

**Contemporary Spinsterhood in Britain: Gender,
Partnership Status and Social Change**

**Roona Elizabeth Huldtgren Simpson
London School of Economics and Political Science**

**A Thesis submitted to the University of London
for the Ph.D. Degree**

Abstract

An increase in spinsterhood is one aspect of recent changes in family and household formation. Family change has been the focus of much academic and political attention, however there is little contemporary research on singleness. This thesis explores the experiences and meanings of contemporary spinsterhood, and considers the extent to which these have altered in the context of recent social change. Quantitative analysis of the British Household Panel Survey demonstrates that recent cohorts of men and women are experiencing longer periods of singleness prior to the formation of any residential partnership. This thesis explores the life histories of thirty-seven never-married single women aged between thirty-five and eighty-three, an age range permitting a consideration of continuities and changes in experiences of singleness over time. This sample included mothers who had 'opted into' solo motherhood via artificial insemination and adoption. The thesis utilised narrative analysis to consider participants' experiences of singleness in relation to social networks and caring relationships, education and employment experiences, and gendered subjectivities. The role of social and institutional contexts in shaping these women's choices and experiences is also considered. This exploration of the actualities of contemporary women's lives found that gender and partnership status continue to structure the possibilities and strategies available to women in both the private and the public sphere. However, their varying experiences also demonstrate significant material and cultural changes, enabling wider opportunities for some. These changes have implications for the practices and discursive possibilities for contemporary spinsters. This thesis considers the extent to which the new discourses and practices emerging in the context of wider social change contribute to a dismantling of normative female gender identities predicated on marriage and motherhood.

Acknowledgement

This thesis could not have been completed without the support of many people. First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to all the participants for generously sharing their time and knowledge with me. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Rosalind Gill and Dr. Diane Perrons for their invaluable comments and encouragement. I am very grateful also to Dr. Katherine Rake for her supervision and support in the earlier stages of this thesis. The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Award R42200124462) is also gratefully acknowledged.

The support and encouragement of my family of friends have sustained me throughout the thesis. In particular I would like to thank my father Kenneth Simpson, who contributed to this thesis in various invaluable ways. My sister Hejdi McLean provided much needed succour, especially throughout the writing up process. Linda Martin's continuing support, not least her time and effort in proof reading this thesis, is very much appreciated. I would also like to thank the 'feminist community' at the Gender Institute, especially my PhD colleagues whose collective knowledge and insights contributed in no small measure to my own intellectual development. The period I have spent with you all has genuinely been mind enhancing! In addition, I am really grateful to many of you for your support and care in the final stages - Roisin Ryan-Flood, Maki Kimura, Francisco Cos-Monteil, Sabine Grenz and Nattha Komolvadhin - as they say in Trinidad, 'we is family'. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother Fran – I consider this thesis in some way a continuation of those conversations we had begun to have.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
Chapter 1 Introduction	9
Aims and Methods of Researching Contemporary Spinsterhood	11
- <i>Conceptualising Singleness</i>	13
- <i>Questioning 'Choice'</i>	15
Changing Subjectivities in Changing Circumstances	17
- <i>Trajectory of Thesis</i>	19
Chapter 2 Theorising Partnership Status, Family Change, and Gender Relations	22
The Family, Gender and the Self in Feminism	22
- <i>Second Wave Feminism on Marriage and The Family</i>	23
- <i>Women Who Are Not Wives</i>	28
- <i>Conceptualizing the Self</i>	32
- <i>Conceptualizing Gender</i>	39
Intimate Relationships and Wider Social Change	42
- <i>Transformations in Couple Relationships</i>	43
- <i>Continuities and Change</i>	51
Single Women	56
- <i>Stigmatisation of Spinsterhood</i>	57
- <i>Challenging Stereotypes of Singleness</i>	63
Conclusion	66

Chapter 3	'Knowing' Single Women: Research Ethics and Sample	68
Feminist Epistemology: from Truth/Reality to Knowledge/Power		68
- <i>'Knowing' Single Women</i>		70
- <i>Delineating the Subjects of this Research</i>		73
Mixed Methodologies: Undertaking Quantitative and Qualitative Research		75
- Quantitative Analysis: Changes over Time in Singleness		76
- Qualitative Analysis: Interviews with Contemporary Spinsters		78
- <i>Recruiting Participants</i>		79
- <i>Sample Characteristics</i>		82
- <i>Interviewing</i>		85
- <i>Interpretation and Analysis</i>		87
Conclusion		93
Chapter 4	Changes in Singlehood over Time	94
The Extent of Singleness: Review of Secondary Data		95
- <i>The Influence of Cohabitation</i>		98
- <i>Delay or Decline in Partnership?</i>		99
- <i>Experiencing Singleness Between Partnerships</i>		100
- <i>Incidence of Singleness in The Future</i>		101
The Extent and Duration of Singleness: Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey		101
- <i>Description of Sample and Variables</i>		104
- <i>The Influence of Cohabitation</i>		105
- <i>Variations over Time in Extent and Duration of Singleness</i>		106
Conclusion		113

Chapter 5	The Intimate Relationships and Social Activities of Contemporary Spinsters: Continuities and Changes	115
Caring as a Labour of Love		117
- <i>Caring as Daughters</i>		118
- <i>Caring as Mothers</i>		127
Intimate Relationships and Wider Social Activities		134
- <i>Friends as Family and Family as Friends</i>		135
- <i>Leisure and Social Activities</i>		142
Conclusion		146
Chapter 6	Gender, Partnership Status and Employment	149
Educational Achievement		153
- <i>Leaving or Remaining in Education</i>		153
- <i>Returning to Education as a Mature Student</i>		156
Experiences Of Employment		162
- <i>Financial Self-Sufficiency</i>		163
- <i>The Changing Character of Work</i>		166
- <i>Care Requirements</i>		171
- <i>Choosing Non-Standard Employment</i>		174
- <i>Gender at Work</i>		178
Conclusion		188
Chapter 7	Partnership Status, Gendered Subjectivities and Social Change	190
The Identities of Single Women		192
- <i>The Stigmatising of Spinsterhood</i>		192
- <i>The Privileging of Partnership</i>		196
- <i>Single Self-Identity</i>		199

Accounting for Partnership and Parental Status	202
- <i>Accounting for Spinsterhood</i>	203
- <i>Accounting for Childlessness</i>	214
- <i>Accounting for Single Motherhood</i>	219
The Practices of Singleness	222
- <i>Doing Things Alone: The Joys of Solitude</i>	223
- <i>Living Alone: Room of One's Own</i>	228
Conclusion	233
Chapter 8 Concluding Discussion	236
Bibliography	250
Appendices	272
Appendix 1: Recruitment Leaflet	
Appendix 2: Sample Introductory Letter	
Appendix 3: Background Information Sheet	
Appendix 4: Topic Guide	
Appendix 5a: SPSS Syntax For Survival Curves, Birth Cohorts 1910 - 1940	
Appendix 5b: SPSS Syntax For Survival Curves, Birth Cohorts 1950 – 1970	
Tables	
Table 3.1: Method of Recruitment and Location	
Table 3.2: Age Group	
Table 3.3: Highest Educational Qualification by Decade of Birth	
Table 3.4: Occupational Status	
Table 3.5: Income and Tenure	
Table 4.1: Partnership Status by Sex and Age: 2002, Great Britain	
Table 4.2a: Never-Married Men and Women (%) at age 35, 1901 – 1966	
Table 4.2b: Percentages Never-Married at Selected Ages and Birth Cohorts	
Table 4.3: Projected Population by Age, Sex and Partnership Status (%)	
Table 4. 4: Partnership Rates White Adults in Great Britain, 2001 (%).	
Table 4.5a: Partnership Rates by Decades of Birth, White Adults in Great Britain	
Table 4.5b: Partnership Rates at Age 25 for selected Birth Cohorts	

Chart and Graphs

Chart 4.1: Percentage Single Men and Women aged 35-44

Chart 4.2a: Percentage Never-Married Men and Women, born 1940s

Chart 4.2b: Percentage Never-Married Men and Women, born 1960s

Graph 4.1: Percentage Never-Married by Decade of Birth, White Females

Graph 4.2: Percentage Never-Married by Decade of Birth, White Males

Graph 4.3: Percentage Never-Partnered by Decade of Birth, White Females

Graph 4.4: Percentage Never-Partnered by Decade of Birth, White Males

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The subject of this thesis is never-married single women in Britain. There have been dramatic changes in patterns of partnership formation in Britain in recent decades, one element of which is an increasing proportion of people remaining never-married. The increasing diversity in familial forms has been subject to much academic scholarship, as well as political concern; however, there is a relative lack of attention to singleness in contemporary debates on familial change, and little up to date academic research on single women or men. This contrasts with the recent attention to single women in popular culture, in programs such as *Sex and the City*, *Bridget Jones*, and *Ally McBeal*. Every research project has a history: while these popular representations of spinsterhood do not constitute part of this research, the emergence of this particular genre did play a central role in my initial interest in this topic. I was struck by how these representations seemed to simultaneously challenge and confirm stereotypes of singleness for women. Although quite diverse, these representations of independent women drew on developments such as women's increasing access to employment. In addition, friendships were portrayed as important dimensions of these women's lives, often sustaining them through the various trials and tribulations these popular cultural forms entertainingly depicted. Nevertheless, the 'resolution' of the various plotlines resided in partnership with a man. The focus on 'thirty-something' White urban professional women 'invisibilised' the heterogeneity of single women's experience. In addition, this universal resolution also invisibilised the possibility that women may opt for singleness over partnership.

The impetus for this research is also rooted in my own biography as a researcher. My previous research considered various policy proposals addressing particular issues around family change from a feminist perspective (Simpson 1997, 1999). I analysed reports produced by centre left 'think tanks' in the mid-1990s advocating an increase in participatory fatherhood (Kraemer, 1995; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996), and the Government's Green Paper on 'Supporting Families' (Stationery Office, 1998). These reports clearly acknowledged changes in family structures, yet also retained a normative emphasis on what 'the family' should be. Consequently, those living outwith the nuclear family were present only as a cause for concern.

The decline in marriage has been a central aspect of contemporary debates about familial change, with concerns being raised by academics, politicians and polemicists that changing familial forms signify a decline in obligations and commitments to others (see Bellah et al., 1985; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Popenoe, 1993; Putnam, 2000). Yet, these debates are extremely politicised and ideologically charged, and both the extent as well as the causes and consequences of contemporary familial change are highly contested¹. Concerns about the ‘breakdown’ or ‘decline’ in the family are underpinned by conceptions of the nuclear family as a basic, often natural, unit in which people are socialised, with the stability of families therefore seen as a prerequisite for the stability of societies. There is a long history of anxieties about those who fail to conform to an ideal family form; however, a prevalent theme in contemporary debates about familial change has been the extent to which a range of changes in behaviour is the expression of a move towards greater individualism, and hence selfishness (Lewis, 2003:48).

There is a large literature, however, which challenges such normative conceptions of the family. Within feminism there is a long history of a questioning of marriage and the family and the relative positions of women and men within this, wherein the nuclear family is challenged as a particular and political construction². More recently, there has been much influential sociological work theorising familial change in relation to wider social changes (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), in which families are not just a “passive bedrock” for wider societal structures, but are re-defined as a “fluid context for intimate relationships” (Silva and Smart, 1999:2). Scholars addressing familial change across various disciplines have argued that concepts such as ‘the family’ are not static, and both the ways in which people ‘do’ family, as well as the meanings that attach to this, vary over time. Changes in values, meanings or motivations therefore cannot be deduced from statistics on family and household change per se. Rather, this scholarship emphasises the need to consider familial changes, and their significance, in relation to the wider social context in which they occur (see Morgan, 1996; Wright and Jagger, 1999; Silva and Smart, 1999; Smart and Neale,

¹ These debates are not analysed in this thesis, however constitute part of the backdrop against which contemporary spinsterhood is considered.

² Feminist analyses of the material and cultural implications of marriage for women are associated particularly with the ‘Second Wave’ of the 1960s and 70s, however can be seen in Mary Wollstonecraft’s 1792 tract ‘Vindication of the Rights of Women’, in which marriage is defined as “legal prostitution” and wives as “convenient slaves” (Wollstonecraft, 1970 [1792]).

1999; Lewis 2001, 2003).

This literature allows for a more nuanced understanding of ‘family’ and how it is practised by individuals across various partnership statuses. Yet, despite the recognition of increasing diversity in the sphere of intimate and familial relationships, much sociological research continues to focus on the ‘modern nuclear family’ (Van Every, 1999). Sociological theorising on transformations in personal relationships contends that inter-related changes in late modernity have led to a greater range of possibilities in the ways people relate to each other (see Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Nevertheless, the focus of these works is the dyadic, sexually-based couple. There is little explicit attention to singleness within debates arguing the ‘decline’ of the family, although presumptions of the necessity of the nuclear family implicitly problematises those outwith it. Previous studies on single people have been mainly from a psychoanalytic perspective. Reynolds and Wetherell observe that academic research on single women has largely assumed that their psychology will be shaped by ‘difference’ and, possibly, personal dysfunction (2003:490), while Gordon similarly notes that research on single women seems “rife with assumptions of deviance” (1994:23). The increasing attention to diversity and difference in scholarship on familial change points to the importance of considering the subjective meanings of various partnership statuses. Empirical studies on single women that are based on first-hand accounts do provide a necessary corrective to popular images of spinsterhood for women, however refer to previous historical eras and/or particular social contexts (see Simon, 1987; Allen, 1989; Byrne 2000a)³. There is thus little academic research on the meanings and practices of singleness in a contemporary context.

Aims and Methods of Researching Contemporary Spinsterhood

This thesis seeks to provide information on the perspectives and experiences of single women. This has several aims: firstly, to remedy the marginalisation of single women in theoretical and empirical work. The absence of up to date research leaves prevalent assumptions unchallenged, and this information may contest the negative depictions of singleness emergent on normative presumptions of the necessity of partnership. This is

³ These studies, reviewed in the following chapter, research American women born in 1910 (Allen, 1989) and between 1884 and 1918 (Simon, 1987). Byrne’s research (2000a) is on contemporary single women in Ireland.

particularly important in the context of attributions of familial change to individualism; remaining single can be seen as paradigmatic of individualism, hence such a development suggests single women risk being depicted as blameworthy. Another aim is to use this information to understand the social processes underlying the propensity to singleness in Britain. Information that allows a better understanding of the factors that account for women remaining single will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary changes in family and household formation.

Empirically identifying and theorising familial change is complex, and this research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide information on different aspects of singleness. Much research on familial change relies on statistical measurements of various aspects such as marital or divorce rates. Such quantitative information however is not a self-evident indicator of social transformation; intentions and motivations cannot be assumed from statistical data, nor the meanings that individuals ascribe to such changes (see Lewis, 2003). Statistical information is therefore too limited to provide an adequate picture of change or understanding of underlying social processes. For example, an apparent decline in marriage may be 'accounted for' by an increase in cohabitation, yet assessing this also requires a normative judgement as to whether cohabitation is considered equivalent to marriage. Value judgements may influence the statistics used, for instance the date from which marriage rates are considered will shape interpretations of these as a 'decline' or reflection of historical flux. Another limitation is that correlations are not informative as to causality. Thus, the long-standing relationship between spinsterhood and higher qualifications (Trieman, 1975; Sokoloff, 1981; Kiernan, 1988) could be interpreted as either an outcome or enabler of singleness. These limitations point to the need for information on the subjective meanings of familial changes, how these are experienced and lived. A major aim of this research is also to identify the extent to which there has been an increase in the phenomenon of singleness. Statistics usefully provide representative descriptive information as to broad trends in partnership patterns, and quantitative analysis allows information on the extent to which there has been an increase in never-married men and women outwith a cohabiting union. This is investigated through measuring the period of time spent single prior to the formation of any residential partnership, marital or cohabiting, and comparing changes in this over time.

Nevertheless, the limitations outlined above highlight the importance of qualitative research in ascertaining whether there has been a genuine turn away from partnership. This research thus also uses qualitative methods to enable a focus on the situated, subjective experiences of singleness for women, how it is understood and experienced, and how this may have changed in the context of wider societal changes. The concept 'single', like family, is not static, and the meanings that attach to this change over time. A central concern of this thesis is considering the extent of change in gender identities possible in particular social contexts. This is investigated through analysis of the narratives of a particular group of women experiencing singleness in a specific social context, that of Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century. The dynamic nature of partnership status however raises difficulties in defining singleness, and the way in which singleness is conceptualised for the purposes of this analysis is outlined below.

Conceptualising Singleness

Various inter-related societal changes in recent decades have led to difficulties in presenting singleness as a robust conceptual category. Single as a civic status means never-married, however has in colloquial usage come increasingly to mean being currently without a partner. Societal changes such as the increased incidence of pre-marital sex (Bone, 1986) and cohabitation (Ermisch and Francesconi, 1996) have also contributed to shifts in the meanings of singleness over time. Thus, 'single' may be used to refer to the ever-married, such as the divorced, as well as to those never-married but in a cohabiting relationship. Being ever-married can be seen as a social location with its own privileges, the symbolic value that accrues to marriage. However, the increase in cohabitation has led to this increasingly being considered as 'de facto' marriage. Some commentators have suggested that this increase 'explains' the decline in marriage (see Kiernan, 1999), while attitude surveys indicate that a minority of the population make any moral distinction between marriage and cohabitation (see Park et al, 2001).

The terminology available to consider single women is also problematic. Terms that denote 'not married', such as spinster or celibate, may be viewed negatively⁴. The term

⁴ Colloquial terms used historically for single women include 'odd' and 'redundant'. Interestingly, there does not appear to be equivalent terms for single men. These terms suggest the particular anomaly of singleness for women.

'never-married' has the disadvantage of negatively defining people by what they are not. The term 'ever-single' is also problematic in that it does not capture the fluid nature of partnership status. This thesis uses the seemingly oxymoronic phrase 'contemporary spinsters' to specify the never-married status of the women in this study, but also to emphasise the shifts in meanings associated with recent familial changes. The dramatic decline in marriage in recent decades necessarily means increasing proportions of bachelors and spinsters. The very different connotations of these terms point to the gendered implications of singleness, with the connotations of spinsterhood demonstrating the negative associations that remaining unmarried has long had for women. However, the somewhat obsolete resonance of the term spinster also suggests the declining importance of marital status in a context of increasing diversity and fluidity in partnership status⁵.

Singleness is defined for the purposes of this study as never-married and not currently in a cohabiting relationship with a man⁶. The criteria for selecting participants for the qualitative research specified a duration of not being in a cohabiting relationship of at least five years. A considerable age range of participants was also selected, in order to consider changes over time⁷. It was considered neither feasible nor desirable to define single as 'never-partnered', as the various routes into singleness were considered a useful resource on which the analysis could draw. Furthermore, the research also looked at the experiences of single mothers, including women who 'opted into' motherhood while single through donor insemination and adoption. Motherhood is an aspect of normative femininity, however women choosing to have children independently of men also poses interesting questions for this research examining changes in gender identity.

One issue that is considered in this thesis is the extent to which a particular partnership status, such as spinsterhood, might be conceived in terms of choice. This research is

⁵ There is some indication however that this term is being 'reclaimed' in an analogous way to the term 'queer', exemplified by the websites 'Twisted Spinster' and 'Leather Spinster', defined as 'single-positive' sites which interestingly include the ever-married. Thus, a Twisted Spinster is 'a single, divorced, widowed or separated woman who has committed to remaining single/without partnership' (see <http://www.geocities.com/wom40plus/twistedspinster061804.html?1088286768972>). The Leather Spinster site described itself as "dedicated to the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of single careerwomen" (see <http://leatherspinsters.com/ezone.html>).

⁶ Where 'single' is used differently by others, for example to include the ever-married, this is specified.

⁷ Other criteria included in selecting participants were that they would be White, heterosexual and aged 35 or over, and the reasons for this are detailed in Chapter Three.

situated in feminist and sociological theoretical and empirical work on the family, and this is considered further below. However, it also utilises recent theoretical developments on notions of agency, autonomy and identity, which have important implications for research on familial change, outlined in the following section.

Questioning 'Choice'

Much work on changes in intimate relationships understands this as reflecting the increased options available to individuals in the context of wider social changes. Both Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) for example argue that profound changes in ways of relating are attributable to the breakdown of barriers imposed by virtue of class and gender, which have encouraged the construction of a self based on personal preference rather than institutional norms. Important differences between these works are considered further below, yet both contend that personal relationships are becoming less ascribed and more a matter of choice.

My initial interest in undertaking this research was to consider the extent to which the changes and continuities in women's lives in recent decades had given rise to a phenomenon of more women 'opting out' of heterosexual partnership. My original hypothesis was that while changes in education and employment had provided more women with the means, it was continuities within the private sphere, such as the gendered division of labour, which provided the motivation for women choosing to remain single. However, during the course of the research I began to question notions of choice, and the assumptions of autonomous agency on which this relies. This questioning is also evident in previous research on singleness. Thus Gordon, in her research on single women⁸, uses a notion of "voluntary singleness" (1994:44). This term derives from Stein's (1981) typology of singlehood, constructed to incorporate elements of choice and permanence. Stein argues that single should not be regarded as a residual category in relation to marriage, and this typology captures the dynamic nature of partnership status, whereby an individual may move in and out of these over the life course. He identifies four categories: "voluntary temporary singles" which include younger never-marrieds and the divorced who are postponing remarriage; "voluntary stable singles" who choose to be single, both the never-married as well as formerly married; "involuntary temporary singles", those who are actively but

⁸ This research, reviewed in Chapter Two, included 'ever-married' separated and divorced women.

unsuccessfully pursuing partnership; and “involuntary stable singles”, those who wish to (re)marry yet have now accepted being single as a probable life course (Stein, 1981:11). Gordon contends that there is an important difference between singleness as chosen and singleness as voluntary, observing that participants in her research mainly depicted singleness as the outcome of various “small decisions”, rather than deliberative choice (1994:46).

Conceptions of individuals as deliberative rational agents are evident in various analyses of familial change, for example economic analyses wherein individuals are understood to be making cost-benefit assessments to maximise their personal utility (see Becker, 1991; Ermisch, 2003). Yet, there is an increasing body of work from a variety of disciplines that questions notions of individuals acting on preferences, understood as consistent and stable and without consideration to the social contexts in which these preferences or choices are exercised. Much feminist scholarship has argued that gendered constraints in both the private and public sphere mean women make choices from a subordinate position (Barrett and McIntosh, 1991). Critics of the notion of autonomous agents freely acting on individual preferences emphasise that people’s choices and actions are constrained by the social structures in which they occur, and as such the context in which choice is exercised must be considered (see Breugal, 1996; Ginn et al., 1996). This thesis considers how these material and cultural ‘structures of constraint’ shape the experiences and options of single women, how these are mediated by factors such as age and class, and how these may have changed over time.

Critiques of notions of individuals as rational actors exercising choice, however, address not just external constraints or opportunities but also the ontological assumptions of human nature on which these are predicated. There are long-standing feminist critiques of the conception of autonomous agency (see Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000). Furthermore, commentators on explanations of familial change in terms of growing individualism point out that in overprivileging individual autonomy, these explanations risk emptying human conduct of its social content (see Irwin, 2000). As noted above, a central focus of this research is the identities available to contemporary single women. An interest in identities and subjectivities has been particularly associated with postmodern theorising. Several commentators have sounded a note of caution that such an emphasis risks insufficient attention to the political economy (see Fraser, 1996).

However, the conceptualisation of self and identity drawn on in this thesis, detailed in Chapter Two, emphasises the structural shaping of self, and hence the importance of social context. The body of work referred to variously highlights the necessary interdependence of individuals (see Benhabib, 1992; Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Sevenhuijsen, 2003) and the need to consider the collective and socially derived frameworks for individual behaviour, that is, the importance of culture in shaping individuals' beliefs, desires and attitudes (see Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Irwin, 2000; Hoggett, 2001). Rather than autonomous rational actors, individuals are construed as radically relational and radically situated. Such an understanding of human nature does not 'do away with' agency, but reconceptualises this as "relational autonomy" (see Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000).

A conception of individual subjects as formed in the process of relations with others and in particular contexts has a number of implications for research on single women. Both the attention to structures of constraint, as well as the questioning of rational agency, challenge understandings of familial change as consequent purely on individual preference or deliberative choice. Rather, it draws attention to the need to consider the role of changing subjectivities as a factor underpinning familial change. Considering subjectivities requires attention to the different social, cultural and material contexts in which these are 'fashioned'. This thesis considers the subjective meanings and concerns of a specific group of individuals, and situates their lived experiences in particular historical contexts. Through their experiences, it aims to get an insight into the material and cultural factors prevalent in certain times and places, and the extent to which these may have changed over time. Considering these 'experiential subjectivities' enables an assessment of the extent to which wider changes contributes to the emergence of changing gender identities. The role of this in familial change is discussed further below.

Changing Subjectivities in Changing Circumstances

In exploring the varying experiences and identities available to contemporary single women this thesis draws on sociological theoretical and empirical work on the family, and developments in feminist theory. Arguments by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) that the conditions pertaining in late modernity have led to shifts from traditional, rigidly defined identities towards a greater diversification in the identities of modern

individuals, have been utilised in their influential work considering changes in the sphere of intimate relations (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). A central focus of these works is changing gender relations in the context of wider social changes. Yet, there is limited consideration of theoretical developments in feminist scholarship. Thus, while processes of reflexive modernisation or individualisation are seen as constitutive of modern subjectivities, these are not presented as gendered, and gender is considered mainly in terms of respective roles of men and women.

Recent feminist work in contrast has conceptualised gender in terms of social practice. As Chapter Two details, much feminist work emerging from the Second Wave looked at the ways in which particular gender relations both produce gender inequalities and regulate normative gender identities, and the role played by various practices and discourses in maintaining this⁹. These pertain not just to the private sphere but also in the sphere of employment and the welfare state, evident in the male breadwinner model, for example, wherein women are classified as dependents (see Lewis, 1992). The material and ideological implications of what Rich (1980) termed ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ has been argued as consequential for all women, yet there has been relatively little attention to those outwith the nuclear family in feminist research, hence little consideration of the implications of a presumption of partnership on single women. Developments in feminist theorising have drawn attention to gender as a process, and the need to consider the practices and discourses through which gender identities are constituted. The aims of this research in exploring the sorts of life-experiences made possible to women in certain historical epochs, highlight the importance of a grounded analysis of single women’s experiences and perspectives.

A central aim of this thesis is to consider the extent to which material and cultural changes give rise to particular ‘conditions of possibility’ for constructing subjectivities and enabling practices that potentially challenge an integrative notion of gender as bound up with marriage and motherhood. The central focus is an exploration of the way contemporary spinsterhood in Britain is experienced and lived. By analysing the narratives of single women this research seeks to elucidate how these women understand singleness, and the factors that account for it. Through empirical research

⁹ For example, the sexual division of labour can be understood not just in terms of the exercise of power, but also as productive of a particular, gendered subject.

considering the meanings and effects of contemporary spinsterhood, this thesis engages with and critically assesses sociologies of family and gender. Through providing information on the experiences and perspectives of a particular group of women, this thesis aims to contribute to contemporary debates on both gender identity and familial change.

The following section outlines the structure of the thesis and details the way in which the complex and diverse material produced by studying contemporary spinsters' lives has been analysed.

Trajectory of Thesis

Through analysing the experiences of contemporary spinsters in relation to intimate relationships, education and employment, this thesis considers the way in which wider social changes have impacted on the behaviours of never-married women, how these changes are experienced, and the possible consequences for gender identity. The first three chapters set out the theoretical context and methodology of the research, followed by four empirical chapters and a concluding discussion.

The next chapter considers the way singleness for women has been addressed in feminist and sociological theorising on marriage and the family. It examines the developments in feminist and sociological theory in relation to gender, identity, and intimacy, arguing that these developments provide an opportunity for a more nuanced analysis of singleness as an aspect of contemporary familial change, wherein contemporary spinsters' narratives are considered with reference to their situatedness as gendered subjects in particular contexts. Previous scholarship on single women is also outlined, in terms of the dominant theme of the marginalisation of their experiences, as well as the way in which the actualities of single women's lives, evident in empirical research, challenge and confirm dominant discourses around spinsterhood.

Chapter Three explores the epistemological and ethical questions arising during the research process. The rationale and methods for the quantitative and qualitative analyses are outlined, and the limitations and possibilities of these considered. These include statistical analyses of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and interviews with thirty-seven never-married single women from a range of ages and socio-economic backgrounds. This chapter details the epistemological and ethical

considerations relating to various stages in the research process, including recruitment, interviewing, interpretation and analysis.

The next four analytical chapters explicate the main findings emerging from the research. Chapter Four outlines the issues arising in ‘measuring’ familial change. It provides information on the extent of singleness derived from secondary data on familial change, as well as the results of original analyses conducted to measure the duration of singleness prior to the formation of any residential union, and changes over time in this. This comparative information is provided for both women and men.

The remaining chapters consider the ways in which changes and continuities in recent decades have impacted on related aspects of women’s lives. Chapters Five and Six consider the experiences of single women in relation to their relationships with family and friends, and to education and employment¹⁰. These experiences in the ‘private’ and ‘public’ sphere are considered primarily in relation to gender and partnership status. The varied ages and socio-economic backgrounds of the participants in this study enables a consideration of changes over time in the relative significance of gender and partnership status in these different spheres, as well as how these are mediated by other factors such as class.

Single women have been somewhat overlooked in previous feminist scholarship, and this research extends the insights of feminist analyses beyond those in conventional familial forms. The experiences of single women in terms of relationships with friends and family are analysed with reference to contemporary debates about transformations in intimate relationships and familial change, debates to which this analysis also contributes. This analysis enables an assessment of a number of theoretical claims about the impact of individualism on obligations to others, as well as in relation to increased diversity as signifying a decentring of heterorelations. It also allows an analysis of the relational choices and possibilities of single women.

Chapter Six considers the educational and employment histories of single women, and the ‘context of decision-making’ in which these occurred. The status of single women is not easily accounted for in a breadwinner/caregiver typology, and single childless

¹⁰ The analysis is distinguished broadly between the ‘private’ sphere of personal relationships and the ‘public sphere’ of employment, however these are not considered as discrete.

women may be considered better situated in a context of shifts to a 'citizen worker' model of employment, or to benefit from an increased emphasis on individualisation in terms of policy. The analysis of their experiences allows a consideration of the foreclosures and possibilities to which contemporary employment practices, and related social policies, give rise, and is conducted in relation to contemporary debates on the impacts of changes in employment in relation to women and work.

Chapter Seven considers the significance of gender and partnership status on individuals' subjectivity. In analysing the subjectivities of contemporary spinsters, this research seeks to consider the identities that can be fashioned in the context of material and cultural changes, including a consideration of the extent to which wider social changes have meant partnership status is less significant as an aspect of identity for women. It considers both the various discourses on which participants draw in 'explaining' their partnership and parental status, and the way in which various 'practices' associated with singleness were experienced. These are analysed with reference to understandings of spinsterhood prevalent in dominant discourses.

The final chapter considers the implications of the research findings in relation to contemporary debates on family change. The importance of a reconceptualised understanding of individuality is proposed, with an emphasis on the relational and situated dimensions of identity. The limits of contemporary debates on familial change that assume the necessity of a particular family form are highlighted.

CHAPTER TWO

Theorising Partnership Status, Family Change, and Gender Relations

There is a long history in feminist thought of looking at women's familial experience and considering its role in shaping women's lives. The structure of the family and its relation to the wider social context has also been the focus of much sociological interest. There has been considerable change in familial formation in recent decades, as well as theoretical developments that include increasing recognition of the importance of concepts of 'difference'. Nevertheless, there has been little acknowledgement of the potential significance of partnership status as an axis of difference, and there has been little attention to singleness in theoretical and empirical work. Shifts in theoretical understandings of concepts such as family, subjectivity and identity, as well as increasing attention to personal relationships in a context of considerable change, enable an exploration of the narratives of contemporary spinsterhood in which the potential for challenges to normative identities is considered. This chapter looks firstly at feminist analyses of the family and considers the insights deriving from this on which this thesis can draw. The conceptualisations of subjectivity and identity utilised in this thesis are also outlined. It then considers recent sociological work on changes in personal relationships in the context of wider social change. The final section looks at existing research on single women, which illustrates both continuities in terms of negative representations of spinsterhood, but also the opportunities for change evident in particular social contexts.

The Family, Gender and the Self in Feminism

The role of marriage and its relation to wider social existence has been particularly associated with the 'Second Wave' of feminism emerging in the 1960s and 70s. Varying approaches to marriage and the family are identified with various feminisms, and there is an extensive and complex literature critiquing marriage and the family from a variety of perspectives. Major themes, however, have included a focus on the political and conceptual significance of 'the family', a critique of the sexual division of labour and a recognition of the interdependence of the private and public spheres.

Shifts in feminist theorising emerged during the 1980s in response to criticisms of much Second Wave scholarship for failing to consider differences between women, as well as to criticisms associated with post-modern and post-structuralist theories. These shifts enabled more nuanced understandings of subjectivity and gender to be proposed. The following section looks firstly at Second Wave feminist theorising on marriage and the family, and outlines the insights from this scholarship that will be drawn on in this thesis. It then considers the way in which subjectivity and the related issue of agency, as well as gender, will be conceptualised.

Second Wave Feminism on Marriage and The Family

Second Wave feminism opened the 'private' sphere of marriage and the family to political analysis and challenged prevailing understandings of the modern family. Parsonian functionalism, established after the Second World War and described as the "standard theory of the family" (Cheal, 1991:3), argued that the nuclear family emerged from the separation of economic production from the home during industrialisation as the structure best suited to meeting the functional imperatives of modern societies. Specialisation between husbands and wives into 'instrumental' and 'expressive' tasks was argued as necessary to enable a well-functioning family which could undertake the socialisation of children and meet individuals' needs for emotional support (Parsons and Bales, 1955:16), while their assignment by sex was explained by the biological facts of childbirth (1955:23).

Claims that the sexual division of labour best suited the requirements of individuals as well as modern societies were challenged by feminist writings of the 1960s that expressed the dissatisfaction of middle-class women with the role of housewife and mother (see Freidan, 1963; Gavron, 1966). These were followed during the 1970s by extensive feminist scholarship critiquing the nuclear family and the division of labour on which it was predicated. In contrast to analyses of 'natural' division of labour in terms of harmony and 'fit', feminist work emphasised that this resulted not just in 'difference' between men and women, but in inequality and oppression (Van Every, 1996). Feminist scholars argued that the 'separate spheres' ideology which emerged during industrialisation, while never a reality for all women¹, nevertheless served as

¹ The secure employment on which the 'male breadwinner' model was premised has also never been a reality for all men (Crompton, 1997).

justification for exclusionary practices in the public sphere which restricted women's autonomy and economic opportunities, thereby reinforcing their dependency on men (see Cockburn, 1983; Davidoff and Hall, 1987; Bradley, 1989).

Second Wave feminism produced a diverse array of theoretical understandings of the place of marriage and the family in women's oppression, with the Women's Liberation Movement subsequently proposing varying strategies to address it. Liberal feminism campaigned for equal opportunities in the public sphere, a focus which contrasted sharply with that of radical feminism on marriage, the family and sexuality, wherein marriage was censured as "the fundamental instrument and foundation unit" of patriarchal society (Millet, 1971). Thus, as well as the broader social and economic inequalities associated with the family, feminism also drew attention to the oppression within it. Radical feminism in particular challenged assumptions of the family as a harmonious, functional unit, putting issues of sexual and domestic violence on the political agenda. Arguing that these were manifestations of a pervasive system of male power, radical feminists criticised not just marriage but heterosexuality for its role in the maintenance of male dominance, and called for its rejection as a political act (Rich, 1980; Jeffreys, 1990). The role of mothering was also extensively debated. Some feminists considered this central to female subordination, and called for the rejection of motherhood or for technology allowing biology to be overcome. Others however regarded mothering as a source of distinctively female values, providing a source of moral insight on which feminists should draw. While some feminists argued men's involvement in childrearing should be encouraged, others argued that this would enhance male control (see Firestone, 1971; Dinnerstein, 1978; Chodorow, 1978).

As well as the contribution of women's unpaid work to maintaining the structures of women's oppression, there were also extensive debates on the political economy of domestic labour and its role in reproducing the capitalist system. Marxist analyses of women's exploitation as reducible to capitalism were strongly contested: critics argued women's subordination was not simply a by-product of class divisions, it was not just capital that profited from it, and women's oppression was far more far-reaching than economic disadvantage. Marxist and socialist feminists thus argued that the nuclear

family fulfilled a vital economic function for individual men as well as capitalist society (see Seccombe, 1974; Hartmann, 1976; Molyneux, 1979)².

Early Second Wave theorising on marriage and the family produced several key insights that have been critical to subsequent analyses in the sphere of family and intimate relationships. Analyses of the family as an ideological construction challenged the notion that women's role as housewife and mother was 'natural'. Rather, feminists argued that the socially constructed roles of wife and mother were constitutive of a passive, dependent femininity that was rendered normative for all women. In addition, feminists theorised the childrearing, housework, affective and sexual activities undertaken by women in the private sphere as work (see Oakley 1974, 1979). The domestic and caring tasks, which constituted this unpaid work, were thus considered productive both in terms of gender identity and in maintaining inequalities between the sexes.

Feminists also drew attention to the ideological underpinnings of the 'separate spheres' ideology that served to exclude women from the public realm on the basis of their reproductive responsibilities and obscure the patriarchal power prevailing in both spheres (Pateman, 1988). The social meanings of womanhood thus had implications beyond the family, with assumptions of women's 'natural' abilities in looking after others reflected in their dominance in the 'caring' professions. While women's inferior status in employment was closely related to their location in the domestic division of labour and their assumed need for only a secondary wage, men's employment status derived from their role as breadwinner, while their ability to prioritise career achievements was based on women's domestic labour (Cockburn, 1983).

Second Wave feminist theorising on the family and the sexual division of labour crucially enabled subsequent analyses of the way in which familistic values penetrate other spheres, and lead to recognition of the need to address gender inequalities outwith the private sphere. The past decade for example has seen a burgeoning literature on the

² Hartmann's 'dual systems' theory argued that patriarchy and capitalism are two separate systems, neither reducible to the other but which reinforce each other and benefit both capital and individual men. "Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, both from higher wages and the domestic division of labour. This domestic division of labour, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labour market. Thus, the hierarchical domestic division of labour is perpetuated by the labour market, and vice versa" (1982:448).

interplay between gender relations, work and the welfare state (see Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury 1994, 1996; Crompton, 1997; Bradley, 1998; Perrons 1998a, 2002; Daly and Rake, 2003).

However, criticisms of much Second Wave feminist theorising for assuming the universality of the nuclear family, hence ignoring the variable arrangements of kinship, sexuality and the household across cultures and class, emerged from the 1980s onwards. Crucially for the purposes of this research, the focus on the nuclear family as central to women's oppression meant an almost exclusive attention to those within it. As with Parsonian functionalism, feminist arguments of a 'functional fit' between the family and a particular mode of production require an essential family form³.

Furthermore, generalising from the experiences of some women to all meant ignoring not only the specificity of the breadwinner/caregiver model, but also the influence of poverty, racism and sexuality (hooks 1982, 1984; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990)⁴. Variations in family structures meant significant differences in the experiences of women, in relation not just to family but also to employment and the welfare state. In contrast to assumptions of the common experiences of women, these were argued to be mediated by axes such as class, ethnicity and sexuality, giving rise to significant differences between women. Liberal analyses that located fulfilment in the world outside the home were thus censured for overlooking women compelled to engage in paid employment. Black feminists also argued that the family, as a site of resistance and solidarity against racism, does not hold the central place in accounting for black women's subordination as it does for white women (hooks 1984, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990). Other feminists similarly argued that a 'family strategy' could provide a means of support for working-class families (Humphries, 1982). Differences between women included the different meanings ascribed to their varying experiences. This included

³ Critics of the 'new household economics' tradition, which interprets specialization between spouses in terms of efficiency gains (see Becker, 1991[1981]), argue that the inapplicability of this tradition to the issue of lone motherhood emphasises its' limitations (Duncan and Edwards, 1997:35). A similar argument can be made concerning the inapplicability of some Second Wave theorising to single women.

⁴ To critics, this failure revealed the racism and homophobia of Second Wave theorists, who failed to recognise their own privilege. Thus, hooks argued "no other group in America has so had their identity socialised out of existence as have black women ... nowhere is this more evident than in the vast body of feminist literature" (1982:7). Fraser and Nicholson similarly observed "in recent years, poor and working-class women, women of colour, and lesbians have ... exposed the earlier quasi-metanarratives, with their assumptions of universal female dependence and confinement to the domestic sphere, as false extrapolations from the experience of the white, middle-class, heterosexual women who dominated the beginning of the second wave" (1990:33).

both subjective meanings and those ascribed by others, reflected in the significant variations in understandings of gendered identities across axes such as class and ethnicity⁵. These criticisms resulted in shifts in feminist research, considered further below.

However, one axis of difference that received little explicit attention in these criticisms is that of marital status. This absence is particularly noteworthy given that a central concern of Second Wave feminism was to challenge the notion that marriage and the family were natural or inevitable structures. As noted above, radical feminism did campaign for women to reject marriage and drew attention to lesbianism as a form of resistance to “compulsory heterosexuality” (see Rich, 1980). Similarly, critiques by black feminists on the centrality of male domination to family life highlighted family structures not centred around a father. However, there was little specific attention to never-married women who were neither lesbian nor mothers. As Dunne argues, feminist concern with the experience of married women is understandable, however to get a better understanding of the nature of constraints on women “we need to extend our analysis to include the experiences of women who are constructing lifestyles beyond the boundaries of marriage” (1997:129). This is what this research aims to provide, through considering the experiences of contemporary spinsters in relation to paid employment and their intimate relationships.

Nevertheless, feminist critiques of marriage and the family which consider the consequences of a familist society for women implicitly address the situation of spinsters, and this has been explicitly addressed in some works. Two key feminist analyses of the family, Delphy and Leonard’s (1992) ‘Familiar Exploitation’ and Barrett and McIntosh’s (1991 [1982]) ‘The Anti-Social Family’, both illustrate some of the insights and shortcomings identified with Second Wave feminist theorising, as well as considering singleness for women, and these texts are looked at below.

⁵ For example hooks (1984) has pointed to representations of black women as “Aunt Jemimas, Sapphires and Amazons”, as reflecting their exclusion from normative notions of dependant womanhood.

Women Who Are Not Wives

Delphy and Leonard's work is a materialist radical feminist analysis defining the family as an economic system in which men benefit from and exploit the work of women. The appropriation of wives' labour in the home has consequences for their status in paid employment, thus reinforcing their dependence on marriage. As such, the family is analysed as "one of the main sites of inequalities between the sexes" (1992:1). However, Delphy and Leonard also point to the heterosexual privilege encompassed in a familial ideology wherein women who conform to the norm derive certain economic and social advantages (1992:265). Nevertheless, they critique analyses of the family which assume that women voluntarily choose marriage and the pre-existing division of labour, a contention which they argue fails to acknowledge the structures and constraints in both private and public spheres that mean women make choices from a subordinate position (1992:192). They argue that the prevalence of a naturalistic discourse hides the social nature not just of marriage but also phenomena such as gender, kinship and sexuality. They also highlight the social meaning that normative gender identities have beyond the family, with the links between femininity and looking after others reflected in the caring work women do as employees in hospitals and schools, as well as the unpaid caring work women who are not married or mothers undertake for others.

Delphy and Leonard's work usefully draws attention to continuing gender inequalities, despite societal changes such as married women's increased labour force participation⁶. However, their central argument illustrates the totalising tendencies with which such feminist theorising is charged. While they state the 'wives as personal dependents' family form is not necessary, their argument requires that the appropriation of women's domestic, sexual and reproductive work by men is omnipresent. Thus they maintain that, while the content and amount of housework might vary by class and ethnic group,

⁶ Delphy and Leonard observe "not only has going out to work not freed women from family work, it has hardly interfered with it at all" (1992:131). There is a multitude of empirical research demonstrating continuing inequalities in time and other resources between women and men in contemporary heterosexual partnerships, despite women's increased labour force participation (see for example Morris, 1990; Laurie and Gershuny, 2000; Bond and Sales, 2001). A recent report on women's incomes over their lifetime illustrates a significant difference between women and men: the report distinguishes the elements of this income differential attributable to a 'gender gap', and that attributed to a 'mother gap', although there are also difference between mothers in relation to numbers of children and individual skill level (Rake, 2000). The differences between men and women's earnings are reflected in their individual incomes in retirement, indicative of the long-term impact of gender inequalities in the private and public sphere (see ONS, 2004a:7-12).

it is still women who perform it. Single women may do work for other kin, as well as their own domestic work, and single mothers may live separately from the fathers of their children, yet these men benefit from the work of women in raising their children (1992:20).

Thus, while differences between women are acknowledged, their argument precludes these 'making a difference' in relation to the all-pervading nature of the family system, and this includes partnership status. Thus they argue that while employed, middle-class women may establish independent households, their standard of living is lower and they are socially less acceptable (1992:131). Women who remain unmarried are usually much worse off economically, especially if they have children, while all women 'on their own' (alone, with children or with other women) are subject to stigmatisation. In relation to spinsterhood, Delphy and Leonard conclude that women "cannot in any case avoid the consequences of heterosexual coupledness simply by remaining unmarried" (1992:14).

Their negative depiction of the situation of never-married women serves their argument about the overarching nature of the family system. Yet, this fails to adequately consider differences between single women, not least by axes such as 'routes into' singleness. In addition, there is little consideration of the varying ways in which singleness may be experienced. Furthermore, despite arguing the social and hence variable nature of phenomena such as marriage and the family, gender and sexuality, Delphy and Leonard's argument about the benefit to men of women's labour rests on a fixed idea of sex roles and categories. While they state that men and women do have agency (evidenced by the active role men play in ensuring the hierarchical gendering of the household), their analysis of family relations emphasises that the family structure constitutes a social fact constraining behaviour (1992:265). The representation of the ubiquitous appropriation of women's labour by men, regardless of familial arrangement, suggests a conceptualisation of patriarchy that appears to offer little room for manoeuvre. The somewhat static concept of gender, embedded in an ahistoric, essentialist and universalistic notion of patriarchy, illustrates aspects of Second Wave feminism that have been subject to criticism in the light of debates about difference and theoretical shifts, considered further below.

Barrett and McIntosh's (1991) 'The Anti-Social Family' seeks to examine the consequences for women and wider society of the dominance of familial ideology, and as such addresses the status of women outside of the conventional family. Their main thesis is that an ideology of familism weakens wider social collectivism. This ideology is manifest in the massive material and cultural privileging afforded the nuclear family in contemporary western capitalist societies, a privileging which challenges the notion of investment in the family as freely chosen. Barrett and McIntosh explain the endurance of marriage and the family as in part due to the lack of opportunities for emotional and material needs being provided for elsewhere, and argue that genuine choice would include viable alternatives that are both available and desirable. However, the concentration of these needs into marriage delegitimises the value of relationships outside the narrowly defined heterosexual pair, thus the family can present certain advantages. They argue therefore that women are both empowered and disempowered by investment in the family. The nuclear family produces inequalities and weakens other institutions, and meeting human needs for affection, security, intimacy, sexual love and parenthood through this is unsatisfying⁷. Yet, the over-valuation of family life is argued to devalue other lives, and the family "sucks the juice out of everything around it, leaving other institutions stunted and distorted" (1991:78).

Barrett and McIntosh raise as a question the extent to which their critique applies to a familial ideology as opposed to a lived reality of family life. Yet these are on occasion conflated, with the consequence that their observations suggest particular experiences for individuals consequent on their location vis-à-vis the family. Thus, the onus on the family as the main provider of emotional and material support has consequences for those not in a family embodying these supportive values, who are liable to find themselves isolated and socially impoverished, as "in privileging the intimacy of close kin it has made the outside world cold and friendless, and made it harder to sustain relations of security and trust except with close kin" (1991:80). There may be "enclaves" in which people manage to establish stronger forms of collectivism and solidarity, such as gay communities or minority ethnic groups, however the tendency of familism is to weaken rather than enrich these forms of community.

⁷ Barrett and McIntosh emphasise that their thesis refers to a particular, historically and socially specific form of family, and make reference to their earlier ethnocentric assumptions and subsequent failure to consider whether or how far their analysis applied also to ethnic minority families, in their previous (1982) edition (1991:164 -166).

Political analyses of the family at the level of social structure usefully challenge conceptions of the family as natural, and both these works draw attention to the prevalence of familism as an ideology that impacts on practices both within families and wider spheres such as employment and the welfare state. Both contend that the material and cultural implications of a familial ideology are constraints on choice, thus challenge conceptualisations of choice assumed to operate in the private sphere. In contrast to individualist explanations which understand practices such as the sexual division of labour as voluntarily chosen (see Becker, 1991; Hakim 1995, 1998)⁸, much feminist work has drawn attention to the structures of constraint which shape the context in which individuals make choices.

However, the challenge to conceptions of choice in these works suggests an understanding of women's capacity for self-determination as restricted by patriarchal conditioning. The cultural hegemony of familial ideology is linked to the construction of a normative femininity as passive and dependent, and the endurance of marriage and the family are attributable to an overarching socialization that limits women's autonomy. As such, these works offer little room to consider the way that changes in the wider social context may impact not just on material changes in the private sphere, but in the formulation of different gender identities⁹.

Furthermore, the arguments in both works rest on a presumption of the overarching impact of familism on the lives of those who are not in conventional families as well as those who are, arguments which risk homogenising the experiences of those not in a nuclear family. This is illustrated in particular in the lack of attention to differences

⁸ Individualist theories of human behaviour explain this with reference to individual preferences, however take these as the starting point of social explanation rather than considering how these arise. Thus, women's inequality is seen as freely and rationally chosen by women themselves, for example Hakim argues women's predominance in part-time employment, in "low-grade, low-paid, dead-end jobs" (1992:141) is "chosen voluntarily by women who prefer to give priority to non-market activities" (1995:435). However, as Breugal argues, Hakim's work reads preferences into outcomes without considering how circumstances frame preferences (Breugal, 1996:177). Feminist economists have also challenged central premises on which standard neo-classical economic theories of the family are based. They have critiqued the presumption of choice underpinning the specialised investment of men and women in their 'human capital'; assumptions of a single utility function which fails to address intra-household distribution; and assumptions that relations between family members are non-calculative for ignoring power relations within the family. Feminist work within 'New Economics' challenges assumptions of undifferentiated interests within the household, arguing that women disproportionately bear the costs of reproduction of human capital, and that an ideology of a unity of family interests helps to maintain gender and other inequalities within it (see for example Gardiner, 1997; Woolley, 1993).

⁹ Barrett and McIntosh (1991) do argue there is a need for a more developed understanding of subjectivity.

amongst single women. Claims of the negative consequences of heterosexual coupledness for single women highlight the need for empirical research on the ways in which the lives of never-married women are experienced.

Criticisms of Second Wave feminism for its failure to recognise the variable family and labour market situations of women drew attention to the need to consider how women's experiences are mediated by axes such as class and ethnicity. The 'grand theorising' of the Second Wave has acceded to more detailed, historically specific analyses which are much more sensitive to differences among women (Smart and Neale, 1999)¹⁰. Contemporary work on the family considers the insights emerging from Second Wave feminism, as well as those emerging from more recent transformations in feminist theorising, and is looked at below. These transformations have been influenced by the increased significance of post-modernism and the demise of broadly structural ideas (Benhabib, 1994), and include the 'destabilising' of the sex/gender distinction on which much Second Wave theorising was based, in ways that can be regarded as productive for feminism (Barrett and Phillips, 1992). In addition, these transformations have led to much debate about notions of subjectivity and agency. The ways in which selfhood and gender are conceptualised in this thesis are now considered.

Conceptualizing the Self

This section considers subjectivity, and related notions of agency and identity. As noted above, feminist work that seeks to explain practices such as the sexual division of labour has critiqued rational choice theories that attribute these to individual preference¹¹. Against this, feminists have argued the importance of recognizing that choices are socially situated. As such, phenomena such as the gender structuring of employment are the outcome of context and constraint as well as choice (Crompton, 1997:126). However, there are also long-standing feminist criticisms of the conception of agency implicit in such theories, of individuals as purposive agents freely making choices, looked at below.

¹⁰ Contemporary debates question whether axes such as 'class' and 'race' are simply variables which can be 'added-on' to theoretical or empirical work about women, arguing rather that these require different levels of reconceptualisation (see Smart, 1992). These issues are considered further in Chapter Three.

¹¹ Theorists of social change such as Beck and Giddens argue that a greater degree of choice is a defining feature of contemporary society (Beck, 1992; Giddens 1991, 1992). The following section looks at the work of these authors in relation to changes in the sphere of intimate relations, and the way in which agency is conceptualised in these works is considered there.

Feminist scholars have critiqued theories of liberal individualism that rest on notions such as freedom, reason, and agency, pointing to these as crucially gendered. They have argued that the dichotomy between autonomy, independence and the public sphere, and the nurturance and caring of the private sphere has not just practically excluded women from full and active citizenship, but also resulted in male-biased notions of the self¹² (Pateman, 1988; Moller Okin, 1991; Di Stefano, 1991; Coole, 1993). Much feminist work has highlighted the way in which mainstream accounts of moral and political theory deny the essential social nature of the self (see Di Stefano, 1991:101; Benhabib, 1992). In contrast to the privileging of masculinist ideals of substantive independence and self-sufficiency prevalent in mainstream accounts of the self, feminist scholars argue that individuals are necessarily interdependent, exemplified by the role of maternal and caring labour in the creation of persons.

Critiques of liberal individualist conceptions of the self as a universal signifier have been paralleled in debates about differences between women, with black feminist critiques of the ethnocentric assumptions of white feminists equally challenging the universality of the category 'woman'. This category has been further deconstructed in post-modern and post-structuralist theorising. Post-structuralist analyses utilising Foucauldian theories of power and agency (see Foucault, 1981; Rabinow, 1986) conceive subjectivity as constituted through discourses and the micropractices of power: as such, there is no 'true self' that escapes the operations of power. Such analyses are not arguing that a particular discourse may be judged as harmful, deforming an ineffable humanity¹³. Rather, these discourses are argued to actually fabricate human subjects with particular competencies and capacities. Accordingly, Rose argues that "the 'self' does not pre-exist the forms of its social recognition; it is a heterogeneous and shifting resultant of the social expectations targeted upon it" (1999:222). The concept of the subject as the author of its own acts is thus seen as a culturally and historically specific product of Western individualism, and such theorising contends that notions such as

¹² Chodorow's psychoanalytic work argues that the role women perform as primary caretaker contributes to a gendered sense of selfhood and differences in the valuing of independence. The process of disconnection from the mother results in men valuing separateness and independence, and contributes to the construction of an absolute individuality, while girls' identification with the mother results in a relational individuality (Chodorow, 1978).

¹³ A conception which underpins some feminist analyses in which women's participation in maintaining gendered power relations is attributed to 'false consciousness', the warping of their true selves by patriarchal conditioning.

agency should be reconceived as a discursive effect of the complex and shifting configurations of power, rather than as a substantive achievement or foundational grounding.

The notion of identity as a fixed or essential property of an individual is also challenged in such theorising. Post-structuralist feminist theory has been particularly associated with the deconstruction of sex and gender categories, for example Butler's (1990, 1993) work argues that the body has no essential essence which provides a 'true' identity, either as 'essentially' male or female, 'truly' lesbian, and so on. Butler's work builds on Foucault's deconstruction of sex as a category, wherein sex is conceived not as a fact of anatomy, but a 'fact' of discourse (Foucault, 1981). Butler contends the body is not 'sexed' in any significant sense prior to its determination with a discourse through which it becomes invested with an 'idea' of natural or essential sex: thus, gender identity is "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990:35). Rather than natural facts therefore, 'men' and 'women' constitute political categories. In line with Foucauldian arguments that sex is produced in the service of social regulation and control of sexuality, Butler argues that sexual identities are constituted by regulatory practices "in accord with principles of sexual difference" to secure the political and cultural operation of compulsory heterosexuality (1990:115) and via a system of significations oppressive to women, gays and lesbians.

Post-structuralist theorising usefully draws attention to the discursive/cultural means by which categories of identity are produced. It highlights the multiple and fragmented nature of the subject, and emphasises the actuality of sexual and ethnic categories and divisions as more contradictory, shifting and ambivalent than that suggested by the dominant public definitions of these categories (Brah et al, 1999). However, Foucauldian notions of power as capillary, and the deconstruction of any notion of a 'doer behind the deed', raise questions as to how discourses constituting particular subjectivities and identities can be transformed¹⁴. As Benhabib (1992) argues, post-structuralist theory has radicalised the critique of notions of identity to the point of questioning the ideal of an autonomous subject of ethics and politics. Feminists have expressed concerns that a post-modern abandoning of identity and autonomy might act

¹⁴ Such theorising appears to beg the question of normative criteria with which to assess particular discourses as oppressive, as well as who it is that decides which merit transformation.

to silence women just as they were acceding to subjectivity and claiming autonomy for themselves¹⁵, and have argued that feminism cannot afford to reject notions such as agency, autonomy and selfhood (see Hartsock, 1989; Barrett, 1992; Benhabib, 1992; Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000). As noted above, criticisms of liberal conceptions of the self have led to a questioning of the lauding of values such as independence and rationality, as well as the dominance of autonomy as a normative standard of mature selfhood and emancipation (Di Stefano, 1991:98). Nevertheless, a ‘strong’ version of the post-modern ‘death of the subject’ thesis is argued to undermine the normative vision of feminist politics and theory (Benhabib, 1992: 214).

These debates have given rise to an alternative configuration of the self, one which recognises the radical situatedness of the subject but which also encompasses some conception of agency. In contrast to mainstream accounts of autonomy which obscure pre-existing relations of interdependence, feminists have pointed to these as the minimal enabling conditions for selfhood, and thus for a conception of the self as essentially relational¹⁶. This reconceptualised notion of the self is not just ‘also’ connected to others, but already connected: individuals can exist only because they are members of various networks of care and responsibility, thus the self can only exist through and with others (Benhabib, 1992; Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000)¹⁷. This minimal conception of selfhood is regardless of the cultural and normative context through which a particular self is formed; however, it is *through* these contingent and culturally specific processes of socialisation that the self develops a personal identity. A central concern of this thesis is the subjectivities of single women in particular social contexts, and the way in which self-identity is conceptualised is developed further below.

¹⁵ As Braidotti argues, such claims ‘have the immediate effect of concealing and undermining the attempts of women to find a theoretical voice of their own’ (Braidotti, 1990:119-120, cited in Benhabib, 1992:237)

¹⁶ Thus, Benhabib’s (1992) ‘weak’ version of the subject is “finite, embodied and fragile”, as human infants who only become a self through interaction with others.

¹⁷ Conceptions of an essentially relational ontology underpin feminist arguments for an ethic of care, in which the lauding of values such as independence are critiqued for impeding the development of alternative moralities of social connectedness and responsibility to others. Rather, an ethic of care argues the inter-relatedness of agency and morality, with caring not just as a means of fulfilling necessary human requirements, but as an important practice through which the potential for moral agency is developed (see Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1998, 2003). There have been criticisms of such work however for its potential reification of mothering and failure to address the complex effects of oppression on agents’ capacities for autonomy (see Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Friedman, 2000). As such, feminist scholars have drawn attention to the necessity of both an ethic of care and an ethic of justice (see Benhabib, 1992:198; also West, 1997).

This reconfiguration of the self encompasses attributes of self-reflexivity and the capacity for acting on principles, prerequisites for any political action and necessary for a self “capable of projecting a narrative onto the world of which she is not only the author but the actor as well” (Benhabib, 1992:6). However, this understanding of the self gives rise to a more nuanced understanding of agency than that assumed in rational choice theory, that of an individual’s capacity to act voluntarily on clear, unambiguous perceptions of his own interests. Rather, feminist scholars have argued for conceiving agency as “relational autonomy”, a characteristic of agents who are emotional, embodied, desiring, creative and feeling, as well as rational (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000:21). This broad concept encompasses the shared conviction that agents’ identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender and ethnicity (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000:4)¹⁸. Thus, the role that social norms and institutions, cultural practices and social relationships play in shaping beliefs, desires and attitudes prefacing an individual’s choices must also be considered.

This reconfiguration of the self encompasses an understanding of subjectivity as dynamically constructed, fluid and changeable. Nonetheless, a coherent sense of self emerges via a process of identification. Following Taylor, this is not understood as a structurally determined process in which all that is necessary is the political realisation by unitary subjects of interests determined a priori by production relations or biology (1998:336). Categories of identity are not fixed or a priori essences, but socially constituted and contingent constructions: nevertheless, identity is the means by which some coherence can be reimposed on the fragmented and differentiated self. As Brah argues: “identity may be understood *as the very process by which multiplicity, contradiction, and instability of subjectivity is signified as having coherence, continuity, stability*” (1996:123-4, cited in Taylor, 1998:335, italics in original).

Taylor distinguishes between categorical and ontological identity, with the former encompassing social categories of others as different/same, and the latter referring to a coherent sense of self. However, the formulation of the latter paradoxically requires the

¹⁸ Relational autonomy is not a single unified conception but an umbrella term that considers the self as essentially relational and radically situated, and maintains some form of autonomy and rationality. The concept of individual autonomy to which this gives rise is therefore distinguished from individualists’ conception of individual autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000:8).

former, as individuals as unique selves are formed only within social relations between others and through participation in, and construction of, social categories. The complex social relations in which individuals are embedded, and through which their sense of self is constructed, are inscribed with a multiplicity of social categories of difference; these different categories operate differently upon their subjects depending on their position within relations of power¹⁹. This conception encompasses the political significance of identification, a process that does not take place in a neutral context. Rather, formation of identity takes place within relations of power that construct categories of identity as dominant or subordinate (1998:336). Processes of construction seek to ascribe essentialised characteristics to some social categories, while others are depicted as more open (1998:341). Nevertheless, individuals who identify primarily with one social category, such as gender, may well see this through the prism of other social categories, depending on how such categories are signified and positioned within social relations. Furthermore, this may not be experienced as voluntary or as a matter of conscious choice. The different identifications an individual makes bears differently upon the coherence of her subjectivity depending on the context within which they are asserted and the meanings they have for her at any one time (1998:341).

This conception emphasises the social construction underpinning both aspects of self and social identity, and as such indicates the potential for change. The relationship between social and self-identity is conceived as iterative, thus individual subjectivities are not determined by social categories of identity but play a role in defining these. Nevertheless, in situating the construction of identity in relations of power, this conception challenges notions of identity as a matter of choice in a plural, post-modern world. This account of identity thus encompasses what Fitzsimons (2002) refers to as a “double sense” of subjecthood, that is subjects as beings who make choices, and who are simultaneously subjected to something or someone. As Benhabib argues, “our narratives are deeply coloured by the codes of expectable and acceptable biographies and identities in our culture” (1992:6). This is considered further in the following section conceptualising gender.

¹⁹ This describes the concept of ‘intersectionality’, used in feminist work to denote the way subjects simultaneously occupy multiple positions (see Yuval Davies, 2003).

Taylor considers the way in which institutional and social practices within social policy give rise to specific identity constructions. These practices function either as legitimating or disciplinary within discourses of entitlement and disempowerment, and may constrain participation in the economic, political and cultural spheres. As an example, Taylor points to ‘lone mothers’, construed in underclass debates as promiscuous, lacking in moral discipline, anti-family and welfare dependent – as opposed to, Taylor points out, the ‘legitimate’ dependency upon a man within the traditional family (1998:347).

This example of lone motherhood usefully illustrates several aspects of identification processes that are pertinent to this thesis. It draws attention to the way subjects may acquire a shared identity through their positioning in the material organisation of social relations, through shared economic or political circumstances. The negative attributes ascribed to particular identities is significant in terms of what they reveal about the political commitments underpinning such ascriptions²⁰. It also usefully points to both the changeable nature of social identities over time, and that differing discourses may simultaneously co-exist. This is illustrated by the somewhat inconsistent policies around mothers and paid work emerging in the context of the erosion of economic and social conditions underpinning the ‘male breadwinner’ model of employment²¹.

Existing research on lone motherhood also demonstrates the ways in which social categories of identity are intersected by various other categories. Duncan and Edwards’ (1997, 1999) research highlights differentiation *within* particular identity constructions. Furthermore, their research illustrates how the ascribed characteristics of a social identity may be in opposition to ‘identifications’ made by individuals themselves. It considers both structural forms and the subjectivity and agency of lone mothers, and

²⁰ The stigmatisation of single women, both childless and mothers, is considered further below.

²¹ These changes have led to a shift to a ‘worker citizen’ model. Nevertheless, various policies have differential impacts on mothers, depending on partnership status. For example, the Working Tax Credit supports a homemaker role for women married to a wage earner (Rake, 2001; Daly and Rake, 2003), while tax relief provided for a ‘fulltime/part time’ pattern of labour force participation constitutes “a very big incentive” for married women to take up part-time employment, despite separate taxation (Dingledey, 2001:662). As such, some policies effectively support what Lewis (2002) describes as more a ‘one and a half adult worker model’ for couple households. Yet, the introduction of ‘welfare to work’ policies such as the 1998 New Deal for Lone Parents suggests single mothers reliant on welfare may not have the same choices to undertake caring for their own children as partnered mothers. Feminist scholars have argued that policies that require specific groups, such as lone mothers, to see themselves as different from other mothers are less likely to be effective (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). Furthermore, such distinctions heighten the construction of particular others as what Taylor terms “bearers of a negative identity” (1998:347), here lone mothers who prioritise unpaid caring work as potentially work-shy.

concludes that while factors such as individual levels of human capital and policy constraints are important, these are contingent secondary factors in explaining the employment position of lone mothers. Rather, it is non-market, collective relations and understandings, the “gendered moral rationalities” underpinning decisions about paid and unpaid work, which are central²². Duncan and Edwards point to the importance of social contexts in which these are collectively negotiated, sustained, modified and changed (1997:34). Drawing attention to the importance of aspects such as social class, ethnicity and geographical location in shaping understandings about what is best or morally right, their work highlights the complexity of identity construction and emphasises the importance of social context in that construction.

The conception of subjectivity outlined above, based not on fixed identities but on constructed, historical and contingent social relations, draws attention to the possibilities for change. Following Taylor, one’s ontological identity, or sense of self, is formed through the categorical identities available, which derive from the social relations prevailing in particular historical and social contexts. There is an iterative relationship between these, thus changes in social relations may enable shifts in one’s sense of self that consequently undermine the cohesiveness of particular social categories²³. Recent shifts in feminist theorising have undermined notions of sex/gender as fixed or stable categories of identity, challenging naturalistic discourses and enabling an interrogation of the ways in which normative identities are assumed as necessary. The following section outlines the way in which gender will be conceptualised in this thesis.

Conceptualizing Gender

Second Wave feminist theorising established the importance of relations in the domestic and private sphere through which gender identity is produced and maintained. The two principle discourses constituting normative femininity, that of sexuality and that of

²² This research thus challenges the presumption of rational agency inherent in prevalent discourses around lone motherhood, as either a social threat or a social problem. Presumptions of rational agency underpinning policy provision have been challenged by other empirical research, for example see Rowlingson’s (2002) research on the shift to individual responsibility in pension provision.

²³ For example, Himmelweit and Sigala’s (2004) research on the employment and childcare decisions of mothers with pre-school children found the self-identities of some mothers changing in response to external events, and point to a “feedback loop” between behaviour consequent on changing external circumstances and individual identity. The authors draw attention to the need to consider the effects of policies on identities in order to enhance their effectiveness.

domesticity and the family, are “specifically linked with the private realm of the home and the bedroom” (Connell, 1987:187). Normative gender identities available to women thus derive from their location within heterosexual relations, and heterosexuality as a particular form of practice, relationship and family structure is “pivotal to conventional feminine identities” (Jackson, 1996:31)²⁴. However, the assumptions of normative heterosexuality are not restricted to the private sphere, rather operate throughout society (Jackson, 1996:30)²⁵.

Connell (1987) contests the notion of gender as a property of individuals, conceptualises this rather as a *process*, thus better understood as a verb²⁶. He argues for a theory of practice that focuses on what people do by way of constituting the social relations in which they live (1987:62). He stresses the importance of individual reflexivity, and contends that individual action, together with the interaction of gender with other social identities, leads to a wide range of femininities and masculinities. This conception necessitates attention to the structures of social relations as a condition of all practices, however, these structures are not immutable and the possibility of structuring gender to reflect different social interests is left open.

Conceptualising gender as a social practice enables the practices through which gender is constituted to be considered. For example, research on the division of domestic labour between men and women in couple households utilising a notion of gender as social practice (see Berk, 1985; Brines, 1994) concludes that performing domestic tasks is not simply about getting necessary work done; rather, it is about engaging in “the production of gender” (Berk, 1985). Thus, rather than culturally produced prior to and elsewhere to such practices, these studies argue gender identities are at least partly produced *through* these practices. The link between dependency and housework thus derives not from relations of economic or quasi-economic exchange, as those arguing

²⁴ Theoretical analyses of heterosexuality emphasise the importance of analysing this as a social practice constituting differentiated gender identities, and of not conflating heterosexuality with sexual desire or sexual acts (Jackson, 1996).

²⁵ Much of the literature on gender and the welfare state for example considers the role of social policy in maintaining normative gender identities (see Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury, 1994; Orloff, 1993; Daly and Rake, 2003). Some commentators have argued that the public sphere is now a more important locus of women’s oppression (see Connell, 1987; Walby, 1990).

²⁶ Anthropological work challenging the conception of sex and gender as foundational similarly argues that it is the performance of particular kinds of activities, rather than simply the appropriate genitalia, that constitute gender identity (Moore, 1994:39).

the political economy of domestic labour contend, but from gender relations that regulate symbolic displays of masculine or feminine accountability (Brines 1994:654)²⁷.

Conceptualising gender as something that people *do*, rather than *have*, allows a consideration of gender as an active ongoing process, continuously achieved in interactions with others (Dunne, 1999:69). Dunne enlarges Rubin's (1975) contention that exclusive gender identity is more the suppression of natural similarities than an expression of natural differences, to include skills, competencies, employment opportunities and wages (1999:71). This conceptualisation of gender as process encompasses both social constructs and material realities and allows a consideration of the way practices can either confirm or contest gender identities. Specific practices are viewed, therefore, not just in terms of the way they may act to prevent choice, but also as a factor in the shaping of gendered subjectivities²⁸.

Normative heterosexuality presumes partnership, and this is particularly imbricated in normative femininity. As Gordon argues, "romantic love, partnership, marriage and motherhood form the cultural context of women and resonate in representations of them. They form a framework within which personal lives and subjectivities are constructed" (1994:1). Dominant beliefs about what it is to be a man or a woman shape our sense of self and behaviour and, as Connell (1987) argues, limits the range of meanings and actions associated with belonging to a particular sex. However, feminist challenges to the notion that differences between men and women are either natural or inevitable have paved the way for research considering the ways in which sexual and other inequalities are maintained and hence can be undermined. Much recent work has drawn attention to the structures and practices which constitute certain types of gendered identities, and which shape gendered preferences. Shifts in feminist theorising have drawn attention to the need for change not just at the level of structure or material practice, but also "at the level of individual identities" (Wright and Jagger, 1999:7). As Dunne argues, feminist politics should encompass contesting both boundaries and hierarchies, and "dissolving gender as a category of both content and consequence" (1999:80).

²⁷ Dunne points to the usefulness of this way of thinking for understanding why domestic arrangements negotiated between men and women are so resistant to change (1999:69).

²⁸ For example, a lack of childcare provision may act both as a constraint limiting mothers' employment options and simultaneously construct them as particular types of subjects, women who undertake unpaid caring work. Both the consequences and meanings arising from such practices are context specific.

Remaining single potentially challenges an integrative notion of gender as bound up with marriage and motherhood. In addition, there have been considerable societal changes in recent decades, which have also led to changing conceptions of womanhood²⁹. This thesis considers the gendered subjectivities that can be formed in the context of wider societal changes. Through analysing the narratives of never-married women, it considers how these women make sense of their singleness, thus the discourses available to never-married women in a particular social and historical context. Through considering their experiences of employment and intimate relationships, it considers the extent to which wider societal changes may give rise to particular ‘conditions of possibility’ - materially and culturally - for constructing certain subjectivities and enabling practices that potentially challenge normative femininity. As such, this thesis provides a vantage point from which to develop contemporary feminist debates concerning gender identity.

The following section looks at recent sociological theoretical and empirical work on contemporary changes in family and household structures in the context of wider social, cultural and economic change. Related aspects of this literature include a shift from the notion of a fixed family form to a focus on choice in personal relationships, as well as increasing attention to non-normative intimacies. Nevertheless, there has been relatively little attention to singleness in this literature. The section below looks at recent sociological theorising on the family and considers its significance for this study on contemporary spinsterhood.

Intimate Relationships and Wider Social Change

The decline of functionalist thought in the 1960s was followed by a period during which the sociology of the family was marginalized (Morgan, 1996), however the 1990s saw a “blossoming” of research into family issues (Allan, 1999). This includes work by theorists of social change arguing that there are ongoing intense and profound changes in the sphere of personal relations. The following section considers Giddens’ (1992) ‘Transformation of Intimacy’ and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) ‘The Normal

²⁹ This can be seen in shifts from an emphasis on domesticity in discourses of femininity to women now having to negotiate motherhood, sexuality and work. This change in discourses of femininity has been attributed to an emphasis within feminism on equality between men and women, as well as increasing individualisation (see Bradley, 1998). Nevertheless, continuities remain, illustrated in the virtual monopoly held by women on performing tasks coded as feminine, such as cleaning.

Chaos of Love', which build on earlier work by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) to argue that intimate relationships are increasingly experienced less in terms of ascription than as a matter of choice. Feminist analyses of the political and conceptual significance of 'the family', plus increasing diversity in familial forms in recent decades, have led to shifting conceptualisations of what constitutes family, and increasing attention to changes in the ways that practices of intimacy and care are enacted, and the implications of this work for studying singleness is also considered.

Transformations In Couple Relationships

Giddens' and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's analyses of the sphere of intimate relationships derive from arguments that epochal changes, at both the global and individual level, have given rise to processes of individualisation and reflexive modernisation. These processes relate to changes in structures such as the labour market, the welfare state and the nuclear family, and mean that individuals increasingly have more freedom, or must make choices, in contexts where ascribed norms no longer apply. Both Giddens' (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) work look at the profound implications of these shifts for intimate relationships, however there are important differences between them. The focus of both works is the heterosexual dyadic relationship, though Beck and Beck-Gernsheim consider the impact of individualisation on the nuclear family and wider relationships. Both works relate changes in the 'private' sphere to wider societal changes, however Giddens rejects deterministic explanations of such change, understanding these rather as initiated by reflexive individuals. This understanding builds on earlier ideas of agents reflexively negotiating various life choices in late modernity (see Giddens, 1991), and represents a "complete transformation" in theoretical understandings of family change as reactions to changes (usually economic) occurring elsewhere (Smart and Neale, 1999:9). The conceptualisations of agency underpinning these works differ considerably and are considered in more detail below. These works also differ in terms of the way that such changes are understood, with Giddens contending that processes of reflexive modernisation are potentially progressive while Beck and Beck-Gernsheim consider individualisation in far more ambivalent terms. Both works recognise the significance of shifts in gender relations resulting from the particular impact of detraditionalisation processes on women's lives. Nevertheless, Giddens' analysis rests on somewhat ungendered understandings of subjectivity, while Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's work,

although assuming differential impacts of individualisation on men and women, does not examine why these arise, suggesting a rather fixed understanding of gender differences. Both works are now considered in more detail.

Giddens argues that there is a 'new' form of intimacy, the pure relationship, based on people negotiating how they want to live together. This relationship is constantly open to renegotiation, hence contingent. Giddens contends that negotiating relationships of sexual and emotional equality has radical possibilities for the democratisation of the personal sphere. He argues societal changes impacting particularly on women mean that, thus far, women have had the prime role in this democratisation; for example, Giddens points to the development of "plastic sexuality", a freeing from "the needs of reproduction" which has meant "a revolution of female sexual autonomy" (1991:28). Nonetheless, Giddens notes the continuing prevalence of marriage and its differential impact on men and women, observing that marriage was previously the "core experience" of women's lives, even if single. Furthermore, only recently are women leaving the parental home for reasons other than marriage, thus "in contrast to most men, the majority of women continue to identify entering the outside world with forming attachments" (1992:33). Nevertheless, his optimistic account argues that increasing autonomy will produce greater diversity in sexual behaviour and freer and more equal intimate relationships. Giddens considers this transformation of intimacy to be of "great, and generalizable, importance", and "explosive in its connotations for pre-existing forms of gender power" (1992:2).

This thesis has been critiqued for underplaying the way in which structural inequalities continue to shape personal life (Jamieson, 1999). Giddens claims increasing sexual and emotional equality, yet fails to adequately address material inequalities between women and men; as noted above, numerous empirical studies have identified persistent inequalities in resources such as pay, as well as in relative time and income between men and women in couple households. Giddens notes there is a considerable distance between the ideals and reality of democratisation of the personal sphere, and argues for the necessity of women's economic independence. However, his somewhat cursory consideration of ongoing gender inequalities in both spheres, and presumption that these will be remedied through equal opportunities in the labour market, suggest an insufficient consideration of the role of gender identities in maintaining gendered power

relations. Giddens does not consider the ways that men and women's relative positioning in the material, social and emotional world may differentially impact on subjectivities, an absence which relates to his ungendered conceptualisation of individuals as rational decision-makers freely and consciously making choices.

Furthermore, these choices are represented as motivated by self-interest. While Giddens lauds contemporary women as "pioneers" who are not simply entering a male world through the adoption of instrumental values, his depiction of the pure relationship indicates it is instrumental, held together by the acceptance on the part of each partner that each gains sufficient benefit from the relationship to make its continuance worthwhile "until further notice" (1992:63). Significantly, this depiction of adults choosing to maintain relationships to the extent they remain personally advantageous does not incorporate caring relationships. As Smart and Neale (1999) have argued, the emphasis in Giddens' account on the pure relationship as contingent, and the personal sphere as emancipated from the needs of reproduction and kinship, ignores the impact of children on heterosexual partnerships. The absence of caring and other relationships in which individuals may be embedded also points to the limitations of the concept of the reflexive self, a concept that assumes an independent autonomous subject. As Hoggett argues, such a conception risks ignoring the ways in which agents are necessarily independent, and may express "an essentially masculine experience of autonomy in contrast to a concept of the 'relational self' in which self cannot be understood except in its relation to the other" (2001:46).

The failure to consider other relationships also reflects a presumption of the necessity and priority of the sexually based dyadic relationship. Giddens' work, unlike that of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, does consider gay and lesbian relationships, regarding these as in the vanguard of social change in having to be constructed on the basis of negotiation rather than ascribed social norms. Yet, while the 'turnover' implied by the contingency of the pure relationship suggests individuals experiencing periods of singleness between relationships, his work does not explicitly consider singleness, nor intimate relationships which are not sexually based. Giddens' work, like that of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, implicitly assumes (hetero)sexual coupledness as the self-evident foundation for intimate relationships. Yet, as Jamieson (1998) argues, intimacy can be

conceived of as about other things than the 'pure relationship' and cannot be assumed just to exist in close associations.

Furthermore, Giddens' emphasis on a sense of intimacy and the pure relationship as the site for personal development and fulfilment supports the rhetoric of companionate marriage popular since the 1940s, despite claims of its late twentieth century particularity. Feminist scholars have argued that the emphasis on companionship serves to deny the social reference points of marriage, as its interpersonal satisfactions and emotional shortcomings are the focus of attention and its institutional bases are of more marginal interest (see Chandler, 1991). As Morgan observes, narratives lauding the growing relational character of heterosexual coupledom in post-traditional societies may serve to obscure gender differences within it (1996:77). Jamieson (1998, 1999) also notes that the emergence of 'the intimate relationship' as an idealised version of personal life has gained ground previously dominated by a particular idealised version of 'the family'. Such an emphasis on intimacy feeds into a therapeutic discourse that individualises personal problems thus downgrades sociological explanations, and can lead to creative energy going into sustaining a sense of intimacy *despite* inequalities. Material inequalities can thus persist alongside changes in modes of relating sexually and emotionally, and Jamieson suggests high rates of dissolution of relationships may be related less to the contingency of the pure relationship than a consequence of tensions between the cultural emphasis on intimacy, equality and mutuality in relationships, and the structural supports of gender inequalities which make these difficult to attain (1999:486).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim address the impact of individualisation on the nuclear family, based on a male breadwinner model functional for industrial societies but increasingly under strain in post-traditional societies: "the fact that work and family are incompatible remained concealed as long as marriage was synonymous with women at home and man at work; it has surfaced with great turbulence now that each couple has to work out its own division of labour" (1995:144). The destabilising of traditional relationships, based on prescribed gender roles and predicated on inequality between the sexes, is depicted as positive: "the adhesive which used to guarantee cohesion is vanishing: the old female role, self-denial for the sake of others" (1995:63). However, their work utilises a different conception of agency from that of Giddens and gives rise

to a less optimistic account of family change. Detraditionalisation brings about new forms of autonomy *and* constraint, and people have to choose strategies of survival in an insecure and uncertain world. Shifts in macro-structures such as the labour market mean individuals are “forced” to build their own lives, yet within conditions that increasingly make this more unattainable as our autobiographies are increasingly “written by strangers”. Thus, increased individualisation paradoxically simultaneously decreases agency, and the family is “only the setting, not the cause of events” (1995:24).

This responds to critics who attribute blame for family breakdown to individuals. Rather, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim emphasise the contradictions between the demands of modern market economies and the demands of relationships³⁰. This account highlights the need for change in both the private and public spheres to enable men and women to live “beyond feudally ascribed roles”, and builds on Beck’s previous work (1992) in calling for the need to limit market relationships and enable social forms of life, demands which are longstanding within feminism.

However, this work assumes the naturalness and necessity of heterosexual partnership, and deviations from this are depicted as less the consequence of individual choice than as a fundamentally negative outcome of powerful cultural pressures undermining the foundations of enduring relationships. Singleness is considered explicitly in this work, mainly that of the separated and divorced, and an increase in singleness is an anomaly requiring explanation, given their emphasis on the mutually enriching heterosexual partnership. This is attributed to the related processes of individualisation and the market model of modernity which, while it may release men and women from ascribed gender roles, also requires them to build a life of their own which may be at the cost of their commitments to family, relations and friends (1995:6). Singleness is thus portrayed negatively, and various hazards of “running one’s life alone” are spelt out, not least the need for a good job and to build a web of friendships. However, success here is presented as a potential “danger” in that these may prove an insurmountable obstacle to any close partnership (1995:145). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that detraditionalisation results in love being increasingly “idolised” as “everything that one has lost is sought in the other” (1995:32). However their account also portrays this as

³⁰ Beck-Gernsheim reiterates in later work that the trend towards individualisation does not mean that the family is breaking up, but that it is acquiring a new historical form, from a community of need to elective affinities (1998:54).

an innate need. That an increase in singleness is necessarily a loss is implicit in a naturalistic discourse about love which privileges the sexually based dyad, exemplified in their argument that some women may be fulfilling the “longings to find oneself in another” through their children, and women opting for having children alone being depicted as replacing the love for a man with that for a child (1995:74).

Single people’s lives are depicted by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim as paradigmatic of the negative consequences of modern market economies: “the kind of existence led by single people is not a peculiar side-effect of social change; it is the archetypal existence behind a full market economy. According the logic of the market we do not have any social ties and the more we accept this the less we can maintain close friendships” (1995:144). Yet, while the logic of the market is responsible for the ‘turnover’ in relationships, people who prefer to live alone are portrayed as selfish and unhappy, “pursuing ideas like independence, diversity, variety, continually leafing over new pages of their egos, long after the dream has started to resemble a nightmare” (1995:4). Smart and Neale observe that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim seem to “equate processes of individualization with the abandonment of ethics and rampant self-interest” (1999:16)³¹. As Lewis (2001) notes, there has been widespread academic support for the idea of increased individualism as a major explanation for family change; however, there are varying conceptions of individualism evident in different debates, with commentators (see Lestheage, 1995; Pahl, 1996) distinguishing between individualism conceived of in relation to societal changes which mean individuals can no longer take externally ascribed norms and morality for granted but must exercise their freedom of choice, and individualism as egocentric behaviour (2001:8). These varying understandings of individualism clearly have differing implications for interpretations and understandings of familial change.

Yet, Giddens’ and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s accounts appear to suggest both. Giddens’ notion of selfhood is one of absolute individuals responsible for the course of their own lives, freely and consciously making self-interested decisions. As noted above, feminist critiques argue such conceptions downplay the social relations of power in the context in which such individualism operates (see Irwin, 2000). Furthermore,

³¹ In more recent work Beck and Beck-Gernsheim aver individualisation does not necessarily preclude the possibility of an ethic of “altruistic individualism”, and differentiate this from a neo-liberal idea of the free-market individual based on an ideological notion of the autarkic human self (2002:4).

Giddens' failure to consider the merits of the 'other-regarding' aspects of individuals' lives indicates a notion of subjectivity that is neither feasible nor desirable: individual identity, as argued above, is not a reflexive project of 'the self', but a relational accomplishment.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's account does assume the necessary relationality of individuals, however their account implicitly prescribes the form such relationships should take. The necessity assumed for heterosexual relationships suggests that those living outwith these are in some way dysfunctional, while the equating of singleness with a lack of commitments to others has parallels with arguments that a growth in individualism undermines essential forms of obligation and results in atomised individuals unlikely to engage fully with family or community, thus is an issue of political and moral concern (see Bellah et al, 1985; Putnam, 2000)³². There are long-standing feminist concerns about the consequences of the 'commodification' of individuals required by modern market economies, not least the double burden experienced by working women with caring responsibilities (see Hochschild 1989, 2003; Crompton, 1997), and the experiences of single women in relation to changes in paid employment in recent decades is considered in detail in Chapter Six. However, arguments which link family change with women's increased labour market participation and present this as necessarily problematic risk downplaying the liberating aspects of increased opportunities for women, as well as the potentially progressive aspects of familial change.

Single women are particularly problematised in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's account, and are interestingly the group given most agency. Women outside marriage are often constituted as culpable in pro-family discourses, attributed by several feminists to fears of women's growing autonomy and independence of men (Faludi, 1992; Campbell, 1993; Wright and Jagger, 1999). While Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue changes in gender roles and relationships are necessary, their negative depiction of familial change can suggest a bemoaning of the previous status quo, and single women as somehow

³² These arguments implicitly suggest that the family represents social cohesion and stability, and as such resonate with the concerns of more conservative commentators who condemn the decline of marriage as signifying the erosion of family values (see Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Popenoe, 1993). Such arguments have a precedent in Parsonian notions of the functional relationship between the traditional nuclear family and society, whereby an emphasis on the socialisation of children and the personal stability of adults suggest deviations would result in dysfunction and instability, for the individual, wider society and future generations (see Parsons and Bales, 1955).

blameworthy. Thus, women who choose to live without men are argued to thereby focus attention only on their own rights, and such women are depicted as either emotionally unfulfilled, selfish, or both. The feminisation of poverty is highlighted, wherein women are “only a husband away from welfare”. However, attention is also drawn to the costs of a career for women, that of having no partner: “at the other end of the scale, there is another problem emerging, affecting those women who pursue an independent career but must in many cases pay a high price, the loneliness of the professionally successful woman” (1995:63).

The way in which singleness is perceived and experienced is an empirical question. However, while various psychotherapeutic studies from the 1970s are cited, there is little up to date research referred to in support of these claims³³. The limited empirical evidence in both Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s work is one aspect of a discourse in which the centrality of sexually based dyadic relationships is presented as natural and assumed as self-evident. Both accounts acknowledge the necessity of analysing the family in relation to other social institutions or social processes, if wider changes in late modernity are to be understood (Smart and Neale, 1999:6), a necessity recognised in feminist critiques of understandings of the private sphere as essentially ‘non-social’. Both challenge prevalent discourses of romantic love as outwith the realm of reflexive action³⁴, and both draw attention to changes in the possibilities and expectations in intimate relationships emerging in the context of processes of detraditionalisation. These works recognise that such processes are variable over space and time, a variability that suggests the importance of an empirical focus on the lived experiences of particularly located subjects. Yet, their implicit assumption of the necessity of a particular form of intimacy means that the complex practices and motivations underlying contemporary familial changes may be inadequately addressed.

There is an increasing body of work considering familial changes which similarly argues that social ties are becoming more reflexive, yet uses a wider notion of intimacy

³³ Beck-Gernsheim’s later work argues for the importance of investigating the subjective meanings of familial experiences, and refers to sociological studies on conflict within relationships and the increasing dissatisfaction on the part of women with prevalent traditional arrangements (1998:54 -55).

³⁴ As noted above, there is much feminist scholarship challenging prevalent narratives of romantic love as ‘pre-social’, arguing rather that there is no ‘meaningless’ love or ‘natural’ private realm. Such critiques point to the way in which choices are governed by prevalent heteronormative assumptions as well as external constraints (see Rich, 1980; Richardson, 1996)

than that evident in the above accounts. A dynamic relationship between family life and wider social structures is also assumed; yet, while this literature does consider recent changes in familial and intimate relationships as significant, attention is also drawn to the importance of continuities in both the private and public spheres. This work is looked at in more detail below, and drawn on in Chapter Five, which considers the various intimate relationships in which the single women in this thesis are embedded.

Continuities and Change

Much recent theoretical and empirical work on familial change has utilised a less restricted conception of the family (see Morgan, 1996; Wright and Jagger, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999; Silva and Smart, 1999). As Silva and Smart observe, a major change in the concept of family is that “it has come to signify the subjective meanings of intimate connections rather than formal, objective blood or marriage ties” (1999:7). This change is reflected in developments in the sociologies of family and gender, emerging in the context of theoretical developments, including an increased emphasis on difference and diversity, as well as the empirical challenge of considerable changes in family and gender relations (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004:136)³⁵. Furthermore, much of this work utilises Morgan’s (1996) notion of family as an active process, a notion which usefully draws attention to the variable ways in which people *do* family, whereby family represents a constructed quality of human interaction rather than a pre-given structure in which people passively reside. As Morgan argues, such changes in modes of conceptualising and understanding familial and intimate relationships may come closer to the realities of everyday living than earlier models such as functionalism (1999:29).

This conception emphasises fluidity, and that ‘family’ constitutes a variable set of relationships that can change and be modified. As indicated above, social theorists have argued that wider social transformations have interacted with changes in the private sphere such that individuals increasingly experience their familial relationships less as a matter of ascription and more as a matter of choice, of “elective affinities” (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). This is reflected in the use of familial terminology to encompass

³⁵ There are parallels with ongoing work in anthropology, for example Carsten (2000) introduces the term “cultures of relatedness” to enable a consideration of ways of being related without presupposing what constitutes kinship. The questioning of the distinction between the biological and social in studies of kinship in anthropological work however has a long history (see Schneider, 1968).

emotional ties not based on biological relatedness, illustrated by the term 'families of choice' to refer to the relationships of affinity of non-heterosexuals (see Weston, 1991). However, the meanings ascribed to family remain highly politicised and contested³⁶. This shift in understandings of familial and intimate relationships is particularly important, for several reasons. As Roseneil and Budgeon argue, it acts as a counter to the explicitly anti-gay and anti-feminist political discourse of 'family values' (2004:136). It also enables a wider range of relationships and practices to be considered, especially important in research on those outwith the conventional family such as single women³⁷, and there is a considerable body of empirical research emerging on the various 'experiments in living' being conducted in contemporary society (see Weeks et al., 1996; Dunne, 1997; Silva and Smart, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999; Wright and Jagger, 1999; Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004). This research challenges pessimistic accounts of family change, arguing that this represents less a decline in family than increasing diversity in its formations. Rather, changes in the way in which individuals are practising and experiencing intimate relationships are understood as representing "a weakening of the normative grip of the gendered and sexual order underpinning the modern family" (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004:128) and therefore as potentially progressive. Furthermore, as Silva and Smart (1999) argue, a focus on actual practices undertaken by individuals, such as caring for others, rather than on the familial structures within which individuals reside, challenges assumptions that only one kind of family can produce moral and caring citizens and as such can provide a better moral rationale for policy and welfare measures in the context of substantial societal change (1999:11-12).

Processes of individualisation and the breakdown of traditional narratives and legitimating discourses are seen by several commentators as making possible diverse ways of life and producing a "pluralisation of domestic patterns and relationships" (Weeks et al., 1996:5), encompassing developments such as the separation of partnership from parenting, visible 'out' same sex relationships, an increasing proportion of people living alone, as well as a disconnection between (hetero)sexuality

³⁶ For example, the term "pretended family relationships" was used to describe same sex relationships in legislation (Clause 28 of the Local Government Act 1988), subsequently abolished in Scotland in 2002 and in England and Wales in 2003.

³⁷ Representations of single childless people as without 'a family of their own', and the qualification 'single parent family' to describe single people with children, can be seen as illustrative of prevalent assumptions of the priority of the nuclear family.

and partnership³⁸. An emphasis on diversity in family practices understands such changes in relation to wider social trends, including evolving employment patterns, shifting gender relations and increasing options in sexual orientations. The family here is not expected to remain unchanged, but is seen as transforming itself in relation to wider social changes, as well as a potential source of change (Silva and Smart, 1999:1). This understanding reflects the insights of Second Wave feminism that the family is not a 'pre-social' unit but is profoundly inter-related with other social processes, and draws attention to the importance of considering the wider social context in which such developments occur. Theoretical shifts, as indicated above, have also led to a focus in empirical work on how individuals are 'doing family', and how such practices are variously mediated by factors such as gender, class and ethnicity, as well as addressing questions of identity and community, and issues of obligations and duties that are increasingly not ascribed but have to be worked out.

However, some scholars have sounded a note of caution about the pluralisation of the concept 'family' (see Riley, 2002; Butler, 2002; Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004). This concept is argued as insufficient to contain the multiplicity of practices of intimacy and care (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004:127), and as precluding the possibilities of more radical social transformations (Butler, 2002)³⁹. Reducing all non-familial intimacies to a notion of 'family', however reconceived, thus risks losing the ways in which some may be not just distinct but potentially superior. For example, Trimberger (2002) argues for the importance of considering friendship as a social reality in its own right, and for its cultural validation as a voluntary relationship encompassing values of choice, mutuality and democracy⁴⁰. Yet, the appropriation of familial terminology to encompass a wider range of relationships than biologically or conjugally related kin reflects its prevalent cultural significance as an exemplar of values of affection, intimacy and care. It also reflects the privileged access to citizenship rights that

³⁸ The limits of vocabulary to describe such developments in part reflect heteronormative assumptions, illustrated by inadequate terminology to describe sexually-based relationships between single women and men, such as 'extra-marital' and 'pre-marital', which inaccurately assume marriage. However, this also reflects the speed and extent of change in personal relationships. A recent term emerging in the US to describe such relationships that are not taken to be of particular import is 'friendship with benefits'.

³⁹ Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) argue the importance of researching counter-heteronormative relationship practices, contending empirical research on non-normative intimacies can challenge the 'heterorelational' expectations - of co-residence, romantic love, monogamy and the primacy of the conjugal couple - underpinning much research on intimacy.

⁴⁰ Trimberger notes this notion of friendship may reflect a culturally specific understanding, citing empirical research on Vietnamese American youth for whom "friendships, like family, are permeated by a sense of obligation, non-egalitarianism, and sharing of resources" (Hung C. Thai, 1999:56).

particular relationships are accorded in late modern societies and to which those currently excluded wish to lay claim. As Silva and Smart argue, accepting diverse forms of intimacy as legitimate forms of family life may de-centre the nuclear family through a process of gradual cultural change (1999:10).

Furthermore, several scholars researching personal relationships have expressed scepticism about the thesis of a trend from the given, hierarchical nature of the 'traditional' family to families of choice, and both the novelty and extent of change have been questioned (see Jamieson, 1998; Pahl and Spencer, 2003). The emphasis on 'transformation' risks exaggerating not just notions of choice but also the obligatory nature of familial relationships. Thus, rather than distinguishing relationships as either 'given' or chosen', Pahl and Spencer suggest a more "fluid interchange of friend-like and family-like relationships" (2003:129). Furthermore, as noted above, the thesis of intimate relationships as elective affinities free of ascriptive and categorical criteria has been subject to criticism for downplaying ongoing material and other constraints. As Jamieson argues, "personal relationships are not typically shaped in whatever way gives pleasure without the taint of practical, economic and other material constraints" (1999:482).

Those questioning the extent of 'detraditionalisation' claimed by some theorists point to the continuities evident in intimate relationships and in wider society, which serve as salutary caveats to arguments of radical shifts in social relations. Thus, as Jamieson (1998) argues, alongside an increasing diversity in familial forms there are also continuities which serve to maintain gender and other inequalities: arguments that relate a decline in heterosexual couple relationships to women's greater participation in paid employment risk downplaying continuing material inequalities between women and men. Furthermore, as noted above, there is much feminist scholarship considering the extent to which the welfare state acts to sustain and encourage the nuclear family. Scholars have pointed out the often inconsistent or contradictory nature of Government policies (see Fox Harding, 1996), nevertheless the moral rationale for most family policies remains founded on the male breadwinner model of the nuclear family (Silva and Smart, 1999:11)⁴¹. As Silva and Smart argue, wider social transformations may

⁴¹The Labour Government's Green Paper 'Supporting Families', described as the first such consultation on the family any Government has produced, promotes stable families as the basis of a strong society and argued for strengthening marriage as "the surest foundation for raising children" (Stationery Office, 1998).

have increased the possibility for individuals to exercise choices about personal relationships, nevertheless such choices are not unconstrained or inconsequential. Familial practices may be potentially variable, however these practices are located in culture, history and personal biography, and do not change randomly or suddenly.

The reconceptualised notion of ‘family’ utilised in these debates suggests significant heuristic potential for researching the intimate relationships of single people. However, as noted above, there has been relatively little attention to these within this literature⁴². This may be due in part to the difficulty of defining singleness in an era of considerable familial change and shifting normative guidelines. Yet, the association between singleness and an individualisation often understood as self-gratification at the expense of commitment to others, heightens the importance of empirical research on the familial and other intimate relationships of single people. There is an extensive literature across a variety of disciplines such as demography and economics as well as sociology considering the cause and consequences of familial change, some of which will be considered in this thesis. Some commentators argue aspects of familial change, such as remaining single or childless, are experienced negatively by individuals (see Di Stefano and Pinelli, 2004). These claims often rest on implicit presumptions of the necessity of partnership or parenthood rather than empirical investigation into how such statuses might be experienced by individuals. The broader understandings of intimacy outlined above challenge such presumptions, and will be drawn on in considering the various intimate relationships with family and friends of participants in this research.

Furthermore, rather than explaining contemporary familial change purely in terms of processes such as individualisation, several scholars have drawn attention to shifts in gender relations emerging in a context of both continuities and change, for example the decline of the male breadwinner model alongside continuities in the domestic division of labour. Silva and Smart suggest that women, now better educated and with greater control over their fertility, may be “less enamoured” of the triple burden of paid work, housework and childcare (1999:3). Such changes and continuities in the private and

Rake (2001) notes that, while New Labour does not shy from making strong normative statements about the correct family form, it remains reluctant to engage in debate about the division of responsibilities for unpaid caring work either within families or between families and the welfare state (2001:227).

⁴² An exception is Roseneil and Budgeon’s empirical research on adults who are not living with a partner. While some participants were in non-residential couple relationships, this research considers cohabitation as a more important signifier of coupledness than marriage, and described these adults as amongst “the most individualised” sector of the population (2004:135).

public sphere have thus been argued as not only increasing the risk of divorce and separation (see Hochschild, 1990:9), but also linked to the possibility that some women “may shun marriage or permanent partnerships” (Bond and Sales, 2001:246). As Bond and Sales observe, there has been little research to date carried out on the nature and extent of these links.

Nevertheless, there has been increasing attention to the significance of gendered subjectivities in familial change. For example, Dunne (1999) argues that increasing opportunities for women in recent decades have meant a radical shift in what it means to be a woman and an expansion of available identities beyond wife and mother. She suggests that raised aspirations and expanded identities for women, alongside a lack of change in men, may explain why so many women are leaving relationships with men or foregoing marriage (1999:79)⁴³. As noted above, normative gender identities presume partnership, and remaining single potentially disrupts conventional femininity predicated on marriage and motherhood. This thesis will consider the gendering of subjectivities in a context of both changes and continuities, and as such this research may elucidate the extent to which transformations in gender identities are a factor in contemporary familial change.

The following section looks at both historical and contemporary research on never-married women, and considers changes and continuities in representations of spinsterhood over time.

Single Women

There is limited research on contemporary single women, and even less that explicitly addresses never-married single women. Until recently this has also been a feature of historical research⁴⁴, however in the last few years several works considering spinsterhood in different historical epochs have been produced (see Holden 1996, 2004a; Bennet and Froide, 1999; Sharpe, 1999; Hill, 2001; Spicksley, 2001). Some of

⁴³ Lees’ research similarly draws attention to the importance of gendered identities, forecasting that young men may increasingly be “left on the shelf” in terms of failing to marry or find work, and relating this to their difficulty in adjusting to women’s changed expectations which often conflict with hegemonic masculinity (1999:74).

⁴⁴ In 1984 Hufton noted that in historical research “the neglect of the spinster...has been almost total in spite of the fact that spinsterhood constituted a significant part of the population” (1984:357). However in 1985 two works considering spinsterhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were published (see Vicinus, 1985; Jeffreys, 1985).

these accounts address the achievements of never-married women, for example their contribution to social changes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (see Vicinus, 1985; Jeffreys, 1985; Holden, 1996). However, this literature also reveals the long history of negative depictions of spinsterhood. As argued above, the meanings and experiences of being unmarried relate to particular social contexts, and as such are both culturally and historically specific. Nevertheless, this literature is useful in revealing continuities in terms of the stigmatisation of spinsterhood. It also demonstrates gaps and fissures in these representations that have enabled challenges to the negative identity ascribed to spinsterhood, and this is looked at below. More recent research on the experiences of singleness for never-married women also suggests challenges to common understandings of spinsterhood, and this research on the contemporary experiences of singleness is also considered.

Stigmatisation of Spinsterhood

A common theme in the historical literature is the opprobrium directed at spinsters. The persecution of single women has ranged from their exclusion from trades, thus limiting opportunities to earn an independent income, to charges of witchcraft in the seventeenth century (Bennet and Froide, 1999; Hill, 2001). However, single women have also been subject to marginalisation through stigmatisation, and invective aimed at anathematising spinsterhood has been recorded since the sixteenth century (Spicksley, 2001).

This stigmatisation has taken diverse forms in different historical epochs, and has been variously explained by factors relating to particular historical moments. For example, Spicksley's (2001) research on single women involved in money-lending in the first half of the seventeenth century argues that attacks on spinsterhood were part of the drive by the patriarchy to retain control in response to the challenge posed to male authority by new issues of female agency emerging during the Civil War, and the high proportions of single women with economic autonomy emerging in its wake⁴⁵. Spicksley maintains that the marginalisation of spinsterhood was achieved by economic and social means, however argues that it was in the sphere of culture that single women

⁴⁵ Spicksley (2001) reports a significant increase in female money-lenders at the same time as marriage rates fell back. While she emphasises that causality is largely a matter of interpretation, she observes that moves taken in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres against the greater economic autonomy among women resulted in a diminution in their employment opportunities and rights to own property.

were subject to the greatest onslaught, including through the rendering of singleness as unwomanly. Spicksley cites Fletcher's (1995) work identifying developments in discourses of gender in the late seventeenth century as the turning point in the creation of the modern gender system, whereby previous understandings of gendered roles grounded in biblical precedent and biological difference developed to encompass new understandings of 'natural' female inclinations, such as meekness, compassion, affability and piety, while men were endowed with strength, reason and courage. However, Spicksley contends this leaves the question of the need for this change largely unaddressed, and argues this was a response to rising levels of female independence.

Hill's (2001) research on never-married women between 1660 and 1850 relates attacks on spinsterhood in part to "public welfare" concerns. The emergence of a family wage ideology during industrialisation lead to the over-representation of single women among the poor, and unmarried mothers in particular constituting high proportions of those in workhouses. The marginalisation of single women is thus attributed to the practical threat to the community's welfare, given the reliance of many single women on poor relief. However, Hill notes that the demands of gentility and duties towards aged parents similarly acted to limit the employment possibilities of middle and upper class women (2001:43), a reflection of the prevalent cultural expectations about women's dependence on men, whether husbands, fathers, other male relatives or masters.

This expectation is illustrated in widespread anxieties about the 'problem' of 'surplus' women that emerged following 1851 Census statistics. Vicinus (1985) cites an 1862 article entitled 'Why are Women Redundant?' in which journalist W. R. Greig expresses concerns about the increasing incidence of spinsterhood, an "unwholesome social state" productive of "much wretchedness and wrong", in particular for those middle and upper class women who, "not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mother, have to carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own". Grieg excluded from his concerns single women working as domestic servants, as "they fulfil both essentials of women's being: *they are supported by and they minister to, men*" (cited in Vicinus, 1985: 451, italics in the original). Vicinus' work on women's communities in the latter half of the nineteenth century challenges this

representation of superfluous women forced to take employment, arguing in contrast that the increase in bureaucratisation accompanying industrialisation provided job opportunities for women and that middle-class women were situated to take advantage of these larger social changes (1985:6). However, as such communities implied women's self-sufficiency and the dispensability of men, women's public and political presence was consequently undermined through attacks on single women as neglecting their family duties (1985:31).

Jeffreys' work on the increasing incidence of spinsterhood in the latter half of the nineteenth century argues that single women provided the backbone of the First Wave of feminism, thus negative portrayals of singleness were consequently used to discredit and undermine the vast quantities of work being done in the women's movement (1985:97). One method was the stigmatising of single women's sexuality. Chastity, a longstanding imperative of singleness for women, paradoxically also enabled women to pursue alternatives to marriage in different epochs, through transferring the religious and moral ideals of chastity, charity and compassion to the civic sphere. Spicksley (2001) notes that beliefs of women's physiological lasciviousness and sexual appetite during the Tudor and Stuart periods afforded men the opportunity for control⁴⁶. However, medical and moral discourses prevalent in the Victorian era, which understood women as having no sexual feelings until after intercourse, enabled celibacy to be pursued as an empowering ideal. Vicinus observes that beliefs about women's moral superiority and the preferability of separate spheres were made use of in women's social reform movements (1985:18), as well as making it possible for women to live together outside heterosexual domesticity or church governance (1985:56). However, medical and scientific discourses undermining celibacy emerging in the second half of the nineteenth century alongside women's increased participation in the public sphere, meant the acceptability of women's romantic friendships changed (1985:285). Jeffreys (1985) similarly argues that the phenomenon of celibacy had been linked by feminist campaigners to a "new social conscience" wherein women positively refused marriage, however the sexological prescriptions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century

⁴⁶ Satirical attacks on spinsterhood referred to their suffering from "the greensickness", a disease of maids and widows thought to result from lack of orgasmic release. Bennet and Froide observe that by the eighteenth century, both young and old single women were increasingly diagnosed with "greensickness, melancholy and hysteria", emphasising the physical and psychological dangers of singleness for women (1999:20).

and the emergence of the stereotype of the lesbian, meant spinsterhood came to be seen as sexually as well as socially deviant.

Historical research thus illustrates that the stigmatisation of spinsterhood, while not invariant in form over time, is nevertheless long-standing. Prevalent depictions rendered spinsters as either pitiable or subject to condemnation, and excluded the possibility of spinsterhood being understood as an alternative to marriage⁴⁷. This stigmatisation is indicative of the alarm and threat caused by women who deviated from normative ideologies of femininity⁴⁸. Shifts in historical conditions enabling women's economic and social autonomy not only practically challenged gender power relations but also, as Gordon argues, threatened notions of sexual difference and complementarity (1994:17). Whereas an 'independent woman' may be considered an incongruous anomaly, increasing numbers represented a threat to understandings of femininity as dependent, as men's 'Other'.

The variability in stigmatised depictions of spinsterhood however indicates the instability of these social identities. As indicated above, certain historical periods could give rise to particular 'conditions of possibility', including shifts in the discursive representations of spinsterhood which could prove empowering for single women. This is illustrated in Holden's (2004a) research on spinsters in Britain between the wars, which looks at the opportunities that demographic, economic and cultural conditions in this period afforded single women. These include the emergence of an identity she terms "imaginary widowhood", related to the prevalent view of a "lost generation" of young men in the Great War depriving a generation of women the chance to marry. The numbers of women who genuinely could not marry may have been relatively small⁴⁹; nevertheless, this notion had a significant impact on beliefs about spinsterhood and hence the lives of spinsters of this generation. While relying on a notion of missed opportunities for marriage and motherhood, this identity reflected a shift from popular

⁴⁷ There is evidence of alternative discourses challenging such depictions, however these do not appear to have been widespread. Jeffreys cites a commentator of the period who related women remaining unmarried to opportunities for education which enhanced "women's independence, women's dignity, women's value", and the lack of corresponding change in the education of boys which meant the men produced by it were just not "good enough", thus girls turned to college and freedom (Re-Bartlett, 1912, cited in Jeffreys, 1985:90).

⁴⁸ This threat was not restricted to remaining single: learned women for example were portrayed as "intellectual transvestites" (Hill, 2001:83).

⁴⁹ Holden notes this issue is a matter of some debate, citing Winter's contention that there is little evidence of an increase in spinsterhood (1986: 255-6, cited in Holden, 2004:19).

imagery of old maids who could not marry because of personal inadequacies, to tragic “imaginary widows” whose future destiny was determined by the loss of those who fought and died for their country.

Holden argues this identity allowed spinsters various opportunities, including employment in social services such as teaching, midwifery, and health visiting, viewed as an acceptable means of sublimating sexual and maternal energy by redirecting it into useful social activities (2004a:13). Such opportunities were mediated by class. Holden suggests that the higher casualty rate amongst the officer class led to some women consciously drawing on beliefs they could never marry to pioneer new careers. The notion of the “war-bereaved spinster” provided these women with a useful rationale for both professional commitments and close emotional ties with other women. Seen through the filter of the “lost generation story”, these could be understood as substitutes for the husband and family they would never have, rather than as choices in their own right. However, while middle and upper class women could use their single status to pursue careers, women from working-class backgrounds had fewer choices. The post-war economic climate compelled women who had experienced highly paid ‘male’ jobs during the war to give these up and return to low paid, often residential domestic or personal service work with very limited access to state benefits.

Nevertheless, the identity of “war-bereaved” spinsterhood was utilised in campaigns established in the 1930s to address the plight of older single women workers in an era of severe economic depression⁵⁰. The National Spinster’s Pension Association campaign for equality with war widows, reliant on representations of spinsters as misplaced potentially married women who should have had husbands to support them, enabled a sense of female solidarity and collective action. Holden suggests this new identity of war spinster, a source of public sympathy rather than contempt, was a factor in this

⁵⁰ For example, the Over Thirty Association campaigned for better living and working conditions for women on low wages. The National Spinster’s Pension Association (NSPA), concerned about spinsters losing their right to a contributory pension at sixty-five due to incomplete records because of unemployment, illness or giving up paid work to care for relatives, campaigned for women to receive the state pension at fifty-five. At its height in 1938, the NSPA, with a mainly working class membership, was the largest women’s reform movement of the 1930s. The retirement age for all women was lowered to 60 in 1940.

generation instigating for the first time ever a political movement entirely based around their position as single women (2004a: 28)⁵¹.

This example illustrates how shifts in the meanings ascribed to the social identity of spinsterhood may provide a productive space for the emergence of new subjectivities. These meanings have changed in recent decades, as differences between married and unmarried women have decreased, and the marginality and anomaly of single women may be being eroded by the increasing diversity in family forms (Chandler, 1991). Nevertheless, negative depictions of single women remain prevalent. For example, Chandler states that women without husbands⁵² are seen “as sad or inadequate, as economic leeches or strident individualists, as rejected or redundant” (1991:58). Lees’ research on the attitudes of contemporary young women found the non-married and childless depicted as shirking their duty, selfish, immature, lonely, bitter, abnormal, unattractive or pathetic (1999:65). The fact that stereotypes of singleness incorporate ever-partnered women suggests that, despite the dynamic nature of contemporary partnership formation, being currently independent of men exposes women to censure⁵³.

Thus, negative stereotypes of singleness continue to “form a ‘fiction’ to which women have to relate” (Gordon, 1994:17). Byrne’s (2000a, 2003)⁵⁴ research on never-married women finds that singleness remains an unacceptable and discredited social identity in contemporary Ireland, with social identities for single women revolving around stereotypes of the fussy, selfish, and choosy, women who were dried up, women who hated men, old maids, wallflowers, women who were left on the shelf and women who had “something wrong with them” (2003:20). As well as proving an onerous challenge for women who do not marry in terms of social interactions, Byrne argues this

⁵¹ Holden notes that the NSPA has been represented as a non-feminist if not anti-feminist organisation, conflicting with equal rights groups working to eliminate all gender distinctions, and opposed by those who feared it might be used as a lever to force early retirement. However, she argues such conflicts were also expressions of differing class interests, pointing out that to single working class women in low-paid, sex-segregated employment offering little job satisfaction or pension prospects, the prospect of equality with men may have seemed irrelevant.

⁵² Chandler’s (1991) research looks at widows, divorcees, and women whose husbands’ employment makes them largely absent.

⁵³ The continuing censure aimed at singleness can also be seen in the opprobrium aimed at single mothers, a trope for moral decline and social disorder: negative stereotyping of lone mothers as welfare dependent is illustrated by a speech to the Conservative Party conference in 1992 in which the then Social Security Minister Peter Lilley referred to ‘young ladies who get pregnant to jump the housing queue’ as amongst groups who would ‘not be missed’.

⁵⁴ Byrne’s collaborative study is based on qualitative interviews with never-married single childless women aged over 30 in Ireland. Some of these women had been involved in lesbian relationships.

stigmatisation effectively works to elicit support for dominant beliefs, practices and values, in this case conceptions of womanhood as heterosexual, married and reproductive. Gordon (1994, 2002)⁵⁵ refers to a new stereotype emerging alongside the “old maid” stereotype, that of the modern, urban, highly-educated, relatively young, ambitious and career minded “city single” who does not want a husband (1994:131)⁵⁶. However, her research indicates this image too can also serve to marginalise women, experienced as something to both live down and to live up to, as well as being a factor in single women’s exclusion from the lives of those in conventional families⁵⁷.

Nevertheless, research which allows the subjective meanings of singleness to be considered also demonstrates experiences which challenge its negative depictions. As noted above, there is limited research looking at contemporary never-married women. However, previous studies based on qualitative interviews with never-married women enable the discrepancies between the popular understandings of singleness and “the actualities of single women’s daily lives” (Simon, 1987) to be considered. These studies are considered below.

Challenging Stereotypes of Singleness

These studies on single women’s experiences encompass considerable heterogeneity in terms of participants’ social and cultural location, and the diverse contexts in which they experienced different life course events. Simon’s (1987) and Allen’s (1989) research looks at never-married childless American women born mainly in the early part of the twentieth century, thus whose experiences relate to an earlier historical context⁵⁸. Empirical research on single women’s experiences in the latter half of the twentieth century includes Byrne’s (2000a) research on never-married women in Ireland, and

⁵⁵ This research derived from a comparative study based on interviews with 72 never-married, divorced, and married but separated women from Britain, the United States and Finland. The women were aged between 35 and 69 at time of interview, and of diverse social class backgrounds and ethnicities. Several had children, while nine were lesbian (Gordon, 1994).

⁵⁶ Faludi argues that this image is utilised by the New Right to represent single womanhood as selfish, choosy, carefree and unwilling to make sacrifices and compromises (1992: 119-30). As argued further in this thesis, this depiction is not exclusive to those who identify themselves with the political Right.

⁵⁷ Thus, Gordon argues that “the lives of single women were considered glamorous, and the contrast to the humdrum of everyday activities was thought to be too great, so families were hesitant to invite single women to their homes or to their parties” (2002:52).

⁵⁸ Simon (1987) interviewed 50 spinsters born between 1884 and 1918, from diverse ethnic, religious and social class backgrounds. Allen’s (1989) research includes interviews with 15 never-married women and 15 widows, all working-class and all born in 1910. While Allen does not refer to the sexuality of her participants, Simon states that the reluctance and refusal she initially encountered led to her not initiating questions about sex or sexual history in subsequent interviews (1987:80).

Gordon's (1994) comparative study on single women, including the ever-married⁵⁹. Several themes are evident which challenge prevailing stereotypes of singleness.

A common and enduring stereotype of spinsterhood is that of loneliness and isolation. Simon's (1987) and Allen's (1989) empirical research emphasises the relationships with both family and friends of the women they interviewed, and both use the notion of intimacy in describing these. Allen's research aims to address the "middle class bias" of historical research on spinsterhood, which she argues obscures the experiences and meanings of singleness for working class women. Allen argues that the prevalence of a familistic ideology as a means of survival in the absence of a welfare state in inter-war America meant that remaining unmarried was viewed not as a deviant, but rather as an alternative strategy (1989:128). While there were variations between the married and never-married women in her study, there were also striking similarities, and all had undertaken caring roles, including serving as "surrogate mothers" to siblings' children. While the family had a powerful role in structuring all of these women's opportunities (1989:85), Allen states the main finding of her study is that "intimacy and mutuality did not issue just in marriage or with one's own children" (1989:100).

Simon similarly states that, far from existing in isolation, most of her participants had created lives of sustained intimacy, rich in friends and intimates (1987:109). Many of these participants had also undertaken caring roles, as daughters, sisters and aunts. Simon notes that while independence was an oft-stated valued goal for the never-married women she interviewed, of equal weight "was the value that these women placed on sustaining close relations with family members and friends" (1987:34). She concludes that the "implied claim of privileged status for spousal intimacy disregards the depth of intimate relationships that the never-married often develop" (1987:169). In addition, both Simon and Gordon note the importance of involvement in voluntary organisations and community groups to participants in their research (Simon 1987:53; Gordon 1994:82-83). As with the caring roles undertaken by many single women in these studies, these wider commitments also challenge stereotypes of singleness as selfish.

⁵⁹ See footnotes 54 and 55 above.

This empirical research also suggests opportunities that are enabled by remaining never-married. Simon points to both the economic independence and broader self-reliance necessitated by singleness, and argues that financial autonomy enabled a social autonomy that, for example, allowed single women to make choices that might be at odds with family or friends (1987:123). Simon attributes a sense of resourcefulness she observes in these retired women to their experiences of contending with the financial, physical, occupational, legal and social demands usually handled by husbands of married women of the same generation. In addition, she attributes their resignation and familiarity with physical difficulties to the caregiving roles these women have undertaken which, she contends, “seems to have prepared this group of women, early and well, to take their own physical deterioration in their stride” (1987:163). Simon notes their “foresighted adaptiveness”, which included making plans for old age such as considering sharing households with friends or family members. She argues that years of singleness have provided these women with the opportunity to discern both the value and limitations of independence, and concludes that their well-developed capacity to rely to some extent on others is a key factor in successfully enjoying old age and coping with its difficulties (1987:182).

As well as providing particular opportunities, researchers of singleness also point to the wider social consequences that women remaining single may engender, what Chandler refers to as “the potential fragmentation of the assumptions of gender” (1991:42). These studies draw attention to the importance of changes both in material practices and subjectivities in challenging normative gender identities. This is illustrated in Byrne’s (2000a, 2003) research, in which she argues that the active withdrawing from the pressures of heterosexual coupledness, either through choosing celibate independence or lesbian partnerships, reveals resistance to dominant conceptions of womanhood. Byrne’s focus is the changing conceptions of both self and social identities⁶⁰, and she argues that the awareness of ‘difference’ single women experience can help build greater self-awareness, contributing to the creation of alternative identities. She considers the “repertoire of stories” provided by women as explanations for a social identity at odds with the dominant norms of society. While at one level most women present themselves as involuntarily single and thereby distance themselves from

⁶⁰ Byrne uses a similar notion of identity to that outlined above, whereby both self-identity and social identity are understood as composed in social, communicative interaction with others (2003:4).

perceptions of this as deliberative choice, she argues that evidence for new, alternative self-identities for women can also be found in single women's accounts. Byrne concludes that single women are actively engaged in composing self-identities that are not posited on heterosexual familism but based on their experiences of being single in contemporary Irish society. She argues that the naming and claiming of self-identities not based on marriage and motherhood effects transformations in social identities and thus, as well as a significant personal achievement for women, is also of ideological import in actively challenging and transcending dominant social identities for woman (2003:32).

These studies variously suggest challenges to stereotyped understandings of singleness, and illustrate the potential for the subjective experiences of single women to contribute to new meanings of categories such as gender and partnership status. Yet, while these studies relate to experiences of singleness in particular historical and cultural contexts, there is little detailed attention to the specific conditions giving rise to particular experiences. In exploring the experiences of never-married women in Britain in relation to areas such as personal relationships and employment, and the subjectivities to which these give rise, this thesis seeks to examine how these relate to changes in the wider social context in which these have occurred.

Conclusion

There is relatively little research on never-married single women in contemporary Britain. The focus of much Second Wave feminist theorising on the nuclear family, while excluding those outwith this, did challenge presumptions of this as either natural or necessary. Rather, much feminist research drew attention to both the role of associated practices, such as the sexual division of labour, in maintaining material inequalities between men and women, as well as its role in normative gender identities. Feminist attention to the necessary interdependence of the private and public challenged the 'separate spheres' ideology, and enabled analyses of the ways in which changes in wider social structures contribute to changes in the 'private' sphere, and vice versa. Nevertheless, the priority accorded to the sexually based dyad in contemporary theorising on transformations in intimacy excludes the experiences of single women.

In addition, the presumption of epochal shifts in some theoretical work downplays the material and cultural constraints that continue to shape individual lives.

Nevertheless, feminist theoretical developments in understandings of concepts such as agency, subjectivity and gender allows a consideration of the subjective meanings and experiences of contemporary spinsterhood, and the way in which wider social changes have impacted on these over time. This thesis explores the meanings and experiences evident in the narratives of contemporary spinsters in order to consider the extent to which these challenge dominant understandings of singleness for women.

CHAPTER THREE

'Knowing' Single Women: Research Ethics and Sample

Since the 1970s feminist researchers have sought to create a sociology *for*, rather than of, women, using feminist ideas (see Smith, 1974). A feminist methodology makes explicit its political commitments, and cannot logically be independent of the ontology, epistemology, subjectivity, politics, ethics and social situation of the researcher (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:16). As such, the researcher must reflexively investigate the assumptions and procedures adopted in undertaking the research. This chapter details the research process, firstly discussing the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning this, then outlining the way in which the study was conducted. There are diverse feminist research methodologies; however, these share a common concern with issues of power dynamics and the ethical treatment of participants, and this informs all aspects of the research process from participation to interpretation and representation. In detailing the methods used in the various stages of this study, this chapter looks at the political and ethical concerns that have arisen in undertaking this research, and how they have been addressed.

Feminist Epistemology: from Truth/Reality to Knowledge/Power

Feminist critiques of 'malestream' social science research emerging in the 1970s drew attention to its androcentric bias, wherein what is presented as universal and unrelated to a particular position, is in fact partial, located, and related to a particular sex as its source and standpoint (Smith, 1987:20). Feminist critiques of the biased character of much knowledge-production emphasised the exclusion of women (Smith, 1987) and the interlocking character of several aspects of knowledge and power in the sciences at women's expense (Longino, 1991). Harding (1986) identifies three perspectives evident in the development of feminist epistemologies to address these issues. The first, 'feminist empiricism', assumes that sexist bias can be removed to enable genuinely objective science. Yet, there are clearly tensions between an endorsement of politically informed research and assumptions of value-neutrality. Many feminists questioned the assumptions of objectivity on which Enlightenment forms of knowledge are predicated¹

¹ As Ramazanoglu and Holland note, feminism in the West has been substantially shaped by the concerns of the Enlightenment, however also developed in conflict with it (2002:24).

(see also Oakley 1981, Stanley and Wise 1983, Smith, 1987). This questioning was developed further in response to the challenge posed by Black feminist criticism of the false universalism of White feminism, as well as postmodern debates, influencing the development of 'post-positivist' feminist epistemologies. Rather than a view of the researcher as an objective knower, who "operates according to principles that are independent of embodied experience, and generates knowledge in a value-neutral way" (Longino, 1991:667), post-positivist epistemologies have challenged conceptions of knowledge and power as analytically distinct domains. 'Feminist standpoint' and 'feminist postmodernism', identified by Harding as the second and third perspectives, question the view of both subjectivity and women's experience as 'unitary' and characterised by a unified discourse, emphasising instead the plural and fragmented nature of identities and the contradictory character of 'experience', and knowledge claims as 'always socially situated' (Harding, 1993)².

Post-positivist epistemologies open up space to take difference seriously, and allow for flexibility, multi-positionality, complexity and partiality. Yet, these also give rise to competing understandings of 'how we know what we know' and varying beliefs about social existence, and the nature of objectivity and relativism within feminist epistemologies remain highly contested (see Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Barrett and Phillips, 1992; Alcoff and Potter, 1993). In distinction to postmodern epistemologies, standpoint theory holds on to subject/object conceptions in arguing for 'objectivity', albeit in insisting upon their inter-relatedness radically departs from the conception utilised in traditional positivist epistemologies. This dual conception of reality, that reality is both socially and materially constructed and that some perceptions of reality are partial, others true and liberatory, has been argued as a "fault line" running through the articulation of feminist standpoint theory (Hekman, 1997:343). Postmodern critiques of the subject and object of traditional knowledge-making "take issue both with the abstract individualism that informs assumptions about who the knower is, and with the conception of knowledge acquisition as disinterested discovery, according to which the object of knowledge is found, not made" (Code, 1995:42).

² A revised standpoint theory places emphasis on a multiplicity of subject positions, arguing that "the subjects/agents of knowledge are multiple, heterogeneous, and contradictory or incoherent, not unitary, homogenous, and coherent as they are for empiricist epistemology" (Harding, 1993:65).

This research follows a feminist postmodern approach in challenging positivist conceptions of identity and experience. However, as noted in Chapter Two, critics of ‘postmodern excesses’ warn of the risks of deconstructing ‘women’, never accorded autonomy, rationality or agency under modernity, out of existence (Benhabib, 1992:21). Furthermore, Haraway (1991) contrasts the “god-trick” of positivist epistemologies founded on notions of objective, discoverable truths, of being able to see “everything from nowhere”, to an extreme relativism which risks “being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally” (1991:191). In addressing the challenge of having “*simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects (...) *and* a non-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world” (1991:187), Haraway argues the need for “situated knowledges”, that is, a view from somewhere and knowledge that is partial, locatable and critical (1991:191).

An understanding of knowledge production as always socially situated draws attention to the need to reflect on the process and production of that knowledge. The section below considers the epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning this study, and subsequent sections detail the research process³.

‘Knowing’ Single Women

In undertaking this research, I have struggled to reconcile varying positions on the complexity of social life, and how the social can be known. In seeking to understand the meanings and effects of spinsterhood through practical investigation of the experiences of a particular group of women, I have held on to the notion that these are grounded in the material conditions of life. However, while these conditions are influential, they are neither determining nor immutable. Any experience derives from specific cultural and historical contexts, and I have also sought to understand the ‘conditions of possibility’ that are available to individuals in a particular location, and how these may have changed over a period of time. Furthermore, as detailed in the

³ Glucksman, in a work which provides a picture of “interpretation in the making”, argues the importance of reflecting on the process and production of knowledge, however sounds a note of warning about saying “more about the research process than about the content of the research, about what goes on in the mind of the researcher than in the patterns she is attempting to analyse” (2000:36). Oakley also argues the critical importance of specifying the criteria used in the research process, given that there is not such thing as ‘simply’ recording or publishing data and thus all empirical research involves an “imaginative and creative leap”. This chapter aims to describe and reflexively comment on the various stages of the research process, detailing the theoretical underpinnings and justifications for the research in order to, as Oakley describes, enable an “audience to track the nature of that leap” (2000:296).

previous chapters, a central aim of this thesis is elucidating the subjectivities of contemporary spinsters, and considering the role that singleness may have played in constituting their self-identity. This interest in subjectivities emerged during the research process in response to an increasing awareness of the need to critically interrogate notions such as agency and ‘choice’. As detailed in Chapter Two, in contrast to the assumptions of rational agency underpinning explanations of familial change as the outcome of deliberative choice, this thesis draws on a notion of ‘relational autonomy’, whereby agents are both rational *and* emotional, embodied, desiring, creative and feeling (see Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000). In addition, the ‘subjects’ of these experiences are understood not as rational agents with ‘fixed’ identities grounded in categories such as sex, class, or ethnicity, but as subjects constituted *through* experience. As such, I concur with Skeggs when she states:

“I want to hold on to experience as a way of understanding how women occupy the category ‘women’, a category which is classed and raced and produced through power relations and through struggles across different sites in space and time. I do not, however, want to argue for experience as a foundation for knowledge, a way of revealing or locating true and authentic ‘woman’” (1997:27, cited in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:126).

This research draws on a Foucauldian notion of experience as productive, in investigating the self-identities or subjectivities to which particular experiences give rise. As Skeggs argues, this notion enables “the shift to be made from experience as a foundation for knowledge to experience as productive of a knowing subject in which their identities are continually in production rather than being occupied as fixed” (1997:28, *op cit*).

A Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity as “the outcome of a process of production and self-production through the interplay of discourses and practices” (Byrne, 2002:2)⁴, allows for the study of identity formation through narrative. As detailed below, narrative analysis is a main method adopted in this research. However, rather than a conception of narrative as ‘representation’, a concept of ‘ontological narrativity’ is utilised, which posits that it is through narratives that we constitute our identities

⁴ As Byrne argues, in his later work Foucault was concerned to understand the subject less as the “docile body”, than individuals undertaking the task of producing themselves (see Foucault, 1991:41).

(Somers, 1994). In this conception, identities are not seen either as a reflection of external forces or social conditions, nor as free-floating inventions of self. Rather, these are constituted in relation to an individual's temporal and spatially variable location. Narrative analysis thus enables an exploration of subjectivities in a social context, with narrative the medium through which we express knowledge of material conditions and power relations (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2000).

As Somers argues, such a conception thus enables empirically based research “that is at once temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material and macro-structural” (1994:607). It encompasses an understanding of experience as mediated, subjective and partial, as well as avoiding categorical rigidities by emphasising the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space. However, “to say that sociological explanations entail analytic narrativity is not the same thing as arguing that social science theory is *solely* narrative” (Somers, 1994:645)⁵. Narrative analysis as a method captures dimensions of subjectivity and consciousness, *and* the material conditions that shape individual lives.

Somers distinguishes this ‘narrative identity’ approach from a ‘categorical approach’, which presumes internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act uniformly and predictably. Rather, the narrative identity approach requires a focus on contingent narratives of meaning, rather than assuming a priori categorisations. This conception thus highlights the need for empirical investigation into the subjective meanings attributed by contemporary spinsters to their varying experiences⁶. A narrative identity approach also challenges assumptions that individuals act on the basis of rational means-end preferences; as Somers argues, it assumes rather that people act in particular ways because not to do so would fundamentally violate their sense of *being* at that particular time and place (1994:624). This understanding supports the conception of gender identity outlined in Chapter Two, wherein dominant beliefs about what it is to be a man or a woman shape our sense of behaviour, and limit the range of meanings and actions associated with belonging to a

⁵ Somers also distinguishes between various dimensions of narrativity, counterposing ontological narrativity with ‘conceptual narrativity’, the concepts and explanations we construct as social researchers, which include factors such as labour market patterns or institutional practices (1994:620).

⁶ It also draws attention to the need to explain the use of categorisations such as ‘contemporary spinsterhood’, and this is considered further below.

particular sex. Chapter Two also notes the increasing attention to the significance of gendered subjectivities in research on familial change, with feminist scholars suggesting that this is in part related to increasing opportunities expanding available identities for women. Through analysing these narratives, this research seeks to understand the extent to which changing ‘conditions of possibility’ have enabled the emergence of alternative discourses or counter-narratives about gender identities, and whether these potentially challenge presumptions inherent in dominant discourses about familial change.

This research utilises a mixed methodology, the reasons for which are outlined below, following a discussion of the way in which ‘contemporary spinsterhood’ is defined for this research. The subsequent section details the methods utilised in undertaking this research, explaining these with reference to the political and ethical concerns encountered in various stages of the research.

Delineating the Subjects of this Research

Gender and partnership status are the central categories of analysis in this research. Chapter One outlines the complexities of conceptualising singleness in a period where increasing fluidity in the meanings and practices of partnership have destabilised the significance of spinsterhood and the meaning of ‘single’⁷. Single is defined for the purposes of this research as never-married and not in a cohabiting relationship. Single women however are not a homogeneous category and there are numerous axes that potentially could be considered in studying single women, such as ethnicity, rural/urban location, financial situation, career, family circumstances, sexual orientation and physical or mental abilities. To consider all between group variations would be an impossible task. In addition, the intention of this research is not to make claims on behalf of all single women, rather to explore in detail a particular set of single women, specifically White heterosexual women aged over 35.

Delineating the subjects of this research by sexuality and ethnicity is not to suggest that these are ‘taken for granted’ as fixed or immutable aspects of identity. I decided to focus on White women for several reasons. As noted in Chapter Two, Black feminist

⁷ An initial presumption that spinsterhood would be experienced as a defining aspect of identity was somewhat challenged in the course of this research, and this is discussed further below.

critiques of Second Wave analyses of the centrality of male domination of family life emphasised the variable meanings ascribed to different family structures. The variations in patterns of partnership and parental status across ethnicities in Britain suggest the importance of research that investigates these varying meanings⁸, however this was not the focus of this research. Another associated reason relates to the questions raised by deconstructionist approaches which challenge the pre-eminence of categories such as ‘woman’, as to whether axes such as ‘class’ and ‘race’ are simply variables that can be ‘added-on’ to theoretical or empirical work about women (Smart, 1992). This research does not interrogate how these subjects come to be constituted as heterosexual, White, female and single. Rather, it focuses on the experiences of these *already* constituted subjects. This is not to privilege one aspect of identity over another, but enables a focus on the commonalities and similarities amongst a specific group: as Smart suggests, the traps of ‘fundamentalising’ can be avoided by looking at the specificity of certain gendered, classed and raced constructs (1992:10). Finally, and more prosaically, very little secondary data addressing familial change is broken down by ethnicity, while the British Household Panel Survey dataset does not have sufficient sample sizes to allow any meaningful comparative analysis either across ethnicities or within ethnic groups other than White over time⁹.

In terms of age and sexuality, I anticipated that women aged 35 and over who define themselves as heterosexual would perceive remaining unmarried as anomalous and therefore would have had to ‘account’ for this in ways not reducible to their sexuality, as well as having considered aspects such as living arrangements, financial provision and children in relation to being single¹⁰. Single motherhood is a stigmatised location for women, however is stereotypically associated with a particular group of younger,

⁸ For example, in 2002, more than half of families with dependent children headed by a person of mixed origin (61%) or by a Black Caribbean (54%) were lone parent families, compared with the 9% of Indian, 15% of Pakistani, and 23% of White families (ONS, 2002c). As noted in Chapter Two, Duncan and Edwards’ (1997, 1999) research on lone mothers’ decisions about paid and unpaid work highlights the importance of aspects such as social class, geographical location and ethnicity in shaping the gendered moral rationalities underpinning such decisions.

⁹ The delineation in this research is not intended to conflate ‘race’ with ‘ethnicity’. The latter refers to “a social group or category of the population that, in a larger society, is set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality, or culture” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online). One ‘difference’ referred to in the research is that of participants who have a different nationality from that of the host population to which they have moved, including English participants living in Scotland.

¹⁰ The average age for first marriages for women in England and Wales is 28 (ONS 2003b). Byrne (2000a), in her empirical research on never-married childless women in Ireland, focused on women aged 30 and over after finding younger women perceived themselves as ‘temporarily single’ and had not considered the implications of remaining single over the long-term.

less-educated women. I was specifically interested in considering how solo mothers, women who have opted into single motherhood, might experience this, however the sample also includes women who became mothers while in a partnership.

Primary goals in undertaking this study were to provide information on the extent of singleness, to generate a substantive body of data relating to a broad range of experiences about contemporary spinsterhood, and to be able to consider changes over time in relation to each. This was pursued via a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, detailed in the section below.

Mixed Methodologies: Undertaking Quantitative and Qualitative Research

This research combines quantitative analysis of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), and qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with 37 never-married single women. Qualitative research methods have come to be seen as “quintessentially feminist” (Maynard and Purvis, 1994), considered as both less objectifying than traditional quantitative methods, and a means of enabling more egalitarian relationships in research. However, several commentators have argued that there is no one feminist method (see Kelly et al, 1994), as well as challenging an ‘incompatibility thesis’ in which quantitative and qualitative methods are seen as essentially oppositional (see Reinharz, 1992; Duncan and Edwards 1997; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, Oakley 2000). While some consider that a combination of research designs can act as a check on the credibility and utility of results (see Reinharz 1992, Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998), others have argued that each produces different information. Duncan and Edwards (1997) thus distinguish between extensive and intensive research¹¹, with the former characterised as aiming to describe overall patterns and distinguishing features of a phenomenon, and the latter focusing on causal processes and mechanisms going beyond simple association. The use of mixed methods in this research is not seen as providing information that can be simply aggregated to provide a single unitary picture of the ‘truth’ (Maynard and Purvis, 1994:4), but is used to provide information on different aspects of singleness. The quantitative analysis provides representative description of changes over time in periods spent single prior to the formation of any residential partnership, whether marital or cohabiting, and the

¹¹ A distinction derived from Sayer (1984).

qualitative analysis is used to explore the ways in which singleness is experienced¹². The following sections outline the respective methods used, and address the particular issues arising in the conducting of this research.

- Quantitative Analysis: Changes over Time in Singleness

In order to ascertain whether there has been an increase in singleness over time, original statistical analysis of the BHPS was conducted. A review of the secondary data on marital/partnership change was undertaken, however proved too limited to provide sufficient information to capture changes in singleness¹³. The BHPS is a Government-funded survey conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex. It is a longitudinal data set comprising a nationally representative sample of 5,500 households and over 10,000 individuals, interviewed annually since 1991¹⁴. Using such datasets provides representative or generalisable information, nevertheless simultaneously requires dependence on a priori categories. This is a particularly pertinent issue when the phenomenon under consideration, such as partnership status, is dynamic. Longitudinal datasets, designed to capture changes over time, allow for a “moving picture” of social change, compared to the “snapshot” provided by cross-sectional surveys (Berthoud and Gershuny, 2000). However, there is still an issue of shifts in ‘meanings’ assigned to particular categories, and this is illustrated in the definitions ascribed to the categories of interest in this research. Thus, the BHPS records retrospective marital and cohabitation histories for each individual, as well as any changes in status throughout the duration of the sample, and this information provided the data for the statistical analyses which is considered in Chapter Four. However, the definition of cohabitation used in the BHPS refers to a period of

¹² As Chapter One has noted, intentions and motivations about familial change cannot be assumed from statistical data. The difficulty of ascertaining from statistical information whether there has been a genuine turn away from partnership highlights the importance of qualitative research in order to understand the meanings that changes, such as the shift from marriage to cohabitation or the increase in periods spent single, have for individuals. A central focus of this research, as noted above, is to explore the ‘meanings’ accorded certain experiences, such as singleness, childlessness and single motherhood.

¹³ The dramatic increase in those remaining never-married has been attributed in several studies to increasing cohabitation (see Kiernan, 1999). However, as Chapter Four details, it is difficult to ascertain from secondary data whether cohabitation is sufficient to explain the decline in marriage, or whether there has also been an increase in never-married individuals remaining outwith a residential partnership. Chapter Four considers changes over time in singleness for both women and men.

¹⁴ The initial selection of households for inclusion in the panel survey, made using a two-stage stratified systematic method, is approximately equivalent to the current sample design of the General Household Survey (see Appendix C: Sample Design and Response, in Smythe and Browne 1992).

three months or more¹⁵. The statistical analysis measures periods spent single prior to any residential partnership, thereby equating marriage and cohabitation. The duration used to define cohabitation here however suggests that caution needs to be exercised in assuming that marriage and cohabitation are understood as equivalent. This was also reinforced by the varying way in which cohabitations were considered in participants' interviews¹⁶. Other limitations of the dataset included the lack of any variable for sexuality, as well as the restrictions imposed by the small numbers of minority ethnic groups discussed above.

There is some previous work on trends in marriage and cohabitation using the BHPS (see Ermisch and Francesconi 1996, 1998; Ermisch, 2000), however, there is little research on people remaining single beyond the local marriage rate. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, research on people remaining single at younger ages leaves open the question of whether they will go on to form residential partnerships, that is, older age groups must be considered in order to assess whether there is a delay or decline in partnership over time. The quantitative analysis was conducted on a selected dataset constructed on Wave 11 of the BHPS, that is on data derived from the first eleven years of the panel survey. This consisted of the marital and partnership histories of White British adults, 'cleaned' to exclude those designated as ever-married or ever-cohabiting but for whom no start dates were provided, as well as those with a date for commencement of residential unions prior to age 16. Survival Analyses were then conducted to provide information on changes over time in partnership rates in Great Britain¹⁷. These were distinguished to provide comparative information on the proportions who had never married by specific ages, and on those who had never experienced a residential union (either marital or cohabiting), that is, the proportions of adults remaining single. This information was broken down by decade of birth, enabling comparisons by cohorts to indicate change over time. In addition, this

¹⁵ The specific question asks: "As you know, some couples live together without actually getting married. Have you ever lived with someone as a couple for three months or more?" (BHPS Documentation, online at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps/doc/>).

¹⁶ This differed, for example, across cohorts: whereas partnership was conflated with marriage for older participants, younger participants distinguished between marriage and cohabitation, with some stating they would consider cohabitation but not marriage.

¹⁷ This was conducted using SPSS, a statistical computer software package designed for social scientists. Further information about the data is provided in Chapter Four. 'Left censoring' meant the duration of time single began at age 16, and continued until either the commencement of marriage or any residential partnership, or age 40 (or oldest age possible to conduct a comparison, given ages and sample sizes). The syntax for these analyses is included in Appendix Five.

information was also provided by specific age group, and this enables an assessment of the extent to which there has been a delay or decline in partnership over time. The results of this are reported in Chapter Four.

- Qualitative Analysis: Interviews with Contemporary Spinsters

The main method used in this research was semi-structured interviewing, enabling an in-depth exploration of the experience and meaning of singleness for ‘contemporary spinsters’. As noted above, interviewing women has been seen as a quintessentially feminist research method, producing work that is ‘by, on and for women’, and that prioritises women’s lived experience of the social through ‘giving voice’ (see Stanley and Wise, 1983; Stanley and Morley, 1988). However, an assumption that gender is both a necessary and sufficient condition for feminist research fails to acknowledge other power differentials between the researcher and the researched. Indeed, several writers have drawn attention to the vulnerability of participants *because* of similarities, including a shared gender (see Finch, 1984). Relationships of power and potential exploitation are inherent to the research process and thus require constant vigilance on the part of the researcher, in all aspects from recruitment to interpretation and representation¹⁸.

The notion of ‘giving voice’ also assumes that participants are ‘telling it like it is’. However, the actor’s intentions or self-understanding may not be a sufficient condition for a sociological understanding of action. As Kelly, Burton and Kegan have argued, the relationship between experience and knowledge is not automatic, and theory is required to make sense of experience (1994:29). This point is addressed further in relation to interpretation and analysis below. Furthermore, as Hollway and Jefferson observes, it relies on assumptions of subjects as “transparent selves” who know who they are and what makes them tick (2000:3). As well as coherent, knowledgeable and rational subjects, this notion also assumes that there is a shared meaning to language. Yet, as current theories of communication stress, any kind of account can only be a mediation of reality (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:11). Thus, as Reissman argues, we

¹⁸ The balance of power between the researcher and researched is a complex issue, as Grenz (2005, forthcoming) discusses in relation to being a female researcher interviewing male heterosexual clients of prostitutes.

cannot 'give voice', as "we do not have direct access to another's experiences. We deal with ambiguous representations of it – talk, text, interaction and interpretation" (1993:8, cited in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:3). Instead of considering the interviews as providing neutral accounts of an external reality therefore, these are conceived rather as narrative constructions of this. This conception encompasses a 'critical realism' position, that there is a relationship between people's representations and their experiences, however it is far from transparent (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:4), and as such information about experiences cannot simply be 'read off' from what people say.

The ways in which these issues are addressed in this research is considered further in the following sections detailing the ways in which participants were recruited, the interviewing process, and the interpretation and analysis¹⁹.

- *Recruiting Participants*

The participants for this research were recruited in different locations, mainly from the central belt of Scotland (from small towns to cities), as well as London and a town in the South West of England. The decision to conduct fieldwork in Scotland was related to the method of recruitment originally envisaged for this research, 'snowballing', wherein I would draw on my personal networks to 'start off' the recruiting²⁰. This method has been considered as having considerable potential for sensitive research on 'rare' populations, or where participants are members of a stigmatised group, as the intermediaries can 'vouch' for an interviewer (Lee, 1993). In addition, it was also considered beneficial as a means of providing information on the social networks of participants, a dimension of their lives identified as of interest during the initial literature review, wherein a perception of spinsters as lonely and isolated was evident, as detailed in Chapter Two.

I had assumed that single women would be likely to have other single women in their social networks, an assumption related to a postulation that singleness would be a significant feature of participants' identity. In recognition of the potential drawbacks of

¹⁹ These stages are distinguished here, and described sequentially, for clarity, however in practice often overlapped. As detailed later, the qualitative research followed a grounded theory approach in which the interviewing and analysis are considered an iterative process.

²⁰ Snowballing uses a small group of informants who are asked to put the researcher in touch with friends, and interviewing them until a chain of informants has been selected. Following a pattern of social relations in a particular setting, snowballing thus encompasses relations among individuals (Burgess, 1984:55).

this method, that it can produce a discrete, highly connected sample (Burgess, 1984:57), I initiated recruitment through a diverse range of sources via a leaflet specifying my criteria (see Appendix One). This leaflet was disseminated through personal contacts, various organisations, and posted on online mailing lists. The organisations were Glasgow Women's Library and Engender, a campaigning and research organisation for women in Scotland, both of whom included leaflets in mailings to their members. There was also a poster and leaflets left in the Women's Library. The online requests were via 'Femscot', an online mailing list for women in Scotland, and the Engender online 'NoticeBoard'²¹.

Chapter One has detailed the difficulties in defining singleness. A related issue is that of terminology, which was particularly pertinent in recruiting potential participants. Spinster is a term that technically describes never-married women, however may be viewed negatively, and I did not use this in recruiting participants²². Potential respondents were sent a letter with more information about the study and the format of the interviews, and which stated that all participants would receive a transcript of the interview with a right of veto, as well as a summary of interview findings (see Appendix Two). In terms of location, I offered potential respondents the option of being interviewed in their home, my home or office, or to hire a room²³.

Two participants subsequently suggested other organisations of which they were members, the Older Feminist Network (OFN), and the British Federation of Women

²¹ This clearly risks restricting the sample to those who are members of or active in feminist/women's organisations. However, the poster and leaflet contained a request to circulate information about the study and to pass on information to any one they knew who might be interested in participating, and this appears to have had some success. Some participants referred to having seen information about the study in various locations before responding. This included leaflets at a trade union event that were not distributed by me, suggesting that information about the study was circulated amongst particular groups. Another participant had been contacted by a relative who was a member of an organisation.

²² The term spinster was used during interviews, mainly with reference to stereotypical images of never-married women. However, one participant from the 1960s cohort did introduce the term in ways that suggested a 'reclaiming' of this, stating, "I actually like being a spinster". Nevertheless, some participants' subsequent response to the use of this term indicate a discomfort with its use: for example, another participant from the 1960s cohort commented subsequently in correspondence: "*I did 'flinch' at the word spinster, I prefer singledom!*".

²³ During the period of fieldwork I had access to an office at Glasgow University, however no interviews were conducted there. Some were conducted in my home, one in a participant's workplace, and some in hired rooms in city centre locations (Quaker Meeting House in Edinburgh, Women's Library in Glasgow). However, most were conducted in participants' homes.

Graduates (BFWG), and I also circulated requests through these²⁴. As Table 3.1 below illustrates, about a third of all participants were recruited via organisations. Yet, while responses from participants suggested my hypothesis about the social networks of single women might be correct, this method rarely resulted in further contacts²⁵. In addition, several women who initially responded offered to participate in a telephone or email survey, but were unwilling to commit to the one and a half hours I allowed for a one to one interview.

As a means of getting participants who matched further criteria, I contacted various sheltered housing establishments in order to identify older participants, and circulated my advert through London-based support groups for solo mothers²⁶. I also attempted to recruit participants through the media, arranging an interview with a journalist. However she wished to include information on existing participants, a condition to which I could not agree, and the piece was not published. I thus decided to advertise, writing letters about the research to local free newspapers, and placing an advert in the Scottish Metro, a free newspaper circulated mainly in Edinburgh and Glasgow²⁷. The response to this was considerable, and I was unable to interview all who were interested in participating²⁸. This response and subsequent correspondence with potential respondents however indicated a level of interest that suggested a desire amongst single women to have ‘their story’ told²⁹.

²⁴ Again, this risks identifying a particular group of respondents. Three further participants were recruited through this, a member from each as well as someone introduced to the research by a member of OFN (hence identified as an ‘organisation’ participant in Table 3.1).

²⁵ For example, one participant wrote re never-married single women “*I know quite a few! We gravitate towards one another as there is a tendency for women such as ourselves to become socially isolated and we support one another*”. She subsequently arranged an interview with herself and a friend. During the interviews several participants did refer to having single female friends. The lack of success in recruiting participants through these friendship networks may point to the stigma associated with this aspect of identity.

²⁶ I initially decided to focus on women who had ‘opted into’ single motherhood by choice, however three participants recruited through other means also had children, one during a long-term ‘marriage-like’ cohabiting relationship during which she took her partner’s name, one as a result of an unplanned pregnancy, and another during a cohabiting relationship with the father ‘walking out’ on learning of the pregnancy. I decided to include these mothers in the research as I considered the similarities and difference with other mothers would potentially be of interest.

²⁷ This potentially risked limiting respondents to those living or working in these cities, however the advert coincided with the Edinburgh Festival, and I received responses from people living in a range of locations, including towns outside the central belt of Scotland and London.

²⁸ The time initially allocated to fieldwork was six months in 2002. The responses to advertising led me to interview more women than the 30 originally envisaged, with some interviews conducted subsequent to the original fieldwork period.

²⁹ I received nearly 40 emails and letters in response to advertising the study in this way. Potential respondents commented that they had “*long felt part of a neglected minority*”, and that this was “*a subject that’s needed looking at for a very long time*”. I also had more potential respondents who were

This method of recruiting is reliant on finding informants who matched the specific criteria, and who were available and willing to co-operate with the research, and clearly does not provide a 'representative' sample. However, it did provide the range of ages required to consider the ways in which experiences and meanings of spinsterhood may have changed over time. It also provided sufficient heterogeneity in terms of other factors, such as social class background and educational and occupational status, to allow some insight into the consequences of diverse histories. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide information on the source of recruiting, and the ages of participants in the sample. Other socio-economic characteristics are outlined below.

Table 3.1: Method of Recruitment and Location

Source	Scotland, Town	Scotland, City	London	Total
Personal Contacts	1	2		3
Sheltered housing	1	1		2
Organisations	2	9	2	13
Support groups for solo mothers			4*	4
Media advertising	3	11	1	15
Total	7	23	7	37

* Includes one participant who lived in small town in South West England.

Table 3.2: Age Group

Decade of Birth	Age range at time of interview			
	36 - 41	43 - 51	53-65	65 - 83
1930s*				6
1940s			5	
1950s		11		
1960s	15			

*Includes one participant born in 1919

- *Sample Characteristics*

This section looks at the sample characteristics in terms of education and employment status, income and housing tenure. There is a long-standing relationship between remaining unmarried and higher educational qualifications and occupational status for women (see Kiernan, 1988). Interpretations of this relationship are considered in

solo mothers than I was able to interview, similarly suggesting a desire to tell their story. Some potential respondents asked to be kept in touch with the research, and I have subsequently sent publications emerging from this study (Simpson, 2003). I have considered this response as part of the data on which I have drawn on in the subsequent analysis, noting observations based on these responses in a 'fieldwork diary' kept during this period.

Chapter Six. As Table 3.3 illustrates, the majority of participants in this research had higher educational qualifications, while nearly three quarters had a degree and more than a third had or were taking post-graduate qualifications, four of whom had Doctorates³⁰. In addition, in terms of occupational status most participants were classified as professional. However, these results may well reflect sampling strategies or the socio-economic characteristics of those likely to participate in such research.

Table 3.3: Highest Educational Qualification by Decade of Birth

Decade of Birth	No qualifications	School-level qualifications	Further Education / Professional qualifications	Degree	Post-graduate qualifications
1930s	2		2	1*	1
1940s		1	1	1, 1*	1
1950s		2	1	2, 1*	4, 1*
1960s	1			6, 3*	4, 1*
Total	3	3	4	15	12

* Indicates first degree undertaken as a mature student.

In Table 3.3 participants are classified by the highest qualification achieved. Those who undertook professional qualifications (such as accountancy, psychotherapy and teacher training qualifications) and who also had a degree, are classified under ‘Degree’. As well as possibly reflecting those likely to participate in research, the preponderance of graduates amongst younger women also suggests the increasing importance of qualifications amongst younger cohorts. Table 3.4 illustrates participants’ occupational status

Table 3.4: Occupational Status*

Major Group	Description	Number
1	Legislators, senior officials and managers	1
2	Professionals	19
3	Technicians and associate professionals	-
4	Clerks	1
5	Service workers and shop and market sales workers	13
6	Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	-
7	Craft and related trades workers	-
8	Plant and machine operators and assemblers	1
9	Elementary occupations	-
10	Armed forces	-
11	Other	2

* Based on the International Standard Classification of Occupation, International Labour Organisation

³⁰ The timing of these qualifications, also considered in Chapter Six, is indicated by identifying those who gained a first degree as a mature student, that is, over 21. The age range of participants undertaking a first degree as a mature student ranged from mid-twenties to late fifties.

I have added the category Other to Table 3.4 to include two participants who were not in employment due to long-term ill-health (one of whom had previously worked as a lecturer in Further Education, one of whom had never been employed). Retired participants were classified by their last employment, as were two mothers on maternity leave or taking a career break at time of interview. Two other participants who were not currently working (one just about to commence a full-time postgraduate course after redundancy, another awaiting the outcome of an industrial tribunal on a sex discrimination case) were also classified according to previous employment, occupations to which they intended to return.

Table 3.5 below illustrates reported annual income and household tenure. Not all participants were currently working when interviewed, and this figure may reflect last salary rather than current income. Some also had lodgers, and this is reflected in the total annual income reported. The income band with the most participants (9) was that of between £11,000 and £15,000 a year, while over half (20) of all participants reported an income of £20,000 or less. However, several participants were currently working part-time. The majority of participants owned their own home, an important aspect of financial security for women who do not have access to a husband's wage or occupational pension. One participant owned two homes. 'Social housing' includes sheltered housing, and housing administered by local authorities or housing associations. Two participants from the oldest cohort did not provide information on income (one of whom lived in social housing, the other in privately owned accommodation) and are not included in this table. Three of the remaining four aged 65 and over reported annual incomes of less than £10,000 a year.

Table 3.5: Income and Tenure

Annual Income, Banded	Housing Tenure		
	Privately owned	Privately rented/ Living in parental home	Social Housing
Less than £10,000		1	5
£11 – 15,000	5	2	2
£16 – 20,000	4	1	
£21 – 25,000	3	1	
£26 – 30,000	2		
£31 – 35,000	4	1	
£36 – 40,000	1	1	
...			
£66 – 70,000	2		
Total	21	7	7

The section below considers the interview process, followed by a section considering the interpretation and representation of the 'data' gathered during the research process.

- *Interviewing*

The interviews followed a 'life history approach', and participants were 'guided' through their biographies through various open-ended questions designed around particular themes identified as potentially important during the literature review (see Appendix Four). This "conversation with a purpose" approach gives informants an opportunity to develop their own answers outside a structured format (Burgess, 1984), and has been seen as a means of enabling the active involvement of participants in the construction of data about their lives (Graham, 1984). The 'life history' technique has also been seen as particularly suited to documenting how individuals interpret, understand and define the world around them (Faraday and Plummer, 1979:776). In addition, as Faraday and Plummer note, in locating the individual in her overall life experiences and within the broader socio-historical framework that she lives, this technique enables a better understanding of the choices, contingencies and options open to individuals, as well as throwing light in historical changes which have occurred in the wider world.

All interviews were recorded, and fully transcribed. Participants were firstly asked to complete a 'background information' sheet asking for basic factual information such as occupation and living arrangements (see Appendix Three). They were then asked to talk about their education and employment history, as well as any relationship history, during which I asked and made notes about facts such as dates and qualifications, on a sheet which they could see. This provided a 'timeline' through key stages and events in participants' lives, and information on the sequence of events that enabled questions as to motivation, for example why participants had returned to education. This also allowed these events to be considered in their particular historical context in subsequent data analysis. Participants were also asked more subjective questions, for example whether they considered the way singleness was viewed had changed.

The approach to the interview guide was very flexible, and generally followed an order dictated by the path the conversation was taking. Thus, the extent to which all themes were covered varied, in part because participants differed considerably in the ways in

which they responded³¹. However, the research followed a grounded theory approach (see Corbin and Strauss, 1990) in which data collection and analysis are considered as inter-related processes. Where certain themes or events emerged as significant in early interviews I ensured these were brought into subsequent interviews.

The differences in the social positioning of researcher and researched has been a central preoccupation of feminist research. Yet, as several scholars have argued, these differences cannot be 'erased'. Glucksman (2000) notes their very different and unequal interests, investment in and relation to the research, while Oakley emphasises that from within whichever paradigm, researchers *are* the ones with "the power to define" (2000:72). I consider that the researcher necessarily has a primary role in the production of the research; nevertheless, attempts can be made to acknowledge and minimise these differences. Several feminist scholars have drawn attention to the particular ethical and political problems raised in interviewing women, especially where a conversational approach and the location, often the woman's own home, means the researcher can be situated more as a 'guest' (Finch, 1984)³². This research was designed following the guidelines for ethical practice recommended by the British Sociological Association³³; nevertheless, as Mauthner et al (2002) have argued, the complexities of researching private lives raises ethical issues which are not easily solved by rules and guidelines. According to Oakley in 1981, the only "morally defensible" way for a feminist to conduct research with other women is through a non-hierarchical relationship in which she is prepared to invest some of her identity. I did provide participants with information about my own history and location as a never-married childless single woman in introducing the research, yet was conscious of providing 'restricted' information and for the strategic purposes of locating myself as similar to participants. However, I viewed the open-ended nature of the interview as similarly enabling participants to 'control' the information they provided. The interview is not an egalitarian and mutual exchange, yet can elicit intensely personal information that is

³¹ There was considerable variability in how expansive participants were, and this was reflected in the variable length of the interviews. While I had anticipated an hour and a half, some interviews lasted only 40 minutes, while others lasted considerably longer, for example one (conducted over two sessions) lasted six hours in total. This is considered further below.

³² As noted above, most interviews were conducted in participant's homes, and a few very generously provided me with meals. Finch's salutary observations about the exploitative potential of the trust established in such environments have been a consideration throughout the interviews, subsequent analysis and representation of participants' 'data' in the thesis.

³³ See http://www.britisoc.co.uk/index.php?link_id=14&area=item1.

ultimately data for the research project. I found the interviewing on occasion an intellectually and emotionally difficult process, not least because of the often very personal issues raised by some participants which led to some becoming quite upset. In some instances this related to emotions around singleness, which I had somewhat anticipated, however participants also raised other sensitive personal issues, which highlighted for me the 'trust' and confidence participants placed in me, a relative stranger.

The practical steps I took to address the issues raised by researching personal lives included ensuring anonymity³⁴, and also providing participants with a 'right of veto' over the material in their transcripts, as noted above³⁵. I also asked at the end of the interview whether there were any questions participants wanted to ask me³⁶. I communicated with all participants on several occasions, sending their interview transcripts and a brief summary of information, and contacting those whose correspondence I refer to in the analysis to ask for permission³⁷. I have subsequently kept in touch with several who wished to be informed about the progress of the research and to whom I have sent published work arising from the research, and I was also invited by a participant to give a presentation based on this research to an organisation of which she was a member.

The following section considers the interpretation and analysis of the data.

- *Interpretation and Analysis*

As stated above, this research considers the interviews as narrative accounts of participants' life histories, rather than factual representations of past experiences. The

³⁴ The need for confidentiality was reinforced for me when a childless participant recruited through advertising, on learning I was interviewing solo mothers, offered to introduce me to a friend with whom I was actually already in communication with through a support group.

³⁵ All participants were sent a complete transcript, however few identified changes. In addition one participant, in describing an event during the interview, commented "I may end up editing this out later [...] That is definitely going to be scrubbed from the tape!", yet did not return an edited transcript. I have not included this event in the analysis.

³⁶ This elicited further information that also contributed to the overall 'data' on which the analysis has drawn. For example, some younger participants were curious as to why I had not asked about sex, a contrast to Simon's (1987) experience of interviewing older never-married women in which enquiries about sexuality were met with such indignation that she omitted these in subsequent interviewing.

³⁷ Some participants subsequently sent fuller written notes to clarify certain points in their transcripts. Several participants initially returned transcripts in which the grammar had been corrected. Consequently when sending subsequent transcripts I included in my letter a note saying that, as the transcripts were illustrative of typical speech patterns only factual errors should be corrected.

focus of this research is to investigate the ways spinsterhood is experienced. Narrative analysis of the ‘experiential subjectivity’ constructed in participants’ accounts allows a focus on the meanings ascribed by participants to specific experiences and the ‘conditions of possibility’ for constructing particular subjectivities, and how these may have changed over time and in different situations. This analysis takes a broadly phenomenological approach in considering that these meanings are built up in the course of experience, thus are grounded in the personal histories of individuals.

Somer’s (1994) conception of ontological narrativity is drawn on in interpreting these accounts as particular stories produced by participants to make sense of their lives and define who they are. This research seeks to understand the assumptions and constraints which structure the decisions people make in relation to particular areas, such as education, employment, and personal relationships. In producing a narrative of one’s life, one must construct oneself as the subject of the story, and in doing so claim intelligibility and agency (Byrne, 2002). However, as noted above, the extent to which individuals are transparent to themselves, thus the extent to which they understand their own actions, motives and feelings has been questioned by some commentators, for example Hollway and Jefferson (2000), who take a broadly psychoanalytic perspective. As Chapter Two has argued, the understanding of subjectivity utilised in this research complicates notions of rational agency, and thereby notions of ‘choice’ as the outcome of reasoned deliberation. Motivations for action cannot simply be ‘read off’ from what individuals say, and as such these narrative accounts are not taken at face value. Rather, as Hoggett suggests, a good deal of our reflexivity is actually post-hoc rationalisation designed to maintain certain beliefs about oneself and others (2001:39).

Furthermore, eliciting stories is not always a simple matter, especially from those who feel their lives lack sufficient interest or worth to justify “a story” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:35). Byrne has similarly noted that “some selves are not readily reproduced through narrative” and suggests this may enable some accounts, yet also silence others not so readily produced within this genre (2002:40-41). Variations in the length of interviews have been noted above. There were also considerable variations in the extent to which participants provided reflexive in-depth accounts rather than

providing fairly factual answers to questions, and some participants seemed more at ease than others with the practice of providing one's 'story'³⁸.

Dunne suggests that the perspectival nature of ontologies raises particular problems for research into non-conventional people (1997:33), whereby "ready made theories", or dominant discourses, provide understandings of causal relationships on which participants may draw. This was exemplified in this research. While participants were not explicitly asked why they had never married, the need to 'account' for this was nevertheless evident in several narratives in ways which indicated that this was perceived as problematic. For example, one participant commented while describing her childhood, "I keep thinking, did something happen?"³⁹. Dunne notes in relation to her own research on lesbian lifestyles that participants may select and emphasise aspects of their own past in order to comply with popular understandings, or may play down aspects which confirm these (1997:34). However, this is a feature of all narrative. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) have drawn on psychoanalytic theory to argue for the notion of a "defended subject", whereby subjects "invest in discourses when these offer positions which provide protection against feelings of anxiety and therefore supports to identity" (2002:23). As such, this selectivity may not be conscious.

These narratives necessarily provide partial, subjective accounts. They are also accounts of particular, socially situated experiences. Yet, as Glucksman suggests, studying the particular can contribute to general understanding and provide insights that are of wider significance than the individual case (2000:164). In undertaking this research I sought to get an insight into the subjective meanings and concerns of individuals, *and* to situate their lived experience in particular historical contexts. The constraints and opportunities evident in participants' accounts suggest the 'structuring

³⁸ There are various possible explanations for this. Some participants who provided in-depth accounts had experienced therapeutic counselling, thus may be more used to exploring aspects of their lives with an empathetic listener. In other instance I felt my location as a middle class academic was a 'difference' that was consequential for the story told by participants.

³⁹ Participants' involvement in the research was on the basis of spinsterhood, thus being interviewed may also have encouraged a reflexiveness about this dimension of participants' identity, for example one participant commented that she had been "thinking about that in the car on the way here". Being interviewed on this basis may also have heightened a sense of marginality. Thus, one participant who offered to recruit amongst single friends wrote that she had subsequently discovered they had been married, observing "*I feel like a bit of an oddity now!*". This previous lack of distinction between 'single women' was very interesting, and formed part of the subsequent analysis. However, another aspect emerging from the interviews, and considered further below, is that for some participants singleness was presented as a relatively unimportant aspect of identity. This observation also contributed to the subsequent analysis.

principles' prevalent in certain times and places. The analysis of a relatively large number of biographies allows the identification of dominant themes based upon commonalities in experience, enabling the possibility of generalization (Graham, 1984:109). As Bertaux contends, "a single life story stands alone, and it would be hazardous to generalise on the grounds of that alone (...) but several life stories *taken from the same set of socio-structural relations* support each other and make up, all together a strong body of evidence" (1981:187, cited in Dunne, 1997:36, emphasis in original). The ways in which this was done is now detailed below.

I took a 'grounded theory' approach to analysing the considerable amount of data produced in the course of the interview process (see Corbin and Strauss, 1990), with categorization and interpretation of subjects' experiences and their social contexts proceeding from the production of their own accounts. This data included not just the interview transcripts, but also notes taken during the fieldwork period of observations and reflections arising from both the interviews and communications with potential and actual participants. Certain areas and themes had been identified as of interest prior to the interviewing, reflected in the topic guide (see Appendix Four). However, as noted above, the analysis and interviewing was an iterative process whereby issues emerging as significant during previous interviews were 'brought in' to subsequent interviews. A systematic thematic analysis was subsequently undertaken via 'immersion' in all the data, a process which involved listening to all the interviews and rereading the transcripts and notes several times. This material was sorted and coded in relation to key issues, with significant excerpts grouped under broad themes⁴⁰.

The complexity and variability of the material provided in the interview process provided evidence of a broad plurality of factors and circumstances shaping the experiences of single women, which did not readily give rise to coherent, categorised typologies. Within the broad themes defined as of interest, I considered the extent to which an individual's experiences or actions were similar to or different from other participants. These were thus compared and contrasted, both between individuals and

⁴⁰ This was done manually rather than by computerised analysis software. As Hollway and Jefferson suggest, this allows all that is known about an individual to be taken as a whole, rather than 'fragment' this (2000:69). Furthermore, such software requires pre-existing categorisations of the data in a way that I considered might preclude the emergence of other themes and concepts. Some did subsequently emerge in this process, as a result of returning to and going over the data with new questions derived from earlier analyses.

collectively across time, that is between cohorts. The data was also analysed for disconfirming evidence in relation to particular events or experiences that may not correspond, and this gave rise to new, provisional theorisations. Exploring difference and commonalities through comparison made it possible to generalise by demonstrating that these accounts, for all the differences and variability, also shared certain features.

This material has been structured in this thesis in terms of the implications of gender and partnership status in relation to personal relationships, employment and 'identity'. Issues that cut across these broad areas are changes in the opportunities and challenges for single women over time. This analysis is grounded in subjects' accounts, however is also informed by sociological and feminist theory. All research involves selectivity, and I have thus exercised my intellectual, political and ethical judgement as to which themes to highlight and represent. Gordon refers to her empirical research on single women as a "narrative", one of selection and interpretation (1994:41), and this thesis similarly constitutes a partial, selective narrative account⁴¹. As such, this retains the possibility of alternative explanations. Oakley (2000) states the inapplicability of the concept of 'reliability' to qualitative analysis, as it assumes meanings can be controlled and made identical in successive applications of a question. She argues instead for a notion of 'robustness', as while meanings are unique to a person and to a relational encounter, 'evidence' to support a particular interpretation can nevertheless be provided. Subsequent chapters which present the result of this interpretation and analysis thus use extensive quotations from participants to demonstrate the process by which conclusions have been reached⁴².

This summary of a long research process is necessarily also very partial and selective, however a particular aspect that changed significantly during this process was my own understandings of subjectivities and identities. My initial interest, as noted in Chapter One, was in undertaking a study of women who choose to be single. My reading of feminist theory led me to question the assumptions of agency underlying the notion of

⁴¹ It has not been possible to include analysis of all themes covered in the interviews. Future research based on this material will address areas such as participants' responses to representations of single women in popular culture, and what their variable experiences can say about changes in the welfare state.

⁴² The conventions used in quoting excerpts from participants are as follows: punctuation is used in quotes to signify how comments were made, with underlining used to indicate emphasis. Text in italics indicates quotes from correspondence (written or email). [...] indicates omitted text, while ... indicates a pause by the participant.

choice, and hence to question contemporary explanations for family change which also rest on notions of rational agency. The more complex understandings of subjectivity and agency that emerged in the theoretical literature were confirmed in the narrative accounts, in which ‘multiple’ explanations of the same phenomena would be provided, on occasion by the same participant.

Another aspect of the research process was the emergence of unanticipated themes. My initial ‘coding frame’ of key themes which I wished to consider derived from the literature review, however as there was little contemporary research on spinsterhood I was anticipating considerable differences from previous research. I was surprised to find caring for parents a prevalent theme in several accounts, including participants from younger cohorts, and that this persisted as an expectation of unmarried daughters. This is addressed in Chapter Five. In retrospect, I would have liked to have asked those who undertook caring how and why this was done the way it was, for example what level of ‘care’ was required, whether this was done with the support of social services, and if not why. Also prevalent were experiences of the stigmatisation of spinsterhood. My initial ‘coding frame’ contained spaces for the types of stigma, as it was evident from the interviews that these varied, however I had not anticipated the varying ways in which these experiences would be depicted. This variability, and its significance, did not emerge until I was immersed in rereading the transcripts and identifying similar experiences, which then alerted me to the differences between these, namely the subjective meanings participants ascribed to such experiences. This is addressed in Chapter Seven⁴³. Themes evident in the interviews which I have been unable to analyse here due to lack of space include the way sexuality was talked about by some participants, which contrasted considerably with representations of single women in

⁴³ Another aspect of the research that emerged was that singleness did not hold the same significance as an aspect of identity for all participants. This was surprising, as I had assumed that partnership status would be a central aspect of identity. I first became aware of this on transcribing an interview I conducted fairly early on, with the oldest participant in the sample, who had never been in a relationship. This interview was briefer than I had anticipated, lasting around 40 minutes. While this participant described aspects of her past in some detail, such as holidays spent with her married sister and her family, she was non-committal about her feelings about her singleness, answering for example “it does not worry me” to a question about whether she felt there were any advantages or disadvantages to singleness. I had subsequently observed in my fieldwork diary that the participant was “not very reflexive”. In retrospect, I consider this in part reflected my frustration that she did not focus on her singleness as a significant aspect of her biography. This was confirmed on rereading the transcripts when I became aware that I had returned to similar questions at varying points, eventually eliciting the response that “I must be a funny one, I didn’t seem to have any interest! (laughs)”. However, I subsequently noted other participants also did not present singleness as a central aspect of identity, and thus considered this in the subsequent interpretation and analysis.

popular culture, and this is an area that I anticipate analysing in future research. In addition, participants' experiences were informative as to the welfare state provision available in particular eras; I would like to analyse the material in terms of changes in social policies over time, drawing on the 'biographical turn' in social policy research (see Chamberlayne et al., 2000, 2002) of using biographic methods as a means of better understanding the sort of life experiences made possible through welfare.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the epistemological basis for the research, seeking to explain the foundational basis of the empirical data used in the analysis. It also outlines the way in which the study was conducted, and discusses the way in which I attended to the political and ethical concerns arising in the research. The quantitative analysis of the extent to which there is an increase in singleness is reported in the following chapter. The qualitative analysis considers the experiences of 'contemporary spinsters', organised in subsequent analytic chapters in relation to personal relationships, education and employment, and identity. This analysis also enables a consideration of changes over time in the structuring principles shaping these experiences. While grounded in participants' experiences, this analysis has made the most of having 'multiple biographies' on which to draw, as well as the particular insights enabled by drawing on feminist theoretical and empirical work in these areas. Chapter One notes that while there is considerable attention to single women in popular culture, there has been relatively little in contemporary debates on familial change. It is hoped that the specific focus on single women in this research will elucidate the way in which singleness is experienced, and constitute a contribution to wider academic debates on familial change.

CHAPTER FOUR

Changes in Singlehood over Time

This chapter presents statistical information on the extent and change over time in singleness in Britain. This information provides the contextual backdrop against which the experiences of singleness for a specific set of single women, the subject of remaining chapters, will be considered. The information below elucidates whether or not the recent decline in marriage rates reflects a shift to cohabiting unions, or whether this also heralds an increase in singleness per se. Information is provided for both men and women thus providing a ‘gender lens’ on patterns of partnership formation over time. This chapter outlines firstly the difficulty of deriving this information from secondary data, and then presents the findings of original analysis of the BHPS, conducted in order to investigate whether there has been an increase in the tendency towards singleness in Britain.

Chapter One detailed the difficulties inherent in using singleness as a robust conceptual category. These difficulties include the shift in meanings of singleness. While single as a civil status means never-married, it is increasingly used to refer to those currently without a partner, thus includes the separated and divorced. Singleness is defined for the purposes of this research as never-married and not currently in a cohabiting relationship, and the subjects of the qualitative interviews meet this definition. However, there are difficulties in using either marital or partnership status as a category of analysis to get information on trends in singleness. Registration data on marital status do not distinguish those unmarried and single from those unmarried and cohabiting. Data on partnership status that includes cohabiting unions are very limited, yet the increase in cohabitation in recent decades means that marital status by itself provides an incomplete picture, with marriage and divorce statistics illustrating change only in formal unions. Another difficulty derives from the dynamic nature of partnership status. People may move in and out of varying statuses over the life course, and it is thus very difficult to observe partnership status over the long term.

The following section reviews the available secondary data on partnership status, and highlights the difficulties that arise in identifying trends in singleness from this.

The Extent of Singleness: Review of Secondary Data

A central aim of this research is to ascertain whether there has been an increase in singleness over time, that is whether there has been a decline in the tendency to form residential unions, either marriage or cohabitations. This information is not readily available from either annual household survey or registration data. For example, the General Household Survey is an annual household survey that provides information on the current partnership status of all adults in Great Britain, by age group. The latest figures from this are illustrated in Table 4.1 below. This data does include information on cohabiting unions, and the increased incidence of cohabitation in recent decades is reflected in the figures for cohabitation for younger age groups¹. However, it only contains information on respondents at the time of the survey, and is not informative as to past status. Thus, while those classified as single are never-married and currently unpartnered, we do not know what proportion have previously cohabited. Likewise, we do not know what proportion of those currently cohabiting may have been married.

Table 4.1: Partnership Status by Sex and Age: 2002, Great Britain

Persons aged 16 and over						<i>Percentages</i>
	Married	Cohabiting	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
MEN						
16-24	2	10	87	-	-	-
25-34	37	22	38	-	1	2
35-44	64	12	16	-	5	2
45-54	70	7	10	-	10	2
55-64	77	4	6	3	8	2
65-74	76	2	5	9	6	1
75 and over	63	1	4	28	3	1
Total*	54	10	26	4	5	2
WOMEN						
16-24	7	16	76	-	-	1
25-34	44	20	30	-	2	4
35-44	64	10	12	-	9	4
45-54	71	6	6	3	10	4
55-64	71	3	4	9	11	2
65-74	58	1	4	28	8	1
75 and over	28	1	5	62	4	1
Total	50	9	20	11	7	3

Source: General Household Survey (ONS 2004b:60)

*Totals may add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

¹ The proportion of non-married women aged under 60 cohabiting in Great Britain has more than doubled, from 13% in 1986 (the first year data are available in a consistent basis) to 28% in 2001/2 (ONS 2004a:32).

Nevertheless, there are interesting differences in singleness evident by both sex and age. The proportion of men who are single is larger for all age groups except those 75 and over². This possible reflects that women tend to partner older men³. Nevertheless, these figures illustrate that higher proportions of men overall compared to women are never-married and not currently in a residential union: more than a quarter (26%) of all men are currently single, compared to a fifth of all women (20%).

Table 4.2a below confirms that this pattern is long established. These figures show men and women who have not married by age 35 as a percentage of the population, for selected birth cohorts (this age has been selected as it is above the average first marriage rate throughout the century). Looking at historical data allows us to consider changes over time. These figures, derived from registration data for England and Wales, illustrate trends throughout the course of the twentieth century in the propensity to remain unmarried⁴.

Table 4.2a: Never-Married Men and Women, at age 35, 1901 – 1966

England and Wales		<i>Percentages</i>
Year of Birth	Men	Women
1901	18	23
1906	16	21
1911	18	18
1916	16	15
1921	15	13
1926	14	11
1931	12	8
1936	11	7
1941	11	6
1946	12	6
1951	15	9
1956	19	12
1961	29	19
1966	39	27

Source: derived from ONS *Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics*, Series FM2 no.28 (ONS 2002b:68).

² This discrepancy is attributable to differential mortality rates between men and women: 28% of men aged 75 and over are widowed, compared to 49% of women.

³ For example, the average age for first marriages in England and Wales in 2002 is 31 for men and 28 for women (ONS, 2004a).

⁴ This data shows for men and women born in a given year the estimated proportions married by a certain age. Comparative information is not readily available for Scotland.

While a higher proportion of the female population born during the first decade remained unmarried compared to the male population, there has consistently been a higher proportion of never-married men compared to women throughout the rest of the century. Thus, 23% of women born in 1901 were spinsters at age 35, compared with 18% of men remaining bachelors. Latest figures however estimate that while over a quarter (27%) of women born in 1966 are never-married at age 35, this compares to nearly two-fifths (39%) of all men. These figures indicate an increasing divergence between men and women remaining never-married among more recent cohorts.

In addition, they also show a marked difference between birth cohorts, illustrating shifts over time in the likelihood of remaining unmarried. For women, the latest figure of 27% compares with a mid-century low of 6% for those born in the 1940s; however, this compares with the previous high of 23% of women born in 1901. The proportion of men remaining unmarried over time similarly declines from a high of 18% of those born in 1901 to a mid-century low of 11%, then increases to 39% of those born in 1966. This table shows that the relatively high levels of spinsterhood and bachelorhood of recent birth cohorts are not unprecedented. The variations in rates of spinsterhood and bachelorhood illustrate the point made in Chapter One, that arguments of 'decline' in marriage depend on the period against which contemporary rates are compared. The near universal marriage rates of women born in the 1940s illustrated above can thus be seen as exceptional, rather than the rule, when considered in the context of the course of the twentieth century.

These figures also point to the importance of historical context in understanding these changes. For example, the atypical discrepancy between men and women born during the first decade may be explained by the deficit of men in prime marriageable ages resulting from the First World War. Differences in marriage rates between cohorts reflect very different political, economic and social epochs. A crucial factor intimately implicated in the recent dramatic increase in spinsterhood and bachelorhood illustrated in Table 4.2a is the increased incidence of cohabitation in recent decades, and this is looked at further below⁵.

⁵ For example, about four-fifths of first partnerships begun during the 1990s were cohabiting unions, compared to about one third of those formed in the 1970s (Ermisch, 2002:1).

Registration data confirm both the delay and decline in marriage and a concomitant increase in the proportion of both men and women remaining unmarried among younger generations. This is illustrated in Table 4.2b below, with comparative figures for selected birth cohorts born during the post-war period. These figures show an increasing proportion of the male and female population remaining unmarried at specific ages for each successive cohort. It also illustrates a higher proportion of men remaining unmarried compared to women at every age shown. For both men and women the percentage unmarried declines most rapidly between ages 25 and 30, then subsequently more gradually after 35.

Table 4.2b: Never-married Men and Women, Selected Ages and Birth Cohorts

England and Wales					<i>Percentages</i>			
Year of Birth	Men				Women			
	25	30	35	40	25	30	35	40
1951	41	22	15	13	23	12	9	7
1956	50	28	19	16	29	16	12	10
1961	62	38	29	24	42	26	19	16
1966	72	50	39	-	54	35	27	-
1971	83	63	-	-	68	47	-	-
1976	91	-	-	-	79	-	-	-

Source: derived from ONS *Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics*, Series FM2 no.28 (ONS 2002b:68).

However, as noted above, registration data does not provide information on the extent to which those classified as never-married may be in a cohabiting relationship. Existing studies that have considered the extent to which declining marriage rates are explained by increasing cohabitation are considered below; nevertheless, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, arguments that cohabitation is replacing marriage depend on the extent to which cohabitation can be understood as a proxy for marriage.

The Influence of Cohabitation

Patterns of partnership formation have clearly diverged from those of legal marriage in recent decades because of cohabitation, and several commentators contend that the increased incidence of cohabitation accounts for the shift away from marriage in recent decades. For example Kiernan (1999) has considered the propensity to partnership in a range of European countries⁶. Comparing the estimated proportions of women in two cohorts aged 25-29 and 35-39 at the time of survey, who had never had a cohabiting

⁶ This study uses data from European Fertility and Family Surveys (FFS) from 1996 for a range of European countries, and comparative data for Britain derived from the BHPS.

partnership by age 25, she concludes that the marked change over time in the never-married population in many northern and west European countries is “less to do with the avoidance of partnerships and more to do with the replacement of marital unions by cohabiting unions” (1999: 28).

However, Kiernan’s study indicates that while the proportions never-partnered by age 25 have changed little for the majority of countries, some countries (Spain, Italy and West Germany) appear to have a marked decline in the proportions of women forming partnerships by age 25, with others (East Germany and Great Britain) also indicating a decline, albeit somewhat less marked (1999:29). Other studies have also identified that recent generations in Great Britain are less likely to have entered a first residential union by specific ages than previous generations, and these are looked at below.

Delay or Decline in Partnership?

A study by Ermisch and Francesconi⁷ (1996) comparing the partnership history of men and women also finds a decline in those forming a first partnership, in this study by age 24. Whereas 75% of women born between 1950-62 had entered a first partnership by age 24, this had declined to 66% for those born between 1963-76, and they conclude that partnership is being postponed for younger people (1996:17). A recent study by Berrington⁸ (2003) comparing 1958 and 1970 birth cohorts, which also describes the postponement of entry into first partnership across time, looks at proportions entering first partnerships by age 29. Whereas 80% of men born in 1958 had experienced a residential partnership by age 29, this declined to 75% of those born in 1970, while for women the relative figures are 89% compared to 86%. Berrington concludes nevertheless that while young adults in Britain are delaying entry into first partnerships, the similarity in the overall percentage experiencing a partnership by age 29 shows young adults are not rejecting co-residential partnerships (2002:15).

Interpreting the reduced proportions of people entering a residential partnership in their mid-twenties as a delay in partnership formation assumes that similar numbers will eventually form partnerships. The analysis conducted on the BHPS as part of this research seeks to examine further the extent to which people are substituting cohabiting

⁷ Based on analysis of the 1992 wave of the BHPS, this study measures time to first residential union.

⁸ This study used data from the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70).

unions for marriage, by comparing figures that compare the rates for those never-married with those never-partnered. It also considers the entry into first partnership by later ages, as this more usefully clarifies whether there is a delay in partnership formation, or whether there is evidence of a decline in partnership over time. The results of this analysis are considered further below.

The following section provides information on the extent to which people may be experiencing periods of singleness between partnerships.

Experiencing Singleness Between Partnerships

As well as the increasing incidence of cohabitation either as a precursor or alternative to marriage, there has also been a dramatic increase in ‘turnover’ of relationships in recent decades. Increased rates of separation and divorce indicate that people will also be increasingly experiencing periods of singleness following dissolution of partnerships⁹. However, the dynamic nature of relationships and the relative lack of information on cohabitation means there is little information on how long contemporary de facto partnerships last and whether or how long it takes to repartner after dissolution. While it is difficult getting information on the extent of singleness succeeding dissolution of any partnership, determining the extent to which the never-married experience singleness following dissolution is even more complex. A recent study by Ermisch¹⁰ (2002) analyses repartnering following the dissolution of partnerships, distinguishing between the cohabitating relationships of never-married people, and marital relationships. This study finds that the median duration of cohabiting unions begun in the 1990s is usually very short, with one half either converting into marriage or dissolving within two years. Following dissolution of a cohabiting union, about one-half of people repartner within two years, while 70% are predicted to repartner within five years. However, those who have custody of a child (overwhelmingly women) are among those who repartner more slowly. For those experiencing the dissolution of a marriage in the 1990s (including being widowed), repartnering is slower than after the dissolution of a cohabiting union, with 43% predicted to repartner within five years. Again, those with custody of a child repartner at a significantly lower rate. Thus, this study indicates that 30% of never-married people experiencing the dissolution of a

⁹ The number of divorces in England and Wales rose from 10.1 to 13.3 persons per 1000 of the married population between 1976 and 2002. Comparative figures for Scotland are 6.5 to 9.9 (ONS 2003a).

¹⁰ Based on analysis on the first ten waves of BHPS.

cohabitation in the 1990s remain unpartnered five years later, compared to 57% of those whose marriages dissolve during the 1990s. A substantial part of this difference arises from the fact that those leaving cohabitations are much younger, on average aged 31 as opposed to 48 for married people (2002:5).

The following section considers studies forecasting partnership trends.

Incidence of Singleness in the Future

Another aspect of the complexity of measuring patterns in partnership status is ascertaining the likely impact of recent trends on contemporary generations, that is, whether people who are currently single are likely to experience partnerships in the future. Much available data on partnership patterns is necessarily retrospective, while longitudinal datasets which track changes in partnership status over time require time for partnership histories to occur. However, there are forecasts of future partnership patterns on the basis of current trends, which report an anticipated increase in the proportions of people living outwith a de facto partnership, including amongst men and women who are never-married. A study by Evandrou and Falkingham¹¹ (2000) for example which examines the likely socio-economic characteristics of those retiring in 2020 and beyond concludes that fewer future elderly persons will be married or cohabiting: “if current trends continue, ONS projections indicate that over 10 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men from the 1960s cohort will not have formed a marital or be in a permanent co-habiting union by the time they reach the age of 50” (2000:30).

Shaw and Haskey’s (1999) projections by partnership status, illustrated in Table 4.3 below, indicates that the proportion of people in couples is projected to fall in each age group, except for women aged 65 and over¹². Some of this information is presented graphically in Chart 4.1 below to illustrate changes over time in selected age groups. These figures, based on population estimates of those cohabiting in 1996, illustrate a projected increase in the proportions of men and women who are never-married and currently unpartnered to nearly a third of all men by 2021 (a rise from 27% to 31%) and nearly a quarter of all women (a rise from 19% to 23%).

¹¹ This study analysed data from the General Household Survey (GHS) to examine the social and economic experiences of four different cohorts born between 1916-20, 1931-35, 1946-50 and 1961-65.

¹² A rise in the proportion of elderly women with partners will occur both due to the high proportions of ever-marrying women for cohorts now aged 45 and 65 than for older cohorts, and to projected improvements in male mortality (Shaw and Haskey, 1999:16).

Table 4.3: Projected Population by Age, Sex and Partnership Status (%)

England and Wales

1996-based projections

MEN	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
1996							
Married	4	42	67	76	80	71	56
Cohabiting	8	17	9	5	2	1	8
Never-married (unpartnered)	89	38	14	9	7	7	27
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	3	9	11	11	21	9
2001							
Married	2	33	60	71	77	71	53
Cohabiting	8	21	13	7	4	2	10
Never-married (unpartnered)	89	43	18	9	6	6	28
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	3	9	13	13	21	10
2011							
Married	2	26	49	60	70	69	48
Cohabiting	9	25	19	12	6	2	12
Never-married (unpartnered)	88	47	25	14	8	6	30
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	2	8	14	16	23	11
2021							
Married	2	27	46	53	62	66	45
Cohabiting	9	25	20	14	9	3	13
Never-married (unpartnered)	88	46	28	21	13	7	31
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	2	6	11	16	24	11
WOMEN							
1996							
Married	9	54	72	77	73	39	53
Cohabiting	14	17	8	4	2	1	7
Never-married (unpartnered)	77	24	9	5	5	8	19
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	5	11	14	21	53	20
2001							
Married	6	45	66	73	72	40	51
Cohabiting	15	22	11	6	3	1	9
Never-married (unpartnered)	78	29	11	5	4	6	20
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	5	12	16	21	53	20
2011							
Married	6	36	56	65	68	44	47
Cohabiting	17	27	17	10	5	1	12
Never-married (unpartnered)	78	34	16	8	4	4	21
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	3	10	17	24	50	20
2021							
Married	6	36	51	57	61	45	44
Cohabiting	16	27	20	13	7	2	13
Never-married (unpartnered)	77	34	20	15	9	4	23
Previously married (unpartnered)	0	3	9	15	23	49	20

Source: Derived from Shaw and Haskey, 1999.

The subjects of the qualitative interviews are single spinsters aged over 35, and it is interesting to note the projected increase in the age group 35-44, highlighted above. The proportion of women aged 35-44 who are never-married and currently unpartnered is

estimated to double between 1996 and 2021, from 9% to 20%. Amongst those aged 45–54, the proportion is estimated to triple, from 5% to 15%, in the same period. The increase in singleness for both men and women in the age group 35-44 is illustrated in Chart 4.1.

Chart 4.1. Percentage Single Men and Women aged 35-44

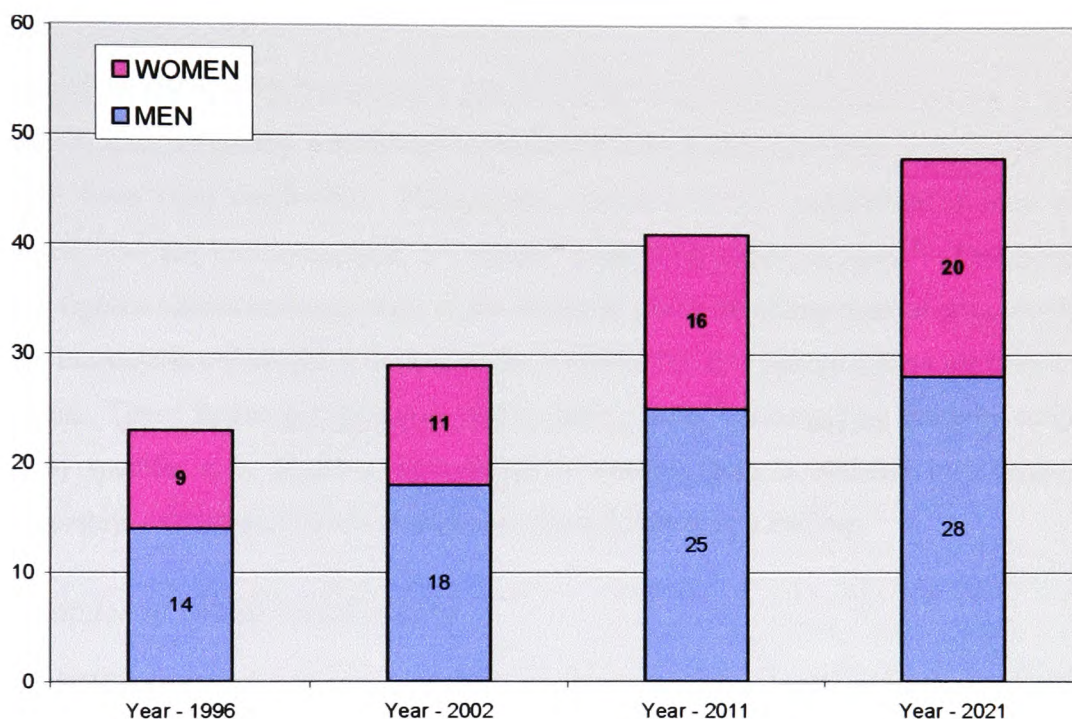


Table 4.3 above also indicates the reduced proportions projected to be in any residential union over time. By 2011 less than half the population, 47% of women and 48% of men, will be in a marriage. Increased cohabitation accounts for some of this decline, as does the proportion of the ‘ever-married’ population who are currently unpartnered. Taking into account the ever-married population who are unpartnered, the overall unpartnered population is projected to increase from 36% to 42% of all men, and from 39% to 43% of all women between 1996 and 2021, over two fifths of the population.

These figures, however, indicate estimated partnership status at a point in time. As with cross-sectional surveys, these do not indicate whether those classified as currently never-married and unpartnered have experienced previous partnerships, thus are not

informative as to duration of time spent single. The following section reports the results from analysis of the BHPS, designed to elucidate changes over time in the extent of singleness among the never-married population, as well as the duration of time spent single.

The Extent and Duration of Singleness: Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey.

In order to provide information on the extent to which people are remaining never-married, and remaining outwith any residential partnership, original analyses of the BHPS have been conducted. Figures are provided for the proportion of men and women who are 'never-married' or 'never-partnered' by specific ages¹³. Comparing these figures allows an assessment of the extent to which declining marital rates are due to an increase in cohabitation or singleness, and whether this pattern differs for men and women. These figures are also provided by birth cohort¹⁴. Comparing these by cohort and by specific ages allows an assessment of whether there is evidence of a delay in partnership, as proposed in some studies reviewed above, or a decline.

Description of Sample and Variables

The BHPS has interviewed annually a representative sample of about 10,000 individuals since 1991. The same individuals are interviewed each successive year, and children of original sample members are interviewed when they reach the age of 16, thus the sample remains broadly representative of the population of Britain throughout the 1990s. The second wave of the BHPS contains retrospective information on complete marital and cohabitation histories¹⁵ for a sample of adults throughout Great Britain aged 16 and over in 1992¹⁶. This data was used for information on White adults born between 1910 and 1949. Subsequent changes in marital and partnership status

¹³ Those designated 'never-partnered' may of course have experienced or be in a non-cohabiting intimate relationship. For the purposes of the quantitative analysis however, those who have not experienced any residential union, either marital or cohabiting, are considered single.

¹⁴ This refers to all those born in a particular decade.

¹⁵ These included both cohabitations which preceded legal marriage and those which were not associated with any marriage. As noted in Chapter Three, any cohabitations of at least three months duration are recorded.

¹⁶ In order to look at changes over time information on those born in the early part of the century is included in the analysis, however older individuals surviving until 1992 will not be typical of their birth cohort for reasons of longevity. Those born pre-1910 were not included for this reason. In addition, the original BHPS sample excluded those living in institutions, and elderly individuals living in residential homes are therefore not represented in this sample.

were recorded for every wave, and this data provided the basis for the information on those born in and since 1950¹⁷. The figures for partnership status of White adults in Great Britain in 2001 (Table 4.4 below) were derived from analysis of data on those present in all waves of the panel survey.

Separate survival analyses were conducted to ascertain the percentages of men and women remaining unmarried by specific ages, and those who remain unpartnered (see Appendix 5a and 5b). The analysis firstly calculated duration from age 16 to date of first marriage or date of interview for those who did not marry, then calculated duration to first cohabitation or first marriage, whichever was earlier, or date of interview for those who did not experience any partnership.

The Influence of Cohabitation

Table 4.4 provides comparative information on the extent to which White adults in Great Britain remain never-married and remain single, by selected ages and by sex.

Table 4. 4: Partnership Rates White Adults in Great Britain, 2001

Age	Men (N= 2379)		Women (N = 2607)	
	Never-Married	Never-Partnered	Never-Married	Never-Partnered
25	50	40	33	22
30	26	16	18	10
35	18	11	13	7
40	14	8	12	6

Comparing figures for those who are never-married with those who are never-partnered illustrates the influence of cohabitation. These figures also show the influence of those remaining outwith any residential partnership. Thus, looking at the comparative figures for women aged 35, the discrepancy between the percentage of women remaining never-married (13%) compared to those who have not experienced any residential partnership by this age (7%) indicates that less than half (6%) of this is attributable to cohabitation. These figures also confirm the information presented above, that larger percentages of men remain both unmarried and unpartnered at all ages, although the differences are less for those who are older. However, partnership rates vary

¹⁷ Those for whom a marital or cohabiting date commencing prior to age 16 was reported were excluded from analysis, as were those classified as married or cohabiting yet for whom no marital or cohabitation date were provided. This data was weighted using BHPS longitudinal weights.

considerably in relation to particular political, economic and social epochs; such a ‘snapshot’ picture of partnership status at a particular point in time is uninformative as to change over time. Information allowing comparisons over time is thus presented below.

Variations over Time in Extent and Duration of Singleness

This section reports the results of analyses on the selected dataset, comparing percentages of men and women remaining both never-married and never-partnered, by specific ages and by birth cohorts. These figures are presented in Table 4.5 below¹⁸. Comparisons based on these are also presented graphically.

These figures confirm the dramatic decline in marriage throughout the Twentieth century, albeit this decline has not been linear and the variations over time reflects the patterns in rates Table 4.2a above. This is illustrated graphically below, in comparisons by birth cohort of the percentages remaining never-married by specific ages (see Graphs 4.1 and 4.2). Higher percentages of both men and women in earlier cohorts remained unmarried compared to the low figures for those born in the 1940s, since when the proportions of people remaining unmarried at every age have dramatically increased. Thus, looking firstly at figures for women aged 30 who are never-married, the proportion has increased from 16% of those born in the 1910s to 51% of those born in the 1970s. Comparative figures for men are an increase from 19% to 55%. The pattern evident from the secondary data of larger proportions of men compared to women remaining unmarried is confirmed here. The decline in marriage means over half of men and women born in the 1970s remain unmarried at age 30.

¹⁸ For some cohorts the number of cases are very small, and caution should be exercised in considering these figures.

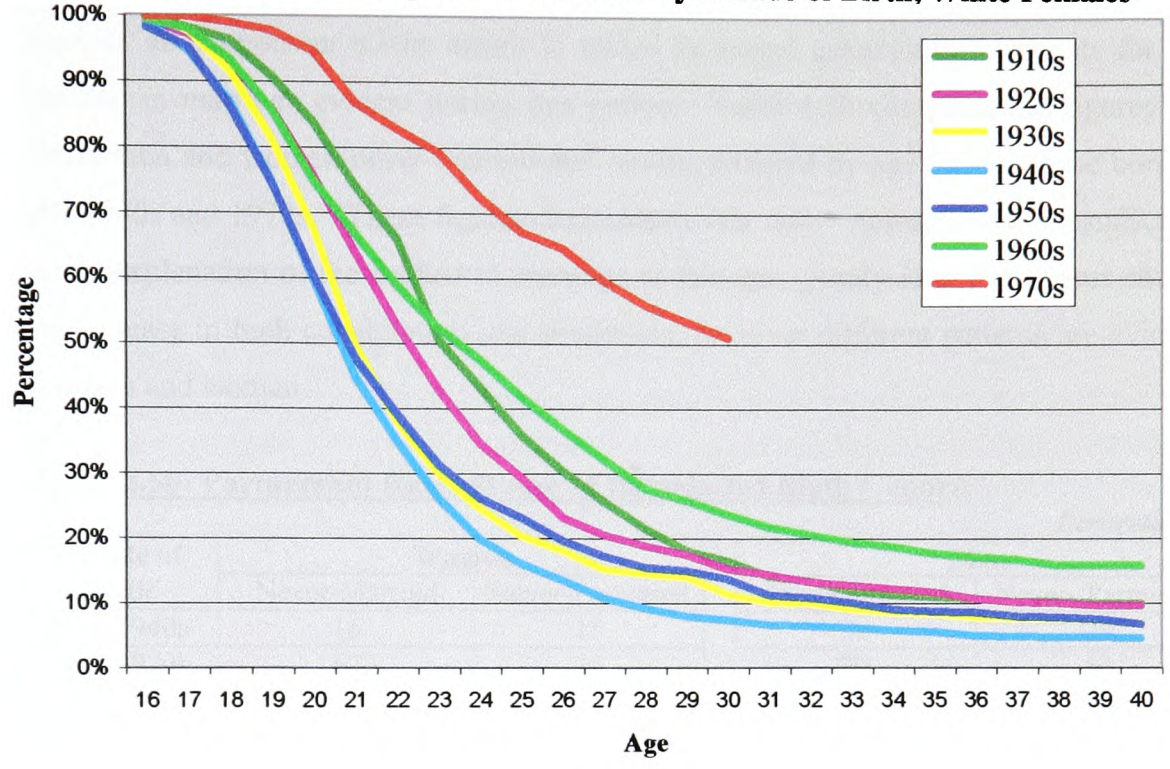
Table 4.5a: Partnership Rates by Decades of Birth, White Adults in Great Britain

Percentages

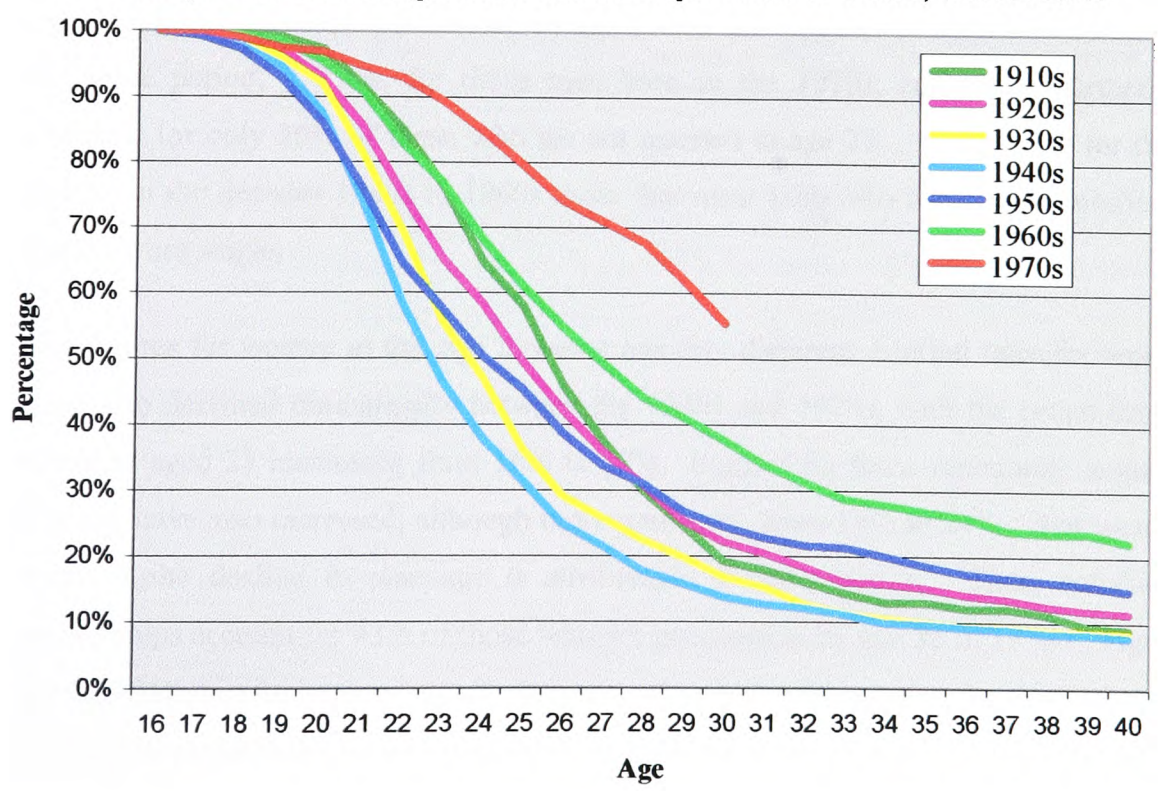
Men				Women			
Decade of Birth	Age	Never-Married	Never-Partnered	Decade of Birth	Age	Never-Married	Never-Partnered
1910s (N=224)				1910s (N=384)			
	25	58	58		25	36	35
	30	19	19		30	16	16
	35	13*	13*		35	11	10
	40	9*	9*		40	10	9
1920s (N=475)				1920s (N=590)			
	25	50	49		25	29	29
	30	22	22		30	15	15
	35	15	15		35	12	11
	40	11	11		40	10	9
1930s (N=506)				1930s (N=568)			
	25	36	36		25	20	20
	30	17	16		30	11	11
	35	10	9		35	8	8
	40	8	8		40	7	6
1940s (N=713)				1940s (N=827)			
	25	31	29		25	16	15
	30	14	11		30	7	5
	35	10	7		35	6	4
	40	8	5		40	5	3*
1950s (N=416)				1950s (N=406)			
	25	45	38		25	23	15
	30	24	15		30	14	8
	35	19	10		35	9	5*
	40	15	8		40	7	4*
1960s (N=454)				1960s (N=515)			
	25	61	36		25	42	18
	30	38	15		30	24	7
	35	27	11		35	18	5*
	40	22	9*		40	16*	4*
1970s (N= 278)				1970s (N= 254)			
	25	79	50		25	67	24
	30	55	20*		30	51	14*

* Indicates less than 30 cases remain in the sample at this age; thus caution should be exercised in considering these figures and these are not included in the interpretation below.

Graph 4.1 Percentage Never-Married by Decade of Birth, White Females



Graph 4.2: Percentage Never-Married by Decade of Birth, White Males



Some of this decline is clearly attributable to the increasing incidence of cohabitation. There is a divergence evident between rates for remaining never-married and never-partnered from the 1940s birth cohort onwards. As noted above, comparing these rates enables an assessment of the extent to which increased cohabitation accounts for the decline in marriage evident during this period. Table 4.5b compares the figures for those men and women never-married and never-partnered by age 25, for those born in the 1940s and 1970s. These figures demonstrate that cohabitation per se is insufficient as an explanation of the decline in marriage at this age. Analysis of the figures shows an increase in both cohabitation *and* singleness, however different patterns are evident for men and women.

Table 4.5b: Partnership Rates at Age 25 for selected Birth Cohorts

Percentages

Decade of Birth	Women		Men	
	Never-Married	Never-Partnered	Never-Married	Never- Partnered
Born 1940s	16	15	31	29
Born 1970s	67	24	79	50

Comparing firstly men born in the 1940s with those from the latest cohort, the 1970s, the figures in Table 4.5b show a dramatic increase in those remaining never-married by age 25 (from 31% to 79%). However, the proportion of those who have never experienced a residential partnership by age 25 has also increased, from 29% to 50% in the same period. Thus, for those men born in the 1970s, cohabiting partnership accounts for only 29% of those who are not married at age 25. The figures for those age 25 in the decades 1940s to 1960s show that most men who were never-married at age 25 were single.

The figures for women at this age however are very different. Marital rates for women have also declined dramatically between the 1940s and 1970s, with the proportion of spinsters aged 25 increasing from 16% to 67%. Figures for those remaining single by this age have also increased, although more gradually, from 15% to 24%. For women, most of the decline in marriage *is* attributable to cohabitation. Thus, cohabiting partnerships account for 43% of those who are not married by age 25 in 1970. Figures for the 1960s similarly show that the majority of women who were never-married at age 25 were in cohabiting relationships, 24% compared to 18% who had never experienced a residential partnership.

Looking at the proportions remaining never-partnered at later ages allows us to assess whether the increase in singleness at earlier ages reflects a delay in partnership, or a decline. Looking firstly at men at age 35, Table 4.5a shows these figures have increased slightly between the 1940s and the 1960s, the latest cohort for whom figures are available, from 7% to 11%. Looking at women aged 30, the latest age at which reliable figures are available, there is also a slight increase between the 1940s and 1960s, from 5% to 7%. While this suggests there is a gradual decline in the proportions of men and women experiencing a residential partnership over time, this cannot be ascertained definitively until the latest cohorts have reached a later age. However, these figures do confirm the delay in partnership is more marked for men. These findings support Berrington's study (2002) cited above, and are illustrated in Charts 4.2a and 4.2b, below, which compare the proportions of men and women remaining single at specific ages, for those born in the 1940s and 1960s respectively¹⁹.

Looking at people who have never experienced a partnership by specific ages for all cohorts presented throughout the century, it is interesting to note that smaller proportions of both men and women are remaining unpartnered than for those born in earlier decades. For example, looking at figures for women, 16% of those born in the 1910s remained never-partnered by age 30, compared to 7% of those born in the 1960s. These figures indicate that cohabitation as an alternative to marriage means *higher* proportions in recent decades experiencing a residential partnership than for cohorts born in the 1910s and 1920s. This is illustrated in Graphs 4.3 and 4.4 below. However, as noted above, cohabitation cannot be assumed to be a proxy for marriage. Ermisch's (2002) research, detailed above, suggests that there are differences between cohabiting and marital relationships in terms of duration and likelihood of repartnering following any dissolution.

Furthermore, as with all retrospective data, a disadvantage is that younger cohorts have not 'completed' their partnership histories at time of interview, thus it remains to be seen whether the patterns evident in earlier generations outlined above are predictive of the partnership statuses that those born in the 70s and beyond will experience.

¹⁹ These charts include some figures for single women that are based on very small sample sizes, as indicated in Table 4.5.

Chart 4. 2a: Percentage Never-Partnered Men and Women, born 1940s

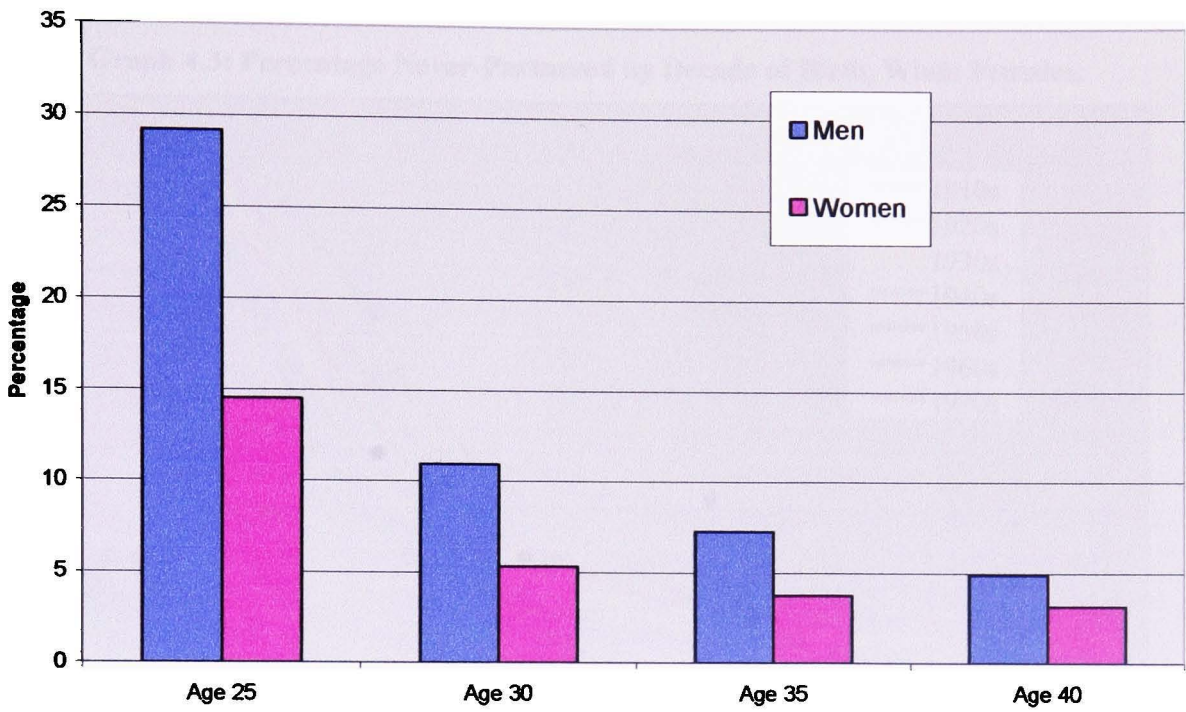
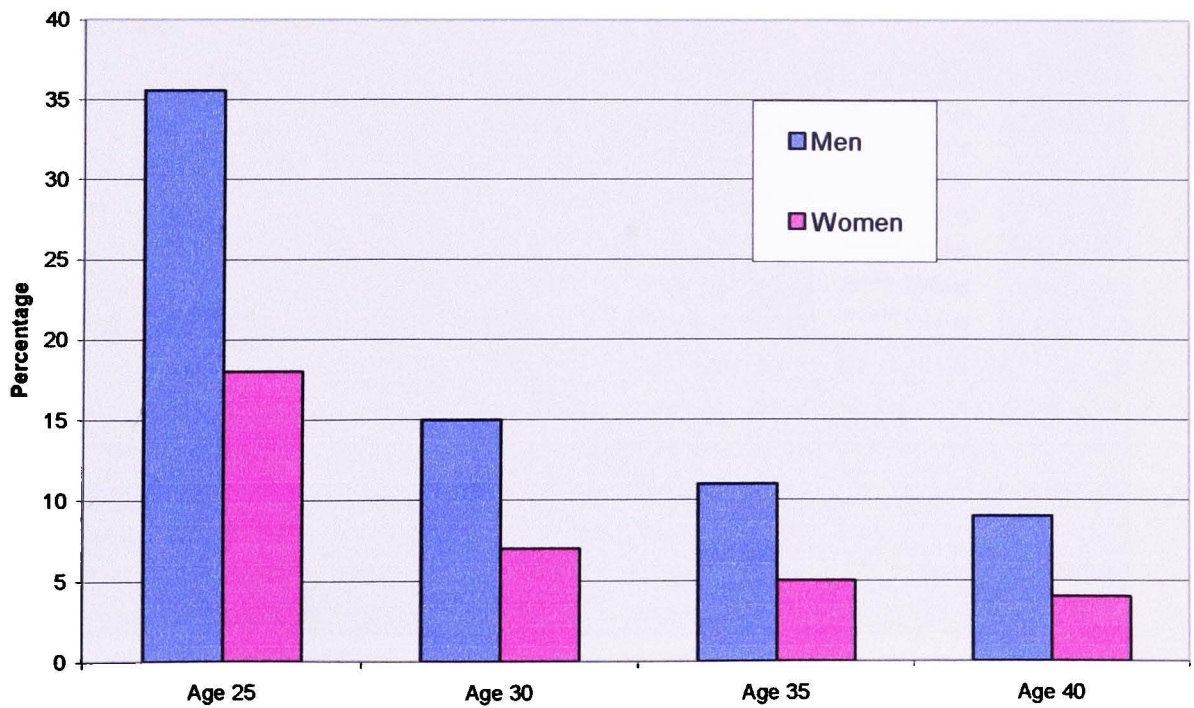
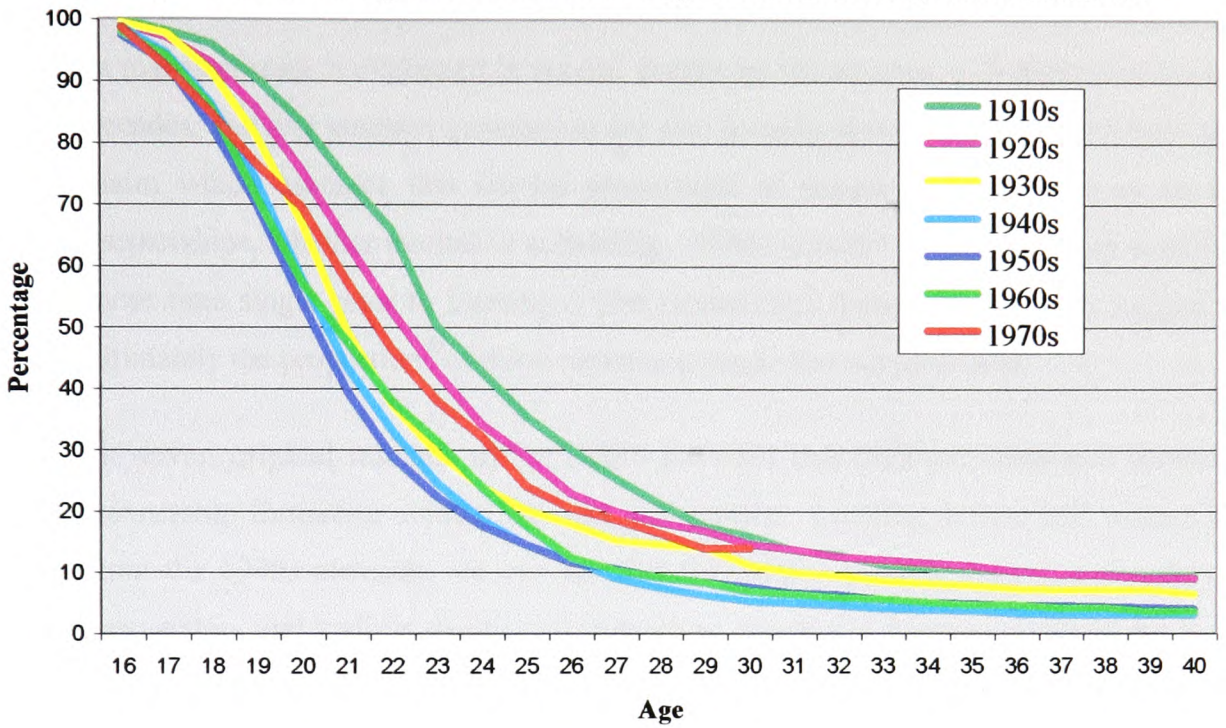


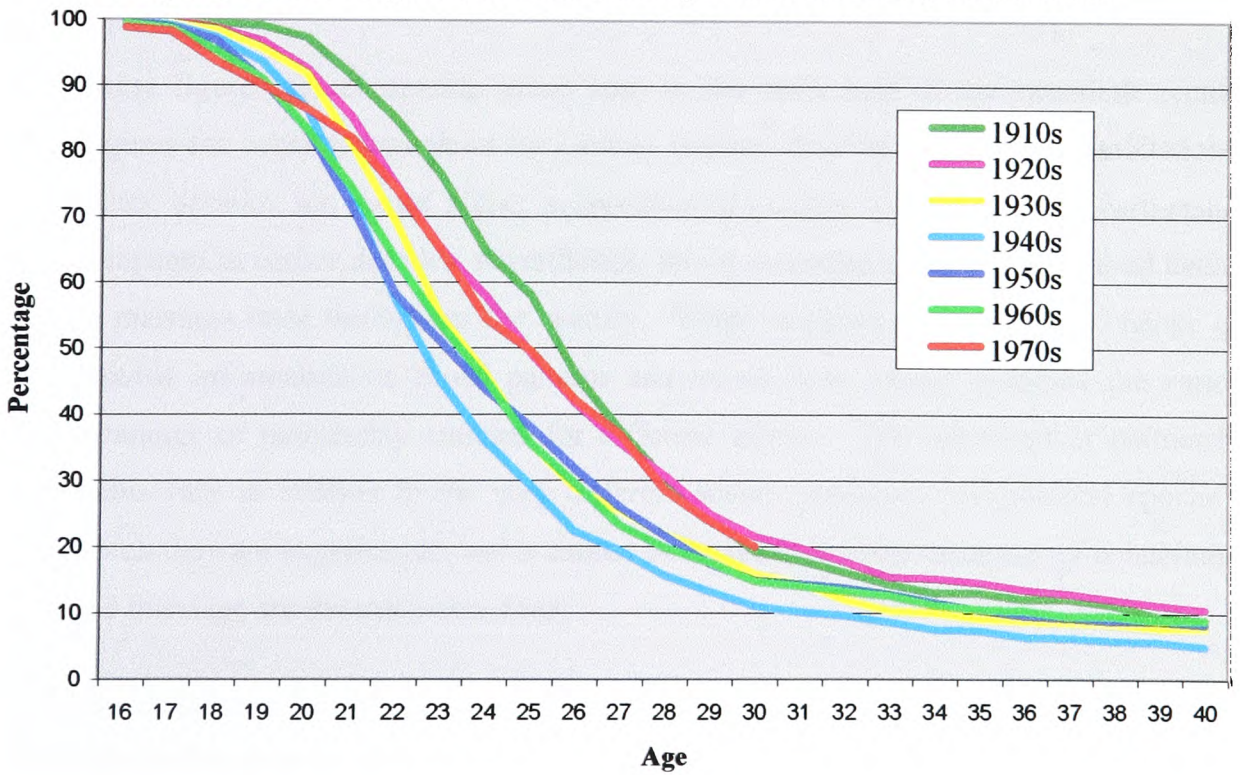
Chart 4.2b: Percentage Never-Partnered Men and Women, born 1960s



Graph 4.3: Percentage Never-Partnered by Decade of Birth, White Females.



Graph 4.4: Percentage Never-Partnered by Decade of Birth, White Males



Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the difficulty of ascertaining the extent to which there has been an increase in singleness over time from the secondary data. The dramatic decline in marriage rates is explained in several studies by the increase in cohabitation in recent decades, and that younger generations are also forming first partnerships at a later age, a claim which assumes that similar proportions of people eventually go on to form partnerships, whether marital or cohabiting. While younger generations may experience more time single prior to forming a first partnership, these commentators suggest that ultimately the proportions of those remaining single has not increased.

However, original research of the BHPS indicates that there are divergent patterns of partnership formation evident for men and women. Looking at men and women born from the 1940s onwards, we can see that for women there is evidence of a delay in partnership, and a slight decline in proportions eventually forming partnerships at later ages. For men there is evidence of both a delay and a larger decline in partnership formation, with larger proportions of men remaining never-partnered at later ages. The delay in partnership formation for both men and women indicates that larger proportions are remaining single for longer periods of time prior to formation of first partnerships.

These figures are comparing those born in the latter half of the twentieth century. Figures for cohorts throughout the century indicate that the increase in cohabitation in recent decades has meant higher proportions of younger people entering partnerships compared to earlier decades; nevertheless, this is occurring alongside an overall decline in marriage rates throughout the century. While statistics on partnership change can provide information on broad patterns and trends, they cannot elucidate the various meanings of partnership statuses for different groups. The meanings of partnership status vary in relation to the very different social, economic and political epochs in which they are experienced, and it cannot be assumed that the meanings of cohabitation and marriage are the same over time.

The difference in partnership patterns between men and women, evident from the information derived both from the secondary data and the analysis of the BHPS, is striking. Larger proportions of men at all ages remain unpartnered in comparison to

women, and larger proportions of men are forecast to be never-married and unpartnered in the future. The differential partnership rates between men and women are somewhat overlooked in secondary studies, however this difference raises the issue of the need for future research on single men.

As stated above, partnership status is very difficult to track over time. Determining change in the duration and number of partnerships is extremely complex. Comparing the information on both marital and cohabiting partnerships in this analysis provides evidence of changes in time spent single prior to formation of a first partnership for both men and women. However, as the increase in turnover of relationships referred to above suggests, and Shaw and Haskey's (1999) forecasts intimate, increasing proportions of both men and women will experience periods outwith marriage, albeit this may be subsequent to a previous partnership. Subsequent chapters address the meanings and experiences for a particular group of these single women.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Intimate Relationships and Social Activities of Contemporary Spinsters: Continuities and Changes

The focus of this chapter is the personal relationships and activities of the single women in this study. It looks firstly at the caring relationships of participants, both as daughters and as mothers. It then looks more broadly at other relationships and activities in which participants were involved. Examining these provides an opportunity to investigate a number of theoretical claims pertaining to the impact of individualism in relation to familial obligations and social change. As Lewis observes, there has been widespread academic support for the idea of individualism as a major explanation of family change (2001:8). However, both the nature of individualism, as well as its precise relationship with familial change, remain contested (2003:72).

As Chapter Two has outlined, there has been much recent theoretical and empirical scholarship that challenges a pessimistic ‘family crisis’ rhetoric, arguing instead that contemporary changes are illustrative of a shift from ascribed relationships to ‘elective affinities’. Changing conceptions of intimate relationships are potentially fruitful in considering the ways in which single women may be choosing and creating their relationships with others in a contemporary context. However, much mainstream sociological research has focused on (hetero)sexually based dyadic relationships (see also Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004:137). Feminists have argued that assumptions of the centrality of heterosexual coupledness function as part of the privileging of heterosexuality that serves to constrain options to construct alternative ways of living (see Barrett and McIntosh 1991, Van Every 1999). Such assumptions limit creativity in forming relationships, and deny the opportunity to form primary relationships that are *not sexual* (Dunne, 1997:14, emphasis in original). As Simon argues, expanding our capacity to picture varied social relationships extends the possibility of “plural paths” to intimacy (1987:110).

Looking after parents or other family members has traditionally represented a socially acceptable explanation of spinsterhood as related to caring and duty while still within the control of the family (Hill, 2001), and historical research has drawn attention to the significance of single women’s unpaid caring work as daughters, sisters and

family friends (Bennet and Froide, 1999; Holden, 2004b)¹. Previous empirical research has also emphasised the importance to single women of the family and friendship networks in which they are embedded (Simon, 1987; Allen, 1989; Byrne, 2000a). Nevertheless, as outlined in Chapter Two, singleness is often depicted as problematic in pessimistic accounts of family change, both for the individuals themselves and for wider society. Singleness is also problematised in debates not explicitly arguing a decline in family. For example, an increase in living alone has been interpreted as signifying profound difficulties in handling close and personal relationships and as indicative not only of a disengagement from family life but also of a diminished significance in commitments to workmates and friends (see Furedi, 2002). The ‘problem’ of singleness is also often feminised, with single women particularly at risk of being depicted as strident individualists characterised by their lack of connection to significant others (Chandler, 1991), or perceived to be socially isolated and lonely (Sandfield and Percy, 2003: 482)².

Arguments for the importance of personal relationships as a source of intimacy, a sense of belonging and care are particularly pertinent to single people. Personal relationships are a key site of socially and personally constructed interactions, and this chapter considers the significance of partnership status in shaping these interactions. The section below looks at the caring practices of participants as daughters and mothers. Caring has traditionally been construed as a normative element of femininity. Conceiving of this as a ‘labour of love’ enables attention to be paid to both its material and symbolic dimensions (Graham, 1983). The revaluing of both these dimensions is a long-standing demand of feminist scholars working on social policy issues (see Finch and Groves, 1983; Joshi, 1990; Lewis 2001, 2002) and those proposing an ethic of care (see Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen 1998, 2003).

The subsequent section considers the personal relationships of participants with both family and friends, and looks briefly at their various social activities. Theoretical arguments of shifts to greater choice and fluidity in relationships in the context of

¹ Holden’s research on never-married women between the wars also highlights the importance of their paid caring work in institutions and private houses, an important but often unrecognised resource both for families and the state (2004b:44).

² Popular representations of contemporary spinsterhood also connote anxieties about isolation and rejection, for example Bridget Jones’ fears of dying alone and being found “three weeks later half-eaten by an Alsatian” (Fielding, 1999).

wider societal changes suggest non-normative forms of social connectedness may also be experiencing transformation. Exploring the narratives of participants allows a consideration of prevailing discourses and understandings in particular contexts, and how these may have changed over time. This chapter considers the way in which their various relationships were experienced. It also considers the varying consequences these had for participants, as well as the changes and continuities evident in the wider social context in which they took place.

Caring as a Labour of Love

Spinsterhood has historically been explained in terms of obligations to care for parents and wider family members, and several of the participants in this study had undertaken caring for parents. However, this had been undertaken in a variety of ways. Various inter-related factors were influential in shaping the caring experiences of participants. These included personal circumstances as well as the particular social and institutional context in which these were enacted. Thus, not all remained in the family home: three women had continued living in the parental home to care for parents and other family members, others had had parents move in to their homes or to live nearby, and one participant had cared for her mother through a protracted illness by spending three days a week in her mother's home³. The amount and content of care provided also varied in relation to factors such as degree of ill health, and whether this was shared with other care-providers. Variety in living arrangements and care-provision in part reflects wider socio-economic changes such as the development of the welfare state. In addition, seven of the participants were mothers, three of whom had 'opted into' motherhood via artificial insemination and adoption, practices also indicative of a changing societal context.

Some women had made significant choices, for example about where to live and patterns of work, in relation to caring responsibilities for both parents and children. Combining caregiving with breadwinning had varying consequences for participants. All the women who undertook caring for parents had continued working full-time, however only two mothers had done so. These caring responsibilities had evidently

³ Heading one's own household is a modern aspect of spinsterhood. Unmarried women historically typically lived in the households of employers or other family members (Vicinus, 1985; Froide, 1999:239). As Chapter Three has detailed, the majority of participants owned their own home and were living alone at the time of interview.

shaped the lives of some of the participants in major ways, and the actions of several women suggested considerable personal cost; however, this was rarely specified as such. Women who cared for parents spoke about this in terms that indicated both their willingness and pleasure at being able to do so. Nevertheless, familial expectations that this was the particular responsibility of participants as single daughters were experienced with some difficulty, as were possible interpretations of their singleness as attributable to such obligations. Participants who were mothers did not talk about looking after their children in such overt terms, and this may be due to the naturalisation of motherhood: seen as a component facet of normative femininity, this caring relationship may not be open to the same scrutiny as that of spinsters caring for parents. The following section looks at the experiences of participants caring for parents.

Caring as Daughters

Previous empirical research on the caring roles undertaken by never-married women in an earlier historical context has attributed this to a “family strategy” of keeping a daughter at home to ensure the well-being of parents in the absence of the welfare state (Allen, 1989). Allen locates this in a familistic ideology of strong kin loyalty, promoted by the family under certain circumstances such as widowhood, with the auxiliary family role of spinsters essential to the maintenance of the family of origin (1989:17)⁴. This family role is evident in the life history of the oldest participant, Faith. Born in 1919, Faith was the eldest daughter of three children in a working-class family. Her father died when she was five, and her mother cared for her children and her own mother, who also required considerable care. Faith and her siblings all left school at fourteen in order to start work, Faith going straight into factory work while her brother became an apprentice to a cabinet-maker. The youngest daughter began work in the ‘NAAFI’ (the Navy, Army and Air Forces Institute) where she subsequently met her husband. Faith worked full-time in two factories until retiring at sixty, changing to another employer when her original employer shut down. Faith remained with her mother to help care for her

⁴ Historical research suggests the long-standing nature of such work. Froide (1999) argues that without the critical assistance of single women, supposedly self-sufficient nuclear families would not have thrived in the early modern period, while Gittins (1986) notes such a strategy in her historical research on Britain between 1850 and 1930.

grandmother for “years and years”, until her grandmother’s death in her nineties, care that was clearly labour-intensive:

“You see my mother’s mother was a cripple in bed. Couldn’t see and, she couldn’t see and she couldn’t contain her water. Well I was – I nursed her along with my mother. She got up in the mornings, and would change her bed and wash her because she couldn’t see a thing. Make her bed and then at night – at five o’clock at night, it was the same again”.

[Faith, 83]

While her brother and sister married and had children, Faith remained with her mother until she died in her eighties, and subsequently moved from their council house into sheltered housing. Her narrative reflects the influence of various personal factors, such as her mother being widowed, with three young children and an invalid mother, as well as external factors such as the economic situation in the 1930s when Faith left school and the lack of state provision in her youth. Factors such as class and gender were also clearly crucial. While all the children left school at fourteen without qualifications, Faith’s brother learnt a trade while she undertook unskilled factory work and helped her mother to nurse her grandmother. Faith was now reliant on state provision for both her housing and care requirements as well as her income, derived from a state pension and means-tested benefits despite a lifetime of full-time employment⁵.

Other participants who undertook caring work for parents had done so as adults. Participants who lived with parents, either in the parental home or by having parents move in with them, mainly depicted this as a voluntaristic relationship that was mutually beneficial. This is exemplified in Franny’s narrative. Born in the 1940s, Franny, who had worked full-time since leaving school at seventeen, described remaining in the parental home on leaving school as her father’s ill-health meant “he needed a fair bit of support”. She continued living with her father after her mother’s death when Franny was twenty-nine, and described this relationship as reciprocal:

⁵ Chapter Two refers to earlier campaign of the National Spinsters’ Pension Association (NSPA) on behalf of low paid older women in recognition of the financial implications of unpaid caring for women’s personal lives. Today the Fawcett Society and Age Concern are jointly campaigning on the long-term implications for women’s poverty in old age of undertaking caring responsibilities and experiencing low pay (see Mordaunt et al, 2003).

“It was fine, I mean obviously if circumstances had been different I could have got my own place, but we got on fine [...] it was more like two friends sharing. I used to cook, because I was good at cooking, but he would do the DIY because he was good at that [...] And instead of sharing a flat with friends, actually I lived with my dad. It worked out perfectly well”

[Franny, 58]

Nevertheless, Franny referred to her father’s worsening ill health as a “fairly traumatic” experience, stating: “I was fairly tired, it was only afterwards I realised it had taken a bit out of me”.

Living with parents was often described in terms of sharing a household, although participants reported undertaking daily domestic responsibilities, such as cooking meals, in addition to full time employment. Several narratives also suggested considerable altruism in the actions some single women had undertaken in order to support parents, although this was rarely presented as such. These themes are both illustrated in Tricia’s narrative. Born in the 1950s, Tricia described returning to Scotland on being made redundant from the Army in part due to her father’s ill-health. She bought a bungalow to enable her elderly father to live with her, and stated she was “happy to have the chance to do it”. Nevertheless, as with other participants describing living with parents, Tricia emphasised her continued autonomy:

“I went out and had a life, I mean I wasn't staying at home [...] Dad was wandering around doing his own thing, and I was wandering round doing my own thing. We happened to share a house”

[Tricia, 43]

Despite caring as a normative aspect of femininity, caring relationships with parents were described somewhat defensively. Previous research on singleness has drawn attention to the difficulties of marking adulthood, conventionally established for women by marriage and motherhood (Allen, 1989:13; Byrne, 2003). This study suggests such difficulties may be compounded for single women living with parents. The evidence of a ‘playing down’ of the impact of looking after elderly or ill parents may in part reflect participants’ awareness and rejection of a stigmatised stereotype of spinsters as dutiful daughters acting as ‘surrogate wives’ for widowed fathers, thus a discursive resistance to being seen as self-sacrificing. However, it may also reflect an

unwillingness to depict these relationships as burdensome, indicating the complex character of caring as work that encompasses emotional bonds. Nevertheless, such tactics may serve to conceal both the altruism and costs involved in caring for others, and some participants clearly had experienced caring as onerous.

Prevalent stereotypes of spinsterhood have included an attribution of this status to possessive relationships with parents (Cargan and Melko, 1982:69). Previous empirical research on never-married women reports their awareness of the risks of non-conformity, such as being subject to pity (Simon, 1987). Some accounts suggest participants seeking to allay interpretations of decisions to look after parents as foregoing opportunities to marry. However, their narratives indicate the difficulties of rebutting a stigmatised subject positioning, wherein one is either the victim of circumstance thus open to pity, or else wilful in having chosen a discredited status, in this case to remain unmarried. This is illustrated in Olive's narrative. Born in the 1930s, Olive described leaving home to begin work at seventeen, "desperate to get away and spread my wings". However, she returned to the parental home at twenty when her mother became terminally ill. After her mother's death she continued living with her father, as "his health wasn't that great". Olive's narrative indicates an awareness of having to account for this situation, despite a relationship she described as reciprocal and nurturing:

"I suppose in a way that affected me, I use to put in for jobs that were temporary, maybe a move to London for a year, and then when my father wasn't that well I just scrubbed it, you know...[...] I did, sort of, to a certain extent, tailor what I did to look after him, you know I was thinking 'was I Daddy's girl?', you know I think we were on the same wavelength but I would have done it for my mother as well, he didn't... I couldn't say I ever felt... you know, if I had ever wanted to get married I would have just done it, you know"

[Olive, 71]

The accounts of many participants reflected experiences of 'coming up against' societal expectations of marriage. Whilst a familist ideology presents the family as a mutually supportive unit, a presumption of the primacy of couple relationships can lead to a cultural undermining of other familial relationships, despite the experience of

these as mutually sustaining. Barrett and McIntosh have argued that the privileging of marriage both lessens and delegitimises the emotional value of relationships outside of the narrowly defined conjugal family (1991:78). Participants' descriptions of relationships with parents indicated these did have considerable emotional value. Nevertheless, their accounts suggest perceptions of stigma did raise specific issues: while Allen (1989) argues that the important caregiving and 'family-keeping' roles fulfilled by never-married women were previously seen as an alternative rather than deviant strategy to marriage, these interviews suggest the pre-eminence of conjugality meant other familial relationships not being accorded similar cultural validation.

This experience of stigma was not restricted to those who had undertaken caring for parents. Three younger participants were currently living in the parental home, a situation all described with some discomfiture. For example, Tanya, born in the 1950s, returned to live with her parents in her late thirties after many years living abroad, a situation she stated she had previously been "a bit ashamed of" as she always considered herself "independent". However, she felt less uncomfortable on learning many of her friends had similarly returned to parents' homes following divorce⁶. Now forty-three, she continued living with her widowed mother, a relationship she described as "immensely important to me" and which had influenced decisions about moving elsewhere.

Another participant, Debra, born in the 1960s, had moved in with her divorced mother for financial reasons on returning to full-time studying at twenty-six. Now thirty-seven, she continued living there along with her youngest brother, both working full time. Debra described her family as very close. She clearly cared about and felt concern for her mother, for example stating her unwillingness to go out on New Year's Eve as it meant leaving her mother alone⁷. Debra's experience of negative

⁶ There has been an increase in the number of adults living with parents, and various explanations have been proposed for this, including economic necessity, difficulty in entering the housing market, the later age of marriage, and preference (ONS, 2004a). There is a significant gender differential however. In 2003 nearly three-fifths (56%) of men aged 20-24 lived with parents, compared to nearly two-fifths (37%) of women of the same age, while the proportion of men aged 30-34 (8%) was more than double the proportion of women (3%) of the same age (ONS, 2004a:30).

⁷ Ungerson distinguishes between "caring about" and "caring for"; the former denotes feelings of affection, but has little implication for how people spend their time (except that they might want to spend it together). The latter refers to servicing their needs, and involves time on the part of the carer (1983:31).

comments by friends illustrates the stigma associated with living in the maternal home:

“They all go, ‘Oh you’re not still living at home with your Mum!’ (disdainful tone) and I say ‘Absolutely. She does all my washing and ironing, she has all my meals ready for me at any time and I don’t do any kind of housework. [...] I get tea in bed, I get out the bed, there’s nothing to do, it’s really good”

[Debra, 37]

While Debra’s account can be read as somewhat defensive in light of the stigma she had experienced, it also depicted much of her domestic work being undertaken by her retired mother. While Debra stated her mother “loves looking after her children!”, doing so clearly involved considerable work. Nevertheless, Debra’s interview suggested she perceived her relationship with her divorced mother as reciprocal. This example illustrates the complex nature of care as a ‘labour of love’. Graham emphasises the need to avoid a focus on the exploitation of women’s labour which underplays the symbolic bonds that hold the caring relationship together (1983:29)⁸. Nevertheless, ‘labour of love’ does not mean the absence of exploitation nor consequences for carers. Long standing feminist concerns with issues of power and equality within families have highlighted the various axes, such as gender and age, along which this can occur, despite a familial ideology of the family as a mutually supportive unit (see Barrett and McIntosh, 1991).

The interviews illustrate the importance of not just gender, but also partnership status as significant factors shaping expectations about who ought to undertake caring obligations. The primacy of one’s spouse and children, a central component of a familist ideology (Allan, 1989:13) also contributed to the shaping of familial expectations about caring for parents. Some participants referred to expectations that caring for parents would be done by unmarried children, while for others such expectations were specifically in relation to being an unmarried, childless daughter. The assumption of married siblings with children that participants, as single women

⁸ Graham simultaneously highlights the need to avoid a “psychological perspective” which risks essentialising care. As noted in Chapter Two, those who seek to avoid a potential reification of caring as an essential dimension of female identity have drawn attention to the need for both an ethic of care and an ethic of justice (see Benhabib, 1987; West, 1997).

without a family 'of their own', should undertake caring for parents, was evident in several narratives, even where siblings' children were now adult and regardless of single women's employment requirements. The accounts of several participants also indicated an expectation of parents being cared for informally at home, a culturally specific notion in part shaped by the availability and quality of public provision⁹.

Previous empirical research on never-married women indicates that while they may have willingly cared for parents, familial assumptions that they should bear the weight was resented (Simon, 1989). These interviews suggest some participants experienced similar responses to expectations that this should be their responsibility. However, participants also responded in different ways to those expectations, illustrated in the following accounts. Wendy, born in the 1940s, was the youngest sibling of two sisters and a brother, all whom married. In her late thirties she undertook caring for her widowed mother who was ill for a year before her death, and described this as an expectation of her family, despite her siblings living locally and her own full-time employment:

“That’s when my singleness really came into play [...] When my mother was ill I fully realised the expectations from both my mother and from the rest of the family, that I was to look after her”

[Wendy, 54]

Wendy was told by one sister who was not in paid work that she should give up her employment, which Wendy attributed to an inability to understand the financial implications of singlehood for women, “because she had everything provided for her in the form of a house, car and everything else [...] she really didn't understand the economics, that when you were earning, these things, you were really having to pay for those things”. Although Wendy continued working full-time out of financial necessity, she rearranged her employment to enable her to stay with her mother three days a week. She stated she had four days off during the period her mother was ill. Following her mother's death Wendy subsequently developed ME and had to give up working, which she attributed in part to her workload during this time.

⁹ There are considerable variations amongst welfare states as to the extent to which elderly care is provided formally or informally, or via home services or institutionally, for example Sweden has a comparatively high percentage of elderly in institutional care (Daly and Rake, 2003:53).

The account of another participant who experienced a similar expectation depicts a very different response. Nora, born in the 1930s, had two sisters and three brothers, all of whom married and most of whom remained in their birthplace, Yorkshire. Nora had lived in London for many years and was undertaking a degree in her forties when her mother became ill. She stayed with her mother for five weeks, however on learning that she was expected to remain with her mother returned to London:

“My mother became ill with cancer and that was when I was studying [...] and I went up to help her [...] and so I said to them (siblings) ‘look, I’ve been here for 5 weeks, I’m willing to go on a rota with you’, so that someone could come and live with her. And when I said this to them the reaction – my brother said ‘look, you haven’t got a family, we’ve got families, it should be your job’ [...] So I said ‘forget it, it’s your problem’. So, I just went back to London”

[Nora, 70]

Nora’s narrative indicated she perceived this expectation as unfair as her siblings did not have immediate family demands, and this “showed me that I was unimportant in a sense to them because I’m not married”. Nora subsequently had limited contact with her siblings. She wrote that her mother’s care had been shared amongst Nora’s siblings, as well as with support provided by her mother’s priest. These different responses illustrate what Finch (1989) describes as variations in individuals’ conceptions of “the right thing to do”. Her empirical research on family obligations indicates that while these are shaped by social norms and obligations, these are never simply ‘givens’, but are negotiated by different actors, negotiations mediated by biographical factors including life course, class and gender.

Other interviews demonstrated participants eschewing what they perceived as oppressive family relationships. However, this decision was also experienced as difficult. Margaret, born in the 1950s and from a working-class background, described her father as an alcoholic prone to “towering rages”. She left home to go to university, and subsequently had limited contact with her family for many years. Margaret was the eldest of five children, and reported learning recently of the “very, very hard time” that her younger sister and brother had had as children, which she felt “very bad” about, despite describing limiting contact as something she had to do:

“I stopped going to see them because I was so terrified [...] I couldn’t cope with it, I literally just had to break away. For sanity and for self preservation I just had to just draw a line under it and not go to see them [...] I mean I have seen him a couple of times more in the last couple of years, but there was a time when I just (pause) couldn’t”

[Margaret, 46]

Thus, some participants had ‘opted-out’ of relationships with their families of origin. Nevertheless, their accounts indicated decisions to do so were not made lightly, and were experienced less as a ‘choice’ than as a necessary response to an untenable familial situation.

The consequences of eschewing family contact varied not just in relation to personal factors but also in relation to the particular social context in which such decisions were made. This is illustrated in the narratives of two participants who were both from working-class backgrounds, and who left home as teenagers due to problematic family backgrounds. Kitty, born in the 1930s, described being raised by an “extremely cruel” stepmother who “beat me up a lot of the time”. As a result she “ran away and joined the RAF” at seventeen, as the organisation would “house me, feed me and train me”. Leaving the RAF after four years, Kitty subsequently lodged in private residences for many years, “mostly with older ladies who wanted one lodger”, prior to buying her own home in her forties. Kitty now lived in sheltered housing. Her account compares with that of Louise, born in the 1960s, who left school at sixteen to get a job, as she “didn’t get on with my step-dad” thus wanted to leave the parental home. Louise had lived alone since she was eighteen, having moved into a privately rented flat at seventeen with a friend, then into a succession of council flats. She subsequently bought the flat in which she was currently living in her early thirties¹⁰.

As noted in Chapter Two, much feminist work has addressed the power inequalities hidden within an ideological entronement of the family (see Barrett and McIntosh,

¹⁰ In 1980 the then Conservative Government introduced ‘right to buy’ legislation offering tenants generous discounts to purchase their council homes. This legislation enabled property ownership to those previously excluded from this asset. However, the success of this policy and the failure to supplement the stock of social housing has resulted in a shortfall in housing provision, and has further stigmatised and excluded those who cannot afford to buy (Society Guardian, 3rd July, 2002). Four participants lived in social housing, with one stating she had not bought her home for political reasons.

1991; Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Some of the interviews challenge an ideology of the family as provider of moral and material support. However, interviews also illustrate cultural and material changes that have provided opportunities such as access to education, employment and the possibility for some women to maintain their own households. These wider societal changes mean women no longer having to accommodate themselves uncritically to relational ties to sustain themselves (Friedman, 2000:46). Such changes are also illustrated in the routes into, and experiences of, motherhood. The following section looks at the way in which the mothers in this study combined caring responsibilities with those of breadwinning for their families, and how these responsibilities impacted on their lives.

Caring as Mothers

The seven mothers in this study were situated very differently in terms of factors such as age at motherhood, class and employment history, as well as in the varied routes into single motherhood¹¹. Some participants had ‘opted into’ single motherhood via artificial insemination and adoption¹². There is very little information specifically about ‘solo mothers’, women who choose to have children while not in a relationship, however the solo mothers in this sample did not match the profile of never-married lone mothers as typically poorer, less likely to be working and more likely to be in receipt of benefit (Kiernan and Wood, 1996). All had their children during the 1990s and 2000s while in their thirties and forties and had above average incomes when in full-time employment. The possibility for women to opt for single motherhood reflects wider social changes, albeit the cultural acceptability of this may be limited by the extent to which single mothers are financially independent of the state. Solo mothers emphasised the necessary forethought and planning required, as well as their financial self-sufficiency, suggesting a desire to distinguish themselves from a stigmatised stereotype of lone mothers as either irresponsible or welfare dependents, and this is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

¹¹ Two participants had children as a result of unplanned pregnancies and were not in a relationship with the father on the birth of their child (although one subsequently lived with the father for a period of months), one had a child while in a long-term cohabiting relationship and another while in an ongoing non-cohabiting relationship. Three women had ‘opted into’ single motherhood via anonymous donor insemination and adoption.

¹² The decision to have children as a single woman was not depicted as a choice, rather as an outcome of various circumstances. This is looked at further in Chapter Seven.

The overwhelming majority of mothers had or were undertaking the responsibility of childcare and financial provision themselves¹³. Two participants had adult children who no longer lived with them, and three had children of pre-school age. The varied socio-economic status of these participants, as well as external factors such as the availability of childcare and the nature of their employment, meant they had or were combining employment with caring in different ways. Nevertheless, the material and other consequences experienced by all mothers highlights the persistent undervaluing of care work.

Recent research suggests that most lone mothers in Britain see their moral and practical responsibility for their children as their primary duty, and for many this responsibility to be a 'good mother' is seen as largely incompatible with significant paid work (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Standing, 1999). As Barlow et al argue, such views of good mothering are compatible with dominant conventional views about family life (2002:14). This stance is illustrated in Sally's narrative. Sally, born in the 1960s and from a middle class background, had a child at seventeen as the result of an unplanned pregnancy. She subsequently lived with the father for five months, however left due to his violence. He did not subsequently contribute financially or otherwise to his child's upbringing. After attending college with the support of her parents, Sally completed a degree in her early twenties, living in student accommodation provided specifically for single parents. She received funding which included a supplement for having a dependent, and the university also provided a crèche. Sally subsequently lived in a variety of shared accommodation, either with friends or other single parents. She looked after her daughter at home for several years, receiving social security benefits and also undertaking occasional casual employment such as waitressing and cleaning to supplement this, as "you couldn't afford it". In her late twenties Sally trained as a nurse, in part because she wanted to be able to provide financially for her child in a way that social security benefits did not allow. However, on completing her training she chose not to go into nursing, and after her daughter left home she subsequently worked in various jobs, including spells travelling and working abroad, as well as occasional agency nursing "to bring some money in".

¹³ One participant's child was in local authority care, living with her only at weekends.

Now forty, Sally was currently employed as a wine retailer, and also taking qualifications that she hoped would enable her to work in the wine industry. Funding this training herself, she was also doing part-time agency nursing to supplement her income. She did not have any personal assets such as savings or property. The experiences and attitudes of participants to paid employment are considered in detail in Chapter Six. However, Sally's narrative indicates her employment history has been shaped by motherhood in various ways. She described her employment choices as follows:

“It was all to do with being a free agent, and going 'well what would I like to try now?' like being in a sweet shop and going 'I don't have the responsibility of a child any more'. I think it was quite hard for me not to work, or not to do what I wanted to do when [child] had been younger [...] I think I was trying to make up for it by just doing whatever came along”

[Sally, 40]

The support Sally received when her child was young enabled her to pursue further education and get a degree. Yet, Sally's narrative indicated she prioritised unpaid care work over paid employment despite experiencing this as “quite hard”, a decision related to her perception of ‘the right thing to do’. This example illustrates the non-market ‘gendered moral rationalities’ identified by Duncan and Edwards (1997, 1999) as central to lone mothers decisions about paid and unpaid work. Sally undertook caring for her child under a previous welfare regime, where lone motherhood was seen as a legitimate reason for withdrawing from the labour market, albeit in the context of stigmatising of lone motherhood and a residual level of income for those dependent on social security. Recent welfare reforms herald a policy shift to reconstructing welfare around paid work for all those of working age. As Lewis (2002, 2003) notes, this emphasis fails to address the ‘care’ side of the gendered dichotomy of work. This research suggests that limiting the option of unpaid work may also not accord with the priorities of lone mothers themselves. Much empirical research has highlighted the implications for mothers of such an emphasis on employment in the context of a lack of provision of affordable quality childcare provision (see Innes and Scott, 2003; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). This lack has particular implications for lone mothers. These implications were evident in the narratives of all mothers who had or were combining caregiving with breadwinning,

in spite of their varied socio-economic status and the differing social contexts in which they were raising children, and are illustrated in the excerpts below.

Flora had a child in the 1970s while in a long-term cohabiting relationship she described as problematic. Her partner had seven other children from two previous marital relationships. After separating from the father who subsequently did not contribute financially or otherwise to the care of their child, Flora took a job with shifts that allowed her to combine childcare with breadwinning, and also took in a lodger. Now in her sixties, Flora continues to have lodgers to supplement her income and at the time of interview was considering various options including retraining in order to get part-time employment.

Participants with school age children who were in employment or full-time study used a mix of formal childcare (child-minders or nursery care). Two also had regular support from parents and siblings, and one child's father provided occasional support. One mother who had continued in full-time employment described the financial implications of reliance on formal childcare on a single income. Tessa, born in the 1960s, had a child in her early thirties, and returned to full-time employment when her child was one year old.

“I enjoyed (work) very much at first [...] and I worked very hard at the job [...] I always found that despite the fact that I was working full time I was still continually broke, and a lot of it was about obviously the childcare [...] I was lucky, I had a brilliant childminder, and a good community nursery, but it cost a lot of money”

[Tessa, 41]

Tessa enjoyed her work and experienced promotion, however was made redundant in her mid-thirties. Following a period of illness, she decided to move from London to a smaller town with her child. She continued working full-time, and also had a lodger.

Several mothers described their work environments as inimical to working mothers, and most had considered alternative employment and retraining to enable them to work less, a ‘choice’ that would have financial consequences. Birgit, born in the 1950s, had a child in 2000 and returned to her employment in the City of London working three days a week. However, she was subsequently made redundant. Birgit

described a demanding working environment inimical to childcare or other needs. She stated she had always worked in very male dominated work places where all “were expected to stay late”. Birgit compared the employment conditions she had experienced with those available in her Scandinavian country of origin:

“I felt that I was made redundant because I had a child [...] In the last place that I worked they were very young so no, it was not family friendly. You were young and single and you would stand on your head for them [...] They gave me the absolute minimum what they had to do according to the law [...] Childcare provision in (country of origin) is family friendly. You know, it is all there for you. It is completely acceptable to go to work at 9 and to go home at 5, or leave at 4. The company would bend over backwards to make your life easier as a parent. Childcare is extremely cheap, available”.

Her reported income, amongst the highest in the study, referred to this previous employment. At the time of interview Birgit was undertaking a Masters degree for which she had taken out a career development loan, which she hoped would enable similar future employment. Asked about possible disadvantage of singleness, Birgit emphasised the financial responsibility of being sole provider for her child:

“For me the main disadvantage has been that, the financial side, that I am the only one that brings in money for me, that there is no one that I can rely on. If something happens, and I lose my job, then - nobody is going to pay my mortgage. It is just me. And now that I have a child, that is quite difficult”.

[Birgit, 44].

Another participant, Brenda, born in the 1960s, had returned to employment in the City of London on a part-time basis after having her child in 2002. Brenda’s income was amongst the highest reported, and she described her financial situation as enabling her decision to have a child, both in terms of being able to afford childcare and that otherwise she would not have considered it, as financial insecurity as well as single motherhood would have been “building pressure into a child’s life”. Brenda was about to be made redundant, which she attributed to conditions in her employment sector, the financial markets. This was depicted as not of immediate financial concern, rather as enabling her to consider future career options which

would allow her to work less. Brenda's account indicated she anticipated the necessity of working possibly until seventy, to provide for herself as well as her child. However, while her current childcare costs were significant, her account suggested she was not anxious about her long-term financial status:

“Hopefully with my redundancy money I won't be too far from getting rid of the mortgage. So then I'm looking at saving up for my retirement, funding him. I want him to go to a state school [...] so I will be better off than I am now because at the moment his (nursery) fees are more than my mortgage! (laughs)”.

[Brenda, 37]

Brenda considered motherhood had possibly limited her career potential. However, her narrative also indicated that having a child determined a career change that Brenda desired, in part due to her long working hours. Brenda's employment experiences are considered further in Chapter Six.

One mother attributed her decision to stop her full-time employment to her childcare responsibilities and an intensification of work. Fiona, born in the 1950s, adopted two children in her late forties, prior to which she had spent her working life in full-time employment as a teacher. She had returned to this after adopting her first child but found this very onerous, and remained at home following adoption of her second child, living off savings accrued during her previous employment. Fiona was considering various income-generating alternatives to returning to full-time employment, including taking in lodgers and after-school childminding:

“Oh, that year I worked was a nightmare [...] if I go back I think it will be supply. But not class teaching because at the moment the workload is just too incredible, and it isn't worth the stress”

[Fiona, 49]

Modern welfare states were established assuming particular patterns of gender relations, based on a version of the role of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers, whereby not just welfare benefits but the provisions of services such as formal care and policies regulating employment have been constituted accordingly (see Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury 1994, 1996; Daly and Rake, 2003). There is a vast

literature considering the way in which variations in the provision of support of care work across welfare regimes mean different material implications for women¹⁴, including some research comparing the economic status of lone and partnered mothers (see Hobson, 1994; Christopher, 2001). The single women in this research varied in the extent to which they had caring or financial responsibilities for others; however, undertaking caring roles either as daughters or mothers had both material and other implications. These were mediated by various inter-related personal factors, such as the age or financial status of participants, as well as external factors such as the state of the labour market and the extent and type of welfare state provision available in specific periods.

These accounts do indicate changes over time, such as in the ability for some women to opt into single motherhood. Nevertheless, the narratives suggest this remained a stigmatised subject position, and all mothers experienced difficulty in combining caregiving with breadwinning. Participants who were mothers sought to combine breadwinning and caregiving in various ways, with the prevalent practice of combining caring with part-time employment depicted as preferable to that of full-time employment. However, there were financial consequences both for mothers caring for their children and reliant on social security, as well as for those in employment and reliant on formal childcare. Single women caring for parents continued in employment, yet the necessity for financial self-provisioning may not have been recognized by family members, and employers could be unsympathetic to their caring requirements. In addition, the possible attribution of spinsterhood to this caring relationship was experienced with some difficulty.

These narratives highlight the enduring significance of not just gender, but also of partnership status. This was particularly evident in familial expectations that single daughters should undertake caring for parents. Friedman notes that prevailing gender norms have required women to make the preservation of certain interpersonal relationships their highest concern, regardless of the costs to themselves (2000:46). These narratives illustrate the way that heteronormative assumptions have also contributed to expectations about the particular obligations of spinsters. However, the accounts also illustrated resistance to such expectations. Friedman draws on a

¹⁴ For an overview of this literature, see Daly and Rake, 2003.

conception of relational autonomy to argue that the disruption of social relationships is not inherently alien to women; rather, the issue is the worth of the relationship in question (2004:46). These interviews suggest that the wider social changes in recent decades mean increasing options as to which relationships individuals wish to maintain. This theme is explored further in the following section, which looks at the relationships of participants with both friends and family.

Intimate Relationships and Wider Social Activities

Personal relationships can be seen as particularly important for single people. Those who do not have one ‘significant other’ must rely on varied others for emotional and other support, and recent research indicates single people spend more time than those who are married in informal socialising with friends and neighbours (Putnam, 2000:94)¹⁵. The importance of friendship in affirming a positive sense of self-identity and confirming self-worth (see Allan, 1989:155) is especially significant for single women who may be subject to stigmatisation as lonely and isolated. Previous empirical research has emphasised the importance of both family and friends in the emotional and social lives of never-married women; nevertheless, this research has also drawn attention to the way these relationships were shaped by the familist assumptions prevalent in the particular societal contexts in which they were played out (Simon, 1987; Allen; 1989).

Chapter Two has outlined recent theoretical work arguing that contemporary changes in wider society have contributed to significant changes in the sphere of intimate relationships. Recent research suggests these changes may mean individuals shifting their locus of intimacy and support away from kin towards other people (Silva and Smart, 1999:9). Arguments of a tendency towards the ‘decentring of heterorelations’ have underpinned calls for the importance of considering ‘non-normative intimacies’ (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2002:138-142). Considering the various personal relationships of never-married single women enables an exploration of the extent to which there have been changes over time, and the following section looks at relationships with both family and friends.

¹⁵ Single here includes the ever-married. Putnam’s findings confirm earlier work which found that the never-married and childless had more friends and spend more time with them (for example see Fischer, 1982, cited in Trimberger, 2002).

Friends as Family and Family as Friends

Many participants referred to having good and close relationships with both family and friends, and their accounts support previous findings on the considerable importance that single women place on these relationships (Simon, 1987; Allen, 1989; Gordon, 1994). In describing relationships with friends, several participants used familial terminology, and their narratives suggested such terms were used to intimate the importance and value of these relationships. This is illustrated in Franny's narrative. Franny, born in the 1940s, had no siblings and both parents were deceased. Talking about friendships, Franny commented:

“Somebody said that in this day and age really you create your own family around you rather than the family you're born with. I think that that's actually true [...] I would say that some of my friends are as close as family. You tell them things that you would only tell very close friends and family, and you rely on them”

[Franny, 58]

Franny's narrative suggests she associated this reliance on friends more with social changes than her single status per se. It also showed clearly she felt she could depend on these friendships to “share the good times and bad times” and for emotional and other support, describing offers of financial help when she was recently made redundant as well as with other problems such as illness: “I have got friends who would drop everything and rush over to me”.

Franny's use of familial terminology suggests a desire to highlight characteristics such as affection and familiarity conventionally associated with families. She described a relationship she had with an ex-partner and his wife, a couple who hoped to have a baby, commenting “I'll be almost an aunt if they do”. Yet, such terminology is also indicative of the ideological strength of assumptions about familial relationships. As Pahl and Spencer state, its usage may reflect the strength of normative expectations about how family members might relate to each other, rather than necessarily their own actual experience (2003:17). Franny, an only child, emphasised the closeness of a relationship she had with a cousin by describing this as “as close as brother and sister”.

The use of familial terminology by participants with problematic familial relationships likewise indicates a desire to intimate a certain level of support and affection putatively associated with the family. For example Louise, born in the 1960s and who left the family home at 17, described having friends who were “sort of like a substitute family in a way”. Wendy, born in the 1940s, similarly described a wish to live with others, a desired community she described as “a surrogate family” that would be there for her in a way that her biological family “certainly hasn’t been” .

However, the narratives of several participants did depict close, affectionate and supportive relationships with both friends and family. Rather than a distinction between friendships as voluntary reciprocal relationships and family as encompassing duty and obligations, these elements were variously evident in both. A theme common to several interviews was participants’ use of friendship terminology for family members, indicating a desire to imbue kin relationships with positive qualities typically associated with friendship¹⁶. As such, this research supports arguments of a ‘blurring’ of roles between family and friends, rather than a shift from families of fate to families of choice (see Jamieson, 1998; Pahl and Spencer, 2003). This is illustrated in the following excerpts from the narratives of two participants living in the maternal home. Tanya, born in the 1950s, described her relationship with a married friend during many years living abroad in the following terms: “when we lived [in Spain] we were constantly together, and basically people said that when that when I left she was like in mourning, you know, I was more of a partner than her husband”. Tanya also referred to her sister as “my best friend”. Tanya was living with her widowed mother, a relationship she described as a source of emotional support as well as companionship: “I have my mum - thank God I have my mum, you know, really [...] Mum and I get on great, you know. We went to New York together, and have good times together”.

Debra similarly described her relationship with her divorced mother, stating she was “the best friend you could ever have” for supporting Debra financially and otherwise while studying, including taking her on holiday every year. Debra’s “very close” family included a younger brother who also lived in the maternal home, a married

¹⁶ Another factor underlying the use of familial terminology to describe friendships is arguably the lack of vocabulary available to encompass intimate relationships outwith the heterosexual dyad, a reflection of a heteronormative context in which other relationships are often invalidated or not recognised.

brother who lived locally with his wife and young children, and a third brother who lived further away. Debra saw her nephews three or four times a week, and related how her married brother had decided against employment requiring relocation as he wanted his young children to remain near his maternal family.

Debra's social life involved activities with both family and friends. One aspect of social change is the construction of a variety of social networks, illustrated in the interviews of several participants. As well as a long weekend break abroad with her sister-in-law and other female friends every year, Debra referred to a forthcoming holiday with her mother, two single brothers, her other brother and his wife and their two children, as well as three friends (a married couple and a divorced friend) whom Debra had introduced to the rest of her family. Recent empirical research on the family and community life of older people finds that strong kin ties, including with a spouse, can "limit the scope of relationships which can introduce people to new social ties and contacts" (Phillipson et al., 2001:256). Debra's excerpt however illustrates the creative possibilities for social interactions and practices of intimacy in the absence of spousal relationships, not just for Debra but also her divorced mother.

The use of 'friendship' terminology to describe kin relations suggests a desire to emphasize the chosen and congenial nature of such an arrangement. This may be particularly important given that the stigma associated with being single and living in the parental home, illustrated in Debra's anticipation of negative reactions to her decision to buy her mother's house: "people could laugh at me and say 'you're such a spinster'". Participants clearly experienced intimate and supportive relationships with both family and friends. However, the lack of cultural validation such relationships may be afforded could result in difficulties for participants. Furthermore, the values commonly associated with friendship include mutuality and reciprocity. The work done by Debra's mother for her adult children, referred to above, illustrates that the emotional closeness ascribed to a relationship does not necessarily preclude inequalities in that relationship¹⁷.

¹⁷ Jamieson (1998) cites a wealth of empirical research on persistent gender divisions in unpaid work within heterosexual couples, in arguing that an increasing emphasis on the emotional dimensions of intimacy in couple relationships can act to suppress attention to material inequalities in time and other resources.

Nevertheless, Debra's narrative also suggests singleness can be seen as enabling a variety of different relationships. Debra referred to having holidayed on several occasions with a married couple whose company she clearly enjoyed, once while with a partner, again with the same man but after they had ended their romantic relationship, as well as subsequently on her own. Her narrative illustrates her awareness of this as atypical, however this friendship was clearly agreeable to all:

“They (couple) didn't have any problem at all about me sharing a room with them, because it had two big double beds and we were great friends [...] A lot of people thought it was strange that I was going on holiday with a married couple [...] But because we were so relaxed and happy with each other we were totally comfortable in doing that”

[Debra, 37]

Several researchers have questioned the notion of the freely chosen nature of personal relationships, arguing the importance of various inter-related factors in shaping both familial and non-familial relationships. Jamieson (1998) draws attention to class and gender differences in patterns of friendships, many of which are the consequences of classed and gendered inequalities in access to resources. Allan's research on friendships similarly argues that these, like other personal relations, are “at least in part shaped and constrained by the configuration of social and material conditions which characterise an individual's life” (1989:10). These interviews indicated that relationships with both friends and family were influenced by various factors. Thus, most participants describing friend-like relationships with kin were referring to relationships with mothers and/or sisters, themselves often widowed or divorced. Debra's discussion of her close family life did not include her divorced father, whom she rarely saw.

Gender has long been considered as an important factor shaping social interactions, with woman's identity particularly associated with the expressive functions of managing relationships, traditionally in the family setting. Partnership status is also a significant factor shaping social interactions (Simon, 1987). While participants' relationships were evidently shaped by various inter-related factors, partnership status was clearly central to these. For example, several participants stated a disadvantage of singleness was the difficulty in finding someone with whom to go on holiday.

Their narratives indicated this meant someone female and single, with several participants referring to the unavailability of friends subsequent to their partnership or marriage. The ways in which heteronormative assumptions such as a presumption of partnership impacted on participants' social interactions and activities is looked at in Chapter Seven, while the influence of other factors, such as time and income, is considered below. However, the influence of various factors indicates these relationships were not solely matters of choice.

Furthermore, this research also indicates that these relationships were not understood as contingent on mutual pleasure or affinity. Many participants described mutually supportive relationships, with family members as well as friends, that encompassed a sense of responsibility for the others' welfare. Yet, a lack of institutional support for these relationships was also evident in several interviews. For example Tricia, born in the 1950s, lived very near her divorced sister whom she saw every day. While she referred to not having to compromise as an advantage of singleness, Tricia remarked "I do compromise with my sister". She later related that she had considered moving to the countryside, however decided against this in part because her sister doesn't drive, thus "her life would be narrower, more difficult if I moved somewhere that was longer, harder [to get to]". Tricia's life was clearly bound up with her sister's in various ways. However, Tricia referred to not having the option of making her sister a beneficiary of her occupational pension, an exclusion that she saw as unjust and experienced with some indignation and resentment¹⁸:

"If I were to die comparatively soon after being given a pension, or before my pension is actually given, before I retire, then it is somebody else's wife or husband who will benefit. And I think that is absolutely shocking, and when I get my act together I might actually start some sort of petition about it, because it is so unfair"

[Tricia, 43]

¹⁸ The Civil Partnership Bill, recently introduced by the Labour Government, will provide same-sex couples who form a civil partnership with parity of treatment in a wide range of legal matters with those opposite-sex couples who enter into a civil marriage (Women and Equality Unit website, <http://164.36.253.98/lgbt/partnership.htm>). An amendment voted in by the House of Lords to extend these rights to close family members who have been living together for at least twelve years, described by the Women and Equality Unit as "an attempt to delay the Act", was voted out. This amendment is also insufficient to address the relationships of those non-cohabiting or unrelated adults who may also wish to claim rights such as access to employment and pension benefits to which they have contributed.

As with the caring relationships discussed above, some friendships also involved a sense of duty or obligation to others. Nevertheless, the informal caring work described by participants was overwhelmingly familial, with only one participant referring to performing this for non-kin. Sarah, born in the 1930s, was a qualified nurse, and spoke about caring for a friend she had met when in her twenties. This friend was married with a son, however her husband had subsequently left her and she had become estranged from her son. Sarah's narrative depicted this woman as very demanding and their relationship as difficult. Nevertheless, when Sarah was in her fifties her friend became ill, and Sarah looked after her on a twice-daily basis for six months prior to her going into a nursing home. Continuing in full-time employment at the same time, Sarah stated this had left her "thoroughly exhausted".

Trimberger (2002) emphasises the importance of care beyond the family and market context, arguing care provided within friendships may be "more genuine and supportive", while providing this through a large friendship network does not create the loss of personal independence that care by one or two family members entails. In illustration, Trimberger cites research documenting the unprecedented mobilisation of networks of people not related by traditional family ties to care for gay men with HIV/AIDS, primarily young men providing care to peers often estranged from their natural family (see Sullivan 1998). Such research challenges the contention of earlier work on friendship that "in practice the basis of solidarity within the tie does not generally facilitate high levels of long-term unilateral support" (Allan, 1989:108). Yet, Trimberger argues that the lack of institutional support and cultural validation for friendship may mean the moral obligations of friendship being perceived as less binding than commonly understood and legally inscribed familial duties and rights (see also Pahl, 2000)¹⁹. The absence of caring for non-kin in this research may be a reflection of the age range of participants. With two-fifths under sixty-five, many participants may not yet have had experience of friends with age-related caring requirements²⁰. Participants did describe both providing and receiving substantial emotional support from friends, as well as practical support such as offers of money.

¹⁹ Butler (2002) uses the term "derealisation" for nonratified relationships outwith the heterosexual dyad, similarly arguing that the toll a sense of delegitimation can take on a relationship can make it harder to sustain a bond.

²⁰ The focus of the interviews was the life history of participants thus in the main centred around biographical events in their own lives, and as such the interviews may not have captured caring tasks undertaken for non-kin that were not of a longstanding nature.

Nevertheless, the absence of reference to substantial care within non-kin relationships in this research may also suggest something about the limits of friendship, and indicates the need for further research.

The relationships participants experienced also included non-couple heterosexual intimacies. Some participants referred to having ongoing relationships with men, yet all considered themselves single, while their narratives did not depict these as primary relationships. This points to a significant shift in meanings and practices in heterosexual dyadic relationships, which challenges dominant heteronormative assumptions of exclusivity, obligation and commitment. For example, one participant referred to having a relationship with the father of her child, however lived separately and did not share financial or other responsibility for the child. Another participant, Ellen, born in the 1960s, described an ongoing relationship that she depicted as mainly for companionship and which she intentionally kept very casual: “I see – I don’t really count it as a relationship, I’ve got a male friend who I see occasionally”. This friendship did not feature significantly in Ellen’s narrative. Another participant, Flora, born in the 1940s, described a relationship that had lasted forty years, continuing intermittently during her long cohabiting relationship with another man to whom she had a child, as well as her friend’s marriage. This relationship was a more important element of Flora’s narrative, and she described holidays she had taken with this friend and her son, as well as meeting her friend’s wife, with whom Flora “got on very well”. Flora’s friend had subsequently divorced, however he and his wife were now sharing a house which has “her half and his half”, an arrangement Flora described as “all about looking after each other in old age”.

These particular relationships are illustrative of what Roseneil and Budgeon refer to as the “burgeoning diversity of contemporary practices of intimacy and care”, which they argue indicate that individuals “are being released from traditional heterosexual scripts and the patterns of heterorelations which accompany them” (2004:141). However, *all* the personal relationships of never-married single women can be seen as indicative of the ‘decentring of heterorelations’. Processes argued as aspects of the contemporary cultures of intimacy and care inhabited by those at the cutting edge of social change, namely the centring of personal life around friendships and the decentring of the sexual couple relationship (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004:129), are

long-standing features of the lives of never-married women, as this and other empirical research has shown (see Simon, 1987). Nonetheless, the experiences of intimate relationships described by several participants do indicate a 'blurring' of values of affection and responsibility across the boundaries of kinship and friendship, as well as an increasing diversity in the practices of personal relationships.

Previous empirical research has also pointed to the significance of activities outside the world of work for single women (see Simon, 1987; Gordon, 1994). The narratives of many participants indicated the importance of various social activities in which they were involved, and these are considered below.

Leisure and Social Activities

Many participants referred to involvement in various activities outside work. As well as informal socialising with friends and family, this included participation in more formal activities, such as singing in a band or taking evening classes, and participation in various organisations, and for several these were clearly experienced with great pleasure. However, some participants described more limited social interactions, and their narratives indicated the impact of various factors including time and income constraints. Both gender and partnership status were clearly significant factors in the leisure and social activities described by participants, and the implications of these are looked at in Chapter Seven. However, other factors were also influential, and these are illustrated in the excerpts below.

The varying experiences amongst similarly situated participants suggests the influence of a range of factors, whereby partnership status may have relatively little significance. This is illustrated in the example of two older participants, Faith, born in the 1910s, and Kitty, born in the 1930s. Both lived in sheltered housing and reported annual incomes below £5,000. However, Faith's narrative indicated she considered her social activities fulfilling and pleasurable, commenting "I'll keep going as long as I'm well enough!". She observed "I keep up with friendships", and referred to being regularly visited by relatives, as well as going on an annual holiday with a friend. Faith was also active in her church, and involved in several activities arranged by various organisations including her sheltered housing and Age Concern. Her narrative contrasted with that of Kitty, who described experiencing poor health that

limited her activities. In addition, Kitty stated she had also experienced several bereavements in the previous decade, losing “friends that were extremely close, that you would have done anything for”. Kitty’s narrative indicated her rather limited social interactions were not through choice and were experienced negatively.

“I am not in great health and I don’t have hobbies and I haven’t been on a holiday since about 1968 [...] I quite like my own company which is a good thing because it is forced upon me a lot of the time! Old age sucks, it really does”

[Kitty, 71]

Both time and income were evidently important factors shaping the leisure and social activities of participants. Several participants described working very long hours and this is looked at further in Chapter Six. For some, this was related to the necessity for financial self-sufficiency implicit in a single lifestyle in conjunction with low paid employment. For example, Katy, born in the 1940s, described herself as a “workaholic”, and as regularly working overtime “for the money”. Combined with the requirements of self-provisioning in terms of domestic tasks, this left her with little free time:

“I do work six days a week, I try not to do seven, I try to have one day off to do my shopping, stock up the freezer, wash the car, do the front garden - but my day off is normally spent doing chores, rather than relaxing or socialising ... So, my aim really is to try and be able to take two days off, but I don’t see it in the near future. I still see me being six days”

[Katy, 53]

Katy referred to her previous activism in both her union and the Labour Party, and stated she “would still be there except for time requirements”. As with several other participants she described eagerly anticipating her retirement, as this would give her more time for friends.

Another participant, Franny, made redundant at fifty-eight, valued the possibility of finding part-time work as an opportunity for more leisure, saying “I have a huge amount of interests and hobbies and friends”. However, even retired participants expressed a similar desire, for example Nora, 70, wrote “*I’d like to have more time so*

that I could go to classes such as Hindi". Nora's narrative described a range of activities, including voluntary work with several organisations. Nora had undertaken psychotherapy training in her fifties, and her volunteering included counselling work, as well as teaching English and visiting a woman in a Special Hospital. Nora had spent her working life initially in various unskilled factory jobs and, after taking secretarial qualifications, subsequently in office administration. She described the activities she had undertaken in retirement as those she would have chosen to do as employment if she had had the opportunity. Olive, another retired participant, similarly described her retirement from a career in the civil service as an opportunity to undertake various activities, including a variety of courses organised via local higher education institutions specifically for older people, and stated "I would say I really blossomed out more into doing what I like to do, writing and things like that".

Several participants referred to activities that can be described as 'other-regarding', including variously participation in churches, trade unions, philanthropic organisations and local politics. The extent of involvement varied, as did motivations, however for some was clearly substantial. Olive's narrative demonstrated considerable political involvement. Olive described her family as very political, and she had served as secretary of her union for three years as well as acting as the Women's Officer of her local Labour Party branch. She stated in correspondence "*I was always interested in the union and quite keen to do my bit to improve conditions and pay*". She also described various campaigning activities related to feminist and peace movements in which she was involved, and while her ill health meant she was no longer able to attend demonstrations, she continued to support various organisations financially.

Simon's research on never-married women noted their heavy and frequent participation in various community organisations, and argues that a common thread shared by many was a "view of themselves as members of groups *larger than* their own families" (1987:53, italics in original). The other-regarding commitments of participants in this research support this finding. Nevertheless, the relationship between partnership status and involvement varied for participants. For example Bridget, born in the 1950s, stated "I'm a Christian, I attend church on a Sunday and I'm involved in whatever goes on in relation to church [...] I also think it's unusual,

most people of my age don't go to church anymore, but when I was saying people haven't got time to listen to me talking about me, I do find my religion sustaining". Bridget clearly considered her religion a source of personal sustenance given the lack of 'space' she felt was made available to her by family and friends. Another participant, Sarah, born in the 1930s, described undertaking missionary work when younger which involved working as a nurse in remote rural areas of India. Now retired, she attributed her regular involvement in activities such as a lunch club provided by her church in part to her singleness: "I think I always have this need to be needed, because I'm on my own. This wanting to care for someone, you know. Maybe that's my nursing".

Participation in other-regarding activities may be explained in relation to a desire to reinforce a sense of self-worth, particularly important given negative stereotypes of singleness. The narratives of several participants indicated an awareness of, and anxiety about, these understandings of singleness. Nora stated in correspondence: "*probably being single makes one selfish*", despite the various voluntary activities in which she was involved. Similarly Katherine, born in the 1930s, when asked about any possible disadvantages she perceived, answered being single "could be quite a selfish way of life", despite previously referring to reducing her work hours in part because her mother's ill-health meant she "needed a lot of care and attention". As such, single women may undertake other-regarding activities in order to rebut such perceptions either of themselves or from others.

However, some narratives indicated a resistance to being perceived as undertaking various activities because they were single. For example, Maureen, born in the 1950s, described being "heavily involved" in her church and running an annual holiday club for children, which meant taking a week of annual leave. Her narrative indicated she objected to this being attributed to her single, childless status. Partnership status may have been an influential factor shaping the social and leisure activities of participants, but the narratives also indicate the importance of other factors. Attributions of negative experiences such as loneliness or isolation to partnership status may be the result of a failure to adequately consider the influence of other factors, such as age, health, or financial status. Similarly, these excerpts suggest it is important to avoid explanations of social activities of participants solely in terms of their singleness,

which may inaccurately presume either more time or need to be involved in other-regarding activities. Furthermore, this denies the political and other motivations to which participants themselves attributed their activities. For example, Katy described her previous experience of considerable union activity, including serving as shop steward, as a “very big part of my life, thanks to Mrs Thatcher”. These excerpts thus highlight the importance of considering the subjective meanings ascribed by participants themselves to the various personal relationships and social activities in which they were involved.

Conclusion

Contemporary change in familial relationships has been attributed to an individualism that results in atomised individuals unlikely to engage fully with family or community (see Bellah et al, 1985; Putnam, 2000). Remaining single can be seen as paradigmatic of individualism, while other aspects of the lives of participants in this study, such as living alone and lone motherhood, epitomize wider social changes often taken as signifiers of a ‘decline’ in family values. However, this research demonstrates contemporary spinsters willingly undertaking caring commitments to parents and children. Rather than a decline in commitment, the interviews illustrate an increasing diversity in the way caring relationships are performed. As such, this research highlights the value and importance on familial practices, how people ‘do’ family, rather than an exclusive focus on a particular family structure that limits the ability to account fully for the various practices and meanings of personal relationships.

The depth and range of the varied relationships with both family and friends supports the findings of previous research on the importance of such relationships to never-married women (Simon, 1987; Allen, 1989). The significance of these relationships as the foundation of practical and emotional support challenges assumptions of the (hetero)sexually based dyadic relationship as an exclusive source of intimacy. In addition, this research indicated that both could be experienced as mutually supportive and sustaining, and could encompass elements of pleasure and affinity, as well as a sense of responsibility. As such, these relationships challenge pessimistic accounts of the impact of individualism on intimate relationships. Furthermore, these relationships, as well as the varied other-regarding and communal social activities of many participants, challenge stereotypes of single women as isolated, lonely or selfish.

Rather, these relationships and activities illustrate that an increasing diversity in family forms, possible in the context of changing societal and cultural conditions, does not necessarily mean a decline in commitment and obligation to others.

This research has also highlighted the significance of the particular social contexts in which these relationships were enacted, and drawn attention to the continuities and changes in these over time. Many wider social factors were clearly implicated in these relationships, for example the availability of welfare provision in specific eras, and the educational and employment opportunities participants were afforded. However, personal factors also shaped these relationships, and both gender and partnership status were central to many. This was illustrated in familial expectations that caring for dependent family members is the duty particularly of never-married daughters. The enduring and pervasive character of such expectations reflects the persistence of familist assumptions.

The continuance of such expectations also challenge theories which ascribe changes in intimate relationships to a decline in traditional constraints enabling a concomitant increase in choice, thus individuals freely choosing familial relationships in accordance with personal inclination (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998:66). This research indicates not only the influence of structural constraints, but also ideological constraints shaping choices in accordance with dominant norms. As such, it suggests the conceptions of agency on which these theories are based may be radically misconceived. Rather than the autonomous individual reflexively choosing according to personal preference, this research supports a more interdependent and relational conception of the individual. The notion of relational autonomy encompasses the view that the identities of agents, as intrinsically relational, are in part constituted by elements of the social context in which they are embedded (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2001). Gendered expectations shape the range of options that are socially and culturally available to agents, and this research highlights the need to consider the ways in which such expectations, including those one may have of oneself, constitute the context in which an agent makes 'choices' in relationships with others.

Nevertheless, such constraints are not immutable, and the diversity in practices such as women maintaining their own household and opting into lone motherhood illustrate considerable change over time. In addition, these interviews support other research

emphasising that, although ties to family of origin remain highly significant, they cannot be assumed and are as much part of negotiation as of consanguinity (see Finch and Mason, 1993; Silva and Smart, 1999). In contrast to pessimistic accounts of the decline of family, this research indicates the progressive potential for individuals to 'create' intimate relationships, exemplified in this research both by the women who opted into motherhood, and those who limited contact with their family of origin. Notions of families of 'choice' also include being able to opt out of relationships. A conception of individuals as interdependent and interconnected can also encompass a questioning of particular relationships. Yet, while familial practices may be potentially variable and increasingly a matter of negotiation, these are located in culture, history and personal biography, and do not change randomly and suddenly. Nevertheless, the varied intimate relationships of the participants in this study can be seen as part of the 'everyday experiments' that Silva and Smart (1999) suggest have begun to challenge the normative structures of family life.

CHAPTER SIX

Gender, Partnership Status and Employment

This chapter considers the education and employment histories of the never-married women in this study. The position of women in the labour market has often been explained in relation to their position in the domestic sphere. However, the status of single women cannot easily be accounted for in a 'breadwinner/ caregiver' typology¹. Financial self-sufficiency is a requirement of singleness, and previous research indicates never-married women are more likely than the ever-married to be employed full-time, to have higher qualifications and higher status occupations, and to be in male dominated jobs (see Trieman, 1975; Sokoloff, 1981; Kiernan, 1988). Nevertheless, other research has emphasised that, while single women can be said to work 'like men,' they get paid as women (Simon, 1987; Gordon, 1994)². The relationship between educational and employment achievements and spinsterhood has been interpreted in various ways, and understood as both an enabler and outcome of singleness. Thus, some have argued that never-married women's better qualifications enable the economic independence allowing them to remain single (see Trieman 1975), while others contend the necessity for economic independence implicit in remaining single promotes a more determined³ approach to career development³. Several commentators argue that the expansion of employment opportunities for women in recent decades has offered alternatives to marriage (see Walby, 1990; Dunne, 1997), and the extent to which economic independence is a factor underlying singleness is considered further in Chapter Seven.

This chapter considers the varying implications of financial self-sufficiency through a labour market that, as Chapter Two has outlined, has been predicated on an assumed

¹ As Chapter Two notes, much feminist research has argued that the secondary position of women in the workplace was both a cause and consequence of their dependence on men, with women's economic disadvantage in the labour market providing the 'economic grounding' for the continuation of marriage.

² There is little contemporary research comparing the socio-economic status of men and women by marital or partnership status. However, the 2004 Social Trends on the incomes of people aged 65 and over reports that within each marital status the ratio of women's median income to men's is highest for single women at 85% and lowest for married women at 33%. While amongst men the highest gross weekly income is received by those who are married, amongst women the never-married and widowed receive the highest amounts (ONS 2004a).

³ Dunne makes this argument in relation to lesbian lifestyles, wherein the necessity for economic independence may likewise "be a strong motivating factor in encouraging the acquisition of skills" (1997:125).

gendered division of labour between paid and unpaid work. There is little research on the contemporary employment situation of single women, and much of the recent literature on women and employment has implicitly assumed a couple household. This literature addresses developments in the labour market in the context of wider societal changes and has led to valuable insights, however it overlooks the experiences of those outwith such households. Equality for women in the sphere of paid employment has been a major objective of feminism, and recent decades have seen the introduction of much legislation and a formal commitment to equal opportunities. This has occurred alongside other labour market change. Economic restructuring in a context of globalisation has led to a decline in manufacturing and the growth of services, changes accompanied by an increase in female economic activity rates and a decline in those of men⁴. Inter-related changes such as the attenuation of full-time employment and welfare provision predicated on a breadwinner-caregiver model, changing household structures and the emergence of women as “major players in the economic sphere” have been argued as heralding a change in women’s relation to employment (Bradley, 1998: 210; see also Walby, 1997). However, the ability to participate in the labour market has long been a prerequisite of single women’s autonomy (Gordon, 1994:161).

Theories of increasing individualisation and reflexive modernisation similarly contend that fundamental and widespread changes occurring in recent decades in post-industrial societies have led to a new kind of work and relationship to the labour market (see Beck 1992, 2000; Giddens 1991, 1998). Such theories of social change also suggest that the standardised biography has been replaced by a ‘choice’ biography. These changes are argued to have brought about shifts in the meanings individuals confer to their careers in terms of personal identity, with employment providing a new form of subjectivity for workers: no longer an activity undertaken only for instrumental reasons, work is increasingly the basis of self-fulfilment (see also Rose, 1999). Dominant theories about the contemporary relationship between identity and work treat the experience of men and women in the “new capitalism” as essentially the same, and “generate an expectation of convergence between men and

⁴ Between 1984 and 2003 the economic activity rate for working age females increased from 67% to 73%, and decreased for men from 89% to 84%, halving the gap between women and men from 22 to 11 percentage points (2004a:52). However, much of the increase in women’s employment has been in part-time work, and in 2003 81% of part-time workers were female (ONS 2004a).

women's identities and aspirations" (Wajcman and Martin, 2002:986). Features of contemporary employment such as technological change, deregulation and increased flexibility have been associated with potential hazards as well as opportunities. Thus, Beck's emphasis on the burdens and susceptibility to risk that the continuous process of making life decisions places on individuals in the context of a market economy contrasts with Giddens' account of the increased liberation emerging from the weakening of structural constraints. This optimistic account has been queried by several commentators. As Bauman argues, "all of us are doomed to the life of choices, but not all of us have the means to be choosers" (1998:86).

However, there has been relatively little attention focussed on the gendered impacts of such changes in these debates (Perrons 2002, 2003; Wajcman and Martin, 2002). Recent changes in the labour market such as the erosion of the conditions underpinning a male breadwinner model and the increase in women's labour force participation imply a potential decline in the salience of gender in employment. Yet, while dual earner households are now "the most common form of family life" (Harrap and Moss, 1995:433), patterns of employment remain highly gendered. As Perrons observes, while there may be a narrowing of gender inequalities in terms of labour force participation rates, inequalities in terms of hours of work, segregation and earnings remain (2003:72)⁵. In addition, while optimistic accounts of changes in work suggest a reduction in gender inequality, other accounts indicate increased polarisation, insecurity and inequality along other axes such as social class (see Crompton, 1997; Breugal and Perrons, 1998)⁶. There is an increasing emphasis on paid employment as a route out of dependency and economic self-sufficiency, however it is the type of employment, in terms of aspects such as hours worked and wages received, that is central in considering the role of employment in challenging inequality (see Perrons 1998, 2003; Duncan, 2002). Furthermore, policies for care have had far less priority than policies for work and, rather than a "dual breadwinner"

⁵ In 2000-1 the hourly pay gap for full-time workers was 19 per cent, however the annual gender income gap was 49 per cent (EOC, 2003). The gender pay gap between women's part-time hourly earnings and men's full-time hourly earnings is 59 per cent (ONS, 2002a). In 1999 44% of women's employment was part-time, and female part-time workers worked on average 17.7 hours a week. Nearly 80% of women working part-time worked in female dominated jobs (more than 60% of the occupational workforce is female), compared to 57% of those working full-time (Daly and Rake, 2003).

⁶ Women's labour market participation rates have approximated those of men in a context of labour market deregulation and increasing polarisation in the terms and conditions of employment. The pursuit of an equal opportunities agenda within a liberal market regime has meant greater gender equality at the cost of rising inequality between women (Breugal and Perrons, 1998).

model, most couple households are typified by a “one and a half adult worker” model (Lewis 2001, 2002). As Chapter Five has noted, the need to revalue care work has also been a longstanding objective of feminism. Increased labour force participation, alongside a lack of attention to the gender inequalities in the distribution of unpaid work, means a double burden or “second shift” for those women with domestic and care responsibilities for others (see Hochschild 1989, 2003). The persistence of gender inequalities in employment has thus been explained in relation to women’s continuing responsibility for unpaid work (see Crompton, 1997; Hardill, 2003), while Lucas (2003) emphasises the importance of generational politics over gender, arguing it is children that make a crucial difference to the lives and aspirations of contemporary women.

A consideration of the employment experiences of single childless women potentially elucidates the extent to which characteristic aspects of women’s contemporary labour market experience is attributable to their partnership or parental status as well as gender. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study were financially self-sufficient, while most were, or had been, in full-time employment. While this ostensibly demonstrates an ‘adult worker’ model of employment, participants’ employment narratives suggests this may not necessarily imply ‘gender-neutrality’ at work. This chapter looks at the education and employment experiences of participants, and considers what these indicate about changes over time in labour market relations. These experiences suggest a complex story, in which various factors such as age and social class, as well as partnership status and gender, are significant⁷. These factors are often inter-related in various ways. The chapter is divided into two main sections: the first considers the various factors and motivations shaping participants’ educational achievements, while the second looks in more detail at the varied employment experiences of participants. This section considers these experiences in terms of several themes: the requirement for financial self-sufficiency; the changing character of work; caring requirements; non-standard employment; and the significance of gender. These education and employment experiences are considered in relation to the historical contexts in which these took place, thus enabling an exploration of the impact of wider changes over time.

⁷ The age of participants is significant in indicating both the particular historical epoch to which their educational and employment experiences relate, as well as to their stage in the life course. As such their current age is always indicated, and reference made to particular decades where relevant.

Educational Achievement

The longstanding relationship between spinsterhood and higher educational qualifications is reflected in the qualifications reported by participants. As Chapter Three has detailed, the overwhelming majority of participants had higher education qualifications, nearly three-quarters (27) had a degree and a third (12) had or were undertaking post-graduate qualifications. Nearly a fifth of participants (7) had left school either at or before 16, four with no qualifications. However, at the time of interview only three participants had no qualifications.

Previous research on never-married women suggests one interpretation of their higher status occupations may be that these are a self-selected group who choose to develop their careers rather than combining them with marriage and motherhood (see Kiernan, 1988). However, the narratives of participants indicate various factors influenced decisions about higher education, and these were not always related to career development *or* partnership status in a straightforward way. In addition, the educational achievements of participants were not necessarily reflected in their income⁸. While most participants had higher educational qualifications, several had not continued in education on leaving school. The following sections look at the various factors influencing decisions to pursue or leave education following school, as well as the diverse motivations of participants returning to education as mature students.

Leaving Or Remaining In Education

Many participants who continued in higher education related this less to considerations of pursuing a specific career than to other factors. For example, the narratives of several women from professional/middle class backgrounds who went on to university after school indicated the influence of parental expectations. Joan and Brenda were both from the 1960s cohort. Joan, 40, described “an unwritten assumption that I’d go to university [...] it was always going to be that way, I was going to go”, while Brenda, 37, joked “if I had said that I didn’t want to do a degree I would probably have been crucified!”. Katherine, born in the 1930s, similarly stated

⁸ Nearly half reported an annual income below the male average of £17,100, while ten reported an income less than the £11,200 median income for women in the UK in 2000 (Women and Equality Unit, 2002:105).

“it always seemed to be just taken for granted that I would go”. Thus, while participants may also have considered higher education important, factors other than individual choice were relevant in shaping their educational histories, in this case a cultural expectation related to social class.

While this expectation was evident across all cohorts there were differences in terms of employment expectations, related to the period in which higher education was undertaken. Thus Katherine, attending university in the 1950s, stated “you never questioned that you would get a job at the end of it all, so that you went on studying as long as you were able to, really”, although she noted both parental financial support and ability as necessary prerequisites. Joan and Brenda attended university in the 1980s, an era when educational qualifications were considered advantageous in a competitive labour market. This employment climate was referred to by Brenda in her school’s suggestion she pursue a science subject for vocational reasons: “they felt that was better for jobs because [...] this was Thatcherite Britain, and the idea that education and jobs were inextricably linked was forming at that stage”. Nevertheless, Brenda chose to study classics and subsequently trained as an accountant. Both Joan and Brenda reported having no definite career in mind on graduation. The lack of a strategic career path, in particular in early adulthood, was common in participants’ narratives⁹. This was illustrated in Katherine’s account, in which she described undertaking a Doctorate and subsequently pursuing a career as a research scientist, despite originally intending to teach after doing a general science degree. Her narrative depicts her subsequent career not in terms of a strategic career path but more as the outcome of a series of opportunities that emerged while studying:

“I decided I was going to teach. And then [...] this grant came up and it was for a year in the first instance, so I thought the work sounded interesting and so I’d do it for a year, and then I’d go to teaching, having got a little bit of experience of working behind me. But in the end it went on for 14 years, so by that time, I didn’t want to go back to being a student [...] Both my education and my work, a lot of it was not conscious decisions, although I have thoroughly enjoyed my work, particularly”.

[Katherine, 65]

⁹ Several participants retrained or returned to education at a later age, considered further below.

A prevalent feature of participants' accounts was the predominance of feminised occupational choices, with many also referring to teaching or nursing as something they considered¹⁰. While a number of participants reported enjoying their work and clearly experienced considerable career success, the lack of a strategic 'career narrative' was also a feature of many accounts. This was evident in several ways, either related by participants themselves or in the foregrounding of other factors and motivations shaping decisions about education and employment. This can be seen in part as reflecting a work orientation in which other goals were prioritised, and this is considered further below. However, it may also reflect a discursive tactic whereby single women sought to avoid presenting themselves as having chosen the pursuit of a career over marriage and motherhood, a longstanding stereotype of singleness also considered below¹¹.

The social class background of participants was also significant in the accounts of participants who did not continue in education following school. Notably, all participants who left school either at or before 16 were from working class backgrounds. The narratives of older participants who did not continue in education illustrate both the impact of social class location and historical context. For example, Faith, 83, reported her father dying in the 1920s, and her mother having responsibility for looking after three young children as well as her own invalid mother. The oldest child, Faith left school at 14, remaining at home with her mother to help care for her grandmother. She also worked full-time in factories until her retirement. Another participant, Nora, 70, described herself and four siblings all leaving school at 14 without qualifications. While another brother had passed the 11 plus, further education was not possible as "I think they couldn't afford the uniform or whatever". On leaving school Nora also started employment in a factory. Kitty, 71, who left school at 13, also reported financial reasons as restricting her opportunities to pursue education: "we had no money and there were no student grants and there was no chance to go to university, so I never achieved the way I would have liked to achieve".

¹⁰ Eight participants had trained as teachers, seven as secretaries, and a further two did both. Two trained as nurses. This did not appear to differ across cohorts, and five of the nine with secretarial training were from the 1960s cohort. However, not all had experienced employment or continued working in these fields.

¹¹ As Chapter Two has outlined, the image of professional single women pursuing career success in lieu of family life is longstanding, despite arguments such as that of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim that this is 'an emerging problem' related to contemporary conditions (1995:63).

Olive, born in the 1930s and also from a working class background, did continue in school. Her narrative describes the importance placed on education as a route out of the factory work her parents had done. She did well academically, however decided to leave education for financial reasons and at seventeen successfully took Executive Officer exams for the civil service:

“In our day it (education) was a passport out of going into [local factory] or anything like that, if you had a decent education, it wasn't that they were all saying it but you just knew and you just did your best [...] The Head Master said to me why don't I go to University, but the thing was my brother had to exist on very very little, it was before the grants (*so he had gone to university?*) Yes he had gone to university and it was the Carnegie grant but he never had any money, I mean I never had any money, you never had any money to go anywhere, I thought 'och I'd better go out and earn some money'”.

[Olive, 71]

These excerpts illustrate the material implications of social class location, as well as the absence of state provision limiting access to higher education. The role of the welfare state in enabling opportunities and managing risk for individuals is considered further below. These accounts also indicate that the factors shaping the educational experiences of participants in early adulthood were not just material but also cultural, illustrated in the parental expectations mentioned by participants. The section below considers the various factors evident in decisions to return to education.

Returning to Education as a Mature Student

Several participants acquired qualifications as mature students (see Chapter Three), and this can be seen as indicating these participants' recognition of the possibility of remaining single encouraging the acquisition of qualifications. However, varied motivations were evident among adult returners. While for some women returning to education was related to a desire to widen career opportunities, for others higher education was undertaken for reasons unrelated to career enhancement. This is demonstrated in the following excerpts, which also indicate the external opportunities and constraints pertinent to particular epochs.

Nora, who left school at 14 with no qualifications, worked for many years in various factory and shop jobs. Despite finding school a “horrible experience” she remained interested in education and attended various evening classes, taking some purely for interest but also studying shorthand and typing, which led to employment in office jobs. In her 40s Nora did a course designed for adult returners, and subsequently a degree in English, from which she derived great pleasure. Her narrative suggests her decision to do so was shaped by a mix of external circumstances enabling the opportunity to pursue a longstanding interest in education:

“I heard about this – if you felt you hadn’t got on well in education [...] an opportunity to go back ... marvellous ... That was really an opening for me [...] you were in full-time education and I got a grant, it was marvellous, compared to nowadays [...] Anyway, it went well, and then I discovered that some of the others were going on (to study for a degree) as a mature student, so I thought ‘I’ve been as good as them in the class, so I can’ [...] (*so when you started that you hadn’t intended to do it as a preliminary to further study, it was just for interest?*) Yes, to try and satisfy this feeling, that I felt so uneducated really”

[Nora, 70]

Flora, born in the 1940s, depicted returning to education in her late 50s as a way out of a “very demoralising” work environment. She described considerable rationalisation in the public sector organisation where she had worked for fifteen years, despite active union campaigning in which Flora had been involved: “why I became involved in union politics [...] was the initial downsizing, 1988 [...] they were cost-cutting and using ‘natural wastage’ as they put it, in terms of employees [...] this was going on all over the country, quite relentlessly”. The impact of changes in the labour market in recent decades is addressed further below, however for Flora it acted as a push towards education unrelated to career goals. Flora described applying successfully for a scholarship provided by her union to undertake further education, and after a year at college subsequently did a degree in women’s studies.

“I think that ethos, and the spirit that we were inured with as far as fighting the closures at the time (mid-1990s) was dissipated somewhat and we got quite disillusioned [...] so I was thinking ‘God, I’ve got another five years, what am

I going to do, I can't stand it!' [...] (*And when you applied for the scholarship, had you previously thought about returning to education?*) No, I mean I'd done one or two courses, but I can't honestly say I had considered higher education, probably because it seemed too daunting to consider at that stage! Having left education in 1958, so this was almost 40 years [...] I knew that I as about to retire anyway, so I wasn't gearing myself towards a career so to speak."

[Flora, 61]

Several participants depicted a return to education as motivated by personal goals unrelated to career considerations. This was evident in accounts across all cohorts, and also appeared unrelated to the age at which participants decided to return. For example Maureen, 43, who had worked as a librarian since completing a degree in her early twenties, was a Christian and about to commence training via distance learning for the auxiliary ministry which she intended to practise part-time in addition to her current employment. Mandy, 39, had started a degree after leaving school however left before completing the course. After several years of unemployment she set up a business designing and making clothes. In her late twenties she returned to higher education, completing a year at a further education college followed by a degree at a College of Art, for which she received a grant: "I decided that I would go and explore my creativity [...] the idea was to go to art school, and sort of just to kind of completely open up the potential of what I could do creatively".

For some participants the motivation to undertake higher education was related to a desire to widen career opportunities after having experienced unsatisfactory employment. This is illustrated in excerpts from two participants born in the 1960s cohort, both of whom entered banking on leaving school¹². Nevertheless, both narratives indicate that neither participant had a clear career path in mind when undertaking further education. Louise left school at 16 in order to start working, as

¹² Research on employment in banking notes that while openly exclusionary practices such as women recruited into banking as a secondary labour force to carry out routine tasks were removed by equality legislation in the 1970s, these continued to be informally reproduced. For example, throughout the 70s and into the 80s young men, but not young women, were encouraged to take the banks' professional exams essential for promotion. While both legislation and the banks own policies have now outlawed discrimination against women who aim to develop a career in banking, this has occurred alongside massive restructuring and cutbacks of staff, thus growing insecurity in banking (Crompton and Birkelund, 2000).

she did not get on with her stepfather and her priority was “to leave the house as soon as I could”. She initially worked in a bank, however left after five years as it “wasn’t very good money”. She also worked part-time in pubs and nightclubs to earn extra income. Louise returned to full-time education at twenty-four, firstly doing further school level qualifications then a Higher National Certificate in business studies. Louise’s enjoyment of higher education was a theme common to several narratives:

“I went back to college [...] I thought it was a buzz because you were actually getting mental stimulation, which I really really enjoyed, whereas in a bank, it was just a grind all day. Working in the bar, you were getting the social side, but you weren’t really getting challenged up here. So I just absolutely loved it, it was great [...] (*Why did you go back to studying, was that because you wanted to pursue a particular career, or was it to get more qualifications generally?*) You know, I wasn’t really sure what kind of career, I still wanted to work with numbers, and I had a bit of a hankering for accountancy, but I still wasn’t a hundred per cent that it was going to be accountancy. But yeah, basically I was studying to try and get a bit of a better career”.

[Louise, 37]

Louise subsequently did a degree in accountancy in her thirties, however at the time of interview had not completed the requisite professional exams. She was currently working full-time on a temporary contract doing accounts for a national charity, and working part-time at weekends to “bring in a bit of extra cash”.

Debra also began working in a bank on leaving school. She described starting the job as a temporary alternative prior to commencing a degree at a college of art, yet continued working for seven years: “I had got my place at college, so I could leave school to go and earn some money, and then once I started earning money that was it”. She relates her decision to leave banking to an awareness of the requirement of further study for career progression:

(*Why did you decide to leave the bank?*) I was not on the career ladder. I was just going to be one of these women who worked at the front counter, either on the cash or on the accounts [...] I worked my way up into the corporate lending side and I was doing that (*And did you aim towards that?*) No, no, I

didn't, I just ended up doing it because I was good at it and I actually set up a new, what's called a desk [...] and then the bank did a job evaluation on it and it came out a grade higher than I was and the manager at the time (laughs) said 'well, you don't have bank exams, so I'll need to give it to one of the boys but could you teach him how to do the job please?' [...] And so I sort of realised that I'd either do three years study to do my bank exams to give me the opportunity to progress in the bank or go to university".

[Debra, 37]

Debra returned to college in her mid-twenties to update her qualifications, and then undertook a general arts degree at university, which she "just loved". She initially considered training as a teacher, however instead did a postgraduate qualification in human resources, a decision influenced by meeting women working in this field. Debra subsequently started work for a business firm and had been promoted to senior manager.

Life history research usefully enables a consideration of factors such as the motivation and timing of higher education, which potentially challenge simple correlations between partnership status and educational achievement. These excerpts demonstrate both the wide-ranging motives underlying participants' decisions to pursue or leave education, and the external opportunities and constraints prevailing in particular eras. The varied motivations and factors evident in decision-making in relation to education challenge attributions of these to individual preferences. Both material means and cultural norms - factors related to the historical and social class location in which decisions about education were made – were significant in shaping participants' attitudes and expectations as well as their educational histories.

Singleness for women necessitates financial self-sufficiency, thus can be seen as a factor encouraging women to pursue career development. As noted above, the majority of participants had higher education qualifications and nearly three quarters had a degree. However, the decision to pursue education was for many not related to a specific career choice. Human capital theorists attribute women's position in the labour market to actual or anticipated specialisation into paid and unpaid work, and many participants described expectations of marriage and motherhood predicated on a breadwinner/caregiver model as prevalent when they were younger. While for some

this was something they consciously rejected, for others this was part of their own taken for granted assumptions about their likely future. Some accounts indicated such expectations had shaped early career decisions. Thus Kathleen, born in the 1950s, undertook a secretarial course on leaving school at seventeen, and subsequently worked for some years in office jobs she “hated”, a decision she attributed to prevailing expectations about women’s employment.

“There was this expectation that yes, you are doing some sort of training, but if you only do it until you get married, of course you get married [...] I think I just presumed of course I will get married, of course it really ought to be to one of these boring people like an accountant or a solicitor or a doctor, a good middle class, secure professional! (laughs)”

[Kathleen, 47]

Various commentators have argued that changing societal conditions mean younger generations of women are more committed to career development (see Bradley 1998, Walby 1997), while Beck argues the equalisation of educational opportunity demonstrates “the expression of a strong career motivation among young women” (1992:111)¹³. However, while the lack of a specific career orientation in early adulthood was not universal, it was evident in all cohorts¹⁴. Thus Tessa, born in the 1960s, described doing a degree on leaving school, yet without a clear career path in mind. She stated that on graduating “I just didn’t know what I wanted to do [...] I always assumed I’d go to university and find a nice bloke, and I hadn’t really thought about a career afterwards”. However, Kathleen subsequently returned to education and retrained as a child psychotherapist, while Tessa had experienced promotion to management within the voluntary sector. This suggests both the significance of social contexts in which individual preferences are shaped, and the dynamic nature of these over time.

¹³ Young women in Britain are achieving better qualifications than previously and in comparison to men. For example, the proportion of young women achieving two or more GCE A levels (or equivalent) increased from 20% in 1992/3 to 43% in 2001/02, during which time the proportion for young men also increased, from 18% to 34% (ONS, 2004a). This has, however, given rise to concerns that young men are being disadvantaged.

¹⁴ The youngest participants were 35 at age of interview: younger generations of women brought up in a different social context may express more career-focused work orientations.

As noted above, several participants had returned to education or undertaken further training as mature students. Expectations of traditional marriage may have shaped the work orientations of some participants in early adulthood, nevertheless the educational and employment achievements of many participants indicate that these did not restrict career development in the long term. Dunne suggests that mechanisms exist within heterosexual relationships that “may act to pre-empt the possibility of women either experiencing or expanding employment opportunities” (1997:93). This research suggests that singleness may provide not just the motivation but also the opportunity for career development. In addition, as participants’ accounts of pursuing education for intrinsic reasons indicate, singleness can also be seen as enabling other opportunities. This argument is developed further in the following section, considering participants’ varied experiences of employment.

Experiences of Employment

The employment experiences of participants are considered here in relation to various themes; these are not discrete but are inter-related, however are considered separately in sections below for ease of analysis. One theme is that of financial self-sufficiency. Single childless women may be better placed to strive for this through wage labour, however low pay and fewer prospects for promotion for women compared to men form a “framework of restrictions” on the establishment of autonomy (Gordon, 1994:83). Another theme is that of the changing character of work. Over the last two decades employment in both the private and public sector has become more individualised and market oriented. There has been an explicit attempt to deregulate labour markets, and to privatise or deregulate the public sector (Perrons, 2000:293). These changes have been accompanied by a shift to personal responsibility for self-provision in the management of risk, exemplified by changes in the welfare state such as pension reforms (see Rowlingson, 2002). Another theme is that of participants’ own caring requirements. The caring responsibilities of participants have been considered in Chapter Five.

Women’s contemporary labour market status is often explained in relation to caring and domestic responsibilities, however the varied employment patterns of those without caring obligations highlights the significance of other factors. Another theme is the non-standard employment chosen by some participants without caring

responsibilities, a choice indicating the importance of other priorities over career goals, which illustrates that a gendered ‘framework of restrictions’ in employment did not preclude the exercise of autonomy for some. Nevertheless, the pursuit of autonomy outwith employment may also be an indication of the way in which this framework of restrictions shaped work orientations, and this theme is also considered below.

Financial Self-Sufficiency

The overwhelming majority of participants had experienced employment and were economically independent¹⁵. However, their current incomes and housing tenure, reported in Chapter Three, indicated their varied financial status¹⁶. This highlights the significance of diverse factors, including education levels and occupational class. The employment histories of participants also varied considerably in relation to personal as well as external factors. These factors were often related in complex ways, for example the financial status and stage in the life course of participants shaped responses to external events such as redundancy.

The employment histories of several participants demonstrate conventional career success and enjoyment of work. However, asked about disadvantages of singleness, several referred to having to rely on one income. The narratives of some participants illustrated that economic activity, even when full time and long term, may not be sufficient to ensure financial independence. For example Faith, 83, spent her working life in two factories since leaving school at 14 with no qualifications. Her narrative illustrates the consequences of long-term low paid employment. Her income, derived from a combination of state pension and income support, was less than £5,000 a year, and she currently lived in sheltered housing, having previously always lived in council housing.

Several participants described working very long hours. Some explicitly related this to the necessity for self-sufficiency, while for others this was also related to low paid employment. These features are illustrated in Katy’s account. Born in the 1940s,

¹⁵ One participant had not experienced paid employment due to ill-health, and some participants were in receipt of state benefits, either due to ill-health or retirement.

¹⁶ For example, reported annual incomes ranged from less than £5,000 to £70,000, and one third did not own their own homes.

Katy described regularly working long hours including overtime, as “there’s just one wage coming in”. She had previously worked in the railway sector for many years, but had taken early retirement at fifty and was currently working in the civil service. Katy’s past and current employment had required shift work, which she preferred as it was a means of earning more. However, Katy was unsure whether she would be able to sustain working these hours: “on an early shift I get up at half past three in the morning, I don’t want to be doing that in my late fifties”.

Katy’s narrative indicated she considered it important to plan ahead in terms of finances: “I like to be organised so I know what is on from of me, expenditure-wise”. While she had not yet been able to reduce her working hours as she had hoped, Katy had invested the lump sum she received on retiring from the railway as financial security for her future, and described looking forward to her retirement:

“The money that I got when I retired I invested, and I invested it long term [...] so I know that that’s there for the future. I also have a railways pension [...] I could have left it till I was sixty, I decided to take the pension now, the idea being it would supplement my income and stop me doing overtime! (wry laughter) [...] I can’t wait (for retirement), I just hope I have the health to enjoy it [...] Although I enjoy working and it fills up a big part of my life, when it goes I don’t see it being a problem because there is so much I want to do that I don’t have time to do”.

[Katy, 53]

However, subsequent to the interview Katy wrote that her savings had been negatively affected by revaluation in the stock market. Rowlingson’s (2002) research on pension provision argues that the shift to individual planning through the market may exacerbate existing inequalities, as people vary in resources and capacities to make future provision, such that it is already advantaged groups (those whose lives were stable, who had a predisposition for self-reliance, who were financially literate and who had high incomes) who were best able to capitalise on policies encouraging private provision (see also Arber and Ginn, 2004). Katy’s account also highlights the risk of market provision. Furthermore, several participants stated their current income did not allow the possibility of private pension provision. For some the complexity and risk associated with private pensions schemes was also a source of concern, and

several expressed anxiety about being able to maintain an adequate income as they got older.

Nevertheless, while some were anxious about their future financial situation, others were more sanguine. In part, this reflected an attitude espoused by several of not being materialistic and requiring only a sufficient income¹⁷. The foregrounding of other priorities over wealth is illustrated in the accounts of those who chose non-standard employment, looked at below. However, for some their experience of financial self-provisioning had contributed to a confidence in their ability to provide for themselves. This outlook was illustrated by two participants who currently held more than one job. Queenie, 51, had worked mainly in the hotel and catering industry after a year at catering college following school. She was currently employed full-time as a shop manager for a charity, and also worked part-time in the evenings washing dishes. She stated “I’m not a material person, and I’ve always managed with what I’ve got, so I don’t worry about money [...] I’ll always get work, I don’t care what I do”. Another participant, Louise, described a non-standard employment history that included several breaks to travel abroad, during which she rented out her house. She was currently working full-time for a national charity, and had a part-time job at weekends. When asked about her financial future Louise replied:

“I’m not really that bothered [...] because I have got a lot of work experience, I know I will get work of some sort, it might not be very well paid, I could be back into working in bars or shops, or back into working at the bank, although it would be a lot less money it would still be enough to pay the mortgage [...] I’ve very much got this attitude that life’s too short, you’ve got to have some sort of personal goals as well”

[Louise, 37]

Both Queenie and Louise were from working-class backgrounds. Allen (1989) has argued that the disproportionate representation of highly-educated, professional career women among the never-married has resulted in the experiences and meanings of singleness for working-class women being obscured. Based on her own research she contends that, without access to the same resources or occupational rewards, non-

¹⁷ What constitutes a sufficient income is clearly subjective, and the incomes of those participants who expressed this ranged considerably.

professional, never-married women do not organise their lives around the worker role, despite their lengthy work history (1989:36). While an instrumental attitude to employment was not universal in this research, it was however evident amongst participants from all cohorts and all classes. Factors shaping work orientations are considered further below.

Many participants clearly valued the autonomy their financial independence enabled. It provided some participants with options in relation to employment such as career breaks or part-time work, looked at below. Financial status was also a factor in the decision to opt into single motherhood¹⁸. The economic status of single mothers has been considered an important indicator of the extent to which women can form autonomous, solvent households independent of men (see Hobson, 1994; Christopher, 2001). The emphasis on financial independence evident in some solo mothers' accounts may in part reflect a concern to distinguish themselves from negative stereotypes of single motherhood. However, the ability to opt into solo motherhood can also be understood as reflecting increased educational and employment opportunities, in conjunction with cultural and technological changes.

As Perrons has argued, whether the feminisation of employment is progressive “depends on the nature of the work, the broader economic, political and social context within which it takes place, and the more specific circumstances of the women themselves” (1998:20). The following section considers the changing character of work, and the way in which this impacted on employment experiences.

The Changing Character of Work

Changes in employment in recent decades include an increased emphasis on individual performance, and the intensification of work and development of a ‘long hours culture’ (see Gregg and Wandsworth, 1999; Burchell et al., 1999). Several narratives demonstrated that these changes were variously mediated by personal factors such as age and financial status. This is illustrated below in the accounts of three participants who had spent their working life with the same organisations in the public sector.

¹⁸ Chapter Seven looks at other factors, such as supportive family networks, that participants described as enabling this decision.

The majority of participants born in or before the 1930s, now all retired, had experienced full-time long-term employment in the same sector. Two who had taken early retirement related their decision in part to changes in work. Katherine, 65, spent her career working for the National Health Service. In her late fifties she reduced her working hours, motivated in part by her mother “needing more and more care and attention” as well as changes in her employment: “the department was, what the Americans call ‘downsizing’, and I thought that so long as I could continue to work part time, I would take early retirement to fit in with the department's needs”. While Katherine described, “thoroughly enjoying” her work, she considered this a “very good” arrangement, which she appreciated as it gave her more time¹⁹.

Olive also spent her professional career in the public sector with the same employer, however her account of employment in the civil service suggests she remained there for reasons of financial security, rather than any intrinsic rewards. Such an instrumental attitude was prevalent in several accounts, and is discussed below. Olive described her “very political” family as active in the trade union movement, and Olive served as Secretary of her local union branch in the 1970s. Despite experiencing promotion, Olive did not regard career progression as a priority. She took early retirement in the late 1980s at fifty-six, a decision motivated by a workload she described as “very very stressful”, and she continued working in odd jobs for financial reasons until pensionable age:

“(So you had been trying for this (promotion)? Aye, and I always remember senior staff in the office saying ‘for God sake keep off Women’s Lib, and don’t mention CND’ (laughs) and all this, ‘you want the job don’t you!’ and I said ‘I don’t want it under those terms!’ [...] I wanted to retire because I thought I would die I was so exhausted, I had a very very heavy workload [...] I mean they were bringing in so much automation that one had the chance to go, so I was in the lot that was eligible, so I just went [...] I feel I am getting the good of having stuck it out now that I am getting a decent pension, but ... very soulless the civil service”

[Olive, 71]

¹⁹ Chapter Five has addressed the way in which caring obligations are shaped by both partnership status and gender. The impact of participants’ caring needs on employment is considered below.

Some women depicted changes at work as an opportunity to consider a career change or the possibility of part-time employment after many years working full time, a decision enabled in part by their particular financial status and stage in the life course. However, for some women such changes were experienced less as a choice or opportunity but as necessitated by their employment. For example Maureen, born in the 1950s, had also spent her working life to date with the same employer in the public sector. Changes in her employment following local government re-organisation during the 1990s meant a move from what Maureen described as “a super job [...] I enjoyed what I did and I was good at it too” to a new post which required shift work. Maureen felt she had little choice about accepting these changes:

“The [name] council, decided that they didn’t have enough money to offer, to provide the service [...] and so I was dislocated, disaggregated, removed, relocated, whichever, whatever [...] they said to me that there was this new post being created and we think that you could do this. And that was probably a polite way of saying that if you don’t want this then you will have to go (*and was it considered as promotion or was it sort of sideways, creating this new post?*) No, it was more of a sideways, more of a sideways step. I mean, the money - I am earning more now than I was but that’s probably to do with the fact that I am working shifts and weekends, which was a major upheaval at the beginning”

[Maureen, 43]

Empirical research has related an intensification of work to increased perceptions of job insecurity among employees over the last three decades (Burchell et al., 1999). Participants’ narratives indicate many experienced both long working hours and job insecurity. More than a quarter of participants (10) had experienced redundancy, of whom the majority (6) were from the youngest cohort. Again, the implications of redundancy were mediated by factors such as stage in the life course and financial situation. For example Franny, from the 1940s cohort, had just been made redundant at the time of interview. Franny was fifty-eight, and had worked full-time in bookselling since leaving school at eighteen. She was with two companies for eight years and twenty-five years respectively, and then had various short-term jobs, as “the collapse of the small companies has just been phenomenal”. Franny was now considering getting a part-time job until retirement:

“(So you’re finishing full-time work...but it’s not through choice?) No, it’s absolutely not through choice, I’m pissed off about it! [...] I really only have a couple of years to go, and I don’t want to do something I really don’t like. So why not have a bit more leisure, and just do something, I mean I don’t really care what I do”

Franny had a private pension that, in addition to the state pension, should “hopefully give me enough to live on” in retirement. This was also related to not requiring a large income, as well as being eligible for various subsidies such as free travel and reduced prices for leisure services:

“This house is so small, you know, the running costs are very very little, and providing I get a council tax rebate, I can live on very little [...] I mean I’m not going to be terribly rich, but as long as I have enough to go to the cinema, a little meal now and again, get my hair cut and things like that, I should be fine”.

[Franny, 58]

Some participants thus regarded redundancy as an opportunity to work less or reconsider career directions. However, this was clearly related to factors such as age and financial status. The following excerpts illustrate the anxiety caused by insecure employment, especially for participants responsible for their own financial provision or with responsibility for others. Furthermore, while as noted above several participants did not depict a strategic career narrative, some participants did express specific employment-related objectives. The following excerpts from younger participants who had experienced redundancy also demonstrate the impact of external events on these ambitions, necessitating career changes that were depicted as imposed rather than chosen.

This is illustrated by Tricia’s employment history. Born in the 1950s, Tricia joined the Army after completing a degree in teaching, subsequently undertaking a Masters degree as part of “a career plan” she described as “to be the boss! The first female boss”. However, Tricia was affected by the massive redundancy programme instituted in the Army in the 1990s, leaving in 1995 and subsequently working as a lecturer in further education. She described this sector as currently experiencing

changes including mergers of colleges, which raised the possibility of having “to apply for my own job”. Now 44, Tricia stated she had “lost that ‘I’ve got to be at the top’ attitude”. In addition, she observed that army pensions “are designed for thirty-five years service”, while the teacher’s pension which “used to be very good (is) crap now”. Tricia thus thought she would now have to work until she was seventy, and expressed considerable concern about her own financial future.

Another career-orientated account was that of Birgit, also from the 1950s cohort. Birgit had travelled abroad to study, graduating with an MBA from an American Ivy League university at twenty-six and commencing work in banking. Her narrative suggests considerable ambition and she described moving from her Scandinavian country of origin to London in the early 1990s because it was “where everything was happening” in terms of the financial markets. However, Birgit had subsequently experienced redundancy three times. When first made redundant in 1993 Birgit entered the wine trade, and spent some time retraining and managing a wine retail outlet. However she found the industry “very unprofessional” and “very badly paid”, and returned to employment in the City, latterly with a software company. Birgit attributed her third redundancy to having a child. While her income was amongst the highest reported, this referred to her previous employment, and following her third redundancy she had taken out a career development loan to fund a “very practical, technical” Masters degree which she hoped will enable employment in a similar job. Being the sole provider for her child was a source of anxiety for Birgit.

Financial independence was a valued aspect of singleness for many, and several participants clearly also gained intrinsic rewards from their employment. Yet, several reported onerous expectations and excessive hours. Some participants joked about being supported by a male partner as a way to work less, illustrated in the following excerpts from participants born in the 1960s. Fenella, 38, from a working class background, depicted her education and employment history in terms of personal achievement, nevertheless also described her current employment in the higher education sector as very demanding. She expressed anxieties about her poor health and her current workload, commenting “I don’t think I can keep up this line of work at this pace indefinitely [...] maybe I’ll just have to find a man and marry him and whatever just so I can go part-time! (laughs) [...] who said being a career girl was that

fantastic, you know!”. Joan, from a middle class background, worked full-time in private sector employment she described as enjoying. She similarly commented:

“Sometimes I would like to have the option of giving up work, and of course having children would be a way of doing that, although my God I know that it is not an easy option! But it would be different from work [...] I think what I would love is [...] to be free to have choice – but that ain’t going to happen unless – what if I meet a very rich man, that would be – I might even actually still end up working again secretly if I didn’t have to, I don’t know! (laughs)”

[Joan, 40]

This excerpt exemplifies an ambivalence towards employment expressed by several participants. This research suggests this may in part be explained by changes in employment that have led to increasing insecurity as well as an intensification of work. Such changes may thus be amongst the factors shaping the work orientations of participants, explored further in the final section of this chapter.

Chapter Five detailed the implications of caring responsibilities for participants. The following section indicates how employment histories were also shaped by participants’ own health and care needs.

Care Requirements

Most participants were financially self-sufficient, however two described experiences of long term health problems that meant they were unable to work. Shona, from a working-class background, left school at 16 without qualifications. She described her home life as abusive and herself as having emotional difficulties and being “prone to depression”. Shona, 39, had never been in regular employment, although she had done voluntary work with an environmental organisation and spent two years with the Territorial Army. She had also gained a school level qualification through adult education classes. Shona became pregnant at 28 while in a cohabiting relationship, however the father “walked out” on learning of the pregnancy. After a difficult birth Shona had post-natal depression, and her child had since been looked after by social services. She had spent several periods in hospital, and was currently living in supported accommodation for people with mental health problems. Her income,

reported as £47.50 a week, was derived entirely from social security. Both Shona and her son were dependent on welfare state provision for their care and maintenance.

Wendy, 54, retrained as a teacher following completion of her Doctorate at 26, and subsequently worked as a lecturer in further education. However, following a period of looking after her mother while continuing in employment, Wendy developed ME and had not worked since 1988. She was now in receipt of Incapacity Allowance related to her previous salary, and reported an income of £12,000 a year. During her illness Wendy had taken in lodgers for both financial reasons and to have someone to help care for her. She had recently sold her property with a view to buying another large enough to allow several lodgers, in order to supply an income in retirement. Wendy had subsequently retrained and would like to be self-employed part-time, however feared this would impact on her benefits. The financial implications of her interrupted employment history, particularly after retirement age, were a source of considerable anxiety.

These excerpts illustrate the financial consequences for those unable to participate in the labour market due to their own care needs, and highlights the importance of the welfare state in managing such risks. As these excerpts demonstrate, unforeseen events such as ill-health may mean dependency on the welfare state, and a quality of life dependent on the quality of state provision. This dependency has particular implications in the context of a shift from Keynesian to monetarist economic policies, and an accompanying ethos of individual responsibility wherein state provision is becoming increasingly residualised²⁰.

This individualistic ethos was evident in the way the caring obligations of others were described by some participants, with a few suggesting children were a personal responsibility that should not impinge on work. For example Betty, 48, commented that while female colleagues with school age children might have crises with childcare or illness, “as a general principle they bend over backwards not to

²⁰ The status of state pension provision in recent decades exemplifies this tendency. Since 1980 the value of the basic state pension has declined relative to national earnings, while those retiring with private occupational pensions received increasingly large amounts. The shift from state to private pension provision means that growing inequalities in earnings, structured according to factors such as gender, educational level and occupational class, translate into a widening dispersion of later life income (ONS 2004a:11). Nevertheless, as Katy’s narrative above illustrated, private pension provision also individualises risk.

disadvantage the work that I'm responsible for because they know that I don't approve of children! (laughs)". This attitude may reflect a concern expressed by several participants that family friendly policies mean single childless people being expected to work extra hours to compensate for time taken off by parents. Queenie, 51, described having to undertake different tasks when female colleagues had unexpected childcare requirements, and joked "I've often said to the boss 'I'm going out to adopt five children, is that alright?' (laughs)". The stigma associated with singleness and childlessness for women may also be a factor explaining a somewhat defensive tone in accounts comparing the different priority accorded to varying commitments. For example, Louise stated:

"I'm quite vocal about that because somebody will say, 'well I've got kids', and I'm like 'well, I've got a life as well, I didn't choose to have kids', and I'll think well, you should have thought of that before you had kids. Don't go having kids and then trying to, sort of, pull rank in the workplace. Because my life, my choices are just as important as yours [...] when I was studying it came up a couple of times, people would say 'but I've got kids', and I would say 'well, I've got an education to get'"

[Louise, 37]

A prevalent understanding of caring as an individual choice, as well as a woman's responsibility, does not only have implications for those with direct caring responsibilities, but may also contribute to polarisation amongst women. Chapter Five highlighted the need to recognise that caring for others is work, and for a revaluing of this work. This section highlights the consequences for those with caring requirements, exacerbated in a context of individual responsibility. As such, this research supports arguments for a revaluing of care to encompass the notion of this as a societal rather than an individual responsibility.

As mentioned above, several participants had not experienced a standard 'male' employment path of long-term full-time employment. Explanations for this were various, and included factors such as the caring requirements for others or of participants themselves, as well as labour market changes. However, non-standard

employment histories were also depicted in terms of choice²¹, and this is looked at below.

Choosing Non-Standard Employment

Several participants clearly enjoyed their work and felt a sense of satisfaction at doing it well. Nevertheless, some accounts indicated an instrumental work orientation. In addition, choices to work part-time, spend periods outside the labour market or take early retirement demonstrated the prioritising of time outside work. The following section looks at the accounts of four childless participants, all who work in education and chose non-standard employment. These excerpts demonstrate that characteristic features of female employment, for example part-time work, are not attributable only to caring obligations. Rather, these participants had chosen this as a means of enabling other valued ‘commodities’ such as more time to pursue other interests or goals.

Teaching has traditionally been seen as an appropriate profession for women. The prevalence of feminised occupational choices amongst participants has been mentioned above, and a quarter (9) of participants had teaching qualifications. Fran, born in the 1940s, did a degree at a college of art after school and after a year’s employment, chose to work freelance in textile design. She did this for ten years, a period in which she also did occasional odd jobs such as working in a bookstore “to bring in a bit of cash”. In her early thirties Fran did a teaching qualification, and has since been employed part-time teaching art to adults:

“When the textile industry crashed, I thought I’ll do a teaching certificate [...] I always promised myself that I would only teach part-time, so that I could do my own work. And then I did exactly what I planned. I taught part-time, and did my own work and had regular exhibitions, and [...] you know, I gradually built on it”

[Fran, 55, income £16,000]²²

²¹ This contrasts with narratives describing education or employment as the outcome of other factors, rather than in terms of conscious or deliberative decision-making. Equivocation in relation to choice is evident also in relation to partnership and parental status, considered further in Chapter Seven.

²² Incomes are included here to illustrate the varying financial positions of participants making such choices.

Fran described a balancing act between part-time teaching in various establishments and her art as “feast or famine!”. While she currently had “more teaching really than I want”, she described her “very chequered career” as somewhat insecure, as “if you are part-time, they can get rid of you if they run out of money. You know, you just get the boot”. Nevertheless, choosing non-standard employment had enabled her the opportunity to pursue her own art.

Another participant, Theresa, born in the 1950s, described undertaking a teaching qualification in her 40s purely as a way of making a living, stating “I really don’t like school teaching”. After leaving school she had spent several years running her own business and doing various jobs she described as “dead end”. Theresa then went to university in her early thirties to do a degree, and continued in education, completing a Doctorate at forty-four. She had attempted to get a lecturing position, however found this difficult, and eventually considered this an unattractive option. Theresa described her academic subject as one which “will never ever get you a job!”, and stated that retrospectively she would “probably do things very differently” and pursue a more vocational subject, but nevertheless stated she would “still do (her subject), I would just do it for myself, you know, because it’s a really interesting topic”. Theresa worked part-time as a teacher, and continued to pursue her own research. She was currently editing a book for publication, and did not consider an academic career would allow her the same freedom in terms of time. She was considering alternatives to teaching, such as buying and renting out properties, to enable her to have more time as well as generate an income:

“I wanted to be a lecturer, but I couldn’t find a job [...] my tutors and my friends were always doing all this admin work and teaching [...] You know half the time these days you have to do research in your own time – this is crazy! [...] I figured it might be easier to get an income in another way and do my own research [...] The idea was never to be a teacher as a career [...] the whole point (was) that you could [...] have a bit of time, either travelling, or doing the research”.

[Theresa, 46, income between £5/6,000²³].

²³ Theresa also rents out a property, and this reported income may not include rental income.

Betty, also born in the 1950s, spent three years teaching in Africa with Voluntary Services Overseas following her degree. Returning to Britain to work in a secondary school in her mid-twenties, she then decided she would rather continue working abroad as a means of experiencing life in other countries. After taking a Masters degree to get “qualifications to go back overseas, greater credibility”, Betty taught in different countries over a period of years. She returned to Britain in her late thirties to be near her elderly parents, and subsequently lectured in further education. Betty described herself as remaining in Britain to spend time with her widowed mother, however as “ready for a change” and intending to travel abroad in the future:

“I dare say I could stay in my present job until I retired. I think it’s very unlikely that I’ll do that, I will make the decision to stop working and go overseas, which will be a bad career move, but that doesn’t worry me [...] I certainly don’t see myself as working full-time until I’m sixty-five”

[Betty, 48, income £35,000]

Sarah, born in the 1960s, spent several years working firstly with the Meteorological Office and latterly with the Ministry of Defence after doing a science degree on leaving school. However, at thirty she decided to do a teaching qualification, and currently did supply teaching. Sarah’s narrative indicated an instrumental attitude to employment. “There was no need to take a permanent job for security, because there will always be plenty of supply work available, and if that’s not available I’ll do office temping work”. She recently stopped working for a year and did a Masters degree for interest, “just something I wanted to do”. She stated she would like to move to teaching part-time once she has paid her mortgage in order to enable more time for other interests.

The possibility of not pursuing a standard ‘male’ employment path of long-term full-time employment was rarely explicitly related by participants to their singleness; however, an advantage of singleness that many respondents reported was that of having the freedom to make choices, attributed by many to their singleness and childlessness. Sarah, 36, whose reported income was £13,300, stated: “there’s a lot of advantages to being single in that you have so much money and time to spend as you like, and you can take holidays and go places that you can’t once you have a family”.

Comparing her situation with that of friends, Betty remarked “all my married friends have children and they’re all hard up, you know [...] they’ve got school commitments, children’s schooling [...] they’ve got to stay in the job, because the job is security, I don’t have anything like that”²⁴.

These employment histories reflect choices enabled by participants’ singleness and, in particular, not having dependent children. While women’s labour market status has often been explained in relation to caring and domestic responsibilities for others, the non-standard employment choices of single childless participants indicate that other factors are also relevant. This research suggests these include an instrumental work orientation wherein some women sought to secure an adequate income in order to pursue other goals. Commentators critiquing the intensification in work of recent decades argue this is in part explained by the increasing importance of work for identity and material reward²⁵. Single women are particularly vulnerable to being targeted in such arguments, however excerpts from participants across all cohorts indicate a prioritising of other values than the purely material, and challenge arguments about the centrality of employment to self-identity.

Furthermore, participants’ accounts also reflect the significance of gender, indicated by features of employment such as vertical and horizontal segregation. For example, when asked how she compared her life with single men, Betty replied that most of her single male friends “have worked in Scotland all their lives, you know, their career - they’re Head Teachers in secondary schools, primary schools, whatever, and there’s that which is different to my history”²⁶. As Wacjman and Martin have argued (2002), several theorists of social change suggest the declining salience of gender in the workplace. This research however indicates the continuing significance of both gender and partnership status. Furthermore, it also suggests these may be implicated in shaping work orientations, considered in the following section which focuses on the

²⁴ The decision to pay for children’s schooling can also be understood as a choice shaping parents’ employment histories.

²⁵ For example, Lewis et al argue that “the power of money and consumerism in western capitalist societies underpins the dominance of work in our lives. At the individual level paid work has become central to identity, with perceptions of worth attached to consumer goods and money” (2003: 16).

²⁶ A higher proportion of men as a proportion of all men in the teaching profession in Scotland occupy management posts than women as a proportion of all women: one-quarter of men are in head teacher posts at primary level, compared to less than one in ten women. At secondary level only 3% of women compared to 12% of men have posts as head teachers, their deputies or assistants (Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 2001:46).

employment experiences of three participants from the most recent cohorts in this study.

Gender at Work

Feminist scholarship on the effect of work orientations on labour market behaviour has been critical of individual choice theories, such as Hakim's (1996, 2002) work that ascribes women's heterogeneous employment patterns to their personal preferences. Such theories have been critiqued for treating orientations and preferences as static and external to the labour market, for offering no explanation as to how these are formed or developed, and for downplaying structural constraints and differences in opportunities (see Ginn et al., 1996; Breugal, 1996; Fagan, 2001). Rather, as Fagan argues, work orientations are dynamic, and shaped by individuals' experiences in education and the labour market, their domestic circumstances and the options they face in a wider social context constituted by economic conditions, state policies and other social institutions, as well as cultural norms (2001: 242-243).

The employment accounts of three participants with experience of long-term full-time careers illustrate dynamic work orientations that their narratives suggest shaped, and were shaped by, their experiences in the labour market. Both gender and partnership status were important factors shaping their employment experiences. Thus Bridget, born in the 1950s, joined a retail company at seventeen, and trained in commercial management, the first woman in the company to do so. Her employment included considerable job mobility, relocating several times throughout Britain as well as travelling in Europe, which Bridget depicted as enjoyable. Remaining single was an explicit requirement from her employer, as well as necessitated by the demands of her employment:

“They'd never had a woman who was a commercial manager before [...] I was told that they would allow me to do this, but that anything I got wrong it would be because I was a woman and I would have to be better than the men, and there was no way that I could have a boyfriend, and that I would have to be able to move around and be involved in this job [...] (*So moving around wasn't a problem?*) It was exciting! I liked it, it was good [...] I enjoyed whatever I

did, I quite looked forward to being given the next assignment. And because I had no ties and no connections, it was all right”.

Bridget had undertaken her training in the early 1970s, however Brenda, born in the 1960s and who started employment as an accountant in the City in the late 1980s, also indicated her singleness was a factor in her employment, which similarly required travelling in Europe: “I was always quite suitable for non-standard work [...] so that is a useful thing for people to have”.

Bridget clearly enjoyed considerable career success, becoming the youngest and first female branch manager; however, she attributed this in part to having to ‘prove’ herself in a male-dominated environment. “I always excelled at what I did, because you have to remember at the back of my mind was always ‘if you don’t do better than the men, that will be because you’re a woman’”. After twenty-four years with the company Bridget left to work for a commercial company in the leisure industry, a decision she related to not wanting “to do the same thing for the next twenty years”, despite the well-paid environment and guaranteed pension. After six years she was head-hunted and began working for a transport operator, however was made redundant after fifteen months. Bridget described redundancy as an opportunity to reconsider her priorities. She stated she no longer wanted to work in the commercial sector, a decision related in part to previous experiences at work. At the time of interview Bridget was considering employment in the voluntary sector with an organisation that would allow her to work from home:

“In each of the organisations that I have been in, the frustration for me has always been that they won’t listen to what I am saying [...] very often I have been in a situation where what I have said has been the right answer, has been the way forward and it’s almost a case of ‘Oh, Miss Brown, just hold on, one of the men will suggest that in a minute’, and I’m not, you know, I’m not exaggerating [...] I want to do something that I think is decent [...] Again, I’ve been prepared to ... well, sacrifice is the word, being at home, to work for organisations that I think I’ve reached the stage where I think ‘hey, wait a minute, what are they giving me back?’”

[Bridget, 47]

Bridget owned two properties and her income was amongst the highest reported by participants. Her financial status was clearly a significant factor enabling decisions to change careers and to view redundancy as an opportunity to select a job reflecting her current priorities. However, her gender and partnership status were also significant. The explicit injunction that Bridget remain single while training in commercial management was not a requirement of male colleagues. This can be seen as an example of overt sexual discrimination, as with Bridget's experience of being overlooked²⁷. However, this also reflects an understanding that practices such as long working hours and job mobility are predicated on a gendered division of labour, thus have very different implications for married women with children than equivalent men²⁸.

Brenda also reported enjoying her work and the opportunity to travel. However, she described experiencing "incredible pressure" in her first job, and in her early thirties left the company because of the working hours, a decision she related in part to her singleness, as well as the impact on her social life generally.

"I was working with a lot of US companies who like to be able to phone you at ten o'clock at night and I decided that I had had enough of that [...] and I did find that while I found the work there (continental Europe) very, very interesting – it did also make me feel quite depressed in terms of not seeing my friends, not really [...] It meant that I was making it impossible, really, to have any stable kind of partnership [...] it wasn't making the other parts of my life sustainable"

[Brenda, 37]

Brenda continued to work in financial services, a sector she describes as "very male dominated". She described having been sexually harassed, although she did not raise this formally with her employers. While her new job did not require travelling, it was "very demanding", requiring working very late at night as well as at weekends.

²⁷ Some participants did recount experiencing sexual harassment or discrimination, however only one reported taking formal action to address this.

²⁸ This is evident in the response of Ruth Lea, head of policy at the Institute of Directors, to the Kingsmill report, in which she attributed the enduring gender pay gap to "marriage and children" (cited in *The Guardian*, 6th December, 2001).

Although she had always assumed that she “would get married and have children”, Brenda decided to have a child on her own in her mid-thirties. This decision was in part attributed to not having yet met a suitable partner, but also to a desire to change her lifestyle:

“It (deciding to have a child) was bound up with all kinds of things to do with the fact that I had started working very, very long hours again [...] You can’t have a proper life like that. You really can’t have a proper life [...] and so I came to the conclusion that this wasn’t the life that I wanted to lead and that the reason I had so much energy, and I do have a lot of energy, was because I should be having children and wanted to have children”

Brenda had a child at 37, and following maternity leave was currently working three days a week. She stated that motherhood “has limited my ultimate potential, where I can go”. However, this was depicted as not of fundamental importance to her, while she considered her work conditions as necessitating a change of career regardless of motherhood: “I’m not sure that that matters, to be honest. I’m not sure that for me it is the be all and the end all (pause) And do I want to be working at that rate for ever and ever? No I don’t. I mean I would have had to have done something”. Brenda’s income was amongst the highest reported. She was about to be made redundant, however like Bridget depicted this as not of immediate financial concern and an opportunity to consider options that would allow her to work less, such as consultancy work or retraining in order to work as a supply teacher.

Brenda’s narrative thus suggests that having a child had determined a desired career change. While this decision was clearly mediated by Brenda’s financial status, her account also indicates the importance of gender. Brenda’s onerous working conditions were evidently a factor underlying the decision to have a child and thereby work less. Nevertheless, she perceived her male colleagues were able to sustain both marriage and fatherhood as well as a demanding career, attributed to having wives who were not in employment: “what I realised was the men who were at my level [...] married and did have children, almost inevitably to women who were happy to give up working”.

Much feminist scholarship on gender and employment has emphasised the importance of considering the social context of male productivity. As Chapter Two notes, the structuring of employment around a presumption of a breadwinner/caregiver division of labour is an insight emerging from Second Wave feminism. Thus, Cockburn argued in 1983 that men's career achievements, the long hours they work, and their readiness to move around the country for promotion is predicated on women's domestic labour. Despite women's increased labour force participation in recent decades, several commentators argue that women's often disadvantaged employment situation (and men's advantaged employment circumstances) cannot be understood without reference to their home life situation (see Dunne, 1997; Hochschild, 2003). These excerpts indicate that a particular gendered organisation of domestic life and social production also underpin contemporary working practices, and that changes in employment such as an intensification of work may reinforce this gender restructuring. As Bradley argues, the rules and norms of employment continue to reflect the practices of dominant masculinities. "The requirements of organisations that employees 'prove' their worth by dedicating increasing amounts of time to their job fits well with certain forms of middle class masculinity ... married women, constrained by domestic responsibilities, find it hard to emulate their male colleagues in this competition" (1999:218). This research suggests that is not only wives directly engaged in caring responsibilities for others that are affected by such practices. Single women may be financially independent and not have caregiving responsibilities for others, however they may still be situated differently from partnered men²⁹.

Both Brenda and Bridget had pursued successful careers. Their accounts presented working fewer hours as a desired opportunity prompted by circumstances such as redundancy and motherhood, and afforded by their financial status. However, this was also desired because of their experience of working long hours and job mobility. As Perrons observes, the time or willingness to work long hours may form a new means of gender differentiation, just as other differences such as qualifications and formal opportunities are becoming more equal (2003:70-71). This research suggests that contemporary working practices, alongside the requirement for self-provisioning

²⁹ The continuance of a pay gap attributable to gender, over and above caring responsibilities (see Rake, 2000), indicates that single women may also be situated differently from single men.

in terms of domestic responsibilities, may be a factor shaping preferences to work less³⁰.

As noted above, dominant theories about the relationships between work and identity propose the increasing importance of work for individual subjectivities, wherein work is conceived less as something the worker has to be liberated from as an activity through which individuals produce their selves (see Rose, 1999). Yet, while employment has long been considered particularly important for single women, this was not reflected in the work orientations of participants in this study. Some accounts depicted an instrumental orientation, while others indicated a career orientation that waned over time. This research suggests that for women, changes in both the private and public sphere can be argued as necessitating a ‘stretching’ of female gender identity to encompass economic independence³¹. As noted previously, most participants were financially independent, while several had experienced full-time employment and conventional career success. Nevertheless, while they may ‘work like men’, many narratives indicated a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards their employment. These work orientations may be shaped in part by contemporary working practices that have different implications for women and men. These include the practical implications of employment predicated on a gendered division of labour. However, another implication may be the differential ‘rewards’ provided by gendered employment practices in terms of confirming or challenging gendered identities, looked at further below.

As the scholarship on gender and employment has long argued, gendered assumptions are not only brought to the workplace from the ‘private’ sphere, but are actively constructed and re-constructed through workplace relations (Phillips and Taylor, 1980; Cockburn, 1983). As McDowell argues, “jobs are not gender-neutral – rather they are created as appropriate for either men or women, and the sets of social practices that constitute and maintain them, are constituted to embody socially

³⁰ One participant referred to employing a cleaner. Changes in work in recent decades include an increase in formal domestic labour. This has been attributed to the feminisation of the labour force leaving a void in the sphere of reproductive labour (Anderson, 2000:1). However such an account fails to address the continuing feminised nature of domestic tasks. Several commentators have drawn attention to the increasing polarisation associated with this largely unregulated, poorly paid, feminised and often racialised sector (see Breugal and Perrons 1998, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

³¹ In her research on lesbian lifestyles, Dunne similarly argues that the subjects of her research, shaped neither by social expectations to be primary breadwinners nor by the constraints associated with becoming secondary workers, “possibly represent a new kind of worker” (1997:176).

sanctioned but variable characteristics of masculinity and femininity” (1999:135). The new economy has been seen as perpetuating gendered career trajectories (Hardill, 2003:17), and the demarcation between women’s and men’s work is being reproduced, surviving and reforming around new technologies, economic restructuring and new work relations. Such trajectories may reinforce male identities bound up with notions of financial provision³². Commenting on the differential impact of individualisation for men and women, Beck observes that while for women this process requires a new social identity, for men “individualisation (in the sense of making a living through the mediation of the market) *strengthens* masculine role behaviour” (1992:112, italics in the original). The centrality of paid work to the construction and reproduction of masculinity has been demonstrated in a number of studies (see Fitzsimons, 2002:106). As well as employment status, having a family is also central in signifying hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Despite changes in the labour market, recent empirical research demonstrates “the sense of responsibility and sacrifice undertaken by men for the welfare of their families” (Fitzsimons, 2002:123) continues to inform their views on paid and unpaid work³³. Thus, Dermott’s (2003) research on the work orientations of contemporary fathers in professional careers found a restricted investment in caring labour and a very large portion of time spent in paid employment compatible with an expressed desire to practice “intimate fathering”. Wacjman and Martin’s (2002) research on modern managers similarly found that for men, despite subscribing to a cultural ideal valuing relationships of intimacy, generating wealth through market action was still portrayed as an important way of enacting the story of family life. Many male managers were working longer hours and harder than ever before, and there remained for many a reliance on “a wife at home” arranging domestic life and caring for children (2002:994).

However, there has been relatively little empirical research on the importance of work to female identity, and the implications of this for gendered work orientations and therefore labour market behaviour. Gender differences in employment may signify

³² However, changes in the labour market such as an increase in women’s labour force participation can threaten traditional notions of masculinity predicated on breadwinning, as arguments about the ‘redundancy’ of men prevalent in ‘crisis of masculinity’ debates implicitly acknowledge.

³³ Dunne cites several studies which identify discourses of hegemonic masculinity as an important factor underpinning men’s resistance to undertaking ‘women’s work’ in the private sphere, even when economic roles between couples are reversed or shared (1997:110).

differences in the meanings employment holds for men and women. This is considered below in relation to Jenny's account, in which she compares her employment experiences with those of male colleagues. However, this study suggests that this is an area that requires further research.

Jenny, 39, was a university lecturer. She had relocated several times in the course of her academic career, both for educational and work purposes. Jenny was currently working in a department with no other academic female members of staff, and all her male colleagues bar one were married, most with young families. Jenny's narrative indicates that gender, partnership and parental status were all significant factors shaping her work, which differed from that of male colleagues in several respects. For example, Jenny stated her teaching load "has been higher than most other people in the department", and that this was a factor impinging on the time available to pursue activities that were seen more pertinent for career advancement, such as research. While her particular administrative responsibilities were "very time consuming", she felt these did not have the same status as those undertaken by male colleagues: "A lot of the heavy administrative responsibilities the guys seem to get (are) the administrative responsibilities which carry status with them". Jenny's department had recently introduced twice-yearly recruitment days. Despite objecting to the weekend working it would involve, Jenny had been given responsibility for co-ordinating these. Jenny attributed the difficulties she had in recruiting colleagues to participate to both gender as well as partnership and parental status:

"I do think that men, and men with young families find it easier simply to say 'no I am not available' [...] If no one else is available, and you know I don't know whether this is me personally, or whether it is the gender thing, but I will do it rather than have, for instance our department's information stand unpersonned, where there are potential students and so on there ... more and more universities are offering courses, you want to be there, you want to be open and welcoming [...] But I do think ...there is a sort of thing about, and it probably almost always be a very unconscious thing that, 'well I've got my partner and my young family so I'm not doing it' and whilst they would never overtly come out and say 'you've not', the implication therefore must be 'well,

you don't' ... so I now try, very deliberately, plan things so that I cannot always do it”.

Jenny's narrative suggests she was strategically responding to a situation she regarded as unfair, albeit she depicted this as probably unwitting. It also indicates the personal responsibility Jenny assumed for the success of the recruitment day.

Jenny also observed that colleagues with non-employed wives might be cared for in a way that meant they did not have to spend time on self-provisioning in terms of domestic responsibilities. However, she also questioned whether her own prioritising of domestic tasks was an aspect of gender rather than partnership status:

“A couple of my colleagues are married, their wives are not working [...] I kind of think ‘well I'm sure you pull your weight at home over the weekends’ and this and that, but at the end of the day when you go home the housework's probably been done, the meals are pretty much there (*so they've got that support?*) Yeah, whereas I think anybody who's single has to do that as well ... But I also wonder if single men might be less inclined to worry about it, whereas I, if I see my supplies running low I'll be away to the supermarket, you know I'm not going to go without decent food, or you know if the laundry's piled up I'm going to do it, I don't know, I wonder whether single men would, or say ‘och, that can wait till next week, this is a priority’ or something...”.

Jenny referred to other experiences where gender and partnership status were relevant. Talking about relocating, she considered being female limited the options available to get to know people in a new place, such as going to a local pub: “I think for women in particular that is something that when you are on your own it is difficult, and for guys who are on their own and who are maybe moving around for their careers it's a more... it strikes me to be a more natural, easier thing for men to do”.

Jenny also noted that while she got on well with most of her male colleagues, on occasion she felt “very isolated”. She described a lot of networking at the university amongst male staff through informal sports activities, which did not seem to happen amongst female staff. She attributed this in part to the university not having a staff

common room, but also to a communality amongst men: “there are ways in which the institution doesn’t help with informal networking, but there are also things which I think make men more inclined to come together”. Jenny’s narrative thus suggests both gendered identities, as well as institutional practices, impacted on her experiences of employment.

However, while Jenny regarded gender as a significant factor shaping her employment, she depicted the need to prioritise and enable time to pursue career development as a personal responsibility. Her narrative indicated she experienced considerable time pressures, and was concerned about being able to manage her workload to enable time to pursue the research necessary for career progression:

”There does seem very much to me anyway a state of hierarchy where, you know, the research ... most of the guys are doing the research [...] I’m trying this summer to learn to say no to things, and just try to say well to myself ‘you have to devote time to other things, to your research, to get the publications’, because at the end of the day, I’ll not get a promotion in another institution unless I do, but I’m, I’m not concerned about becoming ... a head of department, or head of faculty or school, or anything”.

While her narrative indicated Jenny felt this was incumbent on her, she also qualified her career ambitions. As stated above, this can be understood in part as a discursive tactic whereby single women seek to avoid presenting themselves as personally ambitious as a way of resisting a stigmatised subject position.

However, this can also be understood as reflecting the differential impact of employment on men and women’s identities. This analysis suggests that employment may not hold the same subjective meanings for women in terms of confirming social identities as it does for men. Furthermore, it suggests that contemporary working practices may be a factor shaping the differential work orientations of men and women. Dermott’s research on fathers’ work orientations describes men defining their identities in terms of their employment (2002:11). These fathers were in professional and managerial positions, skilled employment generally involving a larger degree of autonomy thus regarded as most likely to be experienced as satisfying. Several of the women in this research were similarly employed, however there was

little evidence in participants' accounts of a work orientation in which employment was identified as central to a conception of self. Dermott suggests that men's aspirations and expectations of work supply a mediating filter through which the demands of paid employment are experienced (2002:25). This research suggests that women's expectations and aspirations of work act similarly, that is, these aspirations and experiences are, crucially, gendered.

Conclusion

Women's relation to the labour market has often been understood in terms of their domestic responsibilities, however such accounts are limited in explaining the employment status of single women. Singleness necessitates financial self-sufficiency, thus can be seen as a factor promoting career development. For several women, the economic autonomy afforded by their labour market participation was a valued aspect of singleness. In addition, the experience of financial independence equipped some participants with a confidence in their capacity for self-provisioning. Singleness can also be seen as enabling the educational and employment achievements that allow some women further choices, including the pursuit of education for intrinsic reasons, opting into single motherhood, and the possibility of non-standard employment.

However, for other participants earning an adequate income was evidently difficult. This was exacerbated by a context of changes in employment alongside an increased emphasis on personal responsibility for the management of risk. Job insecurity was both a perception and reality for several participants, and work intensification and redundancy were features of several accounts. These changes were also implicated in the choices made by some participants to work less, albeit this was mediated by factors such as age and financial status. The impoverished financial status and dependency on the welfare state of some participants demonstrates that full-time employment may not be sufficient to ensure financial independence. In addition, the requirement for financial self-sufficiency in retirement was a considerable source of anxiety for several. The accounts of some participants in this research suggest that, as well as a source of concern, individualised responsibility for securing against old age or ill health may be insufficient to ensure adequate protection. As such, this research highlights the importance of welfare state provision to support those with

care responsibilities or needs as well as those unable to protect against risk despite participation in the labour market.

This research also illustrates the enduring influence of factors such as social class in shaping education and employment opportunities, and as such challenges theories contending the weakening of structural constraints. Theorists of social change have argued that transformations in social, economic, political and cultural relations mean that contemporary human subjects are required to construct a life through the exercise of choices. Nevertheless, as Perrons argues, the capacity of individuals to organise their own work biographies and plan financial provision continues to vary with individual and social factors, including responsibilities and opportunities outside as well as within the workplace. These, she argues, remain highly structured by characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, race, social class, educational background, age and stage in the life course, as well as individual preferences (2003:72).

This research also suggests the importance of gender and partnership status in shaping individual preferences. Contemporary work practices, such as long working hours and job mobility, suggest the ongoing gender structuring of employment, wherein both partnership and a division of labour between paid and unpaid work is presumed. The differential consequences of this for men and women may include the differential 'rewards' employment provides in terms of confirming or challenging dichotomous gender identities, which this study suggests this may be a factor shaping work orientations. This also has practical implications for single women, with and without caring responsibilities, combining participation in a labour market predicated on a gendered division of labour with caring for others or provision for oneself in terms of domestic tasks. The employment experiences of the single women in this study thus demonstrate the enduring salience of gender at work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Partnership Status, Gendered Subjectivities and Social Change

This chapter considers the implications of singleness for the identities of never-married women. The conception of the self outlined in Chapter Two encompasses an understanding of subjectivity as dynamically constructed in relation to available social categories, and draws attention to the social relations of power within which categories are positioned as either essential or more fluid, and evaluated as approved or subject to condemnation. As Taylor (1998) observes, the different identifications an individual makes bears differently on the coherence of her subjectivity depending on the context within which they are asserted, and the meanings they have for her at any one time. This chapter draws on this conception of a dynamic relationship between dominant ideologies and identity composition at the level of the individual to explore the significance of gender and partnership status for an individual's subjectivity¹. It considers the social categories around spinsterhood made available in dominant discourses, how these may have changed over time, and the implications for the subjectivities of participants. However, this chapter also draws on a Foucauldian notion of the "technologies of the self" to consider the implications of the 'practices' of singleness for the construction of identities². Chapter Two details feminist arguments that normative gender identities are constructed both through discourses, such as 'compulsory heterosexuality', as well as practices such as the gendered division of labour. This chapter analyses participants' narratives to consider how the experiences of contemporary singleness shape the subjectivities of women in this study, in terms of both dominant discourses and practices associated with singleness, such as financial independence.

¹ This is not to suggest that these aspects of identity are comprehensively constitutive of identity. As Chapter Two details, the complex social relations in which individuals are embedded and through which their sense of self is constructed are inscribed with a multiplicity of social categories of difference. Furthermore, the categorical and ontological dimensions of identity are mutually imbricated. However, conceptually 'separating out' these dimensions of social and self identity emphasises that this conception of identity challenges both understandings of identities as determined by given ideologies, and voluntarist conceptions of individuals freely constructing their own private or public identities.

² Foucault's later work on subjectivity and the constitution of the self advises that we examine the "practices of the self" through which individuals actively fashion their own identities (see Foucault, 1988, Rabinow 1991).

Byrne contends that the connections between prevailing legitimating ideologies and our concepts of personhood remain under-investigated, in part due to the difficulty of detecting the effects of public ideologies on individual identities. Nevertheless, she argues, examining single women's self and social identities can reveal much about the relationship between ideologies, conceptions of womanhood and the capacity for accommodation or resistance to strong social identities (2003:444)³. As Chapter One suggests, the subjective meanings ascribed by individuals to categories such as singleness may contest those available in the public domain, including those prevailing in contemporary debates about familial change. Somers (1994) argues that any given repertoire of narratives available for appropriation is always historically and culturally specific, and as such the kinds of narratives people use to make sense of their situation will always be an empirical rather than a presuppositional question. The subjective meanings attributed by participants to their lived experiences of singleness suggest a range of narratives or discourses that potentially complicates dominant understandings of familial change.

One of the main ways in which normative ideologies operate is through the construction of various forms of 'Otherness'. The negative attributes ascribed to particular identities are significant in terms of what they reveal about the political commitments underpinning such ascriptions (Taylor, 1998). Byrne (2000b) argues that the stigmatisation of singleness as a social identity for women frames a strong ideological setting in which conceptions of womanhood as heterosexual, married and reproductive are favoured. She draws on Goffman's (1963) account of stigma as an 'undesired differentness' wherein stigmatised persons learn the identity beliefs of normal society and the consequences for themselves of being stigmatised, and subsequently learn the process of stigma management to ease tensional interactions. However, where for Goffman this demonstrates the function of stigma in eliciting support for society and identity norms from those very people who are 'excluded', Byrne argues that resistance to normative identities can be discerned in the strategies individuals adopt to ease social interactions (2000b:13). This chapter also considers the extent to which such strategies are evident in the narratives in this study.

³ This chapter draws on an empirical model for researching women's social and self identities proposed by Byrne, based on her research on never-married childless women in contemporary Ireland (2003).

This chapter looks firstly at the social categories available to spinsters in dominant discourses, evident in participants' depiction of social interactions in which their singleness is a significant factor. This section also considers what the varying responses of participants indicate about the 'self-identities' of single women. It then looks at the ways in which participants account for their partnership and parental status. In these accounts, multiple explanations are provided, indicating the availability of various discourses on which participants can draw. The final section considers various practices associated with singleness and the meanings these have for participants.

The Identities of Single Women

As Chapter Two details, feminist theorising has argued that heteronormative ideologies mean that expectations of marriage and motherhood are 'keyed into womanhood' in such a way that those outside marriage are intrinsically problematised. Previous research on singleness suggested that deviations from marriage as the conventionally approved partnership status was a potential source of conflict between single people and their families (see Cargan and Melko, 1982). Despite recent familial change, contemporary empirical research argues that ideologies such as familism and compulsory heterosexuality continue to position singleness as a marginal location for women (Byrne, 1999; Sandfield and Percy, 2003; Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Sandfield and Percy suggest this marginalisation may be an obstacle in unmarried women's acceptance of their own lifestyles as valid, as well as resulting in problematic relationships with others (2003:484).

The following sections describe the social categories of singleness evident in participants' descriptions of experiences of stigma and exclusion, and considers what the varying responses depicted by participants suggests about the implications of these social identities for their self-identities.

The Stigmatising of Spinsterhood

Several participants recounted experiences which indicated the prevalence of stigmatised identities for single women, with stereotypes of spinsters as variously 'left on the shelf', frigid, after other women's husbands, or lesbian evident in several accounts. Such stereotyping illustrates the continuing 'Othering' of single women

through their positioning in 'deviant' social categories. That spinsterhood can only be 'accounted' for in dominant discourses in ways which position single women as either subject to pity or condemnation illustrates how such discourses work to preserve heteronormative presumptions of partnership.

Yet participants' narratives also indicated differing responses to such stigmatised identities. For example Wendy, born in the 1940s, described her discomfort at work-related social occasions during her thirties when male colleagues with whom she was friendly "stuck like glue to their wives and hardly ever spoke to me". Nevertheless, some participants recounted similar experiences in terms that indicated this was something they found risible or remained unbothered by. Thus Betty, born in the 1950s, commented: "I find that if I'm in company where I don't know the people or they don't know me, a lot of wives tend to be quite territorial, 'here's a woman on her own, she must be after my man'! (laughs)".

Some accounts depicted anticipation of stigma as inhibiting particular social interactions and activities. For example Kitty, born in the 1930s, recounted spending much of her time alone, a situation she described as "forced upon me a lot of the time" and attributed in part to factors such as age, income and ill-health. However, her narrative suggested that her perception of stigma was also a significant factor:

"I could join clubs like the British Legion and the RAF clubs but I won't do it because I have no male escort, and I find that the married women are very suspicious of single women socialising. Awfully anxious about their husbands, and I mean you wouldn't look twice at them! But, I kind of stopped because of that attitude."

[Kitty, 71]

Wendy and Sarah, both members of a Christian fellowship group, described considering "joining forces" and living together for companionship as well as financial reasons: Wendy, 54, had not worked for many years due to ill-health, and Sarah, 69, described the upkeep of her home as increasingly burdensome. However, their anxiety about being perceived as in a lesbian relationship was a potential barrier preventing this. Such apprehension supports Simon's contention that "Freudianism has cast lasting shadows over the social acceptability of single women carving out

lives together” (1987:103; see also Jeffreys 1985). Nevertheless, while younger participants referred to experiencing assumptions they were lesbians, none described changing their behaviour in response. Furthermore, their general lack of concern suggests that the increasing acceptability of homosexuality has somewhat nullified the stigma associated with lesbianism⁴. Thus, while participants’ narratives indicated the persistence of the stigmatisation of singleness, shifts over time in the resonances and types of stereotypes attached to singleness were also evident. Similarly, older participants also referred to previous experiences of stigma in ways that indicated that, while significant at the time, they were now considered obsolete. Katherine, born in the 1930s, referred to not being able to socialise with female friends on ‘date night’ during the 1950s, in terms indicating she considered this somewhat ridiculous: “if you were seen by other people and with a girlfriend, on date night, that was ... nobody would touch you.”

Cultural expectations of holidays such as Christmas as ‘family’ occasions could mean those without a family ‘of their own’ being potentially subject to pity, and several participants recounted similar experiences of finding Christmas problematic due to the concern of others⁵. For example Nora, born in the 1930s, stated Christmas could be “tricky”, describing receiving invitations to join neighbours she barely knew, an experience she described as “horrible, I hate it”. Several participants described taking steps to avoid a situation of being ‘looked after’, for example travelling abroad over Christmas. Olive, also born in the 1930s, similarly described being subject to concern that she experienced as somewhat pressuring, as well as on occasion patronising, however had devised a strategic response with a friend in a similar position. On being asked about family holidays, Olive stated:

“Aye that is a problem (emphatic), my friend and I, we’ve solved that [...] we both felt we were getting invited because nobody wanted to think of us on our own [...] so what we do is I go to her on Christmas Day and she comes to me

⁴ Several participants referred to having gay male friends, and some referred to media representations of single women with gay friends as “educating society” and bringing about change. The pejorative term ‘fag hag’ to refer to single female friends of gay men however suggests the mutable but persistent nature of stigmatising of both singleness and homosexuality.

⁵ However, some also depicted being single at Christmas in positive terms: thus Sally, born in the 1960s, responded when asked about whether she found family holidays such as Christmas ‘difficult’, replied, “Oh God no, that’s much better, because I mean, if you are with someone you have to put up with their relatives as well”.

on New Year's Day and that's solved, but I still get the woman across the road that is always saying 'what are you doing this Christmas?' (concerned tone)... and you feel like saying 'oh, covering myself with sackcloth and ashes and just sitting here!' (laughs)"

[Olive, 71]

This experience suggests the endurance of a stereotype of spinsters as pitiable, however it also suggests an inadmissibility of the possibility that individuals may spend such holidays alone through preference, and this is considered further below.

Byrne (2000b) refers to the 'chronic stigma' aimed at those who do not marry, and describes participants in her research responding by inventing boyfriends or wearing engagement rings. The persistence of stigma evident in this research underlines that approved social identities for women continue to be predicated on heterosexual attachment. Nevertheless, practices such as those referred to by Byrne were not evident, indicative perhaps of the different cultural contexts. Furthermore, participants' responses to the stigmatisation of spinsterhood indicated a difference by age, evident in participants from the older cohorts being more likely to depict the stigmatisation of spinsterhood as limiting their behaviour. In addition, several participants also considered that familial changes had lessened the stigma associated with spinsterhood. Thus Franny, born in the 1940s, stated:

"So many people now, I mean divorce is so much more common, people living together is so much more common. It really wasn't done when I was growing up [...] you were expected to fit neatly into the pattern [...] But I think it's going, most people either have a partner or haven't a partner, or whatever"

[Franny, 58]

These narratives thus suggest the mutability of stereotypes of spinsterhood over time and in particular contexts. The different responses of participants to experiences of stigma also suggest considerable variation in the subjective meanings ascribed by participants to the social identities accorded to spinsterhood. This is now considered further in relation to participants' experiences of exclusion on the basis of their singleness.

The Privileging of Partnership

Byrne's research found that singleness as a deviant social identity intruded into single women's relationships and interactions with others, resulting in the exclusion of single women from coupled society in various settings (1999:74). Several participants in this research described being marginalised in relationships with both family and friends, and this was across all cohorts. These accounts indicate a privileging of coupledness and the nuclear family legitimated by dominant discourses such as compulsory heterosexuality and familism, which thereby position single women as marginal. However, participants' accounts depicted differing responses to experiences of this. In part, these varying responses reflect the extent to which participants considered such a 'privileging of partnership' over other relations acceptable. Some narratives indicated this was perceived as normal, as 'what one did', while several accounts depicted this prioritising of coupledness in negative terms.

This included some accounts in which participants referred with some regret to the way their own previous partnerships had inhibited other relationships. For example, Wendy, 54, attributed currently feeling somewhat "socially isolated" in part to having had two long-term relationships that "kind of took up my time, I never got, maybe I didn't develop my female friendships at these particular times, as much as I could have done". Others described the difficulties of 'balancing' the demands of friendship with those of heterosexual coupledness. Thus, Fiona observed:

"When I was with the last partner, friends said 'oh you didn't come to see us, you didn't...', and of course you don't, because you are putting effort into a relationship, you can't put effort into going out, seeing your friends and that. And he used to complain that I spent all of my time on the phone [...] I was thinking, you know, that is one way of keeping in touch with friends".

[Fiona, 49]

Allan (1989) observes that one factor affecting people's involvement in the rites of friendship is the 'space' there is in their lives for sociability, with other aspects of people's lives such as work, domestic obligations and material circumstances encouraging or limiting the way these friendships are 'serviced'. This research indicates that a cultural expectation of the priority of heterosexual relationships was

also an important factor in the servicing of relationships with family and friends. Thus Franny, 58, describing a long-term friendship with a woman for whom she had been a bridesmaid, observed, “she married quite young and we’ve kept friends, I suppose in a different way, because I saw her originally when Sam was doing something else, you know, then she had time for me. But you know, that’s OK”.

This expectation was also evident in some participants’ depictions of the disadvantages of singleness. Thus Emma, born in the 1960s, described a somewhat limited social life, in part due to financial restraints but also because “there is nobody to go out with, all my friends are sort of in relationships and stuff”. It was also a factor in some participants’ perceptions of coupledness as making social activities “easier”. For example Jenny, born in the 1960s, commented, “I think it just makes it more sort of comfortable to go out and just to have friends who are a couple down for a meal, you go to theirs or go out or whatever, if you are in a couple”. Nevertheless, other participants depicted this cultural expectation as a negative dimension of coupledness. For example Sally, also born in the 1960s, attributed her reluctance about being in a partnership in part to previous experiences where she felt somewhat subsumed by societal expectations. She thus depicts the social identities available to those in couples as unattractive:

“When I was in a partnership, I kind of didn’t like it [...] because I wasn’t me, I was part of a couple. And that’s how people see you [...] I mean, you know, say I found someone who I wanted to have a partnership with, that would be difficult, kind of being in a partnership and being amongst all those other partnerships, and that, I would think I would find that difficult”

[Sally, 40]

Sally referred to herself as “a maverick”, and her narrative indicated a sense of herself as somewhat ‘alternative’. The way in which singleness may be a factor shaping an identity derived from a sense of self as different is considered further below.

As well as cultural expectations, practical factors associated with undertaking domestic and caring responsibilities for others were also evident. Gordon’s (1994) empirical research on single women⁶ noted their difficulty in sustaining interactions

⁶ Single here included the ever-married.

with married women whose family ties meant meeting outside the family context was more difficult to organise. Several narratives indicated that familial responsibilities were influential factors shaping participants' relationships with partnered women. This included friends over retirement age who continued to undertake caring roles. For example, Olive, born in the 1930s, in describing a friendship with a widowed friend observed that, although "when she was young her husband was at sea and she went down and did all her mother's housework and brought up the weans", she is now involved in looking after her grandchildren, as a consequence of which "she doesn't have much time for friends of her own"⁷.

However, several accounts indicated that partnership status shaped social interactions with family and friends in ways not solely attributable to familial responsibilities, but also to do with a normative prioritizing of coupledness. Some participants described having their friendship 'relegated' consequent to friends forming a couple relationship and either prioritising this or socialising primarily with other couples. For example Bridget, born in the 1950s, described as a disadvantage of singleness the difficulty she had in seeing married friends without their husbands, as she "would love sometimes just to have the access to my girlfriends on my own". Despite socialising with partnered friends as a couple, Bridget observed, "I don't get invited to the social things that they are doing, but when they come to me they come as a couple [...] I, I feel a bit used".

Gordon contends that family members might hold an implicit stereotype of the glamorous lifestyle of the "city single", with the perceived contrast with the humdrum of family life meaning they were hesitant to invite single women to their homes or parties (2002:52). This suggests that changing social identities for single women may still position them as 'other', thereby precluding certain social interactions. However, single mothers in this research also described exclusion. Birgit, born in the 1950s and with a pre-school age child, wrote "*one bad thing about being a single mum [...] even*

⁷ The impact of social changes such as the increasing labour force participation of mothers, in a context where childcare continues to be undertaken mainly informally and overwhelmingly by women, thus includes limitations on time for wider relationships. Relatives, in particular grandparents, are the most common providers of childcare while parents work, and recent empirical research indicates that people in their 50s and 60s are facing 'work-life' balance issues as they experiencing growing demands on their time to care for other family members. Although employees over 50 often spoke of the satisfaction they derived from their caring responsibilities, almost half said it had made their life more

though I have a child I am still viewed as single and am therefore not included in weekend activities that (friends in couples) do with other couples". This example illustrates the influence of partnership status, rather than 'family life' per se.

As Chapter Three has detailed, this research draws upon a notion of ontological narrativity, which posits that it is through narratives that we constitute our identities (Somers, 1994). As illustrated above, several narratives indicated that partnership status was significant in shaping participants' experiences; however, the ways in which they responded to these varied considerably. These accounts of the stigmatising of spinsterhood and the prioritising of partnership highlight the marginal social location made available to single women in dominant discourses. However, these responses can be understood as part of a "narrative rationalisation" designed to maintain certain beliefs about themselves and others (Hoggett, 2001:39). Thus, these accounts also say something about the variable 'single self-identities' constructed by participants in these narratives, and this is now considered below⁸.

Single Self-Identity

Sandfield and Percy's (2003) empirical research on heterosexual women's accounts of singleness⁹ suggests that heterosexist discourses of romantic quest and marriage as ultimate success contribute significantly to heterosexual women's identity construction. As noted above, participants' variable responses to similar experiences in part reflect changes over time, for example in the resonances of stigmatised stereotypes of singleness. However, these also say something about the subjectivities of single women. Thus, participants might recount common experiences in which singleness was evidently a significant factor, yet also depict these as having variable implications for their self-identities. This is illustrated in the accounts of two participants who both described their mothers' concern about their singleness. Jenny, born in the 1960s, related her mother's attitude to the social identity accorded spinsterhood:

stressful and a third said it left them with less time for their family and themselves (Mooney, Statham and Simon, 2002).

⁸ As noted above, identity is both dynamic and multi-faceted. While this research focuses on singleness as a dimension of identity, this is not to suggest this is comprehensive of participants' subjectivities.

⁹ This research considered the way that singleness was constructed in the accounts of heterosexual women, based on a study of 12 White women of varying partnership statuses aged between 20 and 48.

“I think she probably, I don’t think she wishes I was married or whatever, but I suppose in a sense as well her generation.... (pause) being single might have been seen as something ... in a negative way and I suppose there is still is a lot of that there”.

[Jenny, 39]

Jenny’s narrative suggested she experienced singleness as a negative aspect of her self-identity. She referred to her “own sensitivity to the fact she was single”, and stated this was “maybe because most of my friends are married or in relationships”. Jenny’s narrative suggested that being single caused her discomfort in specific situations and particular relationships, and she observed that she did want to be in a permanent relationship and had recently joined a dating agency.

Bridget, born in the 1950s, similarly recounted her mother’s discomfort about her singleness, saying “she used to find it unbearable to have to explain to people that I wasn’t married! (laughs)”. Yet, Bridget depicted her singleness as an unproblematic aspect of her identity. Bridget had not had any relationships prior to her thirties, which she attributed to the requirements of her employment¹⁰. Asked about her attitude to this, Bridget responded that not having met anyone “just seemed peculiar”, given her friends were mostly married with children, however it “didn’t bother me at all”. Bridget depicted her mother’s concern in terms of an inability to appreciate her situation, rather than as an attitude she shared or which caused her particular discomfort:

“She was ... and it wasn’t just a case of she was ashamed of me, she felt sorry for me, ‘poor Bridget’ (concerned tone) (*and, it was quite explicit?*) Oh she would tell me! And my father used to say things like ‘will you just leave that girl alone, she’s fine, leave her alone’. But she, she couldn’t quite see it”.

[Bridget, 47]

Sandfield and Percy suggest that significant figures in women’s lives, including other women, may reinforce negative images of singlehood (2003:484). Several participants referred to experiencing parental concern about their singleness, with particular anxieties expressed by mothers. However, participants also indicated their self

identities in their varying responses. For example, Sandra, born in the 1960s commented that her mother “would be much happier if she thought I was in a long term relationship [...] which I don’t really understand because she knows I’m quite happy as things are”. Sandra’s narrative depicted a contentment with singleness. This excerpt can be seen as one way in which this contentment was constructed, through her puzzlement at the disjuncture between her mother’s concern and the subjective meanings she ascribed to her singleness. Some accounts in contrast depicted parents’ attitudes or behaviour as a source of distress, for example Maureen, born in the 1950s, became upset when describing receiving a “large cheque” from her parents for her fortieth birthday, which she considered was instead of paying for a wedding dress as they had for her sister.

This research suggests that for some participants their never-married single status could be a source of pity, sympathy or condemnation from others, reactions that highlight the deviant and problematic status attributed to singlehood. Nevertheless, participants’ variable reactions suggest that a stigmatised social identity need not be experienced negatively. This relates to the distinction detailed above between social and self-identity, whereby an individual’s sense of self is not determined by the social evaluation accorded that identity. Rather, some participants depicted positive ‘single self-identities’, often in contradistinction to prevailing understandings of how that identity would be experienced. This is illustrated in Bridget’s account of undertaking various activities alone. She depicted this as through preference, however also observed that this could be “difficult for other people”. This included her mother, who Bridget said used to find this “absolutely unbearable [...] ‘Bridget has to go to the cinema by herself’ (tone of horror), I don’t have to, I want to!”. Bridget’s narrative suggests her mother’s anxiety derived from assumptions about what Bridget’s life should be, rather than Bridget’s subjective experiences. Bridget similarly distinguished the responses of others to her undertaking certain activities alone from her own feelings about this. Thus, she stated that while she was content to undertake certain activities on her own, this was unsettling for others: “I’m perfectly used to being invited to any kind of social occasion by myself, because that’s what I’m used to, but you can see that it really unnerves other people”.

¹⁰ Bridget’s employment history is considered in some depth in Chapter Six.

In these narratives, the 'social' and 'self' identities of single women are simultaneously constituted through depictions of experiences of the stigmatising of singleness and privileging of partnership, experiences that indicate the prevalence of heterosexist discourses in which singleness is constructed as problematic. Byrne (2000a) suggests that dominant discourses of heterosexuality, marriage and motherhood as normative for women may cause difficulties for women "who do otherwise", and several participants in this research depicted singleness as a problematic aspect of identity. However, representations of singleness as a positive aspect of identity were also evident in these narratives, while some participants depicted singleness as a relatively unimportant aspect of identity. These representations were evident in the narratives of participants across all cohorts and from different social backgrounds, thus it is difficult to theorise the processes underlying this variability. The following section considers the ways in which participants 'accounted' for their partnership and parental status, and the variability evident in participants' explanations suggests the emergence of alternative discourses in which singleness is not necessarily rendered problematic. The subsequent section considers the 'practices' associated with singleness, with several participants depicting these as positive aspects of singleness. The possible relationship between the available discourses around singleness, the 'practices' to which it gives rise, and the self-identities of contemporary spinsters, is considered further below.

Accounting for Partnership and Parental Status

As Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) observe, heteronormative discourses operate through the construction and policing of various forms of 'otherness', whereby some modes of living become accountable while others remain unexceptional and taken for granted. Whereas partnered women are rarely called upon to explain their status, the single woman is "expected to have an explanation for her 'condition'" (2003:490). Byrne (2000b) notes that a common experience reported by participants in her research was being asked for explanations of their "failure to marry", and that each had a "repertoire of stories" to explain their singleness. Yet, while these "stigma management strategies" were effective as a basis for individual action and helped facilitate social interactions, such strategies also risked undermining self-identity.

The 'risk' to self-identity relates to the social identities made available to single women in dominant discourses that potentially expose women to either censure or pity. The 'requirement' that women 'account' for singleness itself signifies the dominance of a presumption of partnership. As Chapter Three notes, participants in this research were not explicitly asked why they had not married, yet varying 'explanations' for singleness were evident in several narratives, suggesting an awareness that singleness needed to be accounted for. Several mothers in the sample similarly provided explanations accounting for their single motherhood status. These explanations illustrate the varied 'stories' participants drew on to make sense of their lives and thereby define who they are (Somers, 1994). Looking at these explanations thus allows both a consideration of the discourses on which women draw in accounting for partnership and parenthood status, and the subjectivities of single women evident in such narrative accounting.

Accounting for Spinsterhood

A prominent theme in the interviews was that participants did not present their partnership status as the outcome of deliberative choice. Byrne (2000b) observes that the majority of participants in her research categorised themselves as "involuntary singles", and interprets this as a self-protective strategy used to distance themselves from the perceived and felt social stigma of singleness deriving from a familist society. Common explanations in this research similarly 'protected' participants from being rendered blameworthy, with singleness attributed for example to personal circumstances such as the requirement to work long hours or health problems, or to 'fate', that it 'just didn't happen'. However, other explanations were also evident, and are considered below.

These narratives demonstrated participants 'negotiating' the subject positions made available to single women in dominant discourses. This was evident both in the rebuttals of particular stigmatised identities, as well as in the varying discourses on which participants drew to explain their singleness. For example, Chapter Five illustrated the problems for participants caring for elderly relatives, a common trope of spinsterhood yet which accounts for singleness through an identity which potentially subjects women to pity, and which some participants' narratives indicated they wished to rebut. Another common trope is that of the 'career woman', in which women's

success in employment is presented as at the expense of marriage and motherhood. This identity risks situating single women as blameworthy, as well as subject to pity¹¹. As Chapter Six argues, a prevalent theme in participant's narratives was the lack of a strategic career narrative, and this can be understood in part as a discursive resistance to being positioned as prioritising a career over partnership and parenthood. Thus Katherine, born in the 1930s and who had just retired from a career as a research scientist, referred to an article about Kate Adie, a woman who has never married or had children, and commented, "and like her, I never felt that it was really a conscious decision".

Rebutting attributions of singleness or childlessness to individual choice is one means by which participants can avoid being held to account. However, such explanations also signify the way in which individuals experience their lives, as less the outcome of deliberative decision-making than a combination of various factors and circumstances, or what Hoggett describes as "the multidetermined nature of our own life histories" (2001:40). This was also suggested by the multiple explanations evident in several narratives, which resulted in some cases in inconsistent or even contradictory accounts of singleness¹². In addition, these narratives indicate participants drawing simultaneously on discourses that challenge and confirm social identities for women.

The use of multiple explanations was evident in Katy's narrative. Born in the 1940s, Katy worked six days a week in employment necessitating shifts, and attributed her working patterns to the financial requirements of singleness. She described several long-term relationships, mainly with men she had met through work, as they were able to appreciate the anti-social demands of shift work. Katy had not had a relationship for several years, and attributed her singleness to work in ways that disavow responsibility for this status: "it's not because you don't want to get married or have a relationship, you don't have the opportunity because of the hours that you work". She also accounted for the singleness of younger female friends in a similar way, commenting "they both have to work six or seven days a week, they both have their

¹¹ Some commentators suggest that contemporary representations of single career women in popular culture, in which they are depicted as professionally successful yet lonely and unfulfilled, as well as media stories about 'man shortages' and 'spinster booms', are indicative of societal anxieties about women's increasing independence (see Faludi, 1992; Whelehan, 2000).

¹² As Chapter Three discusses, these are characteristic features of narratives that also counter assumptions that motivations for action can be 'read off' individuals' accounts in straightforward ways.

own properties [...] I see them as being single as well, because they are spending so much time on working to support themselves”.

This explanation resonates with contemporary debates about the impact of work on personal relationships, for example Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) arguments about individualisation and the increased turnover in relationships, attributed to the logic of the market. However, Katy’s account complicates this notion somewhat. Rather than just the requirement to work long hours, it was *because* of this that she was less willing to put up with behaviour she considered unacceptable for the sake of maintaining the relationship. Asked about why previous relationships had ended, Katy stated:

“I suppose the usual reasons, one drank too much, one regularly borrowed money off me which I never got back, and ... you put up with these things so long, I would put up with them so long and then think ‘I work too hard to put up with this’ – and I would put up with it for quite a while. And then I would say ‘No. That’s enough’ and that was the end of the relationship”.

[Katy, 53]

Asked whether she would consider doing anything proactive to change her status, Katy prioritised other aims related mainly to securing financial provision over doing so, saying “I can rely on my friends, I can rely on my work. I want things more secure in my life”. Thus, Katy’s employment can be seen as enabling her to have options about which relationships she wished to maintain. Yet, Katy did not discount the possibility of another relationship, continuing “if somebody comes along, fine, but I’m not dashing to meet somebody”. Several narratives similarly drew on a discourse of romance as destiny, rather than the outcome of strategic action. This explanation confirms that the single woman would be in a partnership if chance had permitted it, thereby protecting her from blame. Nevertheless, in denying the subject responsibility, a discourse of ‘fate’ paradoxically permits the status quo.

A discourse of romance as destiny was also related in some accounts to a notion of ‘Mr. Right’. This was illustrated in Joan’s narrative. Born in the 1960s, Joan had had several long-term relationships, one of which was cohabiting. She stated that “every relationship that I’ve been in there’s come a point at which I guess I’ve known deep

down it's not the one". Although she had joined supper clubs in the past, she stated she was somewhat sceptical about these: "It's going to be chance and, so far, the chances have not come my way". However, she also related her singleness to an unwillingness to 'settle', describing a recent relationship as "wonderful, but not quite enough [...] we loved each other but had not fallen in love. We could have made a marriage out of that, but we both decided that it wasn't enough".

This desire for a deeper emotional commitment points towards Giddens' (1992) emphasis on the 'pure relationship' as a central goal of late modernity. However, Joan's narrative also refers to other factors, including the pleasurable aspects of singleness. She had lived alone for several years, which she "loved", and commented, "we both realised that we both loved our houses, we both loved our way of life, we loved our independence. It was lovely to see him sort of three, four times a week and weekends and so on, but at the end of the day, it's really nice to be in my own space". Joan's narrative also utilised notions of not sustaining relationships unless they were considered 'worthwhile', evident in several narratives and considered further below. She presented the possibility of remaining single as something that "with a deep breath", she could accept. This suggests resignation with this possible 'fate'. Yet, Joan's unwillingness to 'settle', as with Katy's unwillingness to 'put up with' certain behaviour, presents these participants as making choices over the type of relationships they wished to maintain.

While Katy presented singleness as the outcome of other factors, she also depicted contentment with her current status. She described herself as "very settled, very happy" in her current employment, though looking forward to her retirement in order to have more time for friends and leisure activities. Katy's narrative demonstrated a lack of interest in changing her partnership status, and she observed in regard to potential relationships "sometimes I just think I can't be bothered". The indication that singleness was experienced as unproblematic points to a disjuncture with dominant discourses in which singleness is understood necessarily as a 'cost', and suggests shifts in the way the singleness can be represented. While, as noted above, singleness was not depicted as 'choice', several participants 'explained' their singleness in terms of satisfaction with the status quo. Furthermore, some participants depicted singleness as a relatively insignificant dimension of theirs, and others, self-

identity. Thus Katy, asked how her single friends viewed their singleness, replied, “I get the impression neither of them give two hoots”. Several narratives similarly indicated a sanguine attitude about spinsterhood, and this representation is considered further below.

A few participants did describe consciously foregoing partnerships, albeit this was mainly presented as temporary and in order to focus on other goals. These goals varied from the particular, such as the pursuit of higher education, to the more nebulous, portrayed in terms of self-development. This was one explanation evident in Theresa’s account. Born in the 1950s, Theresa described returning to education in her early thirties to do a degree, continuing and completing a Doctorate in her mid-forties. She stated “I thought ‘well I’m not going to go out with anybody when I do my degree because I don’t want any interruptions’ ... and I think I got a bit carried away into this, you know! (laughs)”. The time spent in tertiary education has been proposed as an explanation for a delay in partnership amongst younger generations (Ermisch and Francesconi, 1996). As noted previously, most participants had degrees, however education and singleness were related by some participants in ways not reducible to time constraints. For example Fenella, born in the 1960s, did a degree on leaving school and went on to undertake post-graduate qualifications. Education was amongst the explanations evident in her narratives to account for her singleness, however she expressed this in terms of the wider options it had enabled. From a working class background, Fenella depicted remaining at school after sixteen as unusual, as “the typical thing would have been a machining factory”, and commented “maybe if I never went to college when I was eighteen and had my horizons opened, maybe I would have married the boy next door”. The notion of wider options was evident in several accounts, and is discussed further below.

Other explanations are also evident in Theresa’s narrative, and these illustrate the somewhat contradictory ways in which participants accounted for their singleness. Theresa stated she had never had any desire to get married or have children, which her account indicates she considered as conventional, boring and too restrictive. Although she had cohabited in previous relationships, after many years of living alone she stated she would not want to live with anyone again. Theresa also referred to no longer being willing to sustain a relationship unless it was worthwhile. While this

explanation presents participants as having certain standards, it also risks positioning them as potentially too fussy or demanding. Therese's awareness of this is suggested by her observation that, while when younger she "would just sort of sleep with anybody [...] (nowadays) I think I've gone a bit, maybe too much the other way, when I really meet very very few men that I like, you know". Theresa presented a somewhat 'counter-culture' identity, considered further below, however this 'caveat' suggests a certain difficulty in depicting remaining single as valid, situating her behaviour as potentially extreme and implying that it is her choosiness that accounts for her not liking the men she meets.

However, Theresa also attributed this to contemporary gender relations, specifically a relative lack of change in men. "I still think that on the whole, you know, men find it quite difficult to – I think they are still, they still have this idea that the woman will do the cooking and the washing and of course it's not going to work, not with me anyway!". The narratives of other participants similarly attributed singleness to wider social changes resulting in a 'mismatch' between women and men. Thus Louise, born in the 1960s, stated "A lot of guys I think have still got this mentality that they're, you know, they're looking for [...] the whore in the bedroom [...] their 'mother' to look after them [...] You know, they're still kind of looking with the old-fashioned values, whereas girls now are saying 'well no, sorry mate, after I come in from my work the last thing I'm going to do is go into the kitchen'". Some participants explicitly related this to feminism, for example Fiona, born in the 1950s and who adopted two children in her forties, observed in relation to her failure to experience the type of committed relationship she desired: "we're in the wrong ... you know, we got feminism and nobody thought of liberating the men at the time so all of the men, even the generation below, have not really, are not really coming from the same perspective".

This explanation was related by younger participants to contemporary social changes, yet some older participants similarly expressed a resistance to conventional divisions of labour. Olive, born in the 1930s, attributed her singleness to personal preference, stating she "just didn't fancy marriage". However, in recounting an incident from her childhood, she also suggests the role played by a particular context in shaping this preference: "I remember going to the library [...] and my Mum saying 'we must get back, Daddy's coming in and the tea must be ready', and I said 'surely he could wait

half an hour?’ and she gave me a right lecturing. I thought, I didn’t really fancy that as a life [...] I never felt I would want to rely on anyone paying the bills or anything”.

The narratives of several younger participants portrayed a context in which women’s economic independence provided them with more options over the types of relationships they wished to maintain. Thus Brenda, also born in the 1960s, commented that while previous generations of women “married because they needed to support themselves” or because “there was a tremendous lot of stigma”, widening opportunities in education and employment had led to women asking what they wanted out of marriage. Brenda felt this “has changed [...] I don’t need somebody to look after me financially, I need somebody who will look after me, be with me – and I will look after them, emotionally. You know, I demand more parity in that respect. And I look at, the men who are my intellectual equal don’t want to look for women who are intellectual equals”. Louise’s narrative also combined women’s economic autonomy with the mismatch between men and women’s expectations. “To me it’s very black and white [...] I pay my way in the world, and I don’t owe nothing to nobody, so why should I put up with the crap”¹³. Previous research on the socio-economic characteristics of the never-married has argued that the higher incidence of spinsterhood amongst women “of higher ability, education and occupation” may be due to selectivity in the marriage market, whereby “men may have preferences for wives of lower or equal status but not higher” (Kiernan, 1988:259). Traditional models of behaviour in the matching of couples rely on socio-economic status. However, these explanations establish women’s preferences for *other* forms of equality as a central component of contemporary relationships.

The extent to which the absence of such a relationship was depicted as a loss, however, varied across participants. Di Stefano and Pinnelli have argued that a woman’s greater capacity to negotiate regarding the division of roles could make it more difficult for her to find a partner prepared for greater domestic and parental commitment (2004:341). Brenda and Fiona described desiring both partnership and parenthood and actively pursuing committed relationships, however both subsequently went on to have children alone, and their decisions are considered below.

¹³ The incomes of those referring explicitly to their economic independence ranged widely, and Brenda was amongst the top earners in this sample while Louise was currently working part-time at weekends in addition to full-time employment. Their employment histories are considered in Chapter Six.

Louise depicted her singleness and childlessness in part in terms of personal preference. Nevertheless, her narrative also indicates difficulties in stating this, including caveats that she may change her mind, depicting friends' rebuttals of this possibility, and questioning her own claims of contentment as potentially spurious:

“I’m actually a person that’s quite happy being on their own [...] I don’t know if five years down the line my biological clock will go off, and I’ll think ‘I must breed, I must reproduce’, I don’t know, or ‘I just must have a man’. But right now, I’ve enough interests and I think I just don’t have enough hours in the day. Now whether I’m subconsciously doing that to fill up my day I don’t know, but I don’t think I am [...] And maybe I’ve just been unfortunate, because some of my pals are like ‘you’ve just been out with bad guys (laughs) and that’s put you off’. But I don’t think it’s that either [...] it’s not as if I’m some vulnerable female who’s had a hard time and it’s really put me off”.

[Louise, 37]

This indicates the difficulties created by heteronormative discourses that do not allow for the possibility that women may opt for singleness over partnership. This was also illustrated in Geraldine’s narrative, in which singleness was depicted not as the means to other goals or as the outcome of other factors, but as desirable in itself. Also born in the 1960s, Geraldine had previously experienced two long-term relationships, one in which she and her partner bought a flat together, and a non-cohabiting relationship with someone with children, a relationship that she stated “was perfect in a lot of ways” as she maintained considerable autonomy. Geraldine had been living alone for several years, and single for two. While she stated a preference for this status, Geraldine’s difficulties in ‘going public’ indicate the social unacceptability of this position. However, Geraldine’s narrative indicated she was gradually ‘coming out’ about this:

“I actually like being a spinster [...] I don’t actually want to be with anyone, be in a relationship – but I think people find that strange [...] I’ve been more, just in the past year or so I’ve actually been more open with my friends that’s what I don’t want”

[Geraldine, 36]

Explanations that refer to changes over time in the position of women, particularly economic independence, indicate the influence of a feminist discourse. Here, participants present themselves as opting for singleness rather than putting up with inequalities in their personal relationships. These, as with explanations in which participants expressed a preference for singleness, are in contra-distinction to dominant discourses wherein singleness is represented either as a personal failing or the outcome of other factors, and assumed to be a cost. These explanations thus indicate that the increased options referred to by several participants include the possibility of the cultural acceptability of the option of remaining single, wherein this is understood as an alternative rather than a necessarily deviant partnership status.

Theresa's narrative depicted a somewhat 'counter-culture' identity. She had moved often, living in several countries and anticipating doing so in the future. As well as a resistance to formal marriage, Theresa also stated her resistance to standard employment, and was currently teaching part-time through choice. Other participants who presented a counter-cultural identity similarly indicated a resistance to standard employment and formal marriage. Interestingly, in addition to their singleness, other aspects of these participants' biographies marked them out as 'different', for example being a teenage mother or having a different nationality to the host population of the country to which they had moved. Byrne has argued that "being regarded as different, being on the outside can precipitate a greater self-awareness helping to build a more self-examined life and alternative identities for women" (2000b:18). The narratives of participants who were self-consciously 'alternative' suggest being situated as different in other respects may have enabled the possibility of being open to other forms of difference, such as remaining single.

This is illustrated in Mandy's account. Born in the 1960s, Mandy had ended a nineteen-year relationship in her late thirties, which she described as "troubled". She had bought a property with her then partner, however they had also separated on several occasions. She subsequently had other relationships, though none were cohabiting. Mandy was now living alone for the first time, and had also been single for over a year, the longest period she had spent outwith a relationship. Unlike other narratives 'explaining' singleness with reference to negative experiences of previous relationships, Mandy accounted for her current single status in terms of self-

development: “I know that I have needed a period of time on my own [...] to grow and develop as a person”

This explanation relates to a discourse of ‘self-actualisation’. Such explanations risk situating participants as concerned with self at the expense of wider obligations, a theme prevalent in many contemporary debates. Rose (1999) for example expresses profound unease at the centrality of a “regime of the self” pervading contemporary western culture, which he argues is organised around the values of identity, choice, autonomy and self-realisation at the expense of other ways of relating to ourselves and others, encompassed in terms such as dependency, mutuality, and self-sacrifice. Chapter Five demonstrates that singleness does not necessarily preclude commitment to others. This research also suggests that self-development is not necessarily equivalent to self-centredness, with some narratives indicating that participants may be pursuing this in order to enhance relationships with others, rather than at the expense of these. Thus Kathleen, born in the 1950s, described a problematic family background and a consequently troubled early adulthood during which she was “chronically unhappy”. In her late twenties Kathleen started psychotherapy, which she has since continued. She also decided to retrain as a child psychiatrist, and in her early thirties undertook a degree. During this time she consciously decided to be celibate. However, now forty-seven, Kathleen has since completed her training and is proactively pursuing both a new job and partnership, joining a supper club and considering moving closer to any future employment “so it increases the possibility of, you know, if I am going to bump into someone, you know, I am not all the time either working or sitting on a train”. Other narratives similarly indicated participants’ understandings that experiencing a period of singleness would better equip them to have a successful partnership.

Mandy depicted her biography in terms of agentic decisions, including moving to Scotland and setting up her own business in her twenties, going to art school as a mature student, and ending her long term relationship. Mandy was aware that her singleness marked her as ‘different’, observing that her friends were “perplexed [...] they don’t quite get what I am doing”. She was also aware of potential stigma accruing to her choices: “I think because one has chosen to do something that is very much about oneself, one could be seen to be selfish”. However, this stigma was

gendered: “somebody who is quite single minded or very focused on who they are and what they want, it’s a guy. And it is much more acceptable [...] it’s a much more masculine thing to do”, whereas choosing singleness for women meant “she must be gay or she must be a man hater generally or, you know, she’s frigid”. Mandy also recounted ‘warnings’ that her behaviour would render her unattractive: “my neighbour downstairs thinks that I’m too independent and that says ‘I won’t find a man’, that’s what that means”. However, she attributed this to a traditional view of gender relations, and stated that negative images of singleness “certainly does fuel me to challenge the stereotype”. Mandy’s depiction of singleness as challenging, both in terms of others’ expectations, and that remaining single and childless would require her having “to shift my perception of me as a woman”, enabled her to position herself as resisting dominant discourses and as ‘pioneering’:

“I am not the norm. You are not the norm. I think we are a minority, as it were, so in a sense we are, kind of leading the way. And that kind of filters down through society and maybe there will be other women out there who will question what they want from life and hopefully break free, from rigid stereotypes and rigid pre-conceptions about what women should be and how they should be in the world”.

[Mandy, 39]

This narrative illustrates singleness as a positive aspect of identity. As the following section details, several women depicted singleness as personally empowering, valuing in particular a sense of capability associated with the self-sufficiency necessitated by singleness. However, singleness was more commonly represented as the outcome of social change, rather than as its progenitor.

Mandy represented a period of singleness as a necessary prerequisite for self-development. Yet, when asked about whether she would consider changing her status, she observed that her experience meant she now anticipated future periods of singleness: “I think this is really interesting, I think I am quite likely to be single, if not in the near future, at other points in my life. I think it is going to become the norm rather than not. Because of what I have learnt in the last year”. Several participants depicted various ‘practices’ associated with singleness as both pleasurable in themselves, as well as enabling self-development, and this is considered below.

The following section considers explanations provided by participants to account for their parental status. Considerable changes in the reproductive possibilities for women in recent decades, such as the development of the contraceptive pill and new reproductive technologies, have provided women with more control over their fertility. Nevertheless, common explanations for parental status, including those provided by participants who had opted into solo motherhood, also presented this as the outcome of other factors. The following section looks firstly at the way in which childlessness is accounted for, then at explanations for single motherhood.

Accounting for Childlessness

Byrne (2000b) notes that most participants in her research did not wish to be represented as voluntarily child-free. Explanations for childlessness in this research were less varied than those for singleness, and related predominantly to a dominant discourse in which marriage or partnership was assumed as a prerequisite for motherhood. For example Nora, born in the 1930s, replied when asked whether she had wanted children, “no, I suppose because I just felt that children come with marriage”. Nora also considered married women not having children as “a bit shocking, because if I’d married I would have automatically have had children”. This ‘automatic’ linking of marriage and motherhood has clearly been challenged by changes over time in reproductive possibilities. Nevertheless, an explanation of singleness precluding children was evident in all cohorts. This protects participants from censure, however also risks positioning them as unfortunate. Two participants depicted childlessness in terms of great loss. Sarah, born in the 1930s, stated she always wanted children, and described her childlessness as “a very deep regret”. Wendy, born in the 1940s, also observed she “really would have liked to have had children”, and described feeling “very bitter” about a previous relationship in which she felt lead “up the garden path” and which “used up precious years”.

Nevertheless, other explanations related to personal preference were also evident, again across all cohorts. Thus Olive, also born in the 1930s, stated “I never really had any great desire to procreate the species particularly”. This stated lack of desire potentially risks presenting participants as ‘selfish’ or ‘unnatural’. However, this explanation was utilised in ways that suggested participants were drawing upon a

notion of a biological maternal urge as determining the decision to have children¹⁴. This discourse allows the lack of such a desire to be understood as more a matter of chance than choice. Thus Joan, born in the 1960s, stated when asked about children “I’ve never felt maternal”, and distinguished herself from her sister, “desperate” for children, “I am very different from her because I don’t have this need for children and she does, and that must be dreadful [...] I don’t have any of that – luckily”. Attributing a desire for children to ‘nature’ may mean participants do not feel ‘accountable’ for its absence. This explanation of naturalised maternal desire was also evident in the narratives of women who opted into solo motherhood. As the section below details, while the decision to act upon their desire for children was accounted for, the desire itself was taken for granted.

The notion of a biological maternal desire for children was expressed explicitly by Debra, born in the 1960s: “I think you’re programmed [...] because that’s what makes you want to have a baby, to keep the species going. You can’t help it, I think”. Such an explanation does risk presenting childlessness as either problematic or ‘unnatural’ for women. Debra described a very close relationship with her nephews, which she now considered “enough”. Other participants similarly emphasised valued relationships with children. Debra also did not discount the possibility of having children of her own: “It’s not to say that in another couple of years when I’m nearing forty that I might not go ‘oh my God I want children’”. Participants from younger cohorts who explained their childlessness in terms of their lack of desire similarly referred to the possibility of the onset of this desire at a later age, with some mentioning technological changes as extending the possibilities for later childbirth. These caveats about possible future desire suggest some difficulty for women of childbearing age in claiming satisfaction with childlessness.

Cultural and material changes have led to a possible separation between not just marriage and motherhood, but also partnership and motherhood, and this was acknowledged in participants’ narratives. Thus, some participants who accounted for childlessness through reference to singleness identified this as a personal position. In

¹⁴ This discourse of a ‘biological urge’ is evident in popular analyses of contemporary childlessness, for example Sylvia Ann Hewlett in her book ‘Baby Hunger’ refers to the ‘unfathomable ... depths of the drive to have children’, which ‘has a terrible power’ and ‘must be hardwired’ (2002:42).

addition, this was not necessarily depicted as a loss. For example Jenny's account suggests her awareness and dismissal of the option of having children on her own. When asked about children Jenny, born in the 1960s, replied, "for me the children thing goes with the relationship and without the relationship there won't be any children". While actively seeking a partnership, Jenny felt her age, thirty-nine, meant "it's unlikely that I will have my own children", a prospect about which she felt "comfortable". Jenny also referred to alternatives such as she and a potential partner adopting, observing this was a prospect she would not have contemplated prior to having friends who had recently done so. The way in which particular experiences changed participants' attitudes is considered further below.

This possibility was also evident in its denunciation by some participants. Thus Tanya, born in the 1950s, dismissed solo motherhood as "quite frankly stupid. That's selfish in the extreme. That's narcissistic". Interestingly, this suggests that this possibility may cause new 'difficulties' for women in having to account for their childlessness in ways not reducible to singleness. This also demonstrates the limited approved identities available to women in relation to motherhood, whereby both childlessness and having a child alone risk exposing women to charges of selfishness.

The narratives of several participants depicted them as sanguine about their childlessness. As noted above, this was related to a stated lack of desire for some participants, while for others this was depicted in terms of fate. Ellen's narrative demonstrated both explanations. It illustrates also a theme common to many participants and evident across all cohorts, that of long-standing assumptions of marriage and motherhood. However, her narrative suggests some difficulty in reconciling expectations of how her life would be with current preferences, and she did not discount the possibility of either at some time in the future:

"I'd always assumed that I would prefer to marry, I would be married with children, it didn't dawn on me, you know, that I'd still be single with no prospect of that at the moment [...] I think I would like to have children but at the same time, I'm not desperate for children just now. I don't know if there is a biological clock but I've not got any great urge to have children at this moment in time".

[Ellen, 35]

Several narratives depicted both singleness and childlessness as ‘just happening’, rather than being agentically sought. Thus Maureen, born in the 1950s, observed “when I was younger, I always assumed that I would get married and have children [...] It was just part of what would happen to me [...] but then you get to the stage where you realise it’s just not going to happen, and if it’s not going to happen, that’s it”. Such explanations question attributions of familial changes to individual preferences. As noted above, attributing one’s status to ‘happenstance’ may in part reflect the difficulty of accounting for a stigmatised subject position, however may also reflect how participants experienced their life histories.

As Chapter One notes, there has been considerable attention in recent academic debates to declining fertility in industrialised nations. This includes the contention that professional women in particular may be sacrificing family life in the pursuit of a career (Di Stefano and Pinelli, 2004:366)¹⁵. Yet participants varied significantly in the extent to which childlessness was depicted as a personal cost. Some referred to this as a source of great regret, however others talked about this with considerable equanimity, with any difficulties more to do with coming to terms with the idea of themselves as a ‘childless woman’ rather than childlessness per se. Those who stated a positive desire to remain childless depicted this as an unproblematic decision. Social changes enabling reproductive choices have seen the emergence of a discourse of voluntary childlessness, in which the identity of the childless women may no longer be a problematic identity position¹⁶.

While this was not explicitly stated as a reason for childlessness, several participants referred to not experiencing the ‘costs’ associated with children as an advantage of singleness. This observation points to the importance of the context in which

¹⁵ This is also claimed by Hewlett, who states “somewhere between a third and half of all professional women in America are forced to sacrifice children” (2002:21). She cites a British study (Crompton 1995) using census data to show the number of female managers who do not have children, to suggest a similar scenario in Britain. However, as noted previously, the way in which such changes are experienced cannot be ‘read off’ from statistical data.

¹⁶ An emergent ‘childfree by choice’ movement is evident in numerous websites addressing issues such as the stigmatisation of childlessness, and representing this as an individual lifestyle option. However, these sites also indicate some hostility to ‘family-friendly’ policies in workplaces that, it is argued, impact unfairly on the childfree. As Chapter Six notes, an understanding of caring as an individual rather than a societal responsibility, yet in a context where it is assumed overwhelmingly as a woman’s responsibility, risks increasing polarisation by generation as well as gender.

individual preferences are shaped¹⁷. Explanations for fertility decline include the ‘Second Demographic Transition’ theory, in which individual autonomy and the growth in values of self-realisation, satisfaction of personal preferences, liberalism and freedom from traditional forces of authority, especially religion, are emphasised (see Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaege, 1995). McDonald (2000) argues however that the higher fertility rates of liberal societies, such as those of the Nordic countries, compared to traditional societies, challenge this theory. Rather, it is the uneven nature of gender equity in different social institutions that underpins this decline. Whereas gender equity has progressed in institutions that deal with people as individuals, such as education and market employment, levels of gender equity in other institutions, such as the welfare state and the family, are low. “The male breadwinner model still underpins family-oriented social institutions. The more traditional the society is in regard to its family system, the greater is the level of incoherence between social institutions and the lower is fertility” (2000:17).

As Chapter Two details, there is much feminist research drawing attention to the way in which women disproportionately bear the cost of childrearing, despite the recent increase in mothers’ labour force participation. Other commentators have similarly argued that the rigidity of role divisions helps to explain why some women opt not to set up a family (see Di Stefano and Pinelli, 2004:367). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that birthrates will not increase significantly as long as it is an individual task for women to resolve the tension between a wish for children and “a life of their own”, in the absence of political measures to make these spheres compatible and men’s willingness to take an active share in childcare (2002:126)¹⁸.

As Lewis (2003) observes, the various pathways into single motherhood have changed over time and affect how this has been perceived. The main causes now are divorce, unmarried motherhood and the breakdown of cohabitation, all of which may be considered moral as well as social problems (2003: 22-23). Recent social changes

¹⁷ Variations in fertility rates across European countries indicate the importance of social policy in shaping different contexts. Against a general trend of decline, the Nordic countries (Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden) are amongst the few European countries that have experienced an increase in total fertility rates between 1980 and 2002/3 (Eurostat, 2004:5).

¹⁸ In Britain, the need for policies to address gender equity is increasingly being recognised across the political spectrum. In a recent speech David Willets, Shadow Secretary for Social Security, stated “it is the societies with the most traditional roles for women (and men) ... that have the lowest birth rate ...

have led to the separation of partnership and parenthood, as the mothers in this study illustrate. The section below considers explanations for single motherhood.

Accounting for Single Motherhood

The solo mothers in this sample clearly had to be agentic about becoming mothers via donor insemination and adoption. Nevertheless, their narratives depicted this less as a choice than as the only means to motherhood, given their desire for children, partnership status and age. This desire was depicted as long-standing, for example Brenda, born in the 1960s, observed, “I think I’ve always wanted to have children”. Fiona, born in the 1950s, similarly depicted both motherhood and partnership as enduring desires, “I always said ‘I know I’m going to have children’ [...] I so much wanted to get into a really good relationship for so long”. This contrasted with participants who had become mothers while in cohabiting relationships, and whose narratives did not account for this, suggesting the somewhat ‘taken for granted’ nature of motherhood as an aspect of partnership¹⁹.

The ways in which solo mothers accounted for their decision suggests their difficulties in negotiating this stigmatised subject positioning. Some related this to experiencing relationships that either did not, or were unlikely to, lead to anything further. Thus Tessa, born in the 1960s, stated that following several relationships in her late twenties, “I thought if this continues to go on like this, and there’s no reason why it shouldn’t (laughs), I can’t guarantee that it’s going to change, I still won’t have a baby, and what I really want is to have a baby”. She subsequently started donor insemination, and had a son at thirty. Fiona described having spent a period of time actively pursuing relationships via personal ads specifying that she wanted children, however stated she only met men who did not want commitment or children. “I did that for nearly ten years starting from when I was about thirty-two, and it just began to get soul destroying in the end”. After trying donor insemination and IVF, Fiona adopted two children in her mid-forties. Brenda related her decision to have a child in part to working conditions which she depicted as making it difficult to sustain

It is the societies where women – and men – can combine work and childcare that have higher birth rates. Feminism is the new natalism” (Willets, 2003).

¹⁹ One mother who had her child in the early seventies within a long-term ‘marriage like’ relationship in which she took her partner’s name, did not tell her son until several years after she ended the relationship that she was not married, suggesting her perception of a stigma about illegitimacy rather than single motherhood per se.

relationships²⁰, as well as her age: “at the age of 34 coming up to 35 was the thought of ‘hang on a minute, what is going to be different for the next five years from the last five years? So that I will get married and have children? But I am on a fertility timeline’”. At the time of interview, Brenda had recently had a child via donor insemination.

However, the solo mothers’ narratives also indicated their awareness of the negative social identity associated with opting into single motherhood, illustrating a tension between a validated maternal desire, and pursuing this without a partner. This was evident in their descriptions of difficulties in accessing services. Tessa referred to her considerable anxiety about possible restrictions being imposed when she was pursuing donor insemination “I was terrified that it was going to be taken away from me, that they’d change the law or something before I got pregnant”. Brenda recounted approaching the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority for a list of clinics that would be “willing to inseminate single women [...] the HFEA were very shocked that I could even think of asking this question, and said to me that I would have to go round place by place to find out”. Fiona stated that the clinic at which she underwent IVF “didn’t see single women without partners, so I fibbed and said that I had a partner in order to get treatment there”.

While these narratives demonstrate a ‘separating out’ of partnership and parenthood, participants did not depict opting into solo motherhood as at the expense of partnership. For example Tessa, now 41, stated “I hoped that I’d have a child and then I’d meet someone else and have more children”. Fiona, now 49, who now considered the possibility of having a relationship not “very likely”, described “letting go of, you know, wanting this close relationship with a man” as “the hardest thing”. In contrast, other mothers who expressed an opinion on the possibilities of future partnership either rejected this or were more ambivalent. Thus Birgit, born in the 1950s and who had a child at 42 through a non-cohabiting relationship, stated when asked if she would consider changing her single status, “no, because of my daughter, I cannot imagine another person in our lives”. Sally, born in the 1960s and who had a child at seventeen as a result of an unplanned pregnancy, said she had not wanted any permanent relationships when her child was growing up, in part because she did not

²⁰ Brenda’s employment history was looked at in Chapter Six.

want anyone “interfering with the way I brought her up”, but also because “I was well aware that step-parents, you know research says they are six times more likely to abuse, and I always had that in the back of my mind”. This contrast suggests that solo mother’s route into parenthood may mean a requirement to rebut perceptions of their decision as ‘superseding’ men. Asked about future children, most mothers discounted the possibility of doing this alone. Although they stated they would like to do this, it would be too difficult given their age, breadwinner status and the demands of caring for young children. For example Birgit, now 44, stated “I would have liked to have more but it would make my life very, very difficult [...] And also I don’t know whether I would be able to have more children because I am a bit old”. Tessa observed “if I were to find myself in a relationship with someone that wanted to have children, I would think about it”, nevertheless ruled out the possibility of having another on her own, in part because of the childcare costs.

Mothers’ narratives indicated an awareness of single motherhood as a stigmatised identity in the ways they sought to protect themselves and their children against censure. Birgit stated that her parents were very supportive: “they thought it was a great idea [...] my mum was overjoyed”. She also noted that her child has a relationship with the birth father, who “is around a lot, I mean, she sees him more than most people’s kids see their dads!”. Mothers who had opted into single motherhood located themselves in relation to both partnered women, and stigmatised stereotypes of typical single mothers as feckless and ‘welfare dependent’, emphasising their networks of support with caring for their children and their financial self-sufficiency. Thus Tessa stated, “being a single parent, I’ve always felt because this is what I’ve chosen to be, I have to be very careful and that I should be self-sufficient”. Brenda, describing her family’s support as a prerequisite for her decision, observed, “I have more support than women who are married with children”. When recounting that she had discounted the possibility of future children, Brenda commented “my conscience is salved [...] he’s got a quasi-sibling”, referring to her brother’s child who lived round the corner. Brenda and Tessa both raised the issue of male role models for their sons. Brenda felt this was “incredibly important”, and referred to input from male relatives and friends, stating “I do feel reasonably comfortable that I’ve covered most of my bases with that”. Tessa, noting the “very heavy value judgements [...]

people thinking children should have fathers, and a mother isn't enough", also referred to encouraging her son in relationships with male friends as well as her brother.

As this section illustrates, most explanations accounting for partnership and parental status worked to 'protect' participants from censure or pity, highlighting the persistence of normative ideologies in which spinsterhood, childlessness and single motherhood are rendered problematic. Nevertheless, some narratives also pointed to the emergence of 'alternative' discourses, in which singleness could be represented as a personal preference, or as a positive aspect of identity. In addition, these narratives demonstrate participants both conforming to and challenging social identities available for women in dominant discourses. Thus, solo mothers drew on normative discourses such as that of a 'maternal urge' to account for their decision to have children alone, yet simultaneously - as with all single mothers - challenged normative gender identities through practices such as being breadwinners for their families.

Reynolds and Wetherall argue that "social history, social practices and the ideological field around singleness constructs a cultural slot and a set of identity possibilities", while the process of living with these possibilities is a personal identity project for the individual woman (2003:493). The following section focuses on the 'social practices' engaged in by participants, drawing on a Foucauldian notion of the 'technologies of the self' through which identities are constructed, to consider the extent to which these contribute to a challenging of dominant discourses around singlehood.

The Practices of Singleness

Byrne (2000b) argues that resistance to dominant social identities for women in contemporary Ireland can be discerned in both the stigma management strategies adopted by the single women in her research, as well as the care and practices of the self. This research similarly indicated resistance at work, both in the ways participants sought to rebut particular stigmatised subject positions as well as in certain 'actions' taken, for example to avoid uncomfortable social occasions. However, another aspect of heteronormative discourses is the 'invisibilising' or downgrading of the positive experiences of singleness, and these are looked at below.

Byrne observes that heterosexual familism emphasises separation from family of origin, while leaving the parental home has been identified as a key developmental task necessary to symbolise maturity. Nevertheless, she argues that deliberately nurturing relationships, including with parents and siblings, that sustain single self-identity, and avoiding those which undermine this, can also be understood as indicative of maturity (2003:454). The accounts of participants sustaining intimate relationships with both friends and family, considered in Chapter Five, challenges stereotypes of the lonely or isolated spinster. This research also demonstrated participants agentially opting out of relationships perceived as damaging to a positive sense of self, for example Brenda stated she eschewed contact with those who had a negative attitude to single motherhood, because “what is the point? It is bad for him and it is bad for me”.

Simon has argued that women who never marry cannot share in the social and economic benefits of male privilege, thus “are not protected from the imperatives of earning a living, carving out a legitimate social role, and planning for old age” (1987:83). Participants’ employment histories, looked at in Chapter Six, varied considerably by factors such as socio-economic background and historical context. The extent to which these were portrayed as pleasurable also varied, although several participants depicted their employment as enjoyable. While some participants depicted experiencing the economic autonomy necessitated by singleness as stressful, several depicted this as enabling opportunities to pursue desired goals, such as education or non-standard employment. Several narratives also depicted specific practices of singleness as valued for the pleasure they afford, and the following section looks at participants’ accounts of doing things alone, and living alone.

Doing Things Alone: The Joy of Solitude

Several participants referred to undertaking various activities on their own, ranging from going to the cinema or theatre to travelling or living abroad. While some related this to difficulties in the availability of others to go with, others depicted this as enabling an experience that had its own advantages. Thus Katherine, born in the 1930s, stated “in a way, it’s quite good to do things on your own, because you are not worried, if it’s something you want to see, you are sometimes very conscious of whether the other person likes it or not, and it can spoil it for you if you feel that the

other person is not enjoying it as much as you are". Participants varied as to which activities they would be happy undertaking alone. Nevertheless, the narratives of several participants indicated that while doing so may initially have been motivated by a lack of alternatives, this was often experienced with great pleasure. In addition, some participants presented an ability to undertake activities alone as a particular advantage of singleness.

However, the narratives of several participants indicated that representing undertaking activities alone as pleasurable was a 'tensional' location. Prevailing dominant discourses do not allow for a preference for solitude. Riley (2002), in arguing for the recognition and retrieval of "the solitary", notes that while solitariness may be willed and preferred by its bearer, a "'aint of vice always clouds it"; she suggests this applies especially to women, as if they own a "naturally greater emotional extensionality" (2002:8). This may be especially so for spinsters, given stereotyping of being alone as attributable to personal deficit. Thus, several participants 'accounted' for this practice in various ways, for example attributing their pleasure in solitude to not having siblings or having had a particular upbringing, or deliberately discounting experiences of loneliness. For example Betty, born in the 1950s commented, "being an only child, brought up in the country, you know rather than in the middle of a town, I'm used to my independence and being alone, and being alone is not the same as being lonely".

Some narratives however depicted undertaking certain activities alone as unappealing, and this evidently limited options for some participants. For example Kitty, born in the 1930s, had been advised to go on holiday for her health, however going alone was clearly a challenging prospect: "people say go on holiday, particularly my GP. In my adult life I have never gone alone [...] on my own, there is no appeal. I would need to take that mental adjustment as well as the physical difficulty". An inability to undertake certain activities alone was thus depicted as a difficulty by some participants. Thus Debra, born in the 1960s and who lived with her mother and younger brother, commented "there is a problem. I couldn't go on a holiday on my own [...] I couldn't go live on my own, I don't like, I don't want to be on my own". She attributed this in part to the stigma associated with women undertaking activities alone, but also to fears of personal safety.

“I think society just frowns on women who go out drinking on their own [...] you go into a bar, and it’s six feet deep with guys at the bar, no women. It’s the standard stereotype. I don’t actually ever remember seeing a woman in a restaurant on her own. But I’ve seen plenty of men [...] A woman on her own is more vulnerable to being preyed upon or attacked or, you know, it’s a sad reflection that women are not safe”.

[Debra, 37]

Other participants also related a reluctance to undertake certain activities alone to previous experiences, for example Nora, born in the 1930s, stated “I went to a cinema on my own and I felt someone touching me, it was quite a shock and a couple of times things like that have happened. So, now I would love to just go off to the cinema on my own but now I can’t make myself do it, I’ll only go with my friends, whenever they’re available”. These excerpts thus suggest the limited options available to women, whereby both undertaking activities on one’s own and not doing so could be problematic. However, this also meant participants presenting themselves as somewhat intrepid for undertaking certain activities perceived as unusual for women, and this is looked at further below.

Debra’s narrative also indicated that her trepidation could be overcome in particular circumstances, in this instance having a nearby cinema.

“It’s difficult, there is, society isn’t geared up to single people [...] Even things like just going out on your own, like going to the pictures or something like that, it’s ... intimidating. Because people look at you, as if to say ‘oh she’s been stood up’ because she can’t possibly be on her own. And yet I learned to go to the pictures on my own when I was in London”.

[Debra, 37]

This example illustrates a theme common to several narratives, that of participants’ circumstances giving rise to particular experiences, which were then depicted as having been experienced with great pleasure. For example Katy, born in the 1940s, wrote of having planned a trip to Africa with an organisation for single people because of the unavailability of other female friends with whom she had previously holidayed, and subsequently of her experience of this. The following excerpts illustrate that, while deciding to do this was initially motivated by a lack of alternatives and

considered as somewhat daunting, her enjoyment lead to her booking with the same organisation the following year:

“Rather than sit about for two weeks – I have taken the bull by the horns and booked already to go to [Africa]. Is that brave or what? Quite an adventure by myself”

“[Africa] was WONDERFUL [...] (I) met such NICE folk in our group [...] These singles holidays for older people really serve us well and although they are more expensive than a 'normal' holiday they are well worth it. One is SO well looked after”

[Katy, 53]

Katy’s experience is particularly interesting, as during her interview she had described a holiday spent alone in a holiday resort. While she met two married couples with whom she socialised during the day, she spent her evenings alone and “had an early night”, which her narrative indicates was not through choice. Asked if she would do this again, Katy replied “I would, if I had to, I would”. She described her subsequent trip far more positively. Other participants similarly referred to specialist services in positive terms. For example Joan, born in the 1960s, moved to London following the ending of a long term relationship, about which she was “both excited and daunted”, and described an activity group she joined as a “life saver”:

“I realised you know, that I needed to make friends, whatever, and I joined a group [...] It’s fantastic. It is such a great set up, especially for people who are new to a city [...] I got to know a lot of people pretty quickly and my social life just took off”

[Joan, 40]

These positive portrayals suggest that the provision of such specialist services may challenge a sense of singleness as anomalous, as well as presenting participants as acting strategically to address particular circumstances.

Several narratives thus indicated that, as well as the pleasure afforded from undertaking particular activities, some participants who had initially considered these daunting also derived a sense of satisfaction from having overcome initial

apprehension. In addition, several participants described a sense of fulfillment from having learnt to be self-sufficient and depicted this as an advantage of singleness for women. Some related this to undertaking practical DIY tasks around the home that would normally be undertaken by men, while others depicted the ability to spend time alone as a benefit enabled by singleness (an interesting reversal of the causal explanation of an enjoyment of solitude underpinning doing things alone referred to above). For example Jenny, born in the 1960s, observed that being comfortable with her own company meant she did not feel unable to do certain things alone, from going to concerts to traveling abroad, and she compared this with the difficulties some people may have as a result of being used to undertaking activities as a couple, exemplifying this with the practical constraints experienced by a widowed relative who “didn’t drive and was very much used to her late husband driving her here there and everywhere”.

The narratives of several participants suggested that singleness necessitated certain practices that gave rise to a particularly gendered sense of capability, specifically enabling skills and capacities unusual in a woman. This was depicted in various ways, including in counterposing oneself to partnered women as in the example above. However, this was also depicted through the portrayals of negative experiences in which participants presented their behaviour as problematic for others because it countered gender conventions. Thus Bridget, born in the 1950s, observed that friends’ husbands “don’t know quite how to deal with me”, recounting experiences of being discounted by husbands which she attributed to her having knowledge that these men found challenging:

“Because I would have knowledge and information about some of the bits that would be the main, the man's role, in running houses, I find myself, you know, opening my mouth to start to comment on something [...] (*So it's more than you just being single [...] it's that you know the stuff that the men feel is their domain?*) Yes. It's so weird, and sadly I never know until I cause one of these reactions, what it is that is their domain. Because what I know, I just know!”

[Bridget, 47]

Byrne, drawing on Foucault, identifies as a central element of self-identity the care and practices of the self. As well as provisioning for oneself materially, this was evident in “the capacity to make choices, to prioritise and devise life plans” (2003:14). Some participants, through presenting this capacity as an advantage of singleness, thus presented singleness as a positive aspect of self-identity. Several participants emphasised independence and freedom as significant advantages of singleness, with some defining this as the freedom to make choices. For example Brenda, born in the 1960s, referred to herself and her son as having “this huge freedom in a way that I wouldn’t have if I was in a partnership”, whereby they could travel abroad or move elsewhere. Some narratives also depicted this as freedom from having to undertake the ‘woman’s role’ in a partnership. Thus, Brenda also stated as an advantage of singleness “you don’t have to cook for somebody when they come home – if I were in a typical marriage and I was on maternity leave I would be expected to look after the kid all day and do the domestics as well”. This is considered further below in relation to participants’ experiences of living alone.

Living Alone: Room of One’s Own

Living alone was a common experience amongst participants. The majority lived alone at the time of interview, or had done so prior to having children. Single people living alone have been perceived as “in a conspicuously isolated, lonely, and therefore vulnerable situation” (Adams, 1981:222). However, participants generally depicted this positively, with a majority expressing a preference for living alone and no intention of changing their living status. Some portrayed living alone as a source of great pleasure. For example Franny, born in the 1940s, had lived with her father in the parental home until his death in the early 1990s, and subsequently moved to a purpose-built flat for single people. Asked about living alone, she commented “sitting out there in my garden with my Sunday Times with my cats, and having something tasty to eat, and popping out and having a pot of coffee and sitting out there, life doesn’t get much better. I love it”. As noted above, a common theme evident in several narratives was apprehension about undertaking certain activities alone, which some participants depicted as inhibiting certain activities. However, several narratives indicated positive experiences of undertaking activities or living alone, in spite of initial trepidation. This was illustrated by Mandy, who had lived alone for two years:

“And I love it now, but the first 6 months were really challenging. Really, really difficult. I spent the whole first 6 months out, every night, every day (*so that you could avoid being on your own?*) Yes. The fear, and facing those feelings was just too much. And I knew that I needed to, and ... but it’s great now [...] It’s like stroking a cat, it is just so reassuring and wonderful and I feel a bit guilty about it sometimes”

[Mandy, 39]

This excerpt suggests an awareness that the pleasure derived from living alone may be taboo. As Riley (2002) argues, this may be particularly so for women, rendering her potentially not just “wicked” but “de-sexed”. The emphasis on the pleasures of living alone evident in several narratives can be understood as a rhetorical ‘talking up’ in the face of prevailing presumptions of loneliness. Yet, this also illustrates the ‘double bind’ faced by women who do not conform to heteronormativity, whereby any living arrangement that does not include a male partner is at risk of disparagement, as the difficulties encountered by participants living with parents described previously in Chapter Five, also suggest.

Nonetheless, such taboos did not prevent some participants undertaking particular activities, while the pleasures these afforded were depicted as ensuring their repetition. Mandy had also been on holiday abroad on her own for the first time the previous year which, despite being initially difficult, was described positively: “it was very challenging the first three days. I was really uncomfortable [...] (*and is that something you would do again, go on holiday on your own?*) Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I won’t stop now, I love it. I want to do lots more”. As mentioned above, undertaking certain activities may portray participants as audacious, and thereby can be seen as part of a construction of a positive self-identity.

Many participants referred to living alone as a particular advantage of singleness, and some stated that they would not consider cohabiting in future relationships. For example Queenie, born in the 1950s, had experienced sharing with flatmates, living in hotels when working there, and also cohabiting in a relationship for nineteen years. She had subsequently lived alone for several years, and stated this as an advantage of singleness: “you close the door and you do what you want! (laughs) [...] I think if I did have a relationship, he’d have his house and I’d have mine”. Some portrayed the

advantages of this in ‘gender-neutral’ terms, for example referring to practical considerations such as being able to decide one’s own standards in terms of tidiness or meals. However, other participants depicted as an advantage the freedom from undertaking the ‘woman’s role’. Thus Franny, born in the 1940s and who had lived with her father for many years, continuing to work full-time and also doing the cooking, described as an advantage of living alone not having “to have set formal meals [...] (my dad) was a traditional Scotsman, if it didn’t have meat and two veg, it wasn’t a proper dinner!”. Some participants explicitly contrasted this autonomy with obligations associated with partnership for women. In addition, some also compared this to the constraints experienced at work. Both are illustrated in Louise’s narrative:

“When I come in I can just relax and I don’t have to accommodate somebody, whereas sometimes if you’ve got to do that in your workplace and then come home, and if you’ve got screaming kids... [...] I don’t have to be thinking if I’d got kids ‘oh I need to be doing this, I need to be doing that’, or even a husband that you need to get his dinner or something”

[Louise, 37]

However, several participants did refer to particular issues arising from living alone. Some of these were practical, such as not having someone else with whom to share household tasks, while others related to not having someone there to share pleasurable activities such as eating meals. In addition, not having someone ‘on hand’ to share problems was also reported as a disadvantage of living alone, for example Margaret, born in the 1950s, stated:

“I think that when things are hard – you know, you have got problems and you’re having a hard time at work – there is nothing to distract you. You know, you can’t come home and find somebody else has problems too, or that you can do things together that will just take your mind off it”

[Margaret, 44]

Other participants related possible disadvantages of living alone to experiences such as illness or ageing. Thus Olive, 71, commented: “I think as you get older you maybe think if there was someone there to give you a cup of tea if you’d really had a bad day or maybe not feeling right, a bad back or something”. However, Olive also emphasised the value she placed on the autonomy afforded by living alone. Several

participants were reflexive about a tension between valuing autonomy and a desire for companionship. As mentioned above, Wendy and Sarah discussed the option of living together, and Sarah commented “I would like to have, you know, to have someone there but I also like my own space because, I mean I like being alone, but I like company. You know I think it would be lovely to come in and say 'oh I've had a rotten day, or a nice day' or you know 'what do you think of this?’. As well as the potential stigma restricting this option, noted above, they also referred to the practical difficulties of retaining one’s own ‘space’ when sharing accommodation. However, participants’ awareness of this did allow them to consider various possibilities that would enable both companionship and a degree of autonomy. For example Fran, born in the 1940s, referred to discussions about living with female friends: “we’ve often said when we get older we will have to get a big house together and all live together [...] Our own flats, but all in a big house. I think that would be great”.

The narratives of several participants expressed a somewhat sanguine approach to ageing and their own future care needs, however this was a source of anxiety for some, often related to financial provision, as discussed in Chapter Six. Thus Bridget, born in the 1950s, stated, “what I do worry about [...] is what happens when I get old [...] I actually dread the idea of being old and having to go and live somewhere that’s not what I would like”. She described seeing a financial advisor “to see if I could take out an insurance policy for this, and he said ‘no you can’t’, but assured me [...] that I would be able to afford to live out my retirement in a comfortable manner”. Bridget thus presented herself as acting strategically to ensure provision for her future needs.

However, other participants expressed a more sanguine approach, while also noting this issue was not particular to single people. Thus Franny, born in the 1940s and who had lived with parents who had both experienced ill-health, responded when asked about future care needs:

“There’s absolutely no point in worrying, there’s nothing I can do about it, other than eat sensibly, have check-ups if I need check-ups, but other than that, fingers crossed. I mean, OK there’s not going to be anyone there to look after me, but I mean, people who have been married, it’s no different. By the time you get to pensionable age, you’re unlikely to have family who can run around

after you. Probably you have a daughter in London, a son in Canada, I mean because you're married and have a family, it's no guarantee"

[Franny, 58]

As described in Chapter Two, Simon's research on older never-married women identified characteristics of resourcefulness and foresighted adaptiveness, which she attributed in part to their experience of self-reliance. She also noted a resignation with physical difficulties accompanying old age, attributed to their own caregiving experiences (1987:163). However, she noted as of equal importance their 'well-developed capacity' to rely to some extent on others, observing "through many years of single life, these women have discerned both the value and the limitations of independence" (1987:182). As noted above, autonomy was a valued aspect of the lives of several participants in this research, for example Katy, born in the 1940s, commented "(it's) one of the most important things, my independence". Nonetheless, Katy also describing having a "wonderful doctor" as very important, as well as experiences of both practical and emotional support from her friends. Franny's narrative suggested her approach to future care needs was in part related to the National Health Service and her supportive friends. As such, the narratives of several participants also indicated the value of interdependence.

Most participants' narratives presented themselves as having found an acceptable balance between living alone and meeting needs for emotional and other support. Bridget, born in the 1950s, had lived alone since her mid-twenties, in part a consequences of the considerable job mobility required in her career, and an expressed preference for living alone: "although there are elements of being by myself, I mean sometimes I do want some company, that's not outweighed by the benefits of being on my own". She had also been attacked in her home, but her desire to live alone had meant taking greater precautions about her personal safety rather than changing her living status. Bridget depicted her awareness of living alone as somewhat taboo for women through her description of having been the subject of gossip: "I'd moved to the depths of the countryside and for the first time realised that people were suspicious of me living by myself, they made up stories about me 'she must be divorced, where did she get all that furniture'".

This illustrates the challenge that single women's 'practices' pose to heteronormative assumptions that preclude possibilities such as women heading their own households, and indeed buying their own furniture. The interviews indicated participants' awareness that having a home of one's own is a relatively new option for single women. This was illustrated in Franny's narrative. In both her interview and correspondence Franny indicated she experienced singleness as pleasurable, with living alone as an important aspect of that:

"I used to have conversations with my mother, 'when you're a big girl and married and have your own house'.... And I never thought I wouldn't get married, but then I never thought that I would have my own house without being married [...] *I have sometimes thought about my life and how lucky I am to be able to live this way, with a home of my own and a job. I am only the second generation of my family to have this freedom*".

[Franny, 58]

Franny's narrative indicates the importance of both material and cultural changes, as well as illustrating the joys of solitude evident in several narratives. This excerpt demonstrates the way in which certain practices associated with singleness, such as doing things alone or living alone, were drawn on by participants in presenting a positive self-identity.

Conclusion

These narratives indicate the limitations that heteronormative presumptions of partnership place on the social identities made available to single women, both through accounts of experiences in which singleness was a significant factor, as well as in the explanations accounting for partnership and parental status. Yet the varying responses of participants suggest changes over time in the significance of particular stigmatised social identities. In addition, these responses also indicate differences in the self-identities of participants. Explaining the processes underlying these differences is a complex task, however, prevalent themes evident in the narratives suggest that amongst the possibilities enabled for women by recent social changes is the possibility of claiming a satisfaction with singleness, that is a positive single self-identity.

Rose argues that the modern self is required to construct a life through the exercise of choices from amongst alternatives, with every choice an emblem of our identity, a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are (1998:231). Common explanations evident in participants' narratives utilised personal circumstances, such as the demands of employment or notions of fate, indicative of a discourse of romance as destiny. Such explanations protect the single woman from responsibility, and hence from censure. Other explanations however situated the participant as foregrounding other goals, such as education or self-development, or accounted for singleness in terms of the participant not being willing to settle for any relationship. These preserve the possibility that participants would consider future relationships; nevertheless, in presenting singleness as consequent on the decisions of participants, they situate participants as agentic, motivated and selective.

Other explanations were also evident, however, relating singleness to participants' resistance to contemporary gender relations, as well as a contentment with singleness. Implicit in these accounts, and explicitly expressed by some participants, were wider social changes providing women with the possibility of economic self-sufficiency, which in turn provided options over the relationships they wished to maintain. A few participants expressed a preference for singleness over partnership. Such explanations are not accommodated in dominant discourses predicated on a presumption of partnership or which assume the complementarity of men's and women's roles. However, they resonate with feminist discourses outlined in Chapter Two in which familial change is related to the wider opportunities for women. These opportunities include an expansion of available identities beyond wife and mother. A lack of concern about spinsterhood or childlessness evident in some narratives suggests that familial changes in recent decades have so reduced the anomaly associated with certain statuses that these aspects of identity appeared relatively insignificant aspects of these participants' subjectivities.

Byrne argues that "in naming and claiming identities outside the traditional range, the possibility for new forms of social identities is created" (2003:445). An important aspect of several narratives was the pleasures associated with certain practices of singleness, such as living alone. For many, this pleasure derived from a sense of capability associated with self-sufficiency. In recounting these practices as

pleasurable, many participants constituted singleness as a positive aspect of self-identity. This discursive construction both challenges available social identities and contributes to the emergence of alternative discourses around singleness, including a discourse in which singleness can be explained with reference to its positive dimensions for women.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Concluding Discussion

This thesis has explored the experiences and perspectives of a particular group of single women, considering these in the context of the wider societal changes occurring in Britain in the latter half of the Twentieth century. Familial changes of recent decades have been the focus of much academic attention and political concern, a concern that invariably has implications for this research on 'contemporary spinsterhood'. Those arguing that a decline in marriage signifies a decline in commitment and obligations to others rely on a notion of an essential family form that necessarily problematises those outwith it. Concerns about those who do not conform to an idealised notion of the family are long-standing. However, prevalent explanations of contemporary familial change relates these to wider social processes, and some commentators argue there is a profound moral shift wherein individuals increasingly opt for an emphasis on the self at the expense of family values (see Bellah et al, 1985; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). This understanding is challenged to some extent by the sociological work of Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), which recognises the positive potential of personal relationships becoming less ascribed and more a matter of choice. Nevertheless, the focus of both works is the (hetero)sexually based dyadic relationship, and the presumption of partnership marginalises the experiences of those not in a couple relationship.

As Chapter One details, there is little up to date information on singleness, and relatively little explicit attention to singleness in contemporary debates on familial change. These recent debates however mean a particular tension in research on single women: the emphasis on increasing individual autonomy risks positioning single women as blameworthy, yet understanding their singleness as an outcome of external forces risks confirming long-standing stereotypes of spinsterhood as an undesired and negative experience. However, the limited attention to singleness in academic research highlights the importance of providing information on the actualities of how contemporary spinsters live their lives. The multifaceted range of experiences of 'contemporary spinsters' across time and in relation to various factors, as well as the varied subjective meanings ascribed to such experiences, rendered this 'unravelling' of their understandings of singleness highly complex. Nevertheless, as well as remedying

the relative marginalisation of single women in academic research, this research has also provided an opportunity to interrogate some of the theoretical claims pertaining to the impact of individualism on personal relationships.

One aim of this thesis in examining the varied experiences of contemporary spinsterhood was to consider how these were mediated by various factors, and how these may have changed over time. An important finding of this research is the continuing significance of both gender and partnership status in shaping these women's lives, while other factors such as class and age were also evident. Thus class, for example, was clearly implicated in decisions about remaining in or leaving education, and both material and cultural factors manifestly influenced participants across all cohorts: thus, several from a middle-class background spoke of a parental expectation that they attend university, while those from a working-class background referred to the necessity of leaving education to earn a living. However, as the high proportion of participants with degree qualifications indicates, factors constraining decisions to leave school were not determining in the long term. These were also mediated by other factors, such as the state provision available in particular eras. Nevertheless, this example demonstrates the way that material and other constraints continue to structure the contexts in which individuals make decisions.

The influence of gender and partnership status is clearly demonstrated by the ongoing familial expectations of single women as carers, detailed in Chapter Five. Caring for elderly relatives is a traditional explanation of spinsterhood; the endurance of this expectation in a context of profound social change in part reflects the strength of normative understandings of femininity. Yet, the experiences of those who undertook caring for others, either as daughters or mothers, illustrates both the continuities *and* considerable changes in women's lives in recent decades. The willingness of participants to undertake caring for parents across cohorts can be seen as indicative of a continuity in familial commitments, and represents a challenge to arguments of a decline in obligations to others. Nevertheless, wider societal changes have impacted on the way in which these were performed, for example younger participants having parents move in to their own home. Furthermore, there was also evidence of a 'resistance' to such familial expectations. Both the increasing diversity in how caring was performed, as well as examples of participants who 'opted out' of problematic

familial situations, indicates the increasing options open to some women in a context of wider societal changes.

That such changes give rise to an increasing variety of ways in which people 'do' family is clearly demonstrated by those participants 'opting in' to solo motherhood through adoption and artificial insemination. It is also exemplified by the 'blurring' of the distinction between familial and friendship relationships, whereby, rather than the former being understood as given and the latter as chosen, there are elements of voluntarism and pleasure evident in both. The relationships depicted by several participants with both family and friends challenged conceptions of intimacy as residing only in the sexually based dyadic couple, as well as stereotypes of spinsters as lonely or isolated. The shifts in meanings and practices in personal relationships evident in this research also supports conceptualisations of 'family' as fluid and open to change, and arguments of an increasing diversity in familial forms rather than a decline (see Silva and Smart, 1999). The evidence of multiple factors influencing these familial practices however also endorses arguments that personal relationships are not shaped in whatever way gives pleasure regardless of practical, economic and other material circumstances (Jamieson, 1999:482). Several participants for example referred to a lack of time for personal relationships consequential on the work requirement necessitated by their financial self-sufficiency. In addition to external factors shaping personal relationships however, this research also demonstrated continuities in individuals caring both for and about the welfare of others; this continuity indicates the significance of moral concern for others as an important element of personal relationships. This commitment both challenges claims of familial changes as demonstrating an increasing focus on self at the expense of other-regarding obligations, and contests the assumptions of individual autonomy on which these are predicated, and this is discussed further below.

Nevertheless, the diversity evident in both the practices and meanings of the intimate relationships of participants in this research also points to widening options in the sphere of personal relationships. This was illustrated particularly by those 'opting in' to solo motherhood, however it was also exemplified by those participants who had opted out of problematic familial relationships: 'elective affinities' includes the option of electing not to sustain relationships which may be considered inimical. As Chapter Two has detailed, much feminist work has challenged assumptions of the family as a

harmonious unit, drawing attention to the unequal power relations that operate within it. Friedman (2000) argues that prevailing gender norms have required women to make the preservation of certain interpersonal relationships their highest concern regardless of the costs to themselves. This research suggests that wider societal changes have enabled more options for women as to which relationships they wish to maintain. As such, it highlights the progressive potential of familial change.

The complex way in which various factors inter-related to shape the experiences of women in this research was also evident in relation to their employment experiences. Explanations of familial change which ascribe this to the decline of structural constraints risk downplaying continuing material inequalities between women and men, despite recent changes such as women's increased participation in employment. This research found both gender and partnership status as important factors shaping participants' employment experiences, albeit not always in straightforward ways. These experiences were also mediated by other factors, such as class and age. Single women can be seen as exemplifying individualised 'worker citizens'. However, the experiences of several participants in this research point to the limits of assumptions of individual self-sufficiency underpinning recent employment practices and policies. Thus, the experiences of those who were either providers of care for others, or themselves required care, exemplified the limitations of the lack of attention to care requirements in the shift to an 'Adult Worker' model of employment (Lewis, 2002). The employment experiences of participants in recent decades illustrated the negative implications of an increasing emphasis on the individualisation of risk. The limitations of a reliance on employment per se as a means to financial independence was illustrated by the dependence on state provision of some retired participants whose working life had been spent in full-time but low-skilled, low-paid employment. The poverty of those dependent on state provision while caring for others or as a result of their own care requirements also demonstrated the residualised nature of this provision. As a result, the requirement for financial self-sufficiency and the possibility of dependence on state provision in old age was a considerable source of anxiety for several. However, participants' experiences of exclusion from certain policy provisions illustrated the somewhat partial nature of the shift to an 'adult worker model', with the continuing

significance of partnership status exemplified by marriage as the basis for entitlement to particular pension provisions¹.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have attributed contemporary familial changes in part to the logic of the market, and in earlier work Beck contends that “thought through to its ultimate consequence, the market model of modernity implies a society without families and children” (1992:116). The way in which employment can demand certain requirements regardless of individuals’ personal circumstances was demonstrated by those mothers who did not consider motherhood compatible with the demands of their current employment, thus were considering retraining. Some participants in this research also depicted an intensification of work as restricting the possibility of forming partnerships and having children. Onerous working hours also limited the time available to those without family and children to sustain other valued relationships. Yet, this argument illustrates the way in which the ‘individualisation thesis’ risks downplaying differences between men and women. Individuals are not gender-neutral, and this is demonstrated by the different implications of the labour market for men and women, including single women without caring responsibilities for others. Employment practices such as long working hours and job mobility are predicated on the notion that *other* necessary aspects of provisioning for self and dependents will be undertaken by others². Contemporary labour market practices can also be understood as intensifying presumptions of a breadwinner caregiver divide, despite the increased emphasis on paid work for all adults. This is suggested by the observation of some participants in this research that married men with families were more able to maintain careers than their female counterparts. This continuing ‘division of labour’ has particular implications for single women combining breadwinning with self-provisioning or caring for others.

¹ Chapter Five referred to the recently passed Civil Partnership Bill, which will provide parity of treatment with married couples to same-sex couples who form a civil partnership. This legislation can be read as a recognition of diversity, however can also be read as an attempt to ‘preserve’ marriage. This legislation does not extend these rights to cohabiting opposite sex partnerships, nor to other non-cohabiting or unrelated adults who may be in committed relationships.

² Domestic and caring work need not be undertaken informally, as the rise of formal services such as childcare, cleaning and other personal services illustrates; nevertheless, the prevalence of a ‘one and a half’ adult worker model amongst heterosexual couples with children indicates that the responsibility for this provisioning is retained by women.

This research also indicates that arguments about the increasing importance of work for individual identity (see Rose, 1999) fail to adequately consider the ways in which this too may be gendered. In contrast to the findings of recent empirical research on professional fathers (Dermott, 2002), there was little evidence in this research of a work orientation in which employment was depicted as central to participants' identities. Indeed, work was often depicted in instrumental terms, and by participants from all cohorts. While expectations of marriage and motherhood in childhood reported by participants from across all cohorts may have been a factor shaping early work orientations, the educational and employment achievements of several participants indicate that these did not restrict career development in the long term. The role of participants' singleness here is complex, providing not simply the motivation but also the opportunity to pursue career development. Nevertheless, the choices of some childless participants to pursue non-standard employment indicates that caring responsibilities may not be sufficient to explain differential work patterns between women and men. Rather, this research suggests that one factor may be the differential 'rewards' employment provides in terms of confirming already gendered subjectivities. This is not to imply that women and men incidentally have different work orientations, nor that these are immutable. Rather, it draws attention to the need to consider the ways in which these are socially embedded, and sustained or challenged by particular working practices³.

The complexity of unravelling the significance of participants' various experiences is illustrated by the way in which financial independence was depicted by several as simultaneously a burden *and* opportunity of singleness. Financial independence was cited as an advantage and disadvantage of singleness by several participants, with some both expressing concerns about their reliance on a single salary, especially in a context of increased insecurity, and emphasising the importance they placed on the autonomy this enabled. Furthermore, several clearly also valued the further opportunities to pursue other valued goals this provided, for example being able to return to higher education, opt into single motherhood, or work less. The choices of some participants to pursue non-standard employment was related by several to their singleness and childlessness. This contrasted with the employment decisions of mothers to care for

³ As Chapter Two notes, Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) have similarly drawn attention to the need to consider the effects of policies on identities to enhance their effectiveness.

their children full-time or work part-time, depicted less as a choice than a requirement of single motherhood; for some, this was also related to an intensification of employment. As Chapter Seven demonstrated, some participants related their singleness to their financial independence, depicting this as one factor enabling more options about the type of relationships they wished to sustain.

Nevertheless, a common theme across the narratives was that many participants did not depict either their partnership or parental status as chosen. This was evident even in relation to the solo mothers who 'opted in' to single motherhood through means including adoption and donor insemination. This can be understood in part as reflecting the difficulty of stating one has chosen a stigmatised subject position. Spinsterhood, childlessness or single motherhood are all categories associated with a negative social identity, which thus potentially exposes members to censure. However, this may also be a reflection of the way in which individuals experience their lives, less as the outcome of deliberative choice than a combination of various factors and circumstances. As noted in Chapter One, Gordon (1994) utilises a notion of 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' singleness in her research, to capture the way in which her participants may have 'arrived' at singleness as a consequence of other decisions. As with Gordon's research, some of the participants in this study expressed discomfort at the idea of remaining single and had undertaken action to pursue partnership, such as joining a dating agency or supper club, thus can be considered as 'involuntary singles', while many expressed an ease with singleness and discounted taking action to change their status, thus suggesting their singleness could be considered 'voluntary'.

Yet, such typologies do not easily capture the complex ways in which participants recounted their understandings of, and perspectives on, various aspects of singleness. Participants' narratives indicate the influence of various inter-related factors shaping their experiences, reflecting what Hoggett (2001) terms the "multidetermined nature of life histories". In addition, the multiple, and on occasion contradictory, explanations evident in participants' narratives to account for their partnership and parenthood status challenges interpretations of this as the outcome of deliberative decision-making.

This draws attention to what Duncan and Edwards (1997) term "the rationality mistake", that is a conception of individuals as autonomous agents freely making choices. This is not to deny participants' agency, nor to suggest that choosing

singleness is irrational. Rather, it highlights the importance of utilising both a more complex notion of subjectivity, as well as considering the various constraints and opportunities structuring individual experience. The multifaceted aspects of participants' varied experiences indicate that these are structured by a range of factors and circumstances; nevertheless, the 'conditions of possibility' prevailing in specific contexts are neither immutable nor determining.

This thesis has drawn on a conception of relational autonomy in considering participants' life histories, a conception that understands 'the self' as both socially situated and radically relational, yet holds on to a notion of autonomy. Lewis (2001), in noting the widespread acceptance of arguments of individualism as underpinning contemporary family change, observes also the variable meanings attached to individualism. As well as presuming an individual autonomy which incorporates 'the 'rationality mistake', much research on familial change attributes this to an increasing individualism which is often conflated with selfishness. Claims of a 'decline in the family' or the 'death of intimacy' have been espoused by those on the political Left as well as by those on the Right⁴. Arguments of 'decline' implicitly assume the superiority of a previous status quo, and much debate on familial change fails to acknowledge feminist arguments about the gendered power relations implicit in the traditional nuclear family⁵. Furthermore, such arguments risk downplaying the positive aspects of an individualism conceived of in terms of relational autonomy. Much feminist scholarship has emphasised that concepts such as autonomy and individuality are masculine constructions (see Pateman, 1988). Nevertheless, as Chapter Two has detailed, feminists have argued for reconceptualising notions such as autonomy, and valuing this in terms of self-determination rather than self-sufficiency (see MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Sevenhuijsen, 2003). This thesis has argued that the varied experiences of participants suggests that wider social changes in recent decades have enabled increasing options to some women. As noted above, this includes wider options as to which relationships, or

⁴ For example Martin Jacques, one time editor of *Marxism Today*, commented recently that a rise in individualism has meant a "profound malaise" in western society. As with commentators from a more conservative 'family values' agenda, Jacques expressed concern about the negative outcomes associated with changes such as women's participation in the labour market, as "they are now subject to growing time-scarcity, with profound consequences for the family" ('The Death of Intimacy', *The Guardian*, 18th September, 2004). Such arguments however downplay the liberatory aspects of increased opportunities for women in the labour market, as well as the progressive potential of familial change.

⁵ As Jamieson observes, in the version of the past of those who speak pejoratively of a phenomenon of rampant individualism "there were limits, constraints, obligations and sanctions which worked for the benefit of all" (1998:41).

which type of relationships they wish to sustain. Arguments which conflate familial change with 'decline' and 'selfish individualism' may act as a constraint limiting the exercise of these options. In an analogous sense to arguments that the 'death of the subject' might act to silence women (see Hartsock, 1989; Benhabib, 1992), this 'denunciation of the individual' may also serve to restrict women's autonomy at a time when wider social changes make accessing the status of 'the individual' increasingly possible for women.

The varied explanations provided by participants to account for their partnership and parental status demonstrate the new possibilities for women in a context of social change. The varied explanations evident in participants' narratives included that of a preference for equality in their relationships with men, asserted by some younger participants who related their singleness to the autonomy enabled by financial independence. Both this experience and perspective illustrate the material and cultural changes of recent decades. Changes in terms of educational and employment opportunities mean the position of women in the public sphere does not necessarily ensure what Chandler (1991) refers to as the "economic grounding" for marriage. In addition, this explanation suggests the emergence of alternative or counter-discourses, related in part to the influence of feminism and an equal opportunities discourse. Thus, while some older participants 'accounted' for their singleness in terms of a personal antipathy to the traditional woman's role, these younger participants articulated this in terms of gendered inequalities. As noted above, feminist research on continuing inequalities within the private sphere is downplayed or ignored in many debates on familial change. However, the incidence of this in the explanations of younger participants accounting for their singleness demonstrates the importance of considering this as a factor explaining contemporary familial change.

These explanations also point to the way in which shifts in both discourses and practices have impacted on the possibilities for single women. Thus, as well as the increased options in the range of practices that women can pursue, such as to head their own household or to opt into single motherhood, these narratives also indicated new discourses emerging in the context of wider social change. These emerging 'counter-discourses' challenge those prevalent in many debates on familial change, in particular a presumption of the necessity or superiority of partnership or the traditional nuclear

family. Thus, as Chapter Seven detailed, several participants expressed a sanguine attitude to, or contentment with, their single status, and this was also evident in relation to childlessness. Mothers depicted this as a desired status, with recent changes including access to financial independence as well as technological developments enabling single women to 'opt in' to this. For some participants from the 1950s and 1960s cohort, experiencing a period of singleness was depicted as one aspect of a self-consciously 'alternative' self-identity. A few younger participants expressed a preference for singleness over partnership, although their narratives indicated some difficulty with stating such a preference. This suggests that among the changes impacting on the experiences of contemporary spinsters in recent decades are shifts in the way that spinsterhood, childlessness and single motherhood can be represented.

Nevertheless, the narratives also demonstrated continuities such as a prioritisation of partnership, evident in experiences of particular social interactions recounted by participants across all cohorts. Another related continuity evident in the narratives of several participants was that of the persistence of stigmatised social identities for spinsters. Yet, while such stigmatisation is longstanding, as the review of the historical research detailed in Chapter Two outlines, this research also indicated considerable variability in the responses of participants to such stigma. This in part reflects the waning of the resonances of particular negative stereotypes of spinsterhood over time in the context of wider social changes, such as for example the increasing acceptability of homosexuality. It also indicates a disjuncture between the categorical and ontological identities around spinsterhood, with the narratives of several participants indicating a positive 'single self-identity'.

The disjuncture between the social and self-identity of contemporary spinsters in this research highlights the importance of information on the subjective meanings ascribed to various partnership and parental statuses for research on familial change. As noted in Chapter Two, previous empirical research on never-married women's lives points to a discrepancy between the negative stereotypes associated with spinsterhood and the actualities of spinsters' lives (see Simon, 1987; Allen, 1989). This research confirmed the findings of these earlier studies, such as for example the satisfactions of their intimate relationships and the pleasures associated with the autonomy enabled by financial independence. The 'contemporary spinsters' in this research also depicted

practices associated with singleness, such as living or doing things on one's own, as positive experiences. Again, several participants depicted these experiences in somewhat paradoxical terms, for example portraying living alone as both burdensome and enjoyable. Furthermore, for some participants living or doing things alone was considered an unattractive option, and their singleness was thus a barrier to certain activities. Nevertheless, several participants depicted such experiences with great pleasure. In some instances, this pleasure was related to undertaking certain practices or activities conventionally considered 'off limits' to women, and a particular gendered sense of capability from enacting these successfully. This research suggests that explanations for the positive single self-identities depicted by several participants may reside in the pleasure derived from such experiences.

The 'Other' is usually invoked as a relational opposite through which hegemonic categories are rendered meaningful, and women have long been recognised as 'Other' to men (de Beauvoir, 1972 [1949]). As Chapter Two has detailed, normative gender identities for women are predicated on marriage and motherhood, and in this regard spinsters may be seen as 'Other' to married mothers. This research demonstrates an increasing pluralism in 'experiments in living' enabled by the profound social changes of recent decades, a pluralism which potentially undermines such binary categorisations. Chapter One referred to the difficulties in defining singleness at the outset of this research; the varying relational practices evident amongst the 'contemporary spinsters' in this research illustrates the varying meanings attached to singleness. Participants' diverse experiences demonstrated the 'uncoupling' not just of sex, marriage and parenthood, but also of partnership from assumptions of co-residence, exclusivity, and obligation. A definition of single as never-married and currently not cohabiting with a man encompassed a range of 'routes into' singleness, including some participants with no experience of cohabiting relationships, some with experience of long-term cohabitation and others with experience of several short-term relationships. In addition, a few participants reported having had no relationships, and a few reported more than one simultaneously. As Chapter Five describes, some participants had ongoing relationships with men, yet described these more in terms of 'friendship with benefits' than conventional partnership, and still identified as single. The existence of such relationships did not necessarily imply intimacy and commitment; at the same time, the

absence of such relationships did not mean the absence of intimacy and commitment through other relationships.

These heterogeneous experiences reflect what Budgeon and Roseneil (2004) refer to as the ‘decentring of heterorelations’, a decentring which destabilises binary categorisations such as Married/Other. One aspect of this ‘decentring’ may be a waning in the cultural significance of partnership status⁶. In Chapter Four, I referred to my own surprise during the fieldwork on becoming aware of the relative lack of significance attributed by some participants to their partnership status, or a lack of knowledge as to whether ‘single’ friends were ever-married or spinsters⁷. As Chapter Seven has detailed, singleness was not a central aspect of the identity of some participants. This suggests that shifts in the meanings and practices attached to partnership and parental status may have significant implications for gender identity. As Chapter Two has detailed, much previous feminist work considered the structure and ideology of marriage central to the gendering of women. Feminists have argued that, as women think of their identity as being supplied through an intimate relationship, they sought this not just for connection, but driven by the need for identity (see Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1987). This has resonances with Giddens’ (1992) and Beck-and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) work: both address the potential of wider social changes for new forms of social identities outside the traditional range, nevertheless emphasise the key position of the couple relationship for personal identity. Giddens contends that “being-a-couple” is the most sought after relationship in modern life, while Beck-and Beck-Gernsheim emphasise the importance of love as the “central pivot” giving meaning to people’s lives (1995:170). As Chapter Two details, this thesis questions the assumptions of individual autonomy utilised in these works, utilising instead a notion of subjectivity which conceptualises humans as essentially relational. This conception however is not prescriptive as to which relations should matter to people, and this research challenges a presumption of the priority of partnership.

⁶ Further research comparing the socio-economic status of partnered and single women is necessary to ascertain the extent to which there may be changes in the material significance of partnership for women. Rake’s (2000) research highlights the material implications of motherhood, over and above gender, for women.

⁷ However, as I noted in Chapter Four my initial observation of this related to the interview with the oldest participant in the study, born in 1919, thus suggesting the extent to which this may be ‘new’ is open to question. Allen, in her research (1989) on never-married women born in 1910 notes that the prevalence of ‘family strategy’ amongst working class families meant that spinsterhood was seen as an alternative, rather than a deviant, status to marriage. Assumptions of the significance of partnership status may reflect more the prevalence of familial ideology rather than the lived reality of people’s experiences.

The increasing options in both practices and discourses in the context of wider social change can be understood as contributing to a 'stretching' of gender identity for women, challenging a normative femininity predicated on an assumed complementarity with men. As Simon (1987) observes, an integrative view of traditional womanhood in which women are tied to marriage and men, is undermined when its dimensions begin to socially fragment, for example the disconnection of maternity from wifehood. This research suggests that the importance not just of an increasing diversity of practices, but that these require 'doing' gender in ways that challenges normative aspects of femininity, for example the financial independence required by singleness. As noted previously, societal changes such as women moving into the labour market has led to shifts in conceptions of womanhood to include paid work. Practices such as living alone or prioritising other relationships also contest dominant beliefs of what it is to be a woman, and hence contribute to increased flexibility in gender identities.

Gordon has argued that while "an independent woman" is an ambivalent construction, it has never been possible to keep women outside 'individuality', nevertheless their individuality is characterised by relativity rather than absoluteness (1994:31). She observes in her research the importance of an interdependence that relies neither on conceptions of absolute individuals, nor 'Others' constructed in subordinate relations of power (1994:176). This research similarly notes the importance of such an interdependence in the lives of these 'contemporary spinsters', both in relationships with others but also in terms of a relation with the welfare state. This notion of interdependence challenges the binary notions of independence and dependence underpinning normative gender identities.

This research also highlights the value of the notion of relational autonomy to women's social relationships. A conception of individuals as interdependent and interconnected can also encompass a questioning of the particular social relationships in which they may be embedded. This research highlights the importance of an ethics that encompasses care and justice. Changes in contemporary western societies, such as increasing educational and employment opportunities for some women, have meant many women no longer need to accommodate themselves uncritically to relational ties to sustain themselves (Friedman, 2000). This research has illustrated the ways in which wider social changes, both material and cultural, have impacted on the experiences and

perspectives of single women. Like the women in Gordon's study, the participants in this research can be understood as striving to balance their needs for intimacy and independence, "not as isolated heroes (sic) of their own lives, but in interaction with others" (1994: 177). Through an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of 'contemporary spinsters', this research has demonstrated continuities in women's lives, including the continuing influence of both gender and partnership status. Nevertheless, it has also indicated the ways in which wider social changes interact to disrupt categories of gender and partnership status. This research illustrates both the fluid and changeable nature of subjectivity and emphasises its essentially relational nature. It has also sought to highlight that any questioning of which relationships people are embedded in is essentially political.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acker, J. (1990) Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory Of Gendered Organisations. *Gender and Society* 4 (2):139-158.
- Adams, M. (1981) Living Singly. In *Single Life: Unmarried Adults In Social Context*, edited by Stein, P. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- (1976) *Single Blessedness: Observations Of The Single State In Married Society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Alcoff, L. and Potter, E. (1993) *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge.
- Allan, G., ed. (1999) *The Sociology Of The Family: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (1989) *Friendship: Developing A Sociological Perspective*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Allen, K. (1989) *Single Women Family Ties: Life Histories Of Older Women*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Anderson, B. (2000) *Doing The Dirty Work?: The Global Politics Of Domestic Labour*. New York: Zed Books.
- Arber, S. and Cooper, H. (2000). Gender and Inequalities In Women's Health Across The Life Course. In *Gender Inequalities In Health*, edited by Annandale, E. and Hunt, K. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Arber, S. and Ginn, J. (2004) Ageing And Gender: Diversity And Change. In *Social Trends 34*, ONS. London: The Stationery Office.
- Barlow, A., Duncan, S. and James, G. (2002) New Labour And Family Policy In Britain. In *Analysing Families: Morality And Rationality In Policy And Practice*, edited by Carling, A. Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barrett, M. (1992) Words And Things: Materialism And Method In Contemporary Feminist Analysis. In *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, edited by Barrett and Phillips, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Barrett, M. and Phillips, A., eds. (1992) *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Barrett, M. and McIntosh, M. (1991) *The Anti-Social Family*. London: Verso, 2nd Edition
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism And The New Poor*. Buckingham: Open University

Press.

- Beck, U., ed. (2000). *The Risk Society: Critical Issues For Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- (1992) *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualization*. London: Sage
- (1995) *The Normal Chaos Of Love*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Becker, G. 1991 *A Treatise On The Family*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2nd Edition
- Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1998). On The Way To A Post-Familial Family: From A Community Of Needs To Elective Affinities. *Theory, Culture and Society* 15 (3):53-70.
- Bellah, R. et al. (1985) *Habits Of The Heart: Individualism And Commitment In American Life*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- Benhabib, S. (1994) Feminism And The Question Of Postmodernism. In *The Polity Reader In Gender Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1992) *Situating The Self: Gender, Community And Postmodernism In Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Benhabib, S. and Cornell, D. (1987) *Feminism As Critique: Essays On The Politics Of Gender In Late-Capitalist Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bennet, J. and Froide, A., ed. (1999) *Singlewomen In The European Past: 1250-1800*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Berk, S.F. (1985) *The Gender Factory: The Appointment Of Work In American Households*. New York: Plenum.
- Bernard, J. (1972) *The Future of Marriage*, London: Souvenir Press
- Berrington, A. (2003) Change And Continuity In Family Formation Among Young Adults In Britain, Social Statistical Sciences Research Institute, University Of Southampton, Working Paper 03/04,
- Bertaux, D., ed. (1981) *Biography And Society: The Life History Approach In The Social Sciences*. Beverly Hills and London: Sage.
- Berthoud, R. and Gershuny, J., ed. (2000) *Seven Years In The Lives Of British Families: Evidence On The Dynamics Of Social Change From The British Household Panel Survey*. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Bond, S. and Sales, J. (2001) Household Work In The UK: An Analysis Of The BHPS. *Work*,

- Employment And Society* 15 (2):233-250.
- Bone, M. (1986) Trends In Single Women's Sexual Behaviour In Scotland. *Population Trends* 43 (7).
- Bradley, H. (1998) *Gender And Power In The Workplace: Analysing The Impact Of Economic Change*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- (1989) *Men's Work, Women's Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies Of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Brah, A. Hickman, M. Mac An Ghail, M., ed. (1999) *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Braidotti, R. (1990) Patterns Of Dissonance: Women And/In Philosophy. In *Feministische Philosophie*, edited by H. Nagl-Docekal. Wein: Munich.
- Brannen, J and Moss, P. (1991) *Managing Mothers: Dual Earner Households After Maternity Leave*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Breugal, I. (1996) Whose Myths Are They Anyway?: A Comment. *British Journal Of Sociology* 47 (1):175-178.
- Breugel, I. and Perrons, D. (1998) Deregulation And Women's Employment: The Diverse Experiences Of Women In Britain. *Feminist Economics* 4 (1):103-121.
- Brines, J. (1994) Economic Dependency, Gender and the Division of Labour at Home, *American Sociology*, 100:652-688
- Budgeon, S. and Roseneil, S. (2004) Editor's Introduction: Beyond The Conventional Family. *Current Sociology* 52 (2):127-134.
- Burchell, B., Day, D., Hudson, M., Ladipo, D., Mankelow, R., Nolan, J., Reed, H., Wichert, I., and Wilkinson, F. (1999) *Job Insecurity And Work Intensification: Flexibility And The Changing Boundaries Of Work*. York: York Publishing Services.
- Burgess, A and Ruxton, S. (1996) *Men And Their Children: Proposals For Public Policy*. London: Institute For Public Policy Research.
- Burgess, R.G. (1984) In The Field: An Introduction To Field Research. In *Contemporary Social Research: 8*, edited by M. Bulmer. London and New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2002) Is Kinship Always Heterosexual? *Differences: A Journal Of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (1).
- (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of "Sex"*. New York:

- Routledge.
- (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Byrne, A. (2003) Developing A Sociological Model For Researching Women's Self And Social Identities. *The European Journal Of Women's Studies* 10 (4):443-464.
- (2000a) Single Women's Identities In Contemporary Irish Society, PhD Thesis, Department Of Government And Society, University Of Limerick, Ireland.
- (2000b) Singular Identities: Managing Stigma, Resisting Voices. *Women's Studies Review* 7:13-24
- (1999) Familist Ideology And Difficult Identities: 'Never-Married' Women In Contemporary Irish Society. In *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities In Modern Ireland*, edited by Cohen, M. and Curtin, N. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Byrne, B. (2002) Narrating The Self. *Gender Institute Working Papers* (7).
- Campbell, B. (1993) *Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places*. London: Methuen.
- Cargan, L. and Melko, M. (1982) *Singles: Myths and Realities*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Carsten, J. (2000) *Cultures Of Relatedness: New Approaches To The Study Of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chamberlayne, P., Rustin, M. and Wengraf, T., ed. (2002) *Biography And Social Exclusion In Europe: Experiences And Life Journeys*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T., ed. (2000) *The Turn To Biographical Methods In Social Science: Comparative Issues And Examples*. London: Routledge.
- Chandler, J. (1991) *Women Without Husbands: An Exploration Of The Margins Of Marriage*. London: Macmillan.
- Cheal, D. (1991) *Family And The State Of Theory*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Chodorow, N. (1978) *The Reproduction Of Mothering: Psychoanalysis And The Sociology Of Gender*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- Christopher, K. (2001) Welfare State Regimes And Mothers' Poverty. *Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper No. 286*. Luxembourg: Centre For The Study Of Population, Poverty And Public Policy.
- Cockburn, C. ed. (1988a) *The Gendering Of Jobs*. Edited by Walby, S. *Gender Segregation*

- At Work*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- (1988b) 'Masculinity, the Left and Feminism. In *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, edited by R. a. R. Chapman, J. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- (1983) *Brothers: Male Dominance And Technological Change*. London: Pluto Press.
- Code, L. (1995) *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. New York: Routledge.
- Connell, R.W. (1987) *Gender And Power: Society, The Person And Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Coole, D. (1993) *Women In Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny To Contemporary Feminism*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (1990) Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons And Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology* 13 (1):3-21.
- Crompton, R. (1997) *Women And Work In Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crompton, R., Gallie, D. and Purcell, K., ed. (1995) *Changing Forms Of Employment: Organisations, Skills And Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Crompton, R. (1995) Women's Employment And The Middle Class. In *Social Change And The Middle Class*, edited by Butler, T. and Savage, M. London: UCL Press.
- (1989) Women In Banking: Continuity And Change Since The Second World War. *Work, Employment And Society* 3 (2):141-156.
- Crompton, R. and Birkelund, G. (2000) Employment And Caring In British And Norwegian Banking. *Work, Employment And Society* 14 (2):331-352.
- Daly, M. and Rake, K. (2003) *Gender And The Welfare State: Care, Work And Welfare In Europe And The USA*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. (1987) *Family Fortunes*. London: Hutchinson.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1972) *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathon Cape. 2nd Edition.
- De Vaus, D.A. (1995) *Surveys In Social Research*. London: UCL Press. 4th Edition.
- Delphy, C. and Leonard, D. (1992) *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis Of Marriage In Contemporary Western Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dennis, N. and Erdos, G. (1992) *Families Without Fatherhood*. Vol. 12, *Choices In Welfare No. 12*. London: Institute Of Economic Affairs.
- Dermott, E. (2003) The 'Intimate Father': Defining Paternal Involvement. *Sociological Research Online* 8 (4).

- (2002) Father's Orientations To Paid Employment. *Gender Institute Working Papers* 6.
- Dex, S. (1988) *Women's Attitudes Towards Work*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Di Stefano, C. (1991) *Configurations Of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective On Modern Political Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Di Stefano, G. and Pinelli, A. (2004) Demographic Characteristics And Family Life. *Current Sociology* 52 (3):339-369.
- Dingeldey, I. (2001) European Tax Systems And Their Impact On Family Employment Patterns. *Journal Of Social Policy* 30 (4):653-672.
- Dinnerstein, D. (1978) *The Mermaid And The Minotaur: The Rocking Of The Cradle, And The Ruling Of The World*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Duncan, S. (2002) Policy Discourses On 'Reconciling Work And Life' In The European Union. *Social Policy And Society* 1 (4).
- Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. (1999) *Lone Mothers, Paid Workers And Gendered Moral Rationalities*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- (1997) Single Mothers In Britain: Unsupported Workers Or Mothers? In *Single Mothers In An International Context: Mothers Or Workers?*, edited by Duncan and Edwards, London: UCL Press.
- , ed. (1997) *Single Mothers In An International Context: Mothers Or Workers?* London: UCL Press.
- Dunne, G. (1999) A Passion For 'Sameness?': Sexuality And Gender Accountability. In *The New Family?*, edited by Silva, E. and Smart, C. London: Sage.
- (1997) *Lesbian Lifestyles: Women's Work And The Politics Of Sexuality*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- DWP (2003) Households Below Average Income: Department Of Work And Pensions.
- Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A. (2002) *Global Women: Nannies, Maids And Sex Workers In The New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Eichenbaum, L. and Orbach, S. (1987) Separation and Intimacy: Crucial Practice Issues in Working with Women in Therapy, in *Living with the Sphinx: Papers from the Women's Therapy Centre*, edited by Ernst, S. and Maguire, M. London: Women's Press

- EOC (2003) *Women And Men In Britain: Pay And Income*. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Ermisch, J. (2003) *An Economic Analysis Of The Family*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- (2002) Trying Again: Repartnering After Dissolution Of A Union. In *Working Papers Of The Institute For Social And Economic Research*. Colchester: University Of Essex.
- (2000) Using Panel Data To Analyse Household And Family Dynamics. In *Researching Social And Economic Change: The Uses Of Household Panel Studies*, edited by Rose, D. London: Routledge.
- Ermisch, J. and Francesconi, M. (1998) Cohabitation In Great Britain: Not For Long But Here To Stay. In *Working Papers of The ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change*. Colchester: University Of Essex.
- (1996) Partnership Formation And Dissolution In Great Britain. In *Working Papers of The ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change*. Colchester: University Of Essex..
- Eurostat (2004) *Population And Social Conditions: Statistics In Focus: European Commission*.
- Evandrou, M. and Falkingham, J. (2000) Looking Back To Look Forward: Lessons From Four Birth Cohorts For Ageing In The 21st Century. In *Population Trends 99*, ONS. London: The Stationery Office.
- Faderman, L. (1981) *Surpassing The Love Of Men*. New York: Morrow.
- Faludi, S. (1992) *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Faraday, A. and Plummer, K. (1979) Doing Life Histories. *Sociological Review* 27 (4):773-798.
- Fielding, H. (1999) *Bridget Jones's Diary*. USA Penguin. Reprint edition.
- Finch, J. (1989) *Family Obligations And Social Change*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- (1984) 'It's Great To Have Someone To Talk To': The Ethics And Politics Of Interviewing Women. In *Social Researching*, edited by Bell, C. and London, R. H. Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Finch, J. and Groves, D., ed. (1983) *A Labour Of Love: Women, Work And Caring*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Finch, J. and Mason, J., ed. (1993) *Negotiating Family Responsibilities*. London: Routledge.
- Finch, J. and Summerfield, L. (1999) Social Reconstruction And The Emergence Of The Companionate Marriage 1945-59. In *The Sociology Of The Family: A Reader*, edited by Allan, G. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fink, J., ed. (2004) *Care: Personal Lives And Social Policy*. Milton Keynes: The Open University.
- Firestone, S. (1971) *The Dialectic Of Sex: The Case For Feminist Revolution*. London: Cape.
- Fischer, C. (1982) *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks In Town And City*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Fitzsimons, A. (2002) *Gender As A Verb: Gender Segregation At Work*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Fletcher, A. (1995) *Gender, Sex And Subordination In England 1500-1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Foucault, M. 1988. *The History Of Sexuality: The Care Of The Self, Vol 3*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- (1986) On The Genealogy Of Ethics: An Overview Of Work In Progress. In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Rabinow. London: Penguin.
- (1981) *The History Of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. [1976]
- Fox Harding, L. (1999) 'Family Values' And Conservative Government Policy: 1979-97. In *Changing Family Values*, edited by Wright, C. and Jagger, G. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (1996) *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections On The 'Postsocialist' Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- (1995) From Redistribution To Recognition? Dilemmas Of Justice In A 'Post-Socialist' Age. *New Left Review* 212:68-93.
- Fraser, N. and Nicholson, L. (1990) Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism And Postmodernism. In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by Nicholson, L. London: Routledge.
- Friedan, B. (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Gollanz.
- Friedman, M. (2000) Autonomy, Social Disruption And Women. In *Relational Autonomy:*

- Feminist Perspectives On Autonomy, Agency And The Social Self*, edited by MacKenzie and Stoljar. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Froide, A. (1999) Marital Status As A Category Of Difference: Singlewomen And Widows In Early Modern England. In *Singlewomen In The European Past: 1250-1800*, edited by Bennet, I. And Froide, A. Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press.
- Furedi, F. (2002) Singleton Society. *Spiked* <http://www.spiked-online.com/>
- Gardiner, J. (1997) *Gender, Care And Economics*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Gavron, H. (1966) *The Captive Wife: Conflicts Of Housebound Mothers*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation Of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love And Eroticism In Modern Societies*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- (1991) *Modernity And Self Identity : Self And Society In The Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1992) In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory And Women's Development. In *Feminisms: A Reader*, edited by Humm, M. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Ginn, J., Arber, S., Brannen, J., Dale, A., Dex, S., Elias, P., Moss, P., Pahl, J., Roberts, C., and Rubery, J. (1996) Feminist Fallacies: A Reply To Hakim On Women's Employment. *British Journal Of Sociology* 47 (1):167-175.
- Gittins, D. (1986) Marital Status, Work And Kinship 1850-1930. In *Labour Of Love: Women's Experiences Of Home And Family*, edited by Lewis, J. London: Blackwell.
- Glucksman, M. (2000) *Cottons And Casuals: The Gendered Organisation In Time And Space*. Durham: Sociology Press.
- (1995) Why 'Work?': Gender And The 'Total Social Organisation Of Labour'. *Gender, Work And Organisation* 2 (2):63-75.
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Notes On The Management Of Spoiled Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Goldscheider, F. and Waite, L. (1991) *New Families, No Families?: The Transformation Of The American Home*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- Gordon, T. (2002) Single Women. In *Thinking Differently: A Reader In European Women's Studies*, edited by Braidotti, R. and Griffin, G. London and New York: Zed Books.
- (1994) *Single Women: On The Margins?* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- Graham, H. (1984) *Surveying Through Stories*. In *Social Researching*, edited by Bell, C. and Roberts, H. London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1983) *Caring: A Labour Of Love*. In *A Labour Of Love: Women, Work and Caring*, edited by Finch, J. and Groves, D. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gregg, P. and Wandsworth, J. (1999) *The State Of Working Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Gregson, N. and Lowe, M. (1994) *Servicing The Middle Classes*. London: Routledge.
- Grenz, S. (2005) Multiple Intersections Of Sex And Power In Research On Prostitution: A Female Researcher Interviewing Male Heterosexual Clients. *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*. Spring (forthcoming)
- Hakim, C. (1998) The Sexual Division Of Labour And Women's Heterogeneity. *British Journal Of Sociology* 49 (1):1137-43.
- (1995) Five Feminist Myths About Women's Employment. *British Journal Of Sociology* 46 (3):429-456.
- (1992) Explaining Trends In Occupational Segregation: The Management, Causes And Consequences Of The Sexual Division Of Labour. *European Social Review* 8 (2).
- Haraway, D. (1991) Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In *Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association.
- Hardill, I. (2003) A Tale Of Two Nations? Juggling Work And Home In The New Economy. ESRC Seminar Series 'Work Life Balance In The New Economy'. Seminar 3, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/worklife/>
- Harding, S. (1993) Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'? In *Feminist Epistemologies*, edited by Alcoff, L. and Potter, E. New York: Routledge.
- (1986) *The Science Question in Feminism*. Milton Kyenes: Open University Press
- Harrap, J. and Moss, P. (1995) Trends In Parental Employment. *Work, Employment And Society* 7 (1):97-120.
- Hartmann, H. (1982) Capitalism, Patriarchy And Job Segregation By Sex. In *Classes, Power And Conflict*, edited by Giddens, A. and Held, D. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- (1976) Capitalism, Patriarchy And Job Segregation By Sex. *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society* 1 (3):Part 2.
- Hartsock, N. (1989) Foucault On Power: A Theory For Women? In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by Nicholson, L. New York and London: Routledge.
- Hekman, S. (1997) Truth And Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited. *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society* 22 (2):341-365.
- Hertz, R. and Ferguson, F. (1997) Kinship Strategies And Self-Sufficiency Among Single Mothers By Choice: Post Modern Family Ties. *Qualitative Sociology* 20 (2):187-209.
- Hess, B. (1982) Friendship And Gender Roles Over The Life Course. In *Single Life: Unmarried Adults In Social Context*, edited by Stein, P. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Hewlett, S. (2002) *Babyhunger: The New Battle For Motherhood*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Hill, B. (2001) *Women Alone: Spinsters In England 1660-1850*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Hill Collins, P. (1990) *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Unwin Hyman.
- Himmelweit, S. and Sigala, M. (2004) Choice And The Relationship Between Identities And Behaviour For Mothers With Pre-School Children: Some Implications For Policy From A UK Study, *Journal of Social Policy*, 33(3): 455-478
- Hobson, B. (1994) Solo Mothers, Policy Regimes And The Logic Of Gender. In *Gendering Welfare States*, edited by Sainsbury, D.. London: Sage Publications.
- Hochschild, A. (2003) *The Commercialisation Of Intimate Life: Notes From Home And Work*. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- (2001) Global Care Chains And Emotional Surplus Value. In *On The Edge: Living With Global Capitalism*, edited by Hutton, W. and Giddens, A. London: Vintage.
- (1990) *The Second Shift: Working Parents And The Revolution At Home*. London: Piatkus. [1989]
- Hoggett, P. (2001) Agency, Rationality And Social Policy. *Journal Of Social Policy* 30 (1):37-56.
- Holden, K. (2004a). Imaginary Widows: Spinsters In Britain After The Great War, 1918-1939. presented at *Gendered Passages In Historical Perspectives*. Rutgers Centre For Historical Analysis, Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

- (2004b) *Personal Costs And Personal Pleasures: Care And The Unmarried Woman In Interwar Britain*. In *Care: Personal Lives And Social Policy*, edited by J. Fink. Milton Keynes: The Open University
- (1996) *The Shadow Of Marriage: Single Women In England 1919-1939*, PhD thesis. University Of Essex, Essex.
- Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative And The Interview Method*. London: Sage.
- hooks, b. (1991) *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Toronto: Between The Lines.
- (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin To Centre*. Boston: South End Press.
- (1982) *Ain't I A Woman?: Black Women And Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hufton, O. (1984) *Women Without Men: Widows And Spinsters In Britain And France In The Eighteenth Century*. *Journal Of Family History* 9 (4):355-376.
- Hung Thai, C. (1999) 'Splitting Things In Half Is So White!': Conceptions Of Family Life And Friendship In The Formation Of Ethnic Identity Among Second Generation Vietnamese Americans. *American Journal* 25 (1).
- Humphries, J. (1982) *Class Struggle And The Persistence Of The Working Class Family*. In *Classes, Power And Conflict: Classical And Contemporary*, edited by Giddens, A. and Held, D. Berkeley: University Of California Press.
- Innes, S. and Scott, G. (2003) 'After I've Done The Mum Things': Women, Care And Transitions. *Sociological Research Online* 8 (4).
- Irwin, S. (2000) *Reproductive Regimes: Changing Relations Of Interdependence And Fertility Change*. *Sociological Research Online* 5 (1).
- Jackson, S. (1996) *Heterosexuality And Feminist Theory*. In *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling It Straight*, edited by Richardson. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Jagger, A., ed. 1994. *Living With Contradictions: Controversies In Feminist Social Ethics*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Jamieson, L. (1999) *Intimacy Transformed? A Critical Look At The 'Pure Relationship'*. *Sociology* 33 (3):477-494.
- (1998) *Intimacy: Personal Relationships In Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Jeffreys, S. (1990) *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*, London: The Women's Press
- (1985) *The Spinster And Her Enemies: Feminism And Sexuality 1890-1930*. London Boston and Henley: Pandora.
- Jones, C., Marsden, L., and Tepperman, L. (1990) *Lives Of Their Own: The Individualisation Of Women's Lives*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Joshi, H. (1990) The Cash Opportunity Costs Of Child Bearing: An Approach To Estimation Using British Data. *Population Studies* 44:41-60.
- Kelly, L., Burton, S. and Regan, L. (1994) Researching Women's Lives or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on What Constitutes Feminist Research. In *Researching Women's Lives From A Feminist Perspective*, edited by Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Kiernan, K. (1999) Cohabitation In Western Europe. In *Population Trends 96*, edited by ONS. London: The Stationery Office.
- (1988) Who Remains Celibate? In *Journal Of Biosocial Science 20*. Cambridge: The Galton Foundation. pp 253-263
- Kiernan, K. and Wood, S. (1996) Family Change, Parenthood, Partnership And Policy. In *Option For Britain: A Strategic Policy Review*, edited by Halpern, D. et al., Dartmouth Press.
- Korvajarvi, P. 2002. Gender-Neutral And Denial Of The Difference. In *Casting The Other: The Production And Maintenance Of Inequalities In Work Organisations*, edited by Czarniawska, B. and Hopfl, H. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kraemer, S. (1995) *Active Fathering for the Future*, London: Demos
- Land, H. 1994. The Demise Of The Male Breadwinner. In *Social Security And Social Change*, edited by Baldwin, S. and Falkingham, J. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Laurie, H. and Gershuny, J. (2000) Couples, Work And Money. In *Seven Years In The Lives Of British Families: Evidence On The Dynamics Of Social Change From The British Household Panel Survey*, edited by Berthoud and Gershuny. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lee, R. (1993) *Doing Research On Sensitive Topics*. London: Sage.
- Lees, S. (1999). Will Boys Be Left On The Shelf? In *Changing Family Values*, edited by Wright, C. and Jagger, G. London: Routledge.

- Lesthaeghe, R. (1995) The Second Demographic Transition In Western Countries: An Interpretation. In *Gender And Family Change In Industrialised Countries*, edited by Oppenheim Mason, K. and Jensen, A. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lewis, J. (2003) *Should We Worry About Family Change?* Toronto: University Of Toronto Press.
- (2002) Individualisation, Assumptions About The Existence Of An Adult Worker Model And The Shift Towards Contractualism. In *Analysing Families. Morality An Rationality In Policy And Practice*, edited by Carling, A. Duncan, S and Edwards, F London: Routledge
- (2001) *The End Of Marriage?: Individualism And Intimate Relations*. Cheltenham: E. Elgar Publications.
- (1992) Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes. *Journal of European Social Policy* 2 ((3):159 - 73.
- Lewis, S., Rappoport, R. and Gambles, R. (2003) Reflections on the Integration of Paid Work with the Rest of Life. ESRC Seminar Series, Work Life Balance In The New Economy, Seminar 3, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/worklife/>
- Longino, H. (1991) Multiplying Subjects And The Diffusion Of Power. *The Journal Of Philosophy*:666-674.
- Lucas, R. (2003) Kids! Who'd Have 'Em? New Meanings Of Childhood And The Trend Towards Voluntary Childlessness. *British Sociological Association Annual Conference*, April.
- Mackenzie, C. and Stoljar, N., ed. (2000) *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives On Autonomy, Agency And The Social Self*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J. and Miller, T., ed. (2002) *Ethics In Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Maynard, M. and Purvis, J., ed. (1994) *Researching Women's Lives From A Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- McDonald, P. (2000) Low Fertility In Australia: Evidence, Causes and Policy Responses. *People And Place* 8 (2). Centre for Population and Urban Studies, Monash University
- (1997) Gender Equity, Social Institutions And The Future Of Fertility. Paper read at

Women And Families Conference, Paris, UNESCO-CICRED

- McDowell, L. (1999) *Gender, Identity And Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Millett, K. (1971) *Sexual Politics*. London: Hart Davis.
- Moller Okin, S. (1991) *Justice, Gender And The Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Molyneaux, M. (1979) Beyond The Domestic Labour Debate. *New Left Review* 116:3-27.
- Mooney, A., Statham, J. and Simon, A. (2002) *The Pivot Generation: Informal Care And Work After Fifty*. Bristol: Policy Press in association with The Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Moore, H. (1994) *A Passion For Difference: Essays In Anthropology And Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1988) *Feminism And Anthropology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mordaunt, S., Rake, K., Wanless, H. and Mitchell, R. (2003) *One In Four*. England: Age Concern.
- Morgan, D. (1999) Risk and Family Practices: Accounting for Change and Fluidity in Family Life, In *The New Family?*, edited by Silva, E. and Smart, C. London: Sage
- (1996) *Family Connections*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Morris, L. (1990) *The Working Of The Household: A US-UK Comparison*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Nelson, H.L., ed. (1996) *Feminism And Families*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nicholson, L. (1986) *Gender And History: The Limits Of Theory In The Age Of The Family*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Oakley, A. (2000) *Experiments In Knowing: Gender And Method In The Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1981) *Subject Women*. Oxford: Robertson.
- (1979) *Becoming A Mother*. Oxford: Robertson.
- (1974) *Housewife*. London: Allen Lane.
- OECD (1997) *Beyond 2000: The New Social Policy Agenda*. Paris: OECD.
- Ogden, P., Hall, R. and Hill, C. (1997) The Pattern and Structure of One-Person Household in England and Wales And France. *International Journal Of Population Geaography* 3:161-181.

- ONS (2004a) *Social Trends 34*. London: The Stationery Office.
- (2004b) *Living In Britain: Results From The 2002 General Household Survey*. HMSO.
- (2003a) *Population Trends 113*. London: Office For National Statistics.
- (2003b) *Social Trends 33*. London: The Stationery Office.
- (2002a) *New Earnings Survey 1982-2002*. London: Office For National Statistics.
- (2002b) *Marriage, Divorce And Adoption Statistics*. Vol. 28, *Series FM2*. London: Office For National Statistics.
- (2002c) *Social Focus In Brief: Ethnicity*. London: Office For National Statistics.
- Orloff, A. (1993) Gender And The Social Rights Of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis Of Gender Relations And Welfare States. *American Sociological Review* 58 (3).
- Pahl, R. (2000) *On Friendship*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pahl, R. (1998) Friendship: The Social Glue Of Contemporary Society? In *The Politics Of Risk Society*. Edited by Franklin, J. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pahl, R. and Spencer, L. (2003) Personal Communities: Not Simply Families Of 'Fate' Or 'Choice'. *Working Papers ISER* 2003-4.
- Park, A., Curtis, J., Thomson, K., Jarvis, L. and Bromley, C. (2001) *British Social Attitudes The 18th Report: Public Policy, Social Ties*. London: Sage.
- Parsons, T. and Bales, R. (1955) *Family, Socialization And Interaction Process*. Glencoe, IL Free Press.
- Pateman, C. (1988) *The Sexual Contract*. Edited by Cambridge, Polity.
- Perrons, D. (2003) The New Economy and The Work Life Balance: Conceptual Exploration: and a Case Study of New Media. *Gender, Work And Organisation* 10 (1).
- (2002) Gendered Divisions In The New Economy: Risks And Opportunities. *Geojournal* 56:271-280.
- (2001) The New Economy And The Work Life Balance: New Media Companies In Brighton And Hove. *Geography And Environment*.
- (1998a) Maps Of Meaning: Gender Inequality In The Regions Of Western Europe. *European Urban And Regional Studies* 5 (1).1
- (1998b) Flexible Working And The Reconciliation Of Work And Family Life - Or A New Form Of Precariousness, Medium-Term Community Action Programme On

- Equal Opportunities For Women And Men (1996-2000). *European Commission: Directorate General For Employment, Industrial Relations And Social Affairs Unit V/D 5*.
- (1995) Economic Strategies, Welfare Regimes And Gender Inequality In Employment In The European Union. *European Urban And Regional Studies 2* (2):99-120.
- Perrons, D. and Gonas, L. (1998) Perspectives On Gender Inequality In European Employment. *European Urban And Regional Studies 5* (1).
- Phillips, A. and Taylor, B. (1980) Sex And Skill: Notes Towards A Feminist Economics. *Feminist Review 6*:79-88.
- Phillipson, C., Bernard, M., Phillips, J. and Ogg, J. (2001) *The Family And Community Life Of Older People*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Phoenix, A. (1994) Practising Feminist Research: The Intersection Of Gender And Race In The Research Process. In *Researching Women's Lives From A Feminist Perspective*, edited by M. a. P. Maynard, J. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Plummer, K. (1994) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change And Social Worlds*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Popenoe, D. (1993) American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review And Appraisal. *Journal Of Marriage And The Family 55* (3):527-542.
- (1990) Family Decline In America. In *Rebuilding The Nest*, edited by Blackburn, D et. al. Milwaukee, WI: Family Service America.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourses And Psychology: Beyond Attitudes And Behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse And Revival Of American Community*. New York: Simon And Schuster.
- Rabinow, P., ed. (1986) *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin.
- Rake, K. (2001) Gender And New Labour's Social Policies. *Journal Of Social Policy 30* (2):209-231.
- , ed. (2000) *Women's Incomes Over The Lifetime*. London: Stationery Office.
- Ramazanoglu, C. and Holland, J. (2002) *Feminist Methodology: Challenges And Choices*. London: Sage.

- Re-Bartlett, L. (1912) *Sex And Sanctity*. London: Longmans.
- Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist Methods In Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reissman, C.K. (1993) Narrative Analysis. *Qualitative Research Methods Series* 30.
- Reynolds, J. (2002) Constructing The Single Woman In Therapy. *Journal Of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Therapy* 2 (1):20-31.
- Reynolds, J. and Wetherall, M. (2003) The Discursive Climate Of Singleness: The Consequences For Women's Negotiation Of A Single Identity. *Feminism and Psychology* 13 (4):489-510.
- Rich, A. (1980) Compulsory Heterosexuality And Lesbian Existence. *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society* 5 (4):631-60.
- Richardson, D., ed. (1996) *Therorising Heterosexuality: Telling It Straight*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Riley, D. (2002) The Right To Be Lonely. *Differences: A Journal Of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13 (1):1-13.
- Rose, D., ed. (2000) *Researching Social And Economic Change: The Uses Of Household Panel Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Governing The Soul: The Shaping Of The Private Self*. 2nd ed. London: Free Association Books.
- Roseneil, S. and Budgeon, S. (2004) Cultures of Intimacy and Care Beyond 'The Family': Personal Life and Social Change in the Early 21st Century. *Current Sociology* 52 (2)
- Rowlingson, K. (2002) Private Pension Planning: The Rhetoric Of Responsibility, The Reality Of Insecurity. *Journal Of Social Policy* 31 (4):623-642.
- Rubin, G. (1975) The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex. In *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Reiter, R. London: Monthly Review Press.
- Sainsbury, D. (1996) *Gender, Equality And Welfare States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , ed. (1994) *Gendering Welfare States*. London: Sage.
- Sandel, M. (1996) *Democracy's Discontent: America In Search Of A Public Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press Of Harvard University.

- Sandfield, A. and Percy, C. (2003) Accounting For Single Status: Heterosexism And Ageism
In *Heterosexual Women's Talk About Marriage. Feminism and Psychology* 13 (4).
- Sayer, A. (1984) *Method In Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Hutchinson.
- Scase, R. (2000) *Britain In 2010: The New Business Landscape*. Oxford: Capstone.
- Schneider, D. (1968) *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2001) *Women And Men In The Professions In Scotland*. Edinburgh: The Stationery Office.
- Secombe, W. (1974) The Housewife And Her Labour Under Capitalism. *New Left Review* 83:3-24.
- Sevenhuijsen, S. (2003) The Place Of Care: The Relevance Of The Feminist Ethics Of Care For Social Policy. *Feminist Theory* 4 (2):179-197.
- (1998) *Citizenship And The Ethics Of Care: Feminist Considerations On Justice, Morality And Politics*. London:Routledge
- Sharpe, P. (1999) Dealing With Love: The Ambiguous Independence Of The Single Woman In Early Modern England. *Gender and History* 11 (2):209-232.
- Shaw, C. and Haskey, J. (1999) New Estimates And Projections Of The Population Cohabiting In England And Wales. In *Population Trends*, ONS. London: The Stationery Office.
- Silva, E. and Smart, C. (1999) *The New Family?* London: Sage.
- Simon, B. (1987) *Never Married Women*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Simpson, R. (2003) Contemporary Spinsters In The New Millennium: Changing Notions Of Family And Kinship. *Gender Institute New Working Paper Series* (10), <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/genderInstitute/workingPapers.htm>
- (1999) *Privileging The Nuclear Family: A Discourse Analytic Approach*. Unpublished MSC Dissertation, London School Of Economics.
- (1997) *Discourses On Fatherhood In The 1990s*. Unpublished MA Dissertation, University Of Glasgow.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage.
- Smart, C., ed. (1992) *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays On Marriage, Motherhood And Sexuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Smart, C. and Neale, B. (1999) *Family Fragments?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Smith, D. (1987) *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- (1974) Women's Perspective As A Radical Critique Of Sociology. *Sociological Enquiry* 44 (1):7-13.
- Smythe, M. and Browne, F. (1992) *General Household Survey 1990*. Vol. GHS No 21, *OPCS Series*. London: HMSO.
- Sokoloff, N. (1981) Early Work Patterns of Single and Married Women, in *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context*. Edited by Stein, P. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Somers, M. (1994) The Narrative Construction Of Identity: A Relational And Network Approach. *Theory And Society* 23:603-649.
- Spicksley, J. 2001. The Early Modern Demographic Dynamic: Celibates And Celibacy In Seventeenth-Century England. Unpublished PhD, University Of Hull.
- Standing, K. 1999. Lone Motherhood And 'Parental' Involvement. *Journal Of Social Policy* 28 (3).
- Stanley, L. and Morley, A. 1988. *The Life And Death Of Emily Wilding Davison*. London: The Women's Press.
- Stanley, L. and Wise, S. 1983. *Breaking Again: Feminist Consciousness And Feminist Research*. London: Routledge.
- Stationery, Office. 1998. Supporting Families: A Consultation Document. London: Stationery Office.
- Stein, P., ed. 1981. *Single Life: Unmarried Adults In Social Context*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Sullivan, A. 1998. *Love Undetectable: Notes On Friendship, Sex And Survival*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. 1998. *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative And Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Taylor, D. 1998. Social Identity And Social Policy: Engagements With Postmodern Theory *Journal Of Social Policy* 27 (3):329-350.
- Trieman, D. 1975. Sex And The Process Of Status Attainment: A Comparison Of Working Women And Men. *American Sociological Review* 40.

- Trimberger, K. 2002. *Friendship Networks And Care*, Working Paper No. 31, March, Centre For Working Families, University Of California, Berkeley.
- Tronto, J. 1993. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument For An Ethic Of Care*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ungerson, C. 2000. Thinking About The Production And Consumption Of Long Term Care In Britain: Does Gender Still Matter? *Journal Of Social Policy* 29 (4):623-643.
- 1983. Why Do Women Care? In *A Labour Of Love: Women, Work And Caring*, edited by J. a. G. Finch, D. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Van De Kaa, D. 1987. Europe's Second Demographic Transition. *Population Bulletin* 42 (1):3-57.
- Van Every, J. 1999. From Modern Nuclear Family Households To Post Modern Diversity? The Social Construction Of 'Families'. In *Changing Family Values*, edited by C. a. J Wright, G. London: Routledge.
- . 1996. In *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling It Straight*, edited by Richardson. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Vicinus, M. 1985. *Independent Women: Work And Community For Single Women*. London: Virago.
- Wajcman, J. and Martin, B. 2002. Narratives Of Identity In Modern Management: The Corrosion Of Gender Difference? *Sociology* 36 (4):985-1002.
- Walby, S. 1997. *Gender Transformations*. London: Routledge.
- 1990. *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- ed. 1988. *Gender Segregation At Work*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- 1986. *Patriarchy At Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Weeks, J., Donovan, C. and Heaphy, B. 1999. Everyday Experiments: Narratives Of Non-Heterosexual Relationships. In *The New Family?*, edited by Silva, E. and Smart C. London: Sage.
- 1996. *Families Of Choice: Patterns Of Non-Heterosexual Relationships, A Literature Review*. London: South Bank University Press.
- West, R. 1997. *Caring For Justice*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Weston, K. (1991) *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Whelehan, I. 2000. *Overloaded: Popular Culture And The Future Of Feminism*. London: The Women's Press.
- Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C., ed. 1993. *Heterosexuality: A Feminism And Psychology Reader*. London: Sage.
- Willets, D. 2003. Old Europe? Demographic Change And Pension Reform, 23rd September http://www.cer.org.uk/articles/speech_willets-23sep03.html.
- Williams, F. 2001. In And Beyond New Labour: Towards A New Political Ethics Of Care. *Critical Social Policy* 21 (4):467-493.
- Wollstonecraft, M. 1970 [Originally 1792]. *A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women*. London Dent.
- Women and Equality Unit (2002) *Key Indicators of Women's Position in Britain*. London: Department of Trade and Industry.
- Wooley, F. 1993. The Feminist Challenge To Neoclassical Economics. *Cambridge Journal Of Economics* 17:485-500.
- Wright, C. and Jagger, G., ed. 1999. *Changing Family Values: Difference, Diversity And The Decline Of Male Order*. London: Routledge.
- Yuval-Davis, N. 2003. Intersectionality - Reinventing The Wheel? In ESRC Seminar Series On Gender, Globalisation and Governance, 23rd March, University Of Warwick.

APPENDIX 1: RECRUITMENT LEAFLET

PHD RESEARCH ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND LIFE-CHOICES OF SINGLE WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

Are you a never-married woman aged 35 or over who has not been in a cohabiting relationship with a man for at least five years?

There has been an increase in the numbers of both single men and women in recent decades, and a great deal of media interest in 'singletons', however there has been relatively little research on the lives of single women. I am researching a thesis on heterosexual White women and would like to conduct interviews with single women covering themes such as education and employment history. I am also interested in hearing about the experiences of being single.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. All information will be treated with complete confidentiality, and anonymity will be preserved throughout the project. Please do get in touch if you think you may be interested or would like further information – and let any friends who might fit the bill know about this project!

I can be contact either by email (r.e.simpson@lse.ac.uk) or by post: Roona Simpson, Politics Dept., Adam Smith Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8RT.

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Home address

9th September 2002

Dear

Thank you very much indeed for your letter and interest in my research. Below is some further information about the format of the interviews.

I am conducting interviews with single women as part of a PhD on the socio-economic status and life choices of single women, which I am doing at the London School of Economics. These last approximately one and a half hours, and in terms of content are 'life history' interviews, during which I ask about education and employment history alongside any relationship history. I'll also ask for some biographical information (form attached) about date of birth, living arrangements, etc., as well as about attitudes towards singleness. If there is any information respondents do not feel comfortable providing, that is absolutely fine; these types of interviews have been described as 'conversations with a purpose' and are very informal. I will provide a transcript of the interview to each respondent for their approval, and also a summary of the interview findings to those who wish it. This research is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and all information will be totally anonymous.

I have conducted these interviews in respondents' own homes, and have also interviewed people in my home (I am staying in the West End of Glasgow). I can also arrange to hire a room if that is more convenient. My time is very flexible, so if you are interested in participating in this research we can arrange a time and place to suit you.

If you would like more information, or want to discuss the interviews further, please do feel free to contact me – my home phone number is

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Roona Simpson

¹ All personal details removed.

APPENDIX 3: BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET

INTERVIEW NO:
DATE OF INTERVIEW:

- Date of Birth

- Country where born/raised

- Parent's/Guardian's Occupation:-
Mother: _____ Father: _____

- Number of Siblings:-
Sisters: _____ Brothers: _____

- Your Occupation:

- Living Arrangements – Do you live alone, or with others? (please circle)
If with others – how many? Are these friends/family/flatmates/other?

- Is your home - owned, privately rented, or social housing (please circle)

- Annual income (approximate)

APPENDIX 4: TOPIC GUIDE

[My introduction]

Childhood/Family

Family – [if siblings] where did you come in the order of children?

Parental expectations – do you have a sense of what your parent's expectations were for you when you were growing up? Did you have a clear idea of what you wanted to be when you were older?

If brothers – expectations different from them? What about differences in the house – parents/siblings – were there any? Mother – employment.

Education

What kind of school was it? How did you do at school – did you enjoy it? Were you an academic child? When did you leave school, what qualifications did you leave with?

Higher Education [if straight from school, else first job]

How long studied, what qualifications attained.

Did you have a clear idea of what you wanted to do? Did you see yourself as following a specific career?

Employment – First job/Subsequent employment

What made you take this job/work in this field? [chance or design?]

Was it well-paid/offering good career prospects?

Were there a lot of women working in this area? Were they mostly married/single?

Do you think you were ever treated differently at work because of being single?

Was your singleness relevant in any way?

[Go through employment history – dates, why left each]

Current Employment [Occupation/Income from sheet]

Do you enjoy your current job? [Future prospects/plans]

How do you feel about your financial status? [comfortable/secure, or anxious?]

Relationships/Singleness

Any relationships during this time? (either at school/later)

How long lasted/whether cohabiting/why ended.

What about your friends/family at this time, were they in relationships/getting married or living with anyone?

How long single – Do you see this as something you would like to change?

Have you ever/would you consider doing anything proactive to change your partnership status (for example, dating agencies/supper clubs). If so, what have your experience of these been?

Children

[If childless] What about children? How do you feel about this?

[If children - route into] Do you think your concerns are the same as other single mothers/partnered women? What was the reaction of family/ friends/ colleagues to having (a) child/ren?

Living Arrangements

Where living at particular points – whether with others/alone. Why? [choice of necessity?]

How did you find this? Would you consider changing your current living status (for example, get a lodger/flatmates)?

Social Life/Interests

How do you spend your free time/holidays? Do you have any hobbies or interests? Are you involved with any organisations/group/voluntary work? Is this important to you?

Would you consider yourself religious/political? Is this important to you?

Friends/Family

How would you described your relationships with friends/family?

Who do you see socially/how often?

Do you feel you have people you can call on in a crisis (e.g. if sick)?

How do you spend holidays conventionally seen as 'family holidays' (e.g. Christmas)?

How do you think family/friends regard your being single?

Do you know many single men? How do you think their life compares with yours?

Representations of Singleness

There is a lot of attention to single women on television and in films at the moment – what do you think of the way they are represented?

Do you think there have been changes in the way single women are considered generally?

Future

What about the future?

- financial provision [e.g. pensions], living arrangements, any care needs?

Advantages/Disadvantages of Singleness, if any.

[In conclusion] Are there any questions you want to ask me?

APPENDIX 5a: SPSS SYNTAX FOR SURVIVAL CURVES

Based on Wave 2 Data, for Birth Cohorts 1910 - 1940

```
GET FILE='D:\bhpsdata\bmarring.sav' / keep =
bhid, bpno, blmarm, blmary, blmcoh, blmcbm,
blmcbby, pid.
compute bno = 1.
if bhid = lag(bhid) and bpno = lag(bpno) bno =
lag(bno)+1.
exec.
sel if bno = 1.
exec.
save out = 'c:\martmp.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='D:\bhpsdata\bcohabit.sav' / keep =
bhid, bpno, blcsbm, blcsby, pid.
compute cno = 1.
if bhid = lag(bhid) and bpno = lag(bpno) cno =
lag(cno)+1.
exec.
sel if cno = 1.
exec.
save out = 'c:\cohtmp.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='D:\bhpsdata\bindresp.sav' /keep =
pid, bxrwght, bsex, bregion, bmastat, bmlstat,
bhid, bpno.
match files file = */file = 'c:\martmp.sav' /by =
bhid, bpno.
match files file = */file = 'c:\cohtmp.sav' / by =
bhid, bpno.
exec.
save out = 'c:\latest.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='D:\bhpsdata\xwavedat.sav'/keep
=race, doby, dobm, pid.
```

```
save out = 'c:\race.sav'.
get file = 'c:\latest.sav'.
sort cases by pid.
```

```
match files file=*/ in = tp/ file = 'c:\race.sav' / by
= pid.
exec.
select if (tp=1).
exec.
```

```
compute mardate = 0.
if doby<1900 mardate = blmary*12+1206.
if doby>1900 mardate = blmary*12+blmarm.
```

```
if doby=1900 mardate = blmary*12+blmarm.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mardate
=blmary*12+6.
if blmary<0 mardate=-9.
exec.
```

```
compute cohdate = blcsby*12 +blcsbm.
if blcsbm<0 or blcsbm>12 cohdate
=blcsby*12+6.
if blcsby<0 cohdate=-9.
exec.
```

```
compute cohmar = blmcbby*12 +blmcbm.
if blmcbm<0 or blmcbm>12 cohmar
=blmcbby*12+6.
if blmcbby<0 cohmar =-9.
exec.
```

```
compute age16 = 0.
if doby<1900 age16 = (doby-1800+16)*12
+dobm.
if doby=1900 age16 = 16*12+dobm.
if doby>1900 age16 = (doby-
1900+16)*12+dobm.
if dobm<0 or dobm >12 age16=(doby-
1900+16)*12+6.
if doby<0 age16=-9.
exec.
```

```
compute doi = 92*12+9.
exec.
```

```
compute durm = mardate - age16.
if mardate<0 durm =-9.
IF MISSING (MARDATE) AND BMASTAT = 6
DURM = DOI-AGE16.
if missing (mardate) and bmastat = 2 DURM
=DOI-AGE16.
IF MISSING (MARDATE) AND BMASTAT = 5
DURM = DOI-AGE16.
if missing (mardate) and bmastat = 0 durm =
doi-age16.
if missing (mardate) and bmastat = 1 durm = -
9.
if missing (mardate) and bmastat = 3 durm = -
9.
if missing (mardate) and bmastat = 4 durm = -
9.
if mardate = age16 DURM=2.
```

```
if doi=age16 durm=doi.  
if age16<0 durm =-9.  
if age16=1114 durm = 2.  
exec.
```

```
compute married =not missing (mardate).  
exec.
```

```
missing values all (-9 thru -1).  
compute min = min (mardate, cohdate,  
coh marr).  
exec.
```

```
compute durp = min - age16.  
if min = age16 durp =2.  
if min<0 durp =-9.  
if missing (min) AND BMASTAT= 6 durp =doi-  
age16.  
if age16=doi durp =2.  
if age16<0 durp = -9.  
exec.
```

```
compute partdate = not missing (min).  
compute coh2 = trunc(doby/10).  
exec.
```

```
compute coh = 0.  
if coh2 <191 coh = 0.  
if coh2 >= 190 coh=coh2-190.
```

```
select if durm>0 and durp>0.
```

```
weight off.
```

```
select if race =1
```

```
surv tables = durm by bsex (1,2)/plot (survival)  
/int = thru 600 by 12/status = married(1).  
exec.
```

```
surv tables = durp by bsex (1,2)/plot (survival)  
/int = thru 600 by 12/status = partdate(1).  
exec.
```

```
surv tables = durm by coh(1,4) by  
bsex(1,2)/plot (survival)  
/int = thru 600 by 12/status = married(1).  
exec.
```

```
surv tables = durp by coh(1, 4) by bsex  
(1,2)/plot (survival)  
/int = thru 500 by 12/status = partdate(1).  
exec.
```

APPENDIX 5b: SPSS SYNTAX FOR SURVIVAL CURVES

Based on Wave 11 Data, for 2001 figures and Birth Cohorts 1950 – 1970

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\cindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, cmastat, cmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\cind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\dindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, dmastat, dmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\dind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\eindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, emastat, emlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\eind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\findresp.sav'/ keep
= pid, fmastat, fmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\find.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\gindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, gmastat, gmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\gind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\hindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, hmastat, hmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\hind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\iindresp.sav'/ keep
= pid, imastat, imlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\iind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\jindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, jmastat, jmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\jind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\kindresp.sav'/
keep = pid, klrwght, kmastat, kmlstat.
sort cases by pid.
save out = 'C:\kind.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsdata\bmarrriag.sav'/ keep
= bhid, bpno, blmarm, blmary, blmcoh,
blmcbm, blmcbby, pid.
compute bno = 1.
```

```
if bhid = lag(bhid) and bpno = lag(bpno) bno
= lag(bno)+1.
exec.
sel if bno = 1.
exec.
save out = 'c:\martmp.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsdata\bcohabit.sav' / keep
= bhid, bpno, blcsbm, blcsby, pid.
compute cno = 1.
if bhid = lag(bhid) and bpno = lag(bpno) cno
= lag(cno)+1.
exec.
sel if cno = 1.
exec.
save out = 'c:\cohtmp.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsdata\bindresp.sav' /keep
= pid, bmastat, bmlstat, bhid, bpno.
match files file = */file = 'c:\martmp.sav' /by
= bhid, bpno.
match files file = */file = 'c:\cohtmp.sav' / by
= bhid, bpno.
exec.
```

```
sort cases by pid.
```

```
match files file= */in=w1
/file= 'C:\cind.sav' / in=w2
/file= 'c:\dind.sav' / in=w3
/file= 'c:\eind.sav' /in=w4
/file= 'c:\find.sav' /in=w5
/file= 'c:\gind.sav' /in=w6
/file= 'c:\hind.sav' /in=w7
/file= 'c:\iind.sav' /in =w8
file= 'c:\jind.sav' /in =w9
/file= 'c:\kind.sav' /in =w10
/by= pid.
exec.
```

```
save out = 'c:\ongoing.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='d:\bhpsDATA\xwavedat.sav'
keep = pid, sex, dobm, doby, memorig, race.
```

```
save out = 'C:\bckgrnd.sav'.
```

```
GET FILE='c:\ongoing.sav'.
```

```

match files file = */in = tt/file =
'C:\bckgrnd.sav' / by=pid.
select if (tt=1).
exec.

```

```

compute count = 0.
vector w = w1 to w10.
loop #i = 1 to 10.
. if w (#i) = 1 count=count+1.
end loop.
exec.

```

```

select if race = 1.
exec.

```

```

save out = 'c:\crosswave.sav'.

```

```

get file = 'c:\crosswave.sav' / keep=pid, sex,
bmastat, cmastat, dmastat, emastat,
fmastat, gmastat,
hmastat, imastat, jmastat, kmastat, klrwght,
race,
blmarm, blmary, blmcbm, blmcbby, blcsbm,
blcsby, doby, dobm.
exec.

```

```

compute mastat=0.
vector v =bmastat to kmastat.

```

```

loop #i = 2 to 10.
. if v(#i-1) = 6 and v(#i)=1 mastat = #i.
end loop if mastat >0.
exec.

```

```

compute coh marr = 0.
vector v =bmastat to kmastat.

```

```

loop #i = 2 to 10.
. if v(#i-1) = 2 and v(#i)=1 coh marr = #i.
end loop if coh marr >0.
exec.

```

```

compute newmarr =0.
vector v =bmastat to kmastat.

```

```

. loop #i = 2 to 10.
. if v(#i-1) = 0 and v(#i)=1 newmarr= #i.
. end loop if newmarr >0.

```

```

compute costat = 0.
vector v =bmastat to kmastat.

```

```

. loop #i = 2 to 10.
. if v(#i-1) = 6 and v(#i)=2 costat = #i.
. end loop if costat >0.
compute newcoh =0.

```

```

vector v =bmastat to kmastat.

```

```

. loop #i = 2 to 10.
. if v(#i-1) = 0 and v(#i)=2 newcoh = #i.
. end loop if newcoh >0.

```

```

save out = 'c:\workingfile.sav'.

```

```

compute mar1= 0.

```

```

if bmastat = 1 mar1 = blmary*12+ blmarm.
if bmastat = 1 and missing (blmary) mar1 = -
9.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mar1 =
blmary*12 +6.
if bmastat = 2 mar1 = blmary*12+ blmarm.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mar1 =
blmary*12 +6.
if bmastat = 2 and missing (blmary) mar1 =
.00.
if bmastat = 3 mar1 = blmary*12+ blmarm.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mar1 =
blmary*12 +6.
if bmastat = 3 and missing (blmary) mar1 = -
9.
if bmastat = 4 mar1 = blmary*12+ blmarm.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mar1 =
blmary*12 +6.
if bmastat = 5 mar1 = blmary*12+ blmarm.
if blmarm<0 or blmarm>12 mar1 =
blmary*12 +6.
if bmastat = 5 and missing (blmary) mar1 =
.00.
if bmastat = 6 mar1 = .00.
if bmastat = 6 and missing (blmary) mar1 =
00.
exec.

```

```

compute mar2 = 0.
if mastat =2 mar2= 93*12 +6.
if mastat = 3 mar2 = 94*12 + 6.
if mastat =4 mar2 = 95*12 +6.
if mastat = 5 mar2 = 96*12 + 6.
if mastat =6 mar2 = 97*12 +6.
if mastat = 7 mar2 = 98*12 + 6.
if mastat =8 mar2 = 99*12 +6.
if mastat = 9 mar2 = 100*12 + 6.
if mastat = 10 mar2 = 101*12 + 6.
if coh marr =2 mar2 = 93*12 +6.
if coh marr = 3 mar2 = 94*12 + 6.
if coh marr =4 mar2 = 95*12 +6.
if coh marr = 5 mar2 = 96*12 + 6.
if coh marr =6 mar2 = 97*12 +6.
if coh marr = 7 mar2 = 98*12 + 6.
if coh marr =8 mar2 = 99*12 +6.
if coh marr = 9 mar2 = 100*12 + 6.

```



```

if coharr = 10 mar2 = 101*12 + 6.
exec.
compute MARDATE = 0.
if mar1 = .00 and mar2 = .00 MARDATE =
.00.
if mar1 = .00 and mar2>1 MARDATE =
mar2.
if mar1>1 and mar2=.00 MARDATE = mar1.
if mar1>1 and mar2>1 MARDATE = mar1.
if mar1<.00 and mar2=.00 MARDATE = -9.
exec.

```

```

compute cohdate = 0.
if not missing (blcsby) cohdate =
blcsby*12+blcsbm.
if blcsbm<0 or blcsbm>12 cohdate =
blcsby*12 +6.
if bmastat = 2 and missing (blcsby) cohdate
= -9.
if bmastat = 2 and blcsby<.00 cohdate = -9.
exec.

```

```

compute par1 = 0.
if mardate = .00 and cohdate = .00 par1 =
.00.
if mardate = .00 and cohdate>1 par1 =
cohdate.
if mardate>1 and cohdate=.00 par1 =
mardate.
if mardate >1 and mardate<cohdate par1 =
mardate.
if mardate>cohdate and cohdate>1 par1 =
cohdate.
if mardate <.00 and cohdate = .00 par1 =
mardate.
if mardate = .00 and cohdate <1 par1 =
mardate.
if mardate <1and cohdate>1 par1 = cohdate.
if mardate >1 and cohdate<1 par1 =
mardate.
if mardate<.00 and cohdate<.00 par1 =
mardate.
if mardate = .00 and cohdate<.00 par1 =
cohdate.
exec.

```

```

compute premarr = 0.
if not missing (blmcbby) premarr = blmcbby
*12+blmcbm.
if blmcbm<0 or blmcbm>12 premarr =
blmcbby*12+6.
if blmcbby=-8 premarr=.00.
exec.

```

```

compute par2 = 0.
if par1 = premarr par2 = par1.

```

```

if par1>1 and premarr = .00 par2 =par1.
if par1>1 and premarr<.00 par2 = par1.
if par1<1 and premarr>1 par2 = premarr.
if par1<.00 and premarr>1 par2 = premarr.
if premarr<par1 and premarr>1 par2 =
premarrr.
if par1< premarr par2 = par1.
if par1<.00 and premarr<.00 par2=par1.
exec.

```

```

compute par3=0.
if par2>1 par3=par2.
if premarr<.00 and par2<.00 par3 = par2.
if bmastat =1 and par2<.00 par3 = -9.
if bmastat = 1 and par2 = .00 par3 = -9.
if bmastat = 2 and par2<.00 par3 = -9.
if bmastat = 2 and par2 = .00 par3 = -9.
if bmastat = 3 and par2<.00 par3 = -9.
if bmastat = 3 and par2 = .00 par3 = -9.
exec.

```

```

compute cohpan = 0.
if costat =2 cohpan = 93*12 +6.
if costat = 3 cohpan = 94*12 + 6.
if costat =4 cohpan = 95*12 +6.
if costat = 5 cohpan = 96*12 + 6.
if costat =6 cohpan = 97*12 +6.
if costat = 7 cohpan = 98*12 + 6.
if costat =8 cohpan = 99*12 +6.
if costat = 9 cohpan = 100*12 + 6.
if costat = 10 cohpan = 101*12 + 6.
if newcoh =2 cohpan = 93*12 +6.
exec.

```

```

compute min= 0.
if par3 =cohpan min=par3.
if cohpan>1 and cohpan>par3 min= par3.
if cohpan>1 and cohpan<par3 min= cohpan.
if cohpan=.00 and par3>1 min= par3.
if par3=.00 and cohpan>1 min= cohpan.
if par3<.00 and cohpan>1 min= cohpan.
if par3<.00 and cohpan = .00 min = par3.
exec.

```

```

compute age16 = (doby-
1900+16)*12+dobm.
if dobm<0 or dobm>12 age16=(doby-
1900+12)*12=6.
if doby<0 age16=-9.
exec.

```

```

compute doi = 102*12+9.
exec.

```

```

compute coh = trunc ((doby-1900)/10).
exec.

```

```

compute durm = mardate - age16.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =6 durm =
doi-age16.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =2 durm =
doi-age16.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =5 durm =
doi-age16.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =0 durm =
doi-age16.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =1 durm =
-9.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =3 durm =
-9.
if missing (mardate) and kmastat =4 durm =
-9.
if mardate = age16 durm = 2.
if doi=age16 durm = 2.
if mardate = .00 and kmastat <>1 durm =
doi-age16.
if age16<0 durm =-9.
exec.

```

```

compute married = mardate <> .00 and not
missing (mardate).
exec.

```

```

compute durp = min - age16.
if missing (min) durp = doi-age16.
if age16=doi durp = 2.
if min=age16 durp = 2.
if min = .00 durp = doi-age16.
if age16<0 durp =-9.
exec.

```

```

compute partdate = min <> .00 and not
missing (min).
exec.

```

```

compute klrwght2=trunc(klrwght*100).
Exec.

```

weight by klrwght2.

save out = 'h:workingfile.sav'.

missing values all (lo thru -1).

select if durm>0 and durp>0.

```

select if race = 1.
exec.

```

```

surv tables = durm by coh (5,7) by
sex(1,2)/plot (survival)
/int = thru 500 by 12/status = married(1).
exec.

```

```

surv tables = durp by coh (5,7) by
sex(1,2)/plot (survival)
/int = thru 600 by 12/status = partdate(1).
exec.

```