1 child 2 | 3 male 18 male 16 female 16 female 16 female 3 female 1 female | regular 3 times a week regular informal now resident | none solicitors | married | mother | 2 years | amicable & collaborative | single | |
| Paul | 26 | F.E Lecturer ft. welding | child 1 child 1 child 2 | 18 male 16 female 16 female | regular weekly & informal now resident | solicitors | married | mother | 11 years | amicable | single | |
| Jimmy | 45 | F.E Lecturer ft. electrical.eng | child 1 child 2 child 3 child 4 | 16 female 16 female 3 female 1 female | regular weekly & informal resident | solicitors | married | mother | 7 years | amicable | single | |
| Tony | 40 | Factory Manager ft. | child 1 child 1 child 2 child 3 child 4 | 12 male 10 male 8 male 10 male 8 male 12 female 5 male 2 male | no contact for last year regular visits to foster home unstable w.e contact | court & s.s | married | (father) imposed | 2 years | highly conflicted | remarried | |
| Brian | 32 | Registered disabled | child 1 child 2 child 3 | 10 male 8 male 12 female | main carer (contact with mum) regular w.e & sc.hol | court & s.s solicitors | married married (v.brief) | father father | 2 years 2 years 11 years | fairly amicable, some tension amicable | single single | |
| Clive | 39 | Unemployed | child 1 child 2 child 3 | 5 male 2 male 13 female | resident | N/A | 2nd marriage | N/A | N/A | N/A | remarried | |
| James | 37 | F.E Lecturer ft. Carpentry | child 1 child 2 child 3 child 1 child 2 | 10 male 6 female 21 female 18 male 13 female 11 female | regular ev.other w.e & sch.hol regular & informal resident (step) | solicitors | married | father | 2 years | amicable & collaborative | cohabiting | |
| Chris | 42 | H.E Senior Lecturer ft. Lit | child 1 child 2 child 3 child 4 | 18 male 13 female 11 female | regular & informal resident (step) | solicitors | married | mother | 8 years | amicable & collaborative | remarried (stepCh) | |
| Gary | 44 | Self-employed plasterer | child 1 child 2 child 3 child 4 | 13 female 11 female | resident (step) | solicitors | married | mother | 8 years | amicable & collaborative | remarried (stepCh) | |

| Type of housing | Level of Education | Source of interview |
|------------------|--------------------|---|
| private rented | to H.E | Father's group |
| private rented | to F.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to H.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to H.E | Workplace |
| owned | unknown | Social networking |
| council | unknown | Father's group |
| owned | to F.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to F.E | Fam. Supp. Org (2nd wife initiated) |
| owned | to H.E | Workplace |
| council | unknown | Father's group |
| owned | to H.E | Workplace (college, 2nd wife initiated) |
| private rented | ft. H.E student | Social networking |
| staying with dad | unknown | Father's group |
| private rented | unknown | Fam. Supp. Org |
| private rented | to H.E | Workplace (college) |
| private rented | to H.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to F.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to F.E | Social networking |
| council | unknown | Father's group |
| owned | to H.E | Father's group |
| owned | to F.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to H.E | Workplace (college) |
| owned | to F.E | Social networking |

Appendix four:

Interview guide

'Working at it' Interview Guide:

Introductions

Welcome and thanks for taking part & giving up time

Confirm how much time available

Talk through the consent form; give assurance of confidentiality & anonymity

You can stop and any time and don't have to answer anything you don't want to

Opening theme: Family situation, background/context

I'd like to start by just asking you to tell me about your current family situation, where you are at the moment, and how you came to be there.

Prompts: married, how long, number/ages of children, how long separated/divorced, any extended family, where they currently live, remarried, stepchildren etc.

Caring arrangements:

Current arrangements for spending time with children

Prompts: how often, duration, where, what about holidays, special days (Christmas, birthdays etc), any changes over time, turning points, improvements/problems, feelings about current arrangements

How and why arrangements were made; 'how did you work out what was best to do'?

Prompts: any forms of external intervention, support, advice? Explore 'choices', 'decisions' and what kinds of factors they felt were involved in trying to make caring arrangements

Role and involvement; 'how do you feel about your part in their lives at the moment?'

Prompts: views on their fathering role pre and post divorce, any changes since the divorce, feelings about being their dad now (since divorce), confidence/worries?

Working Life:

Current work situation and brief work history

Prompts: line of work/job description, hours, conditions, flexibility/control, ambitions/prospects, feelings about work

Any changes either chosen or not, to working situation since divorce/separation

Prompts: as above, but could explore ideas of 'priorities', 'commitment', whether attitudes or aspirations have changed, and also whether work and caring responsibilities fit together, or whether they feel any tensions – for those who have become full time carers, or who have made changes to hours or conditions, do they see themselves as unusual?

Being a father:

Can you describe what you do when you spend time with your children – 'describe the last time you saw them/they came to visit

Prompts: what kind of stuff do you do, where do you go, how to you spend time together at home, explore what kind of emotional relationship they feel they have with their children

Are there any other ways that you keep in touch when they are not physically with you?

Prompts: phone calls, mobile phones, letters, email – either with them directly or with mothers/others who are involved with their lives

Are there any aspects of your children's lives that you feel are particularly down to you?

Prompts: school/homework, social life, discipline, health/hygiene, contact with other family members, and ask about whether any of this has changed since the divorce/separation (do they feel they have any, more or different responsibilities?)

Can you tell me about anything you feel most/more confident about, or that you enjoy more, about being a dad? And, then, what you feel least confident about, or enjoy less?

Prompts: consider the different aspects of fathering already discussed and try and explore whether anything has changed for them since divorce/separation (adjustment?)

Can you tell me, a bit more generally, about what you think being a father involves

Prompts: how do you think others see you as a father? Think about social pressures, expectations, own father/childhood, is being a father different to being a mother?

Drawing to a close:

Is there anything you would say you have learnt about being a father, from your experiences?

Prompts: If you could go back in time, what advice would you give to yourself? Could revisit any positive changes in relationships/role that they may have identified, as well as the challenges involved

What are your hopes for the future; for you and your children?

Debrief:

Thank you very much for your time and thoughts

Is there anything else you would like to add, or ask, either about the interview or about the project generally?

You may find that you think of things when you get home, and are free to contact me again if you want to add anything later

All your personal/identifying information will be anonymised when the interview is transcribed

If you would like to, you can see a summary of key findings from the study, once it is finished

If you have any concerns at all, you are free to contact me or my supervisor, using the contact details on your information leaflet.

Appendix five:

**Ethical approval form, submitted to Open University Ethics Panel,
and consent form**

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND MATERIALS ETHICS COMMITTEE (HPMEC) PROFORMA

Please complete and send to:

John Oates (j.m.oates@open.ac.uk), Chair,
Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC)
Centre for Childhood Development and Learning (CHDL),
Briggs, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes
Also send a copy to Research-ethics@open.ac.uk

If you have any queries before you fill in this form please look at the
Research Ethics (intranet) web site: <http://intranet.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>

Title of project

A short, descriptive title.

An inductive study of the experiences & perceptions of divorced/separated fathers who have regular physical care of their dependent children, with particular reference to their caring and work responsibilities & activities.

Schedule

Time frame for the research and its data collection phase(s).

Submission of thesis: Sept 09

Data Collection/Fieldwork: May 07-May 08

Abstract

A summary of the main points of the research, understandable by a non-specialist.

To explore, via qualitative interviews, the working lives, parenting roles & activities and identities, of divorced/separated fathers, from their perspectives.

To analyse these in relation to other theories and accounts of post-divorce parenting, and fatherhood in particular.

To generate insight and theoretical understanding in order to contribute to family policy/services related to divorce/separation

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Source(s) of funding

Details of the external or internal funding body (e.g. ESRC, MRC).

Open University Studentship (Faculty of Social Sciences)

Justification for research

What contribution to knowledge, policy, practice, and people's lives the research will make?

A growing recognition of (and often anxiety about) the importance and 'reality' of post-divorce parenting has focused both academic and political attention on the roles, involvement and position of fathers. The continuation, or indeed re-definition, of fathers' roles following divorce/separation, is likely to bring personal, but also potentially broader social challenges in relation to an enduring gendered model for organising earning and caring, making men in such situations socially and politically significant. My research will therefore contribute to ongoing gaps in the literature on fatherhood and on post-divorce parenting, generating insight into the experiences of a particularly relevant group of fathers and into their perceptions of what enables or constrains their parenting activities. In this way, my research will also be highly policy relevant and will contribute to debates on how best to support parents and children experiencing the transitions brought about by divorce or separation.

Investigators

Give names and units of all persons involved in the collection and handling of individual data. Please name one person as Principal Investigator (PI).

PI: Georgia Philip

Published ethical guidelines to be followed

For example: BERA, BPS, BSA (see Research Ethics web site for more information).

BSA

Location(s) of data collection

Give details of where and when data will be collected. If on private, corporate or

institutional premises, indicate what approvals are gained/required.

Interviews will take place predominantly during the day, in public/semi-public settings such as workplaces, Family Centres or similar. Some interviews may also take place at the participant's home, or at my place of work (F.E College). Some evening interviews may be necessary & where this occurs researcher safety will be attended to.

Therefore, approval will be required from any employers or family support organisations approached. Approval from my own organisation is already gained.

Participants

Give details of the population from which you will be sampling and how this sampling will be done.

The population to be sampled is divorced/separated fathers (of one year or more) who have regular physical care of their dependent children, living in East Anglia. I am aiming for heterogeneity, as a means both to explore diversity/range of experience, and to ensure the inclusion of working class men. My sample will be developed in three main contexts: I intend to approach a range of organisations/places of work formally, but also to try and develop a snowball sample through work-related or informal contacts, which may allow me to engage fathers via social or leisure settings. This strategy, in itself, will be revealing in terms of the extent to which fatherhood is experienced or negotiated between men's own social and contextual networks. I have also established some contacts with Fathers' Workers in agencies such as 'Sure Start' which will be particularly helpful in reaching working class fathers.

Recruitment procedures

How will you identify and approach potential participants?

I have some existing contacts within Children's Services, Family Centres and Fathers Workers, who can act as an initial point of contact/gatekeeper. I will also contact relevant workplaces formally via managers or H.R departments. I have an information leaflet, both in hard copy and electronically, which can be used to introduce, explain and generate interest in the project. I will approach both gatekeepers and potential participants in person as far as possible and be prepared to discuss the project in a range of formal and informal settings. The development of social networking may involve the use of public and/or more informal leisure settings such as sports or recreational clubs/centres, as an initial point of recruitment/negotiation.

Consent

Give details of how informed consent will be gained and attach copies of information sheet(s) and consent form(s). Give details of how participants can withdraw consent and what will happen to their data in such a case (see the Research Ethics web site for an advisory document).

Informed consent will be gained through discussion of the project and its implications, both directly and using the information leaflet. Both the leaflet and the consent form have contact details of the PI and the main supervisor. Should any participant wish to withdraw they can contact the PI directly (phone or email) and all relevant data held (digitally recorded interview and a full written transcription) will be destroyed.

Methodology

Outline the method(s) that will be employed to collect and analyse data.

My research will consist predominantly of individual semi-structured, active interviews. I am only interviewing fathers, not ex-wives/partners or their children. A topic guide will be used to introduce subjects for discussion, but the direction of the interview by the researcher will be minimal, and the approach taken will be responsive and flexible.

The analytical approach taken will be one of grounded theory as a means of pursuing conceptual development in this area. Full transcriptions will be made of all interviews, which will then be coded in order to develop more abstracted theoretical categories, and ultimately a typology of fathers' strategies and perceptions in relation to fathering after divorce/separation.

Data Protection

Give details of registration of the project under the DP Act and the procedures to be followed re: storage and disposal of data to comply with the Act.

I have registered details of my research with the O.U Data Protection Officer. Data will be stored (and backed up) both electronically and in hard copy. All participants will be anonymised and any identifying details changed/removed from the transcripts and final report. When the project is complete, all the digital recordings will be deleted.

Recompense to participants

Normally, recompense is only given for expenses and inconvenience, otherwise it might be seen as coercion/inducement to participate. Give details of any recompense to participants.

None

Deception

Give details of the withholding of any information from participants, or misrepresentation or other deception that is an integral part of the research. Any such deception should be fully justified.

None

Risks

Detail any foreseen risks to participants or researchers and steps that will be taken to minimise/counter these. If the proposed study involves contact with children or other vulnerable groups, please confirm that an enhanced CRB Disclosure has been obtained for each person involved in these contacts.

The main anticipated risk to participants is the potential emotional impact of the interview. I have indicated that I will only be talking to fathers who have been divorced or separated for at least one year, to attempt to avoid interviewing individuals who may be particularly vulnerable. I will take care not to pursue questions beyond the level that participants feel comfortable with, and will also be attentive to the level of de-briefing and control they may wish to have over tapes and transcripts. I am also aware of safety issues relating to myself as the researcher, including where and when interviews take place, my accessibility to participants, and the emotional impact of hearing (and being potentially implicated in) stories of post-divorce fatherhood. Lastly, encouraging men to articulate how they understand and attempt to live-out their role as fathers is likely to produce a range of experiences of the research process. Taking part in research can bring welcome or unwelcome self-knowledge, can be empowering or exposing, pleasurable or painful, or, of course, both. In addition to the standard mechanisms of good ethical practice, my research will be attentive to, and reflective on, the impact of the project as it progresses, and there are good precedents for this style of research into family lives.

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Debriefing

Give details of how information will be given to participants after data collection to inform them of the purpose of their participation and the research more broadly.

At the end of each interview, participants will be invited to ask any questions or raise any issues they may have about the project (including the experience of being interviewed) and be reminded about their right to withdraw (and how to go about this should they wish to). They will also be reminded about the information leaflet (and given another copy if necessary) and the contact details provided. The PI will then re-contact each participant a few days after their interview, to thank them once again and generate another opportunity to discuss their involvement if required.

Declaration

Declare here that the research will conform to the above protocol and that any significant changes or new issues will be raised with the HPMEC before they are implemented.

A Final Report form will need to be filled in once the research has ended (you will be contacted by HPMEC on the date for final report below).

Signature(s)

Georgia Philip

(this can be the typed name(s) of investigator(s) if electronic copy is submitted (which is preferred))

Date

23.03.2007

Proposed date for Final Report

30.09.2009

**Additional Protocols:
(01.05.2007)**

- 1. Emotional distress:** Whilst I have built in steps to try and reduce the likelihood of participants experiencing distress, such as not interviewing recently (under one year) divorced/separated fathers, providing clear information about what the project (and the interview) involves to all potential participants, and providing opportunities to discuss any questions or concerns, I also recognise that some participants may become distressed or agitated during the interview. If this happens, or I become aware that it is likely to, I will offer the participant the option of either taking a break or stopping the interview altogether. I will also stop the Dictaphone and allow the participant time to collect themselves and come to a decision about whether to continue or not. If they decide to end the interview I will suggest that they contact me if they would like to complete the interview at a later date. It will be important for me to show some level of empathy/recognition, either verbally and/or non-verbally of their feelings and some reassurance that their dignity is not at stake, but I will not (and am not qualified to) take on any kind of counselling or advisory role. I will therefore ensure that I have contact details for appropriate support organisations (either national or local) that I could offer, either if asked directly or as a means to clarify my own role. If a participant becomes agitated or angry (although I believe this is unlikely), I will again either initiate a break from, or an end to, the interview. Whilst I will again, allow the participant time to calm down, and will acknowledge their feelings, should I feel myself, or them, to be in danger I will remove myself from the situation and call either my 'reliable person' or the police.
- 2.** In total, I aim to conduct between 20 and 30 interviews for this project.
- 3.** The interviews I conduct will be during the day or early evening. Given that many of my participants are likely to be in (full time) employment I will need to offer some level of flexibility and be available, for instance at lunch breaks or after work. Where possible I will use workplaces or sponsoring organisations (such as Family Centres) as a place to conduct interviews, so that there will be some degree of both privacy and security, but I may also conduct interviews in public settings such as cafes, parks or pubs. I will try to avoid conducting interviews in participant's homes, but where this is necessary and/or appropriate I will ensure that full details of my location are known. Whilst I must take my own personal safety seriously I also need to try and maximise participation by being flexible and adaptable to individual circumstances/schedules. There is also the safeguard that my participants will be accessed via reliable gatekeepers/sponsors who know them either personally or professionally. I will ensure that details of my interview timetable and locations for any given day are always held by my reliable person, with the personal details of the participant in a sealed envelope. I will also always carry a mobile phone with me in order to communicate any changes of plan and/or the completion of interviews.

4. I have made additions to my information leaflet, specifying that the interviews will be recorded and transcribe and that they can be sent a summary of key findings if they wish (revised leaflet attached).

CONSENT FORM:

Title of the project: 'Working At It': A study of men's experiences as fathers after divorce or separation.

Main Researcher: Georgia Philip, Open University, Tel. 07717 194500, email: gp2435@student.open.ac.uk

Research Supervisor: Dr J. Ribbens McCarthy, Open University, Tel. 01908 654530, email J.C.Ribbens-Mccarthy@open.ac.uk

This research project is being funded by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University. The overall aim is to better understand how fathers adjust to being a dad after divorce or separation by listening to men's own views and experiences. It also aims to offer some more general insights into what makes being a dad easier or harder and how different types of work may affect this.

The project will be completed and written up by September 2009. A summary of the results will be made available after that date to anyone who has taken part in the study. For any additional information, to make any comments or to make a complaint, please contact Georgia Philip in the first instance, or the research supervisor, Dr Ribbens McCarthy.

- I have read the information leaflet and been given a chance to discuss any questions about the research project.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research project at any time, and that if I do so, any information I have given will be destroyed.
- It has been explained to me that the confidentiality of the information I give will be protected and that I will remain anonymous.
- I understand that I can see a copy of the findings if I would like to.
- I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the research project.
- I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Name of participant:

Signed:

Date:

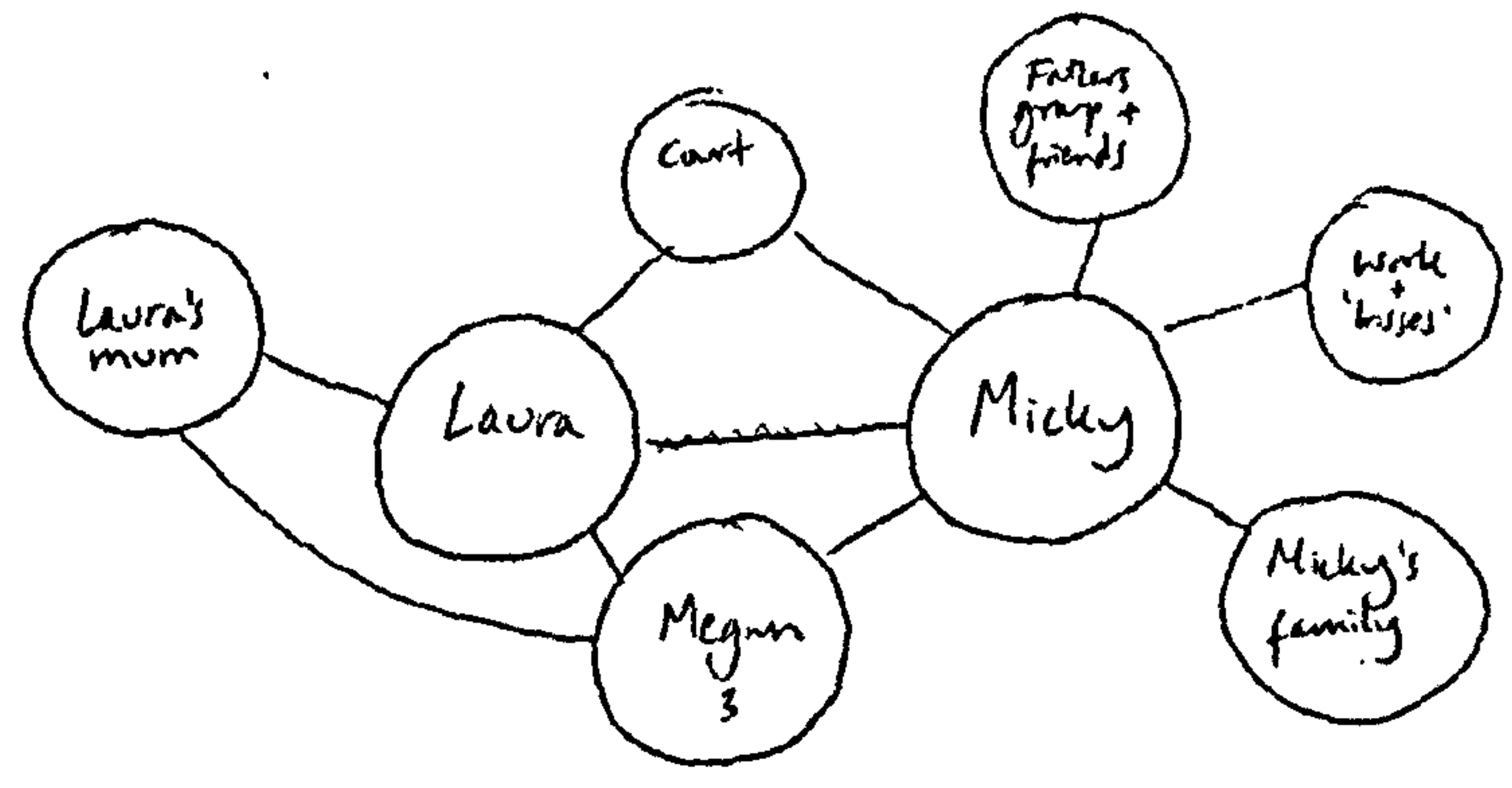
Appendix six:

Example of 'caring network' map, used as part of the data analysis

"I just want to be a big boy"

Micky

27, security guard



practical:

- lost job + home
- moved to YMCA
- went to parenting classes
- attended der. courses
- joined fathers group
- attended contact centres
- found new job
- got council flat (2bed.)
- begin staying over contact

Moral:

- Working as 'god' + part of parental responsibility - taking financial responsibility
 - praising himself as 'god/involved' dad
 - presenting/accounting for himself
 - valuing of 'family'
 - becoming 'nuclear' (= morally responsible)
 - being responsible for 'teaching' Megan
 - "doing right by Megan"
 - Moral evaluation of Laura's behavior
 - perceived 'unfair' treatment of dads
 - Relief in equal status of parents
- (Money has to be used for Megan)

voices: responsible nuclear
playful/spontaneous
active
passive 'old'

Threats to moral identity: → accounting for / contested notions of violence
unstable upbringing
being required to prove himself as good father/person

Relational:

- Increasing recognition of 'growing' a relationship/bond with Megan (knowledge/understanding of her)
- Some communication / co-operation with Laura
- Some recognition/acknowledgement of Laura ('feeling' role)
- Perception of 'equal + unique' contributions from him (dad) + Laura (mum)
- Significance of support / friendship from fathers group + from work
- Some reflexivity on his own behavior + relationship with Laura

Key Themes:

