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**Solitary practices or social connections?
A comparative study of fathering and
health experiences among White and
African-Caribbean working class men.**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Health and Social Policy.

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DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another University.

ABSTRACT.

This study addresses the following research question: what are the implications of African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences within social connections (within families, friendships, communities and workplaces), for fathering and health experiences? The purposes of this study were to undertake a primary piece of intensive qualitative research, and also to analyse, critically, the study's findings, in order to identify implications for theory, policy, practice and research.

This investigation was critical, interpretative and exploratory, informed by the principles of phenomenology and ethnography. Six African-Caribbean and seven White working class men were recruited, using purposive sampling, for two semi-structured individual interviews. This enabled the exploration of the interactive effects and processes of structure and agency, in relation to social class, gender, and ethnicity.

The study did not find major differences between the experiences of these two groups of men, although the assets and constraints related to African-Caribbean men's experiences of ethnicity and racism within social connections were evident. Study findings, for both groups of men, indicated that social connectedness within families, communities and workplaces was highly valued, but social connections, material and structural factors also influenced the health of the men interviewed. Furthermore, findings indicated that men's experiences of social connectedness have limitations. Specifically, men's limited insights into the links between social connectedness and health, men's perceived limitations with their communication skills, their solitary methods of dealing with perceived vulnerability, but also the uncertainty associated with their identities as men were significant findings. Indeed, men's experiences of both solitary discourses and practices and social connectedness, regarding fathering and health, were associated with discourses about masculinities.

Implications for existing theory, for example Connell's (1995) work regarding masculinities, and Putnam's (1995) work regarding 'social capital', are identified. In addition, implications for research, policy and practice are examined, with specific reference to the opportunities for mental health promotion with working class men who are fathers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.

1.1. INTRODUCTION.

This thesis investigated the linkages between African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences of fathering and health on the one hand, and their experiences within social connections (families, friendships, communities and workplaces), on the other. The decision to investigate the similarities and differences between the experiences of these two groups of men was also intended to allow scope for interrogation of issues of structure and agency in relation to gender, ethnicity and social class. The limited existing empirical material addressing the above problematic required a critical and interpretative methodological framework, which was designed to enable a qualitative investigation of diversity and complexity within men's experiences of social connections and social connectedness.

The rationale for this study is developed in the following sections of this chapter. The personal and professional interests that shaped this investigation, in the first instance, are discussed in section 1.3. This is followed by section 1.4, where key conceptual issues, that are addressed within the thesis, will be considered. The case for a focus on the experiences of two groups of working class men of differing ethnic backgrounds, who were also fathers, is provided to underpin the first thesis aim. This is followed by consideration of men's health experiences, and discussion of men's access of, and contribution to, 'social support' and 'social capital', in order to identify the second thesis aim. Finally the significance of the concept masculinities, but also social class and ethnicity are identified, and in this context the third and fourth thesis aims are outlined. The final section of this chapter (1.5)

provides an overview of the thesis structure as a whole. However this chapter begins with an overview of the research design.

1.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH DESIGN.

To clarify the research process for the reader, I outline below the research design. A research design is intended to create a structure for the researcher to address the research question and aims (Polit et.al, 2001). This investigation was a critical, interpretative and exploratory study, informed by the principles of ethnography and phenomenology.

RESEARCH QUESTION.

What are the implications of African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences within social connections (within families, friendships, communities and workplaces), for fathering and health experiences?

THESIS AIMS.

The first four aims identified below are the substantive thesis aims, developed to assist the process of exploring and analysing men's experiences, and hence address the research question. The fifth intention relates to epistemology, methodology and methods which are analysed in Chapter Three, and the sixth aim relates to the critical evaluation of the thesis methodology and findings, which will be undertaken in Chapter Nine.

- 1) Explore, and analyse critically, the similarities and differences within African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences of fathering and health.
- 2) Explore, and analyse critically, men's experiences of social connectedness, with specific reference to discourses and practices regarding health and fathering.
- 3) Explore, and analyse critically, men's masculinities and their links with social connectedness.
- 4) Critically analyse how social structures (social class, gender and ethnicity), and material factors influence men's social connectedness to others, and influence men's experiences of fathering and health.
- 5) Employ a critical, interpretative epistemological and methodological framework to guide fieldwork practice, and qualitative data analysis.
- 6) Critically evaluate study findings, and discuss the implications of findings for theory, practice, policy, and future research.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS.

Seven White and six African-Caribbean working class men, who were in paid work, lived with a woman partner, and had some experience of fathering were recruited for this study using purposive sampling, access being achieved through community contacts. Two in-depth qualitative semi-structured individual interviews were undertaken with each man within a period of 18 months.

1.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS STUDY: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS.

My interest in this investigation had origins in my personal experiences, within which three issues have been most influential. Firstly I will, briefly, consider some of my childhood experiences of masculinity, secondly the impact of becoming a health visitor on my thinking about men and fathers, and thirdly the changes in my life created by my experience of becoming a father.

In retrospect masculinity had always been a source of personal contradiction and ambiguity for me. I never learned to be the masculine young man that I had desired in my adolescence, in secondary school. I could not be as masculine as I felt was required of me. I like men, but I feared the danger in other boy's and other men's aggression. I certainly felt isolated at times within a huge organisation, that is a secondary school of boys and men. Learning to become a man was influenced, indirectly, by my fathers long work hours keeping him away from home, but also some of the destructive discourses and practices of the masculine grammar school where I spent so much time. These experiences shaped my identity, but also my later thinking about the limitations to what I will later identify as hegemonic and complicit forms of masculinity.

For money, I worked within a range of welfare semi-professional jobs between 1980 and 1998 within nursing, district nursing, social work, health promotion and health visiting. However, it was my experiences within health visiting (1989-1998) that stimulated my interest in undertaking practice initiatives, and then research, regarding the needs of men, including fathers. I became increasingly aware of the virtual invisibility of fathers within the health centres I worked within, the

negligible health promotion work with men within health visiting, and also the discourses of some health visitors regarding the strangeness of fathers who were the main carers for children. I had begun some project work with a midwife regarding preparation for 'fatherhood', and later a project with a practice nurse regarding medical screening for unemployed men. I like men and there were opportunities for health promotion work which I enjoyed.

I had been employed as a health visitor for eighteen months when I became a father. My son was born, followed by my daughter's birth, four years later. However, when I became a father my life changed completely. Even though I had some detailed knowledge about child health and development, and had negotiated to work part-time for the first year after my son's birth, the fatigue, sleeplessness, the responsibilities of paid work, but above all the emotional unpredictability of life with an infant was a tremendous shock. This change was compounded by the lack of resources, outside of friends and family, for me to access with my son. Indeed, this difficulty was further complicated by the limited emotional resources that I had in order to handle the experience of parenting. On the one hand, when I pushed my son in his smooth, fashionable pushchair around the shops, in the park, or into the pub, some individual women, who I did not know, would start talking to me with my son, in the pushchair, as the focus for conversation. On the other hand there were no places to go, certainly to meet other people like me, that is other fathers. In addition, midwives or health visitors who visited my partner focussed their attentions on the woman and the babies. My health needs as a man during this period of disruption after the birth of my son, specifically, were not addressed by professionals, and my enthusiasm as a father for caring for the children was largely ignored. At first I was surprised, but eventually I anticipated exclusion from these

encounters with other semi-professionals, and began to consider ways of challenging their discourses and practices regarding fathers.

By 1994 I was in my second health visiting job, and was more confident about my work in mainstream health visiting work. However, I had also been involved in a range of small, non-mainstream, projects with men, for example men who were unemployed, fathers, men with caring responsibilities, and men whose partners were pregnant, because of my interest in the health of men. When I had the chance to undertake some research, I decided to investigate, within health visiting, the ideologies of health visitors and their managers about men and men's health. In a research project for a community health trust in Birmingham, I argued that health promotion with men, including fathers, was 'marginalised' within professional and organisational ideologies, and that the practice priorities of work with mothers and young children were central to health visiting practice and service delivery (Williams, 1997). The experience of exclusion of fathers as identified in this first piece of research remained an important stimulus for the preliminary study (Williams, 1999).

I would go on to investigate, within a preliminary study, fathers' experiences of fathering, health and health visiting, in order, I thought, to complement my earlier research with professionals (Williams, 1997). The preliminary study (Williams, 1999), was assisted by initial funding from the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI). I had received a QNI national innovation award for my previous practice, and the research and development work with men within health visiting. £4,000 was provided by the QNI to help with the preliminary study in November 1997. The preliminary study is discussed and evaluated in the first section of Chapter Two. One of the specific findings was that African-Caribbean and White working class

fathers, within this ethnically diverse sample, appeared to have more limited forms of 'social support' available to them, when compared with many of the Asian men interviewed. This finding partly stimulated the focus of this investigation. However, men within the preliminary study lived in inner city Birmingham, and I also decided to investigate the impact of social class in fathers who may less socially excluded through considering the impact of paid work. (The rationale for the sample selected for this investigation is developed in Chapter Three).

1.4 THESIS DEVELOPMENT: KEY CONCEPTUAL ISSUES.

In this section of the chapter key conceptual issues, that underpin the identified research question and aims, are outlined.

The experience of men who are fathers is central to this thesis, but some important concepts need initial clarification. The term father is often used to denote a man's identity within a family, with most societies emphasizing and privileging biological rather than social fathers (Hobson and Morgan, 2002). Fatherhood, however, refers to the rights, status and power attached to fathers: as Hearn (1987) has argued, the structural and personal power of men who are fathers is directly related to men's experience and power as masculine men. In contrast, Hobson and Morgan (2002) have suggested that fathering relates to the experiences of men's labour in caring for children in families. In this latter respect Lupton and Barclay's work (1997) was particularly important in planning this study, as it challenged the influence within popular and professional discourses regarding fathers that emphasises the problematic or pathological nature of men's involvement, absence, or presence within family life (see Phillips, 1993, for example). By choosing a phenomenological methodological approach Lupton and Barclay (1997) attempted

to investigate 'fatherhood' in order to uncover men's own meanings. This strategy has influenced my approach here, as I have analysed men's experiences, in order to authentically reflect the diversity within their meanings. I should, however, also emphasise that I was particularly keen, within the fieldwork, to explore meanings in the light of the potential influence of masculinities (which I will discuss shortly), but also recognise and explore informants' ethnic and social class backgrounds. Indeed it was intended to explore how material factors influence men's lives, which Lupton and Barclay (1997) underplay, because of their post modern over emphasis upon human agency. As will become clear, material factors such as paid work, accessibility of local resources and services, or the impact of racism, for example, on men's experiences were investigated. Furthermore I wished to investigate whether fathering may enable men to develop the social connectedness, for example trust and reciprocity, within social connections that some writers (eg. Seidler, 1997, Whitehead, 2002) have suggested may be difficult for some men.

The focus upon fathering is central to this thesis, but the preliminary study findings suggested that the health needs of such men may not be addressed by local health services (Williams, 1999). A focus upon the health of fathers, not just fathering, within social connections was important for a number of reasons. Firstly, in Williams and Robertson (1997) we identified a limited amount of empirical research that addressed the health discourses and practices of working class men in general, and African-Caribbean men in particular. We also suggested there is limited knowledge regarding fathers' health discourses and practices. In addition, in my work as a health visitor for 8 years in the 1990's I was also always aware of fathers' limited presence within health clinics, baby clinics and doctor's surgeries, which was another reason for choosing this emphasis. Indeed the thesis focus on social connectedness also provided the opportunity to ascertain whether men

understood if, and how, social connections may be linked to health. In addition, related to this latter problem, this study identifies how material factors (eg shift work, availability of services, crime) influenced men's health experiences.

Watson's (2000) influential empirical research with men in Scotland indicated that transitional events like marriage and 'parenthood' are linked to the start of 'letting go', of 'losing', the physical body for men, as the body is constrained by domestic and work responsibilities. In a similar fashion to Herzlich's (1973) groundbreaking research, Watson suggested that health may be seen as a 'resource' for some men, which enables them to carry on with activities as workers or parents. In this respect I speculated whether being a father or a worker influenced health experiences of men, and but also influenced men's social connectedness with others.

Informed by the previous discussion, of conceptual interests, the first thesis aim was therefore identified as follows: explore, and analyse critically, African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences of fathering and health.

In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) most men were recruited with the help of health visitors, and were largely fathers with young children living in inner city Birmingham. Some of the discontinuities associated with the early experiences of becoming a father were already investigated by many researchers (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). I therefore recruited a more experienced group of men for this study, in order to establish how these men dealt with social connectedness, especially as I was aware from my professional work that the availability of the help of welfare professionals, like midwives and health visitors, diminished as young children matured. Unlike the preliminary study, I had also decided to investigate, in more depth, men's access of support from women partners, children, family,

friends, neighbours, local organisations, church communities and work colleagues, and hence intended to broaden the investigation. In so doing I intended to look beyond the concept of 'social support' alone, because as Wilkinson (1996) and others have suggested, this literature may over emphasise the importance of experience at the personal level, rather than a broader social context. The concept 'social capital' as developed by Putnam (1995), will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, and this concept is certainly contested. However, 'social capital' helped me to think about men's experiences in a way that was not reduced to influential professional agendas and psychological concerns regarding personal networks. However, I made a decision when reading the 'social support' and 'social capital' literature that neither the personal focus upon 'social support' within psychology, nor the broader focus on social cohesion within 'social capital' was adequate for conceptualising the key issues addressed here. Bott's (1957) earlier work researching people's social networks, that is social connections, and people's social connectedness to others, that is the processes that enable people to maintain relationships with others, has influenced my thinking and planning within the thesis. These concepts were employed by Bott to address the personal and wider social relationships that people live within, relationships that include families, communities and workplaces.

What of men's contributions to others within families, workplaces and communities? In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) an important aim was to ascertain fathers' experiences of 'social support' from others, pursuing my earlier interest in exclusion of fathers (Williams, 1999). However, within this investigation it intended to ascertain how fathers contributed to 'social support' and 'social capital', that is contribute to social connections. I initially speculated as to whether men within this study could be understood as assets, as well as recipients within

social connections. Within the masculinities literature, for example in Whitehead's (2002) work, there is a concern about some men's limited abilities to sustain close relationships with others. This study, therefore, investigated how men were involved in practices, regarding trust for example, to enable social connectedness with others.

In the light of the previous discussion regarding the health of men who are fathers, but also the latter discussion regarding social connections and social connectedness, the second thesis aim was to: explore, and analyse critically, men's experiences of social connections ('social support' and 'social capital'), specifically discourses and practices regarding experiences of health and fathering.

Men and women live within the context of unequal gender relations, and in this respect I intended to explore the extent to which Connell's (1995) framework for analysing masculinities was useful in understanding the experiences of men (Connell's work will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). It was speculated that fathering may be an opportunity for men to resist the constraints of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) or demonstrate dynamic masculinities as Connell (1995) suggests may be possible for some men. Men recruited for this study were not living in poverty, not living in communities characterised by deprivation, and all were initially recruited while they were in paid work, of some kind. However it was speculated that the experiences of racism, or possible exploitation within the workplace may be pertinent in relationship to marginalised masculinities (Connell, 1995). How the ethnic and social class backgrounds of these two groups of men impacted on their experiences of fathering, health and social connectedness was therefore investigated. Moreover, comparisons between these two groups of men,

of differing ethnic backgrounds, was intended in order to establish similarities and differences within their experiences.

Notwithstanding the problematic nature of the over determinism within 'role' theory, Pleck's (1995) notion of gender 'role' strain was initially useful in planning this investigation, especially as I had used Pleck's ideas to educate and train other professionals about men's health for some time. I speculated that there may be difficulties, experienced by men who were fathers, within a changing social context, that had implications for their masculinities, and also experiences of health and fathering. The ways in which social connections are experienced with others needed to be investigated in relation to possible material constraints created by, for example, experiences of paid work, leave from work, and the availability of social spaces and resources for men.

In the light of the previous discussion of potential structural and material factors that may impact upon men's experiences, the final two substantive thesis aims are as follows:

The third thesis aim is: explore, and analyse critically, men's masculinities and their links with social connectedness.

The fourth thesis aim is: critically analyse how social structures (social class, gender and ethnicity), and material factors influence men's social connectedness to others, and influence men's experiences of fathering and health.

1.5 THESIS STRUCTURE.

With my research question and aims in mind, Chapter Two critically evaluates the relevant key literature regarding fathering, masculinities, men's health, 'social support' and 'social capital', but also my own work reporting on the preliminary study (Williams, 1999). The critical review of the literature is undertaken to establish existing areas of knowledge, and also help further clarify the research opportunities addressed within this thesis. Chapter Three then discusses the epistemological and methodological framework created to underpin the methods employed within this investigation. The case is made for using principles of ethnography and phenomenology to inform the research design. However, the methodological issues of structure, agency, and realism are also discussed in this chapter, before methods issues are analysed in detail (including access, sampling, data collection, praxis, and ethics). The importance of my own reflexivity within the research process is addressed, before the processes of qualitative data analysis is discussed. Thesis trustworthiness is also established.

The five empirical chapters (4-8) were structured as a result of thematic analysis of men's narratives. Each of these chapters analyses men's experiences within a series of interdependent themes (which are outlined at the beginning of each chapter). Each findings chapter establishes the diversity within men's accounts, but also identifies analytical patterns within narratives as a whole. Moreover, similarities and differences between the experiences of the two groups of men, of different ethnic backgrounds, is undertaken. Chapter Four is the first findings chapter, which begins with brief personal profiles of each of the thirteen men interviewed. This is followed by analysis of the meanings of fathering for the two groups of African-Caribbean and White working class men. In so doing fathers' experiences of social

connections, by providing help to children, and women, will begin to be clarified, particularly through analysis of men's experiences of involvement with children, the financial support provided by men's paid work, but also their contribution to domestic labour. However, this thesis does not address the experience of men who are fathers in general, but that of African-Caribbean and White working class fathers in particular. Hence men's meanings regarding ethnicity and social class are explored and analysed.

Men within this study are fathers, but also men with health needs. Chapter Five therefore analyses men's meanings regarding health focussing upon the extent to which health is understood as involving relationships with other people, and the extent to which health practices take place within social connections. In addition the influence of material factors upon health, for example the difficulties associated with paid work, caring for children, or experiences of racism are interrogated. In Chapter Six a detailed analysis of men's experiences of receiving and giving help to others within social connections is achieved, focussing specifically on men's experiences with children, women partners, extended family members, and men friends. This analysis establishes the scope of men's social connectedness with others regarding their experiences of fathering and health, and identifies implications of these experiences for men's health and health practices. Chapter Seven examines men's experiences within wider social contexts of communities and workplaces. To do this Chapter Seven discusses men's participation, trust, and reciprocity within social connections, by analysing men's narratives regarding: the locality within which they lived, their experiences with neighbours, experiences within local organisations and social spaces, experiences with welfare professionals, and finally experiences of social connections within workplaces. Implications for men's health and health practices are analysed.

In Chapter Eight, the final findings chapter, material largely drawn from the second interview, is analysed regarding what I have termed 'solitary discourses and practices'. This chapter therefore clarifies the meaning of solitary discourses and practices, and establishes the links these experiences have with men's actions to deal with their sense of perceived vulnerability, (specifically health concerns and experiences of personal difficulty). This is followed by discussion of the association of solitary experiences with essentialist and complicit narratives about masculinity. Finally, the implications of social change for men is considered, when men's uncertainty about their identities as men is examined.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, evaluation of the extent to which the study research question is answered is undertaken. In addition, a critique of thesis methodology and methods, is provided, as is an evaluation of thesis findings. It is also intended to identify the implications of findings for practice, policy and research with men. Specifically, mental health promotion theory and policy is discussed, in order to consider how forms of intervention, with men who are fathers, are informed by an appropriate emphasis upon issues of structure, agency and social connectedness.

1.6 SUMMARY.

This chapter has introduced the key conceptual issues, and specific research opportunities addressed within this thesis. These opportunities were stimulated by earlier research and professional practice by myself, but also established through evaluation of existing theory and research. The next chapter, therefore, critically reviews the key existing literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1 INTRODUCTION.

Empirical research regarding African-Caribbean and White working class fathers' experiences of social connections with others is limited, which created particular problems in screening references for relevance and appropriateness. This chapter therefore analyses existing, relevant, key theory and empirical research in order to contribute to the rationale for the research opportunities addressed here. As Polit et al. (2001) have argued, a critical review of the literature enables one to also establish what is known and not known about an area of inquiry

This chapter has five sections. In the next section (2.2) a critical review of the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) is undertaken. The preliminary study influenced the development of important questions for the substantive research reported here, and also influenced the choice of literature reviewed within this chapter. The literature regarding fathers, fathering and fatherhood is reviewed (2.3). This section consists of a critical review of social policy and social theory literatures regarding the experiences of fathers, in order to establish gaps in knowledge this thesis will illuminate.

In section 2.4 the sociological concept of masculinities is interrogated, but within the developing masculinities literature there is a limited focus upon fathering. The masculinity literature is reviewed in order to explore possible links between masculinities on the one hand, and men's discourses and practices regarding fathering and health within social connections, on the other. Similarly while a men's health literature is emerging, there is little within it that takes the concept of

masculinities as a starting point. In section 2.5 the key literature regarding men's health discourses and practices is reviewed to establish what is known about the possible links between men's health and social connections within existing research. In section 2.6 a critical review of the 'social support' and 'social capital' literature is undertaken, although again the literature is underdeveloped in relation to fathering, gender, social class and ethnicity.

Before reviewing the key literature, it is worth briefly outlining the methods employed within the literature review. The policy context was located through a search of governmental and development agency databases including: Department of Health, Home Office, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Social Exclusion Unit, and the Department for Education and Skills. Further policy related, health and social theory literature was identified through electronic database searches for references in appropriate health, social policy and social theory journals using the following resources: Bids, Cinahl, Medline, ASSIA, CommunityWise, and PsychoInfo. Where articles were located, a manual search of reference lists was conducted. In addition the databases of potentially useful journals were also searched. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the literature reviewed is diverse, but was selected on the basis of the issues identified as most pertinent to this thesis.

2.2 THE 'GOING THE DISTANCE' PRELIMINARY STUDY (Williams, 1999).

To help establish research opportunities for this investigation, the feasibility of an interpretative methodology, and to stimulate the literature review reported here, a rapid, broad, preliminary study was undertaken ('Going the distance: fathers, health and health visiting', Williams, 1999). This preliminary study is critically discussed

within this section of the chapter. The intentions of the preliminary study included ascertaining fathers' views about their experiences of health, 'fatherhood', and the local health visiting service within the Aston, Nechells and Newtown areas of Birmingham. An interpretative methodology was employed, in order to underpin the semi-structured individual and group interviews. Sampling was purposive, and involved recruitment of 66 British men, who were fathers. The men were of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and included 12 Hindu, 7 Sikh, 23 Pakistani Muslim, 5 Bangladeshi Muslim, 10 African-Caribbean, and 9 White fathers. All these men had young children, and all were living in Small Heath, Aston or Nechells, in Birmingham, at the time of the interviews. 19 of the men participated in individual interviews, while the other 47 men participated within 10 group interviews, where the group size ranged from 3 to 12 group participants.

Findings indicated that the local health visiting service was generally valued for its work with women and children. Many fathers indicated that the service, however, was difficult for them to access. Indeed, many fathers also indicated that their experiences of being fathers, and their health experiences, were not addressed by health visitors. Most men indicated they were not asked about their experiences of fathering or health. Fathers were in some respects excluded from health visiting services.

Men's views about 'fatherhood' included the recurrent idea that being a father was about meeting the responsibilities of paid work, working in business or caring for children. Furthermore, participants' responses included views that health was about fitness, the absence of illness, but above all health was required for fathers to be able to keep functioning, in order to meet their responsibilities, and hence to be able to 'go the distance' as one of the African-Caribbean fathers said.

Furthermore, findings of the preliminary study indicated that some men, particularly the African-Caribbean and White fathers, seemed more isolated and to have less opportunities for 'social support' from others, when compared with some of the Asian fathers that were interviewed. Some of the Asian men were able to identify, more readily, elders or older people within families or communities who could support fathers. This finding stimulated my interest in men's experiences of social connectedness within families and communities. Findings also indicated that some men, within the preliminary study, found it difficult to access the help of others, and such experiences were associated with being a man, or a 'macho' man, as some men put it, which stimulated interest in the masculinities literature.

Findings within the preliminary study were limited in several ways. The semi-structured interviews allowed fathers subjective experiences to be reported, but the aims of this earlier study were too broad in scope, which influenced the decision to produce a more coherent framework of question, and associated aims, for this substantive research. Validity, in the interpretative sense of producing authenticity, was evident to some degree, but the limited time allocated for interviews, (25 minutes for individual interviews, and 45-60 minutes for group interviews), was insufficient for fathers to fully develop their ideas, in a way that did justice to their experiences. Specific difficulties emerged, both in accessing fathers for the preliminary study, and within the interview processes. Individual interviews with some Bangladeshi and Pakistani men, using an interpreter, were certainly less effective and more stilted forms of communication, providing only limited opportunities for fathers to develop their ideas, and also created limitations for me to respond appropriately. I concluded that such qualitative methods of data collection may require interviewer(s) that were fluent in fathers' first language.

Furthermore, there were specific access difficulties in recruiting a group of Bangladeshi fathers for a group interview: a community development contact made three unsuccessful attempts to recruit for this group interview. As I knew the research for this investigation was to be largely self funded, and would not be undertaken within a team, I decided to recruit fathers who spoke English as a first language for the study reported here. These limitations within the preliminary study, were addressed and overcome with the development of an epistemological and methodological framework for the thesis, which is analysed in the next chapter.

While there were limitations to the preliminary study, there are important strengths to this qualitative approach, strengths that require emphasis. Firstly, recommendations were produced, which were intended to improve the accessibility of health visiting services within Northern Birmingham, for men in general and fathers in particular. The publication of the preliminary study with its recommendations, have influenced the practice of some health visitors in Birmingham, and the study is used as a resource by semi-professionals nationally. The qualified success, of the methods chosen, were in the validity of material produced, using qualitative methods. In this sense, I felt I gained confidence in accessing sensitive and personal material within the individual interviews, specifically, but I also felt frustrated by the limited time I had negotiated with interviewees. I also felt that my confidence had improved in the overall process of planning, and facilitating semi-structured interviews, and felt more able to effectively develop a research design for this study. Above all the preliminary study helped me clarify the research question, as outlined in the previous chapter, for this more substantive piece of research. Furthermore, the preliminary study signposted some of the literature sources that needed to be examined in order to complement my own empirical investigation. I will turn to that literature now.

2.3 MEN, FATHERING AND FATHERHOOD.

In this section of the chapter a critical discussion of social policy and social theory literature is conducted in order to ascertain what is known within these literatures about fathering and fatherhood, and specifically what is known about the experiences of African-Caribbean and White working class men within their social connections with others.

Concerns, about the 'roles' or activities of fathers within families, is increasingly a focus within popular media, political and academic circles. For example, Clare (2000), writing within a psychological framework, has echoed popular concerns about the rise in divorce rates, the rise in lone parent families, and the rise in post-divorce absent fathers. For Clare, men's separation from family life creates a crisis requiring men to redefine their sense of masculinity, and redefine male 'roles' in relation to childcare and family life. In earlier work, Bly (1990) has also made mythopoetic appeals to essential notions of manliness and fatherhood. Indeed, influential conservative sociologists have also been concerned with the 'decline' of the traditional family. Fukuyama (1997), for example, has argued that changes in family structures will lead to social disorder. Similarly Murray's (1990) argument for the reassertion of male authority in the family, may be naturalistic, essentialist, and ahistorical, but it mirrors both populist and some political concerns. The limitations of these essentialist approaches, to understanding men in families, is they lack sufficient insight into structural changes in our society. Indeed, Williams (1998) has argued that in providing uncritical assumptions about the role of men in families, such conservative perspectives may also involve classist assumptions about errant working class fathers, and sometimes involve racialised assumptions. Nevertheless social movements and campaigns have emerged in the UK in response

to changing class and gender relations in our society. For example, the 'Fathers-4-Justice' campaign (Fathers-4-Justice, 2004) intends to reform family law, to enable perceived inequities experienced by fathers to be removed.

Given the emotive nature of the above concerns about fathers, it is worth outlining the relevant demographic patterns. In the UK recent official statistics have indicated that less people are getting married, more people are staying single longer, but that 84 percent of fathers live with their children (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2000). In turn, it appears that 5 percent of men are lone fathers, and only a small minority of men have two or more families (ONS, 2000). The majority of social parents are men, but there is a rising trend of social fathers living with children, for whom they are not biological fathers (Burghes et al, 1997). However, being non-resident fathers does not mean that men will necessarily be absent from children's lives, although Bradshaw et al's (1999) survey indicated that only 45 percent of men who were non-resident had contact with their children at least once a week. As women have become more economically active, there has been a rise in dual earner families (Moss, 1995), and some have even suggested that there is a decline in the traditional 'male breadwinner' (Creighton, 1999).

There are, therefore, different demographic trends evident, which involve more distant forms of fathering for some men, while other men are becoming more involved in the care of children (Lewis, 2000). There seems no evidence for a decline in family life, or a decline in parents', or carers', care for children, as Silva and Smart (1999) have argued. However, changing patterns of employment, education, and changing social class structures require men and women to respond to these material and structural changes when organising the care of children, issues which this study examines.

This study has specifically investigated the experiences of two groups of men, of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnicity is therefore important within this investigation. Chamberlain (1999) has argued that the activities of African-Caribbean men within families may be perceived, by some, as 'dysfunctional', in the light of the findings of the 1991 census, which revealed a higher proportion, than the UK average, of African-Caribbean families having 'lone-mother-headed' households (Chamberlain, 1999). African-Caribbean fathers, Hearn (1998) has suggested, are often defined negatively in relation to the presence or absence of heterosexual marriage, while at the same time young Black men are often defined in terms of a lawless masculinity, connected with crime. Similarly Williams (1998) in her analysis of popular concerns with 'deadbeat dads' suggested such concerns were often explicitly racialised. Marriott (1996), and others, have therefore argued for a challenge to the pathological focus upon perceived socially dysfunctional gender relations within Black families. Indeed, Mercer and Julian (1988) argued against conservative and normative assumptions within functionalism, to ask broader questions about the place of Black men within family structures.

However, the empirical literature regarding the experiences of African-Caribbean fathers in the UK is extremely limited. McAdoo's work in the USA is valuable. McAdoo (1993) has argued, that research regarding Black fathers may be based on ethnocentric or racist assumptions, possibly based on white, middle class norms. This may, as Cochrane (1997) suggests, relate to problems with research methods, such as the sampling of African- Caribbean fathers from poor social backgrounds, rather than more affluent backgrounds. The chosen sample, within this study, of working class men in paid work, as opposed to unemployed men, was intended to partly overcome this problem. This latter decision was necessary as functionalist

theoretical influence, and conservative popular ideas may, McAdoo (1993) argued, lead to a focus upon deficits, such as a perceived lack of responsibility within families by Black fathers. Interestingly, in Williams (1997) I identified that some health visitors held views about African-Caribbean men indicating they were less responsible than other fathers. Furthermore, in the preliminary study (Williams 1999), many African-Caribbean men were extremely keen to emphasise, to me, their responsibilities for children, including their commitment to involvement in child care, and these concerns were articulated in a context of others possible negative judgements about African-Caribbean men.

While a deficit approach towards understanding the experiences of African-Caribbean fathers is influential, there are alternatives. McAdoo (1993) has advocated an 'ecological' exploration of history, and the political and social experience of African-American fathers. Such an approach may be valuable, but is beyond the scope of this investigation. What this study does address is the experiences of African-Caribbean and White working class men, who are fathers, in order to analyse their experiences within families, communities and work settings. This latter point about the scope of the investigation is particularly important, as Chamberlain's (1997, 1999), work indicates that African-Caribbean families may perceive that the care of children may take place within a broader context of extended family, neighbourhood and community, rather than just within a small nuclear family. However, it is important to recognise that, as Hall (1992) has argued, there are a diversity of identities and experiences which contribute to being 'Black' in the UK. Equally, it is important to emphasise that White ethnic identity is not understood within this investigation as a homogeneous norm, a standard by which I can judge the experience of African-Caribbean men. Hence diversity is explored, as are forces of racism, as Mac An Ghail (1994) has argued is necessary.

This study identifies implications for policy in Chapter Nine, but it is worth, at this point, analysing the social policy responses to the trends identified so far. As Fiona Williams (1998) has argued, social policy regarding men has often focussed upon men as workers, citizens or soldiers, rather than fathers. However, men's experiences of fathering are inevitably linked to state policies regarding welfare and work. Nevertheless, there is little consistency in how policy in the UK approaches fathers, with an ongoing contradiction between 'cash or care' taking place (Hobson and Morgan, 2002), that is a contradiction between fathers activities as providing financial support for children, and the range of possible options for children's care. In the UK emphasis has historically reinforced fathers economic responsibilities for children and families (Morgan, 2002). For example, the Child Support Act (HMSO, 1991) emphasised fathers' economic responsibilities rather than their caring responsibilities. Indeed, policy debates often focus upon women, as O'Brien and Shemlit (2003) have argued, and policy initiatives regarding the family also invariably focus upon women.

The election of a Labour Government in 1997 has, however, brought with it new initiatives in this area of policy. The Green paper 'Supporting families' (Home Office, 1998) developed a framework for initiatives intended to improve parenting. In 1999 statutory parental leave was introduced to allow parents of young or 'disabled' children increased amounts of unpaid leave (La Valle et.al, 2002). Supporting families (Home Office, 1998), Meeting the Childcare Challenge (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 1998), and Fairness at Work (Department of Trade and Industry, 1998), were all initiatives intended to address the need for new legislation that would allow parents to reconcile work and home responsibilities. Indeed the Labour government launched the 'Work-Life Balance'

campaign in 2000 to also encourage employers to become more 'family friendly' (O'Brien and Shemlit, 2003). Hence, from April 2003 employers had a legal duty to consider requests for 'flexible' working time arrangements from employees.

Such developments may have significance for this investigation as the men interviewed were fathers and workers. However, policy relating to the relationship between paid work and parenting is also inconsistent. Hearn (2002) suggests this inconsistency, or confusion, within policy relates to the difficulties in dealing with the consequences of the restructuring of work, employment and unemployment within the context of globalisation. For example, in April 2003 the introduction of paid paternity leave was a welcome change that enabled new fathers to have two weeks paternity leave within two months of the baby's birth, but such developments may mean low income will inhibit some fathers accessing such leave. The 1993 and 2000 'European Directives on Working Time' called for minimum daily rest periods, and a maximum working week of 48 hours, but this is not yet fully implemented (Hearn, 2002). The National Childcare Strategy (DfES, 1998) had excellent intentions, but little new childcare provision was resourced. Indeed O'Brien and Shemlit (2003) found that less than 10 percent of fathers had access to a creche, a subsidised nursery place or financial help with childcare.

The potential support systems within taxation, social security, statutory paternity leave, parental leave, and care leave are not yet sufficiently developed to promote or support fathering by men, especially by fathers on lower incomes (Hobson, 2002). Ultimately, although many writers are concerned about the 'problem' of fathers, there is no policy for fathers or fathering, nor policy that addresses the health needs of fathers, and certainly not fathers' social connections with others. I will return to

some of these policy issues in Chapter Nine where implications of findings are discussed.

The research design enabled exploration of men's meanings about fathering with a specific focus upon men's experiences of social connectedness. Unlike the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), this study also explored men's contributions to others' lives, as well as their use of others' help. However, Ferri and Smith (1996), in their analysis of the 1965 and 1991 National Child Development Survey (NCDS), found that there was a gap between egalitarian attitudes of men on the one hand, and the actual practices of men sharing household tasks with women on the other. Indeed Oakley and Rigby (1998), have suggested that men's provision of domestic labour, within families, actually declines over time.

What of men's involvement in the care of children? It is difficult to identify historical patterns of men's caring for children, but Ferri and Smith (1996), again, indicated that increasing numbers of fathers described themselves as playing an equal part in the care of children, and that their involvement increased as mothers became more active in the labour market. More recent research by Warin et.al (1999) indicated that many parents, especially women, talked about the importance of the involvement of men in children's lives. 'Being there' was a concept that many of Warin et.al's informants used as a way of expressing fathers' availability for involvement. Lewis (2000) also found that the desire for active involvement by fathers in the lives of children, especially amongst younger men was evident. Furthermore O'Brien and Shemlit's (2003) secondary analysis of 'Work-life balance Datasets, 2000' indicated that time spent by fathers with children accounted for a third of total parental childcare, although increased working hours by fathers had a negative affect on fathers' involvement.

Regarding the organisation of care for children, Ferri and Smith's (1996) analysis of the 1965 and 1991 NCDS also indicated that the organising of care for children generally falls to women within families. Indeed Phillips (1993) questions whether fathers can rise to the challenge of responsible parenthood at all. She tends to overplay disengagement and 'irresponsibility' by some groups of men, but raises important questions regarding men's organisational skills regarding the care of children. Perhaps men's limited involvement in embodied experiences like breastfeeding, or intimate physical care, is a barrier to developing such organisational expertise within family life, as Lupton and Barclay (1997) have speculated. However, there are other experiences other than breastfeeding such as bathing, washing, dressing, nappy changing and so on! In Chapter Four men's contributions to families begin to be analysed.

This thesis has also explored the dimension of paid work, as paid work may provide opportunities for social connectedness, and also may influence men's health, and their experiences of fathering. O'Brien and Shemlit (2003) indicated that 90 percent of fathers in the UK were employed, compared with 67 percent of mothers. Lone fathers are less likely to be in work than fathers living with a woman partner, and fathers in the UK, generally, work longer hours than those in other European Union countries (Ryan, 2000, Moss, 1995). Dual earner families are a rising trend (Moss, 1995, Hobson, 2002), but fathers' earnings still provide the bulk of family income (Burghes et al, 1997).

How significant is paid work for fathers? A lot of psychological research focuses upon the adequacy of men's identities as 'breadwinners', (for example, see Crowley, 1998). Morgan (2002) has suggested that the most influential ways in

which men may identify themselves, as fathers, may be through their economic activities to support families. Interestingly, Willott and Griffin's (1997) analysis of the narratives of working class men, experiencing long-term unemployment, indicated that masculine identities were understood by men with specific reference to 'breadwinning'. However, on the other hand Burghes et. al (1997) have argued fathers may not see a crude distinction between 'cash or care', and may envisage both support for families and doing paid work as important aspects of being a father.

O'Brien and Shemlit (2003) indicated that 80 percent of fathers, and 85 percent of mothers agreed, or strongly agreed, that people should be able to balance work and home lives in the way they wished. However fathers' expectations about whether 'work- life' balance could be made available within their workplace were low (O'Brien and Shemlit, 2003). It is important, therefore, to recognise that the economic activities of fathers are related to structural patterns. Moss (1995) has argued that the hegemony of free market ideology, and the international globalisation of capital, has had a dramatic impact upon fathers' experiences of paid work. The intensification of work, often rationalised within the language of 'flexibility', the deregulation of labour markets in 1980's and 1990's, and the concomitant weakening of organised labour (Moss, 1995, Hearn, 2002), all may impact upon both the experiences of men as economic providers, but also as men involved in fathering activities in the home. Hearn (2002) further argues that global trends within capitalism create greater time pressures on working parents within a global economy. In conflict with European Directives promoting limited hours and fathers involvement with families, global companies may get round these kind of directives by emphasising self employment, or performance or commission related pay.

There may also, therefore, be tensions experienced by fathers regarding paid work and domestic responsibilities as Milkie and Peltola's (1999) research indicates. Warin et.al (1999) have suggested that fathers may experience a conflict of responsibilities regarding doing paid work and being involved in family life, which may create a double burden of obligations for men. This latter issue is important because, as Lee and Owens (2002) have argued, much of the research, (largely informed by psychological theory), into father's experiences of the relationship between paid work and family life may emphasise men's role in paid work uncritically. Lupton and Barclay (1997) have suggested that it is false dichotomy between women's roles in private with children, and men's roles in public in paid work.

While interest in fathers is evident within popular and academic literature, the experiences of men regarding fathering, but also these same men's health experiences, are less developed within the literature. However, these limitations within existing theory and research do provide an opportunity to investigate men's experiences of social connectedness, by specifically addressing their contribution to, and use of, friendships, families, workplaces and communities.

2.4 MEN, FATHERS AND MASCULINITIES.

Fathers are also men, men whose experience is shaped by gender, social class, ethnicity and other structural factors, which needed recognition within this study of men's social connections and its linkages with health. The concept masculinity is particularly important for this investigation, and therefore needs to be clarified at this point.

The limitations, identified in the previous section, of reductionist and essentialist approaches to the study of fathers, evident in the work of Bly (1990), is not intended to deny that men's experiences of masculinity or health are influenced by a domain as fundamental as their bodies. As Watson (2000) and Connell (1995) have argued men's bodies are important in men's experiences, but essentialist perspectives about fathering, specifically, are deterministic and may be ethnocentric or class biased, as Williams (1998) has argued. The development of sex role theory since the 1950's, as an alternative to essentialism, addressed the 'socialisation' of men and women into particular masculine and feminine sex roles. Hence, some writers with an interest in fatherhood and health have investigated, for example, fathers' influence on breastfeeding, in order to explore men's perceived 'complementary' sex roles, when compared with women (Mercer and Ferketich, 1990). However, sex role theory does not sufficiently acknowledge the inequalities between men and women, and the inequalities between social classes, and between ethnic groups. Indeed oppressive socialised 'norms', and their implications for women, have been exposed by feminists (Segal, 1990). Segal (1990) has identified a shift in focus away from sex role theory towards an understanding of the social context of gender including interest in the gendered division of labour in the home, men's limited involvement in childcare, and men's misuse of power within families and society.

Influenced by feminist theory, Pleck (1995), has attempted to overcome the limitations of his own earlier interest in sex roles, in order to develop an interest in gender roles, and specifically his concept of 'gender role strain'. He argued, that men may experience their identities, as gendered masculine men, in a disrupted and changing wider social context that includes, for example, women's increasing activities in the labour market, and the decline of manufacturing industry. Gender

role strain is how Pleck conceptualises the difficulties, including stress and psychological problems, men may experience when they are unable to take on attributes, or practices, that they may have understood as been necessary for them as men.

Pleck's (1995) approach has influenced my practice, training and teaching around men's health for some years. However, Pleck's work does provide an over socialised view of men's experiences of gender. It may always have been difficult for men to coherently understand their gender roles anyway. Indeed, Pleck's approach also underplays issues of violence, coercion, and misuse of power by men. Nevertheless, Warin et al (1999) have indicated some of the conflicts and difficulties contemporary men who are fathers may experience. In addition, Lupton and Barclay (1997) have also argued that fatherhood may be a transition for men, where they may experience some distress, associated with conflict between traditional and contemporary notions of masculinity. Furthermore, Hite (1994) has also reported that many men do not even see themselves as 'typical' men. While Pleck's (1995) approach has limitations, it does indicate that masculinity may be experienced as difficult, stressful or uncertain for some men, issues that will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

Lupton and Barclay's (1997) interest in gender is specifically applied to phenomenological research with fathers. Lupton and Barclay's (1997) constructivist interest in discourses of fatherhood addresses men's subjective experiences as fathers in Australasia, and provides valuable insights into men's diverse experiences of gender and fatherhood. However, like Pleck (1995), their focus upon the multiplicity of representations of fatherhood underplays, the power of men. As Hearn (2002) has argued, fathers are men with power, with material

interests to protect. Hence, this investigation has both structure as well as human agency, at the heart of its theory, and within its methodological approach. The work of Connell (1995, 2000, 2002) regarding masculinities addresses issues of structure and agency, and will therefore be considered at this point.

Connell (2000) argues that masculinities are not essential attributes, traits or norms but are: ‘...configured within gender relations: a structure that includes large scale institutions and economic relations, the state and the law’ (Connell, 2000: 29). Masculinities’ foundation is, for Connell, within unequal gender relations between men and women in society. A focus upon the diversity of masculinities, as Mac An Ghail (1994) has demonstrated, is important in considering the heterogeneity of men’s experiences of social class, but also ethnicity, as Hall (1997) has argued. However, masculinities are defined collectively in social institutions, including the family. Connell’s (1995) approach is valuable for this study because of his emphasis on both men’s personal experiences and also social divisions, to assist our understanding of men’s experiences of gender.

For Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity involves how a minority of men claim, and attempt to maintain, leading positions in social life over women and children, but also over other men. Men recruited for this study did not have such hegemonic power. However, Connell (1995) also identified relationships between masculinities, that is between groups of men in society. He identified the subordinated masculinities of gay and bisexual men, the marginalised masculinities of poor working class and ethnic minority men, but also the complicit masculinities of the majority of men within gender relations. The notion of complicit masculinity is particularly important for this study, because Connell (1995) distinguishes here between the small number of men who may benefit directly from hegemonic

masculinity on the one hand, and the majority of men who are not in leading positions in society, but may complicitly share some of the benefits of unequal gender relations, that is share the patriarchal dividend, as Connell argues.

Connell's identification of marginalised masculinity (Connell, 1995) as a way of understanding the relationships between powerful, and less powerful, groups of men, is also important for this investigation. The working class men recruited for this study did not, generally, live on a low income, and were not living in areas of inner city Birmingham characterized by deprivation, (which was the case for fathers involved in the preliminary study, Williams, 1999). However, there may be particular difficulties experienced by African-Caribbean men. In Williams (1997) I identified that some professionals had stereotypical views about African-Caribbean men. Furthermore, some African-Caribbean men, interviewed within the preliminary study were concerned about others prejudices (Williams, 1999). For example, an African-Caribbean father told me about his experiences with health visitors:

'A lot of people have preconceptions especially as we are black males.

So we aren't really into the father role, or where's mum, she's doing everything. She came back after that and it was the same attitude.'

Indeed in the group interview, with African-Caribbean fathers, within the preliminary study, the fathers shared a view that they often felt unease, and anticipated prejudice by professionals regarding their involvement as fathers with children. The experiences of ethnicity and racism, for the African-Caribbean men interviewed within this study, may be consistent with Connell's concept of marginalised masculinity, but required investigation. However, the specific links

between masculinities, social class, ethnicity and racism and men's experiences of social connectedness, especially required the primary research reported here.

One of the issues I raised in earlier research (Williams, 1997), was whether men, particularly working class men, may be 'marginalised' as fathers. Segal (1990), Burgess and Ruxton (1996), and Speak et al (1997) have argued that there are institutional barriers to fathers accessing welfare services. Milner (1993), Edwards (1998), and Ryan (2000) have argued that welfare services may target women within families. Singh and Newburn's (2003) findings indicate that many men may feel midwifery services ignore them, and Lloyd et al (2003) have indicated that fathers are often peripheral to Sure Start initiatives, which were intended to help assist parents with their care of children. Whether men are marginalised as fathers, I am now uncertain, but examination of men's experiences of social connections within social spaces, local organisations, and with local professionals is undertaken in Chapter Seven.

While this investigation does not directly focus upon sexuality and sexualness, Connell's (1995) concept of subordinated masculinity refers to the limited power in society of gay and bisexual men. For example, Hearn (1987) and Morgan (2002) have indicated that policy discourses about fathers in the UK may privilege heterosexual identities. Whether discourses about sexuality influence the experiences of social connectedness of men, interviewed for this study, will be examined in Chapter Eight.

I do not share the pessimism and uncertainty of some post modernist writers, such as Petersen and Lupton (1996) for example, about social change. My own praxis includes this investigation, which is intended to identify implications for practice

and policy with men. Connell (2000) also, interestingly, identified dynamic forms of masculinity, referring to men who are less determined by social constraints and expectations about masculinity. In exploring social connectedness such experiences are examined, especially as Connell (1995) has argued that cohabitation, marriage, and partnerships with women may involve degrees of negotiation, compromise and change for men. Indeed Morgan (2002) has argued that fathering may stimulate more reflexivity about gender for some men, and may involve the loosening of gender constraints.

Connell's work has influenced the planning of this study considerably. However, this investigation has also analysed how material factors, such as the stress associated with paid work, impacts on men's experiences, which Connell's work certainly underplays with his Gramscian concern with ideologies and discourses. Furthermore the Australasian, culturally specific, understanding of masculinities which is evident in Connell's work may need to be qualified in the light of findings here, which report on the experiences of British, African-Caribbean and White working class men. The extent to which men's narratives provide evidence of subordinated, dynamic, hegemonic, complicit or marginalised masculinities will be considered in each of the findings chapters.

2.5 FATHERS' AND MEN'S HEALTH.

While fathering is central to this investigation, the men I interviewed were also people with health needs and health experiences. My experience of health visiting and health promotion, the findings of the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), and my reading of the literature regarding fathering and fatherhood indicated that the health of fathers is not an important focus for either researchers or policy makers. It

is therefore necessary to examine the literature, regarding the health of men in general, to establish what is known and not known about fathers and health.

Some have argued that there is a crisis of men's health (Baker, 2001). Specifically, there is concern regarding evidence of men's increased experiences of stress, declining fertility, and the rising incidence of prostate and testicular cancers (Watson, 2000). Prior (1999) has also identified epidemiological patterns such as the increase in hospital admissions with substance misuse and personality disorders by men, and the increase in suicide rates among men, especially young men. Indeed others have indicated that men, when compared with women, are less knowledgeable about health, and are also involved in more 'risky' health practices (Cameron and Bernardes, 1998, Men's Health Forum, 2002). Whether there is a crisis of men's health is uncertain, especially given that, in general, men are living longer than before (Men's Health Forum, 2002). However, the Acheson Report (Acheson, 1998) indicated that material deprivation is an important factor in explaining inequalities in health, and such epidemiological trends are influenced by such variables as social class and ethnicity, for example. Indeed, Karlsen and Nazroo (2002) have argued that the combined affects of material deprivation, perceived, anticipated or actual experiences of racism influence the inequalities in health experienced by some ethnic minority groups.

The policy responses to these health trends are inconsistent. Internationally, initiatives regarding gender and health tend to focus upon social inequalities between men and women, and address the health implications of such inequalities for women and children, specifically (see World Health Organisation, 1998, for example). In the UK an earlier policy initiative, 'Health of the Nation' (Department of Health, 1992), did emphasise the importance of the health of men, but not in

relationship to gender, social class or fathering. The 'Health of the Nation' strategy was intended to target men and women regarding their individual lifestyles, and paid little attention to the social context of health.

The election of a Labour government, in 1997, brought with it a renewed interest in public health, inequalities in health, and the health of communities and neighbourhoods. Hence, 'Saving lives: Our Healthier Nation' (Department of Health, 1999) emphasised the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration for public health, and also recognised some of the social determinants of health. There were no recommendations about major structural change, but inequalities in health were to be targeted. Public health, it was argued, should focus upon individual lifestyle change for men and women, but also focus upon improving the health of specific communities.

The government sponsored Acheson Report (Acheson, 1998) into inequalities in health has been particularly influential, in that it provided a rationale for a range of public health initiatives. The launch of Health Action Zones, in 1997, was intended to enable deprived communities to be targeted for multi-sectoral public health initiatives. Similarly, the launch of New Deal for Communities initiatives in 1998 was intended to tackle a range of social inequalities experienced by neighbourhoods characterised by deprivation. Perhaps the most important initiative, for this investigation, was Sure Start, launched in 1998, which was intended to support parents and children in areas of deprivation. However, as Lloyd et al (2003) have indicated, in their evaluation of Sure Start initiatives, fathers are largely peripheral to such programmes. In this respect Lloyd et al (2003) have confirmed a fundamental difficulty with developing policies for public health regarding fathers. The effects of 'risky' behaviours on men's health is evident in all these documents,

but men who are fathers are conspicuous by their virtual absence. For example, the Acheson Report (Acheson, 1998), when addressing issues of inequality in families, largely focused upon women or mothers. There is, however, more developing interest in 'social capital', for example the national strategy for mental health promotion, 'Making it Happen' (Department of Health, 2001) advocates the importance of social connectedness within communities, but again where families and communities are discussed the main focus is upon women.

While fathering has a limited emphasis within health policy, so do the possible relationships between masculinities and the health of men who are fathers, within theory and research. There is, nevertheless, an emerging literature that attempts to consider the relationships between gender and men's health, although findings of research are inconclusive. In Sabo and Gordon's (1995) influential work, they argue that masculinity is damaging to men's health. Indeed, in a similar vein Courtenay's (2000) findings indicated that men's health beliefs and actions are demonstrations of masculinity, that is specifically 'unhealthy' actions are interdependent with masculinity. Furthermore Moynihan (1998) has argued that men's ideas about masculinity may prevent men from accessing help at a time of illness. In contrast Robertson's (2003) findings indicated that while some men may see health issues as feminine, rather than masculine, there was little evidence that men would not access help at a time of illness.

Watson's (2000) research with men in Scotland was particularly influential in planning this investigation, as he attempted to empirically investigate the relationships between gender and men's health in the UK. While Herzlich (1973) suggested that lay people may express health as a 'reserve', in a similar way, Watson (2000) suggested that men in his study conceptualised health as a

'resource'. Watson's (2000) specific thesis, developed through analysis of his qualitative research with men, was that discourses of 'being in shape' enabled men to fulfill the demands of everyday life. However, Watson's findings also indicated that medical notions of risk, or healthy lifestyle, were subverted by gendered masculine men. Watson's informants pragmatically lived their lives, without necessarily actively pursuing 'health', in the ways that health professionals may recommend. What is particularly interesting within Watson's findings is that events, like marriage or parenthood, are identified as associated with processes of men 'letting go' of their bodies, especially as the body becomes constrained by economic and social obligations.

However, Watson's (2000) work emphasised men's individual and embodied experiences, rather than the social context or social relationships that men may enter into regarding health. This study will uncover the extent of men's understanding of links between health and social connections. However, Herzlich (1973) has suggested that lay people may see health as a property residing within the individual. Indeed, both Blaxter (1990) and Watson (2000) found that a focus on lifestyle is an important way in which men may understand health. Watson (2000) frankly indicated that he began with an initial framework for examining men's health that was informed by a concern to examine men's 'unhealthy' behaviours within masculinities. However, such a focus on individual experience, 'risk' behaviours or lifestyle change is a limited starting point, if one is to consider health in a way that does not strip away the social context. My criticism of Watson (2000) is that such a focus on embodiment is reductionist, in the sense that the body becomes central for analysis within theory and within the clinic, at the cost of understanding the social origins, and social context of health and disease. This investigation therefore explores the health and fathering experiences of men within

social connections, that is within families, within friendships, within the workplace and within communities.

Nevertheless, Blaxter (1983, 1990), again, has argued that lay conceptions of health may underplay social explanations. In contrast, Davison et al (1993) in their research regarding coronary heart disease, found that their informants were able to identify a wide range of social and environmental factors that promoted ill health. However, Blaxter (1990) has also suggested that women are more likely than men to conceptualise health as involving relationships with other people. This latter issue is particularly important for this investigation's focus upon men's experiences of social connections and health, and will be analysed in Chapter Five, and subsequent empirical chapters.

While social connectedness is rarely addressed within the men's health literature, an area of concern has been identified in the ways men access, or do not access, professional help regarding their health (Baker, 2001, Men's Health Forum, 2002). This area of concern relates to the epidemiological patterns that indicate men are often seriously ill before seeking help from psychiatric services (Prior, 1999), men are more likely to be seriously ill by the time they reach their local doctor (Luck et.al, 2000), they consult their local doctors less often than women (Jewell, 1998), their consultations with local doctors are often shorter than women's (Westcott, 1997), and men are even less likely to consult practitioners of alternative medicine than women (Wilson, 1998). Yet such patterns tell us very little about how men experience their health, or health services. In Chapter Seven, men's experiences within communities, including within social spaces and with local services, are examined.

In a sense, the issues raised in the previous paragraph regarding men's help seeking provide a link to the next section of this chapter which focuses upon the 'social support' and 'social capital' literature. However after the first set of interviews an unanticipated issue became significant. That is, the ways in which men dealt with emotionality. Social constructionist accounts argue that other than primary emotions, like anger and fear, emotions are generally socially, culturally and historically variable (Williams, 2000). However, Hochschild (1983) attempted to reconcile bodily, intersubjective and social relationship components of emotionality. Indeed, Williams and Bendelow (1998) argue, after Hochschild, that emotions shared between people provide the basis for social reciprocity.

This latter point is particularly important for this investigation, because popular media and some of the masculinity literature does focus upon men's emotionality as being problematic in some way, and suggests that men may not be fully capable of emotional reciprocity. Interestingly, Walker's (1994) research indicated that men may share popular stereotypes of the emotionally restricted male. Indeed, Goldschmidt and Weller's (2000) study suggested that men use emotional language and 'emotion' words less than women. Seidler's (1994, 1997) work regarding men and emotionality is influential within the masculinities literature. For Seidler some men employ a particular form of reason, instrumental reason, to deny or control emotionality in themselves, but also in others, that is other men, women and children. Rutherford (1988) and Whitehead (2002) have further suggested that the fear of emotional intimacy with others inhibits trust for men. The public expression of certain emotions like sadness or fear by men, which may be experienced at a time of change, stress, illness or sickness, are discouraged in many cultures (Busfield, 1996). Indeed Busfield has argued that the expression of certain emotions may be perceived as indicative of vulnerability or dependence. Similarly, Lupton's (1998)

historical and cross cultural research suggests that ‘mastery’ of the emotional is seen as a positive and valuable thing for men, and some men may see themselves as weak if they fail to exercise that ‘mastery’.

Meth and Pasick’s (1996) research with men in therapy has identified specific strategies for avoidance of emotional expression by men. These strategies include: valuing the rational over the emotional, avoidance of intimate relationships, intolerance of others expressing their feelings, and the use of addictive substances. Chesler (1972), Busfield (1996) and others have suggested that such strategies of avoidance of emotional expression mean that men may be less likely to be able to articulate their difficulties, and hence be less likely to be diagnosed as having depression. However, is dealing with emotionality around fathering different to men’s experiences regarding health? O’Brien’s (1990) research indicates that, when compared with mothers, fathers may have difficulties in accessing others’ help regarding difficult emotional experiences. However, in contrast, Lupton and Barclay (1997) found that an open expression of feelings with children was ‘championed’ by many fathers. Whether men’s experiences of fathering or health influence men’s emotionality within social connections will be addressed in the findings chapters.

2.6 MEN, FATHERS AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS: THE ‘SOCIAL SUPPORT’ AND ‘SOCIAL CAPITAL’ LITERATURE.

A focus on social structures, alone, may not do justice to what Bott (1957) has called social connectedness, the processes in social connections that mediate between the personal and the structural. Researching social connections and social connectedness is important for a number of reasons. I argued in the preliminary

study (Williams, 1999) that African-Caribbean and White working class fathers may have had more limited networks of support than the other fathers I interviewed. In addition the extent to which these two groups of men provide help and support to others, as well as accessing the help of others is addressed. This particular research opportunity is also important because, as Sixsmith and Boneham (2002) have argued, there is limited empirical material that considers the way in which 'social capital' is influenced by gender and ethnicity. This investigation's interest in social connectedness is also significant because there has been a thoroughgoing individualism located at the heart of public health policy, and practice in the UK, where concerns about individual behavioural change, (see Prochaska and DiClemente, 1994, for example), are hegemonic. However, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have identified what they see as historic trends within Western European societies, where individuals may no longer see structural influences upon their lives, for example social class, as significant. Morgan (2002) suggested that individualisation may be most possible for fathers, specifically, who have high, secure income, a high sense of autonomy, and access to the cultural and social capital where fathering is highly valued. The sample of fathers chosen for this study, do not share the wealth and autonomy of those on a high, secure income, nor the socio-economic marginalisation of low income fathers. However the African-Caribbean and White working class men interviewed may be open to debates about fathering practices, but their aspirations may be limited by working conditions and policies regarding care, paternal, or parental leave (see also Morgan, 2002).

When I first began planning this study I was particularly interested in fathers' experiences of 'social support'. Langford et al (1997) have undertaken a useful concept analysis of 'social support', and have indicated the following are four important potential components. Emotional support may involve care for others,

empathy, love and trust. This is sometimes referred to as esteem support, a sense that a person is valued, or held in esteem. Instrumental support refers to the more practical provision of tangible help, goods or services. Information support may be provided to another during times of stress, or help may be provided to someone to help resolve problems. Appraisal support involves communication of information that is related to self-evaluation. The above framework rests upon a conceptual interest in personal networks and functions that are related to individual experience, rather than wider social connections or social structures.

Nevertheless, the 'social support' literature indicates significant links between experiences within social connections on the one hand, and people's health status and health practices, on the other. Callaghan and Morrissey (1993) have argued that increased 'social support' is associated with improved immunological resistance, reduced mortality rates, lower incidence of mental and physical illness, but is also associated with successful health promotion work regarding smoking and breastfeeding. Ganster and Victor (1988) have suggested that social support may enhance mental health status through providing opportunities for interaction with others, relieve loneliness, raise levels of perceived support, enable individuals to feel valued, and assists with coping with stressors. A more recent major longitudinal study, conducted by Stansfield et al (1998), of British middle aged civil servants, found that there was a protective affect on the mental health of these men, associated with the emotional support of their 'closest person'.

For the purposes of this investigation it should be noted that work settings may be important for individuals in establishing social connections throughout their adult lives. Indeed, there is research that paid work may provide benefits for people's mental health. For example, Jahoda (1982) and Warr (1987) have both suggested

that employment may enable individuals to develop social contacts, confirm their identities as workers, provide a shared sense of purpose with others, or even may provide health enhancing mental and physical activity. Furthermore, Heaney (1992) argued that enhancing social support in the workplace has been found to reduce mental health problems in employees, especially in high stress occupations. However, in contrast, Marmot et al's (1999) review of epidemiological research indicates that 'low job control' and an imbalance between 'effort and reward' within the workplace may be related to the development of coronary heart disease. Indeed Ferrie et al (1998) have suggested that employment characterised by insecurity may be associated with disturbed sleep patterns, and may be associated with long term illness, including mental illness. How men within this study experience paid work and the implications for their health, health practices and social connectedness will begin to be analysed in Chapter Five.

Men within this study were recruited, specifically, because they lived with a woman partner, an issue that is important within the context of gender relations between men and women within families. Hearn (1987) has argued that an uncritical focus within policy, on fathers needs, may reinforce men's power in relationships with women, such as violence by men, or reinforce the exploitation of women within the home (as Doyal, 1999, has argued). Regarding women's experiences of 'social support' by men, Oakley and Rigby's (1998) work indicated that women often found women relatives, not men, as the most stable sources of 'social support' over time. Indeed Duncombe and Marsden (1993) indicated that women in heterosexual relationships may experience considerable unhappiness associated with men's limited emotional reciprocity, and over emphasis by men on rationality in relationships. On the other hand, Duncombe and Marsden (1993) also reported that

men may feel 'pulled apart' by the contradictory obligations of paid work and personal relationships.

Nevertheless relationships with women do seem to benefit some men. Chandra et al (1983) found that married men had higher survival rates, than non-married men, 10 years after a myocardial infarction. Furthermore Gove et al (1983) indicated that marriage is associated with good mental health for men, specifically. Brown's (1986) findings indicated that women partners provide most forms of social support for men in families. Similarly, Melson et al (1993) indicated that women were the most important sources of emotional support for men in families, although Henderson and Brouse (1991) reported that women may have more extended networks of support than men after the birth of a baby. Melson et al's (1993) work is interesting, because they also indicated that the accessing of emotional support by men outside the immediate family was associated with discomfort, difficulty and conflict.

Whether the impact of 'social support' on health can be measured is, however, problematic as stress, 'social support', individual coping strategies, material and structural factors may be interdependent. 'Social support' may be seen as buffering an individual: that is the quality of that individuals social relationships enable them to cope with stressors, as Kessler and McLeod (1984) have argued. Similarly, Brown and Harris (1978) also found that, for women, low emotional support from others may be a 'risk' factor for depression. However, the quality of 'social support' is very important as social encounters between people can be stressful, and some people may be well meaning but incompetent in providing help, as Thoits (1995) work indicates. Freund and McGuire (1999) have also argued that women may be particularly exposed to having to deal with the stresses of others.

Furthermore, actually receiving support from others may be less important, for some people, than the perceived potential availability of 'social support' in coping with stressful events (Wethington and Kessler, 1986).

So far, within this section of the chapter, discussion of the 'social support' literature with its emphasis on individuals and their personal connections, has been undertaken, but this study addresses the implications of wider social relationships for health and fathering. In fact, Wilkinson (1996), and others, have challenged an individualistic conceptual focus upon 'social support', in order to develop an interest in social cohesion, social integration or what Putnam (1995) has termed 'social capital'

Putnam's work regarding 'social capital', which examined social connectedness within communities, as well as personal networks, is internationally highly influential. Putnam (1995) has identified the following potential resources that contribute to 'social capital'. First of all 'social capital' may include reciprocal relationships between families, friends and neighbours, including 'social support'. In addition, the level of local civic activity by people, including participation in community networks and organisations contributes to 'social capital'. The establishment of norms of trust, reciprocal help and support are also part of cohesive communities demonstrating 'social capital', for Putnam. Finally, a local sense of identity, belonging, and also a sense of solidarity with others is required within a cohesive community.

Putnam's work provides a useful conceptual focus to help tackle important questions within this study. However, there are concerns with the romanticism about civic life evident within Putnam's work, the economic language of 'capital'

(Fine and Green, 2000), and the conceptual conservatism within Putnam's concern for social integration, which may under emphasise structural conflict for our thinking about these issues. Indeed, the potentially cohesive communities, envisaged by Putnam, may also be characterised by mistrust, fear, racism and exclusion of outsiders, all of which may present potential difficulties for individuals' mental health status. Some social networks, like crime networks, do not benefit health (Baum, 1999). In fact, Halpern (1995) has argued that, within the context of neighbourhood redevelopment, that addressing the fear of crime may help diminish the incidence of anxiety or depression individuals may experience. Nevertheless, a focus upon 'social capital' does stimulate research into the qualitative experiences of trust, sharing, and tolerance within society. Indeed, Gillies (1997) argues 'social capital' helps us to understand health as a civic issue, and confirms the limits to individual change within health promotion. Hence, the concept 'social capital' enables this study to move beyond the potential individualism of a limited focus upon 'social support', and helps gain broader insight into men's experiences of social connections within communities.

As was argued in the previous section of this chapter, since 1997 Labour governments have become more interested in how neighbourhoods and communities function and change, particularly neighbourhoods characterised by deprivation (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Concern about local cohesion, or 'social capital', and how it may impact upon health is evident (Cooper et al, 1999). Furthermore, within policy and practice, nationally and locally, assessing 'social capital' is now being undertaken to complement the traditional interest in epidemiological measurement of mortality and morbidity. However, what is the evidence for the links between 'social capital' and health?

Wilkinson's (1996) specific interest in 'social cohesion' within European societies demonstrated the corrosive influences of indirect psychosocial causes of illness, which are associated with, for example, unemployment, job insecurity, housing insecurity, debt, and issues of control and autonomy in the workplace. Earlier research by Berkman and Syme (1979) in Alameda County, in the USA, indicated that social integration was associated with lower levels of mortality. Kaplan et al (1994), reporting on the Kuopio study in Finland, identified an increased risk of death reported for persons who reported a 'low quality' of social relationships. Furthermore, Kawachi et al (1996) in a study of male health professionals in the U.S.A found an association between social isolation and the incidence of cerebral vascular accidents. There is also some empirical research regarding the impact of participation within religious communities. Ellinson and Levin (1998) have found that 'spiritual well being' is related to self-esteem and inversely related to stress. Brown et al (1990) have indicated that participation in religious communities may protect individuals from social isolation. In addition, Shams and Jackson (1993) have suggested that involvement in religious communities may assist an individual's emotional coping abilities when dealing with difficult life events.

The literature regarding fathers and 'social capital' is negligible. However, Sixsmith and Boneham's (2002) research within a deprived community in Bolton, in the North of England, is useful in it focuses upon men and health. They recognised, in accordance with Spain (1992), that communities consist of gendered places and spaces (including the home, community and workplace). Sixsmith and Boneham (2002) indicated that poor working class men may find it difficult to share their health concerns with others, and that trust for these men is confined to close family and friends. There appears to be no research that focuses upon ethnicity, fathering and 'social capital', but Campbell and McLean (2002) have undertaken a

study with African-Caribbean men and women in order to explore participation within local community networks and organisations. Their findings indicated that both ethnicity and racism impacted upon informants' experiences of 'social capital'.

After initial analysis of the first set of interviews, it became apparent that trust was a particularly important issue for understanding the experiences of men within this thesis. Trust is rarely a topic addressed within social theory, although Fox's (1974) work regarding trust in the workplace is an exception. Misztal (1998) suggests that the ability to trust others is important to our sense of security in the world, in that trust acts a kind of social lubricant with other people. Indeed some have suggested that trust is important in individuals' health experience within communities: Berry and Rickwood's (2000) findings indicated that a lack of trust in others is linked to psychological distress. However, Whitehead (2002) has argued that trust may create particular problems for men, because trust in relationships is contingent upon men 'letting go' of fear, and the desire for control over others. Trust may involve accepting one's limitations, recognising one's own needs, and ultimately being prepared to submit those needs to others, all issues which will be developed within Chapters Six, Seven and Eight of this study.

There is little empirical evidence establishing links between either social class or ethnicity on the one hand, and social connectedness, on the other. Furthermore while there is a wealth of research confirming the links between material deprivation and health, the links between 'social capital' and health are still contested (Gillies, 1997). This investigation examines the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness, with specific reference to fathering and health, and identifies implications for men's health and health practices.

2.7 SUMMARY.

The preliminary study (Williams, 1999) stimulated my interest in this area of inquiry in several ways, including a decision to explore, in more depth, the meaning of fathering for two ethnic groups of working class men: African-Caribbean and White fathers. Questions were also raised within the preliminary study about the links between men's masculinities and health, the possible exclusion of men regarding their health and fathering experiences, but above all men's experiences of social connections within 'social support' and 'social capital' in particular. The initial focus of the literature review was also influenced by this earlier work.

My reading of the social policy and social theory literature indicates that while the experiences of fathers are evident within existing research, the experiences of African-Caribbean men in the UK, in particular, are underdeveloped. Investigating the discourses and practices of African-Caribbean and White working class men, who are fathers, was particularly necessary if research is to challenge the negative ways in which such men may be defined, for example as pathological or dysfunctional, within popular and essentialist accounts. Furthermore analysis of the experiences of these two groups of men was also required because of the need to understand the implications of ongoing changes in family structures, socio-economic changes affecting work and families, and the implications of policy developments for men's experiences.

This study is about men, men in a society structured by unequal gender relations. Hence it was also necessary to investigate men's experiences within a conceptual grasp of both structure and agency. In this respect Connell's (1995, 2000, 2002) framework for understanding gender relations by focussing upon masculinities, and

relationships between masculinities, is significant for this investigation. The efficacy of Connell's conceptualisation of marginalised, dynamic, complicit and hegemonic masculinities for the experiences of British African-Caribbean and White working class men is interrogated within this study. Furthermore the extent to which men's experiences within rapid social change may create gender 'role strain' (Pleck, 1995) is investigated, which is necessary because of the commitment to exploring material and structural influences such as ethnicity, social class, paid work, and the availability of community resources for men. Indeed whether men's experiences of social connectedness is linked to masculinities also required primary research.

The intention to investigate men's experiences of fathering and health within social connections led me to also consider the developing men's health literature. However, this literature often focusses upon mortality, morbidity, illness, sickness or the body (Watson, 2000), rather than the sociological interest identified here in social structures, social connectedness, as well as human agency. Indeed research investigating links between masculinity, fathering and health is limited. This thesis therefore investigated fathers' health experiences. This latter point is important as it was necessary to identify the implications of men's social connectedness, through participation, reciprocity and trust, for their health and health practices.

Putnam's (1995) work regarding 'social capital' is valuable in that it helps us to move beyond an understanding of social experiences that focusses upon the personal, to grasp the influence of wider social relationships that impact on human experience. The economism, and functional conservatism of Putnam's model led me to adopt Bott's (1957) concepts of social connections and social connectedness to help understand the dynamic between personal and structural domains. However,

it was also intended to explore the ways in which social structures like gender, social class and ethnicity influence men's experiences of social connections. This was necessary, in order to investigate the health implications of the ways in which African-Caribbean and White working class men, (who are fathers), deal with health and fathering within families, friendships, communities, and workplaces.

In conclusion, within this chapter I have attempted to use existing theory and empirical research to identify research opportunities for this thesis. The later empirical chapters (chapters 4-8) will integrate the work of other writers, to establish whether my study findings are consistent with, or qualify earlier research. In Chapter 9, key literatures are used to evaluate the extent to which the research question has been answered, and to evaluate methodology used and the findings, but also to identify the implications of this thesis for policy, practice, theory and future research. Finally, the limited amount of previous research specifically relevant to this inquiry signposts the need for an in depth interpretative and qualitative investigation of potentially private experiences. The next chapter provides the rationale for the critical and interpretative methodological strategy employed.

CHAPTER THREE: MASCULINITIES, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Within the previous chapter the key conceptual issues that underpinned the planning of this study were analysed, and it was also established what was known, and what was not known, about this area of inquiry. This latter point is important because in relation to the research question, and associated aims, there is limited empirical literature that speaks directly to the concerns addressed in this study. Hence an interpretative, and critical, methodological framework, for the qualitative methods employed within this study, has been created. This latter decision was particularly necessary, because, as Polit et.al (2001) have argued, interpretative and qualitative research is valuable where a study investigates an area where there is limited previous evidence. This chapter therefore addresses the fifth thesis aim which is: to employ a critical, interpretative epistemological and methodological framework to guide fieldwork practice and qualitative data analysis.

This exploratory study was informed by the principles of ethnography and phenomenology. The men who agreed to be interviewed, were seven White working class men, and six African-Caribbean working class men. All of these men were fathers, were also living with some or all of their children, lived with a woman partner, and were doing paid work at the time of their recruitment for this study. These men were accessed through community contacts, employing purposive sampling. The men agreed to participate in two semi-structured

individual interviews. The rationale for these decisions is addressed within this chapter by discussing the epistemological and methodological issues underpinning this research, the specific methods employed, and the qualitative data analysis undertaken. Finally the trustworthiness of this study is established.

3.2 MASCULINITIES AND METHODOLOGY.

Masculinity was an important concept in planning this study, including the planning of the methodology. Harding's (1990) critique of what she termed 'masculine' epistemological perspectives emphasized how research can objectify human experiences, especially, for Harding, women's experiences. This study, however, attempts to prevent the objectification of men's lives, to authentically understand their experiences, while also recognising the influences of social structures. So often within positivist research regarding 'social support' or 'social capital' (eg. Kawachi et al, 1996), there is insufficient focus upon how social connectedness, is experienced by people, which this study has achieved through exploring the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness. However, the masculinities literature indicates that there may be important potential difficulties to overcome within research with men. Whitehead (2002) has argued that trust in others may be difficult for some men, Seidler (1994, 1997) has suggested that men may use rationality to deny or control aspects of their experience, and Rutherford (1988) has contended that men may talk and act in ways that are informed by a fear of intimacy. Indeed, Cornwell (1984) has argued that it was difficult for her to build familiarity with men within her fieldwork, which inhibited her attempts to acquire insight into men's more personal and private experiences. This latter difficulty was also evident in my fieldwork for the

preliminary study (Williams, 1999), where it appeared that fathers' reticence, silence or more formal responses were provided in ways that prevented disclosure of personal material.

The use of principles of phenomenology and ethnography to inform this investigation was intended to help gain access to men's own meanings about their experiences. The implications of these principles will be addressed shortly, but this study also attempted to recognise and analyse how structural and material factors impacted on men's experiences. Hence this study is informed by a critique of unequal gender relations, and is critical of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). I have therefore employed an epistemological and methodological framework to investigate a chosen sample of men's experiences, without ignoring the unequal gendered social relations in our society. As Morgan (1992) has argued, men have to work against the 'grain', that is we work against our own 'masculine grain' to take gender into account. While relationships between men are hierarchical, as Connell (1995) has argued, this required me to be reflexive in my research about the experience of racism and class that informants may express.

There are two theories about how research should be undertaken that influence the methodology developed here: ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnographic approaches have their origins in anthropology, whereby researchers would attempt to immerse themselves in the culture of informants, in order to understand and describe the lives of communities (Taylor, 2002). For Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, page 2) ethnography "...bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives", which is enabled by the

ethnographer being part of the world that is studied. Involvement in that world is not a source of bias, but provides reflexive material for the researcher to build on when reporting findings. Investigations of cultures therefore require a holistic understanding of human experiences. To undertake this holistic research, observation methods were historically, sometimes exclusively, employed by ethnographers to pursue their aims (Spradley, 1979).

The commitment to in depth insight into men's experiences was intended within this study, but immersion within the families, communities and workplaces of these men was not undertaken for a number of reasons. Firstly, this study was undertaken on a part-time basis while I continued with full time paid work, with limited financial resources, and limited time available for the study. Observation as a method was simply not feasible. Indeed this problem is compounded by the potentially practical difficulties of negotiating access to a multiplicity of homes, social spaces, and workplaces. Silverman (2000) has argued that for new researchers it is important to avoid this process of immersion, to avoid a loose design, in order ensure a project is manageable and feasible. I felt quite lost at times at the beginning of this study, and needed a clear question to guide my work. However, Hammerley and Atkinson (1983) have indicated that the course of ethnography requires preparation, but cannot be pre-determined, as 'foreshadowed problems' are turned into a series of questions within the research process. However for me to plan and finish this study, it was essential to have a coherent research design in advance, to enable me to cope with the multiple stressors involved in such a project. Indeed it was also important to avoid ignoring the importance of recognising and building on cumulative bodies of research by others. Furthermore, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have suggested that it is

important to avoid, where possible, disturbing the 'natural state' of phenomena within the research process. This was an important consideration within the fieldwork, but my influence on the men I interviewed was real. Indeed as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have emphasised, in an earlier text, it is important not to attempt to completely eliminate the effects of the researcher within the research process, but to examine them.

Notwithstanding my rejection of observation methods for this study, ethnographic emphasis on in depth, holistic research to explore men's experience in their own terms is central to the methodological path chosen here.

The principles of phenomenology were important for this research design. Phenomenology has its origins in the work of Husserl (1970), whose critique of positivist standardisation within psychology, and the concomitant attempt to control subjective experience through research, indicated that a fundamental flaw was at the centre of this positivist enterprise. The objectification of human experience was challenged by Husserl, who asserted that a naturalist approach should attempt to strip back our assumptions about the world. An emphasis on subjective experience requires researchers to understand that people are active, thinking human beings.

Within social theory the work of Schutz (1972) is highly influential. Schutz attempted to develop Husserl's ideas, by arguing for a social phenomenology. He argued against a sociological focus on social structures, like social class, as a determinant of people's lives, to confirm, after Max Weber, that people's own meanings provide the motivation to act. Indeed, and this is important here with

the interest in social connectedness, Schutz (1972) suggested that our understanding about experience is subjective, but also intersubjective, that our world is created with others. Furthermore, to gain insight and, at the same time, help people to understand their world, it is necessary as researchers to take nothing for granted, act like 'strangers' in their lives in order to uncover common sense understandings of the world. Polit, et al (2001) argue that this 'stranger' practice involves bracketing, that is holding in abeyance preconceived ideas about the phenomenon, in order to ascertain informants perceptions in full. In addition, the researcher helps the informant, through in depth conversations, to describe their experiences.

There are, however, important limitations for this study, within phenomenological approaches to research. As Silverman (2000) has argued a key question for phenomenologists is : what is the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by these people? These essences relate to critical truths about reality, as grounded in people's lived experience. While insight into men's experiences is central to the fieldwork process, and the fundamental starting point of data analysis within this study , this thesis also involved my influence upon their experience in a variety of ways (e.g. decisions about topic, question, aims, epistemology, methodology, methods and analysis) which are reported here. Furthermore, one of the major difficulties with inductivist and naturalist approaches towards methodology is that it does not do justice to the ways in which social constraints, and social structures influence experience and narrative accounts. This study therefore attempted to both value men's narratives, and critically analyse narratives existing concepts and theories.

The qualitative semi-structured interviews reported here are therefore informed by ethnographic and phenomenological principles of holism, reflexivity, in depth understanding of men's meanings, but also resistance to the standardisation of men's experience. Recognising diversity was also important within this study, particularly, as Hall (1997) argues, that researchers may perpetrate inaccurate stereotypes ignoring internal diversity: it was important to avoid generaliseable statements about Black or White 'essential' subjects.

Giddens (1976), in his critique of interpretative theories, argues that a concern with meaning may downplay the ways in which we transform the world through practice, which is important here, for example, in analysing men's health practices as well as their meanings about health. Furthermore if we seek explanations exclusively in terms of actors motivations, or concentrate upon the fragmented and diverse nature of individual experience, we may neglect the social context which influences thinking, motivation, and meaning. Indeed, social norms articulated by people may reflect and reinforce inequalities in power, which is why Connell's (1995) emphasis upon the personal and social is so valuable. Giddens (1976) provides a different critique of structural positions, where he argues one may erroneously see human subjectivity, for example the pleasure involved in fathering, as the effect of structural systems. For Giddens, interpretative theorists dissolve structure into meaning, while structural theorists dissolve meaning into structure. What is required is 'duality': social structure and meaningful action are understood as two sides of the same coin:

"To enquire into the structuration of social practices, is to seek to explain how it comes about that structures are constituted through action, and reciprocally how action is constituted structurally" (Giddens, 1976:61).

Giddens' argument that neither human agents on the one hand, nor social structures on the other, have primacy in understanding the relationships between structure and agency, is extremely important within this study if I am to deal with the subjective, intersubjective, material and structural experiences within men's narratives. Giddens (1976) also argues that we need to be able to see people as being reflexive, that is that they think about what they do before they do it, act upon the basis of their decisions, and are capable of examining the consequences. Understanding of these processes is through language, articulated here through men's narratives. Human agency, which is brought to the foreground by exploring men's experiences, is seen within this thesis as purposeful human action.

Furthermore, the interdependence of structure and agency does not leave out the real creative subject as Lupton and Barclay (1997) appear to do with their focus upon the representations of fatherhood. My position here, then, is after Sayer (1992), and Mills (1973), that reality exists independent of human interpretation, and is not just socially constructed in the minds of individuals. Like Connell (1995) I would argue that realism is linked to praxis, for example one of my motivations is to raise questions about the methods of improving the health of working class men.

In dealing with the relationships between theory and empirical information Glaser and Strauss (1967) have argued that theory can be generated within the research process itself. Grounded theory, as they see it, is theory that is grounded within the accounts of those studied. In contrast, this study adopted an approach towards the empirical process by, as Mills (1973) has argued, shuttling back and forth

between theoretical speculation and empirical investigation. Hence, the key concepts, discussed in the previous chapter, have informed fieldwork rather than determined it. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) approach does not sufficiently recognise that statements about empirical material, presuppose theory, ideology or discourse. Finally, my intention was also towards objectivity within this thesis, not in the absolute positivist sense, but in the sense that it involves critical reflection on power and process within research methodology and methods.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS.

This section of the chapter provides a rationale for the specific methods used to gather information within fieldwork. Initially access and sampling decisions are outlined, followed by discussion of data collection using semi-structured interviews. Issues of reflexivity, praxis and ethics will be interrogated, before a final discussion of emotionality within interviews.

3.3.1 ACCESS, AND PURPOSIVE SAMPLING.

Initial contacts with the men, interviewed, was achieved by attending a local annual community festival, and further men were identified and recruited through 'snowballing'. That is, I negotiated with initial contacts to meet other potential interviewees. All thirteen men lived in a locality within the city of Birmingham.

In consultation with informants, I changed the name of the locality, for reporting within this thesis, to 'Madeley', in order to help preserve men's anonymity. Madeley, was not an inner city location, characterised by material deprivation,

unlike the localities where the men interviewed for the preliminary study were living. However, some background information about the locality is valuable. The following information is from the 2001 Census (Office of National Statistics, 2004) regarding the electoral ward where Madeley was located. The resident population consisted of 81 percent 'White' people compared with 91 percent across England. However, the African-Caribbean men were part of a small ethnic minority within the local resident population: 4.5 percent of the population were 'Black or Black British', compared with 2.1 percent across England. All the men recruited for this study had been baptised or christened within Christian churches during childhood. In the electoral ward 67.5 percent of the population were indicated as 'Christian'. At the time of sampling, all the men who agreed to help with the study were in some kind of paid work. Unemployment within the ward was 5.6 percent, compared with 3.4 percent across England. All the men interviewed owned or wanted to own their own homes. Owner occupation of housing was 65.3 percent within the ward, when compared with 68.9 percent across England. It is important to emphasise, that although this information is useful background, this study does not measure 'social capital': in Chapter Seven it is the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness within communities and workplaces that are examined.

Access to the thirteen men interviewed was through purposive sampling. Patton (1990) argued that all qualitative research sampling is purposive, that it is pragmatic in pursuit of aims, particularly where there may be limited time and resources. This involves:

“...selecting information rich cases for studies in depth...from which one can learn a great deal about issues central to the importance of the research”
(Patton, 1990: 169).

On the other hand Strauss (1987) has argued for theoretical sampling, which involves collecting, coding, and analysing data to shape the next focus for evolving theory. However, as Coyne (1997) has argued, this form of sampling may not be theoretical sampling at all, as it is driven by analysis anyway. Indeed theoretical sampling implies an initial selection of people and places in a purposeful way. This was my intention: the men were accessed purposefully in order to help me answer the research question, and these decisions were influenced by my reading of the existing literature, and the preliminary study.

In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) fathers were recruited with the help of health visitors working in inner city Birmingham. Many men within the preliminary study were unemployed, many living on low income, some were the main carers for children, although most were not. For the substantive investigation reported here, interest was focussed upon the experiences of other working class men, this time fathers who were in paid work, to explore the link between paid work on the one hand and men's experiences of health, fathering, and social connections, on the other. Also, I planned to explore the experiences of social connectedness of African-Caribbean and White working class men, because the preliminary study suggested that there was more limited access to 'social support' for these men. Men interviewed were living with a woman partner. This latter decision was important, as men's contributions to others' lives

are examined, as well as a focus on help provided by others for men, which was explored in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999).

Men interviewed were fathers of older children, that is they were not recruited as fathers of infants and toddlers, which had happened in the preliminary study. Indeed Lupton and Barclay's (1997) research was, as a counterpoint, invaluable in planning this study. It was decided to move beyond Lupton and Barclay's (1997) focus on fathers with infants, to investigate the experiences of more experienced men, especially because of the limited published evidence about such men in the UK. Men recruited were also well, without longstanding or acute illness, in order to examine men's health experiences within social connections, especially as well men, who were fathers, could be important potential targets for primary prevention within public health. Of course intentions were never fully realised. One of the men, Ron, separated from his wife after we had agreed he would be interviewed. Another man, Liam, gave up his paid work, to help care for his daughter, who had a disability, after we had agreed to meet. After the first interview another man, Trefor, migrated to New Zealand.

(Please note, brief profiles of the thirteen men interviewed are provided at the beginning of Chapter Four).

3.3.2 DATA COLLECTION WITHIN SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.

The method of data collection employed in the two rounds of interviews were semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were influenced by a reading of key literatures, and the findings of the preliminary study (Williams 1999).

In her research, with working class people in East London, Cornwell (1984) found that what people say, and how they say it, is influenced by the people to whom they are speaking, and the context within which they are living. Cornwell (1984) indicated that lay people may provide 'public' accounts that respond to the anticipated 'official' requirements of the researcher. Cornwell (1984) also suggested that it was possible over time to become increasingly familiar with women, which helped her gain access to the 'private' accounts of their experience. Cornwell found it difficult to achieve a similar rapport with men. Indeed McKee and O'Brien (1982) reported on their research experiences, indicating that conversations with men were more formal and less informal than interviews with women. In this latter sense, interviews reported here, shifted between formal and informal phases, as narratives are expressed in sometimes intimate, sometimes relaxed, sometimes with humour, or sometimes more rational modes within interviews. Would I be able to get beyond men's official 'public' accounts of health that may be perceived as correct or proper, especially as responses may be expressed in a new and potentially stressful situation (an interview with me)? In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) I found that the men were most likely to discuss emotional, personal and difficult issues on a one to one basis rather than in the group context.

Within this study, (unlike a more traditional quantitative survey), my listening skills were extremely important as, effectively, I was the research instrument. To make the experience for men emotionally safe, and comfortable for them to talk, required good active listening skills, self awareness and adaptability (Lee, 1993). I am quite confident about my listening skills, having learned a performance within health and welfare work over 18 years, that was intended to provide

empathy, but also sufficient distance to rationally analyse 'problems'. My background helped the interview process, I would suggest, as I was able to attend to men's experiences and retain my rational ability to focus upon, return to, or follow up significant or unpredictable stories. However, while a warm, engaging, accepting style was important, my experience also indicated that they required confidence in the interviewer's authoritative performance. That is they needed to know that I was well organised, and that I knew what I was doing.

3.3.3 INTERVIEW ORGANISATION.

Individual interviews were at a venue of men's own choice. Usually this meant interviewing them in their homes, occasionally my private office was used if they preferred this, and on one occasion I interviewed Steve in his garage while he was doing his carpentry work. Each of the two interviews lasted between 1 ¼ and 2 ½ hours. The beginning and ending of each interview followed a similar pattern. The beginning of the interview involved welcoming the men, or expressing thanks for their invitation to their home. This phase also involved explanations regarding: the research question, the time the interview was expected to take, the importance of their voluntary participation, reassurance about confidentiality and anonymity, the signing of consent forms, confirmation that a copy of the transcript would be sent for their comments, and finally that the payment of expenses would take place.

At the end of the interview, confirmation of all the issues raised at the beginning of the interview was undertaken, and payment of £15 expenses was provided. Payment of expenses was intended to cover any childcare or transport costs, and

was agreed with men when they had agreed to be involved. These two phases of the interviews framed the main body of the interviews, which addressed the questions within the two interview schedules (Appendices One and Two)..

3.3.4 INTERVIEW SCHEDULES.

A good design for the interview schedules was important to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I therefore designed two schedules (see Appendices One and Two). Two pilot interviews were undertaken before each round of interviews to evaluate wording of questions, identify ambiguities, contradictions, appropriateness of questions, and the extent to which questions would facilitate discussion. The first schedule was designed to investigate men's experiences of, for example, fathering, health and social connectedness within families and friendships. After the first interview a second schedule was designed to address social connectedness within communities and workplaces in more depth. However, this second interview also allowed me to address some issues raised within the analysis of the first interviews, for example men's solitary experiences, and also follow up some stories specific to each man.

The use of each schedule was undertaken in a similar fashion with each man, but the order was rarely the same, simply because men responded to questions in their own ways, and would often raise issues that I had planned to address later in the interview. I believed that these developments provided a more relaxed experience, where the men had more control over the process, and hence created more opportunities for me to help them talk about their experience.

3.3.5 TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

In the first interview, questions were asked, initially, to attempt to put men at their ease. These were often closed questions that also provided important background information, some of which is included in the individual profiles of men (Chapter Four: section 4.2). After the initial simple closed questions, more open-ended challenging questions were introduced to address the research aims, (eg. ‘What does being a father mean to you?’). These open questions were followed up by more questions, (eg. ‘What is enjoyable about being a father?’), that enabled a focus upon more specific issues. Prompts were used also. Burgess (1984) suggested that prompts can be used within the interview process to help respondents deconstruct questions. I repeated or rephrased some questions, but usually the main prompts employed were to used to request men to tell me more about an experience, or I would ask for a specific example, a specific story, to support their response. This latter form of prompting became more necessary when, in the second interview, more challenging questions were introduced, for example, questions related to ‘trust’.

3.3.6 PRAXIS, REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICS.

My praxis involves training, education, health promotion, and this investigation as ways of addressing the health of working class men. This investigation study includes implications for policy and practice, as well as theory and research. Furthermore, praxis involves reflexivity within the research process. In this sense my background was important in that it did impact upon the research process.

Hence my discourses, ideologies and practices, presented here in the form of a narrative regarding others' narratives, are influenced by my income, social class, gender, education, ethnicity and other factors.

In the light of this previous discussion, I therefore ask the question could I possibly be an insider (Spradley, 1979) within this research. In relation to my work, income and autonomy I could not be an insider within encounters with men I interviewed. I do not share the same work or class backgrounds, now. I did not leave school at the age of 16 (or before) as many of the men I interviewed did. My income, job security, and educational opportunities have provided me with a range of choices not, currently, available to most men involved in the study. However, in some senses I did have experiences, insights and knowledge that I shared with men (they would often ask me about my work background during recruitment, or before or after interviews).

As a health visitor, my paid work was often health promotion practice with parents in order to promote child health, which provided some insider knowledge about the experience of parenting. However, more than this I am a father with two children, experiencing similar dilemmas to many of the men interviewed here. Above all I am a man. The forms of masculinity discussed and analysed within this study apply to me as well. In many ways my complicit masculine practices, confirmed and resisted at different times, are similar to men within this study. Similar to them, but not the same because I have developed some sophisticated ideologies, and methods of performing a rational, yet caring (sometimes) practice with others. Sometimes as I heard or read the narratives I recognised similarities between men and my own experiences. These issues are

important to note as potential sources of bias, which reinforces the importance of the auditing that took place (which will be discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter), but also important in challenging the naivete of a simple subject-object view of the relationship between researcher and informant.

In the light of the previous discussion, it is important that my individual values of equity, social justice, and individual freedom were integrated within this study to ensure that ethically I did no harm. In this respect I have operated within the framework for ethical research outlined by the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002), and in response to the ethical guidance within the Department of Social Work and Social Policy within the University of Warwick. Furthermore I created anticipatory strategies for dealing with any potential difficulties that men may have experienced within the interviews. To do this I employed Beauchamp and Childress' (1989) four ethical principles to underpin my fieldwork practice, and create strategies to deal with any unforeseen problems with access or fieldwork. These four ethical principles are respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.

Respect for autonomy concerns the rights of men to information about the project, their right to withdraw at any time, and their right to be provided with verbal and written informed consent. For example, one of the men, Liam, refused a second interview, and he refused to make comments on the copy of the first interview he received. This decision was accepted by me, without attempts at manipulation.

Beneficence involved my responsibility to treat men in a respectful, courteous, and caring fashion, but also to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were

maintained. Pseudonyms for men were created, usually by men themselves, and names of other people and places, (including the name of the locality where they lived), were changed to promote anonymity. Of course, pragmatically such an approach also enabled me to establish a good relationship with men.

Non-maleficence involved doing no harm. In this respect I had already identified local agencies and support networks that may be used by men if they should be distressed or unwell when I met them. At a purely humanistic level, responsibility to care for interviewees while I was with them was clear, but I had decided in advance that I would not become involved in helping them with ongoing health concerns, other than to put them in touch with appropriate agencies, if they required this help.

The principal of justice involved being fair and equitable. In this respect it was particularly important, in working with men who had different class and ethnic backgrounds from myself, to consider issues of equity. On a very practical level informants were informed, after agreeing to help with this study, that I was able to pay them £15 expenses for their time. This was a simple but effective way of acknowledging their time was as important as mine. Also as a White researcher can I understand racism and the specific experience of African-Caribbean men? Never fully, because of the limitations of my own background. However, as far as I am aware, there is no equivalent work within health visiting to my report on the preliminary study (Williams, 1999). When it was published, it provided others with the opportunity to critique findings, and further develop discussion, debate, policy and practice regarding the needs of fathers. Many practitioners refer to my work, or ask for my help, in planning projects with men within health

visiting. In this sense, I would suggest it is both ethically and politically appropriate for me to undertake this substantive research to inform policy and practice, but, at the same time, recognise my own limitations as a researcher.

Finally, to create a working agreement regarding the ethical issues addressed above, the individual men and I signed a copy of a consent form, to confirm my agreement with them regarding: the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, anonymity, research intentions, and confirmation of payment for their expenses.

3.3.7 EMOTIONAL DILEMMAS WITHIN INTERVIEWS.

Interviews are emotionally unpredictable encounters, especially when dealing with sensitive or personal issues, and the emotional labour involved is often stressful, as Freund and McGuire (1999) have argued. I know that my labour within the interviews was extremely tiring. However, it is also important to attempt to analyse emotionality within interviews because of the potential impact such experiences may have on the interview process. After Young and Lee (1996) I recorded methodological notes to deal with process difficulties within interviews, in order to understand the complexity of these experiences.

One of the first dilemmas was regarding the tension between my empathic performance on the one hand, and the potential for my responses influencing men's stories, on the other. For example, when I laughed with Steve as he told me his story about his 'swollen bollocks', I was enjoying our shared experience of humour, but at the same time I was colluding with his non disclosure of possible

associated difficult thoughts and feelings. In contrast, I also experienced some irritation, at times, when men would be careful, formal or guarded within interviews, in ways that prevented my intended exploration of their experience. In retrospect I should have been more relaxed about such experiences, especially because I now realise that my determination to listen to, and report on, their experiences of social connectedness was extremely challenging for most of the men I interviewed. In retrospect, I am now surprised how little anger I encountered within the interviews. My experiences with Liam, however, were distinctive. Liam did allow the first interview to be completed but spent most of the interview answering questions, some of which he created for himself, in the form and at the time of his choosing. It was as if he was a politician subverting the attempts of a Jeremy Paxman like figure to pin him down to the question in hand. Of course, I did not perceive I had dealt with the interview in such a crude way, but came away from the interview confused about both structure and process. In retrospect all Liam was doing was taking the control of the interview process away from me: he did not seem to understand the traditional passive, objectified role of the informant!

Desire was also important within my experience of interviews, in that I had a strong desire to do a 'good' interview. However, is a good interview one that helps me answer the research question, one that facilitated men's authentic talk about their experience, or helped elicit unpredicted responses? I was never sure, and the good interview remained illusory. My anxieties were also evident for me, as I began to make analytical notes after interviews: would I be able to elicit material that was appropriate for a thesis. However, I was attempting to create an authentic account of men's experiences not "... a rosy picture of comfort and

harmony that may read as self-satisfied to audiences" (Young and Lee, 1996: 111). How honest, though, is this personal reporting style? Mestrovic (1997) has argued that certain industries construct authenticity, and I strongly believe my experiences in nursing and health visiting helped me perform a kind of authenticity within interviews, and within this thesis.

My solution to the emotional dilemmas that I experienced within fieldwork was to use my semi-professional experience and skills in interviews with men. That is I combined an authoritative, competent instrumental performance to address my aims, with facilitative listening skills. I was controlling my emotionality with the hope of enabling the men I interviewed to talk about sensitive issues, including their emotional experiences. My performance was in effect a complicit masculine (Connell, 1995) approach that was instrumentally structured, but also, I hoped, enabling at the same time.

3.4 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS.

The approach towards qualitative data analysis was influenced by the work of Mills (1973), Burgess (1984) and Miles and Huberman (1994) to provide a systematic structure for this study. Within the content analysis of data I was seeking contradictions and diversity as well as patterns within the totality of qualitative data that was recorded and transcribed (Burgess, 1984). After Mills (1973) I attempted to shuttle back and forth between conceptual speculation, reflection, reading, data collection and analysis. This study never followed a linear course. Qualitative data analysis undertaken within this study was not therefore a technique, but was 'iterative' (Miles and Huberman, 1994), that is

analysis feeds data collection and vice versa. For example after initial analysis of the first interviews, the second interview was partly used to ask questions stimulated by that initial analysis.

As Burgess (1984) has also argued, the personal is central to data analysis. Hence, while the computer software package QSR*NUDIST was used as a mechanical tool to manage data (900 pages of A4 text), I was responsible for analysis using QSR*NUDIST as a mechanical tool only. Finally, as I have argued earlier, my methodology was underpinned by a conceptual interest in structure, agency and realism, hence men's subjective narratives were valued but also analysed.

The practical processes of doing qualitative data analysis involved organising, structuring, and eliciting meaning from research material (Silverman, 2000), but the challenge addressed here was the absence of accepted consensual rules about these latter processes. Crabtree and Miller (1992) have identified many styles of qualitative research analysis. A quasi-statistical analysis style involves standardisation, which was inconsistent with the interpretative and qualitative methodology chosen here. Alternatively, an immersion analysis style involves an intuitive 'crystallisation' of the data (Crabtree and Miller, 1992), where a deeply subjective style of reporting takes place. Such a style, although both intellectually challenging, and attractive in terms of reflexivity, was beyond the scope of this study. I needed clear and coherent structures to enable me to effectively complete the thesis.

An alternative style, identified by Crabtree and Miller (1992), is what they term an editing analysis style, which they argue is most widely used by qualitative researchers. This style involves acting as an interpreter, and analyst, to identify meaningful data, index and code data, and develop categories and themes within the data. It is this latter style that approximates to the path I have chosen. This form of analysis of the content of interviews allowed me to concentrate on the audiotapes and the texts. I will now explain the practicalities of this process.

As well as critical analysis from my thesis supervisor, an independent researcher audited interview questions before interviews, a sample of transcripts, coding decisions, and themes identified by me. However, the most important initial aspect of analysis is 'knowing the data', as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have argued. This involved detailed examination of transcripts and audiotapes, and recording of analytical and methodological notes. Repeated listening to interviews, was followed by reading of the transcribed interviews. All interviews were transcribed in full, and indexed and coded.

Methodological and analytical field notes were essential in this study. As Burgess (1984) has argued, methodological field notes enable reflection upon the extent to which the researcher may affect informants, but also helped evaluate the effectiveness of the data collection process. Analytic notes informed the whole data analysis process, from, for example, informing coding of material, helping to provide preliminary analysis, generating new questions, testing emerging ideas, and ultimately providing signposts towards synthesis and theorising.

Indexing involves identifying and locating material within documents, while coding of material is informed by analytic field notes, study aims, and literature reviewed, but is also informed in the first instance by men's stories (Silverman, 1993). Furthermore, categories were developed from men's stories, a process which involved using many interrelated ideas that informants had used. QSR*NUDIST was used to manage the huge amount of data, and was very useful in the efficient and flexible processes of systematic coding and indexing of data. This software package was valuable in that it makes the data, once transcribed, easily accessible and transportable (Fielding and Lee, 1998). However, analysis of qualitative data was not a mechanical process. In fact, the possible acceptability to research sponsors of mechanical recording of analytic processes of while n using QSR*NUDIST (Fielding and Lee, 1998) did not interest me. I was not seeking pseudo-scientific respectability. However rigour can be demonstrated through the auditing of indexing, coding and theme development, as was undertaken within this study.

Review strategies were used to create reports on specific themes, which eventually become chapters, and sections of chapters, in order to provide a framework for reporting of findings. Initially as data was sorted, by indexing and coding, patterns began to emerge to create categories. For example, in Chapter 8 I identify the 'containment of difficult feelings'. Categories could then be grouped together. For example, categories like 'containment of difficult feelings' and 'rational thinking alone' were grouped together with other categories to create a theme, 'solitary discourses and practices'.

The categories and developing themes were linked together, as a whole, to provide a synthesis within the findings chapters (4-8). Theory helps us to arrange a set of concepts to define or explain some phenomena (Silverman, 2000). However, I had no pre-existing theoretical model, but the preliminary study, and the theories and concepts that I have analysed within the literature review enabled me to create a research design. As data collection, and data analysis continued so did my reading and re-reading of key texts and findings. For example, the work of Connell (1995) regarding masculinities, Watson (2000) regarding men's health discourses and practices, Lupton and Barclay (1997) regarding the experience of parenting by men, and Putnam's (1995) work regarding 'social capital' were integrated, confirmed or qualified within analysis of findings, and will be important key literature to evaluate within Chapter Nine. Theorising continued to evolve until the best explanation was obtained for the data reported.

3.5 THESIS TRUSTWORTHINESS.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that there are four principles of trustworthiness that confirm validity, reliability and generaliseability within qualitative research. Hence the trustworthiness of this study is demonstrated by its adherence to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have argued that one of the key aspects of systematic qualitative research is credibility, by which they mean the accurate interpretation of experience. What I planned was a form of validity that was respectful of, and did justice to, the experiential source, that is the men themselves, as Silverman (1993) suggested is required. I had provided men with a copy of their transcribed

interview, and at the beginning of second interview men were asked if the transcript represented an accurate account of their first interview. Most men, although not all, indicated they had 'looked' at the document, but few had read it completely. Their limited comments confirmed the accuracy of the data. Individual comments included that the interviews were interesting to read, it helped them to 'reflect', to 'look at yourself', or even in one case was 'good therapy'. This process was not conducted, however, for men's censorship, nor to suggest that I intended to analyse at men's level of interpretation. Ultimately, interpretation of findings was my responsibility.

Transferability (Morse and Field, 1996) refers to how findings can be transferred or generalised. However in the exploratory research reported here this issue is more complex than within a quantitative, or experimental piece of research. The generaliseability of findings within this study is more limited in its potential, principally because of the small number of informants. However, findings helped develop critiques of existing literature, practice and policy, and raise important questions to generate further research, which are outlined in Chapter Nine.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have argued that checks need to be made to ensure that the research is dependable, that is reliable. This is an important issue for me within this study as I created a flexible structure to create opportunities for the production of unpredictable material, but the fieldwork and analysis processes were also made available to others to be audited, as Silverman (1993) suggests is required. Hence, research aims, conceptual and methodological frameworks, interview questions, organisation of fieldwork, transcription of field notes, but

also emotional responses of myself, and the men I interviewed, were recorded and then audited by a colleague.

Confirmability relates to the coherent links between the data, and the analysis of that data (Robson,1993). To achieve this I have outlined in this chapter how my epistemological and methodological framework is consistent with my data collection tools. Moreover I have systematically recorded, managed and coded data, and the findings are presented logically and coherently within the following five findings chapters.

After Morse and Field (1996), I therefore argue that because confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability are demonstrated the research reported here is therefore trustworthy. That is, the rigorous, logical and coherent nature of this study is confirmed.

3.6 SUMMARY.

In this chapter I have made the case for a critical, interpretative methodological framework, and have provided a justification for the choice of qualitative research methods employed within this study. Indeed methodology, methods and the forms of qualitative data analysis were intended to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, which I believe I have demonstrated. With this achieved I will now attempt to create an authentic picture (Miles and Huberman, 1994), of the experiences reported by the men I interviewed within the findings chapters. The first findings chapter, 'The meaning of fathering for African-Caribbean and White

working class men' examines and analyses experiences of fathering, and begins to analyse men's contributions to social connections.

A note about the use of quotations.

Men within the study are quoted verbatim, unless interruptions, pauses, or repetitive phrases are excluded. Where this takes place such changes are indicated by elipsis (...).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MEANING OF FATHERING FOR AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN AND WHITE WORKING CLASS MEN.

4.1 INTRODUCTION.

As Burghes et al. (1997) have argued there is no clear consensus within the literature about the meaning of the term 'father' or the scope of fathers activities in families. This chapter establishes how two groups of African-Caribbean and White working class men understand the meaning of fathering for them, but also begins to analyse their discourses and practices that relate to the support they provided to others within families. Consistent with the methodological framework outlined in Chapter Three, this first findings chapter brings to the foreground men's diverse experiences of human agency, but also examines the influences of material and structural factors upon their lives. In particular, examination of similarities and differences between the experiences of these two groups of men, of different ethnic backgrounds,, is undertaken.

The chapter consists of four interdependent themes. The first and most important theme is 'The pleasure of men's involvement with children' (4.3) which analyses men's experiences with children, as men's narratives indicated such experiences were central to their identities as fathers. However, this thesis does not address the experience of fathers in general, but that of African-Caribbean and White working class men in particular. Hence the second theme is 'Ethnicity, fathering and families' (4.4). Here men's meanings regarding ethnicity are analysed, as are narratives that relate to ethnic differences, within narratives, regarding family activities and structures. Within the third theme, 'Fathering social class, and paid work' (4.5), informants' narratives about social class are analysed, followed by a

specific focus upon the implications of paid work for men's experiences of fathering. Finally, unpaid work within the home is addressed, within the fourth and final theme, 'The household division of labour' (4.6). Within this theme, discussion of men's accounts about negotiations with women partners, around the household division of labour, is undertaken. This chapter however begins by providing brief individual profiles to introduce the thirteen men interviewed for this study.

4.2 PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL MEN.

Outlined below are profiles of the thirteen men recruited for this investigation. The profiles are intended to provide the reader with brief introductions to individual men's backgrounds. However, all men shared the following experiences: they lived in Madeley in Birmingham, at the time of recruitment for this study were in paid work, were living with a woman partner and living with some or all of their children. Nevertheless, Liam' and Ron's personal circumstances changed before the first interviews took place, and Trefor's family migrated to New Zealand after the first interview.

The African-Caribbean working class men.

Liam.

Liam was 32 years of age, at the time of the first interview. After he had agreed to be interviewed, Liam gave up his paid work as a building labourer to help care for his younger daughter, who was born with a disability. Liam also had an older daughter, 13 years of age. Liam left school at the age of 16. Both Liam and his partner were unemployed, although Liam was involved in some voluntary community work. He was from a mixed heritage background, describing his

ethnicity as 'Black Irish', and his wife was described, by Liam, as 'Black British'. Liam and his partner had been together for 14 years, and they were not married. The main source of income for the family was state welfare benefits. The family lived in private rented accommodation. Liam refused a second interview.

Paul.

Paul, 28, was not willing to identify his ethnic background, because he believed that organisations may misuse this information, and was doubtful about the value of ethnic monitoring by employers. Paul was a father to 5 children, 1 with a previous girlfriend, and 4 children, (7 years, 6 years, 5 years, and 2 years old), with his current wife. Paul left school at the age of 16, and worked as a fitness instructor at a further education college. Paul's partner's paid work, as a teaching assistant, provided the main source of income for the family. Paul, and his wife, had devout religious beliefs: they were both 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. Paul had been married to his wife, who was a white 'British' woman, for seven years. At the time of the first interview Paul's family lived in local authority rented accommodation, but by the second interview they had bought the house.

Brandon.

Brandon, 34, left school at the age of 16, was a police officer, working in a Midlands town a few miles from Birmingham. He described himself as 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', and lived with his wife and two daughters (aged 15 and 7). His wife, who Brandon indicated was also 'British, but of Jamaican ancestry', worked part-time in an administrative job. Brandon's salary was the main source of the family income. Brandon and his wife had been married for 15 years. They lived in their own house.

Sylvester.

Sylvester, 48, described himself as 'Jamaican first, then English'. He had migrated to the UK during his adolescence. Sylvester left school at the age of 15, and had worked as a plasterer for over 30 years. He was self-employed, working for a private company as a sub-contractor for part of the week, and finding his own work for the rest of his income. Sylvester's work provided the main source of the family income. He had three sons, two of whom were adults, and a younger boy, 7 years of age. His wife, with whom he had been married for 22 years, was an 'Irish' woman, who worked part-time as a care assistant. They lived in their own house.

Oliver.

Oliver, 36, left school at the age of 16, and had worked as an electrician since then. He worked on the production line, as a maintenance electrician, in a local car manufacturing company. Oliver indicated that his ethnic background was 'West Indian and English'. His wife, who Oliver described as 'West Indian and English', worked part-time as a community nurse. They both made similar contributions to the family income, and lived in their own home. They had two daughters, aged 6 and 10. Oliver and his family were active members of a Methodist Church community. Oliver had been married to his wife for 12 years.

Terrence.

Terrence, 27, left school at the age of 16, lived with his partner (they were not married), and lived in a rented local authority flat. They had been together 'on and off' since they left school. They had one child, a nine year old daughter. Terrence worked on the production line at a local car plant, but his partner was not in paid work. He described his partner's, and his own ethnic background, as 'Black and British'.

The White working class men:

Steve.

Steve, 39, left school at the age of 16, and was a self employed carpenter working from home (within his garage). Steve lived with his wife, 4 children: two adolescent boys, a 9 year old girl and an infant son (born between the first and second interviews). They lived in their own home . Steve described himself as 'Welsh and European', and his partner as 'English'. Steve's partner's salary provided most of the family income: she worked as a nurse. They had been married for 15 years. Steve planned his paid work activities around the care of his children.

Peter.

Peter, 30, described himself and his wife as 'British and White'. He lived with his wife who was a part-time social care worker. They married after leaving school, before he went to University. Peter was the only man within the sample who had attended University to undertake a degree, having left school at the age of 18. He had three children: two daughters (12 and 9 years of age), and a 5 year old son. Peter was doing paid work, planning and fitting office equipment. Peter's family were actively involved in their Baptist church community. Peter's paid work provided the main source of income for the family. They lived in their own home.

Trefor.

Trefor, 47, was 'Welsh', had adult children and grandchildren, but at the time of the interview was married for a second time living with his wife (of four years), who like Trefor, was an unqualified social worker. Trefor left school at the age of 18, did a teacher training course at a college of higher education, had worked as a

school teacher for 15 years, before working in social service departments for 8 years. Trefor, and his wife, had a 2 year old daughter, and they both earned similar salaries. They migrated to New Zealand before the second round of interviews was undertaken: Trefor's partner was a 'Maori' and a 'New Zealander'. They lived in their own home, until they moved abroad.

Ron.

Ron, 36, described himself as 'British'. He lived with his three children: two daughters (8 and 10 years of age), and one son, aged 13. After Ron agreed to be interviewed he separated, and was subsequently divorced, from his wife. Ron was thereafter the main carer for his 3 children. Ron left school at the age of 16, and worked full time, on permanent night shifts, on the production line at a local car factory. He owned his own home.

John.

John, 37, described himself as 'British and Irish', lived with his wife (they had been married for 8 years), and also with their two daughters (aged 4 and 7). John left school at the age of 15, and worked on the production line at a local car plant. John's wife, who John described as 'British', worked part-time in an administration role within a public service. John's income was the main source of family income. They owned their own home.

Martin.

Martin, 35, left school at the age of 16, and at the time of the interviews was a telesales supervisor. His income was the main source of family income, but his wife also worked part-time as a library assistant. They had been married for 14 years. Martin had one son, aged 10, and the family lived in their own home. Martin

described the ethnicity of his wife, and himself as 'British', but he was particularly interested in his family's genealogical history.

Don

Don, 42, left school at the age of 16. He worked full time as a firefighter, but also worked as a self-employed painter and decorator. He described himself as 'British', and lived with his African-Caribbean wife, who worked part-time as a care assistant. The main source of family income was from Don's two jobs. They had two adult children, and two 10 year old twin boys. They owned their own home, and had been living together for 21 years.

4.3 THE PLEASURE OF MEN'S INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN.

The first important recurring pattern within men's narratives, shared by men of both ethnic backgrounds, was the perceived importance of men's involvement with children to their understandings about fathering. Involvement with children was often conceptualised, by men, using terms like 'input', 'spending time', 'being there' or 'quality time' to encapsulate their experiences with children. For example, Ron said:

"But a nice time for me is like tonight, when they all come home. We sit on the settee for an hour all three of us. We will then all watch the television. We will normally all end up shouting and arguing, playing about, or something. But, those times are important, that's what being a father is. Being there for them, and they all say 'Can we have a cuddle dad?',... if they are a bit upset over something".

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

For Martin and Steve, their involvement had an intense all encompassing quality, but for all men involvement is understood as an ongoing, indeed lifelong, relationship with children. Furthermore, for many men, one of the most important aspects, and some of the most enjoyable experiences associated with their involvement with children, was within the reciprocal emotional affection that was perceived to exist between men and their children. Indeed many within this study were consistently enthusiastic to talk about the love they felt for their children. Part of this experience of reciprocal love and affection, for many men, was being able to respond to the unpredictable needs of children. In this respect listening to children was recurrently emphasised, by many men, as important in understanding and their caring for their children, as Liam indicated:

You listen to your children and if you care about them, if you want the best for them, it's not about money either because you can't buy your kids out of situations.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Furthermore most men were also enthusiastic about children's ability to express their thoughts and feelings to fathers. Lupton and Barclay's (1997) research, with fathers of infants and toddlers, suggested that the unique and important nature of each child may influence fathers' perceptions in the respect that other obligations are of secondary importance. In Chapter Six, men's emotional support for women and children will be compared, but at this point it should be emphasised that emotional reciprocity with children is perceived as an important aspect of fathering for all men interviewed.

One of the strengths of Lupton and Barclay's (1997) work is that it emphasises the pleasures within men's experiences. While men, within this study, do experience fathering as displeasurable, difficult or stressful, as will become clearer shortly, within my subjective experience of the interview process, and also within analysis of the content of narratives, men's pleasure in relationships with children is striking. John's extract below illustrates this latter point:

It is just the love, it is fantastic being in a family and being part of a family. The kids give you so much love. It is just when they come up to you and throw their arms around you, and the rest of it. It is just a nice feeling.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

'Delight', 'wonderful', 'joy' are terms that Steve, for example, used to explain his experiences with children. Pleasure could be experienced through children's companionship, shared laughter, shared play, stimulation that children provided, but above all reciprocal affection. In addition Brandon, specifically, indicated he enjoyed the pride he experienced as a 'Black' father, an issue which will be developed in the next section of this chapter. Other men talked about enjoying the pride they experienced when children were successful at school, in sports, or involved in public performances. Furthermore, men also talked about enjoying children's individual personalities, their individual 'character's, their idiosyncratic ways of responding to fathers, the ways children sought individual autonomy, or children's distinctive sense of humour.

In section 4.7 of this chapter the household division of labour will be discussed, but men's involvement in the day to day care of children is important here. The organisational feats, 'logistics' as Oliver termed it, of organising care for children

was negotiated by both parents in each household around paid work, work shifts, children's schooling, nurseries, private childcare facilities and extended family help. Sylvester, Don and Terrence were involved in the care of their children, after paid work and before children went to bed, and when they had days off work, they indicated. Most men perceived that full time paid work inhibited their involvement with children, an issue that will be addressed in section 4.5 of this chapter. However, Paul, Don, Trefor and Liam indicated that they shared the care of children with their women partners. For example, Trefor used the language of 'equity' to explain his practices. In contrast Liam gave up paid work in order to share the care of his youngest daughter with his partner, and Ron became the main carer for his children when he separated from his wife, just before the interviews began.

All men also enjoyed play, hobbies, recreation or sports with children which were perceived, by some men, as helping with children's more informal learning. However, men's involvement in formal learning, including school home work or religious studies, was less clear cut. Terrence and Sylvester were not involved in these latter activities at all, some men were involved in such practices, and some men indicated that their women partners played a leading role in helping with children's learning. For example, for Paul, a Jehovah's witness, learning involved him teaching his son about the Bible, as well as helping with his school homework. In complete contrast, Liam indicated that learning around language and play was vital for his youngest daughter, but these activities were shared with his partner:

It's been both of us, I've said she needs the input and once my wife got a grip that it wasn't going to come from anywhere but us, she took on that burden to ensure that she does get the relevant input from us as a family. Like Makaton [a form of signing], if she's here she imposes that regime on the family, so we don't

forget, we use it constantly. And try to make sure the extended family and friends use it with her. They recognise her value when she does do it, it's all about repetition.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Some of the African-Caribbean men (Brandon, Liam, Terrence, and Paul), but none of the White men, anticipated potential difficulties that their children may face, in the future, associated with their being of ethnic minority backgrounds. The potential possible prejudice and discrimination that their children may experience in the future, was anticipated and addressed through helping with children's learning. For example, Terrence told me:

You'll know more about this than me. We all knew. It's just that after that Stephen Lawrence was killed, they had to see it, didn't they? I know she has got to work fucking hard at school, to get a job with good money.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Within the narratives of these four African-Caribbean men there was an explicit sense that there are potential constraints for their children to overcome within the labour market. These accounts are linked to men's narratives regarding their ethnic identities which will be addressed within the next section of this chapter, but also to experiences of racism which will be analysed in Chapter Five.

When children were ill, men's involvement in their care was variable. Ferrie and Smith (1996) have suggested that the care of sick children often falls to mothers rather than fathers. Within this study Liam, Ron and Steve seemed confident about caring for ill children, and Trefor and Steve, specifically, indicated that they

considered it to be 'fair' to women to be involved in these practices. Most men did care for their children when they were ill, although Peter, Sylvester and Terrence indicated they did not. However many men questioned their own competence, when compared with women, that is their competence as carers for ill children, as Terrence indicated:

I got up at 3 in the morning once when she was ill, but it tends to be the missus more than me. She's much better at it than me. She knows what to do, I don't.

(Terrence, 'Black British', production line worker).

Regarding the practical day to day care of children, such as dressing, bathing, or washing children, their seemed, within men's accounts, no proscribed activities that men would not undertake. Indeed, some men often talked in a way that assumed I would understand their practices to be an inevitable, perhaps even natural, aspect of fathering. For example, Oliver described his experiences of braiding his two daughters' hair as follows:

I spend a lot of time doing the girls' hair, somehow. And I don't know why I seem to have taken over that, and people are shocked, and surprised. With black children it takes hours to braid their hair, it literally does take hours. They assume that their mum has done it, and they say you are good doing that, not many dads would do that, and I get a lot of feedback because of that... I suppose that is just one of the things you have to do as a dad.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and Irish', maintenance electrician).

What of men's experiences of thinking about, and planning the care of children? In earlier research, (Williams, 1997), some health visitors argued that women, not

men, may be perceived as the 'grown-ups' within families, in the sense that women had expertise in organising the care of children. Indeed Phillips (1993) has questioned whether men are capable of taking responsibility for thinking and planning care for children. Findings here indicated that men often left practices for planning children's days or activities, such as preparing for the next school day, to their women partners. For example, Peter said:

...they do see my wife as more responsible than I am. That sounds strange. Mummy's always the one they can go to, to sort out a problem whereas daddy they can ask me to do it, but they'll tell mummy at the same time to remind me. So if I have to do something for the next day they would tell mummy as well: 'remind daddy to do this or he'll forget'.

(Peter, 'British', office equipment planner and fitter).

Many men indicated that full time paid work, or shift work, inhibited them from being involved in such activities, which had implications that included men's involvement in planning, for children, was occasional rather than routinised. Nevertheless Trefor, Liam and Oliver were routinely involved in planning children's activities, and Steve indicated that he had the main responsibility for these tasks.

While involvement with children by men was identified as pleasurable, men also indicated some difficulties or stresses associated with their experiences of fathering, issues which will be addressed in more depth in Chapter Five. However, one issue that created considerable stress for many men within the study, was associated with the ways in which men dealt with children's autonomy and behaviour. Many men recognised, and also indicated that they supported, children's developing autonomy,

as they matured. Indeed, Paul, Trefor, Steve and John, saw their companionships with children as friendships, or like friendships, and certainly did not see children as the property of adults. Nevertheless all men indicated that as fathers they would deal with children's behaviour in order to prevent transgression of family or school 'rules', which was deemed necessary to ensure children were 'good', 'sensible' or 'well behaved'.

Dealing with behaviour and autonomy was also linked to ethnicity in certain respects. Brandon, Sylvester, Liam and Paul emphasised the particular importance of African-Caribbean children behaving in appropriate ways, in a similar way that some African-Caribbean men earlier indicated that education was important for dealing with anticipated constraints for children of ethnic minority backgrounds. Indeed for Brandon, 'strictness' and for Sylvester, 'punishment', were practices that were continued from one generation to another within African-Caribbean families. However, at the same time, there was reflexivity, in some of the narratives of African-Caribbean men about physical punishment of children, which was identified as taking place within previous generations of African-Caribbean families, particularly. As Oliver put it, 'sticks would come out and children would be beaten'. Oliver, Liam and Paul were opposed to such practices. Indeed Liam experienced differences with his partner regarding issue of discipline. Her 'culture', as he put it, placed too much emphasis on discipline.

While the White men interviewed did not link issues of autonomy and behaviour to ethnicity, Steve, Trefor and Liam were keen to reject what they understood as men's leading responsibilities for discipline and punishment. Martin and John went even further to indicate that their women partners were more competent than them in

dealing with children's behaviour. Martin was not 'firm' enough he told me, and John said he was too 'soft'.

It is important to note that potential threats to children's safety, health or well being, and men's experiences of fatigue or exhaustion, associated with involvement with children, were also indicated as stressful experiences. Indeed, men's perceived limited sense of personal autonomy, (which will be further discussed in Chapter Five), was associated within men's narratives with the combined obligations of paid work, fathering and other domestic responsibilities.

These findings are consistent with Warin et al's (1999) study which indicated that men, (and women), emphasised the value placed on men's involvement with children within families. One of the most surprising findings, in the first set of interviews, was the ways that men advocated reciprocal emotionality with children. However, they also did not, generally, talk about more difficult feelings, such as sadness or anxiety, even when they talked about the displeasures or stresses of fathering. Nevertheless, the 'championing', as Lupton and Barclay (1997) have termed it, of expression of feelings of love and affection with children, by men in this study, is significant in a context where Seidler (1994, 1997), for example, has reported concerns about men's abilities to express emotionality. Involvement with children did provide men with a context that allowed talk about emotionality within interviews that seemed to be perceived as legitimate or appropriate.

4.4 ETHNICITY, FATHERING AND FAMILIES.

Consistent with the critical and interpretative framework created for this study, men were asked to identify their ethnic backgrounds in their own terms. Men's

responses to interview questions about ethnicity included patterns, but also heterogeneity. Only one White man, Ron, articulated normative notions of ethnicity, explicitly:

Oh, I am British through and through but I am not a bigot or biased or anti-racist in any way. I mean I am like anybody else.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker)

Interestingly, it was only Ron who indicated he had racially abused others, 'you black so and so', which Ron saw as part of the reciprocal practices by different ethnic groups of car drivers. Amongst other White men responses were different. John indicated he had saw himself as Irish in his adolescence, like his two parents, but now saw himself as 'British and Irish'. Peter indicated he was 'British and White', but also made strong statements against racism. Don saw himself as 'British' with Italian ancestry, but lived with his African-Caribbean wife, and four children of mixed heritage backgrounds. Martin, interestingly, had a very local perspective: he described his ethnic background as 'British' but also outlined his family history. His interest in genealogy had enabled him to study his family history, who had lived in and around a specific locality in Birmingham, for over 150 years. Steve described himself as 'Welsh, European, and a humanist'. Trefor also indicated he was 'Welsh', was a Welsh speaker, but his second wife was a Maori. Trefor and his family migrated after the first interview. He indicated his daughter would be accepted as a 'Maori', and was hence eligible for New Zealand citizenship.

Diversity within narratives of the men of African-Caribbean ethnic backgrounds was also noteworthy within analysis. Sylvester, the only man to have migrated to

the UK, indicated that he was 'Jamaican first, and English'. Terrence indicated that he was 'British and Black'. Oliver indicated that he was 'West Indian and English', and Liam that he was 'Black Irish' (both his White parents had migrated to the UK from Ireland before he was born). Brandon indicated that he was 'British, of Barbadian ancestry'. Indeed Brandon distinctively made a series of statements about the value, and importance, of his heritage to his family and himself, providing a view of history that involved slavery, colonialism, conflict, migration and change. Brandon's perspective was a sharp contrast to the harmonious picture of family continuity over centuries offered by Martin. In fact it was Brandon, who particularly, and consistently, returned to issues of ethnicity and racism to explain his experience, within interviews, as will become clearer later in this section of the chapter.

I'm a black British man, or black English man, whatever - they are the same.

Both of my parents are from Barbados

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Normative notions of ethnicity are challenged by both groups of men in many ways. For example, what the two groups of men shared is family histories that included migration, or movement within the UK, where families moved to Birmingham from Barbados, Jamaica, St. Kitts, Italy, the North of Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Wales. Sylvester had migrated from Jamaica during his adolescence, and Trefor had lived in many different parts of the UK. Indeed the heterogeneity of responses indicated the dynamic nature of experiences, and is particularly confirmed by anticipation of future changes, for example, Steve identified his ethnicity with Europe, and Trefor's family's planned to migrate to New Zealand. Men's narratives as a whole are therefore consistent with Hall's (1992) arguments against essential

ethnicities. However, what was most striking about men's narratives regarding ethnicity, was the lack of ongoing reflexivity by White men about their ethnicity, when compared with the narratives of most of the African-Caribbean men (with the specific exception of Sylvester).

Experiences of prejudice and discrimination will be addressed in the next chapter, where the relationship between racism, ethnicity and health is analysed, but it is worth clarifying some important differences between the two groups of men, now. Of the White men, John indicated he had encountered some prejudice in the past, when 'I wore an Irish football shirt' he said, but rarely at the time of the interviews. Don, Ron, Steve, and Martin had not experienced prejudice associated with ethnicity themselves, although Don feared it may be an issue for his children (of mixed heritage) in the future. Peter and Steve had not experienced prejudice, but had witnessed discrimination or harassment of ethnic minority people, to which they indicated they were opposed. Trefor indicated that he had personally encountered racist verbal abuse as a Welsh man while living in the south east of the UK, but not in Birmingham. None of the White men indicated that they had experienced discrimination linked to their ethnicity. On the other hand most of the African-Caribbean men, with the single exception of Sylvester, had experienced or were aware of racial prejudice and discrimination experienced by African-Caribbean people. However, some of these stories were often tentative, couched in terms of the hidden or uncertain nature of racism, although, as will become clear in Chapter Seven, none of the men were aware of prejudice or discrimination experienced by their children.

Analysis of data indicated that there were distinct patterns within men's accounts regarding family structures. Not all men talked about family structures explicitly,

but the unitary nature of the individual father's family was often confirmed throughout the interviews: for example questions relating to the experiences of fathers would often produce a response relating to 'my family'. However, within the narratives it was the African-Caribbean men, specifically, who were most likely to go beyond implicit assumptions about family life, and to develop their ideas about families in quite sophisticated ways. In Chapter Seven the dispersed nature of African-Caribbean men's friends and family will be considered in more detail. However, it is important to emphasise, at this point, that there was more reflexivity within the material produced by African-Caribbean men regarding the position of men within family structures, when compared with the White men interviewed, particularly in relation to the ways many African-Caribbean men expressed distance between themselves, and men who did not live with their children. For example, Paul told me:

My mum and dad believed you should stay together come what May... it is not something to be proud of to have loads of kids with different people.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

These distinctive narratives, from African-Caribbean men, echoed my experience of a group interview with African-Caribbean fathers in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999). These latter fathers were recurrently keen to emphasise their responsibility for their children, the importance to them of living with children, but also that they anticipated the negative assumptions of professionals' regarding African-Caribbean fathers. Interestingly it is this latter 'deficit' approach to understanding 'Black' fathers that McAdoo (1993) and others suggests also influences research in this area.

At times, when I read such narratives, I wondered if some of the African-Caribbean men were entering a debate about the practices of men in families, such as the rise in lone parent families (see Clare, 2000, for example), or debates about 'fatherlessness' in 'Black' families (see Blankenhorn, 1995). On the other hand, and for differing reasons, two of the White men, Steve and Trefor, consistently advocated the political importance of men's involvement with children, but not specifically about living with children. Indeed Steve, Martin, John and Trefor also talked about changes in men's practices, from past or 'traditional' to 'new' or 'modern' practices of involvement.

For Don, Ron, Brandon, and Terrence, there were also discourses evident that included emphasis upon men's power within the family:

There is a picture by an American artist... but basically it is so powerful. ... if you can imagine you have got a little child like this, and then above the child you have the woman, and then you have the man, and he is holding the two of them. To me, that symbolises how I feel about my family and how I felt for my father as well. To me, it shows the strength because he is a bit muscular, and dark, and he has got some African in him, and it shows him with his head bowed over, looking over them and protects them from everything, basically.

(Brandon, 'British with Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Brandon, Terrence, Don and Ron consistently asserted men's leading role in their families throughout interviews, but only Brandon produced such a sophisticated story about his experience. Brandon was a police officer, which he was aware did influence his thinking about protection and safety regarding women and children. Nevertheless, this representation about fathering may well be consistent with

complicit masculinity (Connell, 1995), as the iconic muscular strong man protects his family. It is as if Brandon is responding to Murray's (1990) arguments for the reassertion of male authority within the family. However, this man is also ethnically distinct, 'black' 'with some African in him', protecting the family from the world outside, which includes, from Brandon's perspective, racism.

While Terrence and Brandon asserted the importance of fathers, in leading and protecting families, all the African-Caribbean men asserted their commitment to living within the family as being important to them, and some expressed concerns about other fathers practices that were not sufficiently 'responsible', 'committed' or 'too flippant'.

There was also some recognition by many men from both ethnic backgrounds of changes taking place between men and women within families. Paul, a Jehovah's witness, had clear ideological views about the 'roles' of men and women within families, yet his own experience did not reflect this ideology, as ideas about sharing, fairness and negotiation were developed:

With the Bible, it mentions about an industrious wife, a wife that knows how to look after a household, but that is the ideal situation where the man goes out and earns the income... but when both of you are working then that responsibility has to be shared, because times have changed, some people need two incomes. I think how it works in my house is that we understand each other, that we have our own employment and we just work things out around that. It seems only fair that if you have the time you do it.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

In a similar way, Peter indicated that there were 'blurred borders' and changing responsibilities between men and women within families. Indeed, for Ron, who became the main carer for his children when he separated from his wife, changes in family structures are widespread, there was no longer 'one way you should follow'. These issues will be further developed in Chapter Eight where men's experiences of uncertainty are analysed.

There is evidence of both complicit and dynamic masculinities (Connell, 1995) within narratives, particularly associated with the structure and function of families, and fathers' power and involvement in families. This evidence of contradiction is within the narratives as a whole, but also within individual narratives as well, as Paul's extract, above, illustrates very well.

4.5 FATHERING, SOCIAL CLASS AND WORK.

Men were asked to identify their social class. All identified themselves as 'working class' except Sylvester, who had no interest in this question he indicated, and Peter. Peter saw himself and his family as 'middle class', in spite of Peter expressing the strongest feelings, and most coherent critique of work intensification. Few of the fathers showed any enthusiasm for this subject, especially when compared with their enthusiasm for talking about involvement with children. The specific exceptions to this latter point were Liam and John, who had more critical views about social class. The rationale provided for their class position by men, was often in relation to their occupation or educational experience, for example:

I am working class, I work on a production line.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

The occupations followed by the African-Caribbean men were as follows: fitness instructor (Paul), police officer (Brandon), plasterer (Sylvester), maintenance electrician on a production line (Oliver), production line worker (Terrence), and Liam had worked as a labourer 'on the building'. For the White men, their occupations were as follows: carpenter (Steve), office equipment planner and fitter (Peter), social worker (Trefor), telesales supervisor (Martin), fire fighter (Don), and both Ron and John worked on the production line at local car plants. All the employed fathers worked full time working a minimum of 37 hours. Don, however, worked as fire fighter and as a self-employed painter and decorator, sometimes working 70 hours. Sylvester, who was also self-employed, may work up to 60 hours plastering in the summer. On the other hand Steve may have worked less or more than 40 hours each week as he planned his self-employed carpentry work around his childcare responsibilities. As will be discussed in the next chapter this was associated with work intensification as well as some autonomy, for Steve.

In the UK there is a social trend towards increasing women's activity within the labour market, and a rise of dual earner families (Hobson, 1995), which is reflected here in men's accounts: men's women partners often did paid work. Paul's and Trefor's partners were doing paid work full time, the rest of the men's partners' working part-time, with only Terrence' and Liam's partners not doing paid work at all, at the time of the interviews. However, the cases where the main sources of family income came from men's income, were only Ron, Brandon, Sylvester, Terrence, Peter, and Don. Oliver and Trefor's family income was approximately, they suggested, sourced evenly from both partner' paid work. Paul and Steve's incomes were less than their women partners. Ron's income was supplemented by

Family Credit, and Liam and his family's income was exclusively from welfare benefits.

As I said before financially, I'm sound. If you can save money at the end of the month your OK I don't touch the family allowance and I don't touch Lesley's [Ron's ex-wife] maintenance that sorts of Christmas presents, holidays and things like that. So you know, there is no problem there.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

Social class, for some of the men interviewed, was also associated with opportunities within education:

Class is defined by education and always has been

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

Most men left school at, or before, the age of 16. Trefor trained to be a teacher at a college of higher education, after leaving school at the age of 18. Peter, the only man seeing himself as 'middle class', undertook a degree at a polytechnic after completing his 'A' levels at school. However, men also had other resources and assets. For example, all had access to at least one telephone, and most had access to a car (with the exception of Liam's family). Their accommodation was largely owner occupied houses, the exceptions being Liam's family who lived in a privately rented house, and Terrence's family lived in a rented local authority flat. Terrence and Liam were both said that they intended to buy their own houses as soon as they could.

The individual rationales for class identity were again heterogeneous. For Don, for example, 'I am a working man with a working wife'. For John, his class position was associated with his production line factory work, and his limited educational opportunities. For Trefor his working class values were important in a job, social work, that others may see as middle class, he indicated. For Ron, Terrence, and Oliver, their work in manufacturing was important in how they understood their class position. Brandon saw himself as 'upper working class', although his 'dad' may have seen him as middle class, because he worked as a police officer. Brandon also provided explanations for his class position that were linked to the low expectations by some schoolteachers, regarding working class and 'Black' children. However, Sylvester indicated he never thought about social class (in a similar way to how he did not 'look for' racism). John expressed pride in being working class, and it is interesting to note that, John was the only informant indicating political commitment to trade unionism. On the other hand, Liam, the only unemployed man in the group, had a sophisticated and critical notion of social class: he associated being working class with living on a low income, of spending income to 'survive' rather than saving income, of being a paid labourer (in the past), of the limited assets and resources available to those on low income within the community where he live, and the 'crap' education available locally to children. Liam provided a quite distinct account of the influence of social class influences on human experience, not evident in any other men's accounts:

The working class experience is what you do you get paid for. It doesn't matter what it is. Building up the networks and changing the way we look at developing a foundation for the future. Whatever you want, you earn it, you spend it, you save it and investment, that doesn't happen round here.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Liam's narratives are exceptional within the data analysed here, but as will become clear in the next chapter, where work insecurity and intensification is analysed, men were specifically aware of their limited power as employees, within the labour market. Indeed men's accounts about the specific effects of work on family life are considered now.

The implications of paid work for men's health experiences will be addressed in the next chapter, but paid work was also important in influencing men's experiences of fathering within families. The volume of paid work, the number of hours doing paid work, insecurity associated with paid work, stresses experienced within paid work, or fatigue were linked by all men, in differing ways, to men's activities in families with women and children. Indeed shift work was a particularly important issue. While some men's partners worked evening and night shifts on a part-time basis (as care assistants, or health care assistants, for example), eight of the men also worked shifts which they indicated influenced their health, but also how they acted towards others. While men rarely talked about sadness, fear and anxiety, in relationship to work experiences, Brandon, Don, John, Terrence, Sylvester, and Martin did talk about how frustration, anger or irritation may be expressed, inadvertently, to women and children, for example:

...when you are tired it is very difficult being the sort of parent you want to be really, you want to be a rational and patient, caring person, but sometimes if you are in the wrong frame of mind you may think they are being naughty, but sometimes they are not being naughty. Sometimes that can be quite hard. If you are tired you are not really up to the job are you?

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

The men interviewed for this study also indicated that paid work may limit their involvement in children's activities, or activities that parents may be expected to be involved in, such as parent's evenings at school, or children's clubs, sports or hobbies. Furthermore, caring for children when they were ill was often undertaken by women partners, and not just because some men perceived that women were more competent carers. The extent of working hours, the shifts they worked, but also the limited amount of leave available to them from work were identified as constraints by most men interviewed. Indeed, as will become clearer in Chapters Six and Seven, men's paid work is associated, within men's accounts, with limited involvement in certain social connections such as local organisations, or social spaces used by parents. Above all, the main constraint identified as associated with paid work, by many men within this study, was the ways in which work hours, work shifts and work obligations limited their time with children.

Lee and Owens (2002) have argued that an uncritical focus upon men's 'breadwinner' activities may disguise the tensions fathers may experience between paid work and domestic life. In fact findings here are consistent with Milkie and Peltola's (1999) work which indicated that men may experience conflicts between paid work and domestic responsibilities, or as Peter put it succinctly: 'work can be jealous of family'. In this sense fathering is influenced by structural influences, where men's position as employees (or as sub contractor, in Sylvester's case) restricted their fathering activities. The acute nature of the difficulties of both working and caring for children was experienced by two men in particular: Ron, who was the main carer for his three children, and Liam who had stopped doing paid work to help care for his younger daughter. For example, Ron and Liam said:

... it's a vicious circle. I mean there are times when I think, I need to pack up work altogether to care for the children on my own so... That would be great... I am pinned in to what I am doing now... The only way my work is good for my family life is the money.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

...after Erin was born I went back on the buildings but it was impossible because she got ill again. You could bring home money but it was no substitute for doing the real work, with Erin, which she needs.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Nevertheless, there are many benefits for men associated with paid work which will be considered in Chapters Five and Seven. However it is worth emphasising that Steve and Paul were also clear, that their paid work had benefits for their involvement as fathers with children. Steve planned his self employed carpentry work around the care of his children, and Paul said he was able to plan his care of children alongside his work obligations:

I think it does help me a lot because the work I do in the holidays, play schemes, I can have my children with me. I get more time to spend with them, and give my wife a break. I can't really see if I had another job I'd have the flexibility I have at the moment. It's convenience whilst I'm still working at the college. It's not too far from the school and, as I said I have my son at the nursery at work with me... I can pick them up. And if they're sick I don't get any hassle. Working part time and getting the same sort of wages is the only way it could have been any better at the moment.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

There are material influences upon men's involvement with children. The relationship between paid work and families was influenced by the availability of leave to be with or care for others, including children. Most men indicated that paternity or care leave available to them from their employers was limited as Hearn (2002), for example, has argued. For example, regarding leave after the birth of a baby, that is paternity leave, Brandon had 3 days, and John, Oliver, Terrence and Ron (production line workers) had 5 days paternity leave after the birth of their last child, they indicated. Those working for smaller private companies like Martin and Peter took annual leave, as there was no entitlement to paternity or care leave when their children were born. Sylvester and Steve, who were self employed, could take as much time as they wished, as they would not be paid. Sylvester indicated that his wife did most of the care for the children, and only took time off in 'exceptional' circumstances he suggested, while in contrast Steve attempted to shape his work activities around the care of his children.

The care leave available for most employees was very limited, with most men having to take annual leave on some occasions to care for children. For some men even taking annual leave was not possible at short notice (Oliver, Terrence, John and Ron). Oliver, for example, described how the one 'emergency' day off in a 12 month period can be used in his company:

I can have an emergency day off, should something arise. I would ring in, in the morning, and say one of my children is sick can I have the day off, and they will give me the day off, but that is just for one day.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

As I prepare to submit this thesis I am smiling: the availability of one day to deal with the almost unlimited number of illnesses a young infant or toddler, particularly, is likely to have in the first few years of life seems comical and ridiculous. I know this from personal experience as a father, but also from my work as a health visitor responding to parents and carers questions about young children's illnesses. However, as one might anticipate these difficulties were most acutely experienced by Ron, who had no woman partner, at the time of the first interview, to care for sick children. Ron said he had to forgo promotion at work, had to attempt to negotiate night shifts with his managers, and by the time of the second interview had negotiated with his mother that she would sleep over while he worked, to enable his complex arrangements to care for his children to be maintained:

I have been lucky enough since I have been on my own to stop on nights. I was on nights before we split up, and they said 'we are only going to do days'. But because I explained my situation, they allowed me to stay on nights. It has got a little bit trickier as time has gone on, but I have managed to struggle through, but that has been my main stress point.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

John, Trefor, Peter, and Brandon also indicated that employers may assume care is undertaken by women, and all employed men indicated that it was employers, not employees, that made important decisions about working conditions and leave. For example, Terrence said:

We've got no control over this stuff, Bob. We are just work on that fucking track. People like you should tell 'em.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Men's limited sense of power, as employees, will be addressed in the next chapter where men's health experiences are analysed, but also in Chapter Seven, where men's experiences of social connectedness in work settings is addressed.

As Ryan (2000) has indicated, nine out of ten fathers in the UK are in employment. Indeed this is reflected, and reinforced, by the policy emphasis upon men's economic activities for families, rather than their care of children (Hearn, 2002). Nevertheless an important finding was the surprisingly limited essentialist material within narratives, essentialist in the sense that being a father may be primarily understood as about 'breadwinner' or 'provider' activities. Most men, except Terrence, talked about fathering in ways that indicated that paid work was important as important materially, as a source of income for families, but also at the same time located those obligations and activities in a broader context of fathering children within families. The extract below, from John, illustrates this latter point:

It means caring for the family, providing a roof over their heads for the family, and trying to guide the children as best you can. Maybe give them things in life you never had, which is hopefully a more stable background. And the love, that is what is fantastic about a family

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker)..

Providing income was not seen as being an exclusive, or the most important, aspect of being a father for men within this study, perhaps with the specific exception of Terrence':

I go out to work. It's important. There are a lot of blokes round here who are scared of work, well lawful work anyway [laughs]. Or they prefer to sign on. I am proud that I bring in the cash. That's me.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Findings here are consistent with Burghes et al (1997) who have argued that men may not experience being a father in a way that involves crude distinctions between 'cash' and 'care'. Being a 'provider' was important, but economic obligations are, for most men in this study, only one aspect of fathering. Indeed, for most men paid work is talked about as being of secondary importance when compared with children, or families. As Peter indicated when he talked about work: 'It's not in the same league as family'.

Nevertheless, most men interviewed were doing full time paid work when recruited for this study, even though many of their women partners worked, and some women provided more income for the family than the men themselves. Indeed, for some men there is limited reflexivity about their decisions to work full time. For Brandon, Don, Terrence, Sylvester, and Peter their narratives about their full time work indicated that decisions were not contested, were made many years before, and they were often surprised I asked about this issue. Furthermore, many men did talk about people or things that influenced their thinking about their involvement in paid work. Peter, Terrence, Sylvester and Brandon indicated that their own thinking about work included their own thoughts that they 'ought' or 'should' do paid work, and sometimes these personal rules were linked to the experience of being a man. Interestingly, many men indicated their employers may perceive that men, specifically, should prioritise paid work. Furthermore, some men suggested that insecurity about paid work, or possible future unemployment influenced their

thinking in this respect. Indeed, Sylvester, John, Steve, Trefor and Paul indicated that expectations of family, friends or within the media influenced how they thought about work as well.

These external influences upon men's discourses were however resisted in many ways. Ron had become the main carer for his children, and sometimes thought he would prefer not to work at all. Liam, who suggested that he had always been in work until recently, had already taken the step to stop doing paid work, in spite of potential constraints. Martin indicated that he changed his job to work 40, rather than 50, hours per week, and receive less money, in order for him to be able to spend more time with his son. Oliver indicated he was not seen as 'ambitious' by some friends, because he did not choose to have his own electrical company. In fact, for Oliver, his paid work as maintenance electrician on a production line provided opportunities for more involvement in family life:

I think it is better for my family life than what I used to do. I would go on a Monday and come back on a Friday night, spend the weekend at home and go off again....I gave up a good trade to work on the track in the hope I could swap to maintenance, which I did after two years... but generally speaking the hours I have worked although difficult for me, have been better for the family.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

There is evidence, again, of a complex mixture of responses within men's individual narratives, but also within men's narratives as a whole, where men's experiences are associated with more conservative and more dynamic discourses, with complicit and dynamic masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2000), but also where individual men negotiate and resist personal, social and structural influences on their lives.

4.6 THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOUR.

Previous discussion focussed upon the relationship between fathering and paid work, however what of men's contributions to unpaid work in the home? In Chapter Six men's help and support for women partners is examined, in depth. However, this section of this chapter focuses specifically on how men experienced the division of labour, and unpaid work within the home, although my methodological notes confirmed that many men seemed surprised I asked about this issues, and often seemed disinterested in these issues.

All men, interviewed, indicated that they were involved in conflicts or differences with their women partners regarding financial matters, children's routines and behaviour, or some indicated that they experienced some differences with women regarding the distribution of domestic tasks. However, men's narratives generally indicated that the differentiated allocation or distribution of domestic work was pre-determined, 'settled' in the past, or 'evolved' over time. Sharing obligations with women, was more often emphasised by men in relation to family income and care of children. Many men indicated that paid work limited their involvement in domestic tasks, but Oliver, Steve, John, Paul and Trefor all used the language of 'fairness' to explain their shared commitment with women to care for children, specifically.

In contrast to some men's emphasis on 'fairness' regarding child care, Oakley and Rigby's (1998) findings indicated that women may perceive that the help they receive from men regarding domestic labour was low. In fact, men's accounts about the allocation of domestic labour indicated clear differences between the work men and women do in the home, particularly regarding cooking, cleaning, washing,

and ironing. Terrence, distinctively, indicated that he did no 'housework', while, in contrast, Ron indicated that he did all the 'housework'. Trefor was the only man to talk about 'equity' regarding domestic labour, but the language of 'fairness' was not evident in other men's stories about these tasks. Few of the men did any cleaning around the house. Only Oliver did any ironing, and men seemed to dislike or even detest ironing above all tasks. Some men did shopping for food, although most did not. Cooking for families was largely done by women, but all men indicated that they prepared or cooked food for children. There was no real pattern regarding men's gardening activities, but most men, except Trefor, indicated that they did most of the 'DIY', ('do-it-yourself' maintenance activities), within the home.

Men's responses indicated that their main contribution to the domestic division of labour was the care of children, as Oakley and Rigby (1998) have also argued. Men did do some domestic tasks but most of the work was undertaken by women partners, as Sylvester's extract illustrates:

I muck in. If I am not too tired. If she is working of an evening I usually pick Jack up from school and cook. The only way I get to do the cleaning is if I am not working at the weekend. She will do the hoovering.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

4.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

Involvement with children, and the pleasure associated with such experiences, are central to how men understand the meaning of fathering. These social connections with children did involve social connectedness characterised by reciprocity, particularly regarding reciprocal love and affection shared with children, but also

participation by men within children's practical care, play and learning. These forms of social connectedness were valued and usually enjoyed by men within this study. Evidence of men's economic contributions to families through paid work, their involvement in childcare, and their involvement in some domestic labour is also demonstrated in men's accounts.

There is also evidence within men's narratives of gendered discourses. Complicit masculine (Connell, 1995) discourses and practices are evident in narratives regarding the leading role of men in families, the unreflexive nature of men's involvement in full-time paid work, and the unequal distribution of unpaid work in home. However, this is not the complete picture, as conservative notions of masculinity are resisted in range of ways in individual narratives, but also within narratives as a whole. Dynamic masculinity (Connell, 2000), in the sense that some men may be less influenced by gendered social constraints, is also evident within reflexive accounts and practices regarding the rejection of the leading role of men in families, about encouraging children's autonomy, about 'modern' rather than 'traditional' forms of involvement by men, about negotiating constraints provided by paid work in favour of involvement with children, and regarding perceived changing family structures and functions. The evidence then is contradictory within the data as a whole and within individual accounts.

Furthermore, there is also a diversity of experiences evident in the accounts of individual men. This diversity is particularly evident where men talked about their ethnic identities. However, there are also patterns regarding ethnicity here. While there is reflexivity, within some White men's accounts, where there is advocacy of involvement with children, for African-Caribbean men there is particular emphasis on the importance of fathers living, as opposed to not living, with their children.

There is also material, specific to African-Caribbean men, indicating a particular emphasis on dealing with children's behaviour and punishment, with individual men challenging traditional practices of punishment. Indeed the commitment to living with children, to helping with children's learning, and attempting to ensure African-Caribbean children behave appropriately, was talked about in relation to a social context where some African-Caribbean men anticipated racial prejudice and discrimination. In this sense these findings are consistent with Hall's (1997) argument that ethnic identities may be partly developed in response to social constraints. This latter issue will be further developed in subsequent chapters, particularly in Chapters Six and Seven, where ethnicity and social connectedness is further examined.

While experiences of racism are important constraints for the African-Caribbean men, specifically, both groups of men's experiences of fathering are influenced by other structural and material constraints. These employed and self employed working class men perceive that their experiences of fathering are limited by the working hours, shift patterns, volume of work, limited available leave to care for children, or insecurities associated with working for money. Indeed there is evidence within men's narratives of a real sense of conflict between paid work and fathering, as Milkie and Peltola (1999) have argued. As Morgan (2002) has also argued, men who are involved in paid work and fathering practices may experience stress within these conflicts, but also may be more reflexive about change. Indeed many men within this study do resist constraints in a variety of ways, for example, in the ways that men locate their economic contributions to families as just one aspect of their care for children.

The concerns of Seidler (1994, 1997), regarding some men's limited emotional expressiveness is qualified by findings here, specifically where there is evidence of the 'championing' of open expression of feelings of love and affection for children. However, talk about the expression of more difficult feelings, such as fear and anxiety, was highly limited, even when fathering was experienced as difficult, displeasurable, or caused stress. This latter issue will be developed, initially where men's health practices are examined in the next chapter, but also in subsequent chapters where men's experiences of social connectedness are examined in more detail.

This chapter has addressed the meaning of fathering for African-Caribbean and White working class men, and has begun to consider men's experiences of social connectedness within families. How social connections, material and structural factors influence men's health, and the extent to which men's health is understood as involving social connectedness to others, is examined in the next findings chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: MEN'S HEALTH AS FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, where the meaning of fathering was analysed, men's experiences of social connectedness began to be addressed by identifying men's contributions to families through involvement with children, contributions to family income provided by paid work, and men's contributions to domestic labour. However, the limited empirical research that investigates the health experiences of fathers (Williams, 1999), is compounded by the highly limited amount of previous work regarding the health of African-Caribbean and White working class fathers in the UK, in particular. Of course, men's health experiences may be perceived as less visible, than women's, to professionals, as Watson (2000) has argued. Indeed my own professional experiences within health visiting and health promotion suggested, and my own research (Williams, 1997) indicated, that the health of fathers may be peripheral to health service and professional priorities. Hence while exploring and analysing men's experiences of social connections, with specific reference to fathering, was intended within this investigation, these same men were also people with health needs and experiences. This chapter therefore analyses men's experiences of health, to compare African-Caribbean and White working class men's discourses and practices, to establish how issues of materiality, agency and structure influence men's experiences of health, but above all to establish if, and how, men understand health as involving social connectedness to others.

This chapter is structured around a series of interdependent themes. Initially men's discourses about health are analysed within the first theme, 'Men's health as functional capacity' (5.2) examines men's meanings about health. In the second

theme, 'Men's health as relationships with other people?' (5.3), men's discourses about health are interrogated to establish if men within this study conceptualise health as involving social relationships with other people. 'Influences on men's health', the third theme (5.4), addresses the influence of social class, ethnicity, racism, paid work, and fathering on men's health experiences. The fourth and final theme, 'Men's health practices' (5.5), analyses men's health practices regarding perceived vulnerability, stress, emotionality, consumption and physical activity.

5.2 MEN'S HEALTH AS A FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY.

In this section of the chapter men's discourses about the meaning of health are analysed. In the preliminary study, (Williams, 1999), I argued that the diverse ethnic groups of fathers within that study shared 'functional' views about their health. Analysis of narratives indicated that, for both groups of men interviewed within this study, health is also often talked about as a functional capacity. While, on the one hand, the idea that there was a determined 'role' of economic 'provider' for men within families only had a limited purchase for men regarding the meaning of fathering (as was identified in the previous chapter). On the other hand, in response to questions about health, men's economic obligations were more significant within men's discourses. Men, within this study, needed to be healthy in order to be able to do paid work, but also to meet their obligations as fathers within families, their narratives indicated. For example, Brandon said:

For me personally good health is not catching colds, and being able to get up and get out, get to work, and run around with the kids.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Herzlich (1973) has argued that lay people may express health as a 'reserve'. Watson (2000), after Herzlich, also suggests in a similar fashion, that men may conceptualise health as a 'resource' to enable men to continue with functioning in everyday life, which is consistent with findings here. While functional, pragmatic notions of health are the dominant ways in which men conceptualise their health, it is also important to recognise that this functional capacity has other dimensions. Physical activity intended to improve the body in some way, most often intended for 'fitness' by men, is also an important aspect of some men's discourses. The practices men are involved in to pursue 'fitness' will be discussed in section 5.5 of this chapter. However, it is important to emphasise, at this point, that where men talked about health, they would often use the terms 'fit' or 'fitness' to describe good health. Nevertheless, 'fitness' was also functional, narratives indicated, in a much broader sense of *'being fit enough to live the life I want to live'*:

I take some exercise, a bit of running or jogging, we go walking as a couple or as a family. So if I wasn't able to do a bit of hill walking or to run five miles, then I'd say I wasn't fit and probably wouldn't be healthy either. I'd be packing on the pounds again. It's really being fit enough to live the life that I want to live, really.

(Trefor, 'Welsh', social worker).

'Fitness' and functional capacity were interdependent for some men when conceptualising health, even where they were not involved in the physical activity they said they 'should' or 'ought' to, (as will become clearer in section 5.5 of this chapter). Previous work by Blaxter (1990), again, indicated that men, compared with women, may have 'positive' notions of health regarding exercise or fitness. Indeed Blaxter (1990) found that 'fit' was the most common term used by men,

under 40 years of age, to describe their health. Watson (2000) also found that fitness was a possible focus for men's discourses about health.

However the influence of functional and 'fitness' discourses was made more complex by recurrent discourses within accounts regarding the absence of sickness, illness or disease. Blaxter (1990) has also argued, that women, when compared with men, tend to see health in a more 'negative' sense, of not being ill which may be associated with women's caring responsibilities for others. However, these more 'negative' discourses of health are also evident within these findings, and are associated with the perceived requirement by men that their health is necessary to be able to cope with everyday tasks within the family or at work. For example, Oliver said:

It is important because if you have no aches and pains you can concentrate on life itself. You don't have to worry about when you are going to have the next tablet, or when you can take the children swimming or go out jogging.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

Indeed, even for Martin, who was born with a disability, and had lived with chronic pain for many years, he was 'very healthy', he argued, apart from the effects of infrequent 'bugs' (viruses). Findings are again consistent with Herzlich's (1973) work, in the sense that lay people may see health as a state of being involving absence of illness. Nevertheless, while 'fitness', and the absence of disease are significant ways in which many men conceptualise health, the dominant recurring discourses within narratives, as a whole, relate to the functional and pragmatic way in which health, for these men, is linked to their capacity to undertake activities as worker and father.

5.3 MEN'S HEALTH AS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE?

An issue that is extremely significant for this investigation regarding men's meanings about health, is the very limited ways in which men talked about health as involving social relationships with other adults. Blaxter (1990) has suggested that women are more likely than men to conceptualise health as involving relationships with other people. The analysis of men's accounts indicated a scarcity of material where discourses link health to relationships with other adults, even the limited material referring to those people who were so often identified by men, as the most trustworthy of people in men's lives, that is women partners. Nevertheless, there are some examples of how, for some men, relationships are perceived as important in understanding health. For example for Paul, his disruptive experience of meningitis had changed, he suggested, his views about relationships with family and friends:

It sort of shook up the whole family, and some of the friends as well. It's just made me think you have to find time. I used to phone my Dad, and see him once a week, but it drifted from a month, to two months. He hadn't seen me. He said to me '..we all need someone'. It made me realise you have to make the time.
(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

This exceptional account was not typical of narratives as a whole. Nevertheless, for Trefor, the social worker, the importance of a 'loving' relationship was made explicit:

Having a significant loving relationship has changed me more than being a parent, because my self worth certainly comes from within myself. But it's also

what I get from Kali as well, demonstrating to me that I'm important, OK, all that kind of stuff. The positives, reinforce in times when I don't feel I'm OK. She's important.

(Trefor, 'Welsh', social worker).

With the specific exceptions of Trefor and Paul most men did not link their health to relationships with other adults, particularly in the data collected from the first interview. However, there was a sense that, for most men interviewed, the experience of living with children may be important for their health, although this was sometimes implied rather than made explicit, in their discourses about health. For example, Don understood his children's love as important to his own health:

I have had this discussion with people before, and I feel that because I am relatively happy with my children, a feeling of being content with your life makes a difference to your well-being, if that makes sense.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

The ways in which men deal with health within social relationships, and the implications of social connections for health, is interrogated in more depth in Chapters Six and Seven. In Chapter Six, for example, there is a particular focus upon men's experiences of social connectedness with women partners. However, it is important to emphasise that while health was understood as necessary for men to meet their perceived obligations to others, health was not explicitly necessary in order to maintain men's social relationships with other adults. Health was understood as a functional capacity, to enable men to meet their obligations as fathers and workers.

5.4 INFLUENCES ON MEN'S HEALTH.

In order to explore men's health experiences, men were also asked a range of questions about possible influences on health. Analysis of men's accounts, in this respect, are organised within this theme by initially discussing men's views about social class, followed by analysis of stories about ethnicity and racism, paid work, but also the combined affects of fathering and paid work.

5.4.1 INFLUENCES ON HEALTH: SOCIAL CLASS.

The men were asked if their social class background influenced their health, but to my surprise most men provided material about social class that referred to individual actions or 'individual responsibility' (a term that was used by several men) about health. In fact, at other times within interviews men provided unsolicited explanations about health that related to the actions of individuals. Indeed Trefor and Peter (the only two men having experience of higher education) provided quite sophisticated accounts about the links between individual responsibility and health. For example, Trefor, when asked about ethnicity and health, said:

But I don't think I'm more likely than an English fella or a Scot to suffer. If I were a poor Scot eating deep fried Mars bars in Dumbarton then, yes, but it is self inflicted.

(Trefor, 'Welsh', social worker).

Herzlich (1973) has argued that lay people may see health as a property residing within the individual. In addition, in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) health

was often seen by some fathers, of ethnically diverse backgrounds, as an individual responsibility, particularly where the consumption of food, alcohol, drugs and cigarettes was concerned. Blaxter (1990) and Watson (2000) have also suggested that the influence of individual practices or 'lifestyles' may be important ways in which men conceptualise health. In fact Watson (2000) indicated that he began with an initial framework for examining men's health that was informed by a concern to examine men's unhealthy 'behaviours'. However, throughout the fieldwork, men within this study rarely associated social class background with their own, or others, individual health practices, although as will become clear shortly, men's accounts about the impact of paid work on health are significant.

Blaxter (1983, 1990) has also argued that lay conceptions of health may underplay social explanations. However, two men did talk about social class, rather than individual determinants, of health. Brandon, the police officer, linked social class to people's degree of 'affluency', but the effects of that 'affluency' could be gauged by what food and drink individuals consumed. Liam, the man who gave up paid work to care for his daughter, had quite a sophisticated and political world view, which encompassed a broader, structural aspect to his understanding of his life experience, when compared with other men within this study:

Health is about stress. There is a reason why you may have to drink every day or why you can't say no, or, if you're overweight, but it really comes down to stress. As a working class family we can adapt to a different environment. We're immune to a lot of stress. Other families would be stressed out.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

This romantic account of the responses of some working class people to 'environmental' causes of stress was not typical of men's accounts as a whole, but it did indicate the ways in which work, unemployment, the local 'environment' and stress are linked to health practices, for Liam specifically. Most men, in comparison, did not provide the kind of explanations for health (and health practices) that Liam and Brandon offered. (The health practices of men within this study will be analysed in section 5.5 of this chapter). While social class, as an influence on health, is not explicit within most men's account, the influences of racism, paid work, fathering and the combined affects of paid work and fathering on their health were identified by most men within this study.

5.4.2 INFLUENCES ON HEALTH: RACISM.

Men were asked if their ethnic backgrounds influenced their health. In response, most of the White men indicated that ethnicity had no impact on their health, although Trefor, specifically, explained what he saw as the links between 'culture' and lifestyle. Most African-Caribbean men were also uncertain about the links between ethnicity and health, although Sylvester emphasised the lack of 'sun' was an important difference for him, when comparing life in Jamaica and England:

The only impact I can think about is aches and pains. And that is because of hard work and lack of sun really. If you are used to the sun it will be a different feeling.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

Brandon, however, did identify some genetic diseases such as sickle cell and thalassaemia, as possible influences on the health of African-Caribbean people.

Regarding the influence of racism on health, there were, however, distinct differences within narratives between the two ethnic groups of men. For most White men, racism, they suggested, did not have any impact on their health. Even Don, who lived with four mixed heritage children, and an African-Caribbean partner, suggested that racism did not influence his health. The one exception within the group of White men was Trefor, who had experienced prejudice and verbal abuse as a 'Welsh person', in the past while living in Essex, he suggested:

I lived in Essex for 20 years and the racism that I experienced as a Welsh person was usually very overt. I was a 'Welsh cunt' and I've been called that more times than I care to remember, but also the less overt stuff.

(Trefor, 'Welsh', social worker).

On the other hand, with the single exception of Sylvester, all the other African-Caribbean men indicated that they, or members of their family, had experienced racial prejudice, abuse or discrimination in a variety of ways. Sylvester, who was the only man within the study to have migrated to the UK, indicated that he did not think about social class or racism, because he '*never looks for it*'. He was determined to '*enjoy life*'. All the other African-Caribbean men were able to provide disturbing examples of experiences that they, or members of their family's, had encountered. First of all, prejudice within everyday encounters with White people, is identified by Terrence, Brandon, Paul, and Liam. For example:

What really annoys me is if you are at the checkout, you are going to pay for something, and you give them money. You put your hand down on the table, and they put their hand down on the money, like that! To avoid touching your

hand.. So I then look at my hand, or look to see if they do it to someone else.

And you will remember it, you have stored it away.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

The effects of such encounters where explicit prejudice, abuse or discrimination is not evident, and may be hidden in some way, are 'stored away'. In contrast to these more hidden experiences, overt racist verbal and physical abuse is also an aspect of Brandon's work experience as a police officer:

...the job I do is confrontational, and you are going into people's homes and lives. You are going into places where people feel most secure, and in their opinion this is their castle. I come along and I change all those rules. The upshot of this is that the person will go on the defensive, and they will go for you: 'Black bastard!'. You get that type of abuse. Because I am a sergeant now, I get the stereotypical 'Who is in charge?'. 'I am' I say. 'You can't be because you are black!'...When I am not in work I get it less.

(Brandon, 'British with Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Brandon, Terrence and Paul also identified perceived discrimination within their workplaces. Indeed Paul was the only man to refuse to identify his ethnic background. He had doubts about the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies, which fail to uncover, he suggested, the hidden racism, specifically in the college where he worked:

... certain things have happened here [within the college] and this equal opportunities thing is a load of rubbish. In all corporations they try to cover everything up.....it's in all walks of life.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

Furthermore, Brandon and Liam attempted to identify the institutional determinants of discrimination. For example, Brandon told me:

When they did the recruitment drive in the 50s and 60s, come over and drive our buses, but none of them made it into senior management. They are happy for them to be nurses, they are happy for them to be electricians, work on the shop floor, but not on the board of directors. There is no excuse for it. They were on the board of directors back in the West Indies...there is a tradition of racism, definitely. You can't discover it because it is always said behind your back...

(Brandon, 'British with Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

The language that men used to talk about the impact of these racist experiences on their health is that of 'battle', 'hassle', 'pressure' or 'stress' with implied physical and psychological implications for their health. These negative consequences of racism are highly pertinent to the experience of most African-Caribbean men. However, for the African-Caribbean men it is the hidden and uncertain nature of prejudice and discrimination that is difficult to confirm for these men, and alongside this is some uncertainty regarding the impact of these stressful experiences on health. However, Karlsen and Nazroo (2002) have argued that to understand the psychological consequences of such experiences, actual experiences of racism and the stress associated with perceived or anticipated racism are both pertinent factors. How men within this study dealt with such experiences of racism within social connections, and how these men share pleasure with other African-Caribbean people regarding ethnicity and critical talk about racism, is addressed in Chapters

Six and Seven. At this point, however, it is important to emphasise that some social relationships, between ethnic groups in society, are clearly harmful.

5.4.3 INFLUENCES ON HEALTH: PAID WORK.

In Chapter Four analysis of narratives indicated difficulties, for all men, in the ways in which paid work could impact on experiences of fathering within families. However paid work did also have influence, accounts suggest, on the health of men also. This is not surprising given the ways in which work settings may provide a multiplicity of ongoing demands for an individual throughout their lifetime. However, most men, except Terrence and Ron (two car company production line workers), indicated that paid work did provide some stimulation or social contact that was seen as enjoyable or valued. The pleasure of 'having a laugh' with work colleagues recurred in the narratives of most men, and will be considered in more detail later in this chapter, and in Chapter Six. An example of men's experience, is that of Paul, who enjoyed his work:

I'm doing things I enjoy at work, keeping fit and getting stimulation by speaking to different people, new students, students from abroad, so you get to know different people, so it's good.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

These findings are important because Warr (1987) and Jahoda (1982) have earlier identified potential benefits for people's mental health associated with their employment. The mental and physical stimulation, social contact with others outside of the family, and the contribution work makes to an individual's sense of purpose and identity may have beneficial affects on an individual's mental health

(Jahoda, 1982). While work provided the stimulation of new relationships for Paul, in the example above, Steve distinctively suggested that work also provided a sense of 'well being' and 'achievement'. Steve's narratives about work are particularly interesting because he was the only man, who through self-employment, was able to exercise a degree of autonomy about his work in order to 'tailor' his work, as he put it, and create a balance of paid work and fathering. On the other hand the limited autonomy available for three of the production line workers (Terrence, Ron, and John) compares unfavourably with Steve's 'tailoring' of his working life. For example, Terrence said:

Have you ever done anything like this? You should. That would learn you. You are like a child at school, working there, who has to ask permission to wipe his arse. It [the production line] never stops, unless someone cocks up [laughs].

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Such limitations to autonomy are important, as Marmot et al (1999), and others, have argued that a working environment with high demands and limited personal control for employees is associated with poorer physical health, specifically an increased 'risk' of coronary heart disease. While limited autonomy within the workplace is identified by some men as a source of difficulty, sometimes termed 'pressure' or 'stress', all men identified limitations to their autonomy associated with both fathering and paid work, which will be considered later in this section of the chapter.

Most men identified specific workplace hazards as actual, or potential, influences upon their health, and the experiences of racial prejudice, abuse and discrimination within the workplace by Paul, Terrence and Brandon, particularly, also needs to be

recognised at this point, as additional sources of work stress. Oliver identified the risks of working with 'live' electricity while the track was moving, Peter identified the hazards associated with working with Visual Display Units (V.D.U.s) on a repetitive basis, John identified the problems of the factory environment for his asthma, Terrence identified migraines as linked to working 'on the track', Sylvester had continuous pain in his right (plastering) arm and shoulder, and Trefor noted the psychological stress associated with working with vulnerable people within social work. Indeed Brandon and Don identified serious risks to life, working in social and environmentally hazardous conditions, within the police and fire services respectively. One example of a potential hazard within work, identified by Oliver, is included below:

It is a dangerous job... I am dealing with electricity all the time. Perhaps because I have been doing it so long I don't see the dangers. There is always the danger of electrocution, the danger of getting my hand caught and losing a finger, because sometimes the machinery is moving, which isn't right, but the track is moving and the job needs to be done, and somebody has got to do it.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

All men in paid work confirmed that tiredness, or even exhaustion, were regular experiences after paid work, particularly those men working shift systems. While some men's partners worked evening and night shifts (as care assistants, or health care assistants, for example), eight of the informants also worked a variety of differing shift patterns. With the specific exception of Paul, who valued the way he could organise childcare with work responsibilities, men working shifts indicated negative consequences of their health associated with shift work, specifically tiredness, disrupted sleep patterns, and disruption of routines for meals. Indeed the

negative consequences for men's thoughts, feelings and actions (as has been earlier identified in Chapter Four), are played out in family life.

Another important issue, for some men, is that of insecurity associated with paid work, specifically the insecurity of potential unemployment. Ferrie et al (1998) have suggested that job insecurity may be a psychological hazard, and associated with long term illness. The insecurity for the self-employed, and private sector employees, was most noteworthy. This sense of insecurity was particularly the case for three of the four car plant production line workers, (Ron, Terrence and John), whose companies had recently changed ownership, and had been restructured on several occasions over recent years. Nevertheless, men's accounts do not demonstrate the intense concerns about money that Liam talked about, as did the unemployed fathers in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999). Liam was unemployed, and seemed, in my subjective judgement, the most defensive and also one of the most stressed of the men I interviewed. Bartley et al (1999) have argued that unemployment is associated with increased mortality rates, and also is damaging for people's mental health. It was never entirely clear from Liam's accounts how his experiences influenced his health, but there was always a more potent sense of conflict and stress within his narratives, for example:

I grew up here and I tolerate it, I can survive... Well you might as well get a job, stick to the stereotype of a father, save money, get out and get a better job and forget about it. You have to fight for your resources, fight or buy.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Liam's accounts are consistent with Fryer's (1995) work, where it was argued that unemployment is associated with a restricted sense of personal agency for some people, in that their life opportunities are constrained.

Paid work also created difficulties for some men, associated with the volume or the intensity of work. For example, although Peter had indicated that work for him was important to his 'self-esteem', it also created 'pressure', for him:

Deadlines. When things don't go right, sometimes impossible deadlines to meet!

Quite often I will get projects that are not possible to complete in the time constraints we've got.

(Peter, 'British and White', office equipment planner and fitter).

While those men who were employees had limitations set to their working hours by their employers, the self-employed men, Sylvester and Steve, did sometimes experience much longer hours, and greater intensification of work, their accounts indicated. For example, Steve had decided to plan his self-employed carpentry work around his childcare responsibilities, which sometimes meant he was unable to have any breaks from caring or paid work. Indeed, at certain times of the year, Steve worked long hours to fit in his carpentry with his caring responsibilities. Another example: Don worked full time (48 hours) as a firefighter and then another 20-30 hours as a self-employed painter and decorator, which involved a 15 hour night shift, followed by a day of self-employed work, another 15 hour night shift, followed by another day of painting and decorating. The scope of these activities affected him in the form of fatigue, but also in the ways he acted within his family towards others. Sylvester was a self-employed plasterer. Chronic pain in his right

arm and shoulder, influenced by the volume and intensity of his work, began when he was in his 30's, some 18 years ago:

In my case I start thinking what will it be like in the next ten years? At the moment the worst part of my body is the pain barrier in my arm, you know. Sometimes I cannot sleep at night, and you start thinking will my arm hold up? If I have an easy week it is not so bad... I don't have to push myself, but you get weeks when you have a job you have to push more and it hurts more.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

5.4.4 INFLUENCES ON HEALTH: THE COMBINED EFFECTS OF FATHERING AND PAID WORK.

While the implications of the influence of paid work on men's health have been considered, the experience of men as fathers within families is also important. Men's accounts about fathering and health are less detailed than material about the influence of paid work. However, being a father is associated with, analysis of narratives indicated, both positive and negative health experiences. Indeed the combined influence of fathering and paid work is also evident within men's stories.

As was argued in the previous chapter, involvement with children was understood as pleasurable for all men, but in a variety of forms, including experiencing 'fun', excitement, stimulation, creativity through play, or learning with children. All men enjoyed the reciprocal emotional and physical affection that was possible with children. Indeed children may have helped men indirectly by providing an alternative personal experience to that of paid work, or even helped alleviate stress as Brandon, Trefor, John, Peter and Paul all make explicit within their accounts:

I am two people. I am the person at work and the person at home, and the easiest way for me to transcend over to the person at home is with the kids. The little one goes 'lets have a tea party for the dolls', so I have sat and ate with all these dolls, chocolate cake and stuff like that. That is brilliant, that takes it all away.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry).

Distinctively for Brandon and Peter there was a kind of dualism within their narratives. For example, Brandon in the extract above '*transcends*' to the private man in the home through the pleasure of communication and play with children, which 'takes it all away', that is alleviated the stress associated with paid work. It is important to reinforce at this point that pleasure, relaxation and potential amelioration of stress, associated with involvement by men with children, is in contrast with other accounts, discussed in section 5.3, where analysis of men's stories indicated that health is not generally understood as associated with social relationships with other adults.

Nevertheless, stress is also associated with fathering, which was initially identified in Chapter Four where some of the displeasures of fathering were outlined. Some of the experiences associated with stress for men within this study include potential threats to children's security or health, the complexity of children's differing and competing needs, and dealing with children's autonomy and behaviour. Indeed there were the more mundane, but perhaps more immediately debilitating, effects of broken sleep patterns as sources of fatigue and stress, for men with young children particularly. Furthermore, the stress associated with fathering may be carried over into the workplace as well. This was particularly the case for Ron, who was the

only man interviewed who was a lone parent. Specifically, for Ron, his experience of stress was sometimes acted out through aggressive confrontations with other men within the car plant.

For all men there was a sense, within their accounts, that their bodies were changing as they grew older, confirming Watson's (2000) research with men, in this respect. Men were aware that, over time, they may have gained more body weight, or their body shape had changed, or they may have felt less lithe, less physically strong, less 'fit' than before, feel more tired after exercise, or men talked about experiencing a combination of these changes. For example, Steve said:

I ache a hell of a lot more after playing squash. Again, my muscle tone and stuff has changed. I think I am fairly fit but I am aware of getting up in the morning and feeling stiff as a board, really creaky. My legs and arms and everything, I just feel exhausted which as a young man you didn't think about.

(Steve, 'Welsh, and European', carpenter).

Watson's (2000) research suggested that men may see their body as more fragmented. I am uncertain whether analysis of data confirms Watson's findings, but it is certainly the case that all men subjectively experienced their bodies changing in ways that they do not like. Indeed it is the combined affects of paid work, ageing and fathering within families that were associated, within men's accounts, with such bodily changes. Furthermore, men's health practices associated with consumption of food, alcohol and cigarettes, and physical activity were also associated with these changes in bodies. These health practices will be discussed in section 5.5 of this chapter

One of the other aspects of the influence of both fathering and paid work on men's lives is their limited sense of autonomy, not just the limited autonomy within the workplace. All men, except Liam, were doing paid work. The self-employed men had more potential autonomy, but actually often worked longer hours than those men doing paid work for others. Men were all involved in some childcare, and some domestic labour also. The combination of these responsibilities provides constraints, or '*sacrifices*' as Don termed it, created by the obligations of work and fathering. Sylvester told me:

Being a parent takes a lot really. You tend to forget yourself really. You leave yourself out really. So you haven't got any independence. You take a little piece here and there. It is not what you would ideally like but that is the way it is.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

Autonomy for men was also perceived as being limited regarding the potential for personal development, that is the potential for expressing creativity or through forms of learning. The public sector workers, Don, Trefor, and Brandon, did have regular training or education within their semi-professional work, but the scope for development for the self-employed men, Sylvester and Steve, and the men working for private companies was limited. The constraints for Steve, whose work and childcare responsibilities are interdependent, and for Ron, the lone father, are particularly noteworthy. Ron felt 'pinned in' by having to work night shifts, which was necessary as such shifts fitted with his family responsibilities. However, by working 'nights' opportunities for promotion, or increases in pay, were jeopardised he suggested. Nevertheless some men did seem to have some scope for their own development, in some respects. For example, Oliver was involved in attempting to play guitar music by ear, rather than from sheet music, as he had usually done, in

his 'music room', that is the front room of his house. Some men were also involved in physical activity to maintain, or attain, 'fitness', which they enjoyed as a contrast with work and family responsibilities, as will become clearer in section 5.5 of this chapter.

While the sense of personal autonomy and the scope for personal development was limited for most men, the leisure they were involved in was also limited they indicated. As John put it social life has 'slowed down', when compared with the scope of social activities in the past. Indeed there was a recurrent sense, for most men, that certain activities have been lost, whether that involved time with friends, or specific activities such as playing football, walking, squash, fencing, 'clubbing' or going to the pub. Men were still involved in some of the latter activities, as will become clear, later in this chapter, where specific health practices are analysed. However, the time available for such activities was, men suggested, more limited because of the combination of fathering and paid work obligations, and may have been replaced by other social activities with children, within families, or with other families with children:

It is prioritising now. Whereas before I would go and do this with the lads. It is now what can we as a family do, now what can all four of us do. Social life with the family, yes. Social life on my own with my friends, no.

(Peter, 'British', office equipment planner and fitter).

The above extract illustrates the changing nature of fathers' social lives evident within narratives, as time with fathers' families, or with the families of friends became more significant. Men's friendships were still valued, as will become clearer in Chapter Six, but the time available to spend with friends was more

limited, for all men, than had been the case in the past. The individual circumstances are varied. For example, while Peter's network of friends within his Baptist church were ongoing weekly contacts, Don saw his friends in the pub at least once a week, John saw his friends at the pub one evening every few weeks, and Martin had a part-time job at a Golf club two nights a week which was 'more of a social night than hard work'. Only Terrence was able to spend two or three nights a week out with other adults, in Terrence's case at his local 'pub'.

While leisure for men, according to their accounts, had diminished over time, leisure time specifically spent with women partners had diminished also. For most men social activities with women partners out of the home, without children, was often measured over months or years, with evenings out being once every few months for many men. On the other hand spending time with partners in the home was also be inhibited shift work, evening work, or night work by men or their partners. Watching television or video films was the activity that most men seemed to share with women partners, as leisure within the home. These latter activities are particularly important for Liam, because, as he stated, 'we just don't have the cash for anything else'. Fryer (1995) has argued that unemployment creates restricted agency for people, as it may cut individuals off from a range of life opportunities, which does seem consistent with Liam's experience. However, the men doing paid work also had a constrained or restricted sense of agency, but these restrictions were associated with the combined experiences of paid work and fathering.

5.5 MEN'S HEALTH PRACTICES.

In many ways one could argue that narratives regarding autonomy, leisure, and personal development are ways of talking about health practices, as discourses and

practices may be interdependent. However the final theme of this chapter is regarding men's practices regarding health, specifically regarding 'healthy', as some men termed it, practices but also transgressive practices, that is practices which they 'ought' or 'should' not do. This theme includes analysis of material regarding men's practices regarding physical activity, and the consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and food. There was a large amount of this material within narratives, as men talked a lot within interviews about these 'healthy' and transgressive practices. However, this section of the chapter begins by discussing men's practices regarding stress, emotionality, and vulnerability.

While men within this study often talked about consumption men talked less often about their practices regarding emotionality and stress, particularly how stress affected their feelings and thoughts. The experience of stress was talked about within all men's narratives, usually in relation to the determinants of stress, or sometimes in relation to affects on their bodies. Words such as 'stress', 'hassle', 'pressure' or 'tension' were employed to describe experiences which men often found difficult to describe or explain:

You can't always understand that yourself can you. Sometimes you can cope with everything, and other times the slightest thing will affect you.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

Furthermore stories about the nature of, and the effects of, stress upon body and mind were most often described by talking about the experiences of others, not generally by individual men talking about their own contemporary experiences. For example, Peter, a very careful and calm man throughout the interviews, used the dramatic language of '*knocked sideways*', and '*they blow up*' to describe others'

experience of stress:

... having seen people who were very strong be knocked sideways. I think pressure is where something little is the straw that breaks the camel's back. If you look at a thing in isolation it's nothing, but it's just the limit and they blow up!

(Peter, 'British', office equipment planner and fitter).

Such disturbing influences upon health were rarely discussed as personal experiences. Ron's individual experience was distinctive. The multiple difficulties, he experienced, in working full time combined with the experience of being the main carer for his children was 'stressful' for Ron, but rather than describe such experiences he preferred to talk about possible solutions: 'something has got to change' he told me.

The possible determinants of stress, for example hazards at work, were talked about men much more readily, as previous discussion in this chapter confirms. Stress is associated with a range of issues including work experiences, experiences as fathers with children, or actual or anticipated experiences of racism for African-Caribbean men. Liam's earlier narrative (in section 5.4.1 of this chapter) where he located determinants of stress more broadly within the local '*environment*', or at other times within '*society*', was exceptional within men's accounts, and are interesting in that they were consistent with psycho-social models of stress (eg. Wilkinson, 1996)

As will have become clear in both Chapter Four, but also in the previous section of this chapter, involvement with children was identified by many men as helping fathers to indirectly deal with stress. However other methods of dealing with stress

involved a range of diverse practices, including watching television, watching video films, reading, walking, taking the dog for a walk, or gardening. For example, Martin told me:

Those Bonsai trees. That's very relaxing you know, you can like chill out you just sit down, prune, pinching or whatever and it just relaxes you. If you have a stressful day at work it just brings you down.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

Furthermore, as will become clearer shortly, the pleasure of consuming food, cigarettes or alcohol, or by undertaking physical activity were also methods that men did use to help them deal with stress. However, during the first interviews I was becoming increasingly aware that while men would discuss practices regarding consumption quite readily, men of both ethnic backgrounds rarely talked about how stress affected their thoughts and feelings.

Within the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), but also the early interviews of this investigation I became personally concerned, but also intellectually interested in a recurring issue, which was how men talked about emotionality within the interview process, and within the content of narratives. Some men (Don, John, Brandon, and Terrence) did talk about the unplanned but actual use of verbal aggression directed at women partners, or children, when men were tired or experiencing stress. However, feelings of sadness, fear and anxiety, were rarely talked about at the beginning of this investigation. Such difficult feelings were sometimes talked about regarding a third person, but so rarely in relation to the current experience of men themselves. The emotional accounts of men's pleasure in involvement with children should not be ignored in this context, but the scarcity of material regarding

sadness, fear and anxiety, which may potentially be associated with the psychological experiences of stress, pain, illness, or concerns about health became significant for planning the second interview. The previous discussion is not intended to deny the ongoing ability of Martin and Sylvester to display stoicism or courage, perhaps, in living with ongoing chronic pain:

Urm, well when I was born, I was actually born handicapped. I had what you call club feet. I had it in both feet but they operated on it. When I was young I had it pretty badly in both feet and I had a lot of operations on them and even now, I do get a lot of pain... Something I have come to accept.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

However, the extract above also emphasises that discourses are about what is not said, as well as what is said. Human experience, including human health, illness and stress, has an emotional domain that was often absent in the first set of interviews. Sometimes I compared my experience within the interviews with my eight years experience as a health visitor. Each day of my work in this semi-professional job I would be involved in encounters with parents, usually women who were mothers or carers for pre-school children, and each day that work would largely consist of informal forms of health promotion. That is, I would deal with highly emotional and personal experiences of 'clients', and would attempt to help with their self-esteem, or sense of control over their health and their lives, usually as a way of indirectly promoting child health (through undertaking health promotion with parents). These encounters were almost always personal and emotional, the 'public accounts' always available, but low self-esteem, worry, anxiety, sadness and fear never far away. Hence, in comparison, I worried that men I interviewed here did not sufficiently express their 'worry'! Indeed I actually began to think, at times,

that Real's (1997) arguments about the hidden depression in men may be evident in some cases, as it became increasingly clear that men as a whole were unwilling, or unable to talk about challenging aspects of emotionality.

The public expression of certain emotions, such as sadness fear and anxiety, are discouraged in men in many cultures, as Busfield (1996) argued, and may be perceived as indicative of vulnerability or dependence. In fact, some of the ways men indicated that they would deal with the psychological experiences of stress included ways of thinking and resolving difficulties alone. For example, some men would draw upon their spiritual and religious experiences to help them deal with stress. However, in the second interview I attempted to gain more insight into men's more 'private' (Cornwell, 1984) accounts, by exploring men's solitary experiences, but also their experiences of social connectedness in more detail. Indeed when some men did talk about the possibility of talking to other people about difficulties they experienced, some men also began to talk about their identities as men, which they associated with not 'burdening' other people, with being 'strong' rather than 'weak', for example. All men indicated that they attempted to prevent other members of their family hearing about determinants of stress, particularly regarding their paid work activities. Many men intended to 'protect' their children, and sometimes 'protect' their women partners, from their difficult experiences at work. Such responses were often expressed most forcefully by Don, the fire fighter, and Brandon, the police officer, who both emphasised, regularly, that the experience of hazardous, or life threatening incidents, were topics they would avoid talking about with children, or even their women partners. For example, Don said:

I have been to some quite nasty incidents, and I have always managed to walk away. It may pray on my mind, but I never bring these things home.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Furthermore talking, or communicating with others, was rarely identified, in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) or at the beginning of the fieldwork for this study, as a way of dealing with stress or other difficulties by men, although there were some specific exceptions to this pattern. Trefor, the social worker, and John, a production line worker, both did provide accounts involving others, as helpers and recipients of help, in dealing with stresses, as will become clearer subsequent chapters. Indeed Chapters Six and Seven explore and analyse men's experiences of social connectedness in more detail, which will include how men deal with their health and fathering experiences within social connections.

The specific issues which men identified as requiring them to be 'strong', 'independent' or attempt to 'protect' others, rather than appear vulnerable by being 'weak' or 'burdening' others, were individually specific and diverse but relate to two main areas. Firstly men had concerns about health that involved their own health or mortality, they had concerns about the health of other people, or they had concerns that were associated with how stress affected how they thought and felt (rather than how it affected their bodies). Secondly, men had concerns about difficulties in relationships with women partners or children. These concerns were often dealt with in solitary, rather than as shared experiences, an issue that will be analysed in Chapter Eight, where I discuss what I have termed men's 'solitary discourses and practices'. Men's accounts indicated that they employed solitary discourses and practices, in order to attempt to prevent disclosure of their perceived vulnerability to others.

Nevertheless men within this study were also involved in health practices that they had a lot to say about, practices regarding physical activity, and the consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and food, which were also some of ways in which men indicated they dealt with stressful experiences. In section 5.4.1 it was argued that most men within this study may understand health as being an individual's responsibility. However, it is also the case that most men also talked about 'healthy' activities that they, and their children should be involved in, for example eating 'healthy' food, drinking less alcohol, or stopping smoking cigarettes. Indeed the coercive language of obligations regarding health, often conceptualised by men as what they 'ought' or 'should' do, recurred within the narratives of most men. However, there were two specific exceptions. Sylvester and Terrence did not talk about what they 'ought' to consume or do:

You are going to die somehow, why not enjoy yourself on the way? And anyway I work fucking hard, I burn up so much fat in that job.
(Terrence, 'Black British', production line worker).

Sylvester and Terrence both referred to 'luck' when talking about possible affects of cigarette smoking, for example where Sylvester talked about whether the consequences of cigarette smoking may affect his aspiration to retire to Jamaica:

'If I am lucky. If I get to live 'til I am 60'
(Sylvester, 'Jamaican, then English', plasterer).

This material is consistent with Rogers et.al (1997), who argued that the fatalism within some people's accounts about their health may influence important decisions

people may have about lifestyle choices or change, as practices deemed by professionals to be harmful, may also be very pleasurable. In contrast to Sylvester and Terrence's stories, for most men, of both ethnic backgrounds, there is talk about a desire to improve their health through what many men termed 'healthy' activities, as opposed to forms of transgression by non-'healthy' consumption, or by limited physical activity. However, it was also clear that transgressive or 'healthy' practices regarding consumption and physical activity were often very pleasurable. The narratives of Brandon, Terrence, Steve, Liam, and Oliver indicated, for example, that boxing, football, squash, jogging and running are experienced as pleasurable, and may be perceived as helping with relaxation, alleviating stress, or above all may provide a valued contrast with the constraints of work and family obligations, as Brandon's extract illustrates:

Throughout the whole week I try and do a minimum of three hours in the gym...I love it. I absolutely love it. Especially because I can see some of the results now, I feel fitter and healthier. I enjoy it and it is a form of release.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry, police officer).

Furthermore, transgressive practices, including the consumption of 'junk', 'crap' or 'treat' food, alcohol, and cigarettes, were talked about by all men as pleasurable, or relaxing or helping to deal with stress associated with work or family. Alcohol for Terrence, Don, and John also involved shared activities with other men within the pub, involving the pleasure of 'having a laugh' shared with other people, especially other men:

...it is my time to go out and have a few beers, and to enjoy myself... but to go out with independent people and let your hair down with someone who is

nothing to do with the family. Or you can go out and discuss things which are complete and utter crap, and it doesn't matter.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

In the next chapter analysis of men's experiences of social connectedness with men friends, including the importance of 'having a laugh', is developed further.

Within most men's accounts there is evidence of implicit rules about what men should do to look after their health, what they 'ought' or 'should' do, but in the same interviews men also talked about the enjoyable experiences of consumption they experienced. Similarly, Robertson (2003) has indicated that for men within his study, they may experience a dilemma between 'don't care' and 'should care' regarding their health. Crawford (2000) has elsewhere argued, in his critique of medical forms of health promotion, that pleasure and consumption on the one hand, and 'denial' of pleasure may become lifelong rituals.

Most men within this study also talked about the perceived negative consequences of their transgressive practices, which included, for example, increases in body weight, reduced 'fitness', and possible health consequences such as the 'risk of a coronary', as Trefor put it. Indeed there was also a sense for Terrence, John and Don, specifically, regarding their consumption of alcohol, that this pleasurable activity may have negative consequences for them. For example, John was concerned that his 'binge drinking' sometimes caused him to lose control over his body, and for Don, his alcohol consumption caused him to be more aggressive with friends and family.

Consistent with Watson's (2000) findings, most men within this study were reflexive about their health practices, that is their 'healthy' and transgressive' practices, and the potential implications for these practices for their bodies. However, it is the context within these practices take place that is important to emphasise. All men within this study talked about 'healthy' practices, transgression and pleasure as being associated with constraints they experienced. These constraints were associated with the obligations of paid work, fathering and domestic responsibilities, but also limited leisure, and limited personal autonomy. Cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption, in particular, were understood for some men as helping with relaxation, but also helping to alleviate stress. Furthermore, while the potential outcomes for men's health are certainly associated with transgressive practices within men's stories, they are also linked with ageing, paid work and family life. In addition, food within all families is a very important issue, and some men indicated that they may eat more, partly because of the ongoing availability of food for children within the home. Furthermore, even those men involved in physical activity for 'fitness' have to plan these activities within the time constraints created by work and domestic activities.

Within men's narratives about 'healthy' and transgressive practices it became clear, within analysis, that these men had a constrained or restricted sense of their own personal agency. These men were not generally living with poverty (except Liam), and they were not generally the main carers for children (except Ron and Steve). However, Graham's (1994) research regarding the links between cigarette smoking, on the one hand, and the constraints experienced by working class women's experiences of deprivation, on the other, did indicate the affects of constraints on health practices. Here the constraints of paid work and fathering are certainly

associated within narratives with transgressive practices. For example, for Don '...going on the beer' was a way of dealing with his limited 'independence'.

There is also reflexivity within all men's accounts about both transgressive and 'healthy' practices, reflexivity that was related to men's experiences as fathers. Many men's consumption of food was influenced by preparing 'healthy' not 'crap' food for children. Specifically many men indicated that they had changed, or intended to change their activities regarding cigarette smoking, drinking alcohol, and food consumption, unsafe car driving, and also the amount of physical activity they did, because of their obligations to children. This certainly indicates a degree of reflexivity about health practices associated with fathering. For example, John said:

I packed up smoking after the birth of our second child, because I thought I will try and be around for a while now, I made that decision.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

The material constraints of the social connections of paid work and family for men within this study were considerable. In my subjective judgement, however, there was little sense within men's accounts, about 'healthy' and transgressive practices, that talking about these practices was stressful or difficult. This may be because these practices did involve men being required to express their perceived vulnerability to others, and talk about such practices did not involve emotionally challenging 'talk'. Indeed disclosure to others about men's sense of vulnerability regarding difficult feelings, regarding concerns about health, about stress or personal difficulties was not conceptualised as a 'healthy' practice, in the same way that boxing was, for example. Indeed not sharing such experiences with others was

rarely seen as transgressive within men's accounts, especially in the first interview, and before I questioned men about solitary experiences in the second interview. Talk about 'healthy' and transgressive practices did not involve talk about vulnerability, weakness, and the activities of men to ensure they appeared 'strong' to others.

5.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

In Chapter Four I argued that, regarding issues such as the structure of the family, or children's discipline and learning, for example, there were important differences between the experiences of the two groups of men of differing ethnic backgrounds, within this study. However, in this chapter the differences identified between the two ethnic groups of men are more limited. Most men shared limited views about the influence of ethnicity on health, but the specific nature of many African-Caribbean men's experiences of perceived, anticipated or actual racism within work settings and communities was understood as a cause of stress, specific to African-Caribbean men. It is clear that some social relationships, specifically between ethnic groups, are harmful, and the sense that African-Caribbean men's experiences do seem consistent with Connell's (1995) concept of marginalised masculinities, is an issue that will be developed in subsequent chapters.

It is also the case that men, of both ethnic backgrounds, shared more similar health experiences than they did differences. While the issue of marginalisation is important to recognise, there is evidence within the accounts of both groups of men that as fathers they are involved in reflexivity and change. First of all, men are reflexive about their bodies, particularly regarding individual transgressive and 'healthy' practices such as physical activity and consumption. Indeed men's

accounts indicate changes having taken place within men's health practices that they associated as being necessary as fathers with their obligations to children. In this sense fathering is again associated, I argue, with more dynamic (Connell, 2000) sense of being a man. However there are material influences on men's health that were also shared by these two groups of men. While involvement with children may be pleasurable, or help with relaxation, or help ameliorate work stress, fathering was also associated with a multiplicity of stressors, including for example, dealing with children's behaviour. While paid work was a source of income, stimulation or social contact it was also associated with workplaces hazards that may affect physical health, but also insecurity, limited autonomy, or a high volume of work with implications for fatigue or stress. Indeed the combined affects of paid work and fathering were associated with limited leisure, limited scope for personal development, limited autonomy, and hence with a restricted sense of personal agency.

While men's accounts do not generally indicate evidence for men linking their social class background to health, they consistently linked individual practices of consumption or physical activity (or lack of it) to health. There is also a consistent ambivalence within men's narratives, (as Crawford, 2000) has also argued, within men's accounts about 'healthy' practices they 'ought' or 'should' do, and transgression of these implicit rules by consuming 'crap' food, for example. However, it is clear that such health practices take place within the context of men's constraints associated with paid work, domestic activities and limited autonomy. It is this broader context for individual practices that is consistent with the dominant way in which men conceptualise health, that is functional capacity to allow men to work and meet obligations of fathering. However, health as functional capacity is generally not linked to social connectedness with other adults within discourses, but

to 'fitness' or absence of disease.

The limited reflexivity about social connectedness with adults regarding health, within men's stories, was important within the development of this thesis. Indeed while, on the one hand, access within interviews to 'private' and 'public' accounts (Cornwell, 1984) was possible where men talked about transgressive health practices, on the other hand, regarding the psychological experiences, particularly the emotional experiences, of stress, health or illness access to men's 'private' accounts was more problematic. The meaning of health for most men within this study is certainly not associated with social relationships with other people. Indeed within the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), and within the first few interviews of this investigation it was becoming increasingly clear to me that men were 'protecting' children, and some women, from their experiences of vulnerability, but also retaining experiences of vulnerability from me. The emergence of ideas about 'strength' associated with non disclosure of difficult experiences, and 'weakness' being associated with sharing experiences with other people, confirmed some of the issues raised in the masculinities literature (see, for example, Whitehead, 2002). Men's experiences of vulnerability seemed to be associated with discourses about masculinities. Hence in Chapter Eight examination and analysis of both men's masculinities and 'solitary discourses and practices' is undertaken. However, before this, in Chapters Six and Seven detailed exploration of men's experiences of social connections and social connectedness within families, communities and workplaces is undertaken to establish implications for experiences of fathering, health, but also interrogates men's practices for social connectedness.

CHAPTER SIX: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS WITHIN FAMILIES AND FRIENDSHIPS.

6.1 INTRODUCTION.

In Chapter Five, evidence indicated that men within this study did not generally conceptualise health as relating to social connections with other people. Hence, in this chapter, and within Chapter Seven, men's experiences of social connectedness within families, communities and workplaces is analysed in depth. This chapter specifically explores and analyses men's experiences of health and fathering with: children, women partners, other family members and men friends. Within the first theme, 'Fathers pleasure in providing help to children' (6.2), men's experiences with children are analysed with a particular focus upon emotional reciprocity, and talking and listening with children. In the second theme, 'Women partners as the most important providers of help and support to men' (6.3), the significance of women as the key individuals in men's lives is examined. In the third theme, 'Fathers contribution: the difficulties associated with 'talking' with women' (6.4), men's accounts regarding their women partners includes further examination of men's practices for social connectedness, in more depth. In the fourth theme, 'Contingent trust and reciprocity within extended families' (6.5) men's experiences with older people, siblings and dispersed family members is analysed, before the final theme, 'Men friends: the pleasure and limitations of 'having a laugh' (6.6), addresses the companionship and constraints of men's friendships with other men. This chapter examines men's experiences in a way that values agency and diversity within experiences, but also considers material and structural issues that influence health and fathering. In particular, comparisons are made between the two groups of men of different ethnic backgrounds, although, as will become clear, the

similarities within men's narratives are greater than the differences within African-Caribbean and White working class men's stories.

6.2 MEN'S PLEASURE IN PROVIDING HELP TO CHILDREN.

For men of both ethnic backgrounds children provided important forms of help, in a variety of ways. In a practical sense, most children were expected, although this was not always realised, to be involved in contributing to some domestic labour, (including for example, tidying up their bedrooms, vacuuming, loading the dishwasher, helping with gardening, or helping with mending and maintenance tasks). Some adolescent children and young people were also involved in some childcare. On the whole, these instrumental forms of help are less significant within men's accounts than talking and listening with children, within the context, already identified in Chapter Four of emotional reciprocity and shared affection. Part of the perceived reciprocity with children involved older children's 'worry' about fathers (for Sylvester and Brandon), or older children's attempts to help men with their communication skills (for Ron and Don). Initiatives by children to help resolve conflicts, experienced by adults and children, were also identified by several fathers (Ron, Don, and Brandon). Furthermore most men indicated that children indirectly helped men with their sense of their own worth as fathers. For example, Don said:

We could just be standing in the room, and they will come up to me, grab me, put their arms around my waist, look up and say 'I love you dad'. That says to me that I am doing alright.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

However, what do men offer children? In Chapter Four it was argued that men may see their contributions to children's lives by, for example, providing income for the family, providing love, helping with learning, providing physical care, and dealing with autonomy and discipline. The specific intention in this section of the chapter is to focus upon aspects of men's 'talking' and 'listening' with children, as these experiences are important in examining social connectedness in more detail.

Providing praise or encouragement for children was identified by most men as an important aspect of their fathering. Such activities were particularly important for men, as they were linked to helping with children's confidence. Helping with confidence involved recognising and praising children's activities in a variety of differing contexts, including schooling, sports, friendships and other forms of creative activity undertaken by children. For Brandon, Peter, Don, Oliver, Martin, John and Paul their optimistic desires that children will have confidence in themselves in the future, was also often linked to ideas about security or continuity within the family. For example, Brandon said:

They know their mum and dad love them. And the worse they are going to get, even if they are really naughty, is a bollocking from their mum, and a slap from their dad. That is the worse thing that can happen... They know that whatever happens they are going to come home and think, that is my home and I am safe there.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Another aspect of the help men provided for children, they suggested, is through listening to children, as was initially identified in Chapter Four. All the men talked about stories that involved situations where they could elicit feelings, or acquire

information from children. Even for Terrence, who found talking and listening 'very tiring', he, like all the other men, talked about the importance of listening to children. Listening involved, for example, attending to children's concerns, observing and dealing with their behaviour, or observing their body language:

I sit them down. If anything is bothering them, and I ask them 'what has happened at school'. And they say 'nothing'... and then I get it out of them. One will say I had an audition today for a solo part in the school Christmas play. Then she said 'I didn't get that part, but I might be doing that part'. And that is great, she wasn't upset or ashamed. Now I would feel if I failed at school I wouldn't tell anyone.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

Listening was also intended, accounts indicated, to help men understand their children, particularly for those men with adolescent and older children (Brandon, Liam, Don, and Trefor). Understanding older children and young people was necessary as they may have more autonomy, and may be less open to the influence of parents (than they had been in the past). For most men, understanding also required children being able to express feelings and thoughts to their fathers, which men wished to encourage. Furthermore, for Liam and Brandon two of the African-Caribbean men, listening may also have involved being prepared to respond to children's experiences that relate to ethnic identity or racism, although none of the men interviewed identified racist experiences that their children encountered. For example, Paul told me:

If there is something on the TV about race I won't shy away from watching it or talking about it. Like, I might say to my daughter, have they spoken about September 11 at school, have any Asian girls got an opinion about it?

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

In Chapter Five men's limited emotional expressiveness, particularly regarding men's perceived vulnerability, was identified. However emotional talking by children was encouraged by most men, except Terrence who argued his woman partner was best suited to deal with 'upset'. Indeed emotional expressiveness by boys is understood by some men (Trefor and Martin) as having potential implications for children's health, echoing professional concerns about mental health problems in young men (Men's health forum, 2002).

Encouraging children's developing relationships with other people, was also understood for some as being an aspect of their fathering. Some men (Martin, Terrence, Don, Brandon, Paul, John, and Steve) indicated that children could be helped to make relationships within families, friendships and neighbours. Such talking and listening was intended to ensure that conflict is prevented through co-operation with others, or to provide respect for other people or their property, or through controlling litter and noise. For example, Terrence said:

You've got to keep the situation cool. If our kids are effing and blinding just like the kids down the road, people won't like them, and I tell them they won't get asked round to their houses. I do have to be careful, because I can get carried away if I've got a problem with a neighbour.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Talking and listening with children was valued in a variety of differing ways by all men, of both ethnic groups. However, what is also important to emphasise is that men also talked about the limitations to their skills in talking and listening with children. All men, within the second interview, indicated that talking and listening with children was not easy, for example Steve indicated that paid work was easier than looking after children, in this respect. This lack of ease in communicating with children was, for most men, reinforced by their doubts about the quality of their listening to children:

I am crap like that, ...because I take everything on a very personal and macho level. Sometimes my wife has to explain to me that no, they are not saying that, this is what they mean... Unless it is black and white, cut and dried and they are asking a specific question, that there is a specific answer to, I don't always know what they are actually asking, and then my wife will help me, and say this is what they are saying.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Women partners were also identified as important mediators between children and some men (Don, Terrence, Brandon, and Peter), particularly because, as all men participating in the second interview indicated, women were perceived as being better communicators than men. This issue will be developed further in Chapter Eight, where men's understanding of gender differences is further explored. However, in addition, there is another important issue to emphasise about what men did not say, within these accounts about talking and listening with children. There is negligible material where men talk about fear, anxiety or sadness with children. Peter, at one point, identified one of his own fathers' strengths as being the ability 'to show his vulnerability', but Peter, and other men, did not talk about doing this

themselves. During initial analysis I speculated about how informant's children learn to deal with their own vulnerability, death, illness or loss, and the difficult emotions that go with such experiences. The 'championing' of love and affection, and the value placed on listening to children's difficult feelings was certainly talked about as a legitimate and important activity for fathers, but reciprocity with children was qualified. In fact, men's accounts indicated that emotional expressiveness in men was not requested, or demanded, by younger children, although Ron's adolescent son did challenge him, on one occasion, in this respect. Men's accounts provided little evidence that there are the same explicit demands for '*talking*' from children, that is the same demands that their women partners made of them about emotionality and intimacy.

Reciprocal trust between children and fathers, is confirmed by all men. Misztal (1998) has argued that trusting others is important to our sense of security in the world, and enables our experiences to include co-operation with others and wider social cohesion, (as Putnam (1995) has also emphasised). Trust in children within men's accounts involved identification of individual attributes (such as honesty), or activities by children to ensure faithfulness, confidentiality, or behaving well in relationships with others. These attributes or activities were understood as necessary for mutual respect between people, or to enable children's safety or their security. Children's trust in fathers was, according to most fathers, absolute, for some men that trust being all encompassing, and anticipated for many years into the future. Men's ongoing availability, involvement, love or 'protection' is confirmation of this trustworthiness. However, there was some uncertainty for men about whether children could understand 'trust' as an idea, although some men talked about children's ability to deal with their personal safety when dealing with strangers. However, talk about trust was sometimes qualified, within interviews as a whole,

where there were difficulties associated with, for example, children's appropriate responses to parents' advice and guidance. With adolescent and older children, however, trust for Don, Trefor, Sylvester, and Brandon was even more contingent, especially as children and young people gained more autonomy. For example, Don was unwilling to discuss some of the activities of his oldest adult son, because of *'what he has done to us'*.

The sense of reciprocity regarding trust, affection, pleasure, and emotional support within men's accounts about children is strong. However, men's awareness about how their emotional support for children may impact upon their health was limited, often remaining implicit, in spite of my prompts. Furthermore, reciprocity and trust was certainly not evident in the ways in which men addressed their own perceived vulnerability. Indeed, Whitehead (2002) has argued that trust may be very challenging as it requires men to stop attempting to establish some control within relationships. As will become clear in Chapter Eight, it was, ironically, the non-rational fear of disclosure of private matters to others, that was associated with specific forms of masculinity about perceived vulnerability. Furthermore, it is also important to emphasise that stories about children involved more detailed, concrete examples of pleasure, emotional intimacy, listening, and encouragement than the stories men produced about their women partners.

6.3 WOMEN PARTNERS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PROVIDERS OF HELP AND SUPPORT TO MEN.

My experience in health visiting, reading of the literature (for example, Henderson and Brouse, 1991), and findings from the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) were linked to my anticipation that women partners may be the key individuals in

providing support to men within families. However, the activities of women partners within families were often subsumed within men's accounts within more abstract stories about the family. At times, within some interviews, women's activities were settled, normalised, perhaps even taken for granted contributions, which required careful attempts to elicit information. Nevertheless, women partners were identified as the most important helpers for men providing information, advice, emotional support, help in communicating with others, but also helping men develop relationships with other people, in other families.

At times of personal difficulty, when men were experiencing stress related to parenting or work, when men had concerns about their health, when they were ill, or men encountered racist abuse, prejudice or discrimination it was women partners that men within this study indicated they were most likely to confide in regarding their concerns, if they were to confide in anyone. At times of difficulty for men '*kindness*', '*love*', '*comfort*', and '*solace*' were terms used to describe the emotional support provided by women partners, which was especially needed, for example, for Oliver, John, Terrence and Ron at a time of insecurity associated with ongoing restructuring within the motor companies where they worked. However, in contrast, the help of women partners was also available, all men indicated, in dealing with day to day experiences linked to living with children, including, for example, difficulties men may experience with their children's behaviour, young people's developing autonomy, or difficulties children experience at school. For example, Paul's wife was 'very supportive' in helping him resolve his concern about gaining legal 'access' to one of his daughters, who lived with a previous girlfriend. Experiences of racial prejudice, abuse or discrimination could be shared with women partners for some of the African-Caribbean men (Brandon, Terrence, Liam) as they were confident their partners would understand such experiences. For

example, Terrence told me:

She knows what I mean. She has had to put with that 'Black bastard' stuff. We both get pissed off, but we can have a laugh about them thick scum too!

(Terrence, 'Black British', production line worker).

Most men, who participated in the second interview, also suggested that women partners helped them understand how valuable they were, as Don put it: 'She tells me I am good at these things'. It is interesting that, by the time of the second interview, Ron had a new partner, and at this time he seemed more relaxed, less stressed and there were far less absolute statements of uncertainty within his narratives. These experiences contrast with Ron's first interview, after he had recently separated from his wife, when the absence of a woman partner was specifically associated with isolation and uncertainty:

...but I have been saying that for a long time that something has gotta change soon. I think now wouldn't it be good if I met somebody...but I don't want to put myself on the shelf. But everybody wants somebody I think. I don't like casual relationships, its another problem. What do I know?

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

Relationships with women partners, according to all men's stories, did, however, have limitations. These perceived limitations related to differing emphasis, between men and women, regarding, for example, decisions about money and financial issues, the volume and timing of domestic tasks, or differences between partners in how they dealt with children's behaviour. Interestingly, two men questioned their partners' communication skills with children, or with themselves. For example,

Liam believed that his partner was far less patient with his youngest daughter than was required. Also Steve's partner worked long hours, rarely taking holidays, and often was not as available to talk with him, as he would wish. While, as will become clearer shortly, men often talked about women as having better communication skills than themselves, John, Steve and Martin identified their sisters, or brothers, as able to provide support in the form of listening as well as, or instead of, their women partners.

There is within men's accounts, about women partners, a strong sense of both trust, sometimes talked about in absolute terms. That trust, was associated with men and women's shared purpose in parenting, and the ongoing availability of women to help men with information, advice, listening, encouragement or reassurance regarding a range of issues. In contrast to these stories is the recurring evidence, within the accounts of most men within this study, that the potential availability of support from trustworthy women, is not always realised by actually accessing their help. Indeed Wethington and Kessler's (1986) findings indicated that perceived support may be more important than actually receiving 'social support' for some people. This perceived potential help, as opposed to actually received help, was particularly evident where men's health concerns, or more intense difficulties in personal relationships, were experienced. With the specific exceptions of John and Trefor, men's accounts indicated that support around issues of vulnerability could remain in the abstract, rather than concretely acquired, as Peter indicated:

If the problem was between us it would have to be sorted out between us first...but that's all theoretical at the moment, because we never really talk about those sorts of things.

(Peter, 'British and White', office equipment planner and fitter).

Using the help of women partners was also contingent for Brandon, Don and Peter upon the perceived implications of such practices on their 'independence', or 'self sufficiency' from other people. For example, Don talked to me about a future strike within the fire service:

If I couldn't deal with it myself, and if I had to talk to someone about it, it would probably be my wife. But I would prefer not to talk to anybody if I thought I could sort it out myself because I am very independent.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

However it was not just Don, Peter, Terrence and Brandon with their more traditional patriarchal views regarding the leading role of the man in the family, that were involved in limiting their own support provided by women partners. Avoiding 'weakness' or 'not being a wimp' or being 'strong' was often also associated with men's identities as men, within narratives where issues of perceived vulnerability were addressed. 'Strength' was sometimes necessary in order to not 'burden' partners about men's difficulties. For example, Steve, after discovering that he had a testicular lump, waited three or four weeks to see his local doctor, and did not 'burden' his wife until the diagnosis had been confirmed, as benign, by a hospital consultant some months later:

I think because she is involved in the medical field it tends to be a bit more worrying when it's somebody you care about. When you're involved with somebody it's a lot harder to step back from that.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

In this example, even Steve's wife's background in health work, as a nurse, was interpreted as a disadvantage in dealing with his 'burden'. Men may chose to think, feel and act alone regarding some difficulties, and, for all men participating in the second interview, there was something about the experience of being a man that was associated with not talking to women about their experiences. This line of discussion will be further developed in Chapter Eight.

All men indicated that their women partners were people they could trust, and some men suggested that their partners were the most trustworthy individuals in their lives. Trust in women partners was most often linked to the sharing of responsibilities within the family, for example, shared activities with children, shared commitments to providing income through work, or shared activities for maintaining the home. Although this investigation did not directly address sexualness within relationships, some men made it explicit that their partners were sexually faithful, and others confirmed their women partners were honest about their sexualness. Other men emphasised the importance of women preventing 'gossip' by people outside of the immediate family, or their women partner's could be relied on to keep information confidential from other family members, or non-family people. Women helped with 'keeping problems at home', as John put it. However, strong statements about absolute trust in women partners, were not always consistent with stories about the disclosure of more private matters that involved vulnerability. It will become clear in Chapter Eight that men's unwillingness to trust women with vulnerability is associated with specific discourses about masculinity, rather than a perceived lack of trust in women as such.

Brown's (1986) research suggested that women partners provided the greatest part

of men's interpersonal support needs. For men within this study the potential or actual availability of women partners' help with providing income through paid work, childcare, domestic labour, listening, advice, information, and encouragement is evident within narratives. However at the same time, trust and reciprocity for men within this study is highly contingent, and is associated with solitary activities by men, and also associated with specific forms of masculinity. Indeed, there is little explicit sense that men have insights into how men's health may be influenced by such experiences with women, in ways that Stansfield et al (1998), for example, have indicated that emotional support may have a protective affect on mental health.

6.4 FATHERS' CONTRIBUTION: THE DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH 'TALKING' WITH WOMEN PARTNERS.

In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), I had investigated fathers' access to others help, without considering men's potential contributions to families. However, within the review of the literature it was argued that there may be limitations to men's contributions, specifically regarding men's exploitation of women (Doyal, 1999), or men may not be perceived as being 'grown-ups', as assets, within families (Williams, 1997). Hence, exploring and analysing men's support for women has been undertaken, within this study.

Notwithstanding the perceived limitations of women partners, as identified by men, a way that men talked about their relationships with women, was through attempting to understand their women partners, although most men indicated they did not ever fully understand them. This understanding was developed over time, narratives indicated. One of the ways that some men attempted to help their understanding of their partners, to sustain their relationships, and avoid conflict was

through 'listening' and 'talking'. All men suggested that time to talk, as a couple, without children being around, was limited. There were activities at the end of the day, when both partners may be tired, such as sitting watching television, where some talk took place, some men indicated. However, some men (John, Steve, Peter, Oliver, and Brandon) did say they 'ought' or 'should' talk more with their partners, in a similar way in which men talked about they themselves 'ought' to lose body weight. Indeed Steve, John, Trefor, and Brandon all used the following phrase: 'I don't think people talk enough'. The idea that talking in relationships was a 'good' thing recurs for most men, except Sylvester. For Terrence, talking with his partner was a 'should', but it is was also very tiring, he indicated. Sylvester was even more explicit about the tensions around 'talking' with his partner. For example, talking was sometimes done reluctantly, after a hard physical day doing plastering within the building industry:

You don't want to be talking, no. You don't want to hear nothing about problems. You just want your brain rested. Sometimes you don't get that chance, because you come back and have to deal with the home. If you don't try and deal with that, it becomes a problem, and you have friction with your wife, which you don't want.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

Furthermore, for many men participating in the second interview, there was also a pattern where men indicated that most of the talking, between men and women, was done by women. Women were consistently identified as being more practised, confident and skilled talkers than men. Indeed for some men (Brandon, Sylvester and Peter) women's success at talking was associated with influence over how some decisions within families are made. These perceived gender differences

between men and women's 'talking' will be developed in Chapter Eight. However, it is important to emphasise that the quality of men's own 'talking' is questioned by most men. In the example below, Ron emphasised how important talking was, but his skills in this respect may be more limited than his woman friend:

I am probably the world's worst at not talking. Annette says we have got to talk about this. We had, not an argument, but an upset. I thought it had gone away, but it hadn't and I got upset. But we still sorted things out, so talking is very, very important.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

When I read such excerpts I speculated about whose value on talking is represented in discourses here: was it the women, or the men themselves? As Paul suggested 'I don't talk enough, my wife tells me'. It was as if, men, who may not necessarily want talk, were providing a normative response, that talking is a good thing, for the researcher (who they may guess or know 'talks' for a living), in the same way that avoiding 'crap' food was also identified as 'good' thing in the previous chapter. The value placed on talking may be a 'public' account (Cornwell, 1984) for the researcher. This latter point is reinforced by the ways in which 'talking' is also devalued by men within this study. For example, Steve asserted the importance of 'talking', but also devalued that talking in two ways in the excerpt below. Here he distanced himself from 'babbling' by others, which may imply incoherence, and also argued that when he was talking about a subject he can be a 'bore', that is, what he said may be uninteresting to others:

I am not somebody who constantly babbles away. When I have a subject I can get my teeth into I suppose I can be a bore.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

'Chatting', or 'babbling', or 'gossiping' were terms used by men to describe women's talking. I would argue that this may be significant, as the devalued, trivial 'chat' may potentially have helped create communication with others, that could lead to accessing help, at a time of need. Nevertheless, while talk may be devalued by some men, it was, in fact, the more instrumental nature of talking (as opposed to 'trivia') that was often valued by most men within this study. Indeed, even valuing instrumentality, I would argue, indicates something about the emotional desire for rational control within communication with others (as Seidler, 1994, has also argued).

Furthermore, difficulties experienced by men may inadvertently be expressed to others as anger or frustration, rather than talk about sadness, anxiety or fear. John, Don and Terrence indicated that rather than talk about their concerns about work, they would sometimes shout aggressively at women or children within the family. John, Don and Terrence indicated that they 'should' not act in such a way, but while shouting at others was 'wrong', not talking to others was not talked about as being 'wrong'. Terrence told me:

Screaming and shouting. I hate myself for it.. It's wrong...No one else could stand the way it comes across, unless they were with you, or loved you.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Some men also talked about the ways they had encouraged their partners, for example with job applications, helping their partner to lose weight, or praising their success as a mother. This encouragement of women was talked about by John, and

the three actively religious Christian men (Paul, Peter and Oliver), particularly. For example, Oliver said:

I will tell her openly of my feelings towards her. I am still in love, that is the way it is, and I am quite happy with the way she is bringing up the children, and the way she cooks the food, and keeps the house, and she goes out to work as well. ...I think she is doing very well.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

Interestingly, while all men were keen to provide detailed accounts of how they attempted to encourage their children, there were far less concrete stories regarding encouragement for women partners. Similarly, while some men talked about listening being a 'good' thing that they 'ought' to do for their women partners, only Martin, John, Oliver and Steve provided specific concrete stories about how they helped create situations where they could listen to partners. One example, however, illustrates the importance of listening, to women, for some men:

I mean, when I picked her up on Thursday as she finished late, as soon as I saw her I knew she had got a problem. You could see it. She wasn't talking to them (work colleagues) with animosity when she was saying 'tarraa', but you knew something had gone on there, so I asked her straight out

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

There is more limited reflexivity within men's accounts about listening, than talking. However, while most men indicated that they were less skilled talkers than women, they also indicated that they were less skilled listeners. This extract, from Don again, illustrates this point:

...unfortunately being a stereotypical male I should probably listen more. I might be there in the room the time my wife is talking about something, and I don't listen properly. And we generally need to listen as opposed to just be available.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Men's perceived limitations as communicators, were often explained as being associated with constraints provided by other priorities and obligations men may have, including involvement with children, paid work and domestic responsibilities. For example, some men acknowledged that the difficulties associated with negotiation and sharing of obligations with women, within families, may affect their communication with women partners. And most men also talked about the tiredness, or even exhaustion, experienced by them, which they indicated prevented them from talking and listening. As Brandon said:

To be comfortable you have to put the graft in and the effort in. So if that means you have got to work sixty hours a week and then come home... you are not going to want to be the most loving person. You just want to come home, eat your dinner, sit in front of the TV and sigh.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Liam and Martin indicated that a man's interest in children may be associated with less communication with women partners. Interestingly, five fathers compared their activities as father and partner, and where they did this they all indicated that they were better fathers than partners. Indeed being a father was actually explicitly more enjoyable than being a partner, Brandon and Terrence suggested. While Terrence

and Brandon's responses were not typical of men's narratives, as a whole, there seemed a greater sense of pleasure for all men when they talked about time with children, when compared with stories about time with women partners. The complex requirements of understanding, negotiating, talking and listening with adult women, for many men, were experienced as being much more difficult than involvement with children. For example, Oliver who was a man who consistently praised his wife within interviews, said:

I am a better father than a husband. Children are easier. I know the children fairly well. I can tell you what they will eat and what they won't, what they will wear and what they won't. I think I know the children better than I know my wife.

(Oliver, 'West Indian', maintenance electrician).

Furthermore, within the interviews I never asked if men loved their children or their partners. Yet men's strong feelings of love for children have been identified in Chapter Four. In contrast, only one man, Oliver, said that he 'loves', and 'is in love' with his wife. Findings within this study do not challenge Duncombe and Marsden's (1993) findings from a survey of heterosexual relationships, which indicated that emotional intimacy is a desire by women that is not always necessarily met within relationships with men.

Can women partners trust men? Unsurprisingly all men confirmed that they were trustworthy, some men said they were 'absolutely' trustworthy, and that trust with partners was reciprocated. However, sexual faithfulness was a more problematic issue as one man talked about a previous sexual 'affair', and another man said he had had 'some problems with other women in the past'. However, men's limited

expressiveness regarding emotionality, men's limited talk with women about health concerns or specific difficulties in certain relationships were not seen as issues of trust or mistrust.

Men within this study were reflexive about their communication skills, they did value reciprocity with partners about instrumental obligations within families and work, and they did talk about 'talk' with women as something they 'should' do, although men also preferred more instrumental talk. There is no sense that men did not care for their women partners. However regarding men's perceived vulnerability, then trust and reciprocity was highly contingent. Notwithstanding the identified limitations that women partners are perceived to have, there is no sense within findings that women partners were incapable or incompetent helpers for men, which Thoits (1995) has speculated may be potentially psychologically damaging for recipients of 'social support'. However, all the men's accounts, from the second interview, did indicate that talking and listening with women partners could be too long, or too trivial or too stressful, as Sylvester, for example indicated:

If I have got something to say I will say it, and I get a reply. If she wants to talk it is a long drawn out conversation about something interesting or personal, or trivia. If it is a long drawn out conversation half way through I don't want to know... It causes more stress.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English, plasterer').

Indeed some men (Trefor, Paul, Oliver, Martin, and John) were aware of the potential or actual personal costs of helping other people with their experiences of stress, which is consistent with Freund and McGuire's (1999) argument that there may be increased emotional labour involved in attempting to help deal with others'

difficulties. In addition, my methodological notes suggested that, within the recurring cycles of relaxed, formal and guarded periods within interviews, our talking and listening did seem to create some stress for most men, perhaps with the specific exception of Trefor, the social worker. The specific difficulties men had within the interview process were most often associated, in my subjective judgment, with talking and listening around emotionality. These difficulties may possibly be associated with the challenge of doing emotional work, because as Hochschild (1983) has argued, although dealing with emotions is a significant part of our lives, it also a form of labour. An unwillingness to 'let go' (Whitehead, 2002) and trust others with one's own vulnerability was also evident within the interview process. In fact, it was within the first interviews, where men initially talked about their women partners, that I became concerned about men's solitary ways of dealing with some aspects of their experience, and how such activities were also associated with discourses about masculinities. Furthermore, while in Chapter Five it was argued that, men within this study, did not generally conceptualise health in a way that involved social relationships with others, and there was also a lack of reflexivity about the potential ways in which men's perceived vulnerability may affect how they thought and felt, within their accounts about talking with women partners. I also identified limited reflexivity about how women may help men's mental health through providing support to men.

6.5 CONTINGENT TRUST AND RECIPROCALITY WITHIN EXTENDED FAMILIES.

In the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) findings indicated that 'elders' within families or wider communities, were indicated as people fathers could talk to for information or guidance, for Muslim men and Hindu men particularly. Such

narratives are not to be found within this investigation, although in Chapter Seven the social connections within Christian church communities are explored. There were, however, specific patterns regarding the potential or actual support of families, where there are important differences between the two groups of men of differing ethnic backgrounds. The perceived support of family members has an international dimension for all the African-Caribbean men, with family identified in St. Kitts, Jamaica, Canada, Trinidad, and Barbados, as well as within the Midlands in the UK. The African-Caribbean men talked about support within families within dispersed family structures, as Chamberlain (1997, 1999) has also noted. For example, Sylvester had cousins in Birmingham, but also family in Jamaica, where he intended to retire. Also, Terrence's mother and siblings lived in Birmingham, and he had family in Jamaica who were 'there for me'.. As Terrence also put it:

It's good to have them still there. It makes me feel good that I can go there sometime, anytime.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Findings here are consistent with Campbell and McClean's (2002) research that indicated that personal networks are not necessarily related to geographical space for African-Caribbean families. In contrast, the White men interviewed, did not have such dispersed family structures or contacts, and there was no equivalent sense of the availability of help from wider family members. Nevertheless all the White men had parents, siblings, cousins, or other family contacts in Birmingham or other Midlands town, but also other areas of the UK and Ireland. Trefor, specifically, had family in New Zealand, and migrated there. However while the potential help of dispersed family members is perceived to be an asset for African-Caribbean men, the actual experience of spending time with family, or friends, was also indicated as

valuable as providing a sense of shared histories, or shared cultural interests, but above all shared consumption of food, music, and other interests. Indeed, the reassurance, encouragement, or sometimes emphasis on men's sense of their worth as African-Caribbean fathers, was provided by family, within a perceived British context that may have provided structural or personal constraints for these men of ethnic minority backgrounds:

They know what it's like. It was harder for them coming here years ago. They say how good I am doing. They know I do what I can as a Dad. I do what I can.
(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

Reciprocity within families is evident, for all men in this study, regarding shared social activities within families, although accounts did not indicate the same pleasure men experienced when 'having a laugh' with men friends. However, the practical instrumental help of other family members, particularly men's mothers, or their women partner's mothers, was recognised and valued by all men, as was the information and advice provided by older people for some men (Oliver, Paul, Peter and John). Men's mothers, and their partners' mothers' contributions to help with domestic tasks and childcare, particularly, were considerable. As Brandon put it, in relation to the difficulties of arranging childcare when both parents may be working:

'There have been times when we would have been up the creek if they weren't around'.
(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Indeed for Ron, his mother had, by the time of the second interview, agreed to become a registered childminder in order to sleep over, and care for Ron's children

while he worked four night shifts each week. Older men did not play a major part in men's accounts of social connectedness within extended families, although some informants indicated that some older men did assist older women with childcare, or older men provided information and advice about instrumental issues, (such as decisions about buying a house for Paul). There was also evidence of instrumental reciprocity, regarding the mending and maintenance tasks, that many of the men (except Trefor) had performed, such as plumbing, gardening, carpentry, or decorating for parents or 'in-laws'.

There was not the equivalent interview material regarding older members of extended families, which corresponds to men's stories about talking and listening with children and women partners. Distinctively, at the time of his hospitalisation with meningitis, Paul began to value the emotional support of his partner's parents:

Now the mother and father in law, we went on holiday with them and we got a lot closer. Because I'm in a mixed marriage and we really got on well, and when I was in hospital, they were really supportive, looking after the children, and supporting me when I was in hospital. They came a lot. It was good of them.
(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

Notwithstanding Paul's experience, a pattern within narratives, regarding older people within families, indicated the importance of the abstract perceived availability of the support of others as being valued by men. That is, support was valued as being potentially available, but may never have been concretely attained by informants. However, men's sense of vulnerability was more likely to be disclosed to men's partners, or they may have thought and acted alone.

The limits to reciprocity, and the highly contingent nature of trust in older people within families was associated, for some men, with anticipated or actual negative experiences with family members. For Liam, Terrence, John, Sylvester, and Steve differences with other family members influenced what they disclosed to others. For example, Liam perceived that his extended family members did not approve of his decision to give up paid work, and help care for his daughter. Experiences of actual or potential intrusions, 'gossip', unwanted advice, or others negative judgements was associated with support that was negotiated and qualified. For example, Steve, indicated that the information regarding his testicular lump had to be 'managed' by him within his extended family to prevent it becoming a nuisance:

I was very relieved when I got the final all clear. But I was a little bit concerned about it. I thought there was no point worrying until there was something to worry about, and I knew once Mel [Steve's partner] knew, my mother would know and other family members would know. And it would get blown out of all proportion...that would be the potential nuisance, it would get out and people would start. Because a lot of family members are involved in the medical field, but it can be difficult. So you tend to keep it under wraps until I new what I was dealing with.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Nevertheless the argument outlined so far is not intended to suggest that all family members, other than women partners, are not trusted with personal or emotional issues. For some men, sisters, brothers and 'sisters-in-law' were important figures. For example, Martin and John suggested that their sisters were better listeners than their partners, and Steve and Paul indicated that their older brothers were good listeners and good friends. To illustrate this point, John indicated that he 'went

through quite a bit' with his sister as children, and she recognised his success as a father:

She says you are a really good fella, and stuff like that. I get good feedback. Its great.... I know she is always there for me, and I hope I am for her.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

While some men's sisters and brothers are valued by men for their instrumental help and their shared social activities, it is the continuity of these relationships over time, the shared histories that are associated with less contingent trust in some siblings, when compared with older people in families. This strong sense of trust is linked to an ongoing sense of availability of support by some siblings. Concerns about work or fathering are shared with some siblings. For Brandon, Terrence, Paul, and Liam sharing experiences of racial prejudice or abuse was also possible with siblings. In this latter respect the shared critical talk about racists with extended family members is enjoyed and valued by these African-Caribbean men, specifically. Nevertheless the help of others within families was again highly contingent, as men negotiated who to involve with their concerns, while ultimately men may think and act alone:

If I was worried I wouldn't tell my mum because she's got blood pressure and she worries a lot and it's no good for her. I wouldn't tell my mum. It depends, I probably speak more to my brother more than even my wife. I don't really want to bother her. If not I'd keep it to myself and deal with it somehow.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

Thoits (1995) has speculated that one close confiding relationship may be more valuable to some individuals than a large network of potentially less supportive relationships. Findings here indicated that many family members are valued in differing ways by men within this study, but women partners are the most significant providers of emotional support for men. Melson et al's (1993) research indicated that accessing the help of others, outside the primary relationship with a woman, may inhibit fathers' sense of personal control, and trust in other family members may therefore be proscribed. However the disclosure of vulnerability was negotiated by men, in this study, on the basis of their individual judgements about people, and those trusted with stresses, health concerns or personal difficulties were often woman partners, but for some men their siblings were also important.

6.6 MEN FRIENDS: THE PLEASURE AND LIMITATIONS OF 'HAVING A LAUGH'

Men's friendships with other men were highly valued by all men within this study. Men did talk about women friends and acquaintances, at times, and most men found women helpful and friendly regarding their experiences as fathers. Nevertheless it was the pleasure of companionship, identified within a multiplicity of stories about other men, that this section of the chapter addresses.

Rather like men's accounts regarding their women partners, men all asserted the reciprocal trust that was part of their friendships with men, and, again, some men talked about absolute trust in their friends. For example, for Don, his friend, who he has known since childhood, was 'absolutely trustworthy':

I trust him absolutely. We are both too even minded blokes, and like I say we

know each other very well...I mean, if I have got a big problem he will come over here or I will go over there. It is not an over the phone type of thing. It would suit me if he lived closer.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Aspects of mutual trustworthiness, within friendships with other men, included mutual respect, honesty, keeping confidences, but particularly the mutual availability of men for each other when needed. 'Availability' for practical help, advice or information was rather like 'being there' for children, or 'talking' with women partners, or not eating 'crap' food, as it was indicated as something men 'ought' to do. However, availability to others was influenced by changes within friendships associated, within men's accounts, with: mobility, migration, and the demands of work or family responsibilities. In spite of these changes, men's friendships with other men were identified as being important because of their continuity over time, rather like men's stories about siblings.

The three men who were actively involved with their church communities, that is Peter, Oliver and Paul, had, they suggested, gained many friends through their church communities, although those friendships were sometimes shared within families, rather than exclusively for them as men. Issues of social connectedness and spirituality will be addressed in more detail within the next chapter.

Part of men's friendships with men involved shared talk about experiences of fathering, where there was evidence of reciprocity with men friends. Ongoing day to day issues about children could and were shared with other men. For example, in the following extract, I, (Bob), asked Paul about his friend.

Paul: ... because he used to ask me about my children. And he hasn't been married that long, and this was his first child... I was just trying to reassure him, I suppose, and how to hold them babies... Just things like that which were new to him.

Bob: So you were helpful to him. Was he helpful to you?

Paul: Yes, he was. I think he sees me as having more experience, he asks what I'm doing today, ... his son is probably seven months now and he's rushing off to go somewhere. So we talk about what we're doing and how they're eating. The baby doesn't want the savoury stuff, just the sweet stuff.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor)

There was a pattern, within informant's stories, regarding sharing experiences of fathering, but that did not involve men sharing more difficult experiences of being a father with other men. These experiences were more likely to be shared with women partners. However, for Terrence, specifically, time with his friends was for having a good time, 'having a laugh', and not talking about children, an issue that will be developed shortly.

There is also a pattern of reflexivity about ethnicity and friendships within the accounts of many of African-Caribbean men, but not the White men, within this study. All of the African-Caribbean men, but only two of the White men (Don and John) indicated that they had friendships with men of differing ethnic backgrounds, which is consistent with Campbell and McLean's (2002) findings about African-Caribbean people, specifically. Furthermore, there was also reflexivity, within the stories of African-Caribbean men, about the importance of their men friends sharing the same ethnic backgrounds as themselves. While statements about the absolute trustworthiness of men friends is shared by both ethnic groups of men, in contrast

some African-Caribbean men (Paul, Brandon, and Terrence) indicated that there may be more reciprocal trust shared with African-Caribbean men, particularly associated with the shared experiences of difficulties, including racism, with White people. For example, Paul said:

We talk about what we'd like to do to them. 'Let's go round and sort them out!'

I know we wouldn't do it now... I wouldn't mind though...(laughs). No, I'm joking. We might have, before we had kids... (laughs)

(Paul, 'African-Caribbean', fitness instructor).

However, relationships between African-Caribbean men friends were not solely about responses to prejudice, or discrimination, but also about shared histories as friends. Stories about shared interests in consumption of clothes, leisure, sports, music and other forms of culture that were perceived as positive aspects of such friendships. In this sense there was empathy and solidarity, shared between African-Caribbean men, as Franklin (1992) has also suggested is the case for some African-American men in the USA. However, as will become clear, this form of reciprocity did not necessarily extend to dealing with men's perceived vulnerabilities, unless in relation to racism, but did involve the pleasure of 'having a laugh' with other men.

One of the most important aspects of men's experiences of friendships with men was the emphasis all men, involved in the second interview, placed upon the importance of the pleasure they had with their men friends, within stories that were quite unlike their stories about women partners. In fact, there were more similarities, in men's accounts about other men, to their stories about experiences of pleasure with children, than their accounts about women partners. However, men

friends provided a different kind of pleasure. The experience of 'having a laugh' with other men recurs within narratives for most men. 'Having a laugh' was understood by informants as quite different experiences to other relationships. 'Having a laugh' involved relaxation, (sometimes called 'release' by Don). Relaxation was associated with shared consumption of alcohol or food, the companionship and play with others within the pub, or within other activities such as sports, electronic games, or physical activities within a gym. When men were 'having a laugh', talking was less about the mundane aspects of family life, and more about joking as a way of talking about consumption, sports, sex, work, fathering, racism, or relationships with others. For some men 'having a laugh' also involved talk about shared histories with men, the 'old times', as Oliver termed it. Alternatively the shared humour may be related to more competitive 'banter' between men, which was also perceived as pleasurable. These activities could be stimulating or relaxing, but were enjoyed as being qualitatively different experiences to the responsibilities of paid work or families:

... it's great. It's away from work and from the missus. I chill. It's my 'local', people know me, and some of the lads are a good laugh....we talk about everything, work, sports, all kind of sports, football.

(Terrence, 'Black British', production line worker).

Experiences with other men were associated within most accounts as enabling men to be 'themselves', or even to be 'bad', as Don put it, with their friends, without feeling the constraints that they experience elsewhere in their lives. Analysis of narratives indicated that findings are consistent with Nardi's (1998) work, in the respect that Nardi has argued that men's friendships with men may allow them to depart from social expectations and constraints, and display themselves in ways that

are less effected by social control. In this sense men's friendships were pleasurable as transgressive, in a similar way that 'binge' drinking was identified as pleasurable in the previous chapter. Indeed 'having a laugh' was transgressive within the context of men's restricted agency, associated with work and family obligations. Pahl (2000) has also argued that contemporary friendships are 'postmodern' relationships having differing degrees of intimacy and flexibility, in contrast to traditional family structures where responsibilities and obligations may more influential. While the pleasure in relationships with men involved a distinct contrast with family obligations, there is no evidence here of the intimacy that Pahl (2000) has identified. Franklin's (1992) work on the friendships of African-American men in the USA, again emphasised the importance of friendship in mens' lives, with findings that indicate trust, empathy and intimacy exists between African-American men. Reciprocal trust is evident for both groups of men within this study, but trust is contingent with intimacy being highly limited within stories. Nardi (1998) has also argued that intimate friendships between heterosexual men may be inhibited by homophobia, and negative images of homosexuality. Evidence within accounts about men's friends do not confirm Nardi's work, but the constraints of masculinities and their links to sexuality are addressed in Chapter Eight. Furthermore, while friendships with men may be characterised as less affected by social constraints, Terrence, John and Don both indicated that the combination of alcohol consumption and competitive banter did sometimes lead to conflict and aggression within the context of the pub.

Some friendships with men are not without tensions and constraints, and the evidence of reciprocity between fathers within both Liam's and Ron's narratives was more limited. Ron was the main carer for his children, and Liam had given up paid work. Both men found some men friends as lacking in understanding about

their experiences. For example, Liam, specifically, explained how he perceived his men friends responded to his decision to stop work, in order to teach and care for his daughter:

... this has ostracised me from a lot from friends because their culture is work, work and then rest, talk about football. But everything I do is work, there isn't a free moment and the breaks are aimed at giving my wife and family some release.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Ron and Liam's experiences of multiple life difficulties provided insight into a broader issue that is also relevant to other men's friendships with men. Specifically, only John and Don identified 'talking' or 'listening' as an aspect of an available, and trustworthy male friend. Talking about children was certainly evident for all men in their accounts about men friends. However, illness, health concerns, the psychological experience of stress, and other forms of perceived vulnerability, which may have involved dealing with difficult emotions, is not generally identified as being part of men's relationships with other men. There was no equivalent reflexivity within men's stories about 'talking' to men, that was certainly evident within men's accounts about children and women partners. There were, however, exceptions to this pattern. For John, specifically, men friends were important as sources of advice, practical help, information, company, and emotional support, as well as humour. John's accounts were quite distinctive, in that he attempted to establish reciprocity and trust regarding personal issues with men friends, even within the environments of the workplace or the pub. Such stories about talking and listening were not typical of the narratives of men as a whole. Even the three men who were active in Christian church communities, who were confident about the

shared love of their church communities, did not talk about disclosing vulnerability to men friends. Expression of anger or frustration regarding, for example, work insecurity or the stereotyping of African-Caribbean boys in school, was evident within some men's accounts, but sadness, fear and anxiety were generally not experiences shared with other men. While the perceived potential availability of help from men friends is evident, trust and reciprocity with men friends is highly contingent, as Don's story, below, exemplifies:

Don: I can offer him anything he has offered me in the past, when he has stood by me and been there as moral support with independent thoughts, any number of things. I would like to think I could do the same that he has given to me.

Bob: Have you ever had chance to do that?

Don: I haven't to be honest, no, but that is great because while he doesn't need that support he is doing alright for himself.

Bob: Does he know you are there to help him, if he should need it?

Don: I don't know, I have no idea, I have never actually said it. But if ever I thought there was a situation arising that he may need some help then I would offer it so he would know I was here.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Don had previously indicated that he had an 'absolutely' trustworthy friend 'for life', but he had not had the chance to help, and, indeed, that friend may have had no idea about Don's availability to help. The evident reciprocity regarding fathering with men, the mutual availability of men for help with instrumental matters, the companionship of men, the shared experiences of ethnicity and racism, the relaxation shared with other men, and in particular the pleasure of 'having a laugh' did not provide, with individual exceptions, opportunities for men to give or

receive support with other men when perceived vulnerability was at stake. Certainly, thinking and acting alone by men, when dealing with vulnerability, did not seem to be challenged by 'having a laugh' with other men, as Sylvester's experience illustrates:

You might have something to talk about with a friend, but in the back of your mind your friend might not know about it. You think you have trust, but sometimes you have just got to keep it in and let it work itself out.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, then English', plasterer).

6.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

There was reciprocity evident within the more reflexive discourses of the African-Caribbean men regarding ethnicity and social connectedness, forms of reflexivity that were absent from White men's accounts. Internationally dispersed family structures, and identified links with the West Indies, were perceived to be assets to African-Caribbean men, as Chamberlain (1997, 1999) has also identified. The pleasures of 'having a laugh' with men friends, and the shared help of women partners, friends and extended family members in critically talking about experiences of prejudice, abuse or discrimination is evident also. However such shared experiences were not merely responses to objectification of these men by others, but were positive experiences of shared histories, culture and consumption, and were also associated with men being valued as African-Caribbean fathers.

However, analysis of men's accounts indicated that there were more similarities between African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences of social connectedness, within families and friendships, than there were differences. Within

informant narratives, no one confiding relationship was identified as essential in helping men with their lives, but women partners were consistently identified as the key people to assist men with experiences that may not be disclosed to others outside the immediate family (as Brouse and Henderson, 1991, and Melson et al, 1993, have argued). Women also offered men help men in dealing with the day to day activities of caring for children. Women helped mediate with children, especially as women were understood, by men, to have had more expertise as talkers and listeners.

While reciprocity and trust within families and friendships was nearly always qualified or contingent for men within this study, men did enjoy shared social activities with friends and family, and the more mundane aspects of fathering children was shared with friends or family. Reciprocity regarding information, advice and practical help was evident within the discourses of men regarding siblings, older people within families, men friends, women and children. Within men's discourses there was reflexivity about their communication skills, their talking and listening, with women and children. Informants also did talk about encouraging children, encouraging emotional expressiveness in children, and encouraging neighbourliness and friendships in children. Men did enjoy the company of friends and family, but it was the particular pleasures of involvement with children, or the transgressive pleasure of 'having a laugh' with men friends that they seemed to enjoy talking about most of all. There was less evident pleasure within men's accounts about women, than there was within men's accounts about men friends or children. There were not the same range of concrete stories about listening to, or encouraging women, when compared with stories about children. The constraints of paid work, and obligations to meet children's needs were

identified as influencing men's relationships with women, and only one man indicated he loved, or was 'in love' with his wife.

There is also evidence within this chapter that men in this study did benefit from relationships with friends and family, in ways that impacted on their health, particularly their psychological health, although evidence within their accounts is often implicit. The help of women in listening to, and responding to men's experiences, of racism, work and fathering may have the protective affect on mental health that Kessler and McLeod (1984), Stansfield et al (1998), and others have all identified. Indeed, even children also seemed to help men with relaxation, to help ameliorate some stress, and help with their sense of worth as fathers, although children did not seem to make the demands about 'talking' regarding emotionality that women partners did. Even though 'having a laugh' with other men did not challenge men's solitary ways of dealing with perceived vulnerability, men friends did help provide some relaxation, help ameliorate stress, and was certainly enjoyed as a form of autonomy in the broader context of the men's restricted sense of agency, identified in the previous chapter. Furthermore the potential availability of support from others, if needed, was valued by all men within this study, consistent with Wethington and Kessler's (1986) findings.

While the potential availability of support from others is significant within men's accounts, analysis of narratives increasingly pointed towards limitations in men's social connectedness to others. Specifically, how men dealt with health concerns relating to their own or others health, and how they dealt with experiences of more intense personal difficulties within relationships with others indicated limitations to men's social connectedness with others. Concerns about 'gossip' or unwanted advice from others was an important issue in men's decisions to keep 'problems at

home', and to be more likely shared with women partners, (which is consistent with Melson et al's, 1993, findings). However, men within this study indicated that where they felt vulnerable they may think, feel and act alone. Indeed such experiences were often associated within men's narratives as avoiding 'weakness', being 'strong, or being a 'strong' man, or being an 'independent' man, or not being 'a wimp'. Such discourses about masculinity and 'solitary discourses and practices' will be developed in Chapter Eight.

Emotional reciprocity with other adults is limited within men's accounts. Expressions of anger or frustration were evident where men talked about work insecurity, or prejudice, for example, or men talked about experiences of drinking alcohol with other men, but talk about sadness, fear and anxiety within men's stories was highly limited. In addition, men indicated that their communication skills with women and children, their talking and listening, was not as good as they would have wished, and that they perceived women to be the skilled talkers and listeners within families. In addition, many men devalued talk, especially non-instrumental talk. Furthermore many men indicated that they sometimes experienced talking and listening with women partners particularly, as stressful, especially where difficult feelings were involved.

Within men's accounts of social connectedness with friends and family, particularly where they talked about their women partners, men's practices for social connectedness became increasingly an issue that raised further questions. Men's limited insights into the health benefits of the support provided for them by others, particularly women partners, is evident. Indeed, the evidence of men's limitations regarding emotional reciprocity and trust, the limitations to their communication skills, the stress associated with communication with trustworthy women partners,

and the solitary ways men dealt with vulnerability did not provide evidence of specific health outcomes for men, but identified difficulties with practices for social connectedness with others. In the next chapter it is intended to establish the extent to which neighbours, local organisations and spaces, local professionals, and work settings influence men's experiences of fathering and health, but also to examine men's practices for social connectedness with others in wider social settings.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS WITHIN LOCALITY AND WORKPLACES.

7.1 INTRODUCTION.

In Chapter Six women partners, children, family members and friends were identified as important people that men may help, or access help from, in a variety of forms. Yet men's difficulties in talking to women partners, the limited trust and reciprocity with others, and the emerging pattern of solitary ways men address issues regarding their perceived vulnerability, were all identified as significant. In this chapter it is therefore intended to explore men's social connections within the wider social contexts of communities and workplaces. Putnam's (1995, 1996, 2000) political interest in 'social capital', has taken place alongside an historic concern about the health benefits of social cohesion and social integration, within the work of Durkheim (1951) or more recently Wilkinson (1996). Empirical research addressing the links between health and social capital, (for example, Kaplan et al., 1994) have that higher levels of mortality are associated with 'low quality' social relationships.

This chapter, however, does not attempt to measure 'social capital', but analyses the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness and linkages with fathering and health, within a series of interdependent themes. Initially 'Ethnicity, local identity and neighbourliness' (7.2) is examined before the more negative implications of community life are considered: 'Threats, mistrust and racism within the locality' (7.3). The third theme addresses 'Men's limited experiences of social spaces, local organisations, and with welfare professionals' (7.4), before examination of discourses and practices for 'Social connectedness within Christian Church communities' (7.5), the fourth theme within this chapter. Finally 'Trust and reciprocity within workplaces' (7.7), examines men's experiences of social connectedness within work settings.

7.2 ETHNICITY, LOCAL IDENTITY AND NEIGHBOURLINESS.

Putnam (1996), amongst others, has raised a concern about the effects on communities of geographical mobility. Men's narratives confirm processes of mobility within the city of Birmingham, the Midlands, the United Kingdom, and for two of the men within this study, actual migration has taken place. Sylvester moved to the UK from Jamaica during his adolescence, and Trefor moved with his family to New Zealand, after the first interview.

Indeed the picture is more complex in that some African-Caribbean men, specifically, identified other 'communities' as being important to them, as well as Madeley, where they lived at the time of the interviews. For Paul and Oliver their Christian church communities were the most significant communities for them, (as will become clearer later in this chapter (7.5)). However, in contrast Terrence, Sylvester, Brandon, and Liam associated the concept 'community' with their ethnic identity, in the respect that they were proud about their links with other African-Caribbean friends and family. For example, Terrence said:

I am proud of being a Black man. Proud of what I have achieved. And I don't forget what my Mom and Dad did for me, nor their friends who came over with them. They had it really hard, and they made it easier for us.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Members of these latter 'communities' could be friends or relatives living within localities where men had lived as a child, or were friends or family dispersed within the city, the UK or internationally. The association with the West Indies for all African-Caribbean men is also evident as Chamberlain (1997, 1999), and Campbell and McLean (2002) have also identified. There is no equivalent reflexivity about

'community' and ethnicity within White men's accounts, with the specific exception of Trefor, whose daughter was a Maori because of his wife's Maori status.

While these individuals friends and family members were also dispersed, within the Midlands and the UK, for White men the concept 'community' was not associated with ethnicity. Within the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), for some of the Asian fathers interviewed, 'community' was associated with ethnicity. In this latter respect, geographical localities in the city (within Aston and Small Heath), were linked with specific villages within the Indian subcontinent, where ancestors may have lived or extended family members continued to live. Such continuity of relationships between specified locations in the UK and the West Indies, were not evident within narratives of men interviewed for this study, although Sylvester did hope to return to Jamaica, on retirement, and intended to live close to some members of his family. In addition, for men within this study, there is not the sense of segmentation between groups of people from differing ethnic backgrounds, within localities, that was identified in the preliminary study. Indeed, interaction between ethnic groups was valued by many men, as one of the perceived benefits of good relationships with neighbours, as will become clearer shortly. Furthermore, many men emphasised the importance of 'accepting' or 'tolerating' differing ethnic groups. This tolerance of others was most often associated with the prevention of conflict between people locally, or sometimes there was recognition of, or pleasure in, differences between ethnic groups of people living close to one another. Perceived threats to local people, associated with crime and racism, will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

The patterns shared within the narratives of the two groups of men of differing ethnic backgrounds will now be considered. Unlike some of African-Caribbean men's accounts about ethnicity and 'community', there was no explicit sense of pride in the locality where all the men within this study lived. However most men's stories did

indicate that some felt some identification with the locality within which they lived, even Liam who was deeply critical of the multiple difficulties associated with deprivation for some families. This sense of identification, within narratives, included a sense of 'belonging' for Don, Martin, and John, or 'fitting in' for Brandon, Oliver, and Liam. For example, Brandon compared the potential opportunity for his family to live in a more affluent area of the country, with his current locality. Brandon came to the following conclusion:

I am happy there. That is important. It is all very well having a nice house, but if you don't feel you fit in that house can be the loneliest place in the world.
(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Many men indicated that they liked the area in which they lived, and for some, (Trefor, Oliver, Terrence, Martin), the locality where they lived was valued for practical reasons, as it provided proximity to work, schools, or leisure facilities, for example.

When asked if there was a 'community spirit' in Madeley, all informants indicated that there was not a 'community spirit'. The idea that, in the past, people 'left their doors open' recurred in many narratives, as did the idea that, in the past, neighbours would spend a lot of time in each others' homes. Where these practices were identified, men indicated that they were gone. Some trust and reciprocity with neighbours was valued by the men, but for all of them there was also a perceived distance within relationships with neighbours, when compared with what they envisaged neighbours would have done in the past:

There is a family a few doors away and our kids play with theirs, but I wouldn't say there is a great community spirit. I think life is very different now. I think it

has changed, and people seem to be wrapped up in their own little world. People seem to work. It is not the case that 50% of people are at home all day, when one is out at work. You tend to live in your own little world.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

The reasons provided, within men's narratives, for changes in neighbours' practices, over time, included: changes in the labour market, less intimate or frequent social contact between people, less trust in others due to the fear of crime, many people's absence from the locality in daytime, or people spending little time outside of houses in the winter. Where there were activities to encourage 'community spirit' or neighbourliness, men often suggested that such activities were performed by older people, sometimes older people who may have lived locally for many years. Liam, in complete contrast, provided a distinctive, less positive and more complex view of the same locality. The effects of multiple difficulties for families who had a low income, were important in how Liam perceived his locality, for example:

...people are so preoccupied with just surviving that their preoccupation is with their home environment, not the community.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Liam's more critical perspective should be noted as a contrast with other men's narratives, yet he was the man most involved in voluntary community activities (when compared with other men within this study). Liam's experiences in this respect could not, unfortunately, be explored as he refused a second interview.

For most men, their neighbours, in Madeley, were important geographically local contacts. Neighbours, and good relationships with neighbours, that is 'neighbourliness', was identified by men as valued in a variety of different ways.

However, in my judgement the interview discussions about neighbours seemed less challenging for men, when compared with discussions regarding 'talking' with women partners. I contend that the relatively limited emotional intimacy that was perceived to exist between men and their neighbours, is important in understanding these processes. Nevertheless, men's narratives indicated that while relationships and activities for neighbourliness had changed over time, the importance of shared concerns by neighbours about children, specifically in relation to safe play, dealing with traffic or children's personal safety, were identified by men as a shared contemporary responsibility amongst local people. Many men indicated, for example, that their neighbours shared some responsibility for their children by observing, 'keeping an eye on' as Liam put it, children as they played in others' homes, in gardens, or out on the street. For example, Don told me:

Very good neighbours. Everyone looks out for each other. You are not in each others' front rooms every five minutes, but definitely neighbourliness. If my children are out on the street, and if they fell over or had an accident, or if something happened, any number of parents would come running out.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Social contact with neighbours, involving conversation, was also important for Ron, Don, Brandon, Steve, Peter and Paul. Indeed neighbours may become friends, and share social activities with some of these men, particularly on specific occasions including Christmas celebrations, fireworks parties, or summer barbecues, which may have involved 'having a laugh'. However, there was not the more serious talk about the value of 'talk' with neighbours, that was certainly evident in men's accounts about women partners. Neighbours were not the people to whom men would disclose information regarding their health, stress at work, or more difficult issues about personal relationships. The justification for men's decisions to not disclose some

issues to neighbours was linked to concerns about 'gossip', and more specifically neighbours potential negative judgements about men and their families. For example, John said:

You wouldn't want people gossiping about your personal details, you really wouldn't want that. People keep things in house.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

It was the instrumental reciprocity, with neighbours, that was emphasised as important to men, most consistently, within accounts about sharing with neighbours. Men all indicated that instrumental reciprocity did take place, for example, when a car did not start, when someone may be locked out of their home, or when someone needed a lift to the hospital. Peter, Oliver, Ron and Don suggested that instrumental help was also offered to older people, locally:

It could be my Nan. That someone is coming along to say you need to put your paper out, is what I would do. And when I am old, if I am lucky enough to live to be an old person, someone might come and say to me, you need to put your paper out. And I will say thank you very much. I treat as I would like to be treated. I like to sweep the road, we all sweep the road. Those that can't the sweep I get all the leaves out the way for them.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Respect for other's property, or other's perceived space, particularly regarding parking of cars, was also emphasised by some men as an aspect of 'good' neighbourliness. However, one of the main activities that all men emphasised as important within neighbourliness was informal or formal forms of crime prevention, for example, through Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Many men indicated that they

shared responsibility with neighbours for observing, 'watching', each other's houses, especially when neighbours were at work, or away on holiday. Brandon, the police officer, even identified vigilante-type activity taking place:

An instance is where someone crashed a car and ran off and the neighbours were chasing the fellow up the road

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Other instrumental reciprocal activities, between neighbours, included some childcare, particularly at times of difficulty or crisis for families, for example after an accident when children needed to be cared for by neighbours, while parents were elsewhere. Even where Terrence and John indicated that they had limited contact with neighbours, they both identified the benefits of a lack of conflict between neighbours, as being important to them:

There will always be some nutters, some scum, but it's pretty good round here generally. There isn't much aggro.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

Steve's account about trust in 'communities' was distinctive. Steve was active within one of his children's schools, as a school governor, which he saw as a contribution to his local 'community' life. For Steve, distinctively, trust between people was essential, he argued:

You have to have trust in people. I think if you don't people won't give you the respect and if you don't trust people, society doesn't work without trust.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

For Steve, trust in others was associated with society working well, as Putnam (1995) has argued, but such a view was not articulated by other men. While reciprocity in all narratives regarding neighbours is evident to some degree, trust within narratives is generally more contingent and qualified. Trust in others regarding property or even the care or safety of children was possible for some men, but did not extend to disclosing perceived vulnerability to neighbours. The perceived change over time in the nature of trust within communities, within some men's accounts, is also associated with more limited contact between neighbours. Nevertheless, whereas most men's friends did not live within the same locality as the men within this study, Don, Steve and Peter had friends who were also neighbours. However, Don, Steve and Peter did not use these local friends to help them deal with the health concerns or difficulties in families, even though their friends may have been deemed to be trustworthy.

Evidence from men's accounts about localities and neighbours indicated that these are not men who are socially isolated from others, which is important in the context of Kawachi et al's (1996) findings. The companionship, instrumental reciprocity, social activity, shared commitment to neighbourliness, and some trust in local people was evident in men's accounts, and such experiences were valued by men. However, evidence within narratives, analysed in this section of the chapter, does not indicate the same level of cohesive integration that some men experienced within their Christian church communities, (which will be addressed in section 7.5 of this chapter). Men's experiences within Madeley did not provide evidence of the same demands for social connectedness, particularly demands for 'talking', that their accounts about women partners provided. However, some of the African-Caribbean men were involved in relationships with others around their ethnic identities that were perceived as distinctive assets for these men.

7.3 MISTRUST, RACISM AND THREATS WITHIN LOCALITIES.

While contingent reciprocity and trust with neighbours is valued in different ways by informants within this study, all men were also aware of potential issues that contributed to mistrust within Madeley. Liam's political critique of the impact of inequality on health, and communities, which was discussed in Chapter Five, is not shared by other men within this study. Steve, Trefor and Peter identified media representations of community life as undermining trust and reciprocity between people, with ongoing media stories about crime being associated, for these three men, with the fear of crime. Nevertheless, all men did talk about their own, and other local people's concerns, about actual or potential criminal activity. Actual experience of crime was evident within men's discourses in the form of vandalism, burglaries, thefts from sheds, or car theft, although violent crime was not something that most men talked about.

While older people as neighbours were often perceived as being valuable in promoting neighbourliness, by contrast some men indicated that some children and young people may create difficulties for others within the locality. Young people were perceived as being more mobile, and having a presence, 'hanging around' as John termed it, outside homes and gardens, within shopping areas or close to local facilities. Indeed, Oliver had been involved in a campaign to close down a hostel for 'young offenders' which he perceived was linked to local crime rates. While vandalism, noise, or conflict involving young people was evident within men's stories, there were no stories about criminal gangs. However, it is also interesting that men, as fathers to children and young people, also anticipated their own children would spend more time 'hanging around' within the locality, as they became more autonomous. Indeed, some men explained the presence of young people as inevitable

within the locality, and their involvement in certain activities was temporary, as Terrence indicated:

They are only kids. They may piss around, and cause a bit of trouble. But we've all done it, and they'll grow out of it. That's what kids do. What else is there for them to do?

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

While children and young people may have created 'problems' for others, which all men indicated they would wish to prevent in their own children, talk about 'tolerance' of young people within localities was also evident in many men's narratives.

Regarding potential or actual threats within the locality, the issue which seemed to be most important to all men within this study, was potential threats to children's safety. A desire for safe play space for children was evident in many narratives, as was the desire for the control of road traffic, as a potential threat to children's safety. Men's narratives did not generally refer to violence to children or others, but the importance of children's safety was confirmed within Ron's distressing story about the abduction and sexual abuse of a child, who had attended the same school as his daughter. Ron's story was anomalous within narratives. There was not a pattern within the narratives regarding fathers' concerns about girl's and women's sexual integrity, which was evident in the stories of some Asian men in the preliminary study (Williams, 1999). However, Liam did talk about sexual harassment, experienced by his older daughter, which he associated with the other men's false interpretation of his daughter's intentions, when she wore certain items of clothing.

Another important issue, although not shared by all men, was experiences of racism within the locality. Racial prejudice, abuse, or violence was not generally

experienced by White men or their families. However, as it was argued in Chapter Five, it was the hidden uncertain nature of prejudice and discrimination that was particularly difficult for many of the African-Caribbean men interviewed. Most African-Caribbean men, (except Sylvester), and some White men, were aware of racist prejudice, or abuse, within Madeley, which was linked to people's ethnic background. Steve, specifically talked about an incident of racial violence:

I just happened to be driving down Vincent Road and there were a couple of white lads attacking an elderly Asian couple. They were just having a go at them, calling them names and pulling at their trolley. That was just sheer thuggery. I drove back and screamed and shouted at them until they ran away. I think there is more racial hatred than is let on. I think there is an undercurrent in people. I think people have a mistrust of what we don't understand and what is not like us...I think you have to overcome that and say that person is exactly like me.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Such violence was not experienced within the locality by African-Caribbean men themselves. However, Liam and Paul both talked about the stress they experienced in attempting to talk to others who they perceived to be racist. For example, Liam told me how he responded to racism in public places:

I'm saying you don't think about it. You react immediately because if you think about it, it causes stress. Like 'you should have done something', so you get it off your chest immediately and then move on.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

Interestingly, and surprisingly, all men confirmed that, to their knowledge, racist abuse, violence, or prejudice was not experienced by their children. For example, Don's African-Caribbean wife had experienced verbal racist abuse, but he did not believe his children had similar experiences. Most men also made strong statements, sometimes rather like speeches, against prejudice and discrimination, and in favour of 'tolerance' within their narratives. Even Ron, who used racist verbal abuse when involved in conflict with other motorists, indicated that prejudice against 'coloured' people was 'wrong'.

Baum's (1999) critique of Putnam's work includes the argument that Putnam's (1996) envisaged cohesive communities may also be characterised by mistrust, racism and the exclusion of outsiders, and that some networks around crime may be destructive rather than beneficial to communities. However, while some of the African-Caribbean men identified that their dispersed social connections around ethnicity were assets, there was no sense that they saw themselves as outsiders within Madeley. Furthermore, Halpern (1995) has argued that tackling the fear of crime within localities may be associated with a greater sense of safety, and diminished incidence of depression and anxiety. Mistrust within localities may also be significant, because as Berry and Rickwood (2000) have suggested, a lack of trust in others is linked to psychological distress.

7.4 MEN'S LIMITED EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL SPACES, LOCAL ORGANISATIONS, AND WITH WELFARE PROFESSIONALS.

Stimulated by my experiences within health visiting and my previous research (Williams, 1997, Williams, 1999), I had been particularly interested in exploring men's experiences of local organisations and spaces, and experiences with welfare professionals. However, men's involvement in this latter respect was highly limited.

None of the men interviewed belonged to any political organisations, although Don delivered leaflets for the local Liberal Democrat party. Some men had some trust in local government councillors, which was sometimes associated with their availability to help their families. Trust in national politicians was very limited, many men being deeply suspicious of their intentions.

Regarding local services responsible for helping people with health and parenting issues, a similar pattern was evident. All men had had contact with local doctors, midwives, health visitors, paediatricians, speech therapists, or physiotherapists in the past. Many men had visited health centres in the past, although they remembered little about such experiences, and were often uncertain about the activities of the people employed within them. All men had had contact with midwives who were valued by men, and most men indicated that they trusted midwives. However, findings are consistent with Singh and Newburn's (2003) research, in that John, Steve, Trefor, Brandon, and Paul did talk about midwives focusing their attentions on women. In addition some men talked about experiences of exclusion after the birth of babies, as Edwards (1998) has also identified.

Most men had attended some forms of education, provided by the local health service, before the birth of children, but, again, some indicated that the service seemed to be intended for women. Local doctors were also trusted, but that trust was contingent on men's individual judgements about doctor's availability, reliability, knowledge, or experience. All men within this study indicated they were not ill, but there was no sense, in contrast with Moynihan's (1998) work, that men found it difficult to access help from their doctors when they were ill. Brandon, Terrence, Don and John did, however, talk about not wasting local doctor's time, and Brandon and John talked about not wanting to 'burden' doctors.

Playgroups, 'mother and toddler groups' or parent and toddler groups operated within Madeley. Most men had not visited these organisations, although all the men indicated that their children and partners had done so. Liam, Trefor, Peter and Steve had attended a playgroup or parent and toddler group. Peter, and Liam indicated that they felt some embarrassment in attending such places because they largely involved women organisers and participants, although they did indicate that they enjoyed such experiences and usually felt welcomed.

Fathering children did enable men to be involved in some organisations. Most men were indirectly involved by supporting children's activities, for example within football teams or 'Brownies'. Such experiences did provide some social contact for men with other parents, and occasionally provided some leisure activity, for example a football team's summer barbecue. Individual school teachers were highly valued by all men within this study, especially if they were perceived to be competent, caring, hard working or interested in their children. There was also a much greater sense of reciprocity within men's accounts about individual school teachers, when compared with men's stories about other professionals. All men had met with school teachers, and indicated that they, generally, did discuss shared concerns, between teachers and fathers, about children's learning, safety, care, sociability or behaviour. Brandon, Don, Peter and Paul, indicated they were also involved in making a contribution to some school activities, and Steve, in spite of difficulties with time constraints, was involved in a range of activities as a school governor.

The social space of school playgrounds were used by Steve, Ron, Oliver, Brandon, John and Don, where men had some contact with other parents and carers. Such contact was for brief periods of time, before and after school, although men's involvement was dependent on paid work times and work shifts. Men did not generally have particular friends, or acquaintances, to talk to within the playground,

which was often associated, within their accounts, with the infrequent nature of their visits. However negotiating spaces numerically largely occupied by women was not straightforward. Steve took his children to and from school each day and was aware of the initial difficulties of establishing relationships with women in the playground:

When you talk it's usually in the playground at school where you meet other parents and 99% of it is mothers. I always find myself as a lone father so quite often it is other mothers rather than fathers.....It's always quite strange, it's a lot more difficult to break the ice and get to know them, being a father, whereas the mothers always stand around chatting and you're standing on the outside, looking in as it were. Once you do get to know them, then it's fine and they accept that you're in a similar role. Occasionally I speak to other fathers but when the fathers are there we talk about sport.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Steve was particularly aware of the subtle negotiations required of the father in the playground, building contacts slowly. Steve's experiences in the playground, with other men, involved less talk about the experience of being a father, than when Steve talked to women. Conversations between men were different to those between men and women, he indicated, with a focus upon work, business or sport, rather than children.

Men's involvement in, or contribution to, relationships with local people, other than neighbours, friends and family was limited. Men explained these patterns in a variety of ways. For John, Terrence, and Don the pubs they used, and for Brandon, and Steve, the gyms or leisure centres they visited, were not in Madeley, but in other parts of the city. Furthermore, and consistent with the sense of restricted agency identified in Chapter Five, all men indicated that their local forms of participation were

influenced by their obligations to children, and were also constrained by work hours and shifts. Indeed, many men indicated that activities they once did, had stopped because of their changing priorities, which was again often associated with meeting children's many needs. However, the ways some men talked about playgroups, health centres, and some professionals indicated that they perceived that such opportunities were gendered, that is they were used by or intended for women, not men. Campbell and McLean (2002) have also indicated that African-Caribbean people may anticipate racism within local organisations, which was evident in the accounts of Brandon and Terrence who both were concerned by judgements professionals may have about 'Black' men. However, limited local participation is shared by both groups of men interviewed, and both groups of men appeared, in my subjective judgement, to share an indifference to the questions I asked about spaces, organisations and welfare professionals, in a similar way they were indifferent to issues related to domestic labour. With the exception of local schools, there is limited evidence, that local welfare services had engaged any of these men to address issues of fathering or health at the times of the interviews, and men's perceived vulnerability was not shared with others within the locality. Friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues and members of church communities were far more important people in the lives of the men within this study than local professionals and members of local organisations.

7.5 RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND CONNECTEDNESS WITHIN CHRISTIAN CHURCH COMMUNITIES.

Most men within this study indicated that their lives were influenced by religion or spirituality, and all had been christened or baptised within a variety of Christian churches. However, with the exception of three men, Peter, Oliver and Paul, most men were not actively involved within a church community. For example, Trefor, an

atheist, and Liam, an agnostic, were both deeply critical of Christian religious institutions, but both also indicated they were spiritual men still influenced by Christian ideas. Ron had been 'brought up' within the Church of England, had 'lapsed', and by the time of the second interview had become occasionally involved in a local Roman Catholic church because, he argued, his children attended Roman Catholic schools, which also required them to be actively involved in church rituals. All men within this study had changed their practices regarding spirituality or religion over time. Most did not participate in organised religion any more, but even the three men actively involved in church communities had changed churches and denominations over time. Peter had been christened within the Church of England but had helped create a new 'modern Baptist' church in adulthood. Paul had also been christened within the Church of England, but had become a Jehovah's Witness. Oliver had changed churches on two occasions during his adult life, and was, latterly active within a Methodist Church community. All three men attended different churches to one another, and none of the church buildings were in the locality where the men lived.

All men interviewed indicated that Christian discourses, sometimes termed 'values', 'ideas' or 'rules', were important within their practices as fathers, in providing guidance to children. For example Sylvester talked about helping children with 'the right path', and 'learning about the good, the bad and the evil'. Many men, except Trefor and Steve, talked about the influence of religious discourses in ways that confirmed their authority as fathers, which was necessary to constrain children from certain forms of behaviour that were termed 'bad', 'naughty', 'wrong', 'evil', 'crafty' or 'anti-social'.

For Paul, Oliver and Peter their experiences of active involvement in their church communities were particularly significant for this investigation in many ways.

Unlike other men, within this study, there was clear evidence that they belonged to communities that provided a forum for fathers. These shared spaces and collective relationships were highly valued by Paul, Oliver and Peter, and were more influential in their lives, they all indicated, than other influences, including their ethnic and social class backgrounds. Their spiritual beliefs and experiences were shared with others in a context where being a father was also valued, welcomed and reinforced.

Support in the form of information, instrumental help, and help with solving problems were also given and received between friends within church communities, Paul, Oliver and Peter's narratives indicated. There was also identified a wide range of friendships with other families associated with their church communities. Furthermore while Peter, Oliver and Paul indicated that they had trust in members of their church, they had absolute trust in God. For these three men only, their narratives also indicated that they had an explicit sense of both participation and belonging within a collective community of people, and a communion with God. In fact, Brown et al (1990) have indicated that, in their research regarding religiosity among 'Black' people, participation and a sense of belonging provided people with protection from social isolation. Throughout the fieldwork I had been worried about men's solitary activities, and was particularly concerned about Liam and Ron's possible isolation from others. However, I never felt that Peter, Paul and Oliver were isolated. Interestingly, by the time of the second interview Ron seemed more relaxed and less uncertain, and had also met his girlfriend within the local Roman Catholic church.

For Oliver, Paul and Peter their connectedness with others within the church, but also their spiritual connectedness with God, were important assets in coping with some life experiences, and were particularly important for Oliver in his 'optimistic' outlook on life, he suggested:

That is why I don't worry too much about life. I believe in being proactive and doing something in life, and going out to work and earning your own living. But there are circumstances in life you can't do anything about and when you are a Christian you think I can give that to the Lord in prayer. And you trust him and rely on him, and having that aspect of life is important for me.

(Oliver, 'West Indian', maintenance electrician).

Ellinson and Levin (1998) have argued that 'spiritual well being' was associated with high self-esteem and inversely related to stress in their study. I do not know whether these three men had high self-esteem, although they certainly less concerned about difficult life experiences and stresses than other men within this study. Shams and Jackson (1993) have also indicated that involvement in a religious community may enable individuals to develop 'emotion focussed' coping. 'Emotion focussed' coping involves individual's using a framework of beliefs to redefine distressing situations, which the extract from Oliver, above, does illustrate.

The value of church communities as shared meeting places, and relationships, for these three men, specifically, is not shared by the other men within this study. Indeed one might argue that the trust, reciprocity, participation, belonging, and shared identity that Putnam (1995) has envisaged within cohesive communities is evident within Peter, Paul and Oliver's accounts. However what was most surprising for me, an atheist, was that church members were not actually identified as providing personal emotional support, not actually identified as trustworthy listeners for men regarding issues where their vulnerability was at stake. Emotional support from church friends, regarding perceived vulnerability, was valued as being potentially available, rather than ever received, by Oliver, Paul and Peter. For these three men, their churches were indicated, as providing emotional support in a holistic, shared and collective way rather than as concrete specific personal experiences. The provision of

collective 'solace' at times of vulnerability was, however, identified. Others help at such a time could be accessed through shared prayer, through the 'power of prayer', as Peter put it. The emotional impact of shared beliefs, prayer, preaching, music, or song, for these three men, helped them understand their problems in a broader context of a relationship with God:

In church, whether the pastor is preaching or there is singing going on, the words and the music are all to do with the enormity of God. When you think of how enormous God is, and when you think of God being in control, and the life here going into eternal life, the problems you have got seem a lot smaller. They are still there, and they have still got to be dealt with, but you are looking at the wider picture.

(Oliver, 'West Indian', maintenance electrician).

Although in Chapter Five, it was argued that men did not conceptualise health as related to spirituality, I subjectively felt that these three men had a more holistic sense of well being, trust, and sense of cohesion within their communities, that was unlike other men in this study. However, why, did these three men not talk to other members of their respective church communities about the experiences of perceived vulnerability? Peter, Paul and Oliver were not critical of their church communities in any direct way, but all three men did indicate that their 'standards' were influenced by communities whose beliefs they shared. In this respect there was some talk about the anticipation of other people's possible criticisms if information was disclosed to others. Peter also said that others' expectations may be 'difficult to live up to'. However, even though these three men's accounts of church communities did not make gender distinctions about participation, they did refer to their experiences of being a man, and that being a man was also associated with the solitary ways that

they dealt with perceived vulnerability, an issue that will be further addressed in Chapter Eight.

7.6 TRUST AND RECIPROCITY IN THE WORKPLACE.

Paid work was important to men within this study, as analysis in Chapters Four, Five and Six has confirmed. Paid work was a source of money for family income. Paid work was linked to men's meanings about fathering and health. Paid work was linked to men's physical and mental health and their health practices, but it also influenced the scope of men's social connectedness to others. This section of the chapter, however, analyses men's experiences of social connectedness within paid work by analysing experiences with employers, managers, trade union representatives and work colleagues, specifically regarding men's experiences of health and fathering. These are important opportunities within the thesis because, as Anelay (2002) has argued, employed men may have more extensive social networks than unemployed men, and Jahoda (1982), again, has also identified the potential psychological benefits of social contact with others within work settings.

All the men within this study were in some form of paid work when they agreed to be involved in interviews, although Liam gave up his job before interviews began. All the men worked outside the locality where they lived, except Steve who usually worked from his garage. Of the men in paid work, only Steve was wholly self-employed.

Trust in employers within employed men's accounts was contingent, although generally men indicated that employer's systems for ensuring their 'health and safety' within the workplace, for example, were appreciated. Sylvester was a specific exception in this latter respect, as he perceived that his employer could not be trusted

with his safety in the building industry. Furthermore, where there were occupational health schemes men were often suspicious of the close links between health workers and employers. Trust in employers was contingent, or there was mistrust associated within men's accounts with working conditions, pay, autonomy, security of employment, working hours, or the volume of work. For example, Don said that he did not trust his employers, and that at some point in the future there would be a strike within the fire service about pay and conditions. Another example: John, Terrence and Ron (three of the four car plant production workers) had ongoing concerns about potential future company restructuring and possible unemployment. John, distinctively, even said that his employers were 'capitalists' and were 'exploiting people for profit'. However, Oliver, another man working in a car plant, indicated that the 'new board had to be given time', and they 'hadn't done anything wrong yet'. Nevertheless there were recurring patterns of both uncertainty, but also degrees of powerlessness within men's accounts about decisions employers would possibly make in the future. For example, Peter said:

I work for a small company and its pretty clear that it is run for my boss and his family. I can trust them as long as what I do is in their interests, that we are making plenty of money. When there are problems I have to be very very careful.
(Peter, 'British and White', office equipment planner and fitter).

Many within this study did not generally have any personal contact with employers. It was only in smaller organisations that Sylvester, Peter and Paul had regular contact with employers, and they did not indicate that they were able to share experiences of stress associated with fathering or work, or health concerns with their employers, unless they were ill and took time off work. Peter and Paul indicated that their employers tried to get them to work, even when they were ill. Furthermore men working in small and large organisations shared concerns that their employers did not

fully understand their experiences as fathers. Specifically, as was also identified in Chapter Four, many men indicated that the limited availability of leave to care for children, the limited flexibility of their working hours, or above all the limited insight by employers into the importance of children, may affect their trust in their employers.

In contrast, men's experiences of managers, within work settings, were that they were perceived differently to employers, although for Sylvester and Peter their employers were also their managers. There was, within men's stories, much more scope for reciprocity with managers, when compared with employers, regarding men's experiences of fathering. Regular face to face contact, ongoing negotiations about work, and even negotiations about transgression of work 'rules' was possible with some managers:

Basically they answer to you. If they say do this, and you don't do it they can't hide away or send an e-mail, they have got to face you. That makes them more honest.

(Brandon, 'British of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Another example illustrates the negotiations that were possible with some managers: Ron worked on the production line within a car plant. Ron's managers allowed him to sleep, sitting up, but not lying down, when he had finished his work. Trust in managers was negotiated and qualified on the basis of individual relationships with men. Regarding men's experiences of fathering, many managers did, men indicated, have a greater understanding of their needs, than their employers. Hence requests for changes in the organisation of work hours or shifts, or requests for leave could be shared and negotiated with managers. For example, Ron, again, negotiated working night shifts on an ongoing basis, in order for work to fit with his responsibilities for

children. However, for Peter and Sylvester, their managers were also employers, and both their accounts indicated a lack of insight into fathers' experiences with children. For example, Sylvester's 'boss' said that 'children were women's work'.

Trust and reciprocity with managers was not however linked to disclosure of vulnerability to managers. For example, while Don indicated at one point he could 'trust his manager with his life' in the context of a fire, he never disclosed his concerns about stress, family, or health to this man who was perceived to be 'a good listener' and 'most trustworthy'. Finally, trust in some managers was also contingent, because, as many men indicated, managers shared a limited amount of power, as men themselves did, within organisations as a whole.

Steve, Sylvester, and Martin worked in settings where there was no trade union or professional organisation, but the other men were members of trade unions or professional organisations. None of the men within this study were union representatives, few attended meetings or voted in ballots, although rather like stories about managers, men's accounts indicated contingent individually negotiated trust in local representatives. Union and professional representatives were trusted because it was perceived that they were available for face to face contact, were positioned at the same organisational level as the men themselves, they were volunteers, or they were elected to their positions by the work colleagues, of men within this study. Only one man, John, consistently used the collective language of 'solidarity', and stressed his union's value in 'fighting' for 'rights':

It is from volunteers, they are voted in. It is quite a good union. They fight for your rights everyday basically. They keep you informed.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

For other men belonging to a trade union or professional organisation, there was scepticism about the effectiveness of representatives, because of their limited power or knowledge within the union and within the company, for example, regarding representatives' influence over a future change in the company, or a future industrial dispute. Unlike John's stories, many men valued their representatives because of the individual help they received in dealing with managers or employers regarding shift patterns, work organisation, distribution of workloads, or leave from work. Trade union representatives, like managers, were sometimes individuals they could talk to about work or family concerns affecting work, but not about issues of vulnerability. Nevertheless those men belonging to a trade union or professional organisation, although sometimes sceptical about potential outcomes of negotiations (or 'selling out' as Ron termed it), did value the organisations activities in representing them with employers. As Terrence put it: 'There is nothing else to help us'.

Work colleagues were often highly valued within men's accounts about reciprocity within work settings, especially as men could talk about or address the distribution, volume, intensity, or security of work with colleagues. There were many stories by men within this study sharing experiences of fathering with other men, and women, within the workplace, because, as Martin put it: 'We are all in the same boat, we all have kids'. Hence day to day stories about children's activities, or successes, were shared by men with others.

As has been indicated in previous chapters, the shared experiences of 'having a laugh' with other men, specifically, within the workplace or outside work, was highly valued. 'Having a laugh' provided men with social contact with friends and other colleagues, certainly pleasure in shared humour, but also some shared critical talk about their work experiences. While 'having a laugh' could involve talk about sex, football, other sports, and the media, 'having a laugh' could also involve talk about

managers, other colleagues, employers and other contemporary workplace concerns. 'Having a laugh' was also indicated by Sylvester, Paul, John, Terrence, and Don as helping men enjoy themselves and relax within work settings. Heaney (1992) has argued that enhancing social support in the workplace has been found to reduce mental health problems in employees, especially in high stress occupations. Evidence here indicates that the support of managers, work colleagues, or trade union representatives is valued by men within this study, and there is evidence of reciprocity regarding instrumental work issues, experiences of fathering, and informational support.

However, support from others is not always perceived as being valuable. Hence, trust in other colleagues was not general but negotiated with individuals on the basis of colleagues' discretion, honesty, practices for safety within the work environment, commitment to a 'fair' distribution of work, or involvement in corruption, or 'malpractice', as Brandon termed it. Indeed the pleasure of 'having a laugh' was not without more negative implications. Brandon and Paul indicated that 'having a laugh' may sometimes have involved some racism by work colleagues, for example:

... but when you are the only black person there in that room or in a situation where you are the minority, and the joke or the blag is on you, then it isn't funny, and that is stressful.

(Brandon, 'British of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

While the experiences of racism were specific to the African-Caribbean men, the shared experience of 'having a laugh' also could inhibit men, from both ethnic backgrounds, from talking to others about issues that involved perceived vulnerability. Disclosing experiences of psychological stress, health concerns or specific stresses associated with fathering were envisaged, by some men, as possibly

leading to ridicule by other men, and feelings of embarrassment. 'Having a laugh' could then become 'taking the piss' by other men, as Sylvester, Martin, and Terrence termed it. For example:

You are joking aren't you. Christ they would have a laugh about that, wouldn't they. They'd never stop taking the piss.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, and English', plasterer).

Findings here are consistent with Moynihan's (1998), and Boneham and Sixsmith's (2002) research that men may avoid talking about, or even hide health concerns, from work colleagues. However, John, specifically, did attempt to challenge what he saw as a 'macho culture'. For example, John, was involved in ongoing talking and listening with some men regarding the emotional and stressful implications of being a father, which was not easy for him:

I am a good listener but sometimes it can get a bit too much...There is a guy at work who has got a disabled son and I listen to him and am very interested, but he can be going on a bit too much sometimes, and if you are having a bad day it is like, 'Oh!'.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

Fox (1974) has explored trust within workplace organisations. He has argued that a 'higher' level of trust is trust that is dynamic and reciprocated in the organisation as a whole, but such trust is certainly not evident here, where, for example, men's sense of powerlessness or insecurity, inhibits trust in employers. As I prepared this thesis for submission I was aware that local popular tabloid newspapers were speculating about 5,500 possible job losses at one of the local car companies.

However, I would argue that Fox's (1974) 'lateral' trust between people working at similar levels in the organisation, may be evident here. In terms of men's experiences of work and fathering, such experiences could be shared, to some extent, with managers, work colleagues and trade union representatives. However, work settings may be the context for experiences of racism for some African-Caribbean men, and were not, generally, the context for sharing vulnerability with others, for most men in this study. The implications of men's experiences of masculinities, for example when 'having a laugh' with other men, are particularly important in this latter respect, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

7.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

For some African-Caribbean men, specifically, 'community' has a dimension beyond the locality. Friends and family who lived beyond the area in which men lived, within the city or even living in the West Indies are perceived as being assets. Important forms of support and companionship, shared critical talk about racism, and the pleasure of 'having a laugh', was possible with others who may have shared similar history, culture and ethnicity. 'Having a laugh' with other ethnic groups, however, could also involve some racism. Brandon and Paul anticipated racist assumptions in some professionals about African-Caribbean fathers. While no men at all indicated that their children experienced prejudice, abuse or discrimination, the uncertain, hidden nature of prejudice, within the locality or within work settings, did influence most African-Caribbean men's lives. Men of both ethnic backgrounds also identified local evidence of abuse or violence experienced by people of ethnic minority backgrounds. Nevertheless, there was no sense that African-Caribbean men saw themselves as outsiders within localities, and men of both ethnic backgrounds valued interaction, and tolerance, between ethnic groups. Both ethnic groups of men

also indicated that tolerance of young people, 'hanging around' localities, was necessary.

Men of both ethnic backgrounds valued instrumental reciprocity, some companionship, mutual respect, and shared interests in children's welfare and crime prevention with neighbours. Men's accounts indicated that neighbours acted together, on some occasions, to prevent crime or ensure children's safety. However, men's involvement in local organisations, political organisations, social spaces, or experiences with welfare professionals was very limited. Such limited involvement was associated with men's obligations for family and work, some experiences of exclusion of men by others, but also associated with perceived gender differences between men and women regarding involvement in such social connections. Given that the men within this study identified involvement with children as being central to their meanings about fathering this latter issue raises questions for practice and policy which will be addressed in Chapter Nine. There were exceptions to these patterns. For example, Steve was an advocate of trust, and involvement, in 'community'. He had attempted to negotiate ways into spaces that may have been usually occupied by women. Indeed, all men indicated that some reciprocity with school teachers regarding their shared interest in children was important for them.

Analysis of men's experiences of work settings indicated a complex mix of experiences of stress, such as insecurity, experiences of powerlessness, some 'lateral' trust (Fox, 1974), and some reciprocity for men. Trust and reciprocity regarding fathering and work experiences were indicated as possible with some managers, work colleagues, and trade union representatives. However, trust was dependent on individual men's judgements about the trustworthiness of other men and women they were working with. Instrumental and informational help between men and their colleagues was indicated as necessary to work effectively. However, emotional

support within work settings was limited within men's accounts. That is not to say that 'having a laugh' with other men specifically, was not enjoyed, did not help men relax, and did not help them deal with stress in some way. However, 'having a laugh' could involve racism, and may potentially involve 'taking the piss', that is other men may ridicule men within this study for disclosing their vulnerability to others. Nevertheless, one man, John, did indicate that talking and listening about emotional or personal issues involving fathering was possible with other men in the factory.

The significance of the experiences of the three men, Peter, Oliver and Paul, within their three different Christian church communities, is that they provided a distinct contrast to the experiences of other men within this study. These three communities provided relationships and fora that were highly valued, and which encouraged men as fathers. Such communities were not available to other men. Indeed while this study did not intend to research the locality as a whole, as the intention was to investigate men's experiences of social connectedness, Putnam's (1995, 1996) identification of the 'stocks' of social capital may be evident, to some extent, within the accounts of Peter, Paul and Oliver. Specifically, these three men were part of communities where participation, reciprocity, belonging, trust, purpose and beliefs were shared. In fact, participation within such communities may be beneficial to mental health, as Brown et al's (1990) work, for example, has indicated elsewhere.

This study did not assess health by focussing upon social integration or social isolation within populations, but there is no sense that men are socially isolated within Madeley. Within men's discourses there is evidence of concerns about crime which Halpern (1995), has indicated may have potentially negative implications for mental health. There is also evidence of both stress and social support experienced within the workplace, which Heaney (1992) has suggested is significant for individual's psychological health. The emotional support of other African-Caribbean

people is valued by some of the African-Caribbean men within this study, 'having a laugh' may be pleasurable and relaxing for men of differing ethnic groups, and connectedness with other church members and God was a powerful emotional resource for dealing with life's difficulties, for three of the men (as Shams and Jackson, 1993, have suggested). However, as was earlier identified in Chapter Five, Karlsen and Nazroo (2002) have identified the potentially destructive affects of anticipated or actual racism for mental health, constraints which are experienced by some of the African-Caribbean men in this study.

Men's experiences of dealing with their perceived vulnerability, associated with health concerns, or difficulties in relationships, were not, generally, disclosed within social connections within communities and workplaces. The valued potential availability of support from other people, the pleasure of 'having a laugh' with other men, experiences of reciprocity with local neighbours, mutual support within African-Caribbean communities, cohesion within Christian church communities, or involvement in local spaces, organisations and with welfare professionals did not challenge men's solitary ways of thinking, feeling, and acting alone regarding their perceived vulnerability. Men's experiences of solitary discourses and practices, and associated discourses about gender and masculinities, will therefore be addressed in the next, and final, empirical chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT: MASCULINITIES, AND SOLITARY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES.

8.1 INTRODUCTION.

In Chapters Six and Seven it has been argued that the men within this study were involved in a range of valued social connections with others. However, some writers have identified concerns about men's abilities to cope with social change (Pleck, 1995, Connell, 1995), with their abilities to trust others (Whitehead, 2002), with the ways in which they value rationality rather than emotionality within their experience (Seidler, 1994, 1997), or some have been concerned about men's limitations regarding help seeking regarding health issues (O'Dowd and Jewell, 1998). Within this thesis evidence indicated that men's social connectedness with others was inhibited by what I termed 'solitary discourses and practices', where trust and reciprocity with others was highly limited, specifically where men may have perceived they were disclosing vulnerability to others. After initial analysis of men's narratives from the first set of interviews I decided, in the second interview, to attempt to explore men's solitary experiences. Analysis of men's narratives, mainly from the second interview, led to the creation of four important themes discussed within this chapter. The first theme is 'Men's solitary discourses and practices' (8.2), which discusses the content of these solitary experiences, involving ways in which men thought, felt and acted alone to deal with their perceived vulnerability. The first theme is followed by discussion of 'Masculinities, solitary discourses and practices' (8.2), which examines the association within narratives between solitary discourses and practices on the one hand, and men's discourses about masculinities on the other. The third theme, 'Challenges to solitary and essentialist masculinities' (8.4) analyses men's experiences that challenge a

homogeneous view of solitary men. Finally, 'Masculinities and uncertainty' (8.5), the fourth theme, examines the uncertainty associated with the contradictory and changing nature of men's experiences of gender. In previous chapters evidence of differences, between the experiences of African-Caribbean and White working class men, were examined. However, within analysis patterns were clear: these two groups of men shared similar experiences regarding perceived vulnerability and masculinity, but differences within experiences will be made explicit where appropriate.

8.2 SOLITARY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES: THINKING, FEELING AND ACTING ALONE.

In this section of the chapter the four interdependent elements of solitary discourses and practices will be analysed. However, it is worth clarifying initially, what it is that I understand by solitary discourses and practices. Within the narratives men indicated that they were involved in a range of important social connections with other people, but these same men also attempted to act in solitary ways to deal with potential disclosure of their perceived vulnerability to others. A sense of vulnerability was experienced differently for each of the men within this study. However, men's concerns about their own or other's health, but also men's difficulties in relationships with other people were experiences that men within this study often would keep to themselves. Some examples illustrate these issues. For many men solitary experiences were identified in relation to the way stress affected how they felt or thought, rather than how it affected their bodies. For example, John, Terrence and Ron, did not always disclose the insecurity, associated with potential unemployment, they experienced with other people. Don did not disclose his experience of stress related to a forthcoming strike to others, and Brandon did not

always disclose the racist abuse he experienced in the police force to others. Brandon, Steve, Martin, Paul, Sylvester, and Oliver indicated that they operated in solitary ways when concerned about their own health or the health of others. For example, Martin kept his concerns and practices related to his son's ongoing health to himself, for many years. Don, Brandon and Terrence also indicated that they attempted to deal with concerns about difficulties in relationships with partners or children in solitary ways, also. These examples of men's perceived vulnerability were dealt with by men through intended solitary discourses and practices. The four interdependent elements of solitary discourses and practices, which will be considered in turn, were containment of difficult feelings, rational thinking alone, activities to deal with vulnerability without disclosure, and not accessing others help.

Informants used a range of concepts to explain their solitary experiences, but they often used metaphors of containment or control to explain what they were doing. Hence, men were involved in 'keeping it in', 'bottling things in', 'leave them at work', putting a 'brick wall up against it', or 'shutting up' which indicated intentions to contain or control their experience in some way, a control which, it will become clear, was never fully realised. Below are some examples of how this language was used recurrently by men to describe their solitary activities:

Both with work and family life... I kept a lot of that in.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

I like to think I am not, but I suppose I will bottle things up.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

I like to leave it there. You can get a lot of problems but it is best to leave them there [at work], rather than drag them home.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

I tend to brush it off and hope for the best.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

...generally as far I am concerned I think I have things under control, but I am always trying to think ahead. If I can see a big difficulty coming up I will try and put a brick wall up against it until it happens. But it is always there at the back.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

I tend to shut up about things and ignore them.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

These metaphors were intended to describe processes by which men intended to think, feel and act alone. The four elements of solitary discourses and practices will now be examined.

8.2.1 CONTAINMENT OF DIFFICULT FEELINGS.

The first element of solitary discourses and practices was the containment of difficult feelings. In Chapter Four, it was argued that men within this study 'championed' the expression of emotionality regarding their love and affection for children, however the emotional impact of dealing with health concerns, the psychological experience of stress, or the experiences of difficulties within

relationships were intended to be contained by men. Experiences of sadness, fear and anxiety, in particular, were intended to be contained, and undisclosed to other people.

It should be noted that there were issues within the process of interviews that are relevant within this discussion. Some men indicated how difficult the questions I asked were for them, and many indicated that they struggled to express in words what they wanted to say. These experiences may be consistent with Goldschmidt and Miller's (2000) findings that men may use emotional language less than women. Even John who emphasised the importance of emotional reciprocity with others indicated the difficulty he experienced in expressing certain feelings:

Of course, I think everyone does have these feelings. It is a difficult thing to express really isn't it? It is quite deep really isn't it?

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

Men's narratives did, however, indicate that men in general, and the men themselves, did experience sadness, fear and anxiety, but they intended to contain these feelings. An example of how men attempted to do this was within Brandon's story about his mothers' possible future death from cancer:

Every time you speak about it you go through the anguish of: '...what is going on?'. 'Why is she wearing a wig? Her routine is changed'. And it is like 'I have got breast cancer', and it is like 'Mum is going to have a mastectomy'. And 'It is going to spread, and mum is going to die'. When you calm down you realise that lots of people have it nowadays, and when it is caught early it is OK, and touch wood everything has been fine. But I think I tended not to want to

make a fuss, and not to dramatise it. And the more people you tell the worse it is. You just ignore it. It is easier to ignore it if only you know about it really.

(Brandon, 'British of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

It was easier to 'ignore' the feelings associated with loss, to avoid disclosure to others by not 'dramatising' it. However, underpinning men's attempts to contain difficult feelings were in fact genuine feelings of fear, associated with the prospect of disclosure of feelings to others. For example, Steve provided a graphic narrative confirming the solitary nature of his experience, specifically here regarding fears related to his own sense of mortality. These fears, that he had never expressed to his wife, were associated with his attempt to prevent others understanding his perceived 'weakness':

It is a fear of being seen as a weaker person, to express the fact that you are frightened about something. I know I have felt at times where all of a sudden I have had this thought about death and what it means to me...The world ends when I die. And that scares me shitless when I think of that. I used to go all cold and I think this is very frightening. And what happens? But now I look at my children a bit more and think that is what is left of me.... It is sort of blackness in a way. It does sort of worry me... not knowing how to cope with it.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Containment of these feelings, underpinned by non-rational fear, were also ironically interpreted as 'strength' by many men. That is, if men were to talk about sadness, or anxiety, they may have appeared as 'weak' to others, which they wished to avoid. This attempt to demonstrate 'strength' to others was also associated, for some men, with wishing to 'protect' others, often intending to protect children but

sometimes women partners, from their experiences. Furthermore many men also talked about their wish to demonstrate 'strength' by avoiding 'burdening' others with their emotional experiences. The importance of 'weakness' and 'strength', within men's accounts, will be addressed, again, later in this chapter where masculinities are discussed in more depth (8.3). Furthermore, men's discourses about gender differences between men and women will also be analysed, but it is worth emphasising at this point that women were perceived to be, when compared with men, more emotionally connected to others. In contrast, the men interviewed talked about being involved in practices, for example in the workplace or in the 'pub', which involved men's shared attempts, with other men, to not express difficult feelings to other men. The potential embarrassment or ridicule they may have experienced when 'having a laugh', could turn into 'taking the piss'. In the example below, Ron talked about how a work colleague 'acted the same' within the factory, that is acting in the same non-emotional way as he had done before his wife had died:

We had a chap break down at work on Wednesday night. He broke down in tears. His partner died six or seven weeks ago, and we all thought he was still acting the same all that time. Blimey!

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

What the above extract also indicated was that ultimately, as most men's accounts indicated, containment of difficult feelings, although intended, was never fully realised. For example, in spite of Brandon's best attempts, the 'fear of the unknown' may be uncontrollable:

It is the fear of the unknown. Having the illness isn't the problem it is the consequences of it. It is not what she has got it is what could happen. It is the fear of the unknown which is the basis of a lot of peoples' fears I think. You cannot control it. Sometimes it does come out....

(Brandon, 'British of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Many men also indicated they made careful judgements about who to trust with their feelings, and when to disclose these difficult feelings. For example, Don talked about a 'normal' sadness which did not require disclosure to others:

If it had been a normal sadness or pain or whatever, it would have been something I would have carried, and not exposed my wife and family to. Because I would probably have felt that I was protecting them from something ...they didn't need to suffer and I could take it on myself.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

Don made a distinction between 'normal' sadness, and other more serious difficulties, implying difficulties he experienced within his relationship with his wife. This 'normal' experience remained apparently not shared, but a crisis within Don's relationship with his partner did require him, on another occasion, to share his feelings. Such challenges to men's solitary discourses and practices will be addressed in section 8.4.

In Chapter Six it was argued that men indicated that they found talking within relationships, particularly with their women partners, as sometimes involving stress. Men's responses, within interviews, also indicated that talking with me in a way that involved expressing difficult feelings was very challenging for most men,

except perhaps Trefor, the social worker. I also believe that the interview process itself created stress for most men. As Freund (1999) has argued, emotion work can be very stressful. My 'professional' authoritative organisation of the interview process may have provided an encounter that both challenged and confirmed, at different times, the containment or display of undesirable emotions.

Furthermore, as Williams and Bendelow (1998), after Mills (1973), have argued, emotions provide links between the personal and the social, then attempts to control emotionality may confirm the solitary rather than socially connected nature of men's experiences. The devaluing of emotionality as 'weakness', which men's hidden experience of real fear prevented expression, was a way of men invalidating, in a solitary fashion, their own and other people's feelings, which as Freund (1990) has argued is possible in relationships between people.

8.2.2 RATIONAL THINKING ALONE.

Men's accounts also indicated that rational thinking, and sometimes rational problem solving by thinking, were valued as ways of dealing with difficult life experiences. 'Thinking things out', 'analysing a problem', 'working out options', 'making decisions', 'fixing it', and 'sorting it'. These were the kinds of phrases that men used to identify ways in which they may think, in attempting to deal with their perceived vulnerability. Such language is evident within the narratives of all men within this study. For example, Liam, an unemployed building labourer, emphasised the importance of organising his life to help his younger daughter, using the rational and technical language of 'long term targets and goals'.

Rational thinking about difficult experiences was valued by men. For example for

Oliver, Peter and Paul (the three men active within their church communities), their 'positive' attitudes towards life experience, involving 'optimism', or 'contentment', were important, they argued, in the ways they thought about, and addressed personal difficulties. Accounts also indicated that these more 'positive' ways of thinking were directly related to the help of their spiritual and religious experiences within their churches, and with God, in dealing with life experiences. For example, for Oliver his calm, rational and optimistic way of dealing with difficult experiences was understood as an asset, not a difficulty. In the extract below he talked about dealing with the potential closure of the car plant where he worked:

... my feeling at the time was if it shuts down I will get another job. I know that sounds simple and I might have been stuck for a few weeks when I couldn't have got another job. And what would I have done then? With regards to speaking to other people I don't know... I tend to brush it off and hope for the best.

(Oliver, 'West Indian and English', maintenance electrician).

Nevertheless while the rational processes of thinking are certainly understood by men as personal assets, they are also solitary experiences, as Liam indicated:

...that's why you're there. I'm the solution finder, and if I try to talk about it there's no-one else.

(Liam, 'Black Irish', unemployed building labourer).

This solitary rational activity is, however, also intended to contain or control emotionality. In this respect, it is worth reinforcing here, that men seemed more able to talk about vulnerability to me, using rational rather than emotional language. For example, when Peter was experiencing stress, dealing with 'pressure' from his

employers, it was the 'expectations' not feelings he shared with others. Interestingly, containment of feelings associated with perceived vulnerability, is undertaken by sometimes expressing other feelings, such as irritation, frustration or anger, rather than sadness, fear and anxiety. Such activities were particularly evident, within some men's accounts, when others, often women partners, may attempt to ask about men about their experiences. In the extract below, Steve became irritated, perhaps angry, with me for asking, on several occasions, who he talked to about the 'lump' within his testicles. 'Again' he emphasises in the next extract, it was a question of 'me' making 'my' mind up, 'I' told my wife. In a sarcastic and funny way Steve, a calm and mild mannered man throughout both interviews, tells me assertively that enough of my questions was enough:

Again, It was just a question of me making my mind up when I talked to people about it and soon as I told Maxine I told everybody else but you can't discuss it, it's not every day conversation '...by the way my bollocks are swollen!' You can't drop it into the conversation.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Chronic pain, psychological experiences of stress, health concerns or personal difficulties, men's narratives indicated, could be all be dealt with by rational thinking alone. For example, Steve explained that the 'worry' he had about the lump in his testicles, could be dealt with by thinking. Another example: Sylvester and Martin both indicated that the way that they thought helped them to deal with chronic pain, as the following extract illustrates:

Yes it is something I have learned to live with. I mean I was my son's age when I had the really big operation, and it is though I have lived with pain most of my

life... it doesn't really effect me like somebody else might do. Somebody else might think oh no I can't walk, I am not going into work, but I don't think that way because I have been used to it for so long you know, years you know, its nothing new. I think positively.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

Similarly for Ron it was the 'right' state of mind that was necessary for him to deal with stress associated with the threats of violence, when he was in a previous job as a bailiff, in order to overcome 'weakness' and be 'strong'. Rational thinking alone was perceived as an asset for men within this study.

While the 'strength' of men's solitary thinking is evident within many men's accounts, there is also a recurring, if sometimes implicit, sense of both isolation and uncertainty involved within processes of rationally thinking alone. For example, for Brandon, a strong advocate of rational thinking, decision making, planning, and above all action, expressed some of the difficulties linked to rational problem solving:

I try and think it through, if I have that luxury. I just try to make a decision and rightly or wrongly go for it. If it gets worse do something different. It is when you don't know what to do, that is when I get really stressed. I have no problems in making a decision. I just get frustrated and stressed when I think what shall I do now. A voice says... 'you know what you should be doing now, just go on and do it'. But it doesn't always work.

(Brandon, 'British of Barbadian ancestry', police officer)..

Men within this study were clearly not socially isolated, they were involved in a range of valued social connections, but their methods of dealing with vulnerability were often solitary. However, as I write, these rational concepts about rational thinking sound to me like the professional or managerial discourses I have encountered in over 20 years of work within public services, mostly in the National Health Service, in the UK. The management of emotionality is part of the instrumental rationality that is hegemonic, within what Davies (1995) has termed a 'masculine cultural code' within the NHS. This 'masculine cultural code' informs power relationships within the NHS, but do men in this study have such power? In work settings, such practices may indeed be associated with power, but how valuable such practices are in dealing with personal experiences of perceived vulnerability, is deeply problematic, an issue that will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Seidler (1994, 1997) has argued that some men in Western societies may have a distinctive form of 'reason'. This 'reason' is different to women's experience because it involves an experience of rationality that devalues emotionality (and the body) as inferior to superior 'reason'. The extent to which findings here are consistent with Seidler's theoretical work is not certain. However, the value that African-Caribbean and White working class men place on rationality, and the attempts to contain emotionality are certainly evident within this study. Indeed, findings discussed here are consistent with the evidence discussed in Chapter Six where I earlier argued that, in the context of men's difficulties in talking to women partners, many men devalued some aspects of talk, valuing instrumentality within 'talk' with women specifically. Findings here are also consistent with Meth and Pasick's (1996) research, with men in therapy, which indicated that men may

develop strategies for avoiding expressiveness within relationships, strategies that include valuing the rational over the emotional.

8.2.3 ACTIVITIES TO DEAL WITH VULNERABILITY WITHOUT DISCLOSURE.

While containment of emotionality, and the value placed on rational thinking by men within this study are two important elements of solitary discourses and practices, men were also involved in specific practices to help them deal with their perceived vulnerability, while at the same time maintaining the solitary nature of their experiences. Doing something else other than communicating with others about vulnerability was characteristic of all men's stories within the second interview. These alternative practices, that is alternatives to disclosing the nature of their experience to others, were perceived as being valuable, and sometimes pleasurable, ways of dealing with personal difficulties. These practices may have taken place at the same time as attempting to contain emotionality and employ rational thinking, or even undertaken while attempting to avoid thinking and feeling about the difficulties they experienced.

For many men, particularly Paul, Peter and Sylvester, doing paid work was identified as being activity they could do to help 'put family worries to one side', as Sylvester put it. Physical activity was used in a similar way for Oliver and Brandon, particularly. Oliver indicated that when he was jogging, he could 'put things out of reach', that is put concerns about the restructuring of his company out of reach. Another example was in the ways that Brandon suggested that boxing and 'working out' at the gym were forms of 'release' that allowed him to 'forget' the stresses of police work. 'Having a good workout' while working as fitness

instructor, was how Paul dealt with some of the difficulties he experienced within paid work. In addition, pleasurable transgressive activity consuming the 'wrong' kinds of substances, like food and alcohol, were also employed by many men to attempt to deal with some aspects of men's perceived vulnerability. For example, Don would 'go on the beer' on some occasions when he experienced stress within his family. Terrence particularly enjoyed alcohol, and indicated it helped him deal with his 'heavy' work experiences, while 'keeping things to himself'. Many men within this study also ate 'crap', 'treat', or 'junk' food to help them deal with their perceived difficulties.

While transgressive practices, including consuming the 'wrong' kinds of alcohol and food, may be shared activities with others, for example by drinking alcohol with friends in the pub, these kinds of consumption could also be solitary activities where men spent time with others, but dealt with vulnerability alone. Indeed the importance of men 'having a laugh' with other men in a variety of settings, as pleasurable alternatives to more difficult life experiences, should also not be underestimated in this respect:

Men just laugh and joke about things, and brush off problems. There is no-one I can think of that I go to with any worries or feelings, not that I have got a lot at the moment, I am not one for doing a lot of soul-searching with friends and colleagues. I don't know why that is, maybe it is because I am a man or maybe it is the personality I have got.

(Oliver, 'West Indian', maintenance electrician).

Laughter and joking as a shared way of dealing with vulnerability, without necessarily talking about such experiences, was a recurring pattern within

INTERVIEW ENDING.

- Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?
- I will send a copy of the transcribed interview: do you want an audio or paper copy?
- I confirm voluntarism, confidentiality and anonymity within research process.
- I provide details of how I can be contacted in the future.

narratives. Men within this study are often with others, but in a specific sense their vulnerability is contained, undisclosed to others.

8.2.4 NOT ACCESSING OTHERS HELP.

Evidence reported by Prior (1999), Watson (2000), O'Dowd and Jewell (1998), Wilson (1998), Men's Health Forum (2002), and others, confirm that men may seek professional help regarding physical or mental health issues less often, and less quickly, than women. Evidence analysed in Chapter Seven indicated that social spaces, local organisations and welfare professionals do not generally play a significant part in these men's lives. However, solitary discourses and practices involves not accessing the help of those people who are often deemed to be most trustworthy, including women partners.

For some men, acting in a solitary fashion was necessary, as has been identified previously, in order to 'protect' women, and to avoid 'burdening' women with men's perceived vulnerability. While resistance to 'burdening' friends or family, as well as women, is evident in many men's discourses, there was also recognition for some men, (Paul, Trefor, Martin and Liam), that other's experiences of stress may be extra factors to consider when disclosing their own difficulties. For example, Liam recognised that other people's experience of stress, may affect their ability to provide help, but also may influence the decisions he made about whether he should talk to other's about his concerns. As Liam put it, 'Most people have their own stressful situation anyway'. Furthermore, for Terrence and Sylvester, other people's 'problems' may need to be avoided. This may involve avoiding women partners 'problems' to prevent compounding stress associated with paid work:

...and as soon as I get home the wife will come up with a bill and straight away it is stress on my head. It is no use me saying to her I can't do any more, I do enough. So you just have to bite your lip and keep on doing things. You keep it to yourself, whatever you really want to say to save an argument.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, then English', plasterer).

This latter extract echoes Thoits (1995) findings which suggested that individuals may anticipate others stress as potential stress for them. Another way in which some men avoided seeking women's help was by attempting to compartmentalise work and family experiences, particularly Brandon and Don, who had hazardous or even life threatening incidents at work:

You will come home and your wife will say, 'What was today like?'. And you will say 'What was fucking today like, what was fucking today like?'. And she will say 'Talk about it'. And you say 'Just give me five minutes', and then your back is up. If you had had a bad day at work you can't show your feelings, because it is unprofessional...I don't talk to my wife about it too much.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

Experiences of work related stress were sometimes inadvertently disclosed to women, but not as explicit fear, anxiety, sadness or more general 'worry, but sometimes expressed through irritation, anger or frustration towards women by some men.

Perceived vulnerability was also dealt with, by many men, through some physical contact with others. For example, all men indicated how pleasurable it was to 'cuddle' or 'hug' children, especially young children, where there was no

requirement for talk about their experience. Furthermore, Steve, John, Peter, and Paul indicated they did deal with some personal difficulties, not by talking to women but attempting to gain physical contact with their partners. For example, Steve experienced fears associated with his mortality which he had never disclosed to his wife. However, Steve needed physical contact with her, to help him deal with those fears, experienced late at night in bed:

I have had sort of things when you can be lying in bed and you just want total comfort. But I have had to hold her, nothing more, just hold her, and it will come all of a sudden. It will come into my mind and I just need that contact....and then it will usually subside.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

As will have become clear in Chapter Six, men within this study were reflexive about their communication skills. Women were perceived to have more expertise than men in this latter respect, but men also had doubts about their own skills. For example, for Ron, the limitations to his 'talking' created, he indicated, what his girlfriend told him was a 'secret world' that affected their relationship. Indeed, all men involved in the second interview reported that women may have attempted, sometimes in vain, to 'open up' men, as Paul put it, by encouraging them to talk about their experiences. For example, Martin said:

She keeps trying to get me to open up. I will rarely talk about work when I go home anyway, I like to leave it there. You can get a lot of problems but it is best to leave them there rather than drag them home.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

These attempts to 'open up' men, by women, were never entirely successful. Some men, (Terrence, Brandon, Sylvester, Martin, and Peter), indicated that they did talk to their partners in a way that had a kind of tactical quality. That is, men did do some talk, and did disclose some aspects of their experience, with the intention of preventing further 'opening up', or preventing conflicts in relationships with their women partners. As Peter put it:

You have got to tell them some things just to keep them quiet.

(Peter, 'British and White', office equipment planner and fitter).

Whilst all the men within this study lived with women, those participating in a second interview were involved in practices of feeling, thinking and acting that maintained their solitary experiences. In the following extract, from the first interview with Martin, he talked about issues about which his wife had been completely unaware. Martin was talking about his concerns regarding his son having a heart murmur, concerns he had for over 10 years :

Martin: Because I was told, you know, that 'Watch that he doesn't get breathless...'. And I will tell you something else, that I do now, which is probably really stupid...No matter what time I come in.- I come in at 1.00am- and I won't leave his side until I see his chest going up and down. I have always done it. I mentioned that to people recently and they say your 'daft'. I probably am.

Bob: What are you doing it for?

Martin: I don't know. It might come from that time because 'heart murmur', 'bad heart', 'two weeks to live' type of thing, in the mind.

Bob: And you have told other people about this, and they said that you're daft?

Martin: Yeah. Only... they don't mean it like. Its like a habit.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

The above passage is significant for a range of reasons. Firstly, it is clear that health and illness, particularly where children are concerned, did create concerns which may have involved fear or anxiety, but fear and anxiety are not necessarily expressed. Disclosure of such practices may have involved Martin being perceived as not rational, being 'daft' in this particular case, in the eyes of other people. In fact, in the second interview I asked Martin if he had spoken to his wife about this practice. He had, but 'she said I was daft'. He was dealing with his 'daft' non rational concerns in a hidden fashion. His wife may have known what he was doing, but he had not talked to her about it, even though he had confirmed how trustworthy she was. This was solitary practice to provide personal reassurance for himself, but a practice that continued at home alone for a decade.

Solitary discourses and practices involved containment of difficult feelings, valuing rational thinking, undertaking activities without disclosing vulnerability to others, but also not accessing help from others, even from women partners who were deemed to be trustworthy. Findings within this study are important in a context where Real (1997) has argued that depression in men may be hidden, and under reported. Furthermore, findings are certainly consistent with Lewis and O'Brien's (1987) and O'Brien's (1990) empirical work that indicated men in families may be reluctant to disclose difficulties or problems with others, and also are consistent with Sixsmith and Boneham's (2002) research which suggested that men may not instigate talk about health with others. Men's social connectedness with others is confirmed by analysis of narratives in Chapters Six and Seven, but reciprocity regarding vulnerability, as identification of solitary discourses and practices in this

chapter indicates, is highly limited. Indeed, men's trust in others regarding their perceived vulnerability is highly contingent. However, men's experiences of solitary discourses and practices, and associated essentialist discourses about masculinity, are not without challenges and contradictions which will be addressed shortly, in section 8.4. However, men's solitary experiences were associated with specific discourses about gender, and masculinities, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

8.3 MASCULINITIES, SOLITARY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES.

One of the most surprising findings for me within this investigation was the recurring ways that men, involved in the second interview, explained their own and other men's solitary experiences by talking about particular forms of masculinity. The reader may remember that, in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, analysis of men's narratives indicated that fathering may be associated with a loosening of gender constraints, associated with dynamic masculinities (Connell, 2000), particularly regarding the reflexivity around men's involvement with children. In contrast where men talked about solitary activities, explanations were provided by referring to experiences of being a man that were strikingly essential and also ahistorical. The ways men understood their solitary practices, and also the practices of other men, were inherited from the past or linked to men's historic origins in 'cavemen' or 'primitive' men.

I don't know. It is like asking for help. I have never done it. It might be a sign of weakness maybe. Going to back to like the cavemen type of thing, being the leadersI hate asking people for help.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

Men's narratives indicated that they intended not to demonstrate 'weakness', to not demonstrate emotionality, and should not involve 'burdening' others. Indeed, practices to 'protect' others, to be 'independent' or 'self sufficient', but above all to be 'strong' were recurrently talked about as if men had inherited such practices from other men in the past. Indeed, being 'strong' rather than 'weak' was associated with men's leading or powerful or authoritative activities in families in the past. Furthermore, for Don, Terrence and Brandon solitary experiences were explicitly associated with men's perceived contemporary authority or leadership within households:

When as a male you feel that you are the head of the household, that's the way you have to behave.

(Terrence, 'Black and British', production line worker).

While none of the men interviewed within this investigation could be understood as having hegemonic (Connell, 1995) positions in society, I would argue that Connell's (1995) category of complicit masculinity, which refers to the majority of men who may share in the patriarchal dividend of an unequal society, is relevant to men's accounts about their solitary experiences, within this study. Indeed some men, Don, Peter, Brandon and Terrence, were keen, within the interviews, to confirm their heterosexuality for me, and within discussion of solitary experiences this issue was talked about again. While there were no stories objectifying gay men, Brandon, Pete, Terrence and Don made it explicit that their solitary activities were associated with their identities as heterosexual men. It was also important for Brandon, Terrence, Peter and Don to clarify that they were not gay, for Don specifically that involved being a 'proper' man:

... when you are a male that is very heterosexual you feel that these feelings, which we all have genuinely have, are not something to be shared with your wife. I am a red-blooded proper man.

(Don, 'British', fire fighter).

While some men differentiated themselves from gay men, and as will soon become clear, also differentiated themselves from women, what of other men's influence on men's experiences of solitary discourses and practices? The men involved in the second interview, indicated that men, in general, find it difficult to express their emotions (as Walker's, 1994, research with men also indicated). In fact, other men were perceived as also acting in solitary ways. One of the reasons some men provided for why men, in general, acted in a solitary fashion was related to men's collective practices together, sometimes called a 'macho' performance. Specifically, men together would put on a 'macho' performance intended to prevent disclosure of vulnerability in the form of 'weakness'. Ron, for example, said:

I suppose they are the man, and it is the macho thing to sort these things out, they don't need anybody's help. Men don't do that, and it is a sign of weakness...It is a performance, or a show. That's all.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

The discussion, in the previous chapter, of men's concerns that they should not be embarrassed, ridiculed or humiliated by other men was important in relation to men's activities to appear to be 'strong', as the following extract from Sylvester's narratives indicated:

We are too scared to open up to other people.... We are too scared to cry, do you know what I mean? We just bottle it up until it comes good, and we start smiling again.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, then English', plasterer).

Findings here are consistent with Lupton's (1998) historical and cross-cultural research which suggested that 'mastery' of the emotional is often seen as valuable by men, and if men fail to achieve that 'mastery' they may see themselves as 'weak'. In addition, for many men within this study, they saw themselves in competition with other men within the 'macho' performance:

It is about competing, you have got to be the top notch so you cover it up. I know I do it. If I am concerned about something I will try and work it out myself rather than asking or questioning, whether it is health or anything. I think it is probably the wrong thing to do, but I still do it.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

These collective performances took place in the company of men, particularly according to men's accounts, within the contexts of pub and workplace. For many men, particularly the four men working within car plants, work experiences were talked about on many occasions when explaining solitary experiences. Ron, for example, indicated that a 'macho' performance within the factory constrained him and other people, including other women, who may have to accept or join in that performance. Peter explained similar experiences, but in the example below, masculinity is demonstrated through shared experiences of objectifying representations of women :

It is a performance or a show. Everything is on football....And page three, they will all look at the pictures. So I think what shall I say? So I agree with them, but I don't like doing it. If you don't you are ridiculed for it.

(Peter, 'British', office equipment planner and fitter).

While John, Trefor and Peter did identify individual women as being involved in masculine performances, a recurring pattern within men's accounts is that solitary experiences are perceived as being different to women's ways of dealing with vulnerability. While some men differentiated themselves from gay men, many men also indicated that disclosure of vulnerability, as form of 'weakness', was more characteristic of women, which reinforces the importance of Boneham and Sixsmith (2002)'s findings that some men may not want to reveal what they saw as 'feminine' concerns about health. There are clear gender differences in how men perceived that women and men acted regarding their vulnerability. Women are consistently perceived, by men in this study, as being different to men in how they deal with experiences of stress or 'worries' within their lives.

Women were often perceived as 'worrying' more than men, or women were sometimes perceived as being more emotional in some ways. Women's more emotional practices were perceived as an advantage in some respects, for some men, as Paul indicated:

I think a woman is probably a lot more emotional, their makeup is different. Perhaps I would be lacking in something whereas my wife would have a bit more understanding, and vice versa. What I lack, hopefully the wife can make up.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

Furthermore, where men may be perceived to have solitary experiences women are perceived as talking and listening collectively, they 'congregate', 'communicate', or 'create circles' men suggested. Indeed, as will have become clear from analysis within Chapter Six, women, generally, were perceived to have much better communication skills than men, women were perceived to be better 'talkers' or 'listeners' than men. For example, John said:

Men are not very good at expressing themselves, and maybe they don't talk in the same way that women do when they congregate.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

However, men's gendered views about solitary discourses and practices are evident within men's narratives about other forms of social connectedness. As well as men's gendered views about women's socially connected communication with others, social spaces and organisations were sometimes understood in a gendered fashion as was identified in the previous chapter, and 'having a laugh' with other men was very much an experience of social connectedness shared with men. Courtenay (2000) has argued that men may construct health issues in the context of their masculine identities, but within this investigation evidence indicates that men construct social connectedness to others regarding the experiences of their perceived vulnerability in terms of their masculine identities. The implications of men's complicit masculine discourses (Connell, 1995) for men's solitary discourses and practices, and men's limited trust and reciprocity are considerable for theory, policy and practice and will be addressed in Chapter Nine. These more conservative discourses are, however, evident at the same time as evidence within narratives of challenges to complicit masculinities, which will be considered now.

8.4 CHALLENGES TO SOLITARY EXPERIENCES AND ESSENTIALIST MASCULINITIES.

Evidence within this study indicated that men's solitary discourses and practices limit men's social connectedness with others, specifically regarding experiences that men may perceive involves possible disclosure of vulnerability. In addition, men's solitary experiences are associated with essential and complicit forms of masculinity. However, the discussion so far within this chapter has not intended to provide a unitary homogenous picture of men's experiences. Although Seidler's (1994, 1997) work regarding masculinities is valuable, sometimes his focus on 'superior reason', which some men may employ in an attempt to control emotionality, has an essential quality, an essentialism which is not intended here. Solitary discourses and practices were evident, at the same time as challenges to men's solitary experiences. These challenges took a number of forms that indicated men's masculine discourses may be dynamic as well as essential and complicit. First of all, there was some evidence in men's narratives, within the second interview, that their solitary experiences, participation in 'macho' performances and competition amongst men, their limited emotional expressiveness, their unwillingness to access others help, or their transgressive health practices are not what they 'ought' or 'should' do. As Steve put it succinctly:

I think it was a classic case of head in the sand. If I don't mention it, it won't happen.

(Steve, 'Welsh and European', carpenter).

Of course, reflexivity does not necessarily lead to change. However, while there was evidence of ongoing reflexivity about the issues already raised in this chapter,

there were also three other ways that men challenged conservative discourses, firstly in the experiences of one man, John, secondly, within some men's experiences of crisis situations, and thirdly within most men's experiences of fathering.

Distinctively, and unlike other men within this study, John indicated that although he was involved in 'bottling things up' himself, he also attempted to overcome the difficulties of 'bottling up' processes in himself and other men. That is, John attempted to engage his friends in the 'pub' and within the car factory in challenging ways:

Men do skirt around that... 'Sad' will be 'pissed off'. You will try and dig a bit deeper and come up with a bit more.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

John also provided a series of stories about how the 'companionship' of men could also be emotionally supportive. Indeed, unlike other men, John also attempted to evaluate his own limitations in this latter respect, and evaluate the consequences of emotional reciprocity and mutual trust with men. Although this investigation did not focus on medical discourses about 'risk', John seemed to be taking risks as a man within the masculine environments of pub and factory.

The second substantive way in which solitary experiences and essential discourses were challenged, was within some men's narratives about their experiences of crisis situations. Ron, Don, and Paul indicated that a specific critical life event can enable different experiences for men, as well as, or other than solitary ones. In Chapter Five, Paul's experience of a life threatening illness, meningitis, was discussed. This experience enabled him to re-evaluate the significance of his relationships with his

friends and family, he indicated. Don, it will now be clear, was assertive about his 'independence' as a man, but he also talked about a past experience which required him to disclose his 'weakness', and express sadness and pain, which was necessary and effective in preventing the 'break up' of his marriage. Ron also told me a sad story about the grief experienced by one of the men working within his factory, the reader may recall. Ron reported on the 'hard' masculine performance of another man, nicknamed 'Ceefax'. Ceefax's partner had died seven weeks previously, yet he behaved 'normal', performed 'hard', and did not express his loss, to Ron's knowledge, for seven weeks. Any potential sadness, isolation, depression, disorientation and confusion created by grief remained hidden by Ceefax in the factory. However, in the extract below Ron described how he, and other men, responded to the crisis of Ceefax's eventual distress:

Bob: And how did people respond to this?

Ron: Brilliantly. I put my arm around him, but men don't do that. I said go upstairs and sort yourself out, but there is another guy, a team leader, another little hard case from Droitwich, an ex miner I think he is. My team leader said 'You wouldn't believe what he has just done, he has put his arm round him sort of thing, and told him to go home or go in the rest room'. And that was strange. I never thought he would do that.

(Ron, 'British', production line worker).

The third, and perhaps the most significant way, in which men challenged solitary experiences and complicit masculinities was regarding their experiences of fathering with children, specifically their desires or hopes for a different future for children, compared with their own. Some men, Sylvester, Don, Martin, Brandon,

Steve, and John were aware of the developing solitary experiences of boys or young men as they matured, as Sylvester's story illustrates:

Right now I would like to talk to my middle son. But when I ask him about it he doesn't want to talk about it. I know he has a problem but he doesn't want to talk about it. He is bottling things up and being in his room. I ask him if he wants to go out with his mates, and he can't be bothered. Straight away you know he is worrying, but he doesn't want to talk about it.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, then English', plasterer).

Many men indicated that they wished to encourage help seeking, 'talking', or emotional expressiveness in order to prevent solitary experiences for their children. Notwithstanding men's concerns about the limitations to their own communication skills, the perceived closeness, emotional affection and involvement with children were how men intended to address these issues. Trefor and Steve's political advocacy for increased involvement by men in the care of children was not evident in other men's stories, but a pattern that was evident was a commitment to prevent solitary experiences in children, and in boys in particular. Furthermore, Martin, John, Ron and Paul identified their own solitary experiences during childhood which they did not want, for their own children. Interestingly, within these narratives about children, the metaphors of constraint such as 'bottling things up' are questioned by some men in relation to boys practices. Indeed, the dichotomy between 'strength' and 'weakness' was not generally evident when discussing boys possible futures. Furthermore, Steve, Paul, John and Martin actually linked talking or emotional expressiveness to the good mental health of children, and of boys particularly. Talking and emotional expressiveness may, it was indicated, help children with confidence, sociability, and even preventing future health problems.

For example, Martin was aware of potential risks for boys or young men in dealing with certain life stressors:

I like to think I am always there for my son, which is quite an important thing. So often you hear about, or read stories. Actually a boy who lives around the corner from here actually hung himself because he was being bullied at school, and I keep saying please talk to me, no matter how silly it is, just talk to me. That is quite an important thing because so much seems to be happening at the moment, and with the last year of juniors the pressure will be on him a bit more. Sometimes he seems worried and I ask him what he is worried about and he says nothing. I don't like to put him under pressure too much.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

On the other hand Brandon, who had two daughters, distinctively argued that boys may need to be different to girls:

I feel somewhat hypocritical really.... I would always say don't come to me with a problem come to me with a solution . If I had boys I would be like 'Come onnnnn lad, you have got to get stuck in and get it sorted out'. ...boys should still have a bit more oomph.

(Brandon, 'British, of Barbadian ancestry', police officer).

The 'come onnnnn' and the 'oomph' were expressed with a clenched fist, and seemed to imply an aggressive response to such experiences. Brandon's 'hypocrisy', as he termed it, related to the contradiction between his advocacy of children expressing themselves to parents, but at the same time he advocated practices in boys that may be appropriate on the football pitch, but may not be very

useful in dealing with vulnerability. While Brandon's extract above is distinctive within men's responses he articulated the coexistence of solitary experiences and conservative discourses about masculinity on the one hand, and men's experiences of social connectedness with people, on the other. Within these contradictory discourses there may be opportunities for policy and practice. For example, when this study is completed I intend to begin some public health practice and action research to explore these contradictions, with a specific focus upon the mental health status of boys and young men. Can I target fathers around mental health promotion to help them to help their sons? These issues will be discussed in Chapter 9.

8.5 MASCULINITIES AND UNCERTAINTY.

Throughout the interviews, and particularly in response to my final question within the second interview, which was 'What does it mean to be a man?', men talked about their experiences of gender and masculinity. All men's responses indicated awareness of social changes taking place affecting men and women. In Chapter Four evidence was presented regarding the ways that men perceived that family structures were changing, but also how women's and men's practices in the home, and within society, were changing.

Trefor and Steve actively welcomed such changes. For example, Steve was an advocate of men's increasing involvement in the care of children, and Trefor actually called himself a 'feminist'. Being a feminist, for Trefor, was associated with challenging 'traditional' ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman. While Trefor's ideas are distinctive within narratives, all men identified women's increasing activities in the labour market, and some men identified other changes in

the forms of women's increasing independence, as individuals and within society.

For example, Sylvester told me:

Working out there and in people's houses, and seeing little girls and seeing little boys, I can distinguish the difference between the boys and the girls... Women now are more independent than men.. Very independent indeed.

(Sylvester, 'Jamaican first, then English', plasterer).

Within this context of social change many men indicated that there were difficulties or constraints that influenced their own experiences. For example, some men talked about a range of media representations of men in general, and fathers in particular, which were confusing or contradictory. On the one hand men may be represented as 'modern', 'new', or responsible, while on the other hand men may be represented as 'traditional', 'laddish', comical, or incompetent. Paul and Trefor, specifically, also expressed concerns that the legal system in the UK did not sufficiently acknowledge men's changing patterns of involvement with children in families. Paul, for example, had found it difficult to gain 'access' to an older daughter, who lived with a previous girlfriend. The law, Paul argued, did not sufficiently reflect his desire to be involved with the care of his daughter.

Men also identified other constraints within the responses, activities or expectations of other people. First of all, some of the African-Caribbean men indicated that they anticipated potential prejudice or discrimination as fathers. Specifically some African-Caribbean men indicated that professionals may have negative assumptions about their activities as fathers, and they were keen to assert the importance of them, as fathers, living with their children. Other constraints men identified were in the activities of some welfare professionals, who some men perceived excluded them

from some encounters regarding children's welfare. Trefor specifically indicated that some welfare organisations actively did not recruit men as volunteers, because of the professionals' perceived limitations that they may have identified in men. Men may be perceived, Trefor suggested, as having limited abilities to work with families, but also perceived as potentially abusive, by some professionals.

The second constraint, regarding other people's expectations and responses to men, was associated with other men's practices. Companionship, friendships and 'having a laugh' with men was highly valued. However, some men, who men in this study knew, sometimes did not understand the importance of involvement in fathering children. Indeed, some women within extended families, were also identified as having differing and conflicting ideas to the men interviewed, with specific respect to men's practical and intimate involvement in the care of children.

In response to changing family and gender patterns and changing expectations of others Trefor, Oliver and Paul talked about being able to adapt, or be 'flexible' as Oliver put it, as families changed. Trefor was determined, he indicated, to 'resist the traditional role of the dominant father'. Oliver and Peter's accounts, particularly, do not demonstrate the same degrees of uncertainty about their experience of being a man that most men's narratives demonstrate. Their participation in cohesive social connections within Christian church communities, and also their connectedness with God, are understood to be assets in dealing with social change for Oliver and Peter. For completely differing reasons, Terrence was less concerned about social change, constraints or other expectations. He was proud of being 'head of the family', of 'being the breadwinner', and expressed less uncertainty about his experience of being a man than other men interviewed.

Nevertheless, all men interviewed experienced some insecurity associated with changes in the economy, the labour market, and work organisation and practices, as they generally had little power to influence such changes, as the extract below from Martin's account exemplifies:

Martin: You have got to be more decisive I think to be a man today.

Bob: What do you mean?

Martin: A lot of things. A few years ago if you were fed up of work you could change your job, you can't do that. There is less security, so every decision you make has got to be right so you don't jeopardise any position you are in.

(Martin, 'British', telesales supervisor).

For most men within this study experiences of social change are associated with a complex mixture of changing expectations, obligations, and constraints. Indeed, the perceived changes towards men's increasing involvement with children was taking place at the same time as men's continued involvement in full-time paid work. The combination of these experiences are perceived as increasing the intensification of obligations, stresses, and activities for many men within this study, as John indicated:

... I think roles have changed so much now, I think to be a man you have to be everything really, you have to be a man and a woman. A lot more is expected of you. You have to be a provider, but you have to live up to being a new man. You don't have to, but there is pressure there maybe from the media. I think men at the moment are really battered from all directions. I think you have to conform to everything. There are pressures, like you have got to be more of everything if you like. You are expected to get involved in everything around the

home, expected to wash up. That is fine, I haven't got a problem with that myself. They (men) have certainly got their work cut out at the moment.

(John, 'British and Irish', production line worker).

This perceived intensification of activities, was also compounded by the ways in which many men indicated they had limited autonomy, which was associated with the complex demands of domestic and paid work domains. I have argued, in this latter respect, that men had a more restricted sense of personal agency (in Chapter Five). Furthermore, some men indicated that men's experiences within families, in the past, may have been easier in some ways, in as much as doing both paid work and caring for children was not an easy process. Findings presented here do seem consistent with Warin et al's (1999) research which indicated that fathers may experience conflicts between work and domestic responsibilities. Lupton and Barclay (1997) have further argued that men who are fathers may experience distress within the conflict between traditional and contemporary forms of masculinity. Whether men within this study experienced such distress is unclear, but men's experiences were associated, on the one hand, with essential and complicit (Connell, 1995) discourses of masculinity especially where they talked about vulnerability. On the other hand, men's experiences of fathering were linked with more dynamic (Connell, 1995) discourses of masculinity. These differing experiences may contribute to confusion and uncertainty, as the extract from John, above, illustrates.

In practice, as a health visitor and within health promotion, I found Pleck's (1995) concept of gender role strain very useful in my training with other professionals about men's health, as it helped me to think about interventions with men that allowed for recognition of how changing gender relations impact on men's mental

health. However, within this study Pleck's (1995) approach is not an appropriate framework for the experiences of men interviewed. The notion of a 'role' is an over deterministic way of conceptualising men's experiences of masculinities, ethnicity, confusion, contradiction and change. Men within this study are not passive victims of material or structural influences, but they did experience constraints, did have a restricted sense of agency, and were involved in social change that was experienced as confusing and creating uncertainty. For example, Paul told me:

Whatever you do now you can't be seen to be a male chauvinist. I don't know who's supposed to do what today... (laughs). No, I mean I turned round to my wife and said 'You've got an easy life today!' I don't know where I bloody stand sometimes...Of course she doesn't think so.

(Paul, African-Caribbean, fitness instructor).

8.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

In Chapters Six and Seven men's experiences of social connectedness within families, with men friends, neighbours, work colleagues, and members of church communities were indicated as important and valued for men within this study. Degrees of trust, participation, and reciprocity regarding help and support were evident. However, where men perceived that their sense of vulnerability was at stake, for example where they experienced health concerns or difficulties in personal relationships, men were involved in what I have termed solitary discourses and practices. The four interdependent elements of solitary discourses and practices are containment of difficult feelings, rational thinking alone, activities to deal with vulnerability without disclosure, and not accessing others help. One of the

surprising developments within the fieldwork was when I attempted to explore men's solitary experiences, within the second round of interviews. Men within the study recurrently associated solitary experiences with essential and complicit (Connell, 1995) forms of masculinity, that implied power as men and also involved performing 'strength' and 'protection' rather than 'burdening' others with 'weakness'. Men also provided accounts that differentiated them from gay men, and also women who were perceived to communicate more collectively than men. Indeed, men in general were perceived as reinforcing men's solitary experiences, particularly in the ways 'macho' cultures of men may lead to ridicule or humiliation if they disclosed their vulnerability.

While the evidence of men's social connectedness to others in previous chapters prevents a polarised view of men's solitary experiences within social connections, there was also evidence, within men's narratives, of challenges to solitary experiences and conservative discourses about masculinities. One particular man, John, was involved in emotional reciprocity and challenging 'bottling things up', some men indicated that experiences of crisis also enabled men to resist being solitary men, and most importantly where men talked about fathering more dynamic discourses of masculinity (Connell, 1995) were evident in men's narratives. In particular, men within this study were keen to prevent children, and particularly boys, having solitary experiences.

Changing gender relations, anticipated racism, confusing or contradictory representations and expectations of other people, the perceived intensification of obligations for men as workers and fathers, men's restricted sense of personal agency, all contribute to complex and uncertain experiences of social change. Findings are consistent with Warin et al's (1999) argument for fathers experiencing

conflict between paid work and domestic domains, but are not consistent with Pleck's (1995) over deterministic framework of gender role strain. Nevertheless, men's contradictory experiences of complicit masculinities associated with men's solitary experiences of vulnerability on the one hand, and experiences of fathering associated with dynamic masculinities, on the other, adds to men's uncertainty. Whether solitary discourses and practices, men's perceived limited communication skills, and the stress men experienced when involved in non-instrumental 'talking' are assets in dealing with change, contradiction and uncertainty is an important question. Hence, this latter question, and the associated line of argument, will be examined in the final chapter where thesis intentions and findings are evaluated to establish implications for theory, research, policy and practice.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.

9.1 INTRODUCTION.

A reading of the social policy and social theory literature indicated that, while the experiences of fathers are evident within existing research, the experiences of working class men in the UK who are fathers, and the experiences of African-Caribbean men in particular, are underdeveloped within the literature. Analysis of the experiences of these two groups of men was also required, as there was an opportunity to explore the relationships between social structures, including gender, ethnicity and social class, on the one hand, and personal agency, on the other hand. Indeed, within this context the study has examined the complexity of men's experiences of fathering and health within social connections in depth.

The limited amount of previous research that was directly relevant to this inquiry stimulated the decision to employ an in-depth critical, interpretative and qualitative investigation of potentially 'private' meanings and experiences (Cornwell, 1984). This methodological framework was particularly important, as the study explored human agency by examining diversity and regularities within complex experiences of social connections, but at the same time was able to examine how material and structural influences were related to individual men's experiences.

This thesis set out to answer the research question: what are the implications of African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences within social connections (within families, friendships, communities and workplaces), for fathering and health experiences? This final chapter addresses the sixth thesis aim which was to: critically

evaluate study findings, and discuss the implications for theory, practice, policy and future research.

This chapter therefore summarises, integrates and discusses findings from Chapters 4-8. The evidence for solitary discourses and practices, discourses about masculinities, and similarities and differences between the experiences of African-Caribbean and White working class men are examined. The evidence for men's experiences of social connectedness, reciprocity and trust within families, friendships, communities and workplaces are also examined, before considering the evidence reported regarding men's health experiences. While material and structural influences, such as work, racism and fathering, on men's health are considered, it is the evidence regarding men's health practices for social connectedness that, it will be argued, are most significant within thesis findings. The solitary experiences, rather than reciprocal trust with others, regarding perceived vulnerability, men's perceived limitations to their communication skills, and the coherence of men's identities as men are all significant.

The implications of findings for existing theory are also integrated within discussion, to establish whether previous work is confirmed or qualified. Furthermore, the implications of findings for practice, policy, and future research will also be discussed, the methodological limitations to study findings are examined, and final conclusions outlined. However, while this chapter discusses the significant patterns within men's narratives, men's experiences were also characterised by diversity. Hence, this chapter begins with examination of some of the features of diversity evident within men's stories.

9.2 DIVERSITY WITHIN MEN'S NARRATIVES.

In subsequent sections of this chapter the patterns identified during the analysis of narratives will be reviewed, but this study also clarified the diversity of men's experiences. I will illustrate some of the scope of that diversity within men's accounts now. This study argues that men's solitary discourses and practices may limit their social connectedness to others, and that men's health practices regarding social connectedness have limitations for them in dealing with health concerns and personal difficulties. The forms that solitary practices take are varied within men's accounts, but, John, for example, talked about how he attempted to challenge and support other men regarding their personal experiences, within the challenging masculine environments of pub and factory. Indeed, experience of personal or health crisis for Ron within the factory, and Paul, when he had had meningitis, were associated with challenges to solitary experiences.

Evidence also indicated that the men, within this study, are influenced by dynamic masculine discourses (Connell, 1995), particularly associated with their experiences of involvement, as fathers, with children. Men within this study understood their involvement with children in diverse ways including, for example, braiding hair, caring for them when they were ill, or playing games. However Terrence was, unlike other men within this study, confidently assertive about fathering being particularly associated with 'breadwinner' activities, and he was assertive about domestic labour being his women partner's responsibility. Although it is argued that men within this study experience uncertainty regarding being a man Terrence, again, demonstrated little uncertainty: he was the head of the household, he provided the family income and was proud of it.

Findings also indicated that while love and emotional reciprocity with children was valued by all men within this study, there were a more limited range of stories about emotional reciprocity about women, and most men did not talk about loving their women partners. However, Trefor did talk about his 'loving relationship' at times, and Oliver specifically talked about how much he loved his wife, and that he continued to be 'in love' with her. The importance of different forms of pleasure for men, again, illustrates the heterogeneity of narratives, for example the enjoyment of eating 'crap' food, 'binge' drinking, boxing, running, playing football, or having a 'fag'. Furthermore it is varied ways in which men enjoyed humour, that is 'having a laugh' with other men, in contexts that allow some freedom from domestic and work obligations, that is also important to acknowledge.

There was also diversity in how men within this study understood their ethnic identities. For example, although I employed the categories of 'African-Caribbean' and 'White' working class men within the study, the ways in which men talked about their ethnic identities were strikingly diverse. Men described their ethnicity in a multiplicity of ways, including: 'Black British', 'Welsh, European, and humanist', 'British, of Barbadian ancestry' and 'Jamaican first, then English'. Similarly, although all men had been introduced to, or involved in, Christian religious practices during early childhood, most men were not involved in church activities. Even the three men actively involved in their church communities were involved in three different communities, and all three men had changed denominations or churches over time.

While diversity is evident within men's narratives, as reported in the five findings chapters, it is now intended to discuss some of the important patterns within findings. This is now necessary in order to identify the implications of findings for

existing theory, future research, for policy and practice, but also identify implications for my own praxis with men.

9.3 MASCULINITIES, ETHNICITY AND SOLITARY DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES.

Bott's (1957) concepts of social connections and social connectedness were employed within this study to help understand the dynamic between personal and social experiences of men, but in specific respects findings indicate that men were solitary. In Chapter Eight, the content of what I have termed 'solitary discourses and practices' involved four interdependent elements which are intended, analysis of narratives indicated, to prevent disclosures, by men to others, about their perceived vulnerability. Men's perceived vulnerability related to health experiences, including the psychological experiences of stress or concerns about their own or others health, but also some of the personal difficulties men experienced within families, including difficulties in relationships with children or partners.

The first element of solitary discourses and practices was: men's attempts to deal with difficult feelings alone, by attempting to contain or control their emotionality. For example, talk about more difficult feelings, like sadness, fear, and anxiety, was highly limited even when fathering was experienced as difficult, displeasurable, or caused stress. This finding echoes Lupton's (1998) cross cultural research which indicated that 'mastery' of emotionality by men is important in many cultures. Secondly, rational thinking alone was also valued by men within this study, where the rational was valued more highly than the emotional by many men, as Seidler (1994) has also argued. Thirdly, men were engaged in activities that were

undertaken to deal with their sense of vulnerability, through activities such as physical exercise, consumption of food, or 'having a laugh' with other men, while at the same time avoiding the disclosure of their concerns to others. The fourth element of solitary discourses and practices was the range of differing practices men undertook to not access others help regarding their vulnerability. Hence, women partners, who were identified by all men as being so important as forms of emotional, practical and informational support are not always trusted by men with their perceived vulnerability.

One of the most surprising findings within the study, reported in Chapter Eight, was that solitary discourses and practices were linked within all the accounts (of men participating in the second interview), to ideas about masculinity that were strikingly essentialist, but also complicitly masculine (Connell, 1995). For example, men associated their solitary experiences with ahistorical attributes of men in the past (including 'cavemen'), with men's perceived activities as leaders, as 'protectors, or men being 'strong' in families, or in society. These narratives also involved discourses emphasising distinct gender differences between men and women, women being perceived as being more collective, more connected to others. In this context the prevention of disclosure of 'weakness', of 'burdening' others was important to men, but ironically most men also identified that such practices were associated with their own (non-rational) fear of disclosure.

There was also evidence, within narratives analysed in Chapter Four, of complicit masculinity where being a father was understood as an institution of power and status for some men. For example, some men talked about their leading role in families, and some men talked about 'protection' within their families, usually emphasised in relation to children but sometimes related to women partners.

Indeed, the unreflexive commitment by some to full-time paid work was also noteworthy, as were the unreflexive accounts of most men about the unequal distribution of unpaid work between men and women in the home.

One of the potential difficulties within the discussion so far is that one may provide an account of men's solitary discourses and practices, and complicit masculinity, that implies an essential or unitary nature of men's experiences. The discussion of the evidence of diversity within accounts in the previous section of this chapter challenges such a narrow view. Indeed, men within this study were actively involved in a range of relationships with women partners, children, family members, friends, neighbours, church community members, and work colleagues that they valued. Men's social connectedness to others will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Furthermore, a unitary account is also challenged by evidence from men of how they talked about experiences that were associated with more dynamic discourses about masculinity, which will be discussed shortly. A unitary emphasis on men's experiences is also challenged by analysis of the similarities and differences that emerged in men's sense of ethnic identities.

Dynamic masculinity (Connell, 2000), which encompasses changing and reflexive discourses and practices associated with masculinity, is also evident within men's accounts. In Chapter Four, some men indicated that they negotiated the constraints provided by paid work to achieve more involvement in family life. In addition, the ways in which men talked about economic contributions to families as just one aspect, not the most important aspect, of their fathering is also important here. Findings are absolutely clear that involvement with children is central to how men understand the meaning of fathering. Within this context of involvement with children, discourses about children, especially young children, would seem to be

very much about emotional social connectedness to others. It is also clear, as reported in Chapter Eight, that men within this study desire that girls, and particularly boys, should not have solitary experiences themselves. Many writers, including Whitehead (2002), record concerns about men's emotional inexpressiveness, but the 'championing' (as Lupton and Barclay, 1997, have termed it) of open expression of feelings of love and affection for children, evident in Chapters Four and Six, qualifies sweeping assumptions about emotionally inexpressive men. Findings are consistent with Morgan's (2002) position that active involvement with children may stimulate more reflexivity by men about fathering and gender. There is evidence within all the findings chapters of both dynamic and complicit masculinities within complex individual narratives, and within accounts as whole.

So far, within this chapter, patterns within narratives that are shared by both groups of men have been discussed. This is because findings indicated that African-Caribbean and White working class men shared similar experiences of fathering and health, and similar experiences of solitary discourses and practices. The differences between the accounts of these two groups of men are far less significant than I anticipated at the beginning of this investigation. However, there are important differences that I will discuss now.

First of all, there is clear evidence that, throughout interviews, most African-Caribbean men would talk in a way that linked their life experiences with notions of ethnicity and racism. This contrasts with White men's accounts where reflexivity about ethnicity was far less evident, even where men were asked direct questions. In Chapter Four, it was reported that both groups of men shared reflexivity about the changing activities of men regarding their perceived leading activities in dealing

with children's behaviour. However, there is also material specific to African-Caribbean men indicating changing practices regarding the ways in which fathers deal with children's behaviour and punishment, with individual African-Caribbean men challenging traditional practices of punishment. Regarding the meaning of fathering, while there was talk within both groups of men's accounts regarding involvement with children, for some White men there is evidence of a political concern to promote involvement by men. For most African-Caribbean men, their involvement with children is also important, but it is the specific perceived importance of fathers living (as opposed to not living) with their children that is emphasised.

Connell (1995) has argued that some ethnic minority men may be less powerful, 'marginalised' men dealing with structural constraints within society. Within both the preliminary study (Williams, 1999) and within thesis findings reported in Chapter Four, I identified a recurring concern by African-Caribbean men to demonstrate their commitment to children and families, which included the notion that fathers should live with their children but this concern was talked about by some men in a broader context of others' possible negative assumptions about their activities as African-Caribbean men within families. The commitment of fathers to living with children, to helping with children's learning, and attempting to ensure African-Caribbean children behaved well, was talked about by most African-Caribbean men as taking place in a broader context of anticipated prejudice or discrimination that their children may encounter in the future. Actual or anticipated racial prejudice or discrimination as experienced by African-Caribbean men, or members of their families, were significant forms of stress that were not generally part of White men's experiences.

9.4 SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS, RECIPROCITY AND TRUST.

While the evidence of solitary discourses and practices have been identified as significant, the men interviewed were also socially connected to others within families, friendships, the Madeley locality, and work settings, which were experiences of social connectedness that were valued by men. In Chapters Four and Six it was reported that men's involvement with children did provide opportunities for men to provide care, love, affection and practical help for children. Indeed, men did indicate they helped women and children with family income through their paid work, and by making some contribution to household tasks.

Reciprocity was evident within men's narratives about other people, but it was women partners who were identified, in Chapter Six, as the key individuals in providing emotional, practical and informational help for these men. However, the support of other family members, and male friends, was also highly valued for fathers interviewed here. The importance of reciprocal informational, instrumental forms of support, and shared social and leisure activity with family members, friends, and neighbours, reported in Chapters Six and Seven, should not be underestimated. However, the scope of reciprocity was highly contingent with neighbours, as disclosure of vulnerability or emotional intimacy was proscribed, hence emphasis within narratives is upon instrumental, practical reciprocity. Furthermore, the shared transgressive pleasure of 'having a laugh' with other men friends, or men at work, may be associated with some freedom from the constraints of work and family obligations. These latter experiences were enjoyed by most men.

There is also reciprocity evident within the more reflexive accounts of the African-Caribbean men regarding ethnicity and social connectedness, reflexivity that is absent from White men's accounts. In Chapters Six and Seven, it was reported that locally and internationally dispersed family structures and friendships were perceived to be assets to African-Caribbean families, as Chamberlain (1997), (1999), has argued. In addition, some of the perceived benefits of the 'having a laugh' with men friends, or the help of women partners and extended family members, was in the shared critical talk about experiences of prejudice, abuse or discrimination.

Reciprocity was also evident within men's narratives about the workplace (Chapter Seven). However, the imbalance in power between employers and employees underpins men's critical perspectives about the limited trust and reciprocity possible with employers. While trust in employers was quite limited, trust in managers, or trade union representatives was contingent and negotiated within individual circumstances. Workplace colleagues were also sometimes understood as reciprocal and trustworthy people, particularly regarding shared experiences of work and fathering, but again such relationships were negotiated with individuals on the basis of men's judgements about the efficacy of such friendships. The collective company of other men to 'have a laugh', to share humour as a way of dealing with work experiences was enjoyed by most men, but 'having a laugh' was also perceived to be associated with potential ridicule if men considered disclosure of vulnerability to other men.

The highly limited involvement of men in local community spaces or organisations, that potentially could have been accessed regarding men's experiences of fathering or health, was evident in Chapter Seven. However, three of the men within this

study were actively involved in their church communities. The spiritual experiences of these men, within three different Christian church communities, was an important asset for them. For Paul, a Jehovah's Witness, Oliver, a Methodist, and Peter, a Baptist, these communities were understood as being important spaces and relationships for the recognition and validation of fathers. In addition, for these three men specifically, they experienced a greater sense of cohesion, when compared with other men interviewed, with regard to their place as fathers within communities that shared the same beliefs. However in spite of a recurring statements about reciprocity and trust within these three men's accounts, perceived vulnerability was not shared within church communities. Sharing friendships, sharing rituals such as song and prayer are significant, rather than a forum for help seeking regarding personal vulnerability.

Evidence reported in Chapter Seven indicates that there was no sense of 'generalised trust' (Putnam, 1996) in communities or workplaces. Mistrust and potential threats to families, friends and neighbours was understood as being created by crime, the fear of crime, or racial prejudice, discrimination or violence. However, none of the African-Caribbean men indicated that their own children had encountered racism, and tolerance of the activities of young people, towards people of differing ethnic backgrounds is evident within accounts of men of both groups of men. Nevertheless, in Chapters Six and Seven, it was reported that trust in family members, men friends, neighbours, and work colleagues was highly contingent in some respects. It is certainly the case that men would be prepared to share their stories of experiences of fathering with women partners, family members, neighbours, managers, work colleagues, church members, friends and acquaintances. However, experiences of perceived vulnerability were associated with more contingent trust in others. Statements of absolute trust in partners, family

members, church friends, or men friends do not always correspond with specific concrete examples of help seeking from other adults, or providing help to other adults taking place. Trust may have involved the risks of having to deal with others potential intrusion or negative judgements. Interestingly, findings recurrently confirm Wethington and Kessler's (1986) findings that the perception that support from others is available, if required, may be more important than actually receiving help from others. This perceived potential availability of the help of others even has an international dimension for some of the African-Caribbean men. Nevertheless the identification of other people as potential, rather than actual, helpers was not inconsistent with the stress men indicated they experienced when talking, negotiating, and trusting others with their perceived vulnerability.

There are material factors that are relevant to this discussion about reciprocity, trust and social connectedness. Paid work for most men was full time, involving absence from home and locality for at least 40 hours per week. In addition, most men's limited power as employees and its links with the hours they worked, volume of paid work they did, work intensification, or insecurity, were also associated with men's limited trust in others, and particularly their limited trust in their employers. The limited availability of leave from work to care for others is an important constraint in this respect. While there is evidence of reciprocity and contingent trust with schoolteachers, men's use of, and contribution to, local organisations, social spaces and relationships with local professionals was limited. Neither ethnicity nor racism were important factors within findings in this latter respect, because men of both ethnic backgrounds shared accounts that emphasised the relative insignificance of such resources in their lives. Nevertheless, some men had experienced exclusion in relationships with some midwives and doctors, and some African-Caribbean men did anticipate professionals' prejudice in some respects. In addition, in Chapters

Five and Seven, it was reported that men also identified a perceived sense of limited personal autonomy, associated with paid work and family obligations, which also inhibited involvement in local social connections.

9.5 HEALTH, HEALTH PRACTICES AND UNCERTAINTY.

The literature regarding the health of men so often focuses upon biology, mortality, morbidity, illness, or sickness, but this study specifically explored the links between health and social connectedness. In Chapter Five I have argued that the most influential way in which men talked about health was concerning functional capacity, which is similar to Herzlich's (1973) findings which identified how health within lay knowledge may be conceptualised as a 'reserve'. For men, within this study, health was understood as an asset that allowed them to fulfil their responsibilities, including those of worker and father. This finding is in contrast to men's accounts reported in Chapter Four, where it was argued that 'provider' activities were less significant within men's accounts about the meaning of fathering than had been expected.

Men's lives were also influenced by a range of material factors affecting their health, analysis of narratives indicated. The experiences of fathering did create stress for these men, but fathering was also understood, through involvement with children, as helping with relaxation and ameliorating stress. Paid work was important to all men as providing income, and may have been a stimulating and valuable source of creativity and social contact for some men, as Warr (1987) and Jahoda (1982) have indicated elsewhere. However, occupational hazards, shift work, limited work autonomy, insecurity about work, the volume of work, or intensification of work were identified as forms of stress, affecting their bodies,

their minds, and their relationships with women and children. In addition, some of the African-Caribbean men identified hidden or overt prejudice and discrimination as an extra source of stress they had to deal with within the workplace, which Karlsen and Nazroo's (2002) work indicates may be significant for men's mental health.

It was the combined influences of fathering, paid work, but also ageing that were perceived as being interdependent in influencing changes in body shape, body weight and levels of 'fitness', men's accounts reported in Chapter Five indicate. Nevertheless, fathering did also provide stimulus for some men to change certain practices, for example changing consumption of alcohol or cigarettes, which they linked with their obligations to children. Indeed, the pleasures associated with transgression such as 'having a laugh' while drinking in the pub, or eating 'crap' food, needs to be understood in a broader context than the practices themselves. These transgressive, 'unhealthy', practices took place within the context of perceived constraints within men's lives. The obligations associated with fathering, paid work, and domestic tasks were compounded by men's experiences of limited personal autonomy, limited leisure and limited scope for personal development. Hence, after Fryer (1995), I argued that evidence indicated that men within this study had a restricted sense of personal agency. In this context the social connections of family and work have implications for material influences on health, but also, as will become clearer shortly, influence men's health practices.

Men within this study did not often talk about health as influenced by personal relationships, as was identified in Chapter Five. However, even within the in depth reporting, and analysis, of men's social connections in Chapters Six and Seven, there was very little evidence of men having insight into the health implications of

men's giving and receiving help to others. Hence, the work of Brown and Harris (1978), Ellinson and Levin (1998), Callaghan and Morrissey (1992), Ganster and Victor (1988), Gove et al (1983), Jahoda (1982), Heaney (1992), Kawachi et al (1996), Stansfield et al (1998), and others, which all have indicated the links between social connectedness and health, (particularly mental health), are useful in helping analyse men's experiences, but men interviewed for this study did not generally understand the links between health and social connectedness themselves. Indeed, there was limited sense, within the narratives as a whole, that limited social connectedness with others was a possible form of transgression. However, some men did anticipate the development of solitary experiences in children, particularly boys, and some men desired that boys should not share their own experiences in this respect.

Initially, when planning this study I had been interested in Pleck's (1995) concept of 'gender role strain', as Pleck's work fitted intuitively with my experience of relationships with, and paid work with men. However, Pleck's concept is too deterministic for the complex experiences of personal, material and structural change that men within this study identified. In contrast, in Chapter Eight it was argued that evidence indicated that being a man was associated with uncertainty for most men. Most men talked about confusion, conflict or contradiction as part of their experiences of a changing social world. Men within this study talked about differing ways of being a man, with evidence of both complicit and dynamic masculinity in narratives. What it means to be a man, for those interviewed within this study, was influenced by changing gender relations, anticipated or hidden racism, and confusing or contradictory social expectations or representations of men. Such difficulties were compounded by a perceived intensification of obligations associated with combined affects of paid work and domestic domains.

In addition, in Chapter Four, evidence indicated that men experienced conflicts between paid work and their commitment to involvement with children. Uncertainty is also reinforced, for some of the African-Caribbean men, by their actual or anticipated experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination, and within this context some men anticipated uncertain futures for their children. In addition, there is also uncertainty that some men, of both ethnic backgrounds, associated with their experiences of paid work within a free market economy. It is therefore not surprising that, as was reported in Chapters Five and Seven, men within this study have a restricted sense of personal agency.

The essential and complicit masculinities associated with solitary discourses and practices, which confirmed some limits to men's social connectedness with others, may not necessarily be a sound basis for understanding and dealing with uncertainty, confusion, contradiction and change. In addition, as was reported in Chapter Six, in the second round of interviews men did talk about 'talking' and 'listening' as being a 'good' thing that they 'should' or 'ought' to do with others, particularly with children and women partners. However, talking to others about their perceived vulnerability, even when talking to those people, like women partners and men friends, who they may have indicated that they absolutely trusted was difficult for men. This latter issue was compounded by evidence that all men perceived that their communication skills were not as good as they would like, and certainly not as good as women's perceived expertise in this respect.

The fundamental implications for health and fathering within this study lie in men's health practices within families, friendships, communities and workplaces that disempower men, as fathers, and as men with health needs. This is not to deny the importance of material and structural constraints that clearly influence men's lives.

However, it is the limitations to men's health practices that enable social connectedness with others, that are identified as the most important health implications of this study. Analysis of men's narratives indicated that the perceived limitations within men's communication skills, their limited insight into the health benefits of social connectedness, the uncertainty and limited coherence of their identities as men,, their abilities to establish reciprocal trust with other people regarding experiences of perceived vulnerability, and their solitary methods of dealing with perceived vulnerability are a concern for policy and practice. The implications of findings for policy, practice and future research will now be addressed.

9.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH.

As the processes of qualitative data analysis continued I began to search for a framework to assist my thinking about possible practice and policy responses to both men's fathering and health practices within social connections. In this respect, Tudor's (1996) work regarding mental health promotion was initially important. Tudor's framework was intended to help understand and maintain people's mental health by addressing processes including stress management, coping, identity, self development, self-esteem, autonomy, social support, and change. The evidence for solitary discourses and practices, men's limited trust and reciprocity regarding perceived vulnerability, the limitations to their communication skills, their limited insights into the health benefits of social connectedness, and the limited coherence of men's identities as men, all indicate that such a framework for mental health promotion may be valuable. Tudor's (1996) framework is an important step forward from traditional medical discourses (see Donaldson and Donaldson, 1993,

for example) advocating individual 'behaviour' or 'lifestyle' change by men regarding food or alcohol consumption. Men's transgressive practices regarding food, physical activity, cigarette smoking, and alcohol within this study are not unimportant influences on health, but use of Tudor's framework helps raise important questions about how policy makers and professionals could respond to men's experiences of social connectedness.

However, Tudor's approach to improving health through mental health promotion has some limitations for responding to the needs of men within this study. Informed by psychological theories and insights, this framework helps us understand human agency as distinct from social structure, and indeed social connectedness is reduced to 'social support'. It is the socially structured and gendered experiences of social connectedness by men that are also at stake here. In fact, Naidoo and Wills (2000) have argued that effective health promotion needs to address the broader social, economic, and ecological contexts people live within.

The Department of Health (2001) strategy for mental health promotion, 'Making it Happen', advocates improving mental health 'literacy' at an individual level, but also advocates strengthening communities through encouraging, for example, development of 'social capital' within Health Action Zones and New Deal for Communities initiatives. One of the 'protective factors' identified as necessary to improve mental health within communities was identified as improving social connectedness. In addition, tackling discrimination and inequalities, improving access to resources like childcare, education, employment and housing are also advocated. This policy document begins to identify the social dimension to mental health promotion that Tudor's (1996) framework lacks. However the relationship between personal and social structures, including social class, gender and ethnicity,

are not sufficiently addressed within this policy, and unsurprisingly where gender and parenting are discussed the focus is upon women within families and communities. The significance of masculinities within gender relations therefore needs to be understood by policy makers advocating the development of 'social support' or 'social capital'.

Sensitivity to the gendered, ethnic, and social class backgrounds of men who are fathers is certainly required by policy makers and professionals, as the Men's Health Forum (2002) has argued. In this respect, the recent production of a 'Race Equality Action Plan' (Department of Health, 2004), is welcomed. The latter strategy's commitment to building upon the MacPherson report (MacPherson, 1999) in order to address institutionalised racism, and inequalities in health between ethnic groups in the UK is valuable. In addition, re-evaluation of service priorities, as Gbate et al (2000), Lloyd et al (2003), Boneham and Sixsmith (2002), and I (Williams, 1999) have all indicated is necessary, in order to ensure that services for health and families are positively welcoming to men who are fathers, and those services are also able to reach out to social groups of men from diverse social backgrounds. One of my personal frustrations reading the existing literature, but also in my semi-professional practice within primary care, is regarding the ways in which welfare services focus so much on women. Ultimately, some work with men has to take place. My preference is that mental health promotion work is undertaken with men and boys by professionals who are paid to address community health needs, rather than allow working class women and children, in local communities, to deal with the consequences of men's solitary practices.

Furthermore, if the involvement of men with children is to be supported, policies regarding the relationship between work and family are required to be sensitised to

the experiences of working fathers. While policies to encourage flexible working are welcomed (e.g. Department of Trade and Industry, 2001), and policies to enable increased care, paternity or parental leave are also to be welcomed, security in work and levels of pay while leave or flexible working is undertaken may be more important to working class families than flexibility (La Valle et al, 2002, O'Brien and Shemlit, 2003)

Other implications of this study relate to my own work, as I intend to address the above policy and practice issues locally in Birmingham. With the participation of men and professionals I intend to make the case for a local strategy to meet some of the needs of local men regarding health and fathering. Secondly, I intend to explore, with local professionals and local fathers, the potential for a piece of action research that addresses masculinities, health and social connectedness. Specifically, health promotion and research may be required to establish if, and how, fathers can help boys to develop their health process skills, and hence ultimately develop their social connectedness with others.

There are other research questions that are raised by this study, for example how other groups of men of differing backgrounds may experience health within social connections. However, there is one final issue that I would wish to emphasise. We need to know more about the success or otherwise of men who have been 'man enough', as Seidler (1997) puts it, to re-evaluate the importance of full time paid work, and to develop their involvement with children, as Liam and Steve within this study have done. What successes have these changing men achieved regarding fathering, social connectedness and health?

9.7 STUDY LIMITATIONS.

In Chapter Three the case was made for a critical and interpretative methodological framework, to underpin this qualitative study. The research methods, and the forms of qualitative data analysis employed, were intended to enhance the trustworthiness of the investigation, which was demonstrated in Chapter Three. Addressing men's experiences of human agency, the influence of material and structural factors on their lives, but also distinctively within studies about men, addressing men's experiences of social connectedness was intended, and achieved.

The critical and interpretative framework allowed issues of agency within men's experiences to be brought to the foreground, which quantitative epidemiological research about 'social capital' cannot always achieve. The methodological framework provided scope for encounters with individual men within interviews that enabled men to talk about their experiences in a way that was ethically and personally safe. However, my epistemological and methodological framework was also realist. Hence, I interrogated material influences on health, for example the stress associated with shift work, but also structural influences on men's lives, specifically gender, social class and ethnicity.

A balance was necessary in order to demonstrate understanding of the social constraints experienced by men, without portraying them as passive victims of their social circumstances. Of course, not everything within human experience is open to research, even in depth qualitative research. In asking men about social connectedness and health I was asking challenging questions that required them to talk about emotional experiences, not all of which may be easily articulated in language. In fact, the identification of solitary discourses and practices confirms

one of the difficulties within fieldwork with some men, especially where men talked, or did not talk, about experiences which they may have perceived required them to disclose vulnerability to me, another man.

The research design was intended to explore the complexity of men's experiences, and the question schedules were developed specifically for this study. The schedules have not been subjected to wider testing for reliability and validity. It should also be noted that the decision to explore the experiences of a small number of men for this study, in contrast with the preliminary study (Williams, 1999), makes it difficult to claim findings can be transferred to a range of other settings. However, as Polit et al. (2001) have argued, such a study can enable critical evaluation of theory, and enable further research.

9.8 CONCLUSIONS.

The critical and interpretative methodological framework employed within this study to underpin fieldwork methods and qualitative data analysis, enabled research with men that was ethically safe, and the production of thesis findings that I contend are trustworthy. Furthermore, the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness, the significance of human agency, and the influence of material and structural factors on men's health and health practices have also been identified. It is therefore argued that a traditional epidemiological approach (Kawachi et al, 1997) for studying 'social capital' is insufficient if we are to fully understand the complexity of men's experiences of social connectedness. In addition, this thesis was able to demonstrate that men were not passive victims of social change and social structures, but purposeful, dynamic men active in social change in a variety of different ways.

Within this study I examined the relationships between African-Caribbean and White working class men's experiences of health and fathering within social connections. In so doing, this thesis has identified serious limitations for men's health practices for social connectedness with other people. Analysis of men's narratives indicated that the men's limited insights into the health benefits of social connectedness, men's perceived limitations within men's communication skills, the lack of coherence in their identities as men, and their limited involvement in reciprocal trust with other people regarding experiences of perceived vulnerability are of concern. While it is argued that men within this study do value their social connections with others, and emotional reciprocity with children is certainly evident within men's accounts, there is also evidence of what I have termed solitary discourses and practices. Men thought, felt and acted in solitary ways to prevent disclosure of perceived vulnerability to others. Women partners were often identified as the most trustworthy person in men's lives, but even trust in women regarding vulnerability is highly contingent.

Putnam's (1995) work in developing the concept 'social capital' is valuable, particularly as social connectedness is not reduced to 'social support'. However, the consensual framework Putnam has developed does not provide sufficient scope to address the experiences of men within this study, particularly with respect to structural influences on men's lives. Findings here indicated that, for these two groups of men, their experiences were influenced by their gender, ethnicity and social class, as well as more traditional forms of social cohesion such as religiosity, for some men.

Ethnicity was an important issue within this investigation as it was intended to explore similarities as well as differences within the experiences of African-Caribbean and White working class men. However, findings indicated more patterns shared between these two groups of men than there were differences.

Differences were evident including the ways in which White men were consistently less reflexive about the significance of ethnicity and racism for their lives, than African-Caribbean men. Many of African-Caribbean men, unlike the White men interviewed, deal with constraints in the form of anticipated, or actual experiences of indirect or direct discrimination, abuse and prejudice. On the other hand, for the African-Caribbean men relationships with friends, family, and community have a local and yet dispersed, international dimension which was perceived as an asset in dealing with social constraints, but also involved pleasure in shared history, culture, and consumption.

Even though African-Caribbean and White men shared experiences of being in paid work, and most owned their own homes, Connells' (1995) concept of marginalised masculinities is appropriate for conceptualising the experiences of African-Caribbean men in dealing with the constraints of anticipated or actual abuse, prejudice and discrimination. Nevertheless, Connell's (1995, 2000) work, (although extremely valuable in helping understand the personal and structural context for men's experiences), does not address fathering in any depth. However, while it is argued that the stories of men within this study demonstrate both complicit, marginalised and dynamic masculine discourses, it is also clear that the combined experiences of gender, ethnicity, social class and the material impact of family life and paid work, are all associated for these men with uncertainty, confusion, and contradictions about what it means to be a man. However, this thesis does not, support Pleck's (1995) over socialised argument for 'gender role strain'.

The dominance of biological and behavioural research regarding the health of men is challenged by this study's analysis of men's knowledge and experiences. Indeed, Watson's (2000) valuable work in addressing the conceptual relationships between the

health of men and masculinity is important, but his specific focus upon men's bodies, and men's subjective experience of the body does not allow scope for exploration of men's social connectedness with others. The issue that must be emphasised here is that it is the specific difficulties that men have with their practices within social connections, that is the health processes of enabling social connectedness regarding vulnerability, that are most significant within findings reported here.

This investigation also sought to explore material factors that influenced men's lives, particularly because of their relevance to policy and practice within this chapter. Men within this study conceptualised health as being about their functional capacity to meet their responsibilities as fathers and workers. However, the implications of paid work, for men's physical and mental health have been identified, as were the implications for relationships with women and children in families. Furthermore, the combined affects of fathering and paid work are also associated with a restricted sense of personal agency. Transgressive health practices, involving consumption or physical activity, must be understood in the context of these material constraints. However there are other issues to note here also. Men's limited access to leave from paid work to care for others, some experiences of exclusion with health professionals, the limited use of local resources and spaces available to help parents and promote health, all reinforce men's limited social connectedness to others. The actual or anticipated experiences of racism, for the African-Caribbean men specifically, within the workplace and communities are also important constraints and have implications for their psychological health as well.

The structural and material constraints influencing men's lives have been analysed. However, stereotypical views of work orientated, untrusting, isolated, inexpressive, or 'macho' men is not born out by findings within this study. These men should not be seen as passive victims of material and structural constraints, but purposeful men

responding to changing social circumstances. Men did have some trust in children, women partners, friends and family members, and the importance of potential support from others, locally or internationally (for African-Caribbean men specifically) must not be underestimated. Men did help provide income for their families, they did do some domestic labour, and informational and instrumental reciprocity with others is identified as an important part of their relationships within social connections. Fathering was understood as being fundamentally about involvement with children, and men did enjoy the intimacy of love and emotional reciprocity with children. While talking about emotionality with others was very challenging to most men interviewed, crisis situations did provide some opportunities to move beyond solitary discourses and practices, for some men.

In addition, three men actively involved in Christian Churches were involved in communities where there was a forum to share, value and support fathering. Furthermore men were generally reflexive about their health and health practices, particularly regarding alcohol, food consumption, and physical activity. Finally, the men within this study did enjoy their relationships with children, 'having a laugh' with men friends or work colleagues, and enjoyed the company of women, friends and family.

Furthermore, recognition is also required that men can be understood as assets within families and communities, in their activities as fathers particularly, rather than focus upon men's deficits which may be associated with stereotypes about men's masculinities, social class background, or African-Caribbean ethnicity. Welfare services need to consider how welcoming they are to men, and how those services can reach out to groups of men from diverse social backgrounds. However structural and material constraints for men's health, fathering and social

connectedness which are associated with paid work, specifically, need to be considered by policy makers and practitioners. Policies regarding leave from work to care for others, work flexibility, but also levels of pay and work security for working class men also require consideration.

Implications for policy and practice have been identified, but it is the specific implications for mental health promotion work with men and boys regarding health and fathering, that requires emphasis. Awareness amongst professionals and policy makers is required about men's practices for social connectedness. However, Tudor's (1996) framework for addressing personal agency within mental health promotion, is limiting as findings indicate that interventions requires a structural, social dimension which the 'Making it happen' policy document (Department of Health, 2001) begins to address. Awareness by policy makers about how social divisions like gender, ethnicity and social class impact on men's experiences of social connectedness within 'social support' or 'social capital' is required if policies are to successfully engage men. Indeed, the full implementation of the MacPherson report (MacPherson, 1999) in tackling institutionalised racism within health services, particularly, is essential.

Further research with men who have prioritised involvement with children rather than paid work is necessary to explore their experiences of the relationships between fathering, health and social connectedness. Finally, in my own future work I intend to address some of the implications of thesis findings by undertaking action research, with both men who are fathers and with health professionals, to address how men can help boys to develop health practices for social connectedness. In addition, I intend to investigate the feasibility of developing a local strategy to address the needs of men regarding fathering and health.

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APPENDIX ONE: QUESTION SCHEDULE FOR FIRST INTERVIEW.

BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW

- Introductions.
- Signing of consent form by informants and myself.
- Verbal explanation, by me, regarding ethical issues including: voluntarism, confidentiality, anonymity, and payment of expenses.
- Payment of £15 expenses to informants.
- I answer informant's questions before interview begins.

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

- How many children do you have?
- Do they live with you?
- How old are they?
- How old are you?
- How old is your partner/wife/girlfriend?
- What sort of accommodation do you live in?
- Do you rent it or own it?
- Do you have a phone? Mobile too?
- Do you have a car? Does your partner?
- How do you get around?
- What sort of school did you go to?
- How old were you when you left school?
- What did you do then?
- Have you done any training, or had any education, since you left school?
- Are you working at the moment?
- How many hours per week do you work?
- Do you work shifts: what sort?

- Is your partner working at the moment?
- How many hours per week does she work?
- Does she work shifts: what sort?
- What is the main source of income for your family?
- Do you live together?
- Are you married?
- How long have you been together?
- Would you say you were a spiritual or religious person?
- How would you describe your ethnic background?
- How would you describe your social class background?

SECTION TWO: FATHERING.

- What does being a father mean to you?
- What is it like being a father?
- What is enjoyable about being a father?
- What is not so enjoyable?
- What are your jobs within the home?
- Who looks after the children? When?
- Who plays with them?
- Who helps them with their learning?
- Who helps them learn how to 'behave'?
- What happens when they do not 'behave' in the way you would expect?
- Who helps them when they are sick or ill?
- Who does the mending or DIY in the house?
- Who does the cooking?
- Gardening?

- Cleaning?
- Washing?
- Ironing?
- How do you sort out who does which jobs within the family?

SECTION THREE: HEALTH.

- Are your children healthy?
- Is your partner healthy?
- Are you healthy?
- What does it mean, to you, to be healthy?
- What do you do to relax?
- Are you involved in any hobbies?
- What kind of leisure, or social activities, are you involved in?
- Are you having any training, or doing any learning at the moment?
- Do you have time for yourself?
- What do you do to look after your health?
- Is there anyone who helps you to stay healthy?
- Can you tell me about your job: do you enjoy it?
- Is your job good for your health?
- Is there anything about your work that is not good for you?
- Is your job good for you as a man who has a family?
- Are you allowed leave from work to look after the children?
- Is being a father good for your health?
- You earlier told me about your ethnicity: does your ethnic background affect your health?
- Does racism effect your health?
- Does your social class background effect your health?

SECTION FOUR: GIVING AND RECEIVING HELP.

- Who do you talk to about your experience of being a father?
- Who do you talk to about your health?
- Who would you go to for advice?
- Who would you go to for practical help?

Prompts: women partners, children, elders, family members, friends, neighbours, church members, work colleagues, managers, employers.

SECTION FIVE: HELP FROM WELFARE PROFESSIONALS.

- Do you ever talk to any professionals about your health?
- Do you talk to any professionals about your experiences as a father?
- Have you had any contact with professionals in the past?
- Who do you trust?

Prompts for above questions: doctor, nurse, schoolteacher, midwife, health visitor, counsellor.

INTERVIEW ENDING.

- Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?
- I will send a copy of the transcribed interview: do you want an audio or paper copy?
- I confirm voluntarism, confidentiality and anonymity within research process.
- I confirm I will contact them by telephone to arrange the next interview.

APPENDIX TWO: QUESTION SCHEDULE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW.

BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW

- Introductions.
- Signing of consent form by informants and myself.
- Verbal explanation, by me, regarding ethical issues including: voluntarism, confidentiality, anonymity, and payment of expenses.
- Payment of £15 expenses to informants.
- I answer informant's questions before the interview begins.

SECTION ONE: UPDATE.

- Did you have a chance to look at the copy of the first interview, that I sent you?
- Is there anything that you would wish to say about the first interview?
- Are you well?
- Family members well?
- How is work at the moment?

SECTION TWO: SOLITARY EXPERIENCES.

- Do some men deal with their concerns about health on their own?
- Do some men deal with their concerns about their families on their own?
- Why do you think some men do this?
- Do you do this?
- Do some men found it difficult to express their feelings?
- Do you find this yourself?

SECTION THREE: SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

- What about your children: do they deal with their concerns on their own?
- What is it like to live around here?
- Is there a 'community spirit' around here?
- Do people look out for each other?

- Do people trust one another?
- Are you involved in local community life? In what ways?
- Are you active in any local organisations?
- Are you active in any local political organisations?
- Do you trust local political parties?
- Do you trust your doctor?
- Are you active within your children's school?
- Do you trust the children's schoolteachers?
- Prompts: any other local contacts or professionals encountered?
- Do you trust your employers?
- Do you trust your managers?
- Do you belong to a trade union or professional organisation?
- Do you trust the 'union' you belong to?
- Do you trust your work colleagues?

SECTION FOUR: INFORMANTS AS PROVIDERS OF HELP TO OTHERS.

- Is communication important within relationships?
- Do you do this?
- Do you listen to other people?
- Do people ask you for information or advice?
- Do people ask you for practical help?
- Can other people trust you?

Prompts for each of the above questions: children, partner, family, friends, church members, work colleagues, neighbours.

MY FINAL QUESTION.

- What does it mean to be a man?