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Existing Literature

The propensity women feel towards marriage has been noted in a number of other (international) studies. Jarrett's study of African-American single mothers indicated informants' wishes for marriage, but in an idealized version, although they remained pessimistic about the materialization of this aspiration. McRobbie³ found that working-class girls in her British study found themselves in contradictory positions: while their identities were expressed in female and feminine terms in the school (that is, a heavy concern with marriage, family life, fashion and beauty), in the family they were aware that the notion of romance fell far short of its ideals. Despite this, marriage and children were still strongly envisaged for the future. Phoenix⁴ found that while many pregnant adolescents in her study were negative about men and marriage, some women married before, during or after the birth. Phoenix has proposed four main reasons why women married, namely: to satisfy normative expectations; to have a familiar and reliable partner; to improve their circumstances (that is, leaving the family home); and because marriage seemed an attractive option in the absence of career opportunities.

Cowie and Lees⁵ explored the place of marriage in the lives of young, British working-class women. What Cowie and Lees suggested was that, despite girls' fairly realistic views on marriage based on their observations of it within their own families and social circles, marriage was seen to protect the girls from being categorized as 'slags'. The authors found that any unmarried woman was at risk of being labelled a 'slag' by her former partner once a relationship ended, irrespective of her sexual behaviour. Getting married was thus rooted in a negative choice, to avoid the negative connotations of spinsterhood.

Marriage and Childbearing in a Social Context

Patterns of marriage and fertility have changed considerably in Ireland over the past three decades, as have attitudes to non-marital childbearing.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an alteration in Irish marriage patterns from the previous era, with more people marrying, and marrying at a younger age.⁷ The reason for the increase was seen to be based on an escalation in real incomes and better economic prospects.⁸ The rise in the marriage rate, and the proliferation in the number of young married couples in the population was accompanied by a fall in family size.⁹ By the 1980s, however, the age at marriage was again on the increase, as was the rate of non-marriage.¹⁰ From the registration of births in 1964 until 1970, the total number of non-marital births, and the number of non-marital births as a proportion of total births remained virtually

Marriage and Motherhood

The Contradictory Position of Single Mothers

Abbey Hyde

Introduction

This article explores the relationship between marriage and motherhood based on the accounts of Dublin-based women who gave birth to non-marital children in 1992 and 1993. Data suggest that while these unmarried participants had developed a consciousness about their potential to be exploited within marriage, their cognisance of possible exploitation was not linked to an explicit feminist agenda. Despite their awareness of the limitations of marriage, they were nonetheless propelled towards potentially patriarchal marriages¹ through a need for personal and financial security. They were also influenced by discourses that elevate the dual heterosexual family above other family formations.

I will start with a brief review of existing literature on unmarried women's views of marriage, and locate data within their social and historical context. The methodological stance adopted in the study will then be outlined briefly. Data presentation will begin by exploring women's views on the relationship between motherhood and marriage, and their own mothers' influences on their thinking. This is followed by data suggesting that, in spite of the women expressing resistance to an alignment between motherhood and marriage, they hold contradictory views on marriage and are ultimately drawn towards marriage. I suggest that along with women's need for companionship, the dearth of options open to women beyond marriage and dominant discourses on the family underlie some of the women's views.

unchanged.¹¹ A steady increase in births outside marriage as a percentage of all births began in 1970. In that year, 2.6 per cent of all births were to unmarried women.¹² By 1995, the figure had reached 22.2 per cent.¹³

Until well into the twentieth century, the only refuge for many single mothers was the workhouse, which had developed in the nineteenth century under the Irish Poor Relief Act of 1838.¹⁴ The 1970s witnessed the beginning of discussions about the hardships experienced by single mothers.¹⁵ The 1970s also saw single mothers supported in the national media, and the initiation of organizations such as Ally and Cherish that offered alternatives to institutional care for those women keeping their babies, and also lobbied on their behalf for better provisions.¹⁶

It was not until 1973 with the introduction of the Unmarried Mothers' Allowance that single mothers received some regular state support, although the level of this did not allow the mothers to rise above the poverty line. Furthermore, without childcare facilities, women claiming the allowance had no choice of entering paid employment, given the low level of women's wages compared to those of men. The Unmarried Mothers' Allowance was subsumed under the Lone Parents' Allowance in 1990.

Over the past decade, a contradictory set of discourses has emerged on non-marital motherhood. At one level, the Status of Children's Act (1987) removed the status of 'illegitimacy' and brought property and maintenance rights of non-marital children into line with those of marital children. Furthermore, the subsumption of Unmarried Mothers Allowance under Lone Parents' Allowance could be seen to reduce the stigma of non-marital childbearing by treating single mothers like other women and men parenting alone irrespective of the reason why they were single parents. However, the public depiction of single mothers evidenced in media representations has been varied in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the label of 'illegitimacy' has been removed, in the words of an *Irish Times* journalist, 'a more neutral, more politically correct stigma has risen up to take its place: the notion of births outside marriage not as a moral problem, but as a social problem'.¹⁷ Recent accounts have expressed alarm at the growing number of non-marital births.¹⁸

Newspaper reports in the late 1980s suggested a growing hostility towards single mothers.¹⁹ Rather than concerns about sexual morality which dominated in the previous era, the re-emergence of negative attitudes was seen to be rooted in economic concerns about the drain of resources on the welfare state²⁰ in spite of a plethora of studies indicating that lone-parent families (which includes single mothers) are over-represented in poverty statistics.²¹

In addition to economic concerns, disquiet also began to be expressed in the media about the decline in the family and the role of fathers. A recent *Irish Times* article stated:

No doubt we will have a price to pay for this [single mothering] one day. What the price will be, I cannot say. I merely doubt that [sic] entire generation of socialised, hardworking young fathers of a future generation will emerge from the sort of extended, relatively manless families which are appearing.²²

A headline in the *Star* newspaper in 1992 read, 'The single women who condemn their children to misery', and went on to state:

For what does the future hold for the thousands of Irish children who will never know the love of a father, never know anything about the lasting relationship between a man and a woman? . . .

. . . the child of a single-parent family, often a tired and overworked mother, is more likely to do less well at school, more likely to turn to drugs and crime, more likely to be anti-social.²³

These social transformations give some insight into the changing social context in which the responses of participants may be interpreted.

Methodology

Data to be presented here was gleaned as part of a wider study of unmarried women's experiences of pregnancy and the early weeks of motherhood in an Irish context.

The ante-natal clinic of a large maternity hospital in Dublin was the site of sample selection. Entry criteria were that potential participants be unmarried to the father of the foetus, and be first time mothers-to-be.²⁴ The process of selection was as follows. Following a discussion with the midwifery sister at the Out-Patient Department, it was suggested by me that, having established that the person satisfied the inclusion criteria, midwifery staff would inform potential participants that a woman doing a study on 'motherhood and being single' was present, and would like to talk to them and give them further information about the study. Women were to be informed that the decision to partake or not need only be made after they had spoken to me and acquired the details. Ninety women were invited to participate of which seventy-eight women (86.6 per cent) agreed to take part, and fifty-one of these (65.3 per cent) were eventually interviewed. Women were lost to the study for a number of reasons: withdrawal from the study before the arranged interview date; not presenting themselves on the day of the interview; change of address; marriage during the pregnancy; and premature births.²⁵

Prior to the pregnancy, all but four (92.1 per cent) women were in relationships with the putative fathers, although these relationships varied a good deal in length and quality.²⁶ At least fourteen (27.4 per cent) women were no longer in relationships by the time of the birth and another relationship terminated shortly after the birth. The women's ages ranged from sixteen to thirty-six. In relation to the socio-economic

status, eighteen (35.2 per cent) women were unemployed, and a further eleven (21.5 per cent) were in manual occupations. While twenty (39.2 per cent) were employed in non-manual occupations, the bulk of these were low-paid clerical jobs. The remaining two (3.9 per cent) participants were schoolgirls. Clearly, the majority of participants were in poorly paid occupations with a large proportion unemployed.

In-depth interviews were held in women's own homes in the vast majority of cases, with a small number occurring in restaurants or public houses. Participants were interviewed on two separate occasions, firstly in the later stages of pregnancy, and secondly, between weeks six and eight after the birth.²⁷ Forty-six out of the fifty-one participants were interviewed on a second occasion. Participants' names were changed to ensure anonymity.

In order to centralize women's experiences, the study adopted a qualitative approach from a pluralist feminist standpoint position. Based on the notion that human activity structures and sets limits on understanding, the feminist standpoint perspective was initially developed by writers such as Hartsock, Rose, and Smith.²⁸ It is underpinned by the notion that a partial and distorted understanding of events has resulted from the dominance of conceptual frames based on male perspectives of the social world; this distortion, it holds, can only be redressed by uncovering an understanding of the world from the perspective of women's activities.²⁹ Some writers such as Geisthoorpe have argued for a pluralist standpoint position to acknowledge differences in women's experiences in relation to class, race, sexual identity and so on, which earlier theoretical models of patriarchy tended to understate.³⁰ The present analysis was conducted from a pluralist feminist standpoint position.

Data analysis was facilitated using a style of qualitative analysis resembling a 'grounded theory' approach, first introduced by Glaser and Strauss, and later developed and refined.³¹ An interview guide indicating the main areas of questioning was drawn up in advance of the interviews. In relation to data to be presented in this article, questions that were asked related to women's views on marriage and motherhood, and the place of these in their lives. Unforeseen issues emerging from the early interviews which appeared to be of theoretical relevance were added to the agenda of the interview guide. As data collection progressed, questions about topics become more and more focused around theoretically relevant issues and concepts. A constant comparative mechanism was utilized with like items of data clustered and later theorized.

The Marriage/Motherhood Split

Until the relatively recent rise in non-marital childbearing referred to earlier, marriage and motherhood had been strongly connected, and this

served the interests of patriarchy in so far as the social organization of reproduction is male-controlled.³² However, some women in the study constructed motherhood and marriage separately, particularly in the course of the first interviews. While the majority of women favoured having a partner present for the events of childbearing and rearing, and some revealed that they would prefer to have been married, motherhood was seen by others as separate from marriage:

Kim: I don't think marriage comes into it anymore. It would be different if I hadn't got a fellow.

(21-year-old cleaner, first interview)

AH: Did you always want children?

Carmel: Ask me ma! I used to say I wanted loads of babies and no daddies! I used to always say that! That's what my ma always says, 'Your words came true.'

(18 year old, unemployed, first interview)

Just why women were rejecting marriage is clearly spelled out in some accounts where participants were explicit in their views that marriage signified subservience and loss of control in the face of male dominance, and something which would restrict their freedom:

Veronica: Well when you think of it, it's only a ring and a piece of paper, and then he thinks he owns you. You'd never have a social life or anything, I prefer the way I am.

(24 year old, unemployed, first interview)

Beth: Because the way it is, I think these men that get married think, 'Ah ha. That's fine now. I can do what I like now.'

(27 year old, unemployed, first interview)

Susan: Well, I don't know. It scares me. I'm afraid I'm going to end up like me mother. I'm afraid that I'm going to end up in a marriage that I don't want to be in . . . He [participant's father] used to beat her [participant's mother] an awful lot, and he gave us an awful time. And I think it's because I seen that.

(26-year-old cleaner, first interview)

What the above accounts seem to suggest is the women's consciousness about gender inequality and a need to avoid patriarchal control. As in Susan's case above, negative feelings about marriage were often based on the experiences of participants' own parents, friends or relatives, which supports the findings of other studies on single women's perceptions of marriage.³³ Mothers, in particular, seemed to influence participants' views on marriage. A number of mothers discouraged their daughters from marrying without due consideration:

Nora: My mother will always say, 'Never marry him until you're sure and until you're both ready. Don't rush into things.'

(21 year old, unemployed, first interview)

Rebecca: None of my sisters are married. Me ma would put you off marriage for life! 'Never get married! You can have as many kids as you'd like – don't get married! . . . Then when we got pregnant, 'Don't have any more kids, and don't get married!' She's good about it and all.

(22 year old, unemployed, first interview)

In Teresa's case below, her mother's hesitation at marriage was directly linked to the latter's reported exploitation within her own marriage:

Teresa: Me ma was saying that when her mother was alive and when she got pregnant it was kind of, 'Well you have to marry'. She was forced into marriage because she got pregnant when she was eighteen. And it was kind of, you do everything for the man, everything has to be done for the man. He has to be kept happy and the whole lot like, and you have to marry if you're pregnant. Like that's why she said she'd never force any of us into getting married 'cause she's seen what happened with hers. She ended up marrying a fellow that . . . just it didn't happen.

(20 year old, unemployed, first interview)

On the whole, where participants reported their mothers' views, the latter were found to advise against marriage unless it was being entered into because of genuine commitment to the relationship rather than to satisfy normative expectations about childbearing. This viewpoint was strongly in evidence among participants themselves during the first interviews – that when they did marry, they would do so for the sake of love and companionship and not to conform to social norms. A generation before, things were considerably different. In eleven instances, participants reported that their mothers were pregnant at marriage, and a further two of the mothers had children before they married.²⁴ One could speculate that at least some of these marriages were entered into under pressure to satisfy gender prescriptions in the social organization of reproduction, particularly given that the estimated number of pregnant brides-to-be was 15.5 per cent in the late 1970s.²⁵

The accounts relayed above might appear to convey a feminist consciousness among the women to reject gender prescriptions (such as being wives before becoming mothers) on the basis that marriage was potentially exploitative. However, in the small number of cases (four) where direct reference to a feminist agenda was made either by me, or introduced by the women themselves, it was rejected. Two examples of this are presented:

AH: So you would take a feminist stance on marriage [participant had already expressed views that women are exploited within marriage].

Teresa: Ah no, I'm not into that women's lib stuff, that's ridiculous. I wouldn't see myself in that . . . I'm not into that.

(20 year old, unemployed, first interview)

Susan: . . . I mean, I'm not a women's 'libber' or anything like, but men haven't a clue . . .

(26-year-old cleaner, first interview)

This suggests that an acknowledgement about exploitation or potential exploitation was not framed by the women in terms of a feminist consciousness.

The Lure of Marriage

Although a number of women openly criticized marriage for its potential to exploit women, there was a great deal of conflicting perceptions of marriage, even from the same participants. While on the one hand, as indicated, there was a view that marriage represented a 'trap', on the other was a sense that it provided security. Although many participants mentioned the drawbacks of marriage, there was a tension between these and the need for security associated with marriage:

Teresa: Well he'll talk about it [marriage]. He's always mentioning it, like that when we're twenty-five we'll get married, but eh, I like to hear him saying that, 'cause it does [pause], it makes me feel secure to hear him saying that, that he would marry. I like to hear him saying that, 'cause I know then there is some sort of future.

(20 year old, unemployed, first interview)

While participants were aware of the increasing instability of marriage in society, many believed that marriage provided stronger roots for a relationship than non-marital cohabitation, in terms of the likelihood of one of the partners leaving the relationship. The notion of security was variously described as 'not being on your own', 'knowing there's someone always there', and 'being supported on a long-term basis'. Thus, while marriage was seen to be a controlling institution on the one hand, it was also perceived to be a supportive one. As indicated, participants' aspirations were to meet caring and reliable partners. They were aware from their own experiences that these might be in short supply, but hoped to strike lucky in meeting a supportive companion. Data presented here tends to concur with existing literature in so far as participants indicated their realistic perceptions of marriage on the one hand, yet aspired to an idealized type of marriage for themselves on the other hand.²⁶

In a few cases, while the women involved believed that marriage offered little or nothing over and above the benefits of cohabitation, they nonetheless accepted the marriage proposals of their partners when these were offered.

When asked about the possibility of having other children, a strong feature of data that emerged in the second interviews in particular was the considerable number of women who conveyed the view that if they were to become pregnant again, they would prefer to be married:

Penny: Not being married with one child is fine, but I'd certainly never see myself with more than one and not being married . . . but I wouldn't like to

be unmarried and have two or three children. I don't think that's right . . . I don't think I'd be able to cope on my own with loads of kids. I suppose it's part and parcel of what people would think . . . as well as I just couldn't see myself with a big load of kids and on my own . . .
(24-year-old receptionist, second interview)

Kathy: I always wanted a baby for myself. I always used to say, messing, like, joking, 'I'd like to have a baby', but not to be with the fellow like. Like for it to be mine on me own. But I never thought it would come true. . . . I'd even like another but not for a long time. Five years. I'd prefer to be married. But now that I have [baby] I probably would get married if I knew he [future husband] was going to be all right, but then you can't tell what's going to happen.
(19 year old, unemployed, second interview)

A preference to be married for a subsequent pregnancy was voiced by women even in situations where marriage was attacked for its restrictiveness, oppressiveness, and failure to work, and where the women expressed contentment with the support their families were currently offering. When probed about whether the aspiration for marriage related to a personal need for constant companionship, or for financial protection, it seems that both aspects were important to participants:

Marie: I wouldn't have another one [baby] 'cause I haven't got the fellow there to rear her with me so that's why I wouldn't have another one.

AH: If you had a fellow?

Marie: Probably, if I was married . . . if I had a big house and plenty of money [laughs]. . . . Other than that now, I wouldn't . . . I always wanted a baby. I always thought about thirty [laughs] when I'm married. Being married in a big house and all. That's what I'm still planning [laughs].

AH: Is it more having the house and that, or say other things about marriage?

Marie: Ah yeah, having someone there with you to take some of the worry as well.
(20 year old, unemployed, second interview)

Participants' class position is an important consideration here because, as suggested, a large number were either unemployed, in unstable occupations or in low-paid, non-manual occupations. Furthermore, older, better educated women whose employment was more stable tended to express greater indifference about marriage than the younger women. Caution must be applied in relation to this finding because of the small number of women who were in their late twenties or older. Furthermore, because the older women were generally in higher socio-economic groups, it is difficult to distinguish the impact of age and class on their views. In addition, a number of the older women were cohabiting with separated partners, or had been married previously themselves, and this

may have influenced their perceptions of marriage. Very few women were in occupations that remunerated sufficiently for paid childcare one child, let alone another. A number of women reported the need support they would require for the practice of childrearing as a reason for marrying in the future, suggesting that the high level of support for families that most experienced in relation to the first pregnancy might not be envisaged for a subsequent pregnancy.

When eliciting women's views on marriage during the course of the first interviews in the present study, the inevitability of marriage in their lives was less strong than appeared to be the case in both McRobb and Cowie and Lee's studies, even among the younger working-class women.³⁷ As indicated, marriage and motherhood were often constructed as separate, and the inevitability of childbearing was a strong feature of the data than the inevitability of marriage. At the second interview, however, a smaller proportion of participants reported that they were indifferent about marriage if they were to have more children. In the present study, a fear of the 'slag' category, identified in Cowie and Lee's study, might well have played a part in some participants' views being married for future pregnancies. However, it was noted in the wider (present) study that issues of individual sexual behaviour and moral were not of central concern either among participants, their parents, in public discourses.³⁸ It would seem, therefore, that there were other issues involved in women's wish to marry, such as the need for personal and economic security referred to earlier. Additionally, and very significantly, the ideology of the two-parent marital family as the ideal situation in which to raise children emerged as an important factor for participants when contemplating their future social circumstances.

The Ideology of the Two-parent Family

A considerable number of the women who favoured marriage in the future mentioned their need to provide a secure home for their child and future children, and hoped for a stable family life:

AH: Would you recommend motherhood from what you've experienced so far?

Antoinette: If you were settled down, and married, and you know you wouldn't be moving around, and could give the child a good home and that, I wish I had a waited now. Give him [baby] a better life.
(19 year old, unemployed, second interview)

AH: Do you think you'll have a second child?

Jenny: Definitely not until I'm married if I ever get married . . . I'd have to be married. Part of it is the stable environment like a home for the child's security although you could have that if you were just living together. But if you're with someone and you're not married, there's nothing stopping

them walking out. I know it's the same when you're married, but in a marriage you have to make things work. I'd just like to be married the next time I have a baby, if I do have another baby.

(23 year old, unemployed, second interview)

AH: Would you like to eventually get married?

Celine: Yeah . . . If somebody did come along it would be me and [baby], not just me. If he [potential husband] took to the two of us I wouldn't mind, but not if he just thought 'You, and I don't want to know about the baby.' I'd like if I got married later on that somebody would look on him [baby] as his own. It's very important that the baby is secure and looked after, so I suppose I would like to marry eventually.

(17-year-old school pupil, second interview)

Like single mothers in other studies,³⁹ Una voiced concerns about the absence of a 'father figure' for her child:

Una: I want to marry . . . I'd like him [baby] to have a father figure. Somebody there, you know. Especially when he's young, 'cause then he'll think no different than any other child. Like I feel sorry for him [baby] more than anyone else.

(19-year-old waitress, second interview)

What this indicates is the strength of the ideology of the two-parent marital family as the most favourable environment for children. This, it seems, created contradictions for some participants who were ambivalent about marriage, yet who felt that their children were disadvantaged by the lack of the ideal family life advocated in social discourses. It is perhaps not surprising that women found themselves in irreconcilable positions about marriage, given the publicity associated with the apparent damage the absence of a father figure can do, as indicated earlier.⁴⁰

As control over female sexuality in terms of women's freedom to be sexually active before marriage is relaxed somewhat, the ideology of the two-parent family as the only suitable environment for raising children is reinforced, with women bearing children outside of marriage, especially more than one child, being seen as irresponsible and unfair to their children. Chandliet has noted how unmarried women live in the shadow of 'the family', a shadow that has a dual influence in structuring their experiences and their perceptions and analyses of those experiences⁴¹. The quality of lone parenting, she contends, is often evaluated against the yardstick of the 'normal' family, with differences seen as deficit. Any notions that participants in the present study may have had about the potential injustices of marriage, it seems, were countermanded by the insecurities they felt outside of marriage, and an ethic of responsibility they felt towards their children.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the accounts of a sample of single mothers, the women's ambivalence about marriage and motherhood has been explored. Data suggest that, influenced by their mothers' experiences, participants were aware of the potential to be exploited within marriage; however, this consciousness was not identified with an unequivocal feminist agenda. In spite of women's cognisance of the likely drawbacks of marriage, they were, nonetheless, drawn towards marriage because of feelings of insecurity, both personal and financial, outside of marriage. This elucidates the vulnerability and contradictory position of women who wish to avoid the constraints of marriage, yet feel exposed outside of it. As Walby notes:

. . . women marry because they think they will benefit, and for many, though not all, this is almost certainly the case. Marriage is often the lesser of the evils in the limited options open to women.⁴²

This vulnerability is particularly acute in considering their children: whom participants felt would suffer in the absence of a father. I have argued that, in addition to the need for personal and economic security, discourses which serve the interests of patriarchy, but were titivated in terms of children's rights, played on women's ethic of responsibility to their children. Collectively, these factors drew them in the direction of potentially patriarchal marriages.

Notes

- 1 Marriage is considered to be a patriarchal institution because with marriage, female domestic labour is expropriated. See S. Walby, *Theorising Patriarchy* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990) and on the Irish situation, O'Connor, 'Understanding Continuities and Changes in Irish Marriage: Putting Women Centre Stage', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 5, 1995, pp. 135–63.
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- 6 S. Lees, *Sugar and Spice: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls* (Penguin Books Harmondsworth, 1993).
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- 8 B. Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century', in A. Cosgrav (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland*, (College Press Ltd., Dublin, 1985), pp. 132–50.
- 9 B. Walsh, *Ireland's Changing Demographic Structure*, op. cit.

- 10 D. Courtney, 'Demographic Structure and Change in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland', in Clancy, Drudy, Lynch and O'Dowd (eds.), *Dublin, 1995*, pp. 39–89.
- 11 F. Kennedy, *Family, Economy and Government in Ireland* (The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, 1989).
- 12 Central Statistics Office, *Report on Vital Statistics* (The Stationery Office, Dublin, 1971).
- 13 Central Statistics Office, *Statistical Abstract 1996* (The Stationery Office, Dublin, 1997).
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- 15 Kilkenny Social Services, *The Unmarried Mother in the Irish Community: A Report on the National Conference on the Community Services for the Unmarried Parent* (Kilkenny Social Services, 1972).
- 16 M. Nic Ghiolla Phadraig, 'Social and Cultural Factors in Family Planning', *The Changing Family* (Family Studies Unit, University College, Dublin, 1985. Seminar paper presented on 15–16 June 1984), pp. 58–97.
- 17 *Irish Times*, 19 October 1993, p. 9.
- 18 See: *Evening Press*, 9 September 1989; 4 October 1994; *Irish Press*, 25 January 1992; *Star*, 23 September 1992.
- 19 See: *Irish Times*, 10 September 1987; the *Evening Herald*, 18 December 1987.
- 20 Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children, *Annual Report of the Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children, 1985/86 and 1986/87* (FSUPC, Dublin, 1986 and 1987); the *Irish Independent*, 23 May 1987; 10 September 1987.
- 21 J. Millar, Leeper, and Davies, *Lone Parents: Poverty and Public Policy in Ireland* (Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin, 1992); V. Richardson, 'The Family Lifestyles of Some Single Parents in Ireland', in G. Kiely (ed.), *In and Out of Marriage: Irish and European Experiences* (Family Studies Centre, Dublin, 1992), pp. 70–86; A. McCashin, *Lone Parents in the Republic of Ireland: Enumeration, Description and Implications for Social Security* (The Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, 1993); A. McCashin, *Lone Mothers in Ireland: A Local Study* (Oak Tree Press, Dublin, 1996); J. Williams and B. Whelan, 'Poverty: Temporary or Permanent?' in B. Nolan and T. Callan (eds.), *Poverty and Policy in Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1994), pp. 78–93; I.C. McCarthy, 'Women, Poverty and Systematic Family Therapy', in I.C. McCarthy (ed.), *Irish Family Studies: Selected Papers*, (The Family Studies Centre, University College, Dublin, 1995), pp. 159–73.
- 22 *Irish Times*, 9 November 1994, p. 15.
- 23 *Star*, 23 September 1992, p. 15.
- 24 While all women were unmarried to the father of the foetus, two had previously been married to other men. All women were becoming mothers for the first time, though at least two participants had abortions previously and at least one had had an early miscarriage.
- 25 This wastage rate compares well with other studies of single mothers. See, A. Phoenix, op. cit. and A. McCashin, *Lone Mothers in Ireland: A Local Study*, op. cit.
- 26 Three women became pregnant as a result of 'one-night stand' sexual encounters, and in another case the putative father was an occasional sex partner although the couple were not in a relationship.
- 27 Six women were not available for the second interviews. While the majority of infants were aged between six and eight weeks, a small number were slightly younger or older.
- 28 S. Harding, 'Feminist Justificatory Strategies', in A. Garry and M. Pearsall (eds.), *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy* (Unwin Hyman, Massachusetts, 1989), pp. 189–201; N. Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Towards a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Longman, New York, 1983); N. Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism', in S. Harding (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*, (Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1987), pp. 157–80; H. Rose, 'Haud, Brian and Hean: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences', *Signs*, vol. 9, 1983, pp. 73–90; H. Rose, 'Beyond Masculinist Realities: A Feminist Epistemology for the Sciences', in R. Bleier (ed.) *Feminist Approaches to Science* (Pergamon, New York, 1986), pp. 57–76; D.E. Smith, 'A Sociology for Women', in J. Sherman and E. Beck (eds.), *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1979), pp. 135–87; D.E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1987).
- 29 S. Harding, 'Feminist Justificatory Strategies', op. cit. Feminist standpoint epistemology is rooted in Hegel's analysis of the master/slave relationship, and Marx's development of this into the proletarian standpoint.
- 30 L. Gelshorpe, 'Response to Martin Hammett's paper, "On Feminist Methodology"', *Sociology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, pp. 213–18.
- 31 B. Glaser and A. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Aldine Publications Company, Chicago, 1967); B. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity* (Sociology Press, Mill Valley, California, 1978); A.L. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987); A.L. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Sage, London, 1990); A.L. Strauss and J. Corbin, 'Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview', in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, London, 1994), pp. 273–85; B. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* (Sociology Press, Mill Valley, California, 1992).
- 32 See A. Hyde, 'Gender Differences in the Responses of Parents to their Daughter's Non-marital Pregnancy', in A. Byrne and M. Leonard (eds.), *Women in Irish Society: A Sociological Reader*, (Beyond the Pale Publications, Belfast), pp. 311–26. ~~ibid~~
- 33 J.M. Segal, 'Looking for Mr Right? Older Single Women who become Mothers', *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1995, pp. 194–211.
- 34 Although this figure represents just over 25 per cent of the sample, there is no direct evidence from this study that pregnancy and childbearing before marriage are transmitted inter-generationally, in view of the small sample size and our limited knowledge of the extent of pre-marital pregnancy among the previous generation. See B. Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the Twentieth Century', op. cit. However, British research and North American

studies have indicated a relationship between the age of the mother at first birth and the likelihood of her daughter having an adolescent or premarital birth. See M. Simms and C. Smith, *Teenage Mothers and their Partners*, Research Report No. 15 (HMSO, London, 1986); J.R. Kahn and K.E. Anderson, 'Intergenerational Patterns of Teenage Fertility', *Demography*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1992, pp. 39-57. In the Kahn and Anderson study a strong intergenerational pattern was noted irrespective of race.

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 36 R.L. Harrett, 'Living Poor: Family Life among Single Parent African-American Women', op. cit.; A. McRobbie, 'Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity', op. cit.
 37 A. McRobbie, *ibid.*; C. Cowie and S. Lees, 'Slags and Drags', op. cit.
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Feminism: Personal, Political, Unqualified (or Ex-Colonized Girls Know More)

Ailbhe Smyth

Unqualifying

In a way, these reflections started out a while ago as a paper I intended to give at 'Women's Studies establishment' conferences outside Ireland. Each time, when I was literally on my feet and the point of delivery, I lost my nerve. I knew that what I wanted to say was too personal, too political and awkward for these sophisticatedly rational public articulations of the academic status and credibility of Women's Studies.

Feminism – as worldview and politics – has been an absolutely central part of my life for a very long time, and I cannot talk or write about it without being personal – 'deliberately personal' – and explicitly political. I became involved in Women's Studies in order to challenge the always intensely if covertly political closures, exclusions and stultifying strictures of the very powerful academy and its allied institutions, not to reproduce them. I still believe that to be a primary responsibility and function of feminist academics. It depresses me that in becoming 'established', so much of Women's Studies seems to have so readily abandoned the principles of a transformative and necessarily oppositional practice of knowledge-making. While I have never expected my feminist politics to conduct me speedily up the academic career ladder, it distresses me greatly that whenever I speak (or want to speak) personally and politically, I experience this as disqualifying myself from 'real' academic status within Women's Studies.

I also lost my nerve because I was angry at still always being programmed in 'National Something-or-Another' slots. Since I like 'being