

T I T L E P A G E

THESIS BY SANDRA M. I. SHAW
For Doctoral Programme in British Policy Studies

**W O M E N A N D L O N E P A R E N T H O O D ;
AN ACCOUNT OF THE EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS OF DIVORCED AND
SEPARATED LONE MOTHERS**

Supervisor; Professor Alan Walker

Department of Sociological Studies,
University of Sheffield,
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Sandra Shaw

April, 1994

S U M M A R Y

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This thesis is the result of research undertaken for the Doctoral Programme in British Policy Studies at the University of Sheffield, which consisted of one year's taught courses, and two year's research.

It is an inter-disciplinary piece of work, drawing on both sociological and social policy literature and deals with women's experiences of marriage, and then lone parenthood, which forms the major part of the thesis. Most of the content is reproduced from and arises from interviews conducted with women while doing fieldwork associated with the research. The thesis illustrates how despite the negative aspects of lone parenthood, such as financial deprivation and loneliness, there are still positive aspects, and women make gains that they would not give up easily.

In addition, dependency is one of the issues covered in the thesis; during marriage, and as a lone parent, both on the state and on the family. It is suggested that what are in fact occurring are relationships of interdependency rather than dependency, and that despite having negative connotations, being dependent on the state and/or the family, can in fact be part of the process of becoming independent.

The thesis then seeks to allow women's own experiences to be heard as far as possible in their own words. From this it is learned that women and their children can gain from lone parenthood, although they could achieve more with additional support and encouragement from the state, and that the negativity surrounding the concept of dependency needs to be challenged.

Sandra Shaw.

April, 1994

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This thesis is based on research undertaken for the Doctoral Programme in British Policy Studies, which was a one year interdisciplinary doctorate, with the first year consisting of coursework which was assessed and the following two years allocated to research for the thesis. The subjects of this research were lone parents, specifically women, who have become lone parents due to the ending of a marriage, and the research method that was selected was that of semi-structured interviewing. One of the basic aims of the research was to assess whether or not women felt that lone parenthood was a totally negative experience, or if women might express the feeling that there were certain gains or benefits accrued during lone parenthood, which could, for some women, make it preferable to marriage.

The topics of divorce and lone parenthood have received increasing attention over the past few years from both policy-makers, and analysts due to the significant increase in the number of lone parents, and concerns about the effects of lone parenthood on children. A brief summary (FPSC Bulletin, March 1991) of some of the factual information on lone parents reveals there are now over one million lone parents in Britain, caring for around a million and a half children. Divorced and separated parents account for almost two thirds of all lone parents, but there is diversity among lone parent families which include the never-married, and the widowed, with a minority of such families being headed by men; six in ten such families have to rely on Income Support, illustrating the fact that the majority of these families are to be found among the poorest in our society, a point picked up on in Chapter 5 of the thesis (see also Bradshaw & Millar, 1990). (For more detailed information on lone parenthood and demographic change see Halsey, 1991.) Clearly

then, lone parent families are a major concern for the welfare state, primarily because they represent a substantial drain on the state's resources, and have thus become the focus of attention by politicians and academics (see Chapter 2).

The women interviewed had been lone parents for around two years or more at the time of their interview. Some women had spent a long period as lone parents - four, six, eight and even twelve years - and had thus had considerable time to reflect on their experience of marriage, the ending of a marriage, and lone parenthood. The ages of those interviewed ranged from late twenties to early forties with one, two or three children actually at home, ranging in age from twenty-one months to seventeen years. Further information, in the form of brief biographies of those interviewed, can be found in Appendix A of the thesis. The majority of those interviewed were either totally or partially dependent on Income Support, and were therefore living on a low income.

Contacting those interviewed was done primarily through the network of support groups for lone parents that exists in Sheffield, and in total, twenty-five women were contacted, with twenty actually being interviewed (a few of the women did not attend the kind of group mentioned). All of those referred to have of course had their names changed in order to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. I also attended the meetings of one of these groups for three months, both participating and observing, thus adding another source of information to the research, although it must be stressed that the interview material constitutes the primary source of information. In addition, I had one or two other contacts with the central organization in Sheffield, to which such groups are affiliated, and with another two of the groups.

The basic orientation of the research was woman-centred, by which I mean that I have been concerned throughout the fieldwork, analysis of material and writing-up to allow the respondents' own views to be represented, and to contribute to the development of any insights into the experience of lone parenthood for women. (More insight into the methodological approach can be found in Chapter 3.)

All of those interviewed were asked about their past marriage (or marriages in one case), their experiences as a lone parent, and their hopes for the future, as inevitably we are all to some extent shaped by our pasts, and perceive our futures from where we are in the present. This temporal framework has been utilized in the presentation of the findings in the hope that it does provide a more biographical insight into women's lives, counteracting the static imaging that seems to be entailed in the selective presentation of interview excerpts, according to the researcher's choice topics or concepts. However, this outline of past, present and future, is inevitably based on generalization as a more detailed analysis of each respondent's life, would lead to a very lengthy piece of work, which would have more to say about each individual than about the shared situation in which most women who are lone parents find themselves. Whilst each individual's personal history may be unique, it is still possible to make some generalizations based on a continuity of responses between women, and indeed many of the findings presented here echo the results from other recent studies in this area (Arendell, 1986; Bradshaw & Millar, 1990).

At the time of entering the doctoral programme the terms 'one-parent families' or 'single parents' were commonly used to describe such families or individuals. It has been recognized by other writers that it is difficult to find a term which adequately reflects the diversity of such households (Millar, 1989, Crow & Hardey 1990). At the point of writing up the thesis, however, the term 'lone parent' has become the preferred term amongst academics and policy-makers interested in this area, as for example in the recent survey of lone parent families in the UK (Bradshaw and Millar, 1990), and a recent text on lone parents (Hardey & Crow, 1991). This is an attempt to use a term which can be used to refer to all lone parents whether never-married, divorced, separated or widowed. (The term 'single-parent' for example, does imply that an individual has not been married.) In accord with the dominant convention, the term 'lone parent' has therefore been adopted in the later stages of writing up the research. However, the term does have very emotive connotations,

primarily to do with its association with loneliness, a topic which is discussed in Chapter 8.

The actual fieldwork, however, was conducted using the terms 'single-parents' or 'one-parent families', and these were the words actually used within groups, by the central organization in Sheffield, and by the women themselves. Accordingly, where interviews are quoted directly, if women have used these terms to describe themselves, or others in a similar situation, these have not been edited out, but left in. Whilst accepting the need to find less confusing term for individuals heading one-parent families, those with the power over academic and political discourses should not ignore the words or terminology of those they speak for. Assigning a label to these families has proved problematic in the past and lone parent is at least an improvement on 'fatherless families' (Marsden, 1973), although as the terminology has changed in the past, there is no guarantee it will not change again in the future.

As already stated the subjects of the research were lone parents, and on commencing the fieldwork it was perhaps naively assumed that it would be easy to identify lone parents as fitting the criteria laid out, which was that the women would have been lone parents for a period of around two years or more. The definition of a one-parent family used by the Department of Health and Social Security is still that set out earlier (Finer, 1974). This report defined such a family as 'a mother or a father living without a spouse (and not cohabiting) with his or her never-married dependent child or children aged either under 16, or from 16 to (under) 19 and undertaking full-time education'. As was discovered, however, it can be difficult to assess whether or not someone is in fact a lone parent.

The problem of defining the subject being studied is explored in Chapter 1; the main intention of this chapter being to show that women's lives are complex and may in fact defy any attempt at objective definitions based on the length of time they have spent alone with their children. Women in fact move in and out of relationships, which may or may not be defined as 'living-together' by the women involved, and crucially, even if a woman does have a man

in her life, this does not mean that he has taken on the role of father to her children. In addition, it is assumed that within marriage parents will be actively parenting together, but this chapter highlights how sometimes a women can feel like a lone parent when they are still married. According to any official criteria they would clearly not be classified as lone parents, but their actual experiences of parenting are at odds with this assessment.

As has been highlighted in feminist analyses of social policy (Wilson, 1977; Dale and Foster, 1986; Pascal, 1986; Showstack Sason, 1987), many women depend on the state, but the state also depends on women, as workers, and as carers, both of the elderly, and in this case, of the young. At the outset of the research it was intended that one of the main themes of the thesis would be the nature of these women's dependency on the state, on men within marriage, and on their families. During the process of meeting women, of interviewing them, and of analysis of the interview transcripts, it became apparent that what was under discussion was not necessarily straightforward dependency, but relationships of interdependency, which exist between women and the state, between women and men, and between women and their families.

Whilst the term 'dependency' is used frequently in social policy discussions, there is little agreement about the exact meaning of the term (Walker, 1982, p. 115). Chapter 2 considers what dependency actually means, and in particular outlines some of the ways in which the term has been used politically in relation to the welfare state, and then goes on to consider feminist analyses which in general stress the interdependency between the state and women. The suggestion is made that dependency on the state need not necessarily be a negative thing, but could provide women (and other claimants) with the opportunity to improve their futures, if benefits were not set at such a low level, that all claimants' energy was channelled into managing to survive.

The methodological approach to the thesis is outlined in Chapter 3, which includes reasons for choosing to adopt a qualitative approach, and outlines some ideas inherent in the notion of a adopting a feminist methodology. This material is related directly

to the use of interviewing as the main research method of the fieldwork, and in particular the question of power in the interview situation is considered. Part of the chapter also includes an account of the initial stages of the fieldwork, including material drawn directly from fieldnotes, relating to attendance at the support group for lone parents. An account is also given of the actual gathering and analysis of the interview material, and the general organizing principles underlying the conduct of the research. The point is also made that the interview transcripts are drawn on extensively throughout the thesis, and in many cases form the basis of a chapter.

Chapter 4, focuses on women's accounts of their marriages, which although retrospective accounts, are nonetheless valuable in themselves, as we are all constantly engaged in making sense of the past, by our present knowledge, and later experiences. One of the issues which was covered in the interviews was that of money, and a brief outline of the way economic resources within the household were managed and controlled is outlined. In addition as women were asked why they thought their marriages ended, some of the comments they made are also included. This information is relevant to how women feel about their experiences of lone parenthood, which is assessed in relation to their experiences of marriage.

The following two chapters cover women's views on living on a limited income (Chapter 5), and on the difficulties of returning to work, when there are dependent children to care for (Chapter 6). In both these chapters women's accounts are used extensively. These chapters are concerned primarily with women who are dependent on the state, either wholly or partially (for those whose incomes are also made up from part-time work and/or maintenance.) However, the views of two other women who are totally dependent on maintenance (the term in use at the time of the interviews) are provided, because when maintenance is set at a low level - which it generally is (Smart, 1984) - these women are still surviving on a very low income; they are also missing out on all the fringe benefits associated with state welfare, such as free school meals for their children.

One of the ways in which some women cope with lone parenthood is with the support they receive from their families. The information provided in Chapter 7 illustrates this point well. At the beginning of the fieldwork, this was not an issue of central concern, despite personal experience of this kind of support. However, having adopted a flexible approach to interviewing, allowing women to discuss things that were of significance to them, it became apparent very early on that this was an important area to cover in the thesis. This provides a good example of how respondents themselves can contribute to areas of knowledge, and how theoretical concerns can in fact arise out of the practice of research. Of course, not all women do receive help from their families, and there are a range of factors which will affect whether or not this kind of help is available, which are outlined in the chapter. These ideas should be seen as an initial exploration of the area, which ought to be examined further, particularly as whether or not this particular category of claimants of the welfare state receive additional support from their families, either financial or practical, will affect how well they cope both materially and psychologically with their changed circumstances.

One alternative source of support that most of the women interviewed had in common, was attendance at a support group for lone parents, and this is referred to in the thesis. Other alternative sources of support also exist, and in particular the role of female friends is very important. The numbers of women actually attending groups in Sheffield, represent only a very small proportion of the city's population of lone parents, and whether or not these kind of groups and organizations deserve more support and a higher profile should be of concern to both national and local policy-makers. It should be noted, however, that many of those attending long-term, do so out of a sense of loyalty, or commitment to the group, rather than expressed need.

As indicated two chapters have been devoted to the financial deprivation, and difficulties in returning to work, associated with lone parenthood. One of the other most commonly referred to negative aspects of lone parenthood is that of loneliness (Goode, 1965; Marsden, 1973), and this is explored in Chapter 8. Again, it is

suggested that this is a word which is used, without people being aware of exactly what they mean, and there is a discussion of the term, and of its conflation with being alone. Being alone is not in itself a negative experience, which can be seen from Chapter 9, which follows on and covers the best and the worst aspects of lone parenthood for women.

Whether or not remarriage offers a solution to some of the problems that are seen as being part of lone parenthood is considered in this chapter, and as is revealed, women often feel that there would be too much for them to give up. Women do in fact gain much from lone parenthood, in terms of a sense of achievement, and a growth in confidence and self-esteem, despite material deprivation, and sometimes feeling lonely. In effect, being a lone parent is not all doom and gloom, for lone mothers or their children, although admittedly it may often be a difficult experience.

Finally, the Conclusion addresses some contemporary policy issues in relation to lone parents, summarizes the findings of the research suggesting some areas where further research might be useful, and re-examines the meaning and the nature of dependency, particularly in relation to the welfare state. Here it is particularly significant that when politicians focus their attention on lone parents, it is primarily women who are under scrutiny.

This thesis then covers a number of areas in the lives of women who have been married, then separated and divorced, and who have then spent some time caring for dependent children by themselves. While parts of the thesis will provide additional material to support previous research, it is hoped that what follows will constitute at least in part an original contribution to the study of lone parents.

Whilst the difficulties experienced are highlighted, so too are the more positive aspects of lone parenthood for women, and it should become clear by the end of the thesis, that the lives of families who experience separation and/or divorce should not be seen from a totally negative perspective. All of these women, and their children have a great deal of potential to offer to society, if offered adequate and appropriate assistance, and could anticipate very positive futures if welfare practice and state policy towards lone

parent families, matched up to their hopes and their expectations for themselves and their children.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEMS OF DEFINING A LONE-PARENT

INTRODUCTION

On starting the research, the intention was to interview women who had been a lone parent, as a result of their marriage ending, for two years or more and those interviewed do fall into this category. However, during the preliminary stages of the research, when initial contacts with potential respondents were made, it became apparent that defining a lone parent was not as straightforward as had been assumed, as women's own evaluation of their circumstances did not neatly coincide with any objective criteria laid down in advance.

This chapter will outline some of the issues that were raised as a result of early contacts with women and will highlight the fact that determining the duration of lone-parenthood is not necessarily an easy task for the researcher. To this end some brief comments will be made on several issues. More detailed attention will then be paid to the question of how long it took one woman to think of herself as a lone parent, and how, on the other hand some women once they find themselves alone with their child or children report that their situation has not changed much as they felt very much like lone parents when they were married.

COMPLICATIONS

Some women may have had a reconciliation - albeit brief - with their partner, which will mean that they have not spent all of their period

of lone parenthood alone, and in addition, there are individuals who, although they may not have moved back in together, have continued to have sexual relations with an ex-partner. Women may also have had another or other relationships during this time, which involved living together for a period of time, which again forms part of the period of 'lone parenthood'. Just having a relationship with another man - not necessarily living together - may or may not affect a woman's perception of herself as a lone parent. Women who were interviewed and were involved in a relationship with a man, still stressed how independent they felt as lone parents, and how much control they had over their lives, and this was also something they wanted to continue in the future. In these kinds of situations the state's attitude towards woman and their partners may be very much at variance with what women want, or are experiencing for themselves.

It can be difficult to decide when two individuals are living together, as they may still have separate homes. For those who did have a relationship at the time of interviewing, it is difficult to assess the status of such relationships, particularly as most women were on state benefit, and have very good reasons for not disclosing the fact that they are living with someone. In addition, if someone only stays four nights a week for example, this may still not be seen as living together, and a woman may still see herself as a lone parent. In addition, it is important to note, that a man may be having a relationship with a woman, but it does not follow that he is prepared to play parent to her children, and of course, the man's perceptions of the relationship, and of what it means are also important in determining how she herself sees the relationship. The state, through the benefits system has in the past assumed that if a man lives with a woman, even if not sharing the house every night, then he must be making a financial contribution to the household, and that the woman and her children are to some extent dependent on him. However, as noted, the fact that a woman is having a relationship with a man does not mean that he is willing or able to take on this responsibility, or that she wants him to. Furthermore, some women have relationships with men who drop in and out of their lives as

they please, or for that matter, as the woman pleases, which again complicates the situation.

No women have been interviewed who have become mothers after the marriage has ended - unless already pregnant by the husband - but this is another circumstance which does arise. A married woman may have no children and then become pregnant by someone else after the marriage has ended (or during). Is she then defined as an unmarried mother - who can be seen as being of lower status than a separated/divorced mother? The one woman encountered fitting this description (but not interviewed) did not introduce herself as an unmarried mother, which is significant. (This was a woman, probably in her late thirties, or early forties, with a toddler.) Form-filling and attempting to obtain benefits, might be more complicated when the question of marital status, and paternity, arises - as the woman may still be legally married.

Some women get married more than once and therefore move in and out of lone parenthood. One of those interviewed had been married three times - widowed once - the children arising from the first marriage. There is not enough knowledge to assess how this affects an individual's perceptions of herself, and how smoothly she moves from one status to another, that is, from married to lone parent, assuming that there is a noticeable difference in circumstance between each. Of course, marriage is only the legalization of a relationship, and the same may apply to women who live with men, then by themselves with their children, and so on.

All of the foregoing complicate the process of deciding exactly who is a lone parent, and how long they have been so, and thus are of significance. The following two issues however, will be dealt with at more length, because they have been discussed in interviews with the women concerned. So firstly, one or two women interviewed, expressed the fact that they were more or less a single parent, when they were married, because of lack of support from their partners. Separation then is not a transition from a state of coupledness to singledom in a psychological sense, as it is for others, but more an explicit recognition of the fact that the relationship has finished, or that it never fulfilled the woman's expectations of what marriage

should be. On the other hand, there are women - particularly those for whom the end of the marriage was not anticipated - who may continue to think of themselves as a married woman, even though the relationship is over, and Rachel's story that follows, is particularly interesting, as she spent such a long time thinking of herself as still being part of a couple.

There may be a number of reasons for this denial of the new status of lone parent, which for many may be seen as being of less worth than being a married woman. Feeling that the former is of lower status than the latter, may have a lot to do with social attitudes towards lone mothers, which for example were built in to the benefits system at Beveridge's time, although pre-dating this period. It is apparent in our society that there has been a hierarchy of lone parenthoods, with unmarried mothers at the bottom and widows at the top, separated and divorced mothers in the middle. (Given the recent criticisms of unmarried mothers featured in the media throughout 1993 this kind of idea would still seem to be significant.) Similarly it might be stated that in the hierarchy of motherhood, the married woman is at the apex (Goode, 1965, writing of the United States, puts the widowed mother at the top.) A denial of the fact that the relationship has ended, clearly reflects a desire that it can be mended at some point in the future, and a woman may spend some time, even years, waiting for this to come about. Rachel, like other individuals affected by divorce, was totally shocked by the end of her marriage, and still loved her husband, which made accepting the end of the relationship very painful and very difficult for her. For many, it may also be the case that the end of a marriage may suggest a personal failure - real or imagined - which the individual is unwilling to accept, and in addition there are children to consider.

These two issues to be explored in more detail, indicate that the psychological/emotional aspects of acknowledging oneself as a lone parent, may be at variance with reality, and with objective and official definitions of lone parenthood. Another complication arises when separations occur but the two individuals concerned continue to exist in the same house, whilst at the same time they are no longer

married. This obviously creates difficulties. A woman, for example, will be instructed by her solicitor not to perform any wifely duties, such as for example, making a cup of tea for her husband. If she performed such an act it might indicate that the marriage had not irretrievably broken down (this constitutes grounds for divorce). Such an arrangement could lead to a great deal of tension - particularly where children are concerned, and indicates how ill-defined the boundaries between marriage and lone parenthood can be.

Whatever the reality of the circumstances of those interviewed, they were all mothers, who at some point came to identify themselves as lone parents. An individual's subjective definition of their situation may be at variance with any official or objective definition which can cause stress or conflict for the individual. With reference to the original parameters of the research these were adhered to as far as possible, but some of the issues already mentioned only came to light during the course of an interview, if for example, a woman revealed that her boyfriend had stayed the night. From the point of view of the research, if the explicit intention is to allow women's experiences and feelings to be heard, then these issues are of interest in themselves and worthy of some consideration.

These anomalies, if it is appropriate to refer to them as such, raise interesting points in terms of defining the research area, or the characteristics of those to be studied. This is not as easy as may initially be anticipated, because of the contradiction between subjective and objective versions of reality. This is why it is so important to question the criteria used in setting out objective or official guidelines used for policy decisions about the welfare state. In addition, these criteria are not as objective as we are encouraged to believe, but rest on implicit assumptions about society and individuals and the role of the state, which are determined by the particular political philosophy of the government in power (George and Wilding, 1982).

LONE PARENTHOOD WITHIN MARRIAGE?

As already mentioned, some women stated that they felt like a lone parent when still married. The following extract illustrates how Kate saw her own situation and felt herself to be a 'single parent' as she terms it while still married, this description from her being completely voluntary and unprompted. When asked how long she was married Kate proceeded to describe meeting her partner, living with him and getting married, and concluded 'it was only four years, and I felt like a single parent. I always felt like a single parent.' She was then asked if she meant when she was married and responded as follows.

I mean from when I had my child, because he just didn't want to know. I mean he was thrilled to death that we'd got a son - he wanted a son - but it was a nine day wonder and - I mean it was more than unsupportive, it was cruel really. He just didn't want to know. I was stuck at home with a baby and looking back I think I had post-natal depression, but I thought oh, this is just part of having a baby. Well, we were living right out in the middle of nowhere up on Dartmoor. I never saw anybody all day, and he was sort of finishing work and going to the pub and staggering in about eight o'clock at night and eating his meal and then going to bed, and at the weekend he was conspicuous by his absence. So I was bringing up a child on my own virtually from the start, so once I'd started the divorce, there was no great change to make. It was a great relief when he moved out of the house. We were having such horrendous rows, and there was physical violence and verbal abuse, that I just couldn't stand. I had to get a court order for him to leave the house which was most unpleasant. The divorce went on for nearly two years.

To all intents and purposes Kate saw herself as an unsupported parent, being already alone in bringing up her child, although she was still married. In this respect, getting divorced is a relief,

even though as in her case the process may be lengthy and stressful. Kate continued to describe the nature of their relationship, and one of the key features was clearly the amount of time her husband spent at the pub and the amount of alcohol he drank.

I never knew when he was coming home for a meal. He was always down the pub. He spent far too long there. I think he had a drink problem really. I thought the way he is treating me is worse than he would treat a landlady. As long as I was there with a hot meal and clean clothes and a warm house and all the rest of it, that was okay. He didn't want to do anything together as a family. By this time we had moved to somewhere a bit more civilized, which was better for me because I could walk to the shops and see more people, and get involved in things, but if it was a nice sunny afternoon in the summer, I'd say, "Oh, let's take John down to the beach." "I'm not going on the bloody beach. You take him. Oh, I can't be doing with that!" He didn't want us to spend time together at all, so I thought, what's the point of being married? There's just no point at all.

Her husband's continual absences, drinking and violent quarrelling, pushed Kate to petition for a divorce, which in fact her husband then strenuously fought against. She had no time for people who said that divorce was too easy, as her experience was to the contrary. Her husband in fact wouldn't leave the house and she was given the following advice by her solicitor

Don't do anything for him. Don't do his washing, don't cook for him. Don't do anything, because if he decides to defend the petition, he can say, well she's still behaving as a wife would. I think he thought while-ever he went on living in the house, somehow the divorce would go away. We were living completely separate lives. I mean I just wasn't speaking to him. It was horrendous.

Kate's situation was not unique and sometimes separated or separating couples do have to continue to live together in the same house, with the wife being instructed not to act as a wife (which raises the question of how men are instructed to behave in such circumstances). It is difficult under these circumstances to decide when the term 'lone parent' should be applied, as not only are the couple still legally married, but they are still living in the same house, and it would clearly be problematic for a woman trying to claim benefit for herself and child, while still having a husband at home. However, her own subjective view of the situation, as this case indicates, is likely to be that she is already a lone parent, and of course the purpose of not acting out the commonly understood role of 'wife' is to prove to the legal system that the marriage has indeed ended.

This was clearly a traumatic time for Kate, and of course, for her son. Eventually she had to go to court to get an Disting Order to get him to leave the matrimonial home, instructing him to be out of the house by midday on April 1st, and even then he did not pack until half past eleven that morning. Clearly the end of this marriage was a two-way process and her husband was very angry when faced with losing his home and blamed Kate for his lack of contact with his son, although as she described it he was never there to see him, returning from the pub when he was asleep, the only time he spent with him being Sunday morning for a few hours, before going off to the pub for his lunch time drink. As she put it 'he suddenly wanted to fight for something he'd taken no thought for before.' One of the results of divorce for men in similar circumstances may be that they only realize what it is they have had, when they are about to lose it.

For most, it will be extremely difficult to be certain about when a marriage has actually ended; the end of a marriage not being a one-off event as may be suggested by legal procedures, but normally "an attenuated process and the precise point at which a person recognizes complete dissociation from his (her) partner in life is often hard to define" (Hart, 1976 p.103). The difficulty of knowing when a marriage has ended complicates identification of self as a lone parent. On the other hand, one or two women apart from Kate,

expressed the view that they were more or less a lone parent when they were still married - and living together, because of the lack of support from their partners.

There are also individuals - particularly those for whom the end of the marriage was not anticipated - who may continue to think of themselves as married, even though the relationship is over. Nicky Hart's study (1976), based on a club for the divorced and separated suggested that many individuals may exhibit such feelings, particularly if they have been the 'passive' party in the break-up (she refers to both men and women). This study presents a relatively negative picture of what it means to be separated or divorced, which is acknowledged by the author. The passage of time may well mean that the findings are less applicable today. However, the following section will focus on one woman, who fits into this category. Whilst being the only example in the present piece of research, the story of course may not be unique. Extracts of the interview are given which in particular illustrate the three following points: - there is a certain status attached to being a married woman and mother, which brings with it security; the end of a marriage may suggest a personal failure - real or imagined, which needs to be ignored and, a denial of the fact that the relationship has ended, clearly reflects a belief that it can be mended at some point in the future, and a woman may spend some time, even years, waiting for this to come about.

THE DENIAL OF LONE PARENTHOOD

Rachel was thirty-two at the time of the interview and the mother of a girl aged, eleven, having been married at the age of nineteen. The end of the marriage came as a total shock to Rachel, who had not known that anything was the matter.

We had a good marriage. The only thing that went wrong were as he started er working all hours God sends, or so I thought. But, erm, it took me quite a few months to realize he was working all these hours and I didn't see him, but we were

getting no more money - for the hours, and then it clicked to me that, erm, he was mucking around, and that was about a week before he left. So it took me that long to realize. But other than that we-we seemed to have a good marriage. I didn't - As I say, I didn't realize there was anything wrong. There obviously was, but he didn't say. He wasn't a talker.

Throughout the interview it was obvious that Rachel had been devastated by the decision, taken by her husband, to end the marriage. Towards the end of the interview, when asked if she missed the physical side of marriage, as others do, she indicated a need for non-sexual physical contact, that is, being held and loved and went on to describe what had happened when her husband informed her he was thinking of leaving her. She insisted on being taken to her parents with her daughter, in the middle of the night, because she was so distressed. He was to return there the following day to tell her his final decision.

. . . he took me there - it was the middle of the night - he took me and Susie there, and he was coming back the next day to tell me what his decision was - not my decision - what his decision was, which I think now is ridiculous and er . . . the pain to me was excruciating. They say you don't feel anything in your heart, or anything, you know - it's all up here isn't it? But the pain was bad . . . and all I kept thinking of was - he'll come and he'll put his arms round me and that pain will go . . . and of course he didn't, you know, he came and said he was going, he'd decided that he was going (mmn). Erm . . . and that's - all I wanted to feel, was somebody's arms around me, somebody giving me a hug . . . and in the end I had to ask my Dad to do it. I said "Just- wi- you know, just put your arms around me Dad and, and give me a hug. Love me."

After the separation, Rachel continued to have frequent contact with her husband, which cannot have helped her accept the fact that the marriage was over. In fact, during the course of the interview, her

now ex-husband let himself into the house with his own key, and came in and was introduced to me. I switched the tape recorder off and discretely moved it under the settee, while Rachel made coffee for us all, seemingly totally unconcerned about his visit; he was then in the house in the background for a while. This was disconcerting for me, but for her this was perfectly normal and she was still used to him coming and going as he pleased, eight years after he had moved out. The access arrangements she outlined indicate how often he was around, and also how difficult it would have been for her to accept that the marriage was over.

Now he can come up when he wants to see her. I don't mind. It's only recently that he doesn't come up every day to see her. In the morning he'll come and see her before she goes to school. He used to come up when she was due in from school, but its slowly dropped off, and he used to see her at weekends, and that's slowly dropped off, but he was living a double life. He'd got this other woman but he also wanted this as his family and his family home, and carry on coming and going as he pleased which eventually I got fed up with.

Ironically, here is a man who saw more of his daughter when the marriage had ended, than Kate's husband did of his son, when they were still married. When highlighting how difficult it was for Rachel to accept that her marriage was over, the daily contact she still had with her husband was an important factor, and the last remarks about the situation, and about what she felt he wanted are very telling. It is also significant that her change in attitude towards him did coincide with a decrease in the amount of time he spent in the 'family home', although it is unclear which change occurred first. Even though she does chart a change of attitude in her interview, which is indicated in the following extract, the fact that he could still come and go as he wished might suggest that she had not yet totally accepted the situation.

I just used to take it. I think - I mean at first I felt he was coming back . . . and erm . . . I tried to carry on as it it was - we were still a family - that everything would be all right. I'd try - try to involve him with everything. And, er it's only . . . probably two years since I've decided - I no longer wanted him. This was not for me.

At this time Rachel then began to realize the reality of her situation.

Time was passing by and where was I? I was still stuck in the same position, the same place. Stuck on my own without any friends. And, this house to me was like a prison. That's all I did. This house. I didn't do anything else. And I'd had enough.

Throughout this long period of not accepting that the marriage was over, which amounted to about six years, Rachel was lucky in having supportive family and friends, who allowed her to come to her own conclusion about the relationship.

My family and one or two close friends which understood me, or probably didn't understand me but sat there and said "Right you carry on", and listened to me when I'd got the problems, and just let me carry on - whereas they must've been thinking "She's stupid. She's wasting her life away. She's sitting here waiting for something and doing things for him and nothing's going to come of it." Er, but obviously I had to know myself. There's-there's no point in somebody telling you some- to do something and you going ahead and regretting it for the rest of your life.

In fact, Rachel had initiated divorce proceedings straight after her husband had left but panicked when she got the decree nisi.

I mean straight away I started divorce proceedings, and then I got the decree nisi and I panicked like hell. I thought, I don't want this. I don't want to be divorced. I'm married. I want to stay married. So I cancelled everything. It-it really panicked me - the thought of all that I had to do was sign a bit of paper and it was all over and done with. I know you sign a bit of paper to get married, but it just - I didn't want that. I still felt that I was secure; I was a married woman. I had a husband. And I felt - it was as if I felt safe. It's only this year that I've got divorced, after eight years.

She cancelled the divorce proceedings at that point and waited, and because she was still officially married, she felt, as she put it, 'secure' and 'safe'. Apart from the idea of there being a certain status ascribed to being married, rather than divorced, and the fact that Rachel would have had to negotiate her way towards a new role in society, one other factor that may have affected her refusal to accept the ending of her marriage, may have been to do with being uncomfortable about being a 'single' woman again. Other respondents have mentioned problems associated with engaging in new relationships, or trying to establish a new social life. By remaining, as she felt, married, Rachel did not have to deal with any of this problems.

Throughout this period Rachel described her feelings towards her husband as contradictory - sometimes hating him, and sometimes not, but all the while being continuously hurt by him.

There were times when I hated him, but, I don't know - it's-it's ridiculous really. I mean I hated him, and then, not long after I didn't hate him any more. And each time he'd knock me down and each time it'd hurt a bit more, and you know, and then I'd - it just drove me round the bend. As I say my family and one or two friends that I have had over they years - they obviously think I'm crazy, but there's no use in doing things until you decide. You've got to know yourself.

But as far as she was concerned, if you cared about someone, you didn't give in easily, and because she felt that way, she was prepared to go on trying, and waiting.

I know one or two people, that've just got up and thought "right, he's done that, I'm divorcing him. I've finished!"; but I maintain that if you feel so much about a person, you do not give in so easily. You marry someone because you love them, you want to live the rest of your life with them, so you don't just turn round and say "Okay, Finished! It doesn't matter anymore", because I felt it did, so I was prepared to try and make things work.

From what she said, it was evident that Rachel had been very attached to her husband, and had found it extremely difficult to let go of the marriage. What she said also illustrates the fact that divorce is not an easy process to go through emotionally, and that some individuals will be more deeply affected than others.

Throughout this long period, Rachel also gave her husband financial support - even though she was on state benefit, and he was working and lived with a partner who also worked. This is yet further evidence of her attachment to him. When asked if he had given her any financial support throughout all this period of time, she replied as follows.

I think it's probably swings and roundabouts in that respect, because I've helped out on an awful lot of occasions when he's been - when he hasn't had any money. I mean I couldn't afford to do it, but I have done, because I couldn't bear to think of him suffering or, you know, not having anything, or - and yet I sit back and I think, the times he has known I haven't had any money at all, or any food in the house for the weekend, and it's not meant a thing to him, and yet I was there helping him. He wanted some petrol for the van to get to work, or you know - and he was living all the time with somebody else who works, but it

never actually hit me. I just thought, "He needs help. I've got to help."

This was clearly a very one-sided relationship, and it is impossible not to feel that Rachel was being used, and to feel some sadness at her plight. It was ironic to discover a woman, struggling to cope on state benefit, who was also on occasion assisting her husband financially, despite the fact that he worked, and had a working partner. Clearly the emotional ties that bind people together during a marriage can be very difficult to break, even when the marriage is supposedly at an end.

However, at the time of the interview her outlook on life had changed somewhat and she was very positive about lone parenthood, and if she had not totally come to terms with the end of her marriage, she had at least found some way to cope with it. When interviewed, Rachel had spent eight years alone with her child, but when asked how long she had actually thought of herself a single parent, she replied as follows.

I don't know. Sometimes I did, and sometimes I didn't. I mean it was . . . it's only two years, probably a bit longer, since I stopped wearing my wedding ring. It just - I just - that's it . . . I don't know why . . . erm, I didn't have an awful lot of confidence, but what bit I had was knocked completely out of me when he did go, and all of a sudden I was no good as a wife . . . no good as . . . housekeeper. I just felt I was no good at anything. So - I don't know . . . I-I I still leant on him. I still thought, while ever he's there - so in one respect, yes, I was married, and in another respect, no I wasn't because I had to manage on my own.

It was in fact only during the previous two years that Rachel had started to go out, attending a support group for lone parents, socializing, and even entering into a new relationship. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that for some women the ending of a marriage can be very difficult to come to terms with.

CONCLUSION

It is not easy to arrive at objective criteria for defining the research subject which are satisfactory, when these criteria are constantly challenged by the respondents own subjective accounts of their experiences. Policy-makers make certain assumptions about lone parents, which do not always reflect everyday life. Clearly more sociological research needs to be done into the ending of relationships, and individuals' own perceptions of the passage into lone parenthood. Lone parents on the whole deserve a great deal more understanding, and some acknowledgement of the fact that for those whose marriages have ended, it may take some time to come to terms with these events, which in some cases may not have been sought, but may have been actively resisted. Alternatively, Kate's comments on marriage highlight the lack of support that many women encounter within marriage, which from a woman's point of view can be a social institution which leaves a lot to be desired. Having considered some problems in relation to applying objective definitions to the human subjects of research, the following chapter will examine theoretical issues which are of central importance in understanding and assessing the experiences of women as lone parents.

CHAPTER 2

D E P E N D E N C Y

INTRODUCTION

Dependency is an ambiguous word with multiple meanings
Dependency can refer to an actual state of being, whether physical or psychological; to an attitude and a self-evaluation; to a method of coping and adapting; to a description of relationship among people; to a mode of living, whether economic, sociological, or psychological; and more. (Gaylin 1978)

One of the central concerns of the research has been to look at the application of the concept of dependency to women. It is important to bear in mind that the word does have different meanings and associations in different contexts, and of course according to who is actually using the term. In the course of the thesis a number of different contexts will be considered. These will be women's relationships with men, their families and other support systems, and with the welfare state. Different kinds of dependency are thus involved - physical, social, sexual and financial. A brief, dictionary based, definition of dependency will be helpful at this stage. Dependency refers to a situation or a relationship where one individual or individuals come to depend on another individual or agency for something which they cannot provide for themselves, and which they cannot do without.

Suggesting that someone cannot do without something implies that a relationship based on dependency is a very negative one, yet this is not always true, as relationships between people in particular

tend to be based on interdependence and have something to offer to the two parties concerned. For example, in the section on women's dependence on their families for support as lone parents, the dependence women refer to forms part of their relationship with parents who still care for them and wish to help them. Parents give support, their daughters (and their children) receive it, and in the process a close family relationship is being maintained by both parties, and may be mutually beneficial in many ways, both concrete and emotional.

The focus in this chapter will, however, be on women's dependence on the state and on the very negative way in which this is often perceived. By presenting differing views on the subject - from a critique of dependency, from a feminist analysis of the welfare state, and from women's own views presented throughout the thesis, it will be suggested that we need to re-evaluate what we mean by the term 'welfare dependency', and as importantly its implications for modern society.

DEPENDENCY AND THE WELFARE STATE

It may be constructive to differentiate between individuals who are 'intrinsically dependent', that is physically or emotionally handicapped etc., and the 'extrinsically dependent' those individuals who 'have the intrinsic capacity for mature and autonomous functioning, but because of social or economic roles are in positions where they are incapable of supporting themselves at the most fundamental level.' (Gaylin, 1978, pp. 29-30) For a sociologist, or social policy analyst the latter would include categories of people such as the elderly, the poor and lone parents. It may be that the use of this term should be circumscribed as 'it is an indignity for an adult who has no intrinsic needs for care and maintenance to be reduced to the level of a child - with all the concomitant humiliations - because of a social system that deprives him [her] of the rites of passage into maturity' (Gaylin, 1978, p.30). What is significant is that certain groups within society such as the elderly

or lone parents suffer the consequences of structured dependency (Walker, 1980), that is, it is the way our society is organized which results in these individuals being economically dependent, and it is women who figure prominently in both such groups (Land, 1989). Certainly the use of the word 'dependency' has very negative connotations as already indicated, and suggests incapacity, and humiliation for those who are dependent. This is ironic in view of the fact that 'all of us, after all, inevitably spend our lives evolving from an initial to a final stage of dependency' (Gaylin, 1978, p.35).

The term is, however, used by policy-makers and analysts - increasingly so in the past few years when there has been mounting concern about the costs and benefits of the welfare state. Reconsideration of the term therefore seems appropriate, in the expectation that a more detailed analysis of the term, its application, and implications for those labelled as 'welfare dependants' could lead to a more positive or at least, a more balanced view of welfare dependency, and any other relationships of dependency in which individuals find themselves. While this work is about a specific group in society, the majority of whom are economically dependent on the state to some degree, the ideas expressed are relevant to other groups in society, such as the elderly.

Unfortunately, when used in accounts of the modern welfare state, particularly by right wing politicians and policy advisers, dependency tends to be used in a very negative sense implying something which is harmful to users, to the state, and to the national interest. What lies behind these arguments are ideological concerns about the welfare state, what it should provide for whom, and most importantly, how much should be spent by the state on the provision of welfare. To fuel concern about those dependent on the welfare state much is made of the idea of a 'culture of dependency'. The assumption is that anyone dependent on the state for any length of time will become used to this dependence and find it preferable to any other way of life, and if they have children these will be brought up accustomed to this kind of dependence and will do little

or nothing to become self-sufficient. The kind of arguments put forward in relation to the 'culture of dependency' are in many ways similar to those used in the sixties and seventies about the 'culture of poverty' (Lewis, 1961), and the 'transmission of cultural deprivation' thesis (Joseph, 1972). Significantly, the subjects of the more recent debate around welfare dependency are also the poorest in society.

One widely publicized expression of this position was a speech given by John Moore, then Secretary of State for social Services to a Conservative Political Centre conference in 1987 on the future of the Welfare State (Moore, 1987). The speech was made at a time when the Conservative government was in the process of implementing changes to the social security system. Part of the process of change was, as Moore puts it the necessity to change the ideological climate surrounding the welfare state. Historically the welfare state had evolved to such an extent that it had taken control over people's lives by encouraging dependency on the state. For the Conservatives this dependence 'decreases human happiness and reduces human freedom' and individuals should be encouraged to be independent 'to use their talents to take care of themselves and their families, and to achieve things on their own'. The state had actually encouraged this dependence for more than a quarter of a century by categorizing people into groups and assigning them labels 'that enshrined their dependent status' such as 'unemployed', 'single-parents' and 'handicapped'. In this way their confidence in their ability to support themselves was undermined and 'they were taught to think only government action could affect their lives'.

Moore writes of the 'sullen apathy of dependence' and indeed most people living on a minimal income for an extended period of time are bound to become depressed and even hopeless about their futures. As he suggests people do need to have faith in their abilities, but they also need more than this. All of those in receipt of state benefit need the appropriate support in order to enable them to become financially independent. This includes educational and retraining opportunities and adequate childcare facilities for those with dependent children, together with the appropriate job opportunities

so that people can support themselves, and where applicable, their children. A recent report for the DSS on lone parents draws similar conclusions (Bradshaw & Millar 1990).

In the meantime it is questionable whether or not forcing someone to live on a very basic income does in fact aid them in the long term. Certainly this kind of dependence on the state does produce apathy, and state benefits are deliberately held at a level which makes them less attractive than earning money at work. However, it is this very fact which may depress and alienate people to such an extent that they have no will to do anything about their situation, because they are expending so much mental energy on worrying about their dire financial circumstances. Increasing benefits to a level where people have more time and energy to focus on developing their future potential might in the long-term have the very effect which the right wing so desires. Moore states that -

A spirit of dependency saps the vitality of a society; if individuals are made to believe they are powerless they tend to give up trying and actually become powerless

He may well be right in his prognosis. However, it is not the Welfare State in itself which produces this feeling of powerlessness, but the use of the benefits system as a means of indicating that certain individuals and groups are to blame for their circumstances, and will be penalized for this by making their lives as hard as possible, together with the structural inequalities which persist in British society.

Right-wing politicians are not the only critics of welfare dependency in modern society which, it is suggested, has become so endemic as to warrant description as a disease (Segalman and Marsland, 1989). These authors are also critical of dependence on the welfare state, particularly where female-headed lone parent households are concerned, and believe that dependency on the state is transmitted from one generation to the next - 'The life of welfare dependency is institutionalized and normalized and the fractured family re-creates new generations of children incapable of

disciplined and independent lives' (Segalman & Marsland, 1989, p.ix). As Taylor-Gooby and Dean note (1992, p.23), 'dependency of single parents on state welfare is seen as pathological by those who defend the 'dependency culture' thesis'.

Although supposedly writing about the welfare state in the United States, Britain and Scandinavia, most of Segleman and Marsland's (1989) information seems to be drawn from the United States, and then extrapolated to Britain. They reproduce from other writers (Sheehan, 1976; Sharff, 1986 for example) the characteristics of standard welfare families, which happen to be female-headed and from urban ghettos. Ostensibly a critique on the welfare state Segalman and Marsland have produced an entire sub-text which is clearly an assault on the lone parent family with a woman at the head. Sociologically they also express a functionalist perspective on the family. The family unit's purpose is to socialize children and inculcate them with the appropriate values of self-discipline and respect for authority in society, which will assist in the reproduction of an adequately trained workforce to meet the needs of employers in the twentieth century.

Segalman and Marsland's views on the lone parent family are clearly expressed when they write that whilst 'avoiding unnecessary stigma is one thing; providing positive incentives for the proliferation of incomplete and inadequate families is another,' (Segalman & Marsland, 1989, p.123) Finally they assert that the nuclear family is not a repressive institution, as feminists of course would have us believe, but is 'the indispensable seedbed of genuine freedom' (Segalman & Marsland, 1989, p.124). This may have rather a hollow ring for many women and children, and for men too who may recognize that not every nuclear family is wonderful, whilst not all lone parent households are abysmal.

These authors, like Moore, are also strong on changing the climate of opinion about the welfare state. Their call for the transformation of British and American society reads like a manifesto, and they clearly share some of the political views of the New Right with its emphasis on individuality and freedom at the expense of all else. (Segalman & Marsland, 1989, p.134)

Related to the concept of dependency is another set of ideas which has developed around poverty, which is that there is in existence an 'underclass'. Charles Murray (1990), an American originally writing about the United States has more recently turned his attention to Britain, identifying what he perceives as a growing 'underclass' problem. Murray's thesis connects different themes, but one of the central ideas is the problematic nature of the growth in lone parent families. He is specifically attacking unmarried mothers, but this is yet another example of the kind of criticism that has been levied against lone parents. Using such labels effectively brands particular individuals or groups in society, blaming them for any particular problems they may encounter (or are said to create.) 'Financial dependency on the state . . . is translated into a problem of behavioural dependency' (Taylor-Gooby & Dean, 1992, p.45).

Implicit in these kind of criticisms of welfare dependency is the notion that the individual is to blame for their situation, and that therefore, responsibility lies with the individual to do something about it. With regard to women's dependence on the state, however, a summary of some of the ideas underpinning a feminist analysis of social policy (Dale & Foster, 1986; Pascal, 1986; Showstack Sassoon, 1987), and indeed of our legal system (Smart, 1985), would indicate that this is not absolutely true and that in our society, women are still disadvantaged, and are still more likely to become dependent on the welfare state when marriages end.

FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL POLICY

From a feminist perspective, women's dependence on the state arise out of traditional and stereotypical views of women's role in society. When policies have been devised for the 'family', it is the nuclear family that those involved in the policy-making process have in mind, with a male breadwinner and a woman at home to care for dependants (Gittins, 1985). Feminist analysis of social policy has played an important point in highlighting the nature of women's

dependence on the state, and the state's dependence on women - a fact for too long overlooked by male social policy writers. From the feminist perspective it is these traditional ideas about women's place in society that leaves them, at time of need, dependent on the state. The state has been instrumental in 'reinforcing women's position in the home because it helps alleviate various political, administrative and fiscal problems confronting the state' (Dale & Foster, 1986, p. 60). It has been useful to emphasize women's role as carers so that the state has not had to provide and pay for childcare, or care of elderly dependants.

In addition the time and energy that women have had to devote to these responsibilities, as well as to taking on paid work to supplement the 'family' income has meant that women have not been able to become as active in the political arena, locally or nationally and the policy-making process is therefore still dominated by men. 'Policy-making thus becomes a process of conflict and accommodation between dominant and subordinate men, a process from which women are largely excluded', with the result that social policies have been based 'on the assumption that women perform unpaid labour in the home and are economically dependent on men' (Dale & Foster, 1986, p.61). Of course, even as this is being written we are subject to social change and it would be more appropriate to describe the current attitude towards women's role in society as full of conflict. Even within the Conservative party, bastion of the family, there is disagreement over whether or not women with young children should go out to work. Nevertheless traditional ideas about women's roles and responsibilities still figure prominently in state policies.

Pascal (1986, p.3) also argues that the welfare state has been important in 'supporting relations of dependency within families; as putting women into caring roles'. Social policy writers such as Titmuss are criticized for also being influenced by functionalist thinking on the family and on concentrating on the form of the family, rather than the content so that 'the breadwinner, dependent model of family life, connected to the economy through a family wage is assumed to be functional to industrial society, and to be the

natural object of support by social policies' (Pascal, 1986, p.12). This is again close to Marsland and Segalman's (1989) view of the one parent family as somehow abnormal, or inadequately functioning. By lending support to this type of family 'social policy has played a part in controlling women, keeping them in the private sphere and out of public life' (Pascal, 1986), p.25).

Pascal's argument, however, is not simplistic, and whilst critical of the state for perpetuating women's dependence on men, she also acknowledges that there have been benefits to women from the welfare state, both in providing an income to those without a man to support them, and also in providing jobs for the many women who work in the public sector. Even so, Pascal still states that the welfare state has led to 'an erosion of women's power' (Pascal, 1986, p.32). However, it is not the welfare state in itself that has led to an erosion of women's power, but the actual structure of our society which still creates a relationship of economic dependency between most men and women on marriage, of particular significance for those women who find themselves lone mothers after divorce. Of course the welfare state is a major part of that structure, but is only a part of it, and not the sole cause. (The legal system is another part of the state which contributes to this inequality, but again is not the sole cause (see Smart, 1984).)

As already mentioned, women's dependence as lone parents on the state does lead to a growth in feelings of self-confidence and independence, which in turn gives women more power to do something about their lives - or at least to live their lives the way they want. Whilst women do not like being dependent on the state, it is seen as a 'necessary evil', and one they would like to do without. However, as is suggested in this thesis (Chapter 6), and in other research, such as that by Joan Brown (1989), lone mothers hoping to achieve financial independence by entering paid employment will encounter problems. As suggested here, this does relate directly to their status as mothers, and to the fact that caring for children does leave women vulnerable in economic terms. Women's dependence on either men or the state, is thus socially constructed.

Much as women dislike being dependent on the state, it is preferable to being dependent on a man because if they are in direct receipt of an income at least they have some degree of control over their lives (Millar, 1987; Graham, 1987). However, it is also a fact that 'to live without a male wage is to be at high risk of poverty' whilst living with one is to be dependent, upon a man' (Pascal, 1986, p.44). She herself writes later that 'some women do find in social security, however, painfully, an independent income which enlarges choice about relationships with men' (Pascal, 1986, p.206), so dependence on the state does represent an alternative, albeit a limited one in terms of income and opportunities. This then is the choice which women who are mothers have to face as for women 'motherhood is central, both in the general social concept of woman, and in most women's experience. It casts women into marginal positions in public life (Pascal, 1986, p.97).

WOMEN AND THE LAW

The feminist analysis presented so far has focussed on how traditional notions of what a family is and how it ought to be have contributed to women's continuing subordinate position in society. The concern of this thesis is with lone parents in particular, and it is when marriages end that much of what has been private becomes exposed to the public scrutiny of our legal system. As Smart (1984, p.xii) writes our legal system is only apparently neutral, whilst in fact legitimizing preconditions which help to create an unequal power structure, so that the law is 'implicated in the reproduction of women as subordinates to men and as the primary carers of children'. These ideas only function to a limited extent if women remain married to men who support them financially, but the very fact of their financial dependency makes women extremely vulnerable when a marriage ends. It may be alright for a woman to expect this kind of support during marriage, but in the enlightened eighties/nineties women are expected to become self-sufficient as rapidly as possible (this idea can be seen in practice in the 1984 Matrimonial and Family

Proceedings Act), regardless of the fact that they may have little or no work experience, and limited prospects of a good income. In effect this seeks to remove 'the notion of dependency when marriage ends but does so leaving women continuing to suffer the consequences of their dependency within marriage' (Millar, 1987, p.175).

Ironically it is social change, and pressure from women themselves which have encouraged the law to look upon women as potentially independent and autonomous, even as mothers. However, this change in attitude has taken place without a concomitant change in the actual social world that we inhabit. Whilst women may be subject to pressure to go out and work as well as care for their children, this may in fact be very difficult to accomplish. Thus, 'women are still constrained by their commitment to their families, and are therefore prevented from achieving equality in the labour market' (Cohen, 1987, p.8). Even more ironic for women is the fact that -

there is a continuity from marriage to divorce because the sexual division of labour which is celebrated as natural and desirable during marriage is precisely the basis of the main conflict on divorce (Smart, 1984, p.191).

The conflict referred to here is the decision that lawyers and courts make about what maintenance is to be paid to an ex-wife and any dependants. As already stated a man is expected to support his wife within marriage, but suddenly when the marriage ends, she is expected to support herself.

Whilst the idea of women achieving economic independence after divorce, is a very attractive one to both men and women, 'there is no sign that a proper state scheme to support women without an independent source of income is being planned to replace an admittedly inadequate system of private maintenance' (Smart, 1984, p.204), so whilst the legal system may be keen to reduce a man's liability on divorce, there is no evidence of anything to counterbalance this loss of financial support for women. The result is that 'the ideology of dependency essentially legitimates women's poverty, whether that

poverty is earned through low paid employment, or assigned by subsistence level benefits' (Glendinning & Millar, 1987, p.25), or as often happens in the case of divorce, by the legal system.

We have seen signs at the end of the eighties that the state will be taking firmer steps to ensure that more men pay maintenance, and at higher levels (Social Security Committee, Report in Changes in Maintenance Arrangements, June 1991), with a special agency (Child Support Agency) to follow through maintenance claims for those claiming benefits. The aim, however, is to reduce the state's financial expenditure on lone parents, rather than to improve the financial situation of lone parent families. Increases in levels of maintenance paid may be of benefit to working women, but will be deducted from those on Income Support - the worst off. Again, we return to the fact that it is motherhood which results in economic dependency for most women, and in poverty for those in receipt of state benefit, or otherwise on low incomes.

The role of family law then, as long as it presupposes a particular family form, that is the nuclear family, is to perpetuate

an inadequate system of private economic support for women and children whilst constituting an obstacle to the development of a more adequate public system of support and benefit (Smart, 1984, p.230

The law is thus 'implicated in the poverty of women' ((Smart, 1984, p.23); the point here being that in Smart's research she discovered that the courts tended to set maintenance at a very low level, so that where it was paid it was insufficient to support an ex-wife and children. The logic behind this is that there is a state system to support lone parents. Mothers, however, are trapped by poverty, as state benefit provides only a very basic income, and as already mentioned any maintenance is deducted from benefit. Therefore, because they care for dependants, women are trapped in poverty.

Poverty and caring are for many women, two sides of the same coin. Caring is what they do; poverty describes the economic circumstances in which they do it (Graham, 1987, p.230).

A cynical reading of these kinds of policies, legal or social, in relation to women, is that women are being punished or at the very least penalized for not having a man on whom they can depend financially. At the same time their children are also affected. In recent years we have also witnessed men becoming more vociferous about their rights post-divorce, and their resentment at having to pay maintenance. A collusion between the legal system and men with power in society, even if not fully worked out has resulted in women bearing 'the full adverse consequences of their economic dependence on men - even though it is men who continue to accrue the benefits of this dependence' (Smart, 1984, p.242). In other words, both men and the state continue to benefit from the exploitation of women within marriage, yet when a marriage ends it is women who continue to suffer the financial repercussions.

WOMEN'S DEPENDENCE ON THE WELFARE STATE - AN ALTERNATIVE POINT OF VIEW

The notion of dependence on the welfare state discussed earlier in the chapter is essentially a negative one. An alternative point of view which has arisen during the research presented here, reveals that women interviewed who are financially dependent on the state do in fact express feelings of independence, and satisfaction at having gained more control over their lives, since their marriages have ended. In addition when asked about their futures, most women do not see themselves as continuing on state benefit, and many are actively engaged in ways of coming off it at some point, for example through education, retraining, or returning to work. There is a very real sense in which their period of dependence on the welfare state is actually empowering these women to do something about their futures,

by removing the need for economic dependence on men and allowing them to recognize that they do have the ability to become independent.

It is certainly not an original idea to suggest that in the long-term individuals might be better off with increased levels of benefit, and even more state services to support them. An account of women's dependency on the welfare state in Denmark (Borchorst & Siim, 1988, p.143) describes a similar situation in these countries as exists in Britain and the United States. The breakdown of the traditional nuclear family with male breadwinner, and the increase in divorce has resulted in a change in family patterns, with a resultant increase in more lone parent families. Trying to support a family financially, and thereby being responsible for both unpaid and paid work in the family makes life very difficult for single mothers, the majority of whom come to depend on the state for support.

Denmark has been more generous with state support compared with Great Britain and lone parents receive a supplement to the universal family allowance and are eligible for special housing benefits and economic subsidy for childcare institutions. 'State support in terms of public services and benefits therefore forms an important part of their total income' (Borchorst & Siim, 1988, p.145). During the last ten years, however, the situation has deteriorated with economic crises and mass unemployment and substantial cuts in public expenditure, which have hit this group particularly hard. The same effects can also be seen in Britain and the United States.

The term the 'feminization of poverty' is often used to describe the apparent increase in poverty among women (Scott, 1984), who predominate amongst welfare claimants, but is open to dispute as women have historically always formed a large proportion of the poor (Lewis & Piachaud, 1987), even as lone parents (Millar, 1987). However, what is certain is that there are demographic and social changes, such as an increasing elderly population and changes in the divorce laws, leading to increasing numbers of women who are economically vulnerable, which account for the perceived feminization of poverty. Furthermore the reasons for women's poverty are different from men's, 'because poverty for women is related to women's socially defined responsibilities as mothers and their low

status in the sex segregated labour market' (Borchorst & Siim, 1988, p.146; Cohen, 1987; Graham, 1983).

Women who are lone parents are doubly disadvantaged because of their responsibility as mothers, and their difficulty in finding work with an adequate income, which also fits in with these responsibilities (Glendinning & Millar, 1987; Finch & Groves, 1983). In the countries referred to lone mothers are generally dependent on the state for money benefits, and other public services, such as childcare - where they exist.

The point is, however, that there is a fundamental difference between being dependent as *consumers* of public services or being dependent as *clients* on social welfare. The status as client is often associated with economic dependency, control and social stigmatization' (Borchorst & Siim, 1988, p.146).

Lone parents have clearly been under attack in recent years because they predominate amongst the clients of the welfare state. The way that Borchorst and Siim see the problems of lone parents and their dependence on the state being resolved, is similar to the views expressed in this work, and is based on their own view of the situation in Denmark and Sweden.

We argue that the higher the level of public services and the more comprehensive the universal benefits the better are the chance for women to support themselves and the less likely that they become solely dependent on the state as clients. As a consequence we find that it is wrong to associate a large welfare sector like the Danish one per se with a strong dependency on the state. From a woman's point of view it is rather the other way round: *a strong public service sector seems to be one precondition for avoiding becoming solely dependent on the state as clients.* In Denmark and Sweden women have come to rely on the state primarily as workers in the public sector and as consumers of social services, and only to a smaller degree as clients. The

opposite is true in Britain and the US where women have come to rely on the state primarily as clients (Borchorst & Siim, 1988, p.146).

If more effective help was given to lone parents in this country, in terms of a higher earnings disregard for those on Income Support, more widespread provision of affordable and appropriate childcare, and retraining for work with a salary which can support a family, then more women would cease to be clients, whilst retaining their rights as consumers of the welfare state.

CONCLUSION

To conclude then, a feminist analysis of the welfare state and of the legal system indicates that women's economic dependence on men within marriage is extremely disadvantageous to them, as if a marriage ends this dependence has serious consequences leaving women economically vulnerable, as the state at present, has no intention of providing these women with a level of income which would allow them to move above the poverty line, and enable more women to devote less energy to their finances, and more to improving their future expectations, by retraining, or returning to work. The state has proved singularly ineffective in giving positive encouragement to women to return to work, by its failure to take any responsibility for childcare, and no concerted effort to help women to return to work who wish to do so.

However, a feminist analysis of social policy needs further development in that it does not adequately explore the benefits women can experience during their dependency on the state. Overlooking the significance of this aspect of women's relationship with the state could present women in a very passive way, assuming that they lack the ability to do anything very effective about their own individual circumstances, whereas even on a low income, women do not necessarily experience their economic dependence on the state in a totally negative way, with many women having the potential to actively pursue an improvement in their circumstances. Given the appropriate

assistance and support from the state, many more women could also considerably improve their future expectations, which in the long term can only be beneficial for the society.

This chapter has concentrated on discussing some of the issues relating to women's economic dependency on the state, which is of central importance in any consideration of lone parents in Britain. The other relationships of dependency referred to - on men within marriage, and on the family, will be considered more fully in later chapters, where again it will be stressed that what in fact generally exists are relationships of interdependency between individuals, which can also be represented in a negative manner. Finally, some of the ideas outlined here will be returned to in the conclusion of the thesis, where the concept of dependency is reconsidered.

CHAPTER 3

M E T H O D O L O G Y

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will outline the fieldwork involved in conducting the research, which included both interviewing and participant observation, which was important in terms of gaining access to respondents, but has played a lesser role in the actual gathering of information about lone parents. It will also discuss some of the methodological issues involved in the practice of feminist research and the procedures involved in the analysis of the information obtained. This introductory section sets out some of the ideas involved at the beginnings of the research, which motivated and informed the actual fieldwork.

The main focus of the research lies primarily in women's conceptualization of their lives, in the meanings attached to events, the feelings experienced, and the subsequent effects on future choices in their lives. With the focus on understanding and meaning, and of examining the world through the actors' eyes in order to arrive at explanations which 'fit' with the real world, it was appropriate to make use of methods structured to elicit this kind of information. Hence the approach was qualitative, rather than quantitative in nature. Qualitative research is a term encompassing a variety of methods, but for the purposes of this research, interviews and participant observation were the particular methods chosen. As the research was concerned with getting at the perceptions of individuals and their understanding of their past

experiences, present situation and their expectations of the future, in depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method. Group interviews are an alternative method, but within a group individuals may feel intimidated or embarrassed about revealing private information about themselves, whilst very assertive or aggressive individuals may dominate the conversation, and there is also the risk that respondents may fear disapproval by other group members, and hence not reveal as much information as they might in the one-to-one interview situation. The latter provides the opportunity to collect more personal and more detailed information. Making use of two different methods is valuable in that it does allow the researcher access to more information on the subject, which expands the area of knowledge.

Deciding to follow a qualitative approach because of the particular kind of information sought does not deny the utility of quantitative information for the study of divorce. Quantitative information is useful in providing a context within which a qualitative study can be located. This type of data can provide statistics on matters which are more readily quantifiable, for example, the incidence of divorce, the number of lone parents on state benefit, the number of children in lone parent families, and so on. Such information provides a useful framework within which to situate a more specific and in depth analysis of the impact of lone parenthood, as 'qualitative research reaches parts that other techniques don't' (Walker, 1985).

FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

This section outlines some of the issues involving in attempting to conduct research within a feminist framework. One of the questions often raised in relation to feminist methodology, is: is there such a thing as a distinctive feminist method of inquiry? (Harding, 1987, Chp. 1). However, any type of method could be used by feminists, the crucial point being that the research should be

conducted within a feminist framework, or from a feminist perspective.

Whilst within feminism there are different strands of thought, for example radical feminism and socialist feminism, there are still certain basic presuppositions which form the basis of a feminist frame of reference. These can be summarized as accepting that women are oppressed in society; that the personal is political, and the validity of personal experience; and the importance of making society aware of these facts (Stanley, 1983, p.51-55). The implication of these three basic assumptions is that women's everyday experiences should be researched, and that the findings should be disseminated as widely as possible so that women, and society in general benefit from such research. Having recognized this, the question still remains as to the best means of conducting such research, and the debate concerning this issue has centred on the traditional sociological objective versus subjective debate.

Feminist researchers in general (Roberts, 1990; Stanley, 1983; Smith, 1983) conclude that it is important for female researchers to accept that research is inevitably a subjective process, as the experiences and views of the researcher can never be totally excluded from the research process. This approach, however, is not one owned exclusively by feminist researchers, as anthropologists and historians, for example, seek to use the same approach in their own research (Briggs, 1986; Lummis, 1987).

Although the debate has focused very much around the use of qualitative techniques, the same points can still be made about the use of surveys, a traditional method of inquiry in the social sciences, as even when research is quantitative, the actual gathering of information, and interpretation of data obtained, are filtered through others, and subject to their biases. There is even a case for suggesting that this kind of research is more open to alteration as the information when received for interpretation and coding is decontextualized and:-

Each answer is a fragment removed both from its setting is the organized discourse of the interview and from the life setting

of the respondent. Answers can be understood, or at least interpreted by the investigator, only by reintroducing these contexts through a variety of presuppositions and assumptions, and this is usually done implicitly and in an ad hoc fashion (Mishler, 1986, p.23).

The data generated by surveys, however, tends to be presented as objective and hence, more likely to be 'the truth', and the most appropriate means of making generalizations about people. In addition, what might be referred to as the standard approach to interviewing, has come to be based on this positivistic model, so that basic texts have in the past encouraged researchers to remain as objective, and hence as professional, as possible, and that alternative forms such as unstructured interviews have been viewed as inferior. However, some would suggest 'that the standard survey interview is itself essentially faulted and that it therefore cannot serve as the ideal methodological model against which to assess other approaches' (Mishler, 1986, p.29).

This particular position corresponds with that taken by feminist researchers, who would go further and suggest that interviewing should not be objective, and cannot avoid being a subjective process as feminists researching women cannot fail to take sides (Roberts, 1990), and that this in itself is a positive facet of doing feminist research. As important is the fact that the researcher (and this applies to men as well) cannot remove themselves from the process of doing research as:-

Our consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher (Stanley, 1983, p.157).

As this is the case, then it is important that this fact is recognized and acknowledged and that 'all research must be concerned with the experiences and consciousness of the researcher as an integral part of the research process (Stanley, 1983, p.48).

Feminists, however, are concerned not only with being reflexive researchers, but also with constructing a different kind of interview situation, which allows women the space to speak for themselves.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN A MASCULINE WORLD

Dorothy Smith writes of the academic world being defined by men in masculine terms. Although she is criticizing Sociology in particular, her remarks are also applicable to other disciplines which men have dominated in the past, and continue to dominate. Men's world of work has been traditionally separated from their private life; it being women who have provided the necessary services for them in the home, so that their own professional lives may be pursued. Women engaging in academic study have had to cope with moving between the two areas of life, suffering the consequences, and experiencing what Smith terms 'a bifurcated consciousness'.

The strains and anxieties involved in putting and holding together work sites, schedules, and modes of consciousness that were not coordinated marked the separations institutionalized in a gender division of labour. [. . .] The intellectual world spread out before me appeared, indeed I experienced it, as genderless. But its apparent lack of center was indeed centered. It was structured by its gender subtext. Interests, perspectives, relevances leaked from communities of male experience into the externalized and objectified forms of discourse (Smith, 1987, p.7).

Thus, the process of doing research itself has become yet another example of the gendered inequalities of power that exist in society.

The favoured model for the acquisition of knowledge in the social sciences has been based on the realities of male academic life; on the possibility of leaving behind the personal and developing an objective mode of conducting research. This is true even in interviews which are semi-structured. Even here it has been presumed

that there is a correct, and pre-ordained way of behaving in order to gain the best information. In other words to be as detached as possible. Logically, this viewpoint is open to a great deal of criticism, as it is not possible for us to divest ourselves of our past or our present in entering the interview situation. Even if this were true, we cannot have total control over the person we are talking, or listening to. They will constantly be aware of who we are or who we seem to be.

Feminist methodology seeks to allow women to express the realities of their everyday lives, in their own words. This process involves encouragement, and empathy, and also the ability to ask the right questions, or allow opportunities to arise for women to speak for themselves. The latter necessitates drawing on the researcher's own experiences, in bringing the personal out into the open; into the researcher's own public world which is shared with the respondent. The feminist researcher, however, faces the problem of trying to get on in the masculine world of the discipline. Thus, at the same time as being engaged in feminist research, a woman has to attempt to meet with the approval of those in authority, and to present data which fits with the predominant masculine view. Tuula Gordon in a paper presented at the BSA Conference in 1989 writes of the problem of conducting feminist research while at the same time striving to further her academic career. Not all men may seek to acquire knowledge according to a positivistic paradigm, but professionally men and women are situated differently because of the social and cultural factors at play. As Gordon writes: -

For women sociologists relations of power structured according to gender are part of the professional, scientific community that they are inside and outside of. Neither am I arguing that these relations can be discovered automatically simply by being women and sociologists and hence professionals; the discovery is located in the context of feminist theory and practice which facilitates the expression and analysis of our situation, and the search for alternative approaches in conceptual, methodological fields, and a critique of the organisational,

hierarchical practices involved in the production of science and professionalism of the scientific community.

In order for this particular piece of research to be acceptable professionally (that is, to gain a doctorate) I have been placed in the position of seeing my own status of lone parent as problematic. The fact that I shared, and continue to share experiences with the group of people that I have researched, meant that my research would be subjective, and according to the dominant mode of thought this is to be criticized, presenting a difficulty to be overcome, and could even invalidate the 'data' I would uncover.

However, this shared status has not been a problem, although it was another issue to be considered in the process of doing the research. It became clear very early on, both in attending the group, and in conducting interviews, that being a lone parent had considerable advantages, and gained me access to information which would not inevitably be available to anyone else. Empathy, as a means of eliciting information could be open to anyone - woman or man - choosing to research lone parents, but the actual experiences of being wife, mother, divorced, and lone parent are not present in every researcher's past. It was these very particular experiences which facilitated both the gathering and analysis of information. No research is unproblematic, however, and one of the things I had to ensure when doing interviews, for example, was not to let myself intrude too much, and to allow the women being interviewed, the space to speak in their own words of their own experiences. After all, this was the aim of the research - as far as this is ever possible.

When doing the fieldwork, it was not possible for me to totally separate the private from the public in my research, and there is generally a constant overlap between the two. In particular, the fact that I was a mother constrained my working activities, as much as it constrained those of the women I have talked to. This would seem to coincide very well with the quote by Gordon above, as the "organisational" and "hierarchical practices" referred to are clearly in operation both in the private and the public worlds of women.

DOING THE FIELDWORK

Introduction

This research was concerned with the experiences of lone mothers, with dependent children, who had been married, and at the time of the interviews, were either divorced or separated. It was never intended to examine the immediate aftermath of separation/divorce, but to focus on what it means to live for a period of time as a lone parent, and to ascertain the attitudes and feelings of those who find themselves in this situation, and whether or not they have remained a lone parent as a matter of choice or because circumstances have conspired to make it so. One of the initial hypotheses of the research was that women might prefer dependence on the state, and lone parenthood, to being dependent on a man within marriage.

Those interviewed had been living alone as lone parents for a minimum of around two years, with at least one dependent child, under the age of eighteen. It was anticipated that after two years most one parent families would have achieved some degree of stability in their lives and in their financial circumstances, and for most women it did appear to have taken around two years for them to come to terms with what had happened, although there were exceptions (see Chapter 1). (Additional information on those interviewed will be provided at appropriate points in the following chapters, and in Appendix A).

The fieldwork for the thesis took place between 1988 and 1990. A brief account will be given of the earlier stages of the fieldwork, as early contacts were established, and interviews arranged. One of the main problems in starting the research process is of course in gaining access to individuals who will agree to be interviewed, and I am very much indebted to Scoop Aid, the advice centre for lone parents in Sheffield, for assistance in obtaining initial contacts. At the commencement of the fieldwork, the names of five support groups for lone parents in Sheffield were obtained; women from three different groups were in fact interviewed, together with four individuals who did not attend any such group.

Of course, there may be a problem in seeking respondents via membership of groups in that these individuals might be assumed to share certain characteristics not reflected among those who do not belong to such groups. However, this particular means of contacting individuals did allow for ease of access, which is particularly important in a piece of research carried out by one person. In addition, with the advantage of now knowing something about those interviewed, about the diversity of their experiences, and in general about the congruence of their views with others interviewed for other studies, the fact that most of those interviewed did attend one of these groups does not inevitably indicate that they are unrepresentative of the larger population of lone parents in Britain (see for example, Bradshaw & Millar, 1991).

The following section will utilize some of the fieldnotes made during the research, outlining in particular, the beginnings of the research, and some of the issues which arise in carrying out participant observation. This section will be presented in the first person singular as it does consist of notes made at the time. It has, however, been subjected to some editing, for the purposes of fluency and coherence, and to avoid repetition. In addition, the names, and descriptions of individuals have been omitted to preserve anonymity.

Beginning the fieldwork

The first productive telephone call made was about Gingerbread in Sheffield - to the person whose name was given as the contact for such. This information however, turned out to be misleading and she was in fact the contact for one of the groups affiliated to Scoop Aid. (As it transpired, at the outset of the research, there was no Gingerbread group actually in operation in Sheffield.) This particular group was situated on the West side of Sheffield, and I made arrangements to attend the group at its next Wednesday evening meeting, in October 1988. It was possible for those attending to take children - although no child-care was available. I had

introduced myself to her as a lone parent, but made the decision as a researcher not to take my children with me. I felt it would be too difficult for me to appear as a 'professional' or at least a 'semi-professional' with my own children present! This initial contact represented the first successful step on the road towards conducting the fieldwork. In the early stages of fieldwork it is very easy to get disheartened. The first person I phoned in relation to doing the research was to say the least, very offputting, and not at all encouraging and it did feel good to have taken some positive step towards starting the fieldwork.

Although I had always envisaged being able to use the lone parent support groups in Sheffield as a means of gaining access to individuals whom I could interview, I had not fully worked out the nature of my involvement with, or use of the group. To start with I asked if I could go to the group in order to make contact with people who would be prepared to talk to me, but actually discovered on attending the group that first evening that it was anticipated that I would actually continue to attend the group - not just by my contact who knew from the outset that I was a lone parent, but by others also. It was also made apparent in a very explicit, and even aggressive manner by one of the women that I was only acceptable because I am a lone parent, and that if I had not been so I would have been asked to leave that first evening. Being a lone parent myself meant that members of the group assumed that I would become a group member - whether from desire or need - although everyone was fully aware from the outset that I was conducting research into lone parents, and that I was thus to some extent 'different'.

How honest to be with those being researched was a problem I encountered right from the outset, and not just with this group. By this I mean that it had always been my intention to do a piece of woman-centred research, interviewing only women who were lone parents as a result of separation/divorce. There were, however, three men attending this group with whom most of the women in the group had a history of friendship. In addition these women and others encountered at the advice centre were very sympathetic towards these men. In order not to antagonize possible respondents I found myself

taking men's names as well as women's. It was not my intention to be deceitful; it did in fact occur to me that it might at some stage - time permitting - be useful to compare the situation of men with women.

As time progressed, however, and I continued to attend the group for a while, it became clear to me that there might be problems involved in interviewing men in their own homes in the evening (as they worked during the day, unlike most of the women), and that at the very least I would feel uncomfortable doing so. This was of course based on a purely subjective evaluation of these particular men and there were clearly factors at play which led me to feel this way.

The foregoing seems to highlight two points which a woman doing research might have to bear in mind. One is that interviewing men alone and in a private place may, in some circumstances, be perceived to bear a degree of risk, and that a woman has to decide whether or not she is prepared to take that risk in the interests of her research, and this point will be referred to again in the section on interviews. In this instance as women were to be the focus of my research I did not feel it was necessary for me to interview men with whom at best I felt uncomfortable.

On Interviewing Men

It was always intended that the research would be woman-centred and focus on women's experiences of marriage, divorce and single parenthood, by interviewing female respondents. The means of gaining access to those being interviewed did, however mean that I came into contact with a few men who had been through similar experiences. This posed two possible problems the first that some of the women attending groups thought I ought to interview men, and the second, that the men themselves thought I would want to interview them.

My initial reaction to this was flexible, that is, I could see that it might be useful to interview these men to ascertain in what way their experiences differed from those of the women I interviewed.

However, given that this was a small piece of research, with a relatively small number of total interviewees, it would have been difficult to make adequate comparisons between the men and the women.

A further reason for not interviewing the men concerned arose out of my observations of them when attending the lone parents' support group, whose members I interviewed first. The men were given to making remarks of an overtly sexual nature in the group, which left me feeling distinctly uncomfortable. The women who had been attending the group for quite some time knew the men concerned, were used to their remarks, and seemed to tolerate them. In addition, one of the men concerned, made no secret of the fact that he attended two support groups in order to 'suss out the talent'. In effect, for me to interview these men who all worked (unlike the women) would have meant myself as a woman going to the house of a strange man in the evening. Although there may have been a child present in the house, in bed, I would still have felt vulnerable on interviewing these men.

As Sue Scott has indicated in her article if a woman does interview men in their own homes, she faces problems which male interviewers do not, and will have to take precautions such as letting someone else know exactly where she is and when she will be due back. Whilst in the research she refers to, no actual problems arose she does state ". . . that the whole process of interviewing, and therefore the data themselves, are coloured by gender considerations" (Scott 1984, p.70). Although, as already stated, I interviewed no men during the course of the fieldwork, this omission is as much coloured by the same gender considerations as Scott refers to. The reality of everyday life for women in our society intrudes into the research experience.

Most of the people at the group which I attended for one term, had been going for a considerable period of time, and it was a very small group and thus close-knit, though not without tensions. This meant that the other women in the group had developed a relationship with the men over some time and thus felt familiar with them, and tolerated or put up with remarks made by the men about women. I was a newcomer, an outsider, not conversant with the dynamics of the group, and actually found the comments of the men, and their at times

crude sexual innuendo offensive, and sexist. I think it would also be fair to assume that some of the remarks were made deliberately to see whether or not I would react. As it was I chose to ignore, and not to respond to such remarks. This was partly a normal reaction, that is, the way I would normally respond, but was also borne out of a wish not to jeopardize the research when it was only just beginning. In other words, I had no wish to alienate the women I wished to interview. As Smart (1984) suggests, there may be times when it is prudent to keep quiet or the research may progress no further. So at this point I decided to suppress my feminist principles.

In addition it seemed to be that the social interaction between the men and women in the group was in itself interesting and worth considering. To this end, I did try to probe the women from this group on their attitudes towards the men, and their relationship with them, which bore out my initial impression that these men were on the whole viewed as good friends, with whom it was possible to have a non-sexual and mutually beneficial relationship.

Another point which arose during the fieldwork, was that a woman engaged in doing feminist research cannot assume that the women encountered will have the same views. When I initially visited the advice centre for help in locating people to interview, those women I met expressed a great deal of sympathy for men as lone parents. In fact one woman in particular was extremely hostile about my interest in women only, and very verbal in expressing her opinion. She also seemed to be speaking for other women present.

There did in fact seem to be a great deal of hostility towards any ideas which might be tinged with 'feminism', which was interesting as I had never announced myself as a feminist, but merely as a woman wishing to interview other women. Although this hostility was expressed it should not be taken to indicate that such women do not have strong views about men and marriage and their present situation as lone mothers. They do. Their views however, were extremely contradictory. While many of those interviewed had strong feelings about men's behaviour towards women, based on their own experiences, and with reference to the disadvantages which women

suffered in society, it was also the case that for most of them, relationships with men (whether as friends or lovers) were also something they would rather not do without. It would seem, somehow, that being a feminist (or perceived as one) has connotations of being anti-men.

My reaction when confronted with this hostility was to reassure the women concerned that I knew that there were male lone parents who also experienced problems, and deserved sympathy but that this particular piece of small-scale research was to focus on women's experiences. One interesting issue which did arise at this time, was that of who is a lone parent. One man who attended one of the groups in fact did not have custody of his children, which from the point of the research meant that he fell outside the set parameters. However, for those women who knew him he was still defined as a lone parent, which raises the question of whether both divorced parents can be seen as lone parents - particularly if there is a joint custody order and both parents share care of the child(ren).

I also found that on occasion I had to explain very carefully why I was only interviewing women who had been married and later divorced or separated, rather than interviewing all lone parents, whatever the route to becoming one. Again, this was very much a matter of reassuring individuals that I did have sympathy for, and recognized the problems faced by all lone parents, but that the piece of research I was conducting concentrated on marriage, divorce and the consequent experience of single parenthood for women.

Attending the Group

The second meeting of the group which I attended was held in someone's house, with only the women group members attending this time (although the men had also been invited the previous week). The atmosphere was much more informal - presumably the difference between meeting in a school hall and in someone's home. As this was only my second attendance I was still very much in the position of coming to terms with my own feelings about being in the group (I'm not sure I

ever achieved this!). I still felt like a 'new' person, and was very conscious of how I was performing in this social situation.

Before the first meeting I had been very worried about how I should appear, that is, what I should wear. I wanted to appear as though I knew what I was supposed to be doing, but did not want to seem too official; on the other hand, dressing-down could be perceived as being insulting to the group being studied. Some of the women attending the group did in fact seem quite dressed up and wear a lot of make-up. Whether they make a special effort because they were going to sit in a draughty school hall for the evening, or because members of the opposite sex were present, is impossible to determine, and this may well be the way they usually present themselves.

Throughout the first meeting I was also very conscious of the way I was behaving. It was announced as people arrived, by one of those present, that I was a student doing research into lone parents, and that I was also a lone parent. Therefore individuals were aware of my dual role from the outset, and switched at times from treating me as though I was just another parent to treating me as though I was a researcher - or more specifically writing a book about them. In this respect they liked to draw my attention to interesting bits of conversation, or gossip which I might find useful.

I actually found my dual role confusing, and at times stressful. In fact I was being more than two 'mes'. I was parent, researcher and adult self - switching between these, and at times combining different roles. Even doing something as supposedly simple as having a one-to-one conversation became contradictory. At the same time as talking, I could be thinking - Is this a personal conversation, or is this part of my research? In reality, it is generally both. If this is so, then the researcher constantly has to confront the fact that she/he is always using people and they may not be aware of this.

I did not announce to the members of this group that I was observing them, and at a conscious level I never intended to do so, yet this seems unavoidable in such a situation. It is difficult to totally switch off from being a researcher if those you are watching or talking to are central to your research. Sometimes I felt

dishonest because I had not said I was observing the group, and that I was keeping personal notes at home, recording my impressions. However, as already indicated, there seemed a tacit understanding from the outset, amongst group members, that I would be listening to and observing them. The first time this was made obvious to me in an explicit way was when some gossip was going on and somebody suddenly turned to me and said words to the effect that this would be an interesting tidbit for my book! Trying to be the ethical researcher, I said that of course I would not use pieces of information which could be deemed confidential, in my book. The response was that of course I must use such information in my book - they expected me to!

Gossip

As it turned out, gossip continued to be a rich source of information while attending the group, and interviewing women who belonged to it. Although I was (and still am to some degree) troubled to the extent to which gossip constitutes an acceptable and valid research method, it is a part of everyday life, and some of the personal gossip I listened to provided additional information about the women attending the groups (and the men), and about the set up of support groups in Sheffield.

This extra information about individual respondents was difficult to totally ignore and undoubtedly, albeit unconsciously has had some bearing on my understanding and analysis of some interviews. However, as a source of information for this piece of research, its influence should not be exaggerated. The different pieces of information obtained about individuals (and about groups) were assessed against one another and any gossip evaluated in the light of my impressions of the interview. In particular, it would have been wrong to assume that what was said about someone by another party necessarily has more validity than their own first-hand account. In addition, where gossip about someone I had not met was concerned, I was very careful about not allowing myself to prejudge the individual, and to keep an open mind when meeting them for the first

time, and throughout the process of the interview. What gossip did contribute to the fieldwork, was an amusing insight into how people tend to judge and evaluate the personalities and actions of others.

At this second meeting there was a lot of talk about other groups in Sheffield, about which at this stage I knew very little. A newspaper cutting announcing the setting up of a Gingerbread group in Sheffield, was also produced, with the women present trying to guess who might be running it. I did not get a look at this, which at the time felt unfortunate as it may have been another avenue to pursue. It seemed even at this early stage that I owed some loyalty to the particular group of women I was with, and that expressing an interest in another organization might not be a good idea. As it happens the local Sheffield organization and Gingerbread do have some history of conflict, so this was probably a good move on my part, as some of the women seemed to feel a little antipathy towards Gingerbread (the organization). No further information will be reproduced in relation to this, as of course, it is impossible for me to know the true facts. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that two Gingerbread groups had been set up in Sheffield, and as far as I could ascertain, the relationship between the two organizations was in fact quite cordial.

Myself and the research

With regard to my participation in the group, I have not only gleaned information about the women via conversation, but as part of the process of social interaction, they have learned things about me. This exchange of information is obviously part of the normal process of developing a relationship and getting to know people. However, it does mean that when I interviewed the women attending this group they knew more about me than would someone I had never met before. They had already made some assessment as to what sort of a person I might be, and what sort of information I might be interested in receiving. All of this could have had some effect on the interview situation. Their having informed presuppositions about me makes for a different

referential context for the interview, than when I had only spoken to someone on the telephone, and they knew only that I was a student doing research, and a mother looking after two children alone. Although the point has to be made that establishing rapport with all of those interviewed, presented little difficulty.

Of course, as in any new social situation, I was highly selective about what information I divulged about myself and my children, and on occasion have been very instrumental about the information offered - that is in terms of indicating to respondents that I have been through the same kind of experiences as they have. In both the group situation and interviews, both with women I knew before and those I had never met until then, my circumstances have been referred to. In this sense I have used my own personal autobiography as a research tool. My private life has become very much part of the research process; an issue which other women doing feminist research also have addressed (see for example, Finch, 1984). This seems a valid way of attempting to establish the kind of non-hierarchical relationship so valued in feminist methodology, and of seeking to ameliorate to some extent the inequalities of power that are bound to exist in most research relationships, an area which is considered later in this chapter.

Summary

This first hand account of doing the fieldwork, has raised some important questions with reference to doing research, which can be summarized briefly as follows: - the importance of establishing initial contact and gaining access to people willing to be interviewed; ethical issues, such as honesty, and whether or not to make use of informally obtained information about others (that is, gossip); possible problems associated with interviewing men; restraining one's personal beliefs or principles to enable the research to continue and, the problems of being a member of the group at the same time as being the researcher, which is related to the issue of how much information is revealed about oneself. All of

restraining one's personal beliefs or principles to enable the research to continue and, the problems of being a member of the group at the same time as being the researcher, which is related to the issue of how much information is revealed about oneself. All of these are important issues which arise when doing research which involves contact with others.

The following section examines power relations within the interview situation, which was referred to above. This is a central concern in feminist methodology, and the ideas that follow contribute to the important debate about inequalities of power within the interview situation, considering to what extent such concerns are valid, and suggesting that the respondent is not always without some power in the interview, whilst acknowledging that the interview situation itself does much to contribute to a perceived powerful/powerless dichotomy for both the researcher and the researched.

POWER RELATIONS WITHIN THE INTERVIEW SITUATION

Introduction

Conducting a first piece of research is a revealing process, as whatever has been read about doing the fieldwork, does not prepare the researcher for their actual experiences, and there is a very real sense in which this is something which can only be learned through experience (Plummer, 1990, p.97). The situation with regard to interviewing is not made easier by the fact that 'interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets' (Oakley, 1990, p.31). Although there are now more first-hand accounts of doing the fieldwork, if more 'experts' described in detail the process of interviewing itself, and what happened in the interview situation, and research students were actively encouraged to read such texts, then they might be better

prepared to cope with unexpected events, or would at least be aware that things do not always go as you wish.

I was not anticipating conducting an interview with a screaming toddler present (despite being a parent myself); with young adults coming in and out; with being in the middle of preparations for a birthday party; with the boyfriend, or worse, ex-husband walking in; with a variety of dogs present, including those which seemed intent on demolishing the tape recorder; and I would certainly never have believed that a screeching budgerigar could make so much noise, if I hadn't heard it on tape for myself! Anything can happen in an interview situation, and much of the fieldwork is a learning process, where calmness and adaptability can be as important as preparing the 'right questions to ask.

It is also assumed that the other party to the interview, that is the respondents, will know what an interview is supposed to be. Their ideas, however, will be based on their own knowledge of what interviews are on television, in newspapers and magazines, and perhaps from market research, and the social science interview may not be what they had anticipated. In this sense, if the researcher is the more expert, then it does allow them the opportunity to 'assume control of the type and quantity of information being conveyed' (Briggs, 1986, p. 39), unless a non-hierarchical relationship between the two is adopted, and the interview itself becomes more of a conversation, with the researcher investing more of herself in the research (Finch, 1984). This kind of 'personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives' (Oakley, 1990, p.199). It is this kind of approach which was adopted during my fieldwork, although with a great deal of flexibility, so at times I was prepared to be mainly listener, and at others co-participator in the conversation. In addition to this, aside from the part of the interview which was taped, there was generally conversation before, and after the tape recorder was switched off, when it felt as though there was an expectation that I would reveal more

about myself, my children, and our circumstances, now that I knew so much about them. Establishing rapport is defined as being very important in the process of doing interviews, and sometimes it is suggested that this is a difficult thing to do, when conducting fieldwork (Johnson, 1975). In common with other women interviewing women, however, I did not find this to be a problem, but would agree that: -

there is still necessarily an additional dimension when the interviewer is also a woman, because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender. This creates the possibility that a particular kind of identification will develop (Finch, 1984, p.76).

Apart from being a woman, I was also a lone parent with dependent children. This has clearly been an advantage in immediately establishing common ground between myself and those women interviewed, although of course, other factors such as personality, age and background will still influence the interview situation, so that there will always be some interviews which are 'hard work', and others which are much easier.

There is, however, a danger in this kind of relationship, in that women having perhaps revealed more about themselves, are clearly more at risk of betrayal. One of the ethical dimensions of research is to be aware of this fact, and in the writing up and presentation of interview material, to be sensitive about what kind of information should be reproduced, and what for example would be better left unsaid. In this sense, even a non-hierarchical relationship in the interview setting, does not negate the additional power the researcher has, due to their eventual control over the interview material. It is important to acknowledge this and for feminist researchers to appreciate that part of doing feminist research, involves developing a moral consciousness, so that women do not end up being exploited by other women for their own

professional gains (Gordon 1989; Smith,1987). The rest of this section will focus on the power relationship between interviewer and respondent within the interview situation, an issue which has been a focus of concern for women doing feminist research (Oakley,1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983), with specific reference to my own fieldwork.

Hierarchies of Power

On the one hand, it has been stated that within the interview context, the interviewer has more power than the person being interviewed, and that feminists doing research should be aware of this, and seek to redress this imbalance, by giving more power to those women being interviewed (Oakley, 1990). On the other hand, other feminist researchers, (Smart, 1984; Scott, 1984) have written of the difficulties for women in interviewing the powerful. Women's general structural location in society impinges on their status as interviewer, and the way that they are perceived by persons in higher status occupations, particularly men. Smart in particular writes of her experiences in interviewing locally powerful magistrates/solicitors (1984), and of having to suppress her own feminist views when confronted with discriminatory remarks about women going through the legal processes associated with divorce.

When considering issues of power then, for feminists there are usually two issues which need addressing: -

i) being a woman doing research and interviewing those more powerful than oneself, who are at present more likely to be men, whose gender status together with their professional status, may lead them to perceive themselves as being far superior to the person interviewing them;

ii) interviewing women who are less powerful than oneself, perhaps because less well educated and less articulate, or coming from a different socio-economic background, and because for some groups or

individuals in society, being an interviewer in itself may carry connotations of power and status

These two basic issues are not clear-cut as women being interviewed are not necessarily less powerful than oneself in the interview situation, and women's experiences in life may lead them to be at least as knowledgeable as the interviewer, sometimes more so, which can result in them exerting more control over the interview situation than is generally assumed. In effect, the two separate issues referred to may, in the practice of research become intertwined. In order to illustrate what is being suggested, I will make some general comments about my own research, and use two particular interviews as examples of the way in which women can exercise their power, and exert control over the interview situation.

The Researcher

My own experience as a long-term lone parent, having been through the experience of the ending of a marriage, and the appropriate legal processes, and supporting myself and two children on state benefit, meant that I had a considerable body of knowledge on which to draw when doing the research. However, due to the fact that most of the women interviewed attended support groups for lone parents, or if not, knew of other separated and divorced women, they had a collective source of information, which at times, rendered them far more knowledgeable than myself. This collective knowledge seemed to enable them to be more powerful, in the sense of being active, rather than passive, for example, in their dealings with ex-husbands, the legal system, or with the Department of Social Security. It is also the case that someone hoping to do interviews is very dependent on the goodwill of those being approached, and it is therefore important not to alienate individuals, particularly when still trying to get started.

In the academic world, it may have become more acceptable to be a woman engaging in feminist research, but this does not mean that those women being interviewed will feel comfortable with views openly labelled 'feminist'. Most women will express very strong views about the unequal relationship between men and women in society, but some may also be very hostile to the label 'feminist', which unfortunately seems to have negative implications for many women, due in part, no doubt, to media representations of what a feminist is supposed to be.

Although I did not announce myself as a feminist researcher, I did encounter some hostility from some women purely because I was focusing my attention on female lone parents, and not interviewing men. This did result on one occasion in an interrogation (not in private) as to my motives in wishing to interview women only, and I was manoeuvred into a situation where I had to come up with reasons why I was excluding men from my research. These related to the fact that the majority of lone parents were women, that it was only a small piece of research and therefore concentrating only on one particular group of lone parents, which excluded not only men, but the bereaved and the unmarried (for a fuller account of the reasons behind interviewing women only, refer to earlier sections of this chapter). All of these explanations were correct. At the same time, however, I was submerging my own views to ensure that the research could get started and continue and, I would be able to interview women whose views did not happen to coincide with my own. It is important to recognize that not all women share feminist beliefs, and that a commitment to allow women to speak for themselves should allow for a range of views to be expressed by women.

Having made some general points about my own position as the researcher, the following two sections present examples from two interviews illustrating the way that each of the women concerned has in different ways managed to control or manipulate the interview situation.

Interviewing the Interviewer

The first example given is that of Jackie, a member of the lone parents' group I initially attended, and with whom I therefore had some contact prior to the interview. Jackie was one of the younger women interviewed and had two children. She was undertaking a training course at the time and was an outgoing individual, and very easy to talk to, which from my point of view, resulted in a very productive interview. The following two extracts from my own taped notes made after the interview indicate how she asserted herself in the interview situation, eliciting information from me, which she clearly felt she had a right to know.

The first extract relates to the fact that the tape was switched off during the course of our 'formal' interview.

In the middle of the interview when she started coughing and choking [she had a cold] we switched the tape recorder off, and it was off for about five minutes, during which time we talked. It was interesting that she wanted to know exactly what I was doing in the interviews, and whether I was asking people the same questions and what exactly I was trying to find out, so I told her . . . She just seemed interested in knowing; reassured even. The tape recorder went back on and the conversation - the interview - continued; obviously with her having more knowledge of exactly what I was doing.

The most important point is made in the last sentence of this section. The respondent went to some lengths to find out more about the nature of my research and my intentions in interviewing her and other women, before her interview progressed any further. I do not believe that the coughing fit was produced specifically for this purpose, but she was clearly making use of an opportunity which presented itself to her. The second extract relates to what happened after the taped interview was finished.

When the tape recorder was switched off the conversation continued for some considerable time on various topics. It was actually a personal conversation where I exchanged information about myself. She quite clearly wanted information about me, and she is very skilled at conversation. She obviously had one or two questions she wanted to ask me - personal questions similar to those I asked her, but she always waited for the appropriate moment in the conversation to actually probe and ask for example - why did my marriage end? what did I think about this? - and that sort of thing.

Throughout the fieldwork, it was quite normal for conversation to precede and in particular to follow, the 'formal' interview. Women were generally much more relaxed when the tape recorder was switched off, and would give additional information about themselves, often involving an exchange of information between themselves and me. Jackie, however, was much more assertive than other women in asking for information about me. She clearly felt she had a right to ask me such questions because I had questioned her, and she was a very skilled interviewer, which resulted in my feeling a considerable amount of respect for her and responding to her questions as openly as I felt she had responded to me.

This example, has shown that a respondent is not always only a provider of information, but may also be very active in seeking knowledge about the interviewer. This particular person was articulate and also confident enough to assume that it was her right to know about me. The interview situation then becomes one of an exchange of information. By participating in this exchange and giving information about myself the unequal power relationship which can exist in the interview process has to some extent been redressed. This situation is not a disadvantage as far as the research is concerned. If the interviewer is open and answers the questions put, then the person being

interviewed will feel more relaxed and more comfortable about talking about themselves.

Story-telling

This second example will discuss how it is possible for the respondent to manipulate the interview as it progresses, by the use of story-telling, or the relating of anecdotes. Somebody who responds to the interview situation by casting themselves in the role of narrator can exercise a great deal of control over the agenda for the interview, and over how much information they divulge about themselves, and even whether or not they choose to avoid answering a particular question. When the respondent adopts the role of story-teller and as 'the narrator knows she is providing information; the story marks out the territory in which intrusion is tolerated' (Graham, 1984). In everyday life, people often respond to questions about themselves, or events in their lives by relating an anecdote or story. This also applies in the interview situation. Whilst some respondents will keep their answers brief, and give the facts as they see them with the minimum of detail, there are others who feel obliged to answer questions with story answers.

The most extreme example of this was Sharon, who seemed to answer every question with a long narrative about something or other, which on occasion, seemed to bear very little relation (from my point of view) to the question asked. However, listening to the tape afterwards, together with detailed analysis of the transcript of the interview revealed that Sharon clearly had things she wanted to say, things she wanted to tell me, and she was determined that I would hear them. Although these may not always have coincided with what I thought I wanted to know, the transcript still provides an interesting insight into Sharon's thoughts and feelings, and of course, as to how story-telling can be used by a respondent to exert control over the giving of information.

In response to the question as to why she felt her marriage actually finished, Sharon, who had two girls aged twelve and seventeen, and had been a lone parent on state benefit for twelve years, went into great detail about one specific episode of violence in the marriage. Given the passing of time, her powers of recall were excellent (bearing in mind that we all tend to re-write past events in our lives), although the story as she told it, meanders over several pages of interview transcript. The reason for the lengthy and circuitous account may be that as she stated 'I felt very guilty that I could leave him'. (At the time she had one child of four and was pregnant with the second one.) In effect, the detailed story-telling enabled her to deflect attention away from herself, but also to deal with a past which was not pleasant for her. She was asked on three occasions whether or not the marriage ended because he was violent but even when she eventually answered the question, led the conversation in the direction she wanted it to follow, by using her own response as a direct link into another area of conversation. This was her final response to the question.

I said if he ever hit me again, and pashed me, and I had to go to hospital because I was - If he ever went to hit me, as he meant it, I would go, and I did. And I'm one of these people that if I say a thing I stick by it. Now, even now, if I promise my kids something, they get that what I promised. Now, if I've said to them - if I can afford, 'cos now it's a case of if you can afford it, you will get so and so . . .

Sharon then continued for some time outlining the kind of things she sometimes bought for her daughters; the fact that she never had anything on credit - except a black and white television (she could not afford the colour television licence); finally moving on to discuss television programmes. After this, the conversation then moved on to the kinds of books she liked to read, before finally moving back to a discussion of her marriage, which at this point, was the interest of the researcher.

Sharon had been very successful in dictating the terms of her response to the question originally asked, that is, that it would be lengthy and detailed, and would include other issues of interest along the way! Finally, when prompted again to provide a direct response to the question, she did, but used this to indicate what kind of a person she was - one who doesn't go back on her word, continuing to dominate the interview with her own account of herself and her interests and beliefs.

Whilst it could be inferred that this was an interview out of control, it provided many valuable insights into the experiences of marriage and lone parenthood. Attempting to assert the power of the interviewer over the interviewee would have been unwise, as it would have resulted in hostility and the loss of much useful information. It was also possible at specific points during the interview (when the respondent paused to reflect) to ensure that the topics that were seen as being significant for the research topic, were covered. In addition, if the women's personal accounts are to be reconized as significant, then of course, it is important for them to be listened to.

One further example of how relating a story/event can be used by a respondent is by setting the agenda right at the beginning of the interview situation. Both Sharon and another respondent Jane, seemed to have been waiting for me to arrive in order to launch into an account of a particular occurrence which they desperately wanted to discuss with someone. For the former it was an account of her latest contretemps with the DSS; for the latter an account of her latest wrangling with her ex-husband via his solicitor.

Dominating the opening of the interview in this way of course completely prevents any logically ordered approach to asking questions during the course of the interview, and meant that I had to be particularly alert in order to ensure that I actually covered all of the areas that I was interested in. Whilst this could be seen as a disadvantage, my willingness to listen to such information when given spontaneously, means that I have gained knowledge I may otherwise have missed.

To conclude, story-telling can provide a valuable resource in the gathering of information, and does allow the person being interviewed to exercise some control over the proceedings.

In stories, data and interpretation are fused, the story-line providing the interpretative framework through which the data are constructed. The story, moreover, marks the boundaries of what the individual is prepared to tell (Graham, 1984, p.120).

Summary

The relationships of power which exist in any research context need careful consideration, and the ideas outlined here with regard to power relations within the interview situation are intended to contribute to this area. In particular, the two illustrations presented, indicate how respondents can sometimes exert control during an interview, although of course subjects have very little control over the uses and dissemination of information. Furthermore, when research is conducted with pre-determined ideas at the forefront of the researcher's mind, which are inflexible and sacrosanct, this is another instance when those being researched are rendered powerless. In order to avoid this, these interviews were open-ended, and women were allowed to pursue matters which were of interest to them. Often these resulted in new areas of interest being opened up for exploration within the research, and a prime example of this, is the material presented in Chapter 7, on women's relationship with their families. The significance of the ideas outlined here is that they defy the notion that women are simply passive subjects in the interview process, but may in fact be active co-participants. The final section in this chapter will discuss the process involved in the analysis of the information obtained, before presentation of the findings which begins in Chapter 4.

ANALYSIS

The final section of this chapter will outline the way the interviews were conducted, how material was collected, organized and analyzed. The importance of ensuring the reliability of the research material was recognized from the outset, and every effort was made to be as rigorous as possible in both the conduct of the fieldwork, and the processes of analysis and writing up, to ensure that as accurate an account is presented here of the feelings and experiences of divorced and separated female lone parents. Confidentiality of those interviewed was maintained throughout, and information given by one respondent was not disclosed to any other.

The interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that while respondents were allowed the opportunity to discuss issues that interested them, there were some basic factual questions that were asked of them all. Each interview covered the same basic areas, meaning that the same issues were discussed with all of those women interviewed. The basic factual questions asked, and the broad areas discussed are set out Appendix B. In addition throughout the entire research experience a temporal framework was used, within which to locate these women's experiences. This means that all women have been asked about their marriages (the past), their experiences of lone parenthood (the present), and their hopes/expectations (the future). This framework informed the initial thinking behind the particular areas that would be discussed during interviews, and was the organizing principle during analysis and the writing up process, resulting in the presentation of the findings as set out in the thesis.

This approach did mean that throughout the research there was a sense of order as written material accumulated, which enabled a sense of coherence to be maintained. Another reason for adopting this approach is that it does allow for a more complex picture of the lives of the women interviewed. When interviewing, past, present and future were not always discussed in sequence, but each phase was covered with all of those interviewed, ensuring that when the material was reordered temporally, there was consistency across the

women's accounts. Furthermore, all women were asked about all of the areas mentioned in Appendix B. In addition, while there was no interview questionnaire, the same factual information was collected from all women. These factors contribute to the reliability of the research.

The actual analysis of the material collected was part of an ongoing process. The interviews were taped, and tapes were listened to after each one had been carried out, with notes being made on the content, and all tapes were listened to several times. This facilitated a sense of continuity and also meant that the material collected was fresh in my mind throughout the fieldwork. A relatively small number of interviews were conducted (twenty), and it was possible to retain knowledge of respondents' views without difficulty - bearing in mind that all information could be checked back against taped recordings and notes made. Clearly if more interviews were involved, a more complex system of notation and filing of information would have to be developed.

In the early stages of the research, it was assumed that all tapes would be transcribed in full. This was, however, a very time-consuming process, taking around ten hours to transcribe each hour of tape. Adopting this procedure also resulted in a lot of written material to read through and analyze. Information collected then had to be transferred into a more manageable format, and was put into appropriate files, using a word processor. After the first ten tapes had been transcribed, the remainder were listened to several times, and a form was filled in, which highlighted the basic areas covered in interviews (Appendix C.). At the same time, useful sections of the tapes were typed out for each respondent, using the temporal framework outlined above. This preserved the overall sense of each account, and at the same time provided a readily accessible base of quotations for insertion into the thesis.

My own familiarity with and knowledge of the material was heightened by the fact that I was solely responsible for carrying out the interviews, listening to tapes, and transcribing all of the interviews myself. This is practicable on a small piece of research, but again, would prove much more difficult on a larger piece of

qualitative research, which generally necessitate the involvement of more than one individual to cope with the different components of the research process. The advantage of the same person constructing the interview schedule, carrying out interviews, transcribing tapes and listening to tapes, as well as doing the final writing up, should not be underestimated in facilitating the composition of the final presentation of material.

The final part of the research process is the writing up of the information obtained, and its organization into a coherent piece of work. The foregoing points made on the collection and the analysis of the interview material should illustrate that there was a strong sense of organization throughout, and can be seen as basic groundwork for the final writing. Material had been organized throughout and was available in files on the word processor, so that pieces of information, and material from relevant sources, together with interview material could be inserted into chapters as appropriate. As already noted, the basic format of the thesis had been established at the outset, and the chapters that follow do follow the lives of these women from their pasts, into the present, and give some consideration as to the future. The conclusion also locates the lives of the women interviewed for this research, into wider policy debates about lone parents in general.

Summary

This section has provided an outline of how the collection and analysis of material was carried out, stressing that every effort was made to ensure rigour and reliability. In terms of selecting what to include and what to exclude, every effort has been made to ensure that what is presented here is a representative account of the overall responses. It was the case that women did present similar answers to the same questions throughout the interviews, and these are also reflected in other accounts of research into lone parents

Bradshaw & Millar (1990), for example, is the most recent British research on lone parents referred to in the thesis, and was a large survey of lone parents (1,820 interviews being carried out). It is striking how closely responses reproduced in this study are replicated in my own research findings. Literature referred to throughout the thesis does provide a secondary source of data, which can be used as 'supplementary validation' for the findings presented here (Anselm & Corbin, 1990, p.52). To refer back to the points made about using a feminist framework, this thesis does illustrate the fact that women continue to be disadvantaged in modern society, and that the reasons for this are not only situated in the public world, but also in the private. This thesis goes some way towards providing further evidence for this.

CONCLUSION

This chapter on methodology has dealt with some of the issues involved in doing research within a feminist framework, and in addition has briefly outlined some of the first-hand experiences of doing research. At the beginning of the chapter (p.43), three basic presuppositions were stated as forming the basis of a feminist frame of reference. These were that women are oppressed in society; the personal is political and the validity of personal experience; and the importance of making society aware of facts. It is anticipated that throughout the thesis, it will be clear to the reader, that these three basic points underpin the feminist framework adopted for this piece of research, both during the fieldwork, and during the analysis and final writing-up of the material.

What follows, is a presentation and analysis of some of the ideas and feelings expressed by women during interviews. The material used is as far as possible an accurate, but abbreviated account of women's experiences of, and feelings about lone parenthood. Inevitably, a process of selection has taken place,

reflecting to some extent, the interests of the writer, although as already suggested, these have often been influenced by the women themselves.

CHAPTER 4

W O M E N O N M A R R I A G E

INTRODUCTION

Before considering women's experiences of lone parenthood, this chapter will look at some of the comments women made about their marriages. Clearly one chapter in a thesis cannot hope to be a comprehensive account of women's experience of marriage in the nineteen eighties, particularly as the interviews allowed only for part of the time to be spent discussing women's marriages. In addition, as the women had been lone parents for two years or more, and in some cases, for several years, there was some distance between past events and the present, although their experience of marriage inevitably contributes to their present attitudes and beliefs. Two main areas were discussed during interviews. These were the allocation and control of money within the relationship, and extracts from interviews relating to this are reproduced in the following section, and why women felt their marriages had ended. Devoting more time to the topic reflects the belief that the way money was allocated and controlled within marriage, will directly affect women's later attitudes as lone parents. In particular, as most women as lone parents in this and other studies report that they actually feel better off financially as lone parents, despite the fact that they may in fact be on a lower income, it is important to examine the marital histories that may condition responses in this area.

After covering this in some detail, consideration will be given later in the chapter to some of the other things women had to say when asked why they felt their marriages had ended. It is important to stress at this point that what follows is very much women's accounts of their marriages, and it is their experiences which are of importance in this thesis, and which constitute a contribution to knowledge in this area (Goode, 1965; Bernard, 1973).

MARITAL FINANCES

This section will examine the economic relationship between men and women within marriage, by using interview material to illustrate the different kinds of relationships that may exist between men and women, and the different kinds of arrangements they engage in with regard to the management and control of household resources. It must be stressed at this stage that it is not easy to separate financial arrangements from other aspects of the marital relationship, as the former will certainly impinge upon the latter, and the examples that follow are good illustrations of this point.

The distribution of resources within households has not received sufficient attention. However, Pahl (1989) has provided an excellent starting point with her four point typology, summarized below.

1. The whole wage system. One partner, usually the wife is responsible for managing all the finances and for expenditure except for their partner's personal spending money. If a husband does this, the wife may have no personal spending money of her own.
2. The allowance system. The husband gives the wife a set amount and she has access to her own earnings, if there are any. She is then responsible for specific items of household expenditure. The rest of the money is under his control.
3. The shared management or pooling system. Both have access to all or almost all household money and both are responsible for managing it and for expenditure.

4. The independent management system. There are two incomes and neither has access to all household funds, each being responsible for specific items.

One of the conclusions that Pahl draws from her research is that the way income is distributed within marriage, may have important implications for how a woman feels if a marriage ends. A woman who has little or no access to money when married may feel substantially better off afterwards. This is a view shared by other writers (Millar, 1987; Graham, 1987), and the women interviewed for this study did generally express the feeling that they had more control over finances than when married, and this is even so for women who apparently played a major role in the management of the marital finances. The fact that women can and do have a significant role to play in the management of household resources is not a new phenomenon, particularly amongst lower class households, and oral history highlights how women in these households have traditionally exerted a great deal of influence in this area (Roberts, 1984). Notwithstanding this fact, women who do find themselves to be totally dependent financially are in an extremely vulnerable position, especially if a marriage ends (Smart, 1984).

WOMEN ON MARRIAGE AND MONEY

The following are women's accounts of the management of finances within the marital household, and as indicated earlier, it has to be remembered that these arrangements will impact upon other aspects of the marital relationship. For example, the degree of control exerted by the husbands of Helen and Sharon, is reflected in their use of violence as another means of attempting to control their wives. The extracts are presented as accounts of individuals, but make a number of points about marital finances, and their impact upon relationships.

Kate

Kate was married in her thirties, and had for the most part been used to working full-time and having an income of her own. She was one of the most qualified/best educated of those interviewed, being a librarian. Before marrying her husband, who was ten years older, they had lived together for eighteen months. For six months of that period Kate was actually unemployed and in receipt of employment benefit. At the same time as recounting what happened with the household finances, she is also making the point that her husband's attitude towards her changed on marriage, and then again on the birth of their child, when she ceased work and was dependent on him financially. This is how she described the situation:

We got married and it was all right while I was working, because he was totally feckless with money, so I tended to see that the bills were paid, and he was very irresponsible because he'd never really had any responsibility, and then when I gave up work to have my son, his attitude to me changed quite a lot. It was a bit 'Jekyll and Hyde' really 'cos I think he enjoyed having the sort of economic power over me, 'cos I think when you've got no money, you've no clout, you've got no sort of status, you've got to ask for money, or even if you don't have to ask for it you feel as though - 'cos I'd always worked and paid my own way and paid bills and been independent. I found it very hard to be at home with a baby and an unsupportive husband, who sort of resented handing over housekeeping, but at the same time he kept me in my place, he sort of enjoyed that up to a point but he would have liked me to have been bringing in some money as well. I think that had a lot to do with why the marriage broke up because he couldn't cope with the responsibility.

As it happens her husband had spent most of his adult life in the navy with the money he received really being spending money. Even though previously married, they had no children, and he was still in the navy, so again had not had to face up to any kind of financial responsibility.

As Kate indicated he found it difficult to cope with paying the mortgage and other bills:

He just didn't want to know; he just wanted to spend his money down the pub. He didn't want to talk about money and didn't want to know and he thought that if we didn't pay the electricity bill they'd forget about it, and I'd say, "Well, no they'll cut us off." "Oh, well, they'll have to take me to prison; put me in prison!" It was just a totally irresponsible attitude, but he always had money for a pint at the pub, and money was a really great problem.

Kate was not actually given any personal spending money after she had stopped working.

He gave me so much money a week which I had to use to pay the bills and the housekeeping, and I had my child benefit which got swallowed up in the housekeeping as well.

Even though Kate did the book-keeping for her self-employed husband, she still had no money of her own.

I used to sort all his paper work for the accountant, and he got some tax relief for that, claimed for me as being a secretary, but I didn't get any money of my own.

This, despite the fact that she was actually working for him and saving him money. Again she referred to the difficulty of having to ask for money, and of her husband's intense dislike at having to give her money.

On a Saturday morning I'd say "Can I have money to go shopping?" and he would never voluntarily give me the money. I always had to say "Give me the housekeeping", and it would be given very grudgingly. He hated giving me money, and he still hates giving me money. I mean he doesn't give me money but he once sent a cheque for my son's birthday present and he made it out to me and then he put in brackets 'FOR J' in great big capital letters. I mean it was

just so stupid. It must have really pained him to write my name on a cheque.

Even at Christmas he was still very 'tight-fisted' with money and never gave her money for presents and cards, even presents for his family had to come out of her pocket (while still earning). The only thing he used to do was to buy the turkey.

As already indicated, Kate felt that money problems were the cause of the breakdown of the relationship, with the situation changing after marriage.

If we'd just lived together and I'd gone on working I think we'd have been alright, because I like financial independence. I don't like being dependent on anybody at all, particularly when they're sort of making me feel very small about having to ask for money.

This example illustrates how financial arrangements can alter throughout the course of a relationship, with for Kate the situation changing on marriage, and then deteriorating further when their child was born, when the marriage was in effect operating a kind of allowance system. The financial dimension however, cannot be separated out from other aspects of the relationship. The way that Kate's husband treated her financially was only one symptom of his general attitude towards her when she ceased to do paid work, and became a mother confined to the home. Chapter 1 contains more insight into the kind of relationship that existed between Kate and her husband, showing how little support she felt he gave her. The irony is that while Kate stated that she felt like a lone parent before her marriage ended, the account her demonstrates how very much under another person's control she was. Another issue here is the individuals concerned - both her husbands seventeen years in the navy which almost seems like a surrogate parent in his case alleviating the need for adult responsibility, which in turn led to his resentment on his marriage and parenthood, and the fact that Kate was older when she married and was used to her independence, made it particularly difficult to relinquish. In terms of Pahl's typology she was being given, or more correctly, had to ask for an allowance, for

basic household expenditure, particularly frustrating in view of her husband's irresponsibility and as she continued to stress, his expenditure on alcohol.

Sharon

Whilst Kate actively disliked being economically dependent and this affected the marital relationship in a very negative way, all women do not share her feelings. Sharon, for example, seems to have accepted her dependent status, and even to have seen it to some degree as an expression of her husband's caring for her. Before having children she had done some part-time work in a fish and chip shop and the money she earned was hers, but when married and not in paid employment, it was the allowance system which again operated. The only money she got was for food and for nothing else, and he paid all the bills. When asked if she had any money for personal spending, this is how she replied.

Yes, if he was with me. He wasn't tight with money, don't get me wrong, he wasn't, 'cos I mean within reason I could have literally anything I wanted. Wi'out it was something I wouldn't have gone and got in the first place. I 've never been that type of person who could go out and spend two or three quid on nothing. I like to see something for my money and I've always been the same. If I wanted a new dress, or I needed a new dress, I got a new dress. But he come with me and I thought it were great that, because he just didn't turn a hair, you know. He wasn't a bit embarrassed. He'd go and buy me underwear and that.

Violence was involved in this relationship, and he would seem to have exerted a great deal of power over her in terms of regulating her behaviour. Sharon did smoke, although he did not, but her cigarettes for the week were rationed, because he bought them for her.

He didn't mind me smoking, but if I'd used all my cigs he'd bought for me on Friday, to last me that following week, that were my own fault, I had to do without. "You smoke enough, you know, you don't need to do have anymore", and he wouldn't buy me a packet of fags, no matter. I know I've gone to next door neighbour's and borrowed twenty fags off her on day he's got paid, so I can give them back at tea-time, when he walked in. He never smoked, so he didn't see why I should, but he knew I smoked when I first started going out with him.

This is clearly an example of a man exerting a great deal of control over his wife's life. There are of course moral issues involved to do with smoking and health, but as Sharon herself stated he knew she smoked when he married her. The two examples together indicate that she was very dependent on her husband for providing her with things, which to her were necessary. There were also examples in this interview of the husband trying to control her behaviour in other ways, for example socially, when she was allowed to go out with women friends, but a curfew was set. Sharon, however, was clearly not that easy to manage, and stayed out late - for which she gave me her reason. Her husband's remedy on this occasion was not financial control, but violence, which resulted in her needing hospital treatment. This incident illustrates how much at the mercy of men, some women are. The same kind of behaviour was also exhibited by Helen's husband, and her account follows.

Helen

Sharon's comments indicate that she did not resent her husband having so much financial control within their marriage. Helen on the other hand, one of the younger women interviewed, being twenty-seven at the time of the interview expressed different feelings. Despite having two young children she had managed to do some part-time work as a barmaid during the marriage. When she was earning this money was hers and she in fact used it to keep a car on the road, which at that time was essential for her work. This was, however, the only money she had. In

reply to a question about who paid the household bills she stated that 'he never gave me housekeeping. He used to pay all the bills, do all the shopping, and the food shopping' and then went on to reveal - 'He never trusted me enough to give me money.' Helen would have liked to have done the shopping. Sometimes she did go with him, 'but usually he'd do it while he was at work, in his dinner hour or whatever', and he even chose the food that they ate. This was another marriage where violence was used by the husband to express disapproval and exert control over his wife's activities, (in this case she had forgotten to make the bed before leaving for work, and returned late at night to be set upon by her husband), and this precipitated the separation, although money played a large part in the deterioration of this relationship. In the following excerpt Helen told the story of how things started to go wrong.

Well, it all started about two years before we split up. His auntie died and left him some money, and from that day on he changed completely. We used to have a joint bank account and he went and changed it into his own name. He didn't want me having anything to do with his money. It was left to him, and only him and he went and bought a new car - seven thousand pounds worth of car. A few weeks later he bought me this second-hand car for three hundred pounds, and somebody hit me and it was a write-off. So the insurance company paid up the money it was insured for, and he put it in a bank and he wouldn't let me have the three hundred to get another one. At the time I was working in Chesterfield, so I had to give up my job because I couldn't get there, and like I say, he spent about a thousand pound on a stereo, three or four hundred pound on a camera. Anything he wanted he just went out and bought it. Anything for me or the kids, I had to more or less beg for it, and of course I wasn't working then so I'd not got that money, and he was still paying all the bills and everything else. All I'd got was child benefit, and that was it. Things just slowly got worse. We had silences for about a month, two months, and then he'd just blow up and he'd say it was me that had changed, that I never did anything in the house, and all this that and the other.

The situation deteriorated further and when the husband launched a violent attack on her, Helen was so terrified she actually called the police. She finally went to see a solicitor, having decided that the situation could not continue. In effect her husband's attitude towards money, and his insistence that the money he had inherited was his and his alone, and not part of the family's general resources clearly affected the relationship badly. His actions in relation to the car and his overall attitude towards Helen meant that she and their children were reduced to being totally dependent on him for basic necessities such as food, whilst watching him spend large amounts of money on his own pleasure. Helen clearly resented this kind of behaviour, with her husband seemingly having access to, and controlling most of the household resources.

Helen returned again to how much he had changed when he had some money 'it were just as if he'd turned a light on and it were like that - he'd changed. It was just unbelievable, the change in him.' Helen stated that her husband's family were all relatively well-off, and she knew when they married that someday he would inherit money, but this was not why she married him. In fact on divorce she was adamant that she did not want his money. 'I said "I don't want your money. I want everything in this house and you can just go".' Her husband, however, could not believe this and was convinced that she would try to get more asserting that he would make it as difficult as possible for her to get it. So finally, she received two and a half thousand pounds and everything in the house (it was a council house).

Jackie

Jackie was married young when pregnant, and the couple first lived with her parents, before moving into a shop, which they lived over (without bath or proper kitchen). It was a craft shop which she ran, but it was not profitable. Her husband was a self-employed painter and decorator. Jackie worked for eighteen months, but stopped when becoming pregnant for the second time. They never made much money from the shop, which paid the rent, and that was about all - it certainly did not provide her

with a wage. It was not long after they were married that her husband had to go on the dole which Jackie stated left them 'far better off' because as a self-employed painter and decorator there had been no regular income, so that being on the dole 'was like being rich.'

You don't have a wage coming in every week, and here we were getting something like thirty pounds a week on the dole, and it was every week, so we could go to Sainsbury's and buy food, which we couldn't do when he was working, plus he never gave me any money when he was a painter and decorator.

This illustrates how important it is to consider the way income is distributed within the household, as some individuals may be worse off than others, and also shows how some families will feel better off in receipt of state benefit - in particular if they have an irregular source of income. Initially, Jackie's husband was in charge of the money 'until he made a mess of it' and then she took over and 'showed him how to do it.' So Jackie was the one who managed the money

Because he would spend on luxuries first and what's left pay the bills, and you can't do that. You have to pay the bills first and then if you'r lucky enough to have something left - So, he got us into a lot of debt.

After a while things did improve for the couple, although he was out of work for about four years. He got a job with a friend and starting doing accounts, rapidly becoming financial adviser to the company. Jackie is very scathing about this, and of course it is impossible to know whether her remarks about her husband are absolutely correct, or coloured by her present feelings towards him. This change resulted in a marked improvement in their situation, with Jackie still managing their finances. 'I got the cheque book, so I paid all the bills'. This is an example of someone who is not earning, but is actually managing the money spent, and it might seem having a great deal of freedom. However, life is not as straightforward as that, and other factors intervened to constrain Jackie's freedom.

I was so careful, because of never really having enough, so I never really spent it. I've never been used to spending money on luxuries, so I was very very careful. I can remember being in Atkinson's (a store in Sheffield) and there was a valance which was exactly what I wanted for mine and T's bed and it was reduced from eighteen pounds to five, and I was in a hot sweat because I thought "What will T, say if I spend five pounds?" But I bought it!

Jackie laughed at herself as she recalled this incident, but it does seem quite sad that a woman who is actually managing the household finances still felt that she might have a problem with her husband if she bought something she wanted. Their past financial experiences obviously played a part in her anxiety, but perhaps too this can be interpreted as something deeper - as part of a general feeling that many women have that they have no right to spend money on what would give them pleasure. This illustrates the difference between managing money by day-to-day budgeting and payment of bills, and controlling money, that is making the key decisions about what money should be spent on whom and for what (Graham, 1987). Although Jackie managed the household money, she still felt she ought to consult her husband before making this particular purchase. Although on this occasion, she did not, the anxiety she recalls indicates the degree of control her husband could exert over her actions and her emotions. Jackie expressed a great deal of resentment towards her husband over their financial situation, but this was not cited as the reason for the end of the marriage. From her point of view this was stated as due to his having a relationship with another woman (in fact, a young girl), when she was pregnant. It might be reasonable to seek for a link between the two by considering the irresponsibility that she referred to, and perhaps the immaturity of her partner. Certainly, those who marry young and have children when they are barely into adulthood themselves, may find it difficult to adjust to marriage.

Jane

Jane was an individual with a very complicated marital history, her husband having left her twice - and on both occasions she was pregnant. She had worked as a nurse before and between having her children, and the couple had a joint account. She expressed the view that finances had not been that great a problem, other than:

He was never very good at money. It used to be me who would say 'Look, we've got these bills, can we sit down one night, will you write me the cheques out, and I'll post them.' It was something that he never thought about.'

Jane had therefore been managing the household finances and controlling her own money, and was in some respects a very independent woman. However, this was clearly not how her husband viewed her. The first time he left her she was five months pregnant, and had been 'packed off' to her mother's for the weekend. While she was there:

He had so little faith in me that he closed everything down. He had the telephone cut off. He had the television and video sent back, the electricity put off, the gas put off. Closed the joint bank account, drew it out, paid the bills and gave me half of what was left.

Despite the fact that he did give Jane her share of the money from the account, he clearly had the power to close the account without her permission, and did so. In addition, he was so convinced of her ineptitude, regardless of the fact that she had been a full-time worker contributing to, and managing the household finances, that he decided she would be unable to cope without him. As indicated this was not the end of their marriage and he was present at the birth of their first child. This is an example of how some men perceive their wives, as incapable of making decisions for themselves, or living alone. In this case, financial matters may at times have put a strain on the relationship, but were not a major source of conflict between the two

parties, although this was not so after separation when the payment of maintenance became a major issue. This reflects the fact that even if there is no conflict over finances within marriage, there may well be trouble when the divorce process is set in motion.

Summary

This section could not pretend to be an exhaustive account of the way finances are managed within households, but does represent an attempt to demonstrate how this one aspect of the marriage can cause stress and strain on the relationship. Generally speaking, unsatisfactory experiences in this area may also be related to other aspects of the partnership which have proved difficult. As marriage is a relationship of a multi-faceted nature, with various exchanges between individuals, both material and emotional, it is inevitably subject to a number of strains, any of which will have direct bearing on other aspects of the relationship. To return to the question of dependency or interdependency, raised in Chapter 2, the preceding extracts show the complicated nature of the marriage relationship. Women may often depend on men for financial support, but men often depend on women to manage household finances. Whether or not this kind of exchange is successful is crucial to the relationship, and needs to be agreed and accepted by both parties, so that both are fully aware of the consequences. The following section considers why marriages end, and also raises the question of the kind of relationships that men and women have, or think they have entered into. It is often the case that the two parties concerned have different hopes for the relationship (Bernard, 1973), and thus will experience different disappointments as their expectations are disillusioned.

WHY MARRIAGES END

This was one of the questions asked of all women interviewed and provides an insight into why some marriages end, although of course, it

is not necessarily a question with a straightforward answer. Although this information is presented in a separate section, as already stated, in reality it is not easy to compartmentalize different aspects of a relationship. For example, it can be seen by considering Kate's comments about her marriage in Chapter 1 and relating them to what she said about the financial situation, that the emotional and practical aspects of a relationship are inter-connected, and that the one will reflect what is happening in the other area of a marriage. Furthermore, while women may state one thing or another as being the end, or the beginning of the end for the marriage, it may be that other factors have also contributed to the marital breakdown. For the purposes of clarity, however, the following can be put forward as major reasons stated by women for the ending of their marriage. These are listed in order of frequency - that is the first two are the most commonly cited reasons for the end of the marriage, according to the women themselves. What follows is only a brief summary of what respondents had to say in relation to this matter.

Someone Else

Adultery is more openly talked about these days and it is suggested that an affair need not necessarily mean the end of a marriage. Of those questioned, however, almost half (nine) stated this as the reason for the end of their marriage, and one or two others mentioned that their husbands had had an affair, but this did not cause the end of the relationship. A husband having an affair was seen as a very serious event, and not one which would be tolerated by most women, and if the husband would not end the other relationship (if it was a relationship, rather than a brief affair), then this generally spelt the end of the marriage. Women were particularly hurt when an affair was with someone they knew, as the following statement from Bridget indicates:

He was messing around with other women. I'd had twelve years of him having one night stands, which in my own stupid way I accepted because he always came back to me, but then he had an affair while

were living here, with somebody who was supposed to be a friend of mine and when I found out about the affair, I'd had enough, so I just said "On your bike, mate. Get out!".'

For women who did not know about (or were perhaps not prepared to suspect) another relationship, they were directly confronted with the facts when their husbands announced they were leaving. For Rachel, already referred to in Chapter 1, and mentioned again in the last chapter, the consequences were devastating emotionally. Theresa was another woman who was also shocked when her husband told her he was leaving her for someone else, and the separation resulted in a prolonged period of depression for her, during which time she found it very difficult to cope with looking after her two small children. It was very poignant to her Theresa reveal how she came to blame herself for the fact that he had an affair and left her - if she had been the perfect wife, then he would not have done so. An unfortunate consequence of the end of a relationship may be that women seek to blame themselves, rather than speculating that it may be the other party who was at fault. The significance of this particular ending to a marriage lies in the kind of effect it has on women's views on future relationships, and/or marriage, and this subject is dealt with in Chapter 9.

Although for many women this may have been stated as the primary cause of the end of the marriage, other aspects of the relationship may also have affected the decision to end the marriage. The preceding section on marital finances provides an illustration of problems may be present in more than one area of the marriage. The following section on the impact of children on the relation is another.

Children

Children do place considerable strain on a relationship as both partners adjust to the new situation. Whilst women did not generally state that their marriages ended because their husbands did not help enough with the children, this was an area of the relationship where most women

expressed dissatisfaction. Kate, whose story is related in Chapter 1 expressed the strongest views on this matter, where she stated that she felt like a lone parent when she was still married. Other women expressed similar views by stressing the lack of both emotional and practical support they received from their husbands. For Jackie and for Jane, actually being pregnant provided the reason for the husband to contribute to the ending of the relationship - in the first instance by having an affair, and in the second, by leaving his wife while she was pregnant (twice). Statements such as 'He didn't do a lot with them really,' 'He thought of himself most of the time.', and comparing the husband to another child were not uncommon. Women, in general, felt that they were the ones who had to see to the needs of their children, whatever these might be. Finally, Barbara summed up the kind of support that women could expect to receive from men by suggesting that 'they're about as much use as a chocolate mouth organ!'

Of course it would be unwise to generalize about men's behaviour from such a small study, as many men are undoubtedly capable of being active and supportive fathers. The focus should be on the implications of such experiences. The first thing to remark is that for many women marriage in the eighties' was still very much based around a traditional idea of women as primary carers of the children. Most of those interviewed did not work, or only worked part-time, so it's not unreasonable to assume that they would be the ones to look after the children. Women are not complaining about this, however, but about the lack of support from men, and about the fact that many men seemed unable to cope with the responsibilities associated with bringing up a family. The second point to make is that if women have had this primary caring role, when they become lone parents they are already experienced to some extent in taking on sole responsibility for their children. Finally, because these women have been doing this work since their children were born, they take the needs of their children very seriously. As can be seen from Chapter 5 and 6 that follow, the adverse material consequences of lone parenthood are felt most severely through their children's experiences, and at the same time, the fact of having children, makes it extremely difficult for women to do anything about changing their situation by entering paid employment.

Marital Finances

This has already been dealt with at length, but again it needs to be stressed that this aspect of a relationship cannot be isolated, and will affect other parts of the marriage. In particular, how people come to feel about each other will not be untouched by any problems that exist in this area of the relationship. Many women had a lot to say about this aspect of the marriage, but this was not generally stated as being the primary cause of the end of a marriage, although it may well have been a contributory factor.

Violence.

This was mentioned explicitly by both Helen and Sharon, both referred to in this chapter, and alluded to by one or two other women, but as already shown, was not the most frequently listed cause for the end of the marriage. As this is a sensitive area to discuss, it is impossible to know whether the incidence of violence was higher than that presented, and when asking for the cause of the end of the marriage, women may have selected what to them was the most obvious factor - which does not mean that physical and/or verbal abuse was not part of the relationship. However, remarks like these are very tentative and it would be wrong to speculate further on something which may or may not have occurred more frequently. The importance of the two cases referred to here, lies in the connection between different forms of control - that is, the link between the economic and physical power which some men may choose to exercise.

Other Factors

Apart from the specific headings already listed, other factors may contribute to the ending of a marriage. One of these is that people simply grow apart and come to acknowledge that there is no point in continuing with the relationship, and one or two women expressed this

view (although it may be only one of those involved that initially recognizes this and initiates the end of the relationship). Some of the factors mentioned may contribute to this, but it is also true that sometimes partners may just find themselves out of step with one another, and recognize that the marriage is no longer a viable proposition for either of them.

Summary

The significance of these factors for later life lies in how they will shape women's attitudes towards lone parenthood, and towards the possibility of remarriage, which are considered in Chapter 9. However, it is not possible to make cause and effect predictions about how people will react to various life events, and although having been through a marriage where adultery has occurred may make a woman wary, and reluctant to trust again, it does not follow that all women who have been through a similar experience will have been put off marriage for life. As is the case with most social science research, the unpredictability of human beings inevitably complicates the presentation of the findings. It can, however, be concluded, that for those women who have found marriage unsatisfactory, and an unhappy experience, that lone parenthood may provide a less conflictual and often positive experience, which will lead to some women being very reluctant to enter into a second marriage.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined something of what marriage was like for those who were interviewed on the basis that the past is always important for our understanding of the present, and our hopes for the future. As the following chapters describe what it is like for women who are lone parents, and what their future aspirations are, the information contained here provides some kind of context, from which their accounts originate. Most importantly, they highlight the unsatisfactory nature of marriage

for many women, and expose some of the difficulties women may confront when trying to negotiate relationships with men. Although the thesis is about women's experiences, all of these women are mothers and the impact of such events on their children cannot be ignored. All of those interviewed put the needs of their children first, and their unhappy experiences of marriage, can also be seen to have a negative effect on their children. As will be seen, children continue to be put first when these mothers find themselves lone parents, and it is generally the case that lone parents experience the material deprivation of lone parenthood most acutely through, and on behalf of their children - a topic which is covered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

L I V I N G O N A L O W I N C O M E

INTRODUCTION

When asked what was the worst thing about being a lone parent, women invariably responded, in some form with references to the financial situation and to loneliness. The next two chapters will focus on the former, whilst loneliness is addressed in theoretical terms in Chapter 8 (with comments from respondents reproduced in the final chapter). The financial deprivation experienced during lone parenthood has been dealt with by other writers (Marsden, 1973; DHSS, 1974; Ashley, 1983; Graham, 1987; Millar, 1987, 1988, 1989). Chapters 5 and 6 add to this body of literature, by drawing directly on what women themselves have to say about their relative poverty, and about the problems they have to face if considering the possibility of entering paid employment.

When women referred to their financial situation as being one of the worst aspects of lone parenthood, what they were speaking of was having insufficient money to be able to live without constantly worrying about paying the bills and feeding and clothing their children. Money, or the lack of it, becomes an obsession. As one respondent stated, 'I think that probably one of the main things is that it seems all money orientated this, and it shouldn't be.' Lack of money is thus one of the central concerns of these women's lives, particularly as it is seen to affect the lives of their children. These are the areas addressed in the following extracts from interviews, and in addition, as most of those interviewed (and most

lone parents) are dependent on the state to some extent, some of their comments on this relationship are also included.

WOMEN ON A LOW INCOME

This chapter contains some of the comments women made about how they managed on a low income and how they felt about being dependent on the state financially. As most of those interviewed were dependent on the state for some kind of financial support, the excerpts reflect that fact. Although two separate chapters - one on poverty, and one on work - have been included, there is inevitably some overlap between the two, as the women's precarious economic situation is directly linked to their non or part-time participation in paid employment. The table below shows from what sources women's income was derived at the point of the interview.

Table 1. Women's Means of Support

<u>Income*</u>	<u>IS +</u>	<u>IS +</u>	<u>Work</u>	
<u>Support</u>	<u>Maintenance</u>	<u>+ Pt-time work</u>	<u>+ Maintenance only</u>	
Melanie	Monica	Katherine	Hannah	Sheila
Pauline	Jackie	Theresa	Anne	
	Diane			
Rita		Angela		
Isobel		Bridget	Barbara	
Kate		Helen		
Sharon				
Rachel				
Jane				

*IS = Income Support

Thus, eight women were totally dependent on Income Support; three women received Income Support and maintenance; two women (Bridget and Helen) lived on Income Support, maintenance and part-time work; three women received Income Support and did part-time work; Barbara received some maintenance and did part-time work, whilst only Sheila (a college lecturer) earned enough by working four days a week to support herself and her daughter without turning to the state for assistance. Of the twenty women interviewed, sixteen were in receipt of some Income Support, highlighting the fact that for those who did undertake paid employment, the type of work they did was low paid. Theresa, Bridget, Angela and Helen did part-time bar-work, while Katherine did part-time office-work. For Hannah and Anne, living on maintenance alone, payments were set at a low level so that they were still living on a low income only just above benefit level, but were not entitled to other benefits given automatically to those on Income Support, such as free school meals.

To make the information presented in this chapter more manageable, it has been presented in sections, although this is a somewhat artificial device, since there are overlaps between sections, as everyday experiences can never be neatly compartmentalized in this manner. Four areas will be dealt with in this chapter, reflecting issues which arose during the interviews and these are: women's concerns about providing for their children; women's dealings or contact with the DSS; attitudes to lone parents, and briefly, some of the problems that women in receipt of maintenance face. These areas clearly do not represent a comprehensive analysis of life for lone parents managing on a low income, but do raise issues which are relevant to current social policy debate on lone parent families. Finally, as a primary focus of the thesis is on dependency of different kinds, the views expressed in this chapter should not be seen in isolation, but perceived in relationship to other chapters within the thesis, in order to gain a greater understanding of women's views on lone parenthood.

PROVIDING FOR CHILDREN

Generally, women experienced their poverty most acutely through their children; through not being able to provide adequately for them. Some of these issues are also illustrated by the extra help some lone parents received from their families, which is covered in Chapter 7. One of the areas where women often had a lot to say was in relation to food, or more specifically the problem of feeding their child or children. For those on a low income feeding the children becomes an obsession. Kate's great hope was to get off benefit, and have enough money to feed her son properly.

I think it's diabolical in this country, in this day and age, that I can't provide proper meals for my son. He has a school dinner, which is a free school dinner, which I have to regard as his main meal.

However, nutritionally, she felt these left a lot to be desired, particularly if there is no choice for the children, and they therefore end up eating little or nothing. On one particular day her son would not eat the main course rice dish, because of the sauce - the two could not apparently be served separately. So 'all he'd had for his dinner was two helpings of pudding.' This then put extra pressure on her.

I thought, I've just got to feed this child properly. It's important that he's fed. So, I'm finding now, particularly as it's cold and it's winter, I'm trying to give him a cooked meal at tea-time, but it's very hard to do that. And in the holidays when he's not getting a school dinner, I just think, "Oh, how are we going to eat?" because the money runs out before the week does, and I'm really careful. I just make a precise list of what I need to buy and stick to it and I would just love to go into a butcher's shop and buy a joint of meat for the weekend, but god knows when I last did that. I can't remember. If we go

down to my mother's for a roast Sunday dinner, which we do now and again, it's a real treat just eating a proper meal.

This raises issues to do with whether or not poor families manage their limited resources efficiently. Kate was one of the better educated among those interviewed, but most women seemed to pay a great deal of attention to managing the family budget, and trying to make sure that they did not run out of money. Before criticizing those who do have problems it is worth bearing in mind that the circumstances and actual outgoings of different families will vary, even amongst those on Income Support. For example, some families have to find mortgage repayments; water rates will vary because they are linked to the rateable value of the house and, older children are more expensive to clothe, and to feed. With the latter point in mind, although allowances for children increase at the age of eleven, some younger children may already be wearing adult-size clothes, and shoes, on which Value Added Tax is payable, increasing the cost of their clothing quite considerably. Kate was certainly not ignorant or feckless when it came to managing money. She was in fact, very careful, but still encountered problems..

When I've collected my benefit, I have to put so much a week into the bank to cover everything I've got on a monthly standing order - the mortgage, the rates, gas, electricity, water rates, and I buy savings stamps for my television licence and my telephone bill and then I buy milk tokens for a pint of milk everyday, and when all that's covered I've got twenty-nine pounds a week for everything else. I just don't know how I live on it.

It is very difficult for someone in this financial situation to be able to feed and clothe their child and themselves adequately, and even more difficult for them to participate fully in society.

Jane, was another mother who lived in a mortgaged property, which she had in fact taken on since becoming a lone parent (the marital home being owned jointly). The DHSS (DSS) had agreed to

carry on paying the mortgage interest on her property in Sheffield, provided it was no greater than on the previous property. Managing the payments on capital again proved a problem. She was very organized about finances, but still found things very difficult.

If there's an increase in the mortgage I send my books in, and it comes back with a little more on. I then divide what I've got by four and take that much out per week out of my money that I get in. So, say it was two hundred pounds, then every week, I'd be putting fifty pounds away. Plus then, I also take out the insurance money for the shell of the house that you have to pay and do that for four weeks. Well, that's about £1.40 a week I think. Then I put - I couldn't at first when I first moved in, but I've finally worked out from the bills that I've been having - I put five pounds away each week for gas and electricity, three pounds a week for my water rates, £1.28 for the television licence. The life insurance that I have is paid by my mother, the rates that we had to start paying from April - you know this twenty per cent - my mother pays.

However, organized she was, Jane was only managing to stay on top of things by depending on her mother for extra assistance, for both food and clothing for her children, and this was not uncommon, as Chapter 7 shows. The existence of a mortgage is another expense which constitutes a considerable drain on the family finances for those on Income Support, thus making generalizations about how people manage their basic income spurious, unless these additional expenses are taken into account.

Of course, a mortgage may not be seen as a necessity, but those lone parents who do have a mortgage, defend their right to continue to own their own homes, and also see this as an investment for their future, and that of their children. Aside from these considerations, is the fact that it can be very difficult for lone parents to find suitable accommodation, either in the public or private sectors. Finally, those lone parents interviewed, clearly feared being discriminated against if they needed public sector

housing, and did not want to be moved into deprived areas. As this respondent said 'I did not want my children being brought up in that situation. I wasn't, and I don't see why my children should be allowed to.'

In the following extract, Sharon made a telling remark, indicating that for her, the children come first, and this is representative of other lone parents. The other side of this is that lone parents are likely to feel strongly about the disadvantage their children experience, and the fact that they cannot give them what they think they ought to have, and her comments also reflect how she sees her job as lone parent as full-time, and long-term.

My priority is bringing up my kids as best I can till I can shut door on them both - when they've both gone, and say "Well, I've done my job." Don't get me wrong - I don't class it as a job like nine till five - that sort of thing - but I think that you will find that most single parents, their first priority is bringing their kids up, no matter how they've got to being a single parent in the first place. I mean my money goes on food first, and then, extras.

She then went on to explain how difficult things were at Christmas, when the children wanted things like other children, that she could not really afford. (Significantly, this interview took place just before Christmas.) She had agreed to give her eldest daughter some money for a pair of boots for Christmas, but could not afford to buy her younger daughter the computer she had requested. One aspect of modern society is that children in school will be introduced to modern equipment, such as computers, and computer games, which they enjoy using. However, parents such as Sharon are unlikely to be able to provide these resources within the home, and their children are hence missing out in terms of learning experiences, and enjoyment. On the recent social security changes (1988), Sharon, in common with other women did not feel better off, because she had more to pay out - in this case £4 a week on rent. These examples reveal how difficult it can be managing on a low income, and some of concerns

women expressed in relation to providing for themselves and their children. The following section considers briefly problems that older children in the family can create - an issue which has tended to be overlooked in studies of lone parents and their children.

LONE PARENTS AND OLDER CHILDREN

Sharon's eldest daughter was on a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) scheme and consequently was no longer in her mother's book, that is she didn't receive Income Support for her. Sharon's daughter actually received £29.50 a week on YTS, out of which she gave her mother £10 a week board. She stated that she would have been receiving £24 a week Income support for her daughter, so effectively had undergone a reduction of fifteen pounds a week in her overall income, and this was making a difference to her circumstances.

I noticed it more after about a month, because obviously you don't sort of miss it at first, because your cupboards are stocked up so it don't matter. Ten pound a week for electricity she uses and baths she has!

Sharon's daughter in fact had two baths a day which is perhaps excessive, nevertheless, the amount of money Sharon received for her every week is clearly not enough to cover the costs of keeping an adult child at home.

Melanie, a mother of two teenagers (18 and 14) stressed how she would like to come off benefit if she could find 'a well-paid job', stressing that part-time work would not be worth her while and how difficult it was to go out and get a good full-time job that paid enough 'for us to live on, because the children are like two adults - they eat like adults, and my daughter's still in full-time education.' Although it might be assumed that women with older children should return to work, many mothers still feel that they should be around for young people of this age. In addition, 'children' the age of her daughter, who was in education, and

continuing so for the next year, represent a continued drain on household resources. Although the daughter would get an income during her next year in education, like Sharon, this mother would lose her allowance for her - in effect losing money which contributes to the overall resources available for the household. Young adults of this age might be expected to contribute to the household expenses, but are themselves on a low income, and would expect (and their parents expect them) to retain most of the amount they receive for themselves - for expenses associated with their education, and to enable them to participate in society as young adults.

Lone parents continue to take responsibility for their children when they are young adults, who may be unable to contribute to household resources, and who may prove a burden in economic terms. Social policies, however, do not recognize this kind of responsibility, which raises important questions about perceptions of the family and familial relationships. In a sense families with a low income are being driven to relinquish responsibility for their children before those in higher income families. If they do not, then they have to accept the financial consequences.

PROBLEMS WITH THE DSS

As most women were dependent on the state for their income, it was not surprising that their views on the Department of Social Security, and on this relationship of dependence should have been expressed frequently. Often this arose out of specific problems they had encountered, or contacts with the department, but sometimes these views arose out of more generalized feelings they had about the circumstances of themselves and other lone parents.

Pauline raised the problem of lone parents who need to buy something in an emergency, and the only means of borrowing money they have is by turning to the state.

I had a crisis loan when I were first homeless, and then I had a fifty pound loan to get this suite, 'cos I didn't have enough

money. On the fifty pound they charge you five pounds a week. That's a lot of money! That's one ridiculous thing about the social fund, that they do always put the repayments high. They're much higher than any bank loan, and it is hard. I mean you'd think really they'd understand, that you're on a low income and you can't pay as much, but they don't, they seem to want it back straight away.

Of course, the loan is interest free, but the payments are set at a high level, for someone who is on Income Support.

Sharon was another respondent who had put forward a claim from the Social Fund, but was surprised at the level at which repayments were set. She had put in for a loan to buy a single bed, plus pay the delivery charge, which amounted to a request for seventy pounds.

I asked for a loan for seventy pounds, that was all I asked for. That would 'ave got me a single bed and a headboard, and the delivery charge right? So they sent me this letter - now I nearly dropped a boiled egg! For this seventy pounds they wanted me to pay four pound something a week out of my money back. Now I thought that were astronomical for seventy pounds. Now, if it'd been seven hundred or a humndred I wouldn't 'a thought nothing about it, but for seventy pound, even if you went to a finance company, you could get it cheaper than that. It said on this thing, if we don't hear from you in a fortnight we know that you don't want the grant, so I didn't bother 'aving it. And that's really only dealings I've had with them because I think well, if they're gonna charge a person who are on their own all that much to pay back, and I mean as daft as it sounds I know four pounds isn't a lot of money, but I mean it's the difference between . . . like your weekend's food and sort of scratting, I thought well! I'm one of these that will buy me food first, and I always 'ave been because I will not see my children starve for Social Security and I don't care whether it suits anybody, because I mean, you make your own choices to be a single parent. Now I could 'ave 'ad my kids took into care and

I mean I could 'ave been on me own, but I thought, well I brought 'em into world, I take the responsibility for them, and I always 'ave thought like that, since they were little.

Considering that Sharon was the respondent who had been in receipt of state benefits for the longest - for twelve years - it is not surprising that she had a lot to say, both about poverty, and about the Department of Social Security specifically. When the interview started, her first priority was to tell me in great detail and at great length about her particular complaint against the DSS, which arose due to deductions made to pay her electricity bill, and the complicating factor of her eldest daughter being on, and then coming off her 'book' as she put it. In actual fact, too much money had been deducted, and she had experienced difficulty in setting the situation straight.

Well, it were a lot of money, well, quite a bit for me. I mean £35 means a lot to me. Not to some people, but it is to such as me. And I've been 'aving a right fight with them to get it. Scoop's been 'elping me, and Sheffield Centre for Unemployed. They've put me on to them and they've fought to gerrit it me. Anyway, I can get it. I've just 'ad a right schock through post, this morning. They want all me books back in. Now, it is Christmas on Saturday. We are suposed to get two weeks money this week, you know - in your book. Well, I don't, because I know if I put it in my purse, I'm one of them that'll think oh, I'll just 'ave that, and I'll just 'ave - and then I've got nowt left at weekend. And I thought when I got to know I could get this £35, I thought, oh, great, that'll buy my two daughters their Christmas box from me because obviously with me 'aving me benefit not right, I've been sort of living 'and to mouth for last three or four month. I've 'ad the money to keep me 'ome going, but I 'aven't 'ad nothing for extras. Well, they sent me a letter - it's just come through post this morning. I can't cash any more of me orders. I've got to take or send me books back by post today. There is no way I'm sending that book bck

by post, so it means I've got to go when you go out, you know, when you leave, I have got to go and see Social Security for God knows how long.

She gave a lengthy account of the situation that she had found herself in, which is indicative perhaps of the difficulties claimants can find themselves in, and illustrates the frustration she felt, although fortunately she was able to seek outside help. Her one criticism of 'Social Security' was the way 'they give you your money as if it's their money they are parting with, and in fact it isn't. I mean if we didn't go to such places, they wouldn't have a job in the first place', which is an interesting way of accounting for the employment of social security staff! From Sharon's point of view they clearly owe her something. Expecting someone to post back their Income Support book just before Christmas, and take the chance that it will be returned in time, does seem a little unreasonable. Sharon was not prepared to take any chances and intended to visit them after the interview, and as the last remarks seemed to be a hint directed my way, this did in fact result in her being given a lift in to Sheffield.

Diane faced problems, having returned to England from Germany where her husband was stationed in the army. The problems she had in finding accommodation are outlined in Chapter 7, and she also encountered unexpected problems when she went to claim social security, as she was in receipt of some maintenance.

I was totally honest with the DHSS, which I've found out now, there's certain things you just don't tell them because everybody does it. I'd got a £1,000 in my bank account which I'd brought back with me and he gave me £200 to come back with, and he promised to send me £50 every week. So I went to - I was told as soon as I got here I was to get in touch with the DHSS [by the Army] and they would sort my money out and 'cos I got this I couldn't have anything . . . at all.

Diane's later dealings with the DSS illustrate how confusing the situation can get for some claimants. She had been working recently and claiming Family Credit. Her employment, however, had finished when her contract for nannying was terminated. She had been left in considerable financial difficulty because on trying to claim income support, she had been told she was ineligible because she was receiving another state benefit, that is Family Credit, but of course, she had still suffered a drop in income, due to loss of wages, and the maintenance which was included in her finances took her over the Income Support limit. However, as for many other women, there were problems in relation to the payment of maintenance.

I finished work in January and the Family Credit book wasn't due till about April, and what I was getting from Family Credit and my Child Benefit, and from maintenance took me over the Income Support limit. I tried to point out to them that I wasn't getting maintenance regular. I might get £20 once every five or six weeks sort of thing, so that I was actually below. It took me a month to convince them that I wasn't getting this money regular before they'd give me a top-up and you see all the time that was going on, the rent and rates was building up on this and then the solicitors were fighting to get me money. We were fighting to get more money so that I could come off state benefits altogether, but because I wasn't working by then, by the time it got to court, it wasn't worth fighting for.

This latter comment relates to the fact that any extra maintenance would have been deducted from her state benefit, highlighting the fact that women working and receiving maintenance, are in a better financial situation than those receiving maintenance whilst on Income Support. At the time of the interview she was still having problems with maintenance.

I'm still having problems with my maintenance. It's coming through a lot more regular now than it was. I had a lump sum settlement for myself, so I don't get maintenance for me, which

helped clear a lot of the debts which had mounted up and I'm supposed to get maintenance for the kids every month. It's not coming through every month, but we've got an attachment to earnings now, so if I'm short one month, it's usually made up.

In common with other women, Diane did not like being on Income Support.

I don't like it at all. I don't like it all. I feel as though they undermine me, as if they're ruling your life. You can manage on what they give you, but only just, and if anything major crops up, well, you'd better rob Peter to pay Paul.

As will be mentioned in Chapter 7 Diane had a good relationship with her parents and did receive occasional help from them which made her situation easier, but still felt in relation to the DSS that 'they sort of control me because you're limited to what you can do - you go out to work - what you earn they take off you, so you're no better off.' She was keen to get back to work as were other women.

Angela lived in a red-brick semi-detached corporation property, on the edge of a large council estate in Sheffield. She was doing some casual work, which supplemented her benefit, but was for the most part largely dependent on the state. The extra money enabled her to buy 'the little necessities that you can't afford on benefit.' With regard to the changes that had taken place in 1988 she felt that 'they gave me money with one hand, and took it off with the other hand so that I was worse off'. She was referring to the fact that previously the DHSS had paid her rent, but that now she was having to find more out of her benefit. She had been more or less on state benefit since separating seven years before. Her feelings about depending on the state are not untypical, and again she spoke of the difficulties she faced in attempting to find work which would support herself and her daughter.

The areas covered in the next section encompass official attitudes towards lone parents, the perceptions of others, and how lone parents see themselves and others.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LONE PARENTS

Kate was one of those interviewed living in her own house at the time of the interview. This was a mortgaged property, with only the interest being met by the DSS, and on top of the mortgage, she had repair bills and maintenance to consider. (Despite disliking her financial situation intensely, she did, however, express some of the strongest views against remarriage.) Kate had a lot more to say about being dependent on the state, and in particular about the changes implemented in 1988 which had not made the situation any easier for lone parents.

I think it's got worse since April when they changed the benefits system and have frozen child benefit, and next April, they're gonna claw back the transitional payments that we got and I have a sort of nasty feeling that this government would quite like to phase out all welfare benefits. They don't want to make it easy for anybody to live off the state. There's a general attitude that you're a scrounger and the money they've spent on catching out social security fraud - whereas in fact there is more money lost in income tax evasion, but they spend a lot less money investigating those sort of cases. I mean you're legally entitled to unemployment benefit and income support. It's not a hand-out, but there's this attitude that you should be getting off your backside and working.

Even Kate's sister expressed these kinds of views to her, and she therefore felt that there was stigma attached to being dependent on the state which was also evident in the way that the system is operated, although she herself constantly challenged the negative labelling of lone parents associated with this kind of stigmatization.

If your mortgage interest rate changes, if it goes down so then you're claiming more money than you should, you have to tell them, and then - "Oh, send your book back! Do not cash any more

orders!" And you have to wait to get your book back, and then you find that you've been overpaid by fifty-six pence a week! And you're made to feel as though the allowances are given grudgingly because it's all down to the last silly penny.

Kate then described 'the feeling that Big Brother is watching you. Whatever you earn, or if there's any change at all, you must tell them, because they just might be paying you too much money', and outlined the particular difficulties she faced in claiming an additional heating allowance to which she was actually entitled.

Like my heating allowance, I was entitled to that, but I was made to feel like I was really going with a begging bowl "Please can I have this extra £1.20 a week?", or whatever it was. You were made to feel as though you don't count.

The situation with Kate's extra heating allowance is an interesting one, in that she was initially refused this allowance. In her view, she was discriminated against because she lived in one of the 'nicer' areas of Sheffield, and she had difficulty in obtaining the allowance despite the fact that she lived in a relatively exposed location on the outskirts of the city. This kind of discrimination, based on residential location, was an issue raised by other lone parents (not all of them living in their own houses). Discretionary allowances were seen as being less likely to be given to those living in more affluent areas of the city, although lone parents might be equally as poor wherever they lived, and their needs and those of their children just as great. There is a real problem to be confronted here in that those in need do not all necessarily live in obviously deprived areas, and this is an issue which applies to others in society, such as the elderly, or the disabled. This was also seen as a divisive issue for lone parents in the city, as it was reported that those living in 'deprived' areas were sometimes seen as unwilling to accept that those in the 'nicer' areas could have real problems. Finally, Kate cynically summed up the government's attitude towards incentives for the rich and the poor.

I mean this government is giving all these wonderful tax cuts to the rich, because that's sort of incentives to keep their money in Britain and start up businesses, but at the other end of the scale, we will give the poor incentives by making them worse off. But, I mean you can only complain about people not working if there's full employment, if there are the jobs. And there aren't the jobs! And I get really angry with "Oh, there's jobs if you look for them!" - and there aren't, and they just make it so hard for you.

Bridget also raised the issue of other people's perceptions of what poor people ought to be like, by referring to the appearance of herself and her children, and how it contradicts people's expectations.

They look at this house, and I mean the clothes that I have, I've had for years and years and years, when I was married. I've got some new clothes that my mum and dad have bought me, and the kids are well-dressed because I've got the clothing grant, and then every so often I'll try and save up some money to buy them a new pair of shoes or whatever, and my mum and dad clothe them, so once every three or four months they'll clothe them for me, and then people look at you and say, "She's not hard up for money. Look at the clothes she has!" but they're clothes I've had for years. It's just that I look after my clothes.

People clearly expect those on low incomes to live in certain kinds of houses, in particular areas and wear second-hand clothes. However, Bridget was one of those women who was slightly older when she had her first child, having worked before-hand, and in addition, as is evident in Chapter 7 was also one of those lone parents fortunate enough to receive a great deal of support from her parents - in this instance, in the form of clothes for her children.

The remarks from Sharon that follow raise the issue of motherhood, and what expectations society has of women who are

mothers, which are influenced both by general attitudes and by personal experience. In common with the other women Sharon did not like being on state benefit. However, she clearly felt that as a mother she ought to be there for her children, rather than going out to work, and her own childhood experiences had a great deal to do with this view.

My mother used to work and I used to hate coming home to an empty 'ouse when I was eleven, twelve year old - I mean I weren't a baby and I always said my kids will never be latch-key kids, and they will not be.

Sharon was very sympathetic to the plight of all lone parents, accepting that it was difficult for them to find jobs which fitted in with children. Her sympathy led to her expressing some rather unusual views which although reproduced below, should not be taken to be typical of other women in similar circumstances.

The money you get on Income Support, whatever your circumstances I'm not just saying single parents - does make you think, well, I might as well go out and pinch something. I mean they say crime figures is up, I'm not surprised at all, because there's been times when I've seriously thought - well. And I wouldn't pinch out stupid - don't get me wrong! If I were going out to pinch something I would make sure it were worth my while pinching it. I wouldn't go out and pinch a pair of kegs - you know, stupid things like that. To me, these that go out and pinch a skirt and get fined, God knows how much for pinching that skirt, seems to be absolutely stupid. I mean if I were gonna do it, I'd do a wages job. You know what I mean? I'd make it worth my while. I wouldn't do, you know, just because they were there and you could get hold of them because I don't believe in stealing.

This passage followed remarks by Sharon about how difficult it was to go out and leave the house unlocked as her mother had done, because

there was so much more crime, and then she proceeded to make these comments, which to be fair were delivered with a great deal of humour, and laughter, although eventually she obviously felt the need to contradict what she had just said and point out that she was not the kind of person who would steal. These views from one woman shouldn't be seen as indicating that those on state benefit are will all go out and steal to support their families. However, the fact that they are expressed is surely a reflection of how difficult Sharon felt it was for people to manage on a low income, and how some people may be driven to steal.

MAINTENANCE

As can be seen from Table 1 very few women were solely dependent on maintenance. Those who were, however, also faced considerable financial stresses, and these examples have been included to make the point that whether or not to claim maintenance has presented women with a difficult decision, given that what they do receive will be deducted from any benefit they receive. Since completion of the research, a new system of Child Support has been established, and the Child Support Agency (1993), which largely removes from lone parents themselves the decision of whether or not to make a claim. (Child support is still deducted from benefit received.) This change will be discussed further in the conclusion of the thesis.

Unlike some other mothers interviewed, Jane did feel that her ex-husband ought to be paying maintenance for the children, which at the time, he was not. She hated being on state benefit, and would have preferred to be supported by her ex-husband, while looking after their two young children, seeing this as his legitimate responsibility. However, her intention was to ask the DSS to recover money from the court, so that she could still retain her payment book, as she envisaged difficulties in obtaining the money direct from him. As she stated -

If it's left for him to pay me, and I've got to claim each week, I'll be in a right mess. I'll have my books. I don't like it, but I'll have my books. At least I'll know where I am.

This comment represents the fear that many women have that if they do have to claim maintenance, they will end up in a far worse situation than they are at present.

Bridget was a lone parent depending partially on Income Support and partially on maintenance paid for her ex-husband, although this had been subject to a recent reduction due to his change in circumstances. As maintenance payments are deducted from Income Support payments, she was of course, still living at this basic level of income.

He's dropped it tremendously over these last twelve months. I'm not even getting half of what I was getting before, because he got married and now she's got a baby. I took him to court about it but I lost, you know with him being - but of course you see it was a man. The judge was a man and everybody else that was sat round were men, and I wasn't allowed to open my mouth to defend myself. I was the one that was in the wrong. It made me very angry that I lost a lot, but it pays half the bills, the other half I have to struggle to pay myself, but they get paid.

Bridget was not alone in expressing resentment, and recognizing her powerlessness when confronted with male decision-makers, even though she appeared to accept that her husband's responsibilities to his new child meant he could not continue to pay maintenance at the same rate. She was a homeowner, with the Department of Social Security paying interest on the mortgage. However, at the point of interview she was moving into a cheaper house, because she could not afford to stay where she was. As far as being on Income Support was concerned she had the following comment to make.

I don't like it. I'm looking for a job. I feel guilty that the state, that people that are out working should have to pay for

me to live - that's how I feel. Why should they? He should pay for me to live. He should be the one to pay for everything. Not ordinary people that I don't - that I will never meet, that are working for their money. You know, I'm not creaming, but I feel as if I am, and the sooner I get a full-time job and can come off Income Support the better I shall feel.

Those women totally dependent on maintenance suffered additional hardship associated with not being entitled to the additional benefits accompanying income support. Hannah, for example, with three children aged eleven, eight and five commented as follows -

The maintenance he's giving me makes it so that I can't claim, 'cos it's too much. I don't get school meals. I used to, until she [Mrs. Thatcher] changed it - and there's milk to pay for as well.

Although recent government policy has been to encourage absent parents to pay maintenance towards the cost of their children, clearly this will not necessarily improve the financial circumstances of lone parent families.

Summary

The views of these women are representative of the views of others interviewed, although of course the amount of direct contact with officialdom varied. Women in general emphasized their dislike of their dependence on the state, and saw financial independence as something they were striving to achieve. At the same time, as already suggested in Chapter 2, and returned to in Chapter 9, dependence on the state was seen as better than being economically dependent on a man. One simple fact is that state benefit represents a guaranteed, and regular source of income to these women, which is particularly important when providing for children. On the other hand, maintenance may be irregular, and of course, can also be

something which creates intense conflict between women and their ex-husbands.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown some of the problems that women on a low income face when they have children to support, which include confronting both the Department of Social Security, and other people's attitudes towards lone parents (although any stigma attached to lone parenthood was generally dismissed, which may have a lot to do with the women's own positive attitude towards the status). Without fail women expressed their dislike of being dependent on the state even though as already suggested, this may be preferable to economic dependence on a man, yet as Chapter 6 will show, altering this situation is extremely difficult for most lone parents. Finding paid employment which provides an income adequate to support the family would provide a solution to some of the problems highlighted in this chapter. However, as will be seen it is by no means easy for women to do this.

The chapter on the women and their families (Chapter 7) reveals how some women may find themselves doubly dependent - on both the state and their family. Whilst this may be seen as undesirable by the women themselves, it does result in their being better off in both material and emotional terms, than other lone parents, who only have the welfare state to turn to. With the establishment of the Child Support Agency more women will also be tied economically to ex-partners, with the state as 'go-between', and this adds another dimension to the analysis of women's relationships of dependence (see Conclusion for further discussion).

Finally, women do state that they prefer dependency on the state (and on their families) to economic dependence on men, and this period of dependency may in fact lead to the development of feelings of independence and control over their lives which they did not experience during marriage. Herein lies the contradictory nature of

women's dependence on the state, which will become more complex with recent policy changes in child support. It yet remains to be seen to what extent lone parents and their children benefit from these changes.

CHAPTER 6

W O M E N O N E M P L O Y M E N T

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will consider women's attitudes towards paid employment, and the obstacles that make it difficult for lone parents to enter, or re-enter the labour market. The first section will outline some other research in this area, with particular reference to the most recent survey on lone parents, which was commissioned by the government in October, 1988 (Bradshaw & Millar, Vol. I, 1990). The rest of the chapter will then be devoted to what those interviewed in connection with the thesis had to say on the subject, which raises some of the psychological/emotional barriers that women face when attempting to move from the private world of the family, into the more public world of paid employment.

OTHER RESEARCH

The most recent large-scale piece of research already referred to involved both quantitative and qualitative research, but only Volume I, which presents results from the former will be referred to here (Bradshaw & Millar, 1991). The survey included divorced, separated and single lone parents of both sexes, but only five per cent were male. In total, 1,820 interviews were conducted; of those interviewed the overall total of those employed was 42 per cent, and just over two thirds (70 per cent) of this national sample were receiving IS which is comparable with latest national estimates.

(Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, pp. 11-15). Some of the findings from this, and other research, are referred to in the following paragraphs, concentrating on women as lone parents..

There has been a fall in the proportion of one mothers in employment, from 47 per cent in 1977/1979 to 42 per cent in 1985/1987, which is mainly accounted for by a drop in full-time working, with the result that the employment rates for lone mothers are now similar to that of married mothers in respect of full-time work (16 per cent and 17 per cent of lone and married mothers respectively now work full-time). However, lone mothers are much less likely to work part-time (24 per cent as against 37 percent). 'Thus lone mothers are less likely to be employed than married mothers because they are less likely to be in part-time jobs.' (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, p.76).

Since the Finer Report (1974) it has been of government policy towards lone parents has been based on the assumption that they should have a choice as to whether or not to take up paid employment. Policies have therefore, at least in theory, sought neither to discourage or encourage these mothers into taking up paid employment, and they have therefore had the choice not to work and to remain on IS (which replaced Supplementary Benefit) until their youngest child reaches the age of sixteen, with a more generous earnings disregard than two-parent families when undertaking part-time work. Alternatively, they can work more than twenty-four hours a week (this has now been reduced to sixteen hours a week), and providing their income does not exceed specified limits, may be eligible to claim Family Credit (which replaced Family Income Support.)

This particular policy orientation towards lone parents, is generally presented as being neutral, that is, neither forcing them to remain at home, nor forcing them to go out to work. This approach, has however, been under attack recently for different reasons which are effectively presented in Bradshaw & Millar (1990, pp. 77-79). The first line of attack states that lone parents are prevented from working because support for employment of lone parents has been far too weak, and financial incentives are too limited, with problems arising from the 'poverty trap', where earnings are not

enough to make it worthwhile coming off state benefit, and doing without associated benefits, such as housing benefit and free school meals. There is also the continuing and much debated problem of the lack of adequate and appropriate childcare facilities, at a price that lone parents can afford. The basic thrust of these points, which are raised in other recent literature (Millar 1989; Parker, 1989; Brown, 1989; Cohen, 1988; Hardey & Glover, 1991), is that their choice to work is actually very restricted, and that rather than being neutral, recent government policy very effectively prevents lone mothers from working.

Whilst this first critique of government policy assumes that mothers want to work, but are unable to do so, the second assumes lone mothers do not want to work, and are encouraged to remain dependent by the benefits system. These arguments were outlined in Chapter 2 of the thesis where the 'culture of dependency' was discussed (Moore, 1987; Segalman & Marsland, 1990). Whilst these ideas were criticized it is clearly very difficult for lone parents to make the decision to go out to work if they are not going to benefit financially, as another recent report suggests.

It has become clear that for substantial numbers of lone parents the costs associated with full-time working together with the consequent loss of benefits mean that they will be no better off, and in many cases will be worse off, by starting work (National Citizens' Advice Bureaux, 1989, p.2).

The availability of Family Credit is supposed to encourage lone parents to take up paid employment, but has not been successful in this respect, as the present benefit system:

operates to produce a substantial disincentive to work. A lone parent has to earn a very considerable wage in order to lift herself above the dependency on means-tested benefits, even though it was the express intention of the family credit system to overcome the poverty trap inherent in the pre-1988 benefit system (National Citizens' Advice Bureaux, 1989, p.6).

In actual fact, it is obvious from the comments of lone mothers themselves, which follow in the next section, that it has become more difficult for them to go out to work since 1988, because the costs of childcare can no longer be offset against money earned.

One of the central ideological issues facing British society is whether or not lone mothers should work, which in turn is related to the question of whether or not any mother should work, or whether a mother's place is in the home, looking after her children. This is an area of conflicting views, even within the ranks of the present government, where opinion on this issue is divided. At present there is more demand for female labour due to a lack of young people entering the labour market (what is referred to as 'the demographic time bomb'), yet traditional attitudes towards the family still demand that mothers should stay at home. The conflict inherent in the debate about such matters results in a lack of agreement about the most appropriate policies for lone parents, and certainly does not assist in resolving the problems confronted by lone parents.

Many lone parents do go out to work, and what is of interest to policy-makers is why some work, and others do not, and with this in mind the Bradshaw & Millar survey (1990) considered possible explanations, which are grouped under four headings, which are that the non-employed prefer not to work; that the characteristics of individual women are a major factor; that opportunities available in terms of jobs and child-care will affect employment, and finally, financial incentives, which have to be sufficient and appropriate to be effective (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, p.80). There is a wealth of evidence to be considered when assessing these different explanations (Weale, 1984; Millar, 1989; Martin & Roberts, 1984; Ermish, 1989; Brown, 1989), but it is difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion. The focus of the Bradshaw & Millar (1990) report is on barriers which might prevent employment, or make it difficult for women to return to work, and these are summarized as: attitudes and beliefs; child-care; skills and experience, and financial incentives. The overall tenor of their findings, which is certainly supported by research carried out for this thesis is that:

The women wanted to work for both financial and social reasons but for most of those not currently employed family responsibilities prevented them from working now although all intended to do so in the future (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, p.82).

The impact of children on women's opportunities to work, and on the decisions they make in this area are crucial to understanding how effective policies can be devised which will assist women to work, if they wish to do so. To develop the connection between the impact of children on women's opportunities, within each marital status younger women were less likely to be employed than older women, which would be connected with their greater likelihood of having younger children (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, pp.93-95).

An alternative way of looking at employment status is to consider employment as a continuum, taking into account both present status and future plans, and this kind of approach was built into the research associated with this thesis, as it was in the Bradshaw and Millar survey. This more appropriately captures the dynamics of employment, reflecting the fact that many women will move in and out of paid employment and it also allows for women's future employment intentions to be examined. According to their survey, 'half of the women said that they would want to work in the future although not now', or would work longer hours in the future, and the most common reasons given for not wanting to increase hours, or wanting to delay an increase in hours, were to do with children (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990, pp. 120-123). Again, amongst those women not currently employed, those wanting to delay employment were most likely to be mothers with young children. The small group who never wanted to work tended to be older women, with no educational qualifications. In summary, it can be deduced that most lone parents would at some point in time like to return to work, or increase the hours they work, but the most significant obstacle preventing their doing so, is the fact that there is insufficient and inadequate child-care available in the country, at a price that they can afford. When considering the results if women were able to do what they wanted, Bradshaw and Millar conclude that if all of those women who worked,

and the women who expressed a desire to work were include that '71 per cent of lone mothers would be employed' (pp.135-137). In other words there is a great deal of wasted potential amongst lone mothers in this country.

Having referred to some of the literature in the area of lone mothers and paid employment, and outlined some of the main points made in the most recent survey, the rest of the chapter will utilize interview material from the research to illustrate some of these points further, and to highlight other factors which might prevent or delay women's entry into paid employment; some of which are practical, and just as importantly, some of which are emotional or psychological.

WOMEN ON WORK

Rather than presenting the reader with endless statements from all of the women interviewed, the decision has been made to select accounts from one or two individuals who illustrate specific points of interest, which deserve further consideration.

Kate

Kate had been on state benefit for all of the five years she had been a lone parent, only managing to do some part-time cleaning jobs for cash, which she stated did not exceed the earnings disregard for lone parents. She also said that she felt unable to 'fiddle the sytem'. Kate expressed views about the possibility of working shared by other lone parents

I think what annoys me about being a single parent is that it is so hard for you to get off benefit because I can only earn fifteen pounds before they start reducing my benefit. I've got to have a job that will fit in with school hours, and school holidays, or I've got to have a really well paid full-time job

that will allow me to pay for childminding, which is expensive. I mean the rate that child-minders get is not very much, but if they have your kid for a lot of hours, and if you're not earning that much money in the first place, it's a lot of money. It's just so difficult and I think single parents are at the bottom of the heap. It's just so limiting and I don't think anybody really cares.

Kate was one of the most qualified of those interviewed and it might be assumed (as suggested in Bradshaw & Millar, 1990), that her job expectations, and hence the possibility of improving her financial situation were better than that of other women. However, she was also at forty, one of the older lone parents, with an eight year old son to consider.

I get very depressed about jobs because I know I can't get back into the library, it's virtually impossible. I've been out of library work for eight, nine years. I don't know what I would retrain as. Quite often, you can't get on training schemes unless you've been signing on as unemployed. And by the time my son's old enough to come home from school and let himself in and be old enough to do that, where I can consider working full-time, I'm going to be in my mid forties, and then people don't want to know. I mean I don't think that forty is particularly ancient, but I see jobs in the paper and there's an age range, you know - eighteen to thirty-five - so what jobs are there when you're in your forties, when all you're trained for is to be a librarian.

- In addition of course, it may not be easy, or there may not be the jobs available for someone like Kate to re-enter a particular area of employment, at the same level of pay as before having her son. In relation to this she mentions someone else of whom she has knowledge.

I am already trained, but it's difficult to get back in. It would be difficult - virtually impossible - for me to get back

in on a proper professionally paid scale. I bumped into a friend of mine when I first moved back to Sheffield and asked what she was doing these days. Well, she gave up library work to get married and had two kids, and was trying to get back to being a librarian, and she was doing what's called stand-by relief where you put your name down on a list to go and help out at branches when they're short-staffed, or cover for maternity leave. She and another girl were doing a job share, but she was only being paid on a sort of clerical scale, and that's three years ago, and she's now finally managed to get a permanent job with the library, again, job sharing. She's a senior assistant at a library, and it's a post that used to be paid as a full-time librarian post. Now it's a clerical grade job share, so the libraries are de-scaling, or whatever the word is. The professional jobs are not there.

Finally, Kate makes the point that this situation is all very well for a married woman, who has other means of financial support, but the situation is different for a woman who is a lone parent. Although married and lone mothers may face similar problems in attempting to return to work, in the final analysis the one crucial difference is that the lone mother (unmarried, separated or divorced) has to support a family on whatever she is earning, and therefore needs to be earning a full wage to make working worth her while. This is one area in which lone parents do need to be treated as a special case, in order to facilitate their return to work, if this is what they wish for.

So she's a chartered librarian, so she's working part-time which is three days a week, she's quite happy because she's working in a library, but they're getting cheap labour 'cos she's professionally qualified, and of course everything she's earning she keeps 'cos she's married.

Kate went on to highlight further the problems facing a lone mother who hopes to return to work.

I saw a job last week and I thought that might be all right. It was a kitchen assistant in a school, and it said hours sixteen and a quarter a week, and I thought lovely, that will fit in nicely with school times, so I rang up to enquire about it. The dinners aren't cooked on the premises, they're sent to the school, and they want somebody to serve the dinners and wash up afterwards. I didn't find out about the rate of pay because I thought, all I'm gonna keep out of that is fifteen pounds, so I'm going to be committed to going over there five days a week, serving dinners and washing up which sounds like a lot of work for one person, for fifteen quid. Now who's gonna work for that sort of money? You'd be better to do two days as a charlady for fifteen pounds.

If she were married, Kate would be able to keep all of this money, as she sees it, and felt quite strongly that lone parents were discriminated against, and that everything was against someone wanting to get off state benefit. 'You just come up against all these blank walls and people don't want to know.' Kate felt that the Conservative government of the previous ten years did not care about lone parents. Lone parents have been the focus of much government attention in the last few years, apparently with the intention of helping them, but also at the same time clearly with the intention of saving the state money. Kate summed up the dilemma facing policy-makers with contradictory views towards motherhood and women, and hence to female lone parents. In addition, the government does not want to be seen to be encouraging divorce and/or lone parenthood, so there is a very real conflict between providing sufficient state support for lone parent families (particularly their children), whilst at the same time not encouraging lone parents to remain dependent on the state, a fact which is of course recognized by lone parents themselves.

Mrs. Thatcher wants women to stay at home and look after their kids, she wants a return to all these so-called lovely Victorian values. She wants married women to stay at home and look after

the kids. She doesn't really want them going out to work, but with single parents it's as if we make it harder. We want them - we don't want them to find it easy living on state benefit, so we'll make it harder for them to get out to work, because now I can't claim for child-minding fees or travelling expenses if I get a job. I can earn fifteen pounds, but out of that if I have to pay a few pounds to someone to look after my son, or on bus fares, I'm worse off. I mean before April [1988] I could keep twelve pounds, but I could claim for things.

Another mother (Jane) who as a nurse, was better qualified than most other women interviewed, expressed desire to return to work, but was one of those with young children, her youngest being only two and she felt she had to wait until this child had started school. Even then, she felt that childminding costs, and transport costs might be too excessive to allow her return to work. Added to this was the fact that the kind of work she was trained to do, that is nursing, involved shift work, and it might prove difficult for her to re-enter her previous occupation. Again this is another point which indicates how it may in fact prove difficult for a qualified woman to re-enter her original area of employment, for a variety of reasons.

Angela

Angela was one of the respondents doing part-time work which supplemented her benefit, but she was for the most part largely dependent on the state. She spoke of the difficulties, both practical and psychological, she faced in attempting to find work, which would support herself and her daughter, aged eleven.

I hate it. I absolutely loathe it. At the moment I've applied for a job. I'm now waiting for an answer. I've got another application for another job. the thing is if I go to work full-time it's got to be enough money to manage. I've got a full rent to pay, there's school meals to pay, there's school milk to

pay. It's an easy life being on social, but I don't want it. There's things that matter in a job, and I don't like it. It's all right having all this time, you know. You've got all this time and no money and you've got nothing to do, and she's at school now from nine till three, and I'm just sitting looking at the walls.

Angela's immediate environment was quite depressing, in terms of the location and condition of the estate where she lived, and during the interview it was quite clear that she often felt very depressed about her present situation. For Angela, as for many other women, working is not only about getting paid, but also about getting out of the house and meeting people, and keeping busy. She was at the time doing a one year college course, but was dissatisfied with this, finding that some of those teaching found it difficult to deal with mature students in the classroom. Since being on the course, she had decided that studying was not for her, which therefore limited her options when it came to returning to work. She had been applying for unqualified social work jobs, and hoped that if she could gain some experience she stood a better chance of finding a permanent position in this area. However, she was also considering other options.

I don't think I'll get this job because I haven't got enough experience, so I'll have to sit down and re-think what I'm going to do. This course only lasts till May. Like I said, I'm applying for another job. The money's not very good, and it's only a telephonist.

And if she did not get this job she was prepared to go further, and do some more training, by enrolling on a job training scheme, having just discovered that she was eligible to apply for a place, even though not signing on as unemployed. All of her plans, like those of other women, took into account the age of her child. She anticipated that she had about another five or six years of parenting before her daughter would be totally independent, but that she could not bear to just sit around and do nothing for all that time. Childcare,

however, was still a problem, and with older children it is after school, and holiday care, which presents the problem. As she said 'I've got to have it all worked out. I can work at night. That's fine, I've got a babysitter, but it's giving a third of my wage away.' At the time, she was working as a barmaid in the evenings. There are also the psychological aspects of returning to work which have to be dealt with by anyone who has been out of the paid labour market for some time.

I mean, this course that I'm on now. They tell you to be positive because you've got so many different talents, but they don't count when you're going for a job. It's okay in trying to be positive that way, but it doesn't work.

Being at home looking after children does drain women's confidence in their ability to rejoin the workforce. Angela had gained in this respect by going to college.

It's terrible because before I went to college, it'd got to the stage where I'd nothing to talk to people about, nothing whatsoever. Once I went to college - we talk about what happens at college, not necessarily what happens at home, and what other people have done, and your taste in music, and clothes and everything like that and it's just another world.

Initially she had decided she would like to teach, but there seemed 'to be so many obstacles in the way' as she had no formal qualifications.

I've got to get 'O' levels and then I've got to get 'A' levels, and that's two years, and then I've got to get on to teacher training which is three or four years, and I'd like to take a specialist course, but I've been told that once you've completed your teacher training, you've got to be in a post and do that for two or three years before you can go on a specialized, so

you're talking about ten years. I want to be able to see a result now, not in ten year's time.

Angela was clearly trying to deal with a number of problems. At thirty, she felt any lengthy course of study or training, would mean she would be at a disadvantage when she actually entered the job market. She also very much needed to see immediate results from her efforts, which is hardly surprising as she had already endured seven years on a low income, and perhaps reading what she said, it is possible to detect a sense of dejection, in that all she can manage to see are obstacles in her way, and to return to previous comments, there may be as many psychological as practical impediments to her hopes for the future.

CONCLUSION

Some of the difficulties confronting lone mothers who wish to enter or re-enter paid employment have been raised in this chapter. Clearly there are many practical steps which could be taken to increase women's choices as to whether or not return to work, the most important of these being the provision of adequate and affordable child-care. There are also, however, psychological and emotional issues which have to be addressed, and it is the case that assistance in these areas may be of great benefit to some women. Training and re-education also have an important part to play in encouraging women to take up paid employment, and can be part of a process of building confidence and self-esteem. In this respect, many of those interviewed were undertaking some kind of education or training which would facilitate their entry into the labour market, by developing new skills, or improving existing skills. The one drawback here of course, is the fact that most of these women were training in areas or work which have traditionally been associated with women, such as office work, and are hence lower paid. In effect, although they may at some point enter or re-enter the labour market, they will still be living on a lower income. Having explored

some of the financial implications of lone parenthood in this and the previous chapter, the next chapter will consider the other aspect described as being one of the worst things about being a lone parent, that is loneliness, or being alone.

CHAPTER 7

W O M E N A N D T H E I R F A M I L I E S

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will look at the way that some women depend on their families for support, which may be financial, practical and/or emotional. Although other studies on lone parents do refer to the support given by families (Goode, 1965; Marsden, 1973), and despite more recent research into family obligations (Finch, 1990), this is an area which has not been researched sufficiently (Graham, 1987b, p.255). The kind of support varies and there may of course be lone parents who get no help from their families at all, whereas others will may receive financial help, gifts for the house, presents, and clothing and pocket money for the children (Marsden, 1973, p.25). The relevance of such an area lies in the fact that ideology surrounding the family has been particularly important in recent years, both in political and social terms, as individuals in need, be they the elderly, the ill, or lone parents, have been encouraged to look to the community, and primarily to the family for support when in need, rather than making too many demands on the welfare state. All of the women interviewed were white, and the findings presented here thus challenge the assumption that this kind of support is only widespread among Afro-Caribbean families (Graham, 1987b).

FACTORS AFFECTING SUPPORT

Introduction

Any consideration of women's dependence as lone parents, on their families, must take account of a number of factors which can affect whether or not support is given, and if so, how much, and of what type. Some of these are outlined below, although the list may not cover all factors surrounding this issue, but at least highlights how variable the experience of lone parents may be in this respect. One important point to bear in mind is that in terms of this piece of research, women were talking about their own parents, and other members of their family, and the families of ex-partners were rarely mentioned.

Financial status of woman's parent(s)

The kind of income that a woman's parent or parents have will affect the degree of material support that they can give. If, for example her parents are pensioners, or working in jobs with low wages, then it may be difficult for them to give much financial support - although they may still help as much as they can. Aside from material support, parents can of course offer emotional support which is not necessarily affected by their own financial status, or provide services such as child-minding or baby-sitting.

Other family commitments

Parents often have other family commitments, particularly where there may be other siblings to consider. They may then be in the position of offering assistance to more than one adult child, as well as help with grandchildren. What this means is that they may be subject to considerable stress as they strive to be fair to their children. Although it has not arisen during the course of these interviews, it

is also possible that some parents of lone parents will have their own parents to care for, which could present additional stresses. While the kind of support the women referred to here should be seen in a positive light, it emphasizes the point that divorce, and its consequences reverberate throughout the family network.

Relationship with parent(s)

Parents' sense of obligation (Finch 1989) may be so strong that it does not matter if their relationship with their daughter is not that close. For those interviewed, however, it certainly helped if the women did have a close relationship with their parent or parents. (Where only one parent was concerned it was usually the mother, which reflects demographic facts). In terms of emotional support, it seemed that many women turned to their parents for the kind of support that should be, but is not necessarily present, within the marital relationship. Many women were clearly very close to their parents, although there might still be some things that they would have preferred to discuss with a partner, rather than a parent.

Marital status of parent(s)

The incidence of divorce in this country has inevitably created complicated familial relationships, where individuals may be remarried and have second families. Of those interviewed, two indicated that they had divorced parents. One of these was still very close to her mother, but hardly saw her father; the other had a very close relationship with her father and his new wife, but less contact with her mother. Clearly the marital status of the parents has implications for the kind of support that may be given, and while these two examples still had family members to turn to, others may not be quite so lucky.

The other possibility of course is that a parent may be widowed. With those interviewed, it was the mother who was left as sole

parent, and with whom the daughter had a close relationship. Two women, under different circumstances, may find they have much in common, and it can be a comfort to have someone else to turn to. In a very real sense, such individuals come to depend on each other, and the relationship is one of interdependency, and one of mutual benefit.

Age and health of parents

The amount, or kind of help that parents can give will also depend to some extent on their age, and whether or not they are in reasonably good health. Some women who were born late in their parents' lives, will have older parents in their seventies, or eighties, who may find it more difficult to give the kind of assistance needed - whether financial or practical - although some lone parents will still receive help from this quarter. The other side of this situation is that lone parents may themselves be called upon to support their more elderly parents. Health is another factor which will affect the relationship, as very frail parents, or those in poor health, for example, will be able to offer less assistance.

Geographical location of parents

It is easier for parents to assist in practical ways if they live close to their daughters. In fact, this was usually the case with those interviewed, and at least four women had moved back to Sheffield after the breakdown of a marriage in order to be closer to their own families. Thus, it can be seen, that being close to their own families was extremely important, although in being so their children will be geographically separated from their fathers.

Age of children

The age of the children may affect the amount of support given, though this may be unpredictable. As children grow, they are able to develop different kinds of relationships with their grandparents. For example, younger children will require more practical care, while older children may need a 'friend', or an alternative source of support from their mothers. Some grandparents may find any of these stages a strain, which again can affect the kind of contact they have. On the whole, for most of those interviewed, children were in contact with their maternal grandparents (and sometimes with their paternal grandparents), who therefore have an important role to play in the wider kinship network of the lone parent family.

Lone parents' attitude towards accepting help

One of the most significant factors affecting the kind of relationship that develops between parents and their daughters will be the latter's attitude towards receiving help. Women are placed in a difficult position in psychological terms, as despite being adults with children of their own, they are themselves firmly entrenched in the role of 'child' to their own parents. Of course, as adults we are all always the children of our parents, but it is generally accepted that on maturity we will be able to maintain ourselves, and achieve some kind of independence. For women who are lone parents, this is not so, and this kind of enforced dependency on one's parents is both valued and disliked at the same time.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this relationship is not generally one of straightforward dependency, but one of interdependency. Parents do get something back from the relationship; a continuing close relationship with their daughters and grandchildren, and also support when they need it themselves; family relationships generally being reciprocal in nature. This is a normal part of family relationships, but unfortunately tends to be seen by lone parents themselves in a negative way, because it reflects on their inability

to sustain themselves and their families without additional help. It is not surprising that these feelings were expressed at a time when the dominant political ideology emphasized individualism and self-help as the most desirable way of living one's life.

Summary

Other studies on kinship have of course raised some of these issues (see for example, Bott 1957; Wilmott & Young 1960; Finch, 1989), although these have not been found to be of much use for providing a more detailed analysis of the help that lone parents receive from their families. The following accounts therefore give greater insight into the kind of help women receive, and some of the reasons, or motivations for that help, which are listed above. What these accounts also indicate is that the 'extended family' is of vital importance to many lone parents and their children, and that 'what sustains a family is an undefinable knowledge of belonging to each other and caring for each other' (McNeill Taylor, p.19).

WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

The accounts in this section are again presented as individual stories. As each one may cover more than one of the points outlined above, they constitute a useful insight into lone parents relationships with their families. Although most of the accounts concentrate on the help parents give, some women also mention other members of the family, who may be significant in terms of helping to support the lone parent family.

Jane

Jane, on Income Support and a mother of two young children, living in her own house and paying a mortgage, was an example of someone depending to a great extent on her mother for financial and other

help. So, for example, she stated that 'the life insurance that I have is paid by my mother, the rates that we had to start paying from April - you know this twenty per cent, or whatever it was - my mother pays.' In addition her mother also helped out by providing some food.

She buys me at least one lot of groceries a week. She buys me my meat for the week. Well, she buys me a joint and either mince, or gammon or something else, but we always have a joint at the weekend which she pays for, and as I say, the pound of mince, or a pound of gammon, or something like that, which gives me a couple of meals in the week, and I buy things like bacon and sausages.

As Jane acknowledged she was very dependent on her mother for support - 'If I didn't have my mum, then I wouldn't be in this house. There is no way I could do it.' Jane highlighted the problem of getting out and about with young children without having your own transport - even the possibility of going out to work and dropping off children with childminders becomes a major problem. She recounts her desire to have her own car.

The one thing that I would love to be able to do, is to drive and to be able to run a car. And that would make me so much more independent. At the moment I'm so dependent on my my mum.

Once again, it was her mother who helped out - this time with her car. Jane's aim of returning to work as soon as her youngest child (then two) was old enough to go to school was directly related to her desire to be independent, and not so dependent on her mother.

Jane was fortunate in having this kind of assistance from her mother, and their own personal histories determine why so much help was available to Jane. Her mother also provided help during her marriage, which had a complicated history of its own. Her husband left her when she was pregnant with her first child, and it was to

her mother she turned. After this birth the marriage continued again until she was pregnant with her second child, when he again left her. Once again, her mother was very supportive.

In addition to this her mother was a widow, and at the time of the interview was still in full time employment, so was better able than other parents to help out financially. On the other hand, Jane had a sister, and was aware of the fact that her mother's resources also needed to be directed towards her when necessary - although at this point she seemed to be able to help out both her daughters. So whether or not help of this kind is available to a lone parent will depend on a range of factors, which will include the working or financial status of their parent(s), their relationship with them, and whether or not there are any other claims on the parent.

Rachel

Rachel, on Income Support, with one child, and again living in her own home, was another woman who received a great deal of support from her parents - in this case both father and mother. Whilst Rachel received practical support from her parents, they were also both referred to throughout the interview, and clearly offered her a great deal of emotional support as well. After paying the bills, Rachel was not left with very much money for anything else.

I don't buy any clothes for Susie. My parents buy them all. If I had to buy clothes for Susie, I don't know where we'd be now. They always have done. My mum makes clothes and buys the shoes. I mean she's a big girl for her age (12); grows at a tremendous amount of speed. She's in a size twelve, ladies clothes, so you can appreciate we're paying adult prices. She's in a size six and a half shoe. And coats, well - I mean I've got one sister, but S's outgrown her now! She was getting cast-offs, which were very good, but now she's passed her by, so we have that little bit of a problem, but having said that, my parents provide her clothes.

Rachel's commentary illustrates how difficult it can be for those living on state benefit to buy clothes for children; particularly for those children who are above average sizes. In addition to clothing, her parents again also contributed food,

Vegetables and fruits are bought every week by my mum. And my dad comes every Friday to pick up the fruit and vegetables from the shop round here. I take the order in on Friday morning and dad picks them up and brings me mine, and there's usually a parcel of goodies - meat or something, because I must admit I don't buy meat. Not because I don't want to, it's because I think it's too expensive. So there's always something that she'll buy - a bottle of orange for S, and some milk and toilet rolls and soap powder.

Rachel did rely on her parents for such help, but like other women interviewed was not happy with this situation, and would have preferred to be self-sufficient.

It really bugs me to think that I have to be dependent on my parents, as well as the state. I'm sure they realize how grateful I am, but it hurts me to think I have to accept that. I wish I didn't. They've been the backbone, from the beginning and honestly, I've been very lucky with them. I don't know where I'd be - I probably wouldn't be here today, if I hadn't had the help they had given me. They're always there. You can try so much, but in the end I don't like admitting I can't manage. I'm not easily beaten, but you just have to swallow your pride sometimes and say "I need help".

Once again Rachel expressed conflicting emotions about the help she received from her parents. She was grateful for it, and accepted it, but at the same time because she was an adult, she felt she should be able to look out for herself and her child. In Chapter 2 of the thesis the nature of dependency was considered, and the point was made that women dependent on the state, can still express feelings of

achievement and independence, because they are controlling their lives to a degree which was not possible within marriage. Rachel's account, however, highlights the fact that women in this situation may be doubly dependent - on the state and their family, and may certainly feel that in some ways they have ceased to be adults, and have become like children again; although it is the case that it was Rachel's parents who were enabling her to live a life independent of the support of a partner. The nature of dependency can thus be seen to be extremely complicated, and will be considered further in the conclusion of the thesis, but it must be emphasized that dependency is not in itself totally negative, but that it may engender negative feelings in the individual, which are to some extent socially induced. It is also ironic that this period of dependency, whether on the state, the family, or both, may be for many women a pathway towards an independent future.

Rachel was fortunate that she could get the help she needed from her parents, which then supplemented the income she received from the state. Others of course, may receive no assistance from their families, which would suggest that the material conditions and experiences of those dependent on state benefit will vary significantly. Individuals such as Jane and Rachel when asked how they coped stated that it was difficult, but still presented a picture of someone coping relatively well with a disadvantageous financial situation, because of the alternative source of assistance. This is something which should be borne in mind when assessing whether or not levels of benefit are adequate, and if claimants can manage on the amounts paid out, as responses of claimants may vary according to the degree of support (if any) they receive from their families.

Kate

When married Kate lived in Devon and described how awkward it was living on 'his territory' after divorce, together with the fact that she felt she was 'seen as his ex-wife'. She felt that she was not

free to lead my own life, because he was too much on the doorstep. It was too small a place to stay in, with him being around, and I just wanted to get right away, because I got very depressed living there.

It was a hard decision to make because she did like Devon, and she still wondered if she had done the right thing, but 'just felt I wanted to come back here to be near my family somehow.' Kate's family consisted of her mother in Sheffield, an aunt, her own sister living in another northern town, and a brother in the South. Effectively then she did not have much family actually living in Sheffield, but it was still important for her to return to be near her mother. One of the other motivating factors was to put distance between herself and ex-husband, and between her son and ex-husband, as she felt the latter to be a bad influence on the former (in particular his drinking habits).

After divorce, it is stated how important it is for a child to remain in contact with the non-custodial parent, and it is true that this contact is easier if the physical residences are close. However, it is easy to understand the isolation that Kate experienced, and her desire to return to her 'home'. As it happened her son had some contact with his father - although not on a regular basis - and this was expected to continue in the future. Kate's father had died while she was still living in Devon, so her mother was her main family contact.

There's just my mum and an aunt. I mean I've got loads of cousins all over the place, but none that I'm in touch with. I mean, with my sister living in H. - that's not too far away - so I do see more of her.

Kate had done some odd bits of part-time work such as cleaning, but was primarily dependent on Income Support, facing the same sort of financial problems as other lone parents, and attempting to resolve the same difficulties over returning to work. Again, Kate

had received some financial aid from her mother, but the way this was worked out was interesting, as it very much depended on reciprocity.

I've had some help from my family. Well, I did some decorating for my mother and she paid me for doing that, which I didn't want her to, but if I didn't do it, she'd have to get a decorator in who would charge her a lot of money. She wanted her bedroom decorating. She wanted to sort of help me by, you know, if I did it for her she'd pay me some money, and it was before Christmas, and that was her way of helping me. I mean she would give me the money but she knows that I wouldn't take it. So she said "Well if you do it, I'll pay you for doing that", which perhaps some people might think a bit sort of - but then you've got pride.

Throughout the interview Kate expressed very strong views on lone parents and dependence on the state, and equally strong views on her desire for financial independence. Turning to her mother for occasional financial aid was not something she felt good about, and this was clearly expressed in the description of this event. The only way around these feelings was for Kate and her mother to come to an arrangement; in effect to enter into a kind of unofficial contract, so that Kate performed a task, for which her mother paid. Even this was not completely satisfactory as we see a hint in what Kate said, that other people, if they knew about it, might regard this arrangement between mother and daughter as peculiar, but nonetheless, it did allow her to keep some vestige of pride. Relationships within families are complex and there is a delicate balance between dependence and independence at which people aim in relationships (Finch, 1989b), and this account provides one illustration of this.

Kate's mother, in common with other grandparents, also helped out with her son, but this kind of assistance was again fraught with difficulties as Kate related how much she disliked asking, and how sometimes she had to keep reminding her elderly mother when she did need help.

She'll buy things for John. Recently he needed some new shoes and the only ones he liked and that he was prepared to wear were Clarks' and they cost about twenty-four quid, and she said "I'll pay for those" but I have to remind her because she's got a memory like a sieve. He's in the Beavers and they're going on a Christmas outing next Sunday, which is five pounds and it's a day out, but that's a fiver, and I thought I can't afford that this week, so I saw her at the weekend and I said "Would you like to treat him to his Beaver trip?" "Oh yes, of course!" But I don't like to ask. I hate to. She'll always - I know that if I said "Look, I'm desperately broke, can you give me ten pounds?" she would, but I'd feel awful doing it, so I don't.

Kate's mother also helped out with babysitting, living only ten minutes off which meant that she could go out (money permitting), which was a vast improvement on living in Devon where she did not get out and meet anybody and was living a 'desperately lonely existence'. Her mother was also there to support her if she was ill.

I know that my mother will if necessary meet Steven from school. She'll come and sit in here in the evenings if I'm not going to be out late, or she will have him to stay the night. If I want to go out she's quite happy to have him stay the night and if I'm ill I know I can ring her and she'll come up and look after him for me.

However, there are still problems associated with this kind of help, not least her mother's age, and Kate was conscious of not imposing too much of a burden on her. On the other hand, the relationship between them was clearly one based on reciprocity, as evidenced by the arrangement for decorating and in these comments:

She's seventy-four and she's in reasonably good health, but I wouldn't expect too much, but I can keep an eye on her and she can keep an eye on me. So it's a contact. It's there. Whereas I had nobody in Devon at all, apart from my ex-husband [laughs],

and I know that if I could find a part-time job - say I was working two days a week or something - I know that for those two days she would meet Steven from school, give him his tea and I would get free child-minding, but I certainly wouldn't expect her to do that if I had a full-time job.

While Kate did accept help from her mother, like Rachel she was uncomfortable about being too dependent, and also constantly aware of the fact that her mother's age meant that she could not be too demanding. What was described seemed to be a relationship which was both caring and one of mutual responsibility for one another.

The issue of age is of course an important one when it comes to considering what kind of help lone parents receive from their ownparents. Given recent trends towards women having first babies later in life, and assuming the divorce rate remains consistent, the number of older lone mothers with elderly parents could increase. Present trends in mortality rates mean it is more likely that it will be an elderly mother to whom a lone parent has to turn. (Of course, similar circumstances will arise with fathers who have custody of children.) If state policy of the future is to be that individuals should turn to their families for assistance, rather than depend on the state, this issue is of central importance. The kind of help (if any) received, is not only to do with whether or not an elderly parent is frail, but what kind of demands an adult child has a right to make on parents who may have an equal right to live the rest of their lives without additional stress. Clearly whatever help is given by aged parents will depend on a number of factors, although it should not be assumed that a loving relationship is a prerequisite. As carers of elderly parents may find themselves caring for those they do not love, the reverse may also be true. Individuals may instead be tied together by a sense of obligation and familial duty. In the case of lone parents, of course, there are also children involved, and grandparents may feel an obligation or a desire to assist them.

Other members of the family with whom Kate was in contact, included her aunt and her her sister. The latter was represented as

seeing herself looking out for Kate, in terms of finding her a job, although this also seemed to be tied in with her moving to the town where her sister lived, which Kate had considered, but rejected as she felt her son was happily settled at school in Sheffield, and she that it was important for him that they stayed put. This again illustrates how women perceive the needs of the children as being of a higher priority than their own.

Angela

Angela was another woman interviewed who had older parents, who did give some assistance with babysitting (or childminding) in particular. However her comments also raise another issue, that is to do with parental attitudes towards divorce, and whether they will accept the situation, which can determine what kind of support, or otherwise, they are prepared to give.

My mum and dad are old. I mean my mum's seventy, my dad's nearly eighty-three and he's in frail health. They do what they can, but my mum's very old fashioned. Like when I first left him she wouldn't tell the neighbours. I couldn't tell the neighbours. I couldn't stop there, because my mother wouldn't take the risk at first, so she wouldn't have me up there because she didn't want no trouble and I got very little help from her at the time.

Having left her husband, and made herself voluntarily homeless, Angela in fact spent some time in a refuge before being re-housed. This lack of help from her parents could be seen negatively. On the other hand, given Diane's experiences outlined below, not letting her stay with them, may in fact have assisted Angela, in the sense that she was re-housed in Council accommodation. The situation had changed, however, and when interviewed Angela did receive help from her mother in the form of babysitting, particularly useful as she was following a college course.

When we got us house like, the divorce was out. They help in whatever way they can financially, but they haven't got a great deal. They'll always have Theresa off me. They're always willing to babysit. School holidays come on and I don't get them. They'll have her the week. My mum's now realized that she's grown up and she's capable of looking after herself.

Of course, the latter comment is quite relevant. It may be easier for an elderly grandparent to care for a child who is older and able to some extent to look after themselves - at least in practical terms; always assuming that the relationship between grandparents and grandchild is a good one. The age of the child or children as well as the age of the grandparents will therefore affect the kind of practical support that is given.

Sheila

Sheila was another lone parent with a mother living in Sheffield. She actually had one daughter, aged twelve, and when asked whether or not this has proved useful she responded -

Well, it isn't all that useful. We're close, but it isn't all that useful, because my mother's too infirm to babysit and my sister chooses not to, so I don't actually get any help from them. I get moral support from my mother particularly. She's very good, and you know she's always telling me I'm wonderful in how I manage and that sort of thing, so that's really good, and she helps me out with money occasionally if I'm stuck.

Sheila did not get practical support because her mother was infirm, another factor to be considered, although one not necessarily restricted to the very elderly. In addition, her sister chose not to help out in this matter, although as no further information is given, we can only speculate as to why not. Of course, siblings do not always want to, or may not be in a position to help one another out.

Sheila's mother did what she could, by giving financial aid occasionally and just as importantly, moral support.

Diane

Diane also turned to her parents for support in very difficult circumstances. Her husband had been in the army and they were stationed in Germany. When the marriage finally ended due to his relationship with another woman, Diane made the decision to return to England with their two sons.

My mum and dad came and picked me up from the airport and we went and lived with my mum and dad for about three months and I got totally disillusioned about what I was entitled to once I got back to England. I mean the army had told me I'd get this, that and the other, and I come back here and I literally had to fight for everything I got. They were very reluctant to give me anything.

Although Diane mentioned the army, she was also referring to the more general situation she found herself in, her experiences with the DHSS and her attempts to find somewhere to live. The help she received from her parents extended to giving her a roof over her head. Unfortunately, this meant that when she approached the council for accommodation she therefore would not be given priority - one instance where help from the family actually operates against an individual in need. She was told her parents' house was not overcrowded, even though her parents, her grandmother, her youngest sister, herself and two boys were all living in a three bedroomed terraced house. It was actually her father who managed to find her the privately rented flat that she was living in when interviewed. He knew the landlady and kept 'phoning and pestering and calling her, because she doesn't usually let to families, but to students and nurses.' From a landlord's point of view letting to the latter would be less problematic, in that lets would be shorter, and there would

be the possibility of making more money by letting to individuals, rather than a family. Diane concluded that her family had been very helpful to her, even if they had not always agreed on things:

I'll be honest, I don't know what I'd have done without them. We've come to blows over things, but I suppose even if we'd have stayed in Sheffield, and still been married, we'd have probably had disagreements about certain things. They've been very, very good to me.

Younger members of Diane's family, that is her siblings, had also been instrumental in helping her to re-establish a social life in Sheffield.

Summary

These accounts have been included to present an insight into the lives of lone parents, and to stress how important support from the family can be, and a number of issues have been raised in the preceding accounts. These women were fortunate in the degree of support they received, but other women will not be so lucky, and therefore some lone parent families will find themselves much more isolated, and their lives more stressful, unless they have alternative means of support. Most of those interviewed did attend support groups for lone parents, and those who did not had other sources of help, such as close women friends. Being able to turn to others for assistance is an important aspect of life for lone parents. While it can be difficult accepting that help is needed - and women did express this view - it is an essential element in making life for lone parent families that much easier.

CONCLUSION

Some of the extracts presented in this chapter highlight how helpful family assistance, of whatever kind, can be to some lone parent families, but as can be seen from the introduction and from the respondents' accounts a number of factors will affect the support given. Of course not all lone parents are fortunate to receive such help; perhaps because they have no parents of their own to turn to, or because their parents are unable or unwilling to help them. It can be assumed therefore that the circumstances of lone parent families, and how easy it is for them to manage on a low income will vary considerably. What was most striking about the research was the closeness of the relationships that can exist between parents and children across generations, and the extent to which some parents would go to help their own children, and their grand-children. The significance of these relationships should not be under-estimated when reflecting upon some of the comments women made about their experiences of lone parenthood, which have already been referred to in the previous three chapters and in Chapter 9 where women's attitudes towards lone parenthood are considered further. Before engaging in this discussion, the following chapter will consider the meaning of loneliness. As this is the most commonly cited negative aspect of lone parenthood, alongside lack of money, it is an important issue, and one which is consistently mentioned in other studies on divorce and lone parenthood (Goode, (1965); Marsden, 1973; Hart, 1976). Despite this it has remained an unexplored issue, and Chapter 8 represents an attempt to understand what it is that we mean when we talk about loneliness, whether it is confused with aloneness, and the extent to which such ideas are socially constructed, and influenced by social expectations.

CHAPTER 8

L O N E L Y O R A L O N E

INTRODUCTION

When asked what was the worst thing about being a lone parent, women invariably responded, in some form, with references to the financial situation and to loneliness. The former has been dealt with extensively by other writers (Marsden, 1973; DHSS, 1974; Ashley, 1983, Graham, 1987; Millar, 1987, 1988, 1989), and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this work. This chapter therefore focuses on the latter aspect of lone parents' lives. However, the two areas are not unconnected, as lack of money also contributes to loneliness, in the sense that a woman's social life may be limited because of a lack of resources (Green and Hebron, 1988). This chapter will try to develop further an understanding of what women mean when they say they feel lonely, and to what extent this is a feeling which is influenced by social expectations. To this end, the first part of the chapter is more theoretical, with the latter part using examples from the interviews to reveal the kind of comments that women had to make about this issue. It will become clear that it can be difficult to disentangle notions of loneliness and aloneness, and that from the women's point of view, there are advantages and disadvantages to being alone, which are picked up and expanded further in the following chapter. While negative perceptions of being alone are challenged, people who do feel very lonely or isolated will have problem to deal with, and whilst examining some of the assumptions about loneliness, this is not an attempt to deny the validity of women's own accounts of their feelings. The intention is to make the

point that not all lone parents are desperately lonely merely because they are an easily identifiable group for this kind of labelling.

LONELINESS

Introduction

Loneliness is a feeling which most of us will admit to experiencing at one time or another, yet without explaining what it is that we are actually feeling. Somehow it is taken for granted that other people will know what it is we are referring to, that the feeling is universally shared, because we have named it. Yet Hochschild (1983, p.223) writes that:

To name a feeling is to name our way of seeing something, to label our perception. [...] the names that we give emotions refer to the way we apprehend a given situation - the aspect of it we focus on - and what our prior expectations about it are.

Emotions then are not something universal but are shaped by 'our experience of the social environment, such that our personal history and social context help us to define the emotion we are having.' (Duck, 1986, p.3). We use a word to describe an emotion or feeling based on our experiences - how we have felt before, and on cultural representations of particular feelings in art, literature and the media, as well as through our everyday knowledge of life.

Images of Loneliness

So far as loneliness is concerned, the kind of image conjured up is of someone sad, dejected, unloved, uncared for, and alone. One of the main problems when trying to define loneliness is that being alone is generally perceived as the same as being lonely. Our attitude

towards older people illustrates this point well, yet within this social group some will not feel lonely while others do (Tunstall, 1968, p.88),

The information that someone is alone facilitates the assumption that they must be lonely, which means that certain groups in society, such as older people and lone parents (the current term for this group does have negative connotations), are readily identified as being lonely. Another aspect of loneliness is that it is inevitably seen as something problematic; it is one of the more negative of human feelings. Thus, it becomes something which has to be dealt with and is of concern to society.

Duck (1986, p.23) suggests two different kinds of loneliness 'trait loneliness', associated with the person, and 'state loneliness' which is transient and temporary and 'probably resulting from the situation or a move to a new environment rather than to the specific person; everyone might feel lonely in the same circumstances.' The latter seems to be particularly relevant to those lone parents interviewed, in terms of particular social contexts impacting upon feelings (although any individual could also be a 'lonely type', if such is taken to exist.)

Describing the feeling

Describing any emotion is very difficult because as indicated, people experience and perceive things differently due to external and internal factors, both past and present (and future expectations, or otherwise). In addition attempting to define loneliness is complicated by the fact that it is confused with aloneness, (the state of being alone), and in addition, the word is used to denote a range of different feelings or attitudes, and also to refer to missing out on, or lacking something in life. Assessing whether or not someone is lonely cannot be done by using objective criteria, such as considering the number of social contacts as people only miss something if they want it. If, for example, we want a lot of friends and have a few, we will feel lonely, but if we want a few and that's

what we have we will be happy and not lonely. 'To assess loneliness, we must look at the person's desired or needed levels of social contact rather than at just the levels of social contact that he or she actually achieves.' this will vary, so even if we have a constant number of friends 'we could still feel lonely on some days and not others, depending on our present desire for company or solitude' (Duck, 1986,p.24).

As stated earlier, loneliness is generally seen as something negative. It constitutes a problem which can and ought to be addressed; a disease to be cured. For the social psychologist, loneliness is the fault of the individual, whose behaviour can be modified. For example, the shy person can learn to be more confident, and the person who spends too much time alone can be encouraged to socialize more (Duck, 1986).

A medical perspective

Lynch (1979) raises the issue of loneliness as a causal factor in the death of single people, with particular reference to heart disease, devoting a whole book to the subject, and it is worth considering what he writes in some detail, and the book is in effect an attack on divorce (although he denies this). When writing about the heart Lynch is very emotive and is critical of other scientists who study the heart and heart disease, but ignore the impact of love, or the lack of it, the message being presumably that the single are unloved. He produces facts and figures to stress that non-married adults are much more at risk of dying. His interpretation and presentation of the facts is interesting in that it contradicts other findings which indicate that unmarried women, and married men are healthier than married women or unmarried men. In other words, marriage is better for men than it is for women.

Lynch provides statistics which show that divorced women are more likely to be murdered than married women. Statistically this may be so, but we cannot then conclude that these women died because they were lonely. In fact, what he does consistently is confuse being

alone with being lonely. It is the fact that women alone are vulnerable which is the problem, not the fact that they are lonely, and he does not prove that single women are murdered because they are lonely. The main point is that he does not go behind the figures given and they are to be accepted at face value, or at least his interpretation of these facts is to be accepted. The conclusions he draws then are that to be single is to be lonely, which means a much greater chance of dying prematurely. He does qualify to some extent what he says by admitting 'that acute social isolation and loneliness can, and indeed frequently do, exist even when an individual is married' (Lynch, 1979, p.66), but it is the adult non-marrieds who are at most risk in society.

Lynch (1979) is very critical of modern society with its emphasis on individualism, and freedom. Loneliness, he writes is packaged as the new price for freedom and independence and admitting to feelings of loneliness is a sign of weakness, which is why many people will deny they feel lonely, and have a problem. He is very negative in order to force home his point referring to 'the sad reality' and 'the torment of loneliness' (Lynch, 1979, p.201-204). The message is clear that all those who are lonely - whether they admit to it or not are really suffering. However, those who are lonely, are not necessarily suffering in such an extreme manner as he suggests, and it is more realistic to conceive of loneliness as yet another human emotion which is transient and not a constant in all people's lives.

He goes further with his conceptualization of loneliness as a problem in modern society which has to be confronted, and resolved. Because there are not appropriate social institutions for dealing with lonely people, the medical profession becomes involved. 'For many lonely or isolated individuals, illness itself becomes the only legitimate method for gaining attention.' (Lynch, 1979, p.209) The health of the mind and the body are increasingly been seen as linked, but this does sound like the professional asserting his opinion about the patient. But does doctor know best? (Illich 1976). The kind of approach he is talking about means the medicalization of loneliness, seeing it as something pathological, an illness, and the

lonely person becomes the patient who needs to be cured, preferably by an expert. There are all kinds of dangers inherent in this approach, as the medical profession creates new disease ('iatrogenesis' - Illich, 1976). Loneliness ceases to be an emotion, a feeling, but becomes instead an illness.

A Negative Feeling?

Tunstall (1966) raises the issue of whether or not feeling lonely is a totally negative experience. Humans are social beings, located in a social world. Those who feel excluded in some way, or isolated, are bound to feel lonely at some point, and perhaps, therefore, being lonely is an integral part of being human. As another writer suggests, it is experienced:

when people live in a place or have a position that does not allow them to meet others of the kinds they feel they need. In this and many related cases the concept of loneliness refers to a person who for this or that reason is left alone. (Elias, 1985, p.65)

This picks up the point which has already been made - that being alone and being lonely are conflated, and as the following quote indicates it is not necessary to be alone to feel lonely:

The concept of loneliness refers also to a person in the midst of many others for whom he or she is without any significance, for whom it is a matter of indifference whether or not this person exists, who have broken the last bridge of feeling between themselves and this human being. (Elias, 1985, p.65)

In summary, those who are alone should not be made to feel odd or deviant, whether or not this is their choice, and those who do feel desperately lonely should be helped if this is what they want. This means looking to society and social structures which

discriminate against single adults (whatever their age), and alleviating financial pressures on individuals, whilst at the same time allowing room for the expression of feelings like loneliness, even allowing people to be alone with their loneliness. In addition, time it is very important not to confuse being alone with loneliness, and accepting that people who are alone are not necessarily lonely, and if they are sometimes lonely, this may not have the disastrous consequences that Lynch (1979) foretells.

In our society, we do seem to be predisposed to be afraid of emotions that we term negative, for example, sadness and grief, and often these are treated medically. Perhaps all of these feelings would be easier to deal with if we weren't so afraid of having them, and of admitting that they are part of being human and even potentially useful. In a poem, D.J. Enright (in Alvarez, 1970), writes of how we appreciate what is beautiful by comparison with what is ugly or unpleasant:

Beauty defines itself against the dirt,
That telling reflection -
Like health against a hurt -
Deep in the dark infection.

The usefulness of loneliness may lie in the fact that we are better able to appreciate the times when we do not feel lonely, and may act as a motivating factor for some to participate more fully in the social world.

Summary

To conclude, emotions occur in relationship to other people, absent or present and involve expressive and communicative behaviour. Therefore, to experience a feeling, even one deemed to be negative is incidental to being human and a member of society. Significantly, feelings can be rekindled, or triggered by words and ideas, which is what is happening in the interview situation, and in this respect the

presence of the interviewer cannot be underestimated. In addition emotions tend to be transient and arise in certain contexts. Many of those interviewed referred, for example, to specific times of the day and the year which trigger the feeling of loneliness (see following section).

So far some of the problems inherent in considering loneliness have been outlined. To summarize these include the fact that loneliness is confused with aloneness; loneliness ceases to be an emotion and is diagnosed as a disease to be treated; loneliness is a negative condition. One other important point to make is that loneliness as a term encompasses a range of feelings and attitudes, and this aspect of the term is used to introduce the following section which will set out some of the comments that women had to make in relation to loneliness, and being alone.

WOMEN'S VIEWS ON LONELINESS AND BEING ALONE

Introduction

It has already been remarked that loneliness tends to be conflated with aloneness, and that we should not in fact assume that someone who is alone is automatically lonely. It is not always easy to separate being lonely and being alone, and this certainly showed through in the responses that women gave. Furthermore, the paradox for these women was that there were many advantages to being alone, as well as disadvantages. This means that there are both negative and positive dimensions to being alone, and that an expression of loneliness cannot be taken to mean that women are inevitably spending their lives searching for a new partner. On the contrary, in common with many other people on low incomes, the priority is living in the present, and trying to improve on a difficult situation by practical means, such as finding paid employment, and trying to achieve some degree of financial independence.

If we accept the notion that feelings are socially constructed, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, then to some extent, women's responses will reflect dominant views that adults should have partners, and that mothers should have someone to help them bring up their children. At the same time, because the term is used to denote a range of feelings - as a short-hand in effect - we perhaps should be looking more closely at some of those feelings that might be inferred, such as depression, to see whether or not actual policies and practices can assist in alleviating this more negative dimension of lone parenthood.

Finally, most of the women interviewed mixed with like people in terms of status, thus they did not see themselves as in any sense being 'peculiar'. This raises the question of how lonely those lone parents feel who do not attend support groups, or who don't have alternative social outlets, which in turn raises the issue of marginalization, of not being able to participate fully in society. All lone parents may experience this to some degree because of their financial circumstances, but the truly isolated will be even more adversely affected. The following section returns to the idea that the word 'loneliness' is used to encompass a range of feelings.

Defining the term

It will be constructive at this stage to suggest some of the feelings and attitudes that loneliness does encompass.

Duck suggests the following: -

desperation - panicked, helpless

depression - sad, worthless

impatient boredom - restlessness + boredom

self-deprecation - what's wrong with me? (Duck, 1986, p.25)

and to emphasize the point that use of the word should not be taken for granted, it may be used 'as a way of expressing general unhappiness and dissatisfaction' (Tunstall, 1968, p.88)

To return to the notion of missing or lacking something in life, when the women interviewed talked about loneliness, they seemed to be speaking of something very specific to their situation of lone parenthood. Based on an interpretation of the overall responses given by the women interviewed, this would seem to be what they are referring to: -

Loneliness means lack of an adult companion to talk to, to hold, to be with, who loves them, understands them, and puts them first, before anything else.

What these women are referring to is the fact that they do not have a partner. They are partnerless in a society which finds it easier to deal with couples (Elliot, 1986). The latter statement is fundamental to understanding why women answer in the way that they do. It is the particular social structure in which they find themselves that makes life so difficult for them in various ways. To connect this to the other 'worst' aspect of lone parenthood, that is, the lack of money, it is again the loss of a partner through divorce that has placed these women in such a precarious financial situation. Thus, society and social practices and values contribute to placing these women in a stress-ridden role, and attributing to them a more negative status than they deserve.

The fact that these women feel a need for 'someone special' does not mean that they are more unhappy than other individuals in society who experience similar feelings. Neither does it mean that they are permanently depressed or negative about their lives. On the contrary, they are for the most part extremely positive about themselves and optimistic about their futures.

In this respect, most of the women interviewed attended lone parent support groups, which provided a social outlet for both parents and children, as well as practical and emotional support. Other women interviewed also had alternative social outlets. Family played a very important part in the lives of some women and their children, again providing practical, emotional and even financial support to some. Friends were also very important - particularly

women friends, with friendship portrayed as something much more significant to these women after their marriage had ended than it had been during it, and was very highly valued (Allan, 1989).

To illustrate further what women miss out on, the following represents a brief list based on an analysis of all the interviews. Women miss: - someone special; closeness; intimacy; companionship; sharing humour; talking together; caring for someone and being cared for; mutual support; love; understanding and sharing. This represents an idealized (and perhaps unrealistic) view of coupledom, and the women themselves would recognize this, and assert that experience has taught them that they can enjoy being alone. Nevertheless, these things are expressed as being missed, as lacking in their lives. Some women will be missing something they have never had, but imagine should be there, and others will have experienced these things, and are nostalgic about their passing. The following extracts are indicative of the kind of statements women made about loneliness.

Missing out

Some women like Jane felt that they might like to get married again, although as will be seen in the next chapter, there may be reservations.

I'd like somebody to share my life with, other than two children and friends. I would like the closeness and the intimacy and all the little personal things that make up a marriage.

She went on to state that even two years after separating she still thought of things she would like to tell her ex-husband. She was wary of remarriage, and stressed the good things about being alone, the little things, 'and being able to please yourself when you do things', but at the same time the worst thing about being a single parent was the 'lack of companionship' - not friendship - which is different. She did have plenty of friends, but what she missed was:

just somebody to sit with in an evening - not necessarily to talk - but you could watch a programme on the television, and something strike you as funny, and you could just look at each other and have a laugh

and, 'just to know that there's somebody there who cares about you, and you more than anything else.' Having someone to talk to was important, but more than this was the need to have 'somebody who enters into your sentiments, into your family life, who could understand it and was part of it.' Jane did in fact talk to her mother and had a very close and supportive relationship with her, but even so she still felt she was missing something which she did experience with her ex-partner.

We used to have quite long conversations in bed at night and I always felt that we were more truthful when we were in bed, being in a very intimate situation. We were more truthful and more honest, perhaps because you're both more vulnerable in that situation, whereas when you're up and dressed you're not.

Clearly, she was talking about the kinds of things that can only be shared within a relationship, with a partner.

Lonely times

As mentioned, there are certain times of the day, the week, or the year when people who are alone are more likely to feel lonely. As Jackie stated:

I think the worst things are like Christmas and you end up on your own. For the past couple of years, I've sat eating the turkey while the children have been in here playing with their toys. I always feel there's something missing then.

New Year and birthdays are also times of the year when people may well feel lonely (with or without a partner!), and importantly, at times of crisis. Jackie related how her dog was run over, she was burgled, and one of her children went into hospital, all within a short period of time:

They're all things where you could do with somebody there giving you moral support, and if it's not there you have to cope on your own.

She indicated that this was a time when she felt lonely, but again it is difficult to differentiate sometimes between being alone, and being lonely. This is a clear reminder that neither the respondent or the interviewer can be absolutely certain what is actually being talked about, when dealing with the complex area of emotions.

Another time when a lone parent is most likely to feel lonely is in the evenings as illustrated by Helen, a younger, attractive and very outgoing, mother of two, who again had friends and family around her. Once again the contradictions are evident as she initially states 'Doesn't bother me as such, being on my own', but then when asked about the worst aspect of lone parenthood reveals

Not having somebody there that you talk to and share things with, but it doesn't mean that I'm gonna run out tomorrow and find somebody that I can do it with. But that's the worst thing, the loneliness. I mean once kids have gone to bed and I'm sat here twiddling my thumbs you know, you think it would be nice to have somebody. I mean to say, I've got my Dad that I can ring up and my step-mum, but it's not the same as having somebody there.

On the other hand, the best thing was 'just being able to do something, without having to check it with somebody else first' and 'being able to do what I want to do, and not having somebody tell what I can and can't do.'

Kate, at forty, one of the older women interviewed, talked about feeling isolated, and one of the reasons she gives for attending the support group was that at least it was one night a week when she made 'the effort to go out and see other people who understand what I'm talking about.' This is another dimension to the women's situation - feeling that other people do not understand what they are going through - which may contribute to feeling lonely. It is important to mix with people who have been through similar experiences. But once again, Kate valued 'being in charge of' her own life, and the freedom that she has gained.

If what has been perceived as a good marriage ends, this may lead to more intense feelings of loneliness, particularly initially. Rachel was devastated by her husband's decision to end their marriage taking a long time to adjust to the situation. She mentioned loneliness as being the worst thing about being a lone parent:

I've got friends, but there's still that initial loneliness when the child's gone to bed and you're sat here, on your own, and sometimes it would be nice to think that if you've got a problem, that if you had someone else there, you could turn round and just share it, because they're not always problems that you can go to your parents or your friends with.

And she made the point that it would be nice to have 'somebody to share in the joys of being a parent', although she would be very wary of remarriage for some of the reasons outlined in the following chapter.

Love

Often when women talked about loneliness and about missing something, they are either explicitly or implicitly talking about love - specifically romantic love. They had loving relationships with their children and their families, but still would like to love and be loved in a different kind of way by (for those interviewed) a man.

Their own past may tell them that love can go wrong, but it is still something that they feel they are missing out on. There is an irony in the fact that something they really feel they are missing and would like, is something they also know does not necessarily lead to an ideal life. Jackie was the most obviously contradictory of those interviewed and could best be described as a cynical romantic. She was clearly influenced by the dream of finding 'Mr. Right', but at the same time constantly asserted that she didn't think she could bear to live with anybody. Again, herein lies a contradiction - liking being alone, but not liking feeling lonely.

Summary

The extracts produced above are representative of what other women had to say about loneliness and being alone. The two are linked but not inevitably, and the responses illustrate the kind of pressures that women find themselves under because they are women alone, raising children.

CONCLUSION

Loneliness is presented here as an issue to be considered because it is something which those women interviewed talk about and although other studies have mentioned social isolation and loneliness as particular problems for lone parents, the area has not been explored in any detail. Much of what is written here attempts to illustrate how complicated it is to attempt to describe or define what people are feeling. What women feel however, does affect their attitudes and expectations from life. If women are indicating that for them loneliness means missing out on a partner, then we need to consider whether or not finding a new permanent partner, with the possibility of remarriage is seen as representing a solution to their loneliness.

However, for these women there are many advantages to being alone, and once more, we have to realize that whilst women are making use of the word 'loneliness', it is often 'aloneness' that they are referring to and that this in itself may not be problematic, and indeed may have many advantages. The following chapter considers further women's comments about lone parenthood, highlighting the contradictory nature of their lives, as whilst there are negative aspects to lone parenthood, both material and emotional, as already outlined, there are also positive benefits to being alone. Consequently not all women may wish to relinquish the status of lone parenthood, for that of remarriage, which although as it will be seen, is often put forward as a solution to the 'problem' of lone parenthood, is not necessarily either a valid, or an attractive option for all women.

CHAPTER 9

CONFLICTING EXPERIENCES OF LONE PARENTHOOD

INTRODUCTION

The two things most commonly expressed as being the worst aspects of being a lone parent were the financial situation and loneliness, both of which have already been covered in the thesis. This chapter will examine in more detail exactly what women felt about being a lone parent, and consider the positive and negative aspects of lone parenthood. In addition, the question of remarriage will also be discussed, although this was not the only possible future that was discussed with women. As can be seen from Chapter 6 getting back into paid employment, and becoming financially independent was an issue to which many women were devoting a lot of attention. Therefore, trying to decide whether or not to remarry was not a question that dominated women's lives, and this chapter is only considering one aspect of what a woman's future might or might not hold.

Many women were actively working towards returning to work and supporting themselves, by retraining, or various types of education, and were generally positive about their potential futures as lone parents. (At least two women also expressed the desire to travel and see the world once their children became adults.) However, the question of remarriage is an important one, as it reflects social pressures about unmarried adults, particularly past a certain age (Allen, 1987; Collins, 1991), and also social concerns about lone parents, and whether or not children can be brought up effectively in

such a family unit, and it is an issue which has been considered previously by the present author (Shaw, 1991).

Financial difficulties and loneliness, are frequently and consistently expressed negative aspects of being a lone parent. These problems raise the question of whether or not remarriage is considered an attractive possibility for the future, by women themselves. Bradshaw (1988) writes that there is a public interest in encouraging women to remarry, as it would save the State money. He also argues that there would be benefits for both parents and children, in the 'reconstitution' of the family. Whilst financial matters may not be paramount when it comes to making a decision to remarry, he suggests there are financial measures which might encourage this decision. He ends by suggesting that this might include a 'lump sum reconstitution grant as a kind of dowry' (1988, p.25).

Yet lone parent families are families in their own right, and do not need reconstituting like a packet of mashed potatoes by adding the missing ingredient - in this case a man. It is important that the views of those concerned should be heard and taken note of by those in a position to influence policy making. Actively encouraging remarriage also seems a dubious policy option when it is generally accepted that second marriages are even more likely to end in divorce than first marriages, and 'despite popular beliefs remarriage does not seem to solve the problems generated by divorce at either a personal or public level' (Burgoyne et al, 1987, p.39).

It should not be assumed that all divorced women desperately want to remarry, and that the only reason they don't is because they are too old, too fat, or too unattractive, and that they can't find anyone who will take them on. Generally, statistics on rates of remarriage are taken to indicate that a woman's chances of remarriage decline rapidly as she ages, particularly after the age of thirty-four - unlike men's. This interpretation tends to be taken for granted, without questioning whether or not these women want to remarry.

Throughout the interviews women were allowed to express their ideas about their hopes for the future, and about remarriage as an

option. Respondents never suggested that they might be too old, unattractive, or wouldn't be able to find anyone. They never presented themselves as rejects on the marriage market. Most women do in fact have mixed views about remarriage, which are affected by their own experiences of marriage and lone parenthood. It is here that the many positive results of being a single parent need to be considered, as these have a direct bearing on how women feel about remarriage.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF LONE PARENTHOOD

Introduction

The following sections highlight some of the positive things that women had to say about lone parenthood, and again, are representative of women's responses in general. This challenges this negative stereotyping that has been associated with lone parenthood, presenting a much more encouraging picture of the status. It should also be borne in mind that these positive feelings will also influence the children of these women, although it is accepted that both lone parents and their children still have to contend with a lot of negative feedback from different quarters.

Emotional gains

All respondents expressed positive feelings about being a lone parent, arising out of gains that they feel they had made, thus giving further confirmation of Sharpe's finding that divorced mothers may be 'happier alone' (1984, p.205). Their gains are hard-won and would not be given up lightly. The benefits of being alone may be fundamental, or may at first glance appear trivial. Some of the most fundamental gains may be identified as emotional ones, and these can be seen to revolve around ideas of independence, pride and self-esteem, confidence, and a feeling of doing a hard job (that is,

parenting) well. Anne, aged forty, who had experienced a very traumatic time in her four years as a lone parent, including problems with her two eldest children, and having recently been evicted from the marital home still felt able to say:

I like my independence. I wouldn't like to go back. It's hard. I think you take a lot of knocks, and some of them take a hell of a lot of getting over, and you think you're not gonna get over them but somehow you do.

Barbara at age thirty-six, with only one child had been a lone parent for the same length of time and had a very positive approach to life in general. She expressed herself both forcefully and at times eloquently, as when she stated 'I think it's just a sense of achievement you know. I mean you feel like a phoenix rising from the ashes - your marriage being in ashes - to suddenly rise again.'

Jane, thirty-one, a lone parent since before the birth of the youngest of her two children who at this point was only twenty-one months old, was one of those interviewed not attending a support group for lone parents. She had instead developed her own social network via the local church that she attended and was very determined not to 'let this divorce break me up, which it could have done. In fact, if anything, it's made me a lot stronger, because I was determined that I wasn't going to give in to it.'

Finally, thirty-two year old Rachel, mentioned elsewhere as having problems accepting her new status of lone parent expressed this sense of achievement also felt by others: 'At the end of it all you can turn round and think "I've brought those children up or child up on my own", and you can look and you think "Well, I've done it!".'

Throughout the interviews women consistently made statements referring to these emotional gains, which clearly counteract the more negative feelings and experiences associated with lone parenthood. Such gains, arising as they do out of difficult times, are very highly valued, and reflect their sense of pride and achievement.

The little things

In addition to the major emotional gains that respondents spoke of as coming from their experiences of lone parenthood, it is also often said that it's the little things in life that can make or break a marriage. In the same way, it's the little things that might deter a woman from remarriage. These include having to wash someone's dirty socks, having to iron shirts, and being expected to cook meals to order. As Jane stated: 'I don't have to worry about meals. We can have what we want. I don't have to wash and iron shirts and trousers. Oh, it's heaven!' Although these might appear to be 'little things', together they do represent a stereotypical view of traditional marriage, with women seeing to men's needs. This is the type of marriage that most of these women have experienced, even in the so-called 'liberated' 1980's, and these small gains are significant. What is interesting, however, is that when women do visualize what a future marriage might involve, some seem to expect to fulfil these duties once again. It is therefore not clear to what extent they are questioning traditional roles for men and women.

Gaining control

The following gains, whilst perhaps being small in themselves, do represent something much more fundamental for women, namely the achievement of being in control. They include being able to go out alone without permission, not having to ask for money and not having to consult a man before spending money

With regard to financial matters, women were not always without any control over money during their marriage (see Chapter 4). Women's experiences of the economic aspects of marriage were very diverse. Some women, even after giving up work, had total responsibility for the financial management of the household, even to the extent of holding the cheque book, or in one case, being handed the pay packet. Nevertheless, women as mothers, not making a financial contribution to the household, still tended to see income

as the husband's, and to feel obliged to ask permission to spend money - particularly on themselves.

From the point of view of coping financially as a lone parent, many women have significant experience of managing resources when married (Pahl, 1989), although of course, after separation or divorce, they are most likely to be living on a reduced income. It is significant, however, that even women who appeared to have quite a lot of control over money when married still referred to the benefits of controlling the household finances themselves. The important thing is that they no longer have to consult someone else, or seek permission before spending money, or allocating resources.

Being alone

A fourth issue was that of being alone, and relates to the benefits of not having a permanent and full-time partner (more information on this aspect was set out in the previous chapter). As has already been indicated, not having someone is seen in our society as a lack, but there are also benefits to being alone. Once again, this illustrates the contradictory nature of being a single parent. The advantages of being alone include being able to watch what you want on T.V., going to bed to sleep, not waking up every morning with someone's head on the pillow next to you, and not having someone there all the time, under your feet.

Summary

This section has shown how there are positive aspects of lone parenthood. However there are also negative aspects and as has already been claimed the two worst things about being a lone parent were the financial situation and the loneliness. Both of these have been dealt with at length in the thesis in Chapters 5 and 6, and Chapter 8 respectively. On the positive side of lone parenthood, additional factors which make life easier are the support of family and friends,

and for some women, of attending a lone parents' support group, and these points have also been raised earlier in the thesis (see for example, Chapter 7).

One of the areas covered during interviews was the issue of whether or not to remarry. As stated at the beginning of the chapter this is often suggested as the best possible solution to the 'problem' of lone parenthood. In pre-existing literature (Goode, 1965; Marsden, 1973; Hart, 1986) women (and men in the latter case) who are divorced, are presented as living in some kind of limbo. The suggestion is that they are incomplete human beings, for whom the ultimate resolution of their problems and their own identities can only be found in a new marriage. According to this perspective, women such as those interviewed are merely filling in time between marriages. It is the contention of this thesis, however, that this is not the case, as has already been suggested in the introduction to this chapter.

W O M E N O N R E M A R R I A G E

Introduction

Women's attitudes towards lone parenthood as opposed to remarriage are clearly affected by their previous experience of marriage and by the breakdown of a marriage. Three issues in particular feature time and again during the interview in discussions of the possibility of remarriage: wariness, reluctance or inability to trust, and fear of getting hurt again. Sometimes these ideas were related to having been through the experience of finding that the husband had had affair, although of course other factors set out in Chapter 4 could also induce these kind of feelings in response to the ending of a marriage. However, because adultery had a significant impact on many of those interviewed, a separate section on this particular issue follows.

The impact of adultery

Adultery was often mentioned either as the cause of the breakdown of the marriage, or as a contributory factor, although of course, individual circumstances vary (Lawson, 1989). Several husbands had been having an extra-marital relationship before the final separation, and left their wives in order to live with someone else. Some women seemed prepared to tolerate, or (perhaps put up with) affairs, because they loved their husband, but when an affair was too close to home, that is with a neighbour or with the wife's best friend, enough was enough.

From the point of view of the partner who has been left, the most traumatic scenario seems to be when she is unaware of the fact that an affair had been going on, and in fact felt that the marriage was good. This highlights the fact that in every marriage there are two marriages, and each partner has their own perception of what is occurring, and whether or not the relationship is satisfactory (Bernard, 1973). In these circumstances, being left is devastating and it can take months, or in some cases years, to come to terms with the end of the marriage.

Rachel, for example, at the time of the interview, was only just getting her life back together again after eight years as a lone parent. She had spent the first six years of that time not acknowledging the fact that she was a lone parent, appearing to conceive of herself as still being in some kind of a marriage. This in itself would clearly affect whether or not a person would consider remarriage to someone else. She stated that 'it's only two years, probably a bit longer, since I stopped wearing my wedding ring'. Her husband initially had regular (daily) contact with their child, and he even had his own key to the house eight years on. She also loaned him money from her State benefit, even though he worked and was living with a woman who also worked. 'I still thought, while ever he's there - so in one respect, I was married, and in another respect, no I wasn't because I had to manage on my own.' It took several years before she realized that, 'time was passing by and where was I?'

Whatever the circumstances, women express most anger and hurt about the fact that they have been betrayed and deceived. It is these feelings which lead them to be wary of another marriage, and which contribute to their inability to trust. Generally, women feel sad about this, but feel unable to totally control or conquer this lack of trust. So, for example, Barbara, whose husband left her to live with someone else, stated:

The thing that I think I resent most about being a single parent is the loss of faith in people, because I think everyone you meet, especially men, you're looking for an ulterior motive, and it's not fair really, because not all men are the same, like not all women are the same. I trust the chap I'm with at the moment ninety-nine percent. It's the other one percent, and likewise I don't think I can ever give myself a hundred percent to any man again, because I did to my first husband and he betrayed my trust.

Contradictions

The complexities of lone parenthood are such that many of the gains of being a lone parent, have a negative aspect. The things mentioned as possible reasons for remarriage, have also featured in alternative format as reasons for not remarrying. Prominent among reasons given for considering remarriage are being alone, being lonely, needing someone to discuss things with, someone else to make decisions sometimes, the possibility of more money for the household, someone to be there just for you, and even someone to laugh with. All of these are seen as attractive reasons for remarriage and as Jane said 'I would like the closeness and the intimacy and all the little personal things that make up a marriage.' Although the need for physical contact was mentioned by many women this does not necessarily imply sexual contact, as women most commonly express the desire to be touched, to hold hands, to be held and to be cuddled by a man.

The romantic ideal

The romantic ideal also features in women's responses. This might relate to the ritual of courtship and marriage, for example through the romance of a wedding and the romance of love. Although, Rachel had clearly been deeply hurt by the end of her marriage, she might consider remarrying if she could 'have a big sticky-out red frock. Like Scarlet O'Hara!' Jackie, twenty-nine, also referred to her longing to wear a beautiful white dress and experience the 'proper' wedding she missed out on first-time round - although she was quite cynical about what would happen afterwards! In addition, some women have an idealized notion of a perfect relationship, which can be achieved, even in the light of past negative experiences. In other words, they are eternally optimistic.

Summary

Some of the views on women on remarriage have been presented to give an overview of the kinds of attitudes they have towards this as a possibility for the future. We also have to bear in mind the social pressures on women to remarry which might exist. These can originate with government policy, or with individuals or groups giving advice to policy makers. At a more immediate level for the lone parent, the views of family and friends might be expected to have some impact, as will the particular image which is conjured up by the label 'lone parent'. The next section considers whether or not women are still under pressure to remarry, or whether or not there has been a change in social attitudes during the second half of the twentieth century.

CHANGE OVER TIME

Introduction

Some previous studies on divorce and single parenthood will now be considered to see whether or not there is any evidence of change in social attitudes towards lone parents, and in particular, in women's views on lone parenthood and remarriage.

Previous studies

Goode's *Women in Divorce* (1965) refers to a study of divorced women carried out in Detroit in 1948. Goode's thesis is that the status of divorce is so problematic that divorced women will quickly be 'reassimilated to the status of "married",' (1965, p.204). A divorced mother was of lower social status than a married or widowed mother, and there were therefore pressures towards remarriage as a solution of the 'institutional ambiguity' of the status 'divorcee mother' (Goode, 1965, p.210).

Many of the pressures Goode refers to can be placed together under the heading of social pressures, and would include criticism and advice, living in a 'couple society' and not fitting in as an older unmarried person, and being seen as a potential threat to spouses, and of course, the perceived need for children to have two parents. These pressures would generally originate with family and kin.

In addition, Goode also suggests that there was the inconvenience of not having a permanent sexual partner, which poses particular difficulties for women: 'in our society the woman in particular is conditioned to respond less fully and adequately in a sexual relationship if it is defined as purely for sexual pleasure'. There was in effect little room for adult non-marrieds in contemporary American society at the time, and 'almost all roads for the divorcee [would] lead to remarriage'. Remarriage would furnish the solution as it would provide the divorcee with a status, and a

prescribed role with which she and others would feel comfortable. A period of lone parenthood thus became a period of adjustment, where the divorcee moved from becoming a divorced person to 'a potential spouse'. (Goode, 1965, pp. 124-125).

Marsden in *Mothers Alone: Poverty and the Fatherless Family* (1973), based on a survey of unsupported mothers (of different types) on National Assistance (forerunner of Income Support) carried out in 1965 and 1966, considers whether or not remarriage (or marriage) might be a solution to the problems of lone parenthood. He concludes that there might be pressures both for and against remarriage, stating that only about one quarter of respondents actually wanted to remarry, a quarter would consider it, and the remainder did not want to. However, he suggests rather ambiguously at this point in his discussion that a woman's chances of remarrying, that is her eligibility, might affect her response, thereby seeming to cast doubt on the veracity of women's responses (Marsden, 1973, pp.157-9)

Nicky Hart in *When Marriage Ends A Study in Status Passage* (1976) presents a study of a club for the divorced and separated, which includes both men and women. She paints a very negative picture of what it means to be separated or divorced and suggests that remarriage is the solution which will be sought by most individuals. Again, this relates to the status of the unmarried who are held in contempt, or pitied, or perhaps resented (Hart, 1976, p.37) However, she repeats the claim, made by Goode and inferred by Marsden that the prospects of remarriage decline particularly for women, as the age of thirty approaches. She also states that most (73 per cent) of her respondents wanted to remarry, and that particular handicaps were age, money, lack of access (to potential partners) and parenthood. Again, it is taken as a given that women are less well favoured, and the pressure to remarry is seen as largely a social one, due to the ambivalent status of the divorcee, and the fact that we live in a 'couple society'.

For Hart, 'Divorce is a process of endless becoming, hopefully becoming something else' (1976, p.221), that is married. And few divorcees become reconciled to remaining unmarried. Hart finishes by stating that 'As long as divorce remains a minority problem in

Britain and social life continues to be organized so consistently around the married couple, such a solution to the divorcee's difficulties is bound to be widely sought.' (Hart, 1976, p.230)

So, does the situation still remain the same, and do the same social pressures still exist for divorced and separated women to remarry? Or, even if such pressures do exist, do women today react to them differently? One more recent study in the United States by Terry Arendell *Mothers and Divorce Legal, Economic and Social Dilemmas* (1986) indicates that a change in attitudes has taken place since Goode conducted his survey. Arendell uses the word ambivalence to describe women's feelings towards remarriage:

Some stated strongly that they would never marry again, but the majority said they were uncertain or doubtful about it, and some had already declined marriage proposals. Their ambivalence about remarriage seemed rooted in a new feeling of independence, a new sense of self that required protection; their hard-won gains might be lost in a new marriage (Arendell, 1986, p.143).

When considering remarriage, women weigh up the costs and benefits, and remarriage may diminish in attractiveness. For most women remarriage would involve sacrifices. This finding is also supported by the more recent British study referred to throughout the thesis (Bradshaw & Millar, 1990), who again emphasize that there are positive aspects to lone parenthood.

Summary

This section has attempted to show that there has been a change in the social climate, that it has become more acceptable for women to bring up children alone, and that women are not subjected to the same kind of pressure to remarry as previously. This evidence should, however, be treated with caution. Phillips's history of divorce in Western society, *Putting Asunder* (1988, p.636), notes that:

We should not look for a simple linear evolution of attitudes toward divorce in a positive direction, however, for shifts in opinion [have] varied according to specific social and political context as well as according to class and gender.

In other words, changes in attitudes do not necessarily progress in a positive manner, and in this respect the present political context may be contributing to a regressive change of attitudes towards lone parenthood.

CONCLUSION

The responses given in this research would certainly bear out what Arendell states, namely, that lone parenthood has positive results for women, and that remarriage is seen as something which would involve sacrifices. Ambivalence is, however, a vague term, and I would suggest that some women have much stronger attitudes about the choice between remarriage and staying a lone parent. Some would certainly like to remarry, and this represents their hope for the future. Others, however, definitely do not see remarriage as part of their future.

It might therefore be appropriate to think of women's views as arranged along a continuum, but as indicated at the beginning of the chapter these views may change. At one extreme are those who wish to remarry, whatever their previous experience of marriage, and those at the other end who do not want to remarry. In between these two extremes women express a range of opinions, which reflect the contradictory nature of their feelings on the matter. It should be stressed, however, that even women who express a definite desire to remarry qualify what they say, and anticipate that a new marriage would not be like their old one.

In addition, several women also state that they would rather live with someone than get married again - cohabitation clearly being seen as something qualitatively different to marriage. Finally, there are those with their own unique attitude towards

marriage, as evidenced by Theresa who at the age of thirty had already been married three times - divorced, widowed and separated. She would still try marriage again, even though it had never proved entirely satisfactory for her. She was very philosophical about this concluding that 'Marriage is to me, what cucumber is to some other people. I like it, but it doesn't agree with me!'

There seems little evidence of family and friends exerting the kind of pressure to remarry that might have been experienced by earlier generations of lone parents, although of course, they may wish to see someone happily remarried. Most women do maintain that there is still stigma attached to the label 'lone-parent', but this is not enough in itself to persuade them that the benefits of remarrying will inevitably outweigh the costs.

Over time, women who are lone parents do make fundamental gains, arising out of their everyday experiences. Whilst achieving such gains, women are actively engaged in challenging the negative stereotypes associated with being a lone parent. In the process they are renegotiating their status in society as lone parents, and in the long term this can only be beneficial for women themselves, and for the children they care for.

C O N C L U S I O N

This final part of the thesis will begin by considering some of the policy issues around lone parenthood at the time the research was being carried out. This will be followed by an outline of some of the areas where further research might be useful. The last section will consist of a reconsideration of dependency, and some concluding thoughts on lone parenthood.

SOCIAL POLICY AND LONE PARENTS FAMILIES

Introduction

Lone parent families have come in for a lot of attention, by government and in the media, throughout the nineteen eighties' and early nineteen nineties', partly for economic reasons and partly for ideological reasons. It was recognized that most lone parent families were economically dependent on the state - the women interviewed for this work are thus representative of most lone mothers. Poverty was also acknowledged by many as a significant problem in British society, and lone parents and their children are seen by organizations, such as the Child Poverty Action group as particularly vulnerable to poverty. In 1989, for example, 76% of children in lone-parent families were living in poverty compared to 30% of children in two-parent families. Between 1979 and 1989 the number of children living in poverty in lone parent families (on or below supplementary/income support) has grown from 660,000 to 1,420,000 (Oppenheim, 1993). As already indicated throughout the thesis, poverty is also a gender issue, with the majority of lone parents women. Throughout this period, government has been

increasingly concerned about the level of public expenditure and lone parents have inevitably been a focus of concern, because of their heavy dependence on state benefits.

At the same time, there has been increasing concern about the breakdown of traditional values, and in particular, the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family. Lone parent families have been attacked by various individuals (Segalman & Marsland, 1989; Murray 1990) for being unable to bring up their children effectively, and for transmitting to them the idea of welfare dependency as acceptable. Hence, lone parent families have been under the spotlight for both economic and moral reasons. Both of these considerations have become entwined in recent social policy as it relates to lone parents, with moral justification providing a convenient cover for the underlying economic concerns of the government.

Child Support

The major policy issue relating to lone parents at the time the research was in its final stages was that of the financial support of lone parents and their children. This will therefore be the primary focus of this section on social policy and lone parents. At the time of carrying out the fieldwork, the particular payments made by ex-partners, to lone parents caring for children were referred to as maintenance. The Child Support Act in 1991 introduced the term child support.

By 1989, 770,000 lone parent families were dependent on Income Support, and the percentage of those on benefit and in receipt of maintenance had fallen from 50% in 1981/1982 to 23% in 1988/1989 (HMSO, 1990). At this point, lone parents were increasingly presented as a drain on the state's resources, and hence a social problem. The general critique of welfare dependency, often came to be aimed at lone parents in particular (see Chapter 2). In *Children Come First* (Vol. 2, HMSO, 1990), the government outlined its concerns over problems with maintenance payments, which were often set at a low level by the courts (see also Smart, 1984), and it was recognized

that there were problems with the system that was in operation at the time of this research. It was therefore concluded that a change in policy was necessary, and that an alternative system needed to be set up. Using evidence from overseas, in particular relating to Australia, and to Wisconsin, in the United States, it was concluded in the Summary of Volume Two of this document that certain measures ensured that increased levels of maintenance would be paid by non-custodial parents. These included: - the use of a maintenance formula; automatic deduction from wages; separate collection agencies; and requiring lone mothers to co-operate in obtaining child support (HMSO, 1990, Vol.2, p. 87).

The White Paper, Volume One (HMSO, 1990) set out the government's proposals for the new system, and the basic principles underlying the new policy. In the Foreword, the obligations of parents are stressed, and the welfare of children. Part of the purpose of the new policy was stated as being to clarify and highlight 'parental responsibility' for securing the welfare of their children. The existing system of setting and collecting maintenance, using the courts was seen as 'fragmented', 'slow' and 'ineffective' (HMSO, 1990, Vol. 1/1). The new proposals were designed to make sure that parents did honour their responsibilities, whenever they could afford to do so, and produce 'fair and consistent results', and to improve the efficiency of the system. It was also a stated aim to reduce or limit dependence on Income Support for lone parent families (HMSO, 1990, Vol. 1/6). This does suggest that economic considerations ranked highly, despite the fact that the moral duty of parents to support their children is highlighted.

It was decided that a formula would be used to calculate the amount of child support that should be paid, and that a new Child Support Agency would be established responsible for the 'assessment, collection and enforcement of maintenance payments' (HMSO, 1990, Vol. 1/6). This agency was to be given considerable powers to enable it to operate as intended. Those lone parents who were dependent on Income Support or Family Credit would have to make a claim to the Agency for an assessment. The different aspects of the proposals - the formula, the new Child Support Agency, and the principle of

encouraging those parents with care to work (lone parents now have to work only sixteen hours per week before being eligible to make a claim for Family Credit), whenever possible, are all stressed as equally important in this White Paper.

Child Support Act, 1991

The Child Support Act 1991 put these ideas into practice, and some brief points will be made in relation to this. In the Act parents are referred to as the 'absent parent' and the 'person with care', and the basic principles underlying this piece of legislation are that there is a duty to maintain their child or children, on the part of parents. The term 'parent' is used to refer to the natural mother or father, or those who are treated in law as parents, for example, in cases of adoption. Under the terms of the Child Support Act (1991), maintenance assessments will be made by the child support officer - although at this time the Child Support Agency (established in 1993) did not exist. This was a move away from maintenance payments being set by courts, and the Child Support Agency, which is now in place, is under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State for Social Services. The Child Support Agency was not covered by the Child Support Act, but was mentioned in the second reading of the bill by the Lord Chancellor.

According to the new Act, the welfare of the children is significant in determining whether or not an assessment should be made, which does seem to imply that the welfare of children from subsequent marriages or partnerships should be taken into consideration, but discretion is built into the interpretation of this term 'welfare of child'. There is clearly a great deal of potential for conflict with regard to this particular aspect of the legislation. In terms of making an assessment, a formula is used which is based on Income Support rates for the basic costs of maintaining a child; the absent parent is allowed 'exempt income' for necessary expenses, and the rest of the income (after tax and

National Insurance) is regarded as 'assessible income', for the purposes of calculating how much child support should be paid.

Child Support Agency

In April, 1993, the new system for child maintenance was established, and a new government organization called the Child Support Agency was set up to operate the scheme. There was much publicity at the time and literature was produced for those who would be affected (DSS, 1993). The initial targetting of the Agency was those parents who were already on some kind of state benefit (DSS, 1993, p.4). Those parents with care, not in receipt of any of these benefits who have an already existing agreement were also able to apply at any time from 5th April 1993.

Under the terms of the Child Support Act (1991), a parent with care has a 'duty to give information' about the absent parent (Bird, 1991, p.36), and in the majority of cases, this will be the mother, giving information about the father. When the Child Support Agency was set up, there was a lot of adverse publicity around the effects of seeking maintenance payments in this way, and a great deal of concern about the effects on lone parents. For example, a campaign was set up in Sheffield (Sheffield Against the Child Support Act). The Agency would have the power to cut benefit payments to lone parents, if it was felt that the parent with care did not have sufficient grounds to withhold information. The maintenance payments would be deducted pound for pound from Income Support, leaving the parent with care no better off, and if maintenance payments took people off Income Support, they would lose other associated benefits, such as free school meals; yet they could still be on a very low income. In addition the Agency was given considerable powers to enable them to carry out their investigations. Previous court settlements could be overturned, and it was felt by many parties that the new legislation and the new agency could create a lot of trouble for lone parent families.

A Briefing Paper prepared for lobbying MPs (Single Parent Action Network, 1993 (SPA)) raised a number of points of concern before the Agency was in operation. One of these concerns was around the issue of whether or not the parent with care should be forced to name the absent parent. This would involve the interpretation of such terms as 'harm or undue distress' - that is she (he) would not be obliged to do so if there was a risk to the parent with care, or the child. These definitions are interpreted by child support officers, and could create problems for some lone mothers if they were forced to name the father of their child. If a parent refuses to co-operate then they it was proposed that they could lose 20% of their Income Support adult allowance for a period of twenty-six weeks, followed by a reduction of 10% for a further fifty-two weeks. Clearly a very punitive approach was to be adopted by the Agency. The conclusion of this paper is

that many aspects of this Act place single parents at risk of even grater poverty, stress and potential violence. It will destabilize many families who have sorted out their relationships happily (SPA, 1993)

They conclude by stating that many single parent groups

believe that this act is being introduced on old fashioned moral grounds to penalise single parents and their ex-partners for not being a nuclear family, and as a cost-cutting exercise for the treasury SPA 1993).

It is significant that those initially being targetted for maintenance assessments, were those on state benefit. A cynical reading of this is that the government was interested primarily in saving the state money, rather than making sure that both parents accepted responsibility for their child(ren). These financial considerations for the state are referred to explicitly in *Children come First* (HMSO, 1990).

Summary

This section has presented a brief outline of the most recent policy change in relation to lone parents. With regard to those women I interviewed, eight women were receiving some maintenance payments. Only three of those were on state benefit - Monica, Jackie and Diane. At the time, eight other mothers were on Income Support, but not receiving any maintenance. This means that after the new agency was in place, these eleven mothers would have been amongst the target group of those required to provide information so that an assessment for child support (or for a re-evaluation of an order already in place) could be made. While a mother such as Jane would probably have welcomed the opportunity to claim child support from her ex-husband; other women, for example, Angela, prefer to have no financial support from their ex-partners, and are likely to resent this further intrusion into their lives, by the state.

Before implementation of the Act, and the establishment of the Agency, most concern was expressed on the effects of this piece of legislation on parents with care, most of whom are mothers. However, during 1993 a lot of attention has been focussed on absent parents - most of whom (although not all) are fathers. Throughout 1993, there has been increasing protest by men against the new system, and the actual effects on lone mothers and their children seems to have been overlooked.

There has been considerable concern over the way the Agency, and its officials assess earnings; the way that settlements made during divorce can be overturned - for example if the house has been made over to the parent with care, by the court instead of maintenance, and the possible negative effect on already strained family relationships. With regard to the latter the demand for additional payments can lead to increased hostility between ex-partners. It can also lead to additional pressure on any additional family that the absent parent may have. In the final analysis it has to be asked whether or not this agency as it presently operates is in the best interests of children of lone parents. Concern has also been expressed by interested organizations such as Gingerbread and by

Parliament with the result that at the time of writing, there does seem the possibility of some changes. However, the Child Support Agency, is still a body with considerable power to affect the lives of absent parents, parents with care and dependent children, and seems likely to remain in place. The following section will outline some some ideas for further research with regard to lone parents.

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The research conducted for this thesis has resulted in the findings presented, but at the same time has highlighted how much more research is needed before a fuller understanding can be gained of the lives of lone parents in Britain. The following represent some of the areas where further research would be useful. Although the thesis has focused on one particular group of lone parents, some of the suggestion made would apply to other groups of lone parent, and to lone parent families headed by men.

Lone parents and work

With regard to lone parents and work, more information is needed on the emotional and psychological barriers preventing women from returning to, or entering paid employment. Being a mother is undervalued in society, both by women themselves and by potential employers. Understanding women's feelings on the subject, and ascertaining how such barriers might be overcome would be a productive area of research, particularly at a time when government is trying to encourage women to take up paid employment. Lone parents are of particular interest here at present in social policy debates, because of the recognition that they represent a large group claiming benefits, and hence are presented as a burden on the state.

In addition more information is needed to the pathways women follow returning to work, and the kind of education and training they take up. If they end up in stereotypically female jobs, which are lower paid, but fit with families, they are left at a disadvantage long-term in the labour market, and in terms of pensions. This results in long term financial disadvantage for women, and as such is a important area to be tackled. If it is not, then many women can hope to continue living in poverty throughout their lives.

Lone parents and the family

A chapter in this thesis has been devoted to the relationship between women and their families, outlining the kind of support that some women receive. This is another kind of dependency or interdependency which is under-researched in relation to lone parents. This could be developed further, in particular, looking at those who are in receipt of welfare benefits, to assess how much help and how little help lone parents receive. The significance of the kind of relationships described here lies in the fact that for some lone parents, their situations are made considerably easier by the kind of help they received from their own parents. It would also be interesting to do comparative research in this area to ascertain whether there are any differences between white and black and Asian lone parents, and indeed, if different categories of lone parent receive more or less support. One problem of this kind of research, however, could be that if this kind of support was found to be widespread, then the state might abdicate from some its responsibilities in the social policy arena.

Children and lone parenthood

The impact of lone parenthood on children is a topical issue, both in the policy arena, and in the media. It is an issue which concerns many people. One of the problems that lone parent families have had

to deal with is confronting negative stereotypes of lone parents and their children. It would be encouraging to see research undertaken which does not only consider the worst that can happen to children in such families, but adopts a more positive, or at least a more open-minded approach. (It is also worth pointing out that many children who grow up in families with two parents have problems.) In other words, the lone parent family has tended to be set up as a kind of 'folk devil' in discussions about the family. A problem seeking orientation is likely to reveal children with problems; a more balanced approach might result in more varied results. Further research on children is certainly needed in this country, and recent policy changes, such as the Children Act (1989) should encourage a more active research approach to children.

An additional point is that any of those interviewed had young adults living with them, and that you don't suddenly cease to be a parent when your child reaches sixteen or eighteen, contrary to what the benefit system implies, that is, the age at which automatic entitlement, and then actual benefit ceases. The way the present system operates places all low income families at a disadvantage, and the message seems to be that the family should be preserved as a unit only if it can afford to do so itself. A young adult can represent a real drain on household resources for those dependent on benefit, and parents still have to give all the psychological and emotional support required. This represents an additional pressure on lone parents and other low income families, and the implications of this are not fully acknowledged. In addition it does seem clear that we have insufficient information on the actual costs of keeping a child of any age, and further information in this area would be useful (Brown, 1988).

Other categories of lone parents

There has been more research on separated/divorced mothers, and on unmarried mothers, than on those whose partners have died. This is because the former are seen as social problems in society. The

latter are ignored possibly for a variety of reasons - because it's a fact of life, because it should be private, because people are embarrassed by bereavement and grief. Nevertheless research in this area should not be overlooked, because of the impact of the situation on the adults, and on the children involved. In addition, it might be useful to get a true picture of the difference or similarities between children in these different types of one parent families.

Summary

These are only a few ideas for further research which have arisen during the course of this piece of work. Furthermore, the changes that have recently taken place in the area of child support present a new area of interest, which needs opening up by means of appropriate research, which should consider the impact on parents with care, absent parents, and children from both first and subsequent marriages or partnerships. Only in this way will the consequences of this new social policy be clearly understood.

DEPENDENCY RECONSIDERED

Introduction

Dependency has become an overused term, without much thought being given to its meaning. It has been suggested in the thesis that what we refer to as dependency is not straightforwardly so in all circumstances. Within marriage for example, many women who find themselves doing unpaid caring work as mothers, whilst being financially dependent, may in fact have husbands who depend on them for management of the household finances. In addition, women who have been brought up as Bernard (1973) suggests, to expect men to fulfil their emotional needs, come to find that it is men who depend on them emotionally. Thus a relationship of interdependence exists

between men and women within marriage. This is not to deny, however, the significance of men's continuing economic power over many women's lives, and as can be seen from some of the case histories used, some men will also use violence as a means of attempting to exert control over women.

Women's economic dependence on men within marriage has been one of the basic assumptions on which our present welfare state was founded. However, while this dependence may be seen as acceptable within marriage, it appears that when a marriage ends, it has been expected that women should become financially independent of their ex-partners (Smart, 1984). One consequence of the new Child Support Act (1991) is that women such as those interviewed, would be forced back into economic dependency on men - albeit with the state acting as go-between - when clearly so much research indicates that they would rather be dependent for their income on the state. It remains to be seen how women will feel about this situation, which further complicates debate around women's dependence on the state.

Whilst we are all dependent at some stage of our lives, this is acceptable in some cases but not in others. Stigmatizing some individuals or groups within society can be a powerful political weapon, as it has the effect of targetting such groups or individuals with negative labels, providing 'scapegoats' within society. As has been indicated, many lone parents may be rejecting this kind of negative labelling, but it can still have adverse effects on the children of lone parents. Within the education system, for example, parents may be encouraged to inform their child's school if they become separated or divorced. Doing so, however, runs the risk of the child being labelled as one with problems, by education professionals, and of any perceived problems being put down to the type of family in which the children live.

Women or children?

One of the important facts about the discussion of dependency and the welfare state in this thesis is that it does relate specifically to

women. Even in the second half of the twentieth century, many women have been raised to expect to be economically dependent on men, most specifically when they become mothers. This traditional idea is still very forceful, but of course, when marriages end, on whom are women to depend?

In this country the state does step in, but reluctantly it would seem, in the present political climate, especially with regard to providing an income which is above basic subsistence levels. There is still, however, an acceptance that women ought to be taken care of, because they are mothers; the state takes over the role of the husband. However, in the process of doing so, it is as if the state ceases to recognize the fact that women are adults, and they are in fact lumped together with their children, as dependants of the state. It is as if women become children once again. There is a long historical tradition in our society of treating women as if they were children, focusing on their helplessness and vulnerability. Significantly, lone mothers fit these images very well, but the reason they do so is not primarily because of their dependence on the state, but *because they support others who are dependent on them, that is their children.*

The fact that they are adults with real responsibilities is overlooked, when the focus of attention is on the economics of welfare, and how much lone mothers are costing the welfare state. There are of course two-parent families who are dependent on state benefits, but while in some senses, for example in the experience of living in poverty, the situation of these mothers is similar, in others it is not. These families have a male head of household, on whom it is still more acceptable for these women to depend - even though in the final analysis all such women are dependent on the state.

Many of the elderly are also dependent on the welfare state, not just financially, but physically, and in some senses, lone mothers have a lot in common with the elderly, as both may be treated as though they are less than fully adult. This despite the fact that the elderly have a whole lifetime behind them of contributing to society in one way or another, as responsible adults, and that lone

parents are presently making the same kind of valuable contribution. The elderly are often treated as children, as helpless individuals; and those who cannot help themselves, deserve some support from the state, but are to be pitied. This brings us full circle to the negative implications of the word 'dependency' (see Chapter 2). If all of us, at more than one point in our lives will be dependent, why is it that the word has such negative connotations? Perhaps it is time that it is accepted, that this we all experience some kind of dependency at some stage in our lives, and there is should be no shame attached to this inevitable consequence of being human.

As has been stressed throughout the thesis, what appears at first glance to be a relationship of dependency is generally one of mutual interdependency. The welfare state itself depends on women to provide welfare, and this is precisely what lone parents are engaged in when caring for their children. In the different relationships dealt with here, between women and men, between women and the state, and between women and their families, an exchange is taking place. This is an exchange of goods and services in a practical sense, but also often one involving more intangible aspects of human social life, where the emotional dynamics of relationships are as significant as the material.

WOMEN'S FEELINGS ON DEPENDENCY

Different kinds of relationships have been discussed; those between women and the state; those between women and men; and those between women and their families. The last of these two relationships are more clearly based on interdependency than the former, with women co-existing with men, or with their families, and entering into reciprocal relationships. Within these, both material and emotional resources have been given, or exchanged; sometimes with conflict, and sometimes with love. It would be too easy to say that the former relates only to marriage and the latter to relationships with parents and other blood relatives. However, parents and children do not

always get on, and gifts or exchanges may arise more out of a sense of moral obligation than love, and of course many marriages within society are more successful than those referred to here, and whilst these women have recounted some of the more negative aspects of their marriages, these may also for periods of time have been based on love and affection, rather than hostility. This, of course, is particularly true for the women who were not expecting their marriage to end, and who thought that things were all right. The other relationship, that between women and the state, is also not straightforwardly one of dependency, as the feminist analysis of social policy illustrates. As mothers, these women do in fact provide a service for the state; particularly where state provision of child-care is minimal.

Women have expressed feelings of confidence and self-esteem that they have gained as lone parents, and despite being on benefit; of feeling independent. Thus, the experience of dependence on the state is not for them totally negative. However, they are not untouched by the negative ideology surrounding welfare dependence. This negativity surrounding dependency also extends into their present relationships with their families, as most women would rather be independent of their own parents. In effect, depending on their parents, makes them feel like children again, rather than adults caring for their own children. Here, their relationship to their family, mirrors that with state.

The desire of the majority is not to be dependent on a man again (as already noted the recent legislation does have an impact here), but to take some steps towards financial independence. As in this sense, their dependency within marriage, and as lone mothers on the welfare state, and on their families (where this applies), has made them more determined to achieve independence for themselves, which again challenges the idea of the negativity of dependency, and the passivity or apathy of welfare claimants.

If, however, this period of time can be one where new skills are developed, then as suggested in Chapter 2, they need more assistance in achieving this aim, and one of the first steps could be providing them with an income which does not mean that the majority

of their energy and time is spent of worrying about making ends meet. This comment of course, does not apply exclusively to lone parents, and is applicable to other welfare claimants. In common with other individuals who have been out of work for a while, women need encouragement in returning to work, and this should not just be in the form of earnings or maintenance disregards, but also needs to come in the shape of advice and support. Most of these women feel confident in their abilities as lone mothers, but do not feel confident about returning to (or starting) paid employment.

It is fashionable to assert that these skills are transferable, and some institutions ask for this kind of experience to be detailed on application forms. However, there still seems a world of difference between the private world of the home, and the public world of the office or the shop, or wherever, for many women. There are also the additional practical problems lone mothers do, with having to compromise between being mothers and paid workers, and making difficult choices, where choice exists, about care for their children. It is of course, not original to focus on this as one of the barriers to women becoming financially independent, but it still needs to be repeated, when progress has been so slow in this area.

LONE PARENTHOOD REVIEWED

At the beginning of the research one of the aims was to try to redress the negative image of what it means to women to be a lone parents, and this point is re-examined in this final concluding section. Much of what women have said relates back to their experiences of marriage, which suggests that the structure of marriage as an institution needs to be rethought by men and women, if its adverse effects on many women - and consequently their children are to be avoided. Men also suffer from the ending of a marriage, which for most means separation from their children. Anything which seeks to avoid these effects should be welcome, although this does

not mean making people stay together, as these costs might prove even greater both personally and to society in the long term.

Women's expectations about marriage appear to have changed, more rapidly than men's, and a period of changing ideas is inevitably going to put stress on such an institution. Therefore rather than seeing the institution of marriage as under threat, and in danger of extinction, it is more realistic to see it as undergoing a process of change which may result in a different kind of marriage being the norm in the long term. This kind of change will take a long time as marriages cannot only change from within but have to contend with the social and structural elements already existing in society, so for example, women need to be able to work and be independent if they wish, and men need to be able to share more fully in childcare - which means working practices have to be altered, and there has to be more childcare available.

Socially, therefore, rather than being seen as threatening, divorce could be seen as accommodating a period of social change. Lone parents should consequently not be seen negatively, but as people involved in this changing social world, deserving support, and their families should not be seen as abnormal. In fact, the more divorced people there are, and the more children from such families, the more normal they come to be - and certainly they already form a very large minority.

Perhaps marriage as life-time commitment has to be re-thought - something to be valued, but which may not be realizable or even wanted by many people. Historical writers would present the evidence that most people would have died before they had been married too long, and divorce fulfils the same function. Alternatively, and more positively, if people want to marry for life, they have to be totally realistic about how long this might mean, and perhaps consider marrying later!

Regardless of these comments about marriage, one of the significant facts to emerge from the research is that women's experiences of lone parenthood are not all negative. Despite the financial hardship, and sometimes the loneliness, there are still positive dimensions to being a lone mother, and these would not be

relinquished easily. Women have also stressed the close relationship they have with their children and have pointed to the absence of conflict which makes for a more beneficial home environment, than an antagonistic marriage. Lone parenthood can then be a positive and rewarding experience for many.

As it was always the intention during the course of this research to allow women the opportunity to speak for themselves it seems appropriate to end with a comment by one of those interviewed. Here, Rachel sums up the sense of achievement that all women felt, whilst at the same time acknowledging that we still live in a man's world. The remarks were delivered with a sense of irony, and a great deal of humour. These were attributes shared by most of the women and will be one of the most enduring memories of the research.

Things are sent to test and try us, and when I get wherever I'm going I'll want a diploma. A big cup! A gold cup! No, not a cup, because I'd have to polish that! No. If I have to come back, I'll make sure I come back as a man!

A P P E N D I X A

BRIEF DETAILS OF THOSE INTERVIEWED

What follows are brief details of those women who were interviewed. All of those interviewed have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Monica. Age 36. Married at twenty-five and it lasted two years. Lone parent for eight years. Divorced. Had one son, aged ten. Did clerical work before children born. Lived in own house. Did attend a support group for lone parents. A lot of support from her parents and other family members. Was on Income Support. Not engaged in paid employment at the time of interview, but was doing a GCSE. Reason given for end of marriage was incompatibility. Did receive maintenance, but paid directly through DSS, and her ex-husband had no contact with their son. She mentioned one relationship with a man which had finished, and did want to get married again. Feelings about the future were ambivalent, but she wanted to be financially independent.

Melanie. Age 40. Married at twenty-one; it lasted sixteen years. Divorced. Was married to an Italian and lived in Italy, working in the family business before and after having children. Returned to England when the marriage ended. Had two children, one girl aged eighteen and one boy aged fourteen. They had been to see their father on holiday. Lived in council flat. Did attend a support group. Both her parents were dead, but initially she did get a lot of support from other family members when she needed it, and knew they were there in emergencies. At time of interview, no paid employment, but very much wanted to find work. Had done one or two

courses, for example, in computing. Reason for end of marriage was that she spent most of her time alone with the children, and she and her husband were like strangers. Was on Income Support. She did have a serious relationship with a man at the time, and was unsure about her views on remarriage. With regard to the future, she was very positive, and also adamant about never losing her independence.

Pauline. Age 28. Married at twenty-one; it lasted five years. Separated. Had two children, both boys, aged three and six. She had been a lone parent for two years. The children saw their father regularly. Lived in private rented house, but had been given notice to quite. Was on Income Support. Did attend a support group. No help or support, primarily due to the distance involved, although she did see her mother regularly and was hoping to move closer, so that she could help with the children. Before having children she had worked as a butchery assistant, and when interviewed was hoping to get on a retraining course, possibly in computers. Reasons given for end of marriage were that the situation changed after they had children, and he never got used to the idea. For the future, she stated that although it would be nice to have somebody, she was much happier by herself. She wanted very much to work and had had enough time at home. She was fairly optimistic about the future.

Rita. Age 31. Had been married three times; being divorced, widowed and separated. The most recent marriage had lasted one year. She had a girl and a boy, both at school (ages not specified). These children were from the first marriage, and no contact with first or last husband was mentioned. Lived in private rented accommodation. Was on Income Support. Did attend a support group. Her parents were mentioned a great deal, and provided lot of material and financial support. Did a variety of jobs, for example as a cook, and factory work, before and after having children. Not working at the time of the interview. Reason given for the end of the last marriage was that he was extremely violent. She did have a new relationship at the time. For the future, she might like to have another go at marriage, but was not that bothered at present. She was intending to

work again, and overall was pleased with the way things were going at present.

Hannah. Age 32. Married at twenty-one; it lasted eight years. She had been a lone parent for three years. Divorced. She had three children, two boys, aged eleven and eight, and one girl, aged five. Father saw the children once a week. At the time of the interview she was still living in the marital home, which was in joint names, and was totally dependent on maintenance received from her ex-husband. At first she had little support from her family, who believed that this was her husband's responsibility, but had more help recently. She had worked as a secretary before the children were born, but apart from some temporary part-time work filling shelves, had not worked for eleven years. She was doing a numeracy course and a computer studies course at the time of the interview. Had just started attending a support group. Reason given for the end of the relationship was being left alone too much, and getting no support with the children. Described herself as having an on-off kind of relationship at the time. With regard to the future, she wanted to get as many qualifications as possible while her children were young, possibly to a refresher course in office work, and even discussed more advanced level studying. Her aim was to get a job, although if she met someone nice, she might like another child. She was very positive about the future.

Katherine Age 34. Married at twenty-one; it lasted seven years. Had been a lone parent for six years. Divorced. She had one daughter, aged seven. Access every weekend. Lived in a council maisonette. Before having her daughter she worked as a typist, and did child-minding after she was born. At the time of the interview she worked two days a week as a typist, so her income was part Income Support and part earnings. She was also doing a part-time computer degree course. Did attend a support group. She had a sister in Sheffield, who provided a lot of practical support. The reason for the end of the marriage was the birth of her daughter, and the fact that her husband behaved as though he was still single. She had had

one brief relationship, but none at present. Had attempted a reconciliation with her husband which did not work. She did not think she would consider remarriage, although she might live with someone, although the longer she was by herself the more independent she felt. Her ideal future would involve travelling, and she did not want any more children.

Isobel Age 37. Married at eighteen; it lasted twelve years. Had been a lone parent for seven years. Divorced. Three children a daughter aged eighteen (not living at home), and two sons, aged fourteen and fifteen. Contact with the father had been sporadic. Lived in a council house. Had worked at odd times in the past, for example, cleaning. At time of interview was on an office training scheme. She was on Income Support. Did not attend a support group. She was close to her family, but did not receive help. Reason given for the end of the marriage was that he had an affair with her best friend. Was involved in a serious relationship at the time, and would like to remarry, but primary aim to get a job. Very optimistic about the future; looking forward to children leaving school, so that she could do what she wanted.

Bridget Age 37. Married at twenty; it lasted fourteen years. Had been a lone parent for three years. Divorced. Two children, a boy aged ten and a girl aged twelve. Children did see their father regularly. Lived in own house. Income was derived from maintenance, part-time earnings and Income Support. Before having children worked as a typist, then afterwards did bar work, which was how she was employed at the time of the interview. Was going to college shortly do do a secretarial course. Reason for the end of the marriage was that he had an affair with a friend (also several years of 'one-night stands'). Had attended a support group for a few months. Her parents lived near, and she was very close to her mother, who sent money, and provided food regularly. She had had relationships in the past, but none at the time of interview. She was adamant that she would not remarry, although she might live with someone. She saw the future very much the same as the present, with her remaining on her

own. She hoped her daughter would not get married. She wanted to see her children through college and carry on working. She was much happier by herself.

Theresa Age 40. Married young. Two children. Divorced. Children had been to see father for a holiday (he lived in the Channel Islands). Lived in own house. Was on Income Support and worked part-time as a bar maid. Had worked part-time throughout marriage. Husband ended the marriage when he left to live with someone else. She did attend a support group. Some help from her family - her father mentioned in particular. Relationships in the past, and did have one at the time of the interview, although seemed unsure about its status. Did not want to remarry, although the opportunity had arisen in the past. For the future, she hoped that when the children were grown up she would be able to work on a cruise ship, and travel.

Sharon Age 40. Married at twenty-two; lasted six years. Lone parent for twelve years (left when pregnant). Had two daughters, aged twelve and seventeen. An injunction preventing husband from seeing children because of his violent behaviour. Did pay maintenance but directly to DSS. Divorced. Lived in a council house. On Income Support. Had done some part-time work when married, for example, working in a fish and chip shop, and as school dinner lady, but not working at time of interview, and no immediate plans to seek work. Had attended a support group, and was hoping to set one up in her neighbourhood. Although she did mention her family, asserted that she preferred to look after herself. Reason for end of marriage seemed to be the husband's violence. Relationships in the past. Although the opportunity had presented itself she was wary of remarriage. She valued her independence. She was happy the way things were. For the future, she thought that she would carry on looking after her daughters until the youngest was eighteen, and then perhaps look for work.

Rachel Age 32. Married at nineteen; it lasted five years. Lone parent for eight years. Divorced. Had one daughter, aged eleven.

The father had frequent access - often daily, but paid no maintenance. On Income Support. She did clerical work until her daughter was born, but no work since. She might consider doing part-time work, but was worried about it. Lived in own house. Did attend support group. A lot of help and support from both parents and other members of the family; the former provided her with weekly supplies of food, transport, and help in clothing and treating her daughter. Husband ended marriage when he left to live with someone else. No relationships for six years, but some more recently. Joked about getting remarried if she could have a nice frock, but stated that she would be frightened. In fact was very ambivalent about remarriage. Valued being in control. At time of interview was feeling very positive about the future.

Jackie Age 29. Married at nineteen; it lasted six and a half years. Lone parent for three and a half years. Divorced. Had two children, a boy aged nine and a girl aged seven. Lived in privately rented house. The father saw the children quite often. On Income Support; some maintenance paid. Did run a shop while married, and after first child. At the time of the interview she was on a full-time training course in nursery nursing. Did attend a support group. Had a lot of help and support from her mother (her parents were divorced, and she did not see her father that often). Reasons for end of marriage included husband's affair and general dissatisfaction with the relationship. Views about remarriage were mixed; she managed to be both a romantic and a cynic at the same time. Had had relationships with men, and was in one at the time - although from her point of view it was not serious. Very positive about the future, which was connected to the fact that she was training to work, and had a lot of hopes.

Jane Age 31. Married at twenty-three; it lasted seven years. Lone parent for two years. Divorced. Had two children, a boy aged five and a girl, aged twenty-one months. Lived in own house. No access. Was qualified as a nurse, and had gone back to work after the birth of first child. At the time of interview she was not working at all.

On Income Support, but applying for maintenance to be paid (problems in getting this because her husband's solicitor had written a letter stating that they thought she was receiving a high level of Income Support!). Did not attend a support group, but an alternative network of friends via the church. Had a lot of help from her mother who was a widow; this took the form of money, of food, transport and help with the children. Husband left her twice when she was pregnant, returning after the first child. The second time he left for someone else. Did carry on a physical relationship with her husband for some time after end of marriage. Might like to remarry, but very way - concerns about the children - but was not looking for anyone. Would like to go back to work in order to be more independent. She was very optimistic about the future, and had a very full life.

Kate Age 40. Married at thirty; it lasted five years. Lone parent for five years. Divorced. Had a son, aged eight. Lived in own house. Son had been to see father for holidays, but the latter lived in another part of the country. On Income Support. Was qualified as a librarian, but had not worked since son's birth, other than doing part-time cleaning. At the time of the interview she was not working at all, but was constantly looking for a job that fitted in. Did attend a support group. Did receive help from her elderly widowed other, but also helped her. Other members of the family were also mentioned. Reason for the end of the marriage was lack of support - she felt like a single parent although married, and felt that her husband did not care. In common with others, it was felt that the birth of a child altered things drastically, and the husband could not cope with the responsibility. Had had relationships, but none mentioned at the time of the interview. Was adamant that she would not want to remarry; she valued her independence too much. Was positive about the future, but this was dependent upon finding paid employment that guaranteed a more comfortable existence.

Barbara Age 36. Married at twenty-two; it lasted ten years. Lone parent for four years. Divorced. One son, aged six. Had not seen

father for two years because of problems with access visits upsetting the child. Income derived partially from maintenance, and from part-time work. Had worked throughout her marriage and up to the present, doing part-time work, for example, market research. Had just taken on a job as an advice worker. Did attend a support group. Parents had been marvellous support with babysitting, and giving occasional money. Marriage ended because of husband's adulter. Had had relationship; serious one at time of interview. Remarriage would be difficult because of being so independent, but might live with someone. Optimistic about the future - things were going well at the time of the interview. Valued independence and sense of achievement.

Anne Age 40. Married at twenty-three; it lasted thirteen years. Lone parent for four years. Divorced. Had four children, a son aged twenty, a daughter aged sixteen, and twin boys aged six. Did see father once a week. At time of interview, lived on maintenance alone. Had recently been evicted from own house and was living in a council house. Did part-time bar work when married, but had to give up when separated because of the children. No work since. Did attend a support group. Mother (a widow) mentioned as giving a lot of support - babysitting, and sometimes money. Reason given for end of marriage was husband's inability to cope with the responsibility of the last two children. Had had relationships. Was very depressed at the time of the interview, and therefore did not want to discuss the future, but did value her independence.

Sheila Age 40. Married at twenty-five; it lasted seven years. Lone parent for eight years. Divorced. One daughter, aged twelve. Had been to see father on holiday (he lived abroad). Lived in own house. Had always worked as a teacher - part-time since birth of daughter, so did support herself (no maintenance). Did not attend support group, but network of friends. Close to mother, but stated she was infirm; she gave moral support and sometimes money. Reason given for end of marriage was lack of communication, and the fact that her husband was suffering from depression. Had had a relationship, but nothing serious. Would not like to remarry, as she valued her

freedom, although she might live with someone. Was looking forward to daughter reaching eighteen, so that she can travel. Very positive about the future.

Diane Age 30. Married at nineteen; it lasted eight years. Lone parent for four years. Divorced. Had two sons, aged eight and fourteen. Lived in privately rented flat. At time of interview had just finished work and was in receipt of Family Credit still, and claiming Income Support. Husband did pay some maintenance - erratic. Did see sons occasionally. Was actively looking for work of some kind, possibly office work - was doing a typing course. Did attend a support group. Had a lot of support from various members of the family. Marriage ended because the husband had an affair, and left for someone else. A relationship had recently ended, and there had been previous relationships. (Very definite about not remarrying, although she might live with someone. Her own experience of marriage was that she might as well have been by herself.) For the future, was hoping to find more challenging employment, and would like to buy her own house, and be able to live comfortably. Optimistic about the future.

Helen Age 27. Married at seventeen; it lasted seven years. Lone parent for three years. Divorced. Had two children, a boy aged eight and a girl aged five. Children saw their father regularly. Lived in council house. Worked part-time while married before and after having children. At time of interview on Income Support and doing part-time bar work. Looking for day-time work now that both children at school; had done voluntary work in the past. A combination of factors contributed to the end of the marriage, including problems to do with money, and husband's violence. Had started attending a support group. Very close to father and step-mother, who gave practical support. Had lived with someone for a while after marriage ended, but no relationship at the time of the interview. With regard to remarriage, did not want to marry again, but might live with someone. Reasonably positive about the future.

although couldn't see much change in present situation. Would like to get a job and be financially independent.

Angela Age 30. Married at twenty; it lasted three years. Lone parent for seven years. Divorced. Had one daughter, aged nine. Had not seen father for six years. Lived in council house. Did part-time work when married, such as cleaning and bar-work. At time of interview on Income Support, plus part-time earnings (worked in a bar). Was also doing part-time study. Actively looking for a better job, in order to come off benefit. Did not attend a support group. Had a good relationship with her parents, although these were quite elderly (father was eighty-three), and not well-off; they helped occasionally with money, and babysitting. Reason for end of marriage, was that she was more or less by herself when married, so their seemed little point continuing with the relationship, plus they drifted apart. Did have a relationship at the time of the interview, though intermittent and not serious. She was adamant that she would not remarry, although she might live with someone when her daughter was older. She very much valued her independence and liked being by herself. Most of her thoughts for the future were taken up with trying to find a decent and fulfilling job

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This is an interview schedule - a checklist for myself to ensure that all that similar topics were covered in all interviews, with the proviso that where women had something they particularly wanted to talk about, I was prepared to listen. Therefore this is not a list of questions, but of ideas, and of areas to probe in the light of previous interviews, and of comments to myself.

EACIS.

Separated or divorced.

When separated; when did the marriage finish; when did he/she leave .
How long have you been a single parent? (How long divorced?.)

Age at marriage. Age now.

Children: number of, age(s), sex, living with whom.

Further questions necessary in relation to older children - do they live at home, are they still economically dependent e.g. students, or Y.T.S.

PASI

Work. What work did your ex-husband do?.

Did you work before, during marriage, after having children. Doing what?

If so, was your money regarded as personal, or did it contribute to supporting the family unit?.

If not, what access to money - was ex-husband generous, was money a problem.

Who managed the money in the house - that is, who paid the bills, and so forth.

Feelings about these issues.

Social life. Together. Independently. As a family. Not at all.

Emotional issues. Closeness. Support from husband - with the children, and with problems. Communication. In other words, the personal relationship. What was the physical relationship like - sexual, but also in terms of physical closeness, i.e. touching and holding.

Why do you think the relationship ended?

What changes did having children make?

PRESENT

Income. How do you support yourself?

Work - full/part-time.

State benefit - full or partial dependency.

How long have you been receiving state benefit?

Do you receive any maintenance at all? Feelings about maintenance.

If not receiving any, do you think you should.

Have you, or do you receive help from any other members of your family - in kind, or financial, regular or occasional?

Is your income sufficient?

Particularly pertinent if on state benefit, where respondents are indicating that it is insufficient.

Feelings need to be drawn out about this - which tends to happen spontaneously, but check this.

How do you feel about being dependent on the state? (Also on ex-husband if applicable).

Feelings about independence and dependence tend to surface here, so make sure they are drawn out.

Would you like to be able to work? Frustrations about not being able to find a job that pays sufficient to take off state benefit level, and fits in with children.

How do you feel about the changes which took place last year? Have these left you any better off?

Other issues which have been raised by respondents -

Feelings about the D.S.S. and the way they are treated by D.S.S. staff

Child-benefit (the debate)- this is deducted from state benefit, so may not be perceived as an allowance paid for having children

School meals (good/bad)

Pressure to claim (extra) maintenance from D.S.S.

Changes with reference to 'disregards' and its implications for work.

The Social Fund - have you tried to use it, if so, repayments necessary? feelings about

The impact of young adults on the family income - with particular reference to YTS and continuing education/training - payments to young adults leads to a reduction in income for the head of household if on state benefit - though this may be relevant for only a few

The house. Is this your own house? Is it rented from the council or privately? If paying a mortgage, how do you manage this?

The D.S.S. and interest on mortgages - are they paying increases (particularly relevant at the moment), or not, as one respondent indicated.

Contact with ex-husband. Does he have access? How does this work? How successful is this for child(ren), for respondent? What is your relationship like with your ex-husband?. Feelings may persist after a relationship has ended.

Social life. Going out - in the day, in the evening? (Pubs, clubs, evening classes, bingo . . .)

The problems of attempting to have a social life on a low income. Difficulties with babysitting.

Include here any activities done in the day, for example, studying. Most of the respondents go to a support group for lone parents, so ask about this, e.g. what they get out of it. If they don't, then why? Don't feel the need and so on . . .

Note here, the importance of friendships, that is, close friendships.

Relationships

Do you at present, or have you in the past, had another relationship?

How easy/difficult to meet available men?* How necessary?

Women's attitudes to sexuality - are physical needs being met; do they need to be met; how important is this aspect of life . . . ?

Most respondents so far have spoken of the need for close physical contact, rather than sex, and reinforce the notion that sex is something that women can do without, that needs to take place within a close relationship, and so on . . . i.e. women are different from men. (AIDS has also been mentioned in relation to being a sexually active adult).

The difficulties of being perceived as a woman looking for a new father and a financial crutch.

The impact of children on relationships.

The difficulty of being a sexually active adult (and not just a mother), with sexually maturing adolescents in the house. Tensions and conflict.

How do you feel about being a single-parent?

Independence, control etc. tends to arise here. Also relationship with

children. The impact of your separation/divorce on your child(ren). Do you feel that children in single-parent families are any different from those in two-parent families? Most respondents so far are indicating very positive feelings about their children, and their ability to raise them alone, and are hostile to negative images of 'broken homes'.

Is there any social stigma attached to being a single-parent?

Have you ever encountered prejudice/hostility of any kind, anywhere? This may be from within the family, or from older people in particular. Follow this through. Some men's attitudes to divorced women - they are desperate for sex. Married women - respondents so far indicating that they have met more resentment/hostility from other women than from men.

Unattached women perceived as 'sexually available' and therefore a threat, or looking for another husband, even someone else's. Or the idea that any marriage can break down is seen as a threat. Social situation. The difficulty of being alone, and mature, or of being a 'lop-sided' family.

FUTURE

How do you actually see your future going? Positive. Negative. Mixed feelings.

What would you like to see change in your life? Is this possible?

Would you like to get married again?

Is there anything you miss about being married?

Attitudes towards marriage, and towards living with someone. What sort of a 'living together' relationship would you like to have? Are you afraid of losing your independence? Are you worried about losing control of your life?

Do you feel you would be better off, financially, married? Most respondents, despite their experiences, see marriage as being a partnership, based on sharing. There is often a contradiction between reality and an ideal, so probe this.

What is the worst thing about being a single parent.

What is the best thing about being a single parent.

THIS IS THE END OF THE INTERVIEW. THANK YOU FOR TALKING TO ME.

*All of those interviewed talked in terms of relationship with men.

A P P E N D I X C

RECORD OF RESPONSES

Code Pseudonym Age L. P'Hood
No. of children Sex Age(s) Housing
Area Group(if one attended)

MARRIAGE Age on Length of time married

Money matters

Emotions

Reasons for end of

WORK Past

.....

Present (including education/training

.....

Future

EXPERIENCES OF LONE PARENTHOOD

The Best/Worst of L. P'Hood

.....

Family Relationships

.....

Group support (if applicable)

Friends

Relationships

.....

Attitudes towards marriage/remarriage

.....

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

.....

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