

**ARTICULATING AN ETHIC OF CARE:
*THE MORAL NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES OF
WORKING LONE MOTHERS IN SOUTH WALES***

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of Working Lone Mothers (WLMs) as they attempt to negotiate the complex articulation of public/private spaces whilst caring for their children and themselves. The focus of the research is set on WLMs' understanding and practice of care within their 'relational network' of family and friends and against the contextual backdrop of the community in which they live. More specifically, it seeks to ascertain the type and quality of care currently articulated in the private domain against the assumption that changing gender roles may produce a 'care deficit' or caring 'gaps' within the family context of 21st century Britain. With this objective in mind, I have carried out 35 in-depth interviews of WLMs living in the South Wales area between the Rhondda Valley and Cardiff.

The research is conceptually placed within the framework of an 'ethic of care', which, as a moral theory, is only a few decades old and, as such, is still in the process of being formulated. With a relative small number of care ethicists currently publishing in the international and national arena, this thesis seeks to enhance the value and importance of care both as a private and as a public virtue and practice against the cultural and political dominance of an ethic of work. From this particular standpoint, if an ethic of work seems to be increasingly hijacked by consumer capitalism and shaped to respond primarily to 'privatised' and 'marketised' self-interest, an ethic of care appears to have been relegated to the private concerns and considerations of women in the domestic sphere of life. Against this backdrop, whilst the understanding of the public/private articulation has remained primarily a matter of theoretical discussion, the important dimension of care has not yet been thoroughly investigated within the empirical framework of these conflicting environments. This thesis intends to offer an empirical investigation of these issues by evaluating the inter-dynamic nature of WLMs' paid work in relationship to their caring commitments. In the process, the embedded tensions of both environments will be exposed and analysed.

I will argue that whilst 'enabling flexible arrangements' at work are conducive to a better management of caring work and promote a better balance between the two domains, 'disabling flexible arrangements' are not. Given that the latter have emerged as the most common form of work management, many WLMs do struggle to find the time to care. Yet, under these constraints, WLMs have devised strategies that allow them to carry out their caring responsibilities by ways of maximising their limited resources of time, space and energy whilst minimising their overall investment. This process appears to be so clearly widespread amongst the respondents as to have generated definable patterns. Namely, under apparently normalised and routinised conditions, the cumulative effect of transferring and converting commodified values and practices from the public sphere and the workplace into the world of informal care has been increased and intensified to such an extent as to affect and change the type and quality of care that WLMs are able to experience and practice in relation to their children, to themselves and to some extent, to their 'relational networks'.

CHAPTER 1

Setting the scene

1.1 Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to offer a meaningful contribution towards a better understanding of an ethic of care as it is perceived, experienced and expressed by working lone mothers (*WLMs*) in contemporary Wales. More specifically, it seeks to offer a new understanding of the ways in which ‘care’ is lived by WLMs in relation to their children and themselves whilst accounting for the contextual realities in which they are embedded. These include the networks of their extended families and close friends. Within these contextualised practices, the shape that ‘care’ takes has both *empirical* and *theoretical* implications. By exposing changing practices within the informal domain of domestic life, the evidence from fieldwork analysis provides a conceptual framework for revising, updating and strengthening current theoretical perspectives on an ethic of care.

In all of these contexts, whilst pursuing a distinctive holistic approach that aims to be inclusive and considerate of *all* aspects of social life, an ethic of care is arguably perceived in ideological contraposition to traditional and current interpretations of an ethic of work. This is because, from the perspective of an ethic of care, past and present expressions of work ethics have developed along the flawed lines of a gender division of labour. This compartmentalisation, in turn, has made it possible to erect artificial boundaries between public and private spaces and to draw a wedge between the normative values that have come to be associated with the public sphere (epitomised by

the ‘economically active’ individual), and the private sphere (perceived as the locus of the ‘economically inactive’), and as such, seen as occupying a marginal and subsidiary role in the economic and social development of a nation. These narrow parameters however do not account for or properly reflect women’s lived realities and actual concerns. Furthermore, the continuous social process of attempting to normalise these realities has contributed to render these distortions invisible to those women who are embedded in them and who struggle to meet society’s normative expectations.

In light of these considerations, it should be noted that this thesis is conceptually positioned *between* the inter-dynamic tension that is arguably exercised by conflicting interpretations of ‘work’ and ‘care’. In view of the wide sociological breadth and interdisciplinary nature of this study, I am aware of the limited scope and consequent modest claims that qualitative research of this kind can provide, since findings remain invariably confined to the contingent and contextualised realities of specific times and spaces. However, as it is the case for most qualitative research, the rich data generated in this thesis aim to interact with theoretical discourses rather than with statistical numbers (Bryman 2001). This means that in the process of investigating a relevant range of cases, each one of them can become an embodiment or a representation of different experiences or processes. These can be tested against standing theories and allow, through comparative analysis, the discovery of new patterns or trends.

This research is positioned within the framework of ‘feminist research practice’ (Maynard 1994; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994). This said, there is no single agreed definition or guideline on what constitutes or qualifies as ‘typical’ feminist research

(Maguire 1987). But the wealth of empirical studies and analysis carried out from the 1970s onwards by feminist scholars has permitted the formulation of commonly acknowledged criteria, by which 'feminist' research has emerged as different from other research involving the study of women and gender issues. Feminism is about 'challenging gender inequalities in the social world' (Brayton 1997: 1) and, as such, is politically motivated because it advocates the removal of power imbalances and social inequalities centred on gender. Thus, feminist research it is not so much research about women, but rather research *for* women (Cook and Fonow 1986, Mies 1993) that aims at changing a pre-given status quo. From this standpoint, 'feminist theory - of all kinds - is to be based on, or anyway touch base with, the variety of real life stories women provide about themselves' (Lugones and Spelman 1990: 21). These 'real life stories' should 'account for the everyday experiences of women which have been neglected in traditional sociology' (Cook and Fonow 1986: 22). On the basis of these parameters, this thesis can be described as situated within 'feminist research practice' because at its core is the dedication to uncover, understand and address women's concerns and moral agency as experienced through their daily struggle. More specifically, against the normative framework outlined above, WLMs' narratives and moral agency are analysed as they attempt to re-define and negotiate their roles and identities *within* and in *between* the public and the private, their paid and unpaid work.

Epistemologically, the research strives to achieve 'openness' towards *all* aspects of the research process. From this perspective, the 'researcher's intellectual autobiography' (Maynard 1994:16) is also important since her personal experiences, life choices and

moral point of view bear direct consequences on the questions to be asked and on the manner of the asking. From this perspective therefore, it becomes rather self-evident that no research can possibly be completely free from biases. To claim otherwise, Maynard (1994) argues, would be naïve and disingenuous. In line with this argument, the researcher's introspective reflexivity serves an instrumental purpose (Letherby 2003) as it becomes a method for monitoring and identifying ethnocentric 'blind spots' (Clarke 2006) and 'filling' those 'silences' (Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994: 46) which could otherwise weaken the quality of good research.

1.2 Placing my 'intellectual autobiography' within the research process

This thesis has been developed within the conceptual framework articulated above and is the 'brain child' of converging autobiographical and sociological insights, which have been crucial in motivating and shaping this work. The former refers to personal 'choices' made over the past ten years; the latter emerged from my sociological 'awakening' and the gradual realisation of the extent to which the moral agency of social actors is shaped by dominant political and cultural discourses. In view of this, I will begin this thesis by outlining first the autobiographical and sociological reasons behind my interest in this particular area of study.

Many of the realisations that have emerged from the partial autobiographical account given below were reached *a posteriori*, whilst coming towards the end of a long and often difficult journey. In this respect, what I came to learn about myself was the end product of a process that matured as I listened to, interacted with, and analysed the perceptions

and experiences of other WLMs. These considerations bring to the fore the deeply social and contextual nature of reflexive thinking as it has been articulated by Giddens (1992, 1999, 2002a, 2002b). Indeed, introspective self-reflection and reflexive processes cannot be understood as free-standing factors or ‘skills’. As it was proved over and over again by the 35 WLMs interviewed for this research, the ability of moral agents to understand and negotiate their social environments whilst attempting to carve multiple spaces and roles for themselves, is shaped and ultimately limited by the temporal and spatial frameworks which they inhabit. In other words, what a moral agent *can* do remains restricted by a partial and (at times) distorted understanding of the influential factors and circumstances in which s/he is embedded.

This was certainly my case when, following my separation and divorce I came to the decision to re-enter full-time education. I was then in my mid 40s, with three daughters approaching puberty and making a living through a dead-end and unstable part-time job. My weak employability position reflected one of the most common outcomes delineated in post-divorce families under ‘neo-traditional’ arrangements (Crompton 2006). That is, my marriage had subscribed to the ‘male breadwinner/female part-time earner’ type of gender relationship. Arguably, this nexus of relations highlights the normative convention that men are entitled to uninterrupted horizontal and vertical mobility in their chosen career, whilst women should retain primarily a supportive (and thus marginal) economic role. In this, it can be seen that wives’ primary function remains firmly tied up to the caring role of mothers and home-makers (Glover 2002). In the aftermath of my separation and divorce, my insignificance as a wage-earner within a strongly competitive

labour market was the most direct cause of the relative state of poverty in which I found myself. In addition, my 'British' children and my post-marriage arrangements (Smart and Neale 1999) restricted my horizontal mobility in more than one way, since I could not even contemplate the possibility of returning to Italy, my country of origin, where my birth family and all my brothers and sisters live. Altogether, these combining factors guided my 'choices' towards seeking higher qualifications. In spite of my age, this appeared to be an ideal way to improve my chances for future employment, to break with the past and learn to reassert myself in my new identity as a working/studying 'lone mother'. But, these realisations and my subsequent 'choice' to re-enter higher education were a guided process, made possible by the political and cultural context in which I was embedded.

From a cultural point of view, the dominant assumption of 21st century post-modern Britain supports the notion that social actors are the makers of their own personal and professional histories. 'Individualised' lifestyles (Beck 1992, 1994) unfold through self-defined life-cycles or phases, benefiting from ever-increasing levels of reflexive thinking (Giddens 1992). Overlapping and reinforcing this cultural trend, New Labour political ideology supported a pseudo-moral point of view that validated social, professional and personal 'success' only through the spiral of ever-higher and competitive educational attainment. From this perspective, not only did my decision seem to be the 'right' one, it became also a *doable* one as I was allowed to access the financial benefits of a standard educational grant (as a mature student with dependent children) and Working Tax Credit (for being a working mother). Of course, I had also other 'options', namely, I could have

pursued less ambitious career paths and invested more in caring for my children and for my aging parents (which is what many middle-aged women in a similar position to mine often do). But this option held no currency for me since my mind was firmly set on proving my 'worth' where I felt it really counted: namely in the public sphere. Thus, by entering into full-time education as both a 'mature student' and a 'lone mother', I fully subscribed to what was New Labour's political agenda in the early 2000's by fitting the profile of a particular, and supposedly upwardly-mobile, social individual. I belonged to those 'aspirational' classes (Brown 2008, 2009) who are seen as victims of adverse circumstances and eager to navigate their way out of poverty through higher education and better employment. Certainly I had no desire to become a negative statistical number on the 'scrap heap' that comprised the jobless and 'unproductive' minorities (Cameron 2007: 7).

My undergraduate years were an illuminating experience. But just as much as I was flourishing in one environment, I found that I was struggling in the other. My life at home was increasingly difficult and, at times, unmanageable. I was struggling to find the time to fit in all my commitments and in the process my relationship with the children and my social life began to suffer. In addition, the compounding effect of a sedentary lifestyle mixed with an erratic and unpredictable routine was also having an effect on my physical health; I developed high blood pressure and a seemingly ever-expanding waistline. As a mother, my loyalty was to my children; to them was my 'true' long-term investment and commitment. I cared deeply for their well-being and I felt fully responsible for their emotional development. However, whilst their needs were

important, they did not appear to be as *urgent* or as structured and contextualised as my work and study commitments were. They emerged or flared up unexpectedly and I was often unprepared or too tired to deal with them in any real depth. On some occasions, I found myself ‘performing’ my motherly role by going through the motion of and knowing intuitively what to do but subconsciously I was withholding my reservoir of time, resources and energy for more ‘urgent’ tasks, which I knew, would have to be faced later on in my long working day. Only when a problem reached its explosive conclusion (such as when a fight amongst the children would erupt), would I put time aside to investigate and confront the issue.

With the passing of time, this reactive mode of interaction (that is, interacting mainly to contain, manage or counteract real and potential crises) continued and to some extent became normalised and embedded as I continued with my studies and went on to start a PhD. All the time however, my continuous attempts to negotiate and streamline the difficult triangular relationship of work-family-study in a more ‘balanced’ manner were constantly frustrated because I could see that most of my time, my mental energy and resources were channeled into the public sphere at the expenses of the private. A consequence of this was an unrelenting sense of guilt; I found myself apologising endlessly to my children whilst repeating the mantra ‘this will not be for long, and in the end we will all be better for it’.

As my university life progressed, my moral dilemmas and my ambivalences were

increasingly framed in a sociological context. I become deeply intrigued by the complex dynamic of public/private spaces and the ways in which these social spaces were negotiated specifically by women who could not rely on the support of a partner. I knew that I could not manage on my own and that the only moral justification that I could offer for the contradictions in my lifestyle was reminiscent of the Catholic dogma: 'suffer now and get your reward later'. But whilst preparing for a hypothetical better tomorrow (Beck 1992) that was supposedly going to make all of us happier, my children managed to grow up with little emotional help from me. I was deeply troubled by this notion, particularly as I seemed unable to rationalize the deeper mechanism of what was taking place. It was with this state of mind that I initiated my exploration of the subject in the form of an undergraduate dissertation at the University of Glamorgan.

What I found was that the sense of unease and disquiet that I was experiencing in my personal life was to a great extent reproduced and intensified in the lives of other WLMs, whose life situation echoed my own. Not only were these WLMs struggling to find a workable balance in their busy lives; many of them were also emotionally and physically exhausted in their endeavours to be constantly on top of all their multiple responsibilities. This first exercise provided me with a useful snapshot of a complex reality that was as compelling as it was difficult to unravel. Furthermore, it brought into sharp relief the realisation that the problem was both acute and widespread. This said I was nowhere near to grasping the deeper causes for this social malaise nor was I able to explain to myself the moral contradictions that had riddled my own family life. It was therefore with the objective of finding more substantive answers to these moral dilemmas that I

embarked on my doctoral thesis. The focus of this exploration can be succinctly summarised in the following research statement:

Against the backdrop of the spatial-temporal negotiation of public/private spaces and within the contextual realities of their relational network, this thesis sets out to investigate: 1) the type and quality of care that WLMs allocate to their children and, 2) the kind of impact that conflicting demands and intense lifestyles have on WLMs and on their personal sense of well being.

Having identified the focus of my thesis, I will now go on to outline the socio-political and cultural background of the research by defining some of the most significant issues and dominant themes that have emerged in the public arena within the framework of ethic of care since its inception in 1983.

1.3 The research in socio-political context

The underpinnings of this research lie within the polarised tension of two interlocked ethical frameworks: ‘work’ and ‘care’. Against the backdrop of a dominant ethic of work, the phenomenon of ‘lone parenting’ as it is understood today¹ is a relatively recent one. During the last 30 years there have been two distinctive positions that have dominated the socio-political agenda: lone mothers are either represented as a ‘social threat’ (‘new’ right) or as a ‘social problem’ (‘new’ left) (Duncan and Edwards 1999). The message emphasised by the last three New Labour governments, prior to their return in opposition following the 2010 election, was centred on supporting lone mothers to escape from poverty through paid employment. This policy programme has been carried

¹ Lone parenting is not a ‘new’ phenomenon. Past and recent wars have broken many families apart

out with some underlining ambivalences since work-centred policies have been deployed side by side with increased financial support for lone parents, stressing the notion that children's wellbeing was also a central concern for the last government (Crompton 2006). In order to better define the socio-political context of my proposed research the next section will now discuss this in greater detail. Within the New Labour political framework, Blair's government put in place a number of strategic policies and initiatives that sought to reform the tax and benefit system (New Deal for Lone Parents, 1998) and 'make work pay' for the 1.9 million lone parent families currently in Britain (www.gingerbread.org.uk 2009). The aim was to have 70 per cent of lone mothers in paid employment by 2010. At a national level, statistical evidence indicates that the number of working lone mothers has been gradually on the increase. This is the case, even though employment uptake varies considerably amongst lone mothers with children above or below school age, with variable rates between seventy/seventy-eight per cent and 35 per cent respectively (Social Trends 2008).

Predictably therefore, in recent times poverty rates have been falling (One Parent Families: 2002a, 2005) and this appears to be the case even against some evidence to the contrary (Crompton 2006). Thus, from a political standpoint, the strategy seems to be working. As a result, the political pressure exercised on lone mothers to enter the labour market grows and it is likely to intensify further in the austere economic climate of the current coalition government, as the latest budget clearly indicates (Osborn: 2010). In contrast, as Barlow, Duncan and James (2002) have argued, social policies should not be solely based on economic rationality and material considerations, nor should they be

causing many women to care alone for the offspring,

taken as the sole measure for understanding the problematic moral situation in which many lone mothers find themselves at the present. This becomes particularly evident when, under unpredictable and enforceable circumstances, caring responsibilities take priority over and above all else. In such cases, and contrary to what Hakim (2000) seems to suggest, paid work may not be the best or even the most appropriate ‘choice’ or ‘option’ for lone mothers.

Reflecting similar statistics, in Wales more women and (lone) mothers than ever before are taking up paid work. Specifically, between Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) and Cardiff, where the fieldwork was carried out, the proportion of lone mothers at work in 2006/8 was between sixty per cent and forty-six per cent in RCT and between forty-four per cent and fifty-eight per cent in Cardiff. These figures were considerably lower than the average rates of partnered mothers working in the same areas. Their rates oscillated between seventy-one per cent and seventy-seven per cent in RCT and sixty-nine and seventy-two per cent in Cardiff (Annual Population Survey 2006/9 in Appendix A1), mirroring the UK national averages for married/cohabiting mothers, set between seventy and seventy-five per cent (Social Trends 2008). Overall, women’s employment in Wales is comparable to the employment pattern present in the rest of the UK. In an overview of jobs distribution, imaginatively described by Harris, Charles and Davies (2006) as ‘oval’², two thirds of the work force occupies the middle of the occupational structure³, which thins towards the top, for non-manual managerial jobs, and the bottom, for lower

² This image is used in contraposition to the traditional ‘pyramidal’ working structure of industrial times, heavily dependent on manual work and on a rigid managerial structure

³ Middle range occupations describe such jobs as associate professional and technical occupations, administrative and secretarial work, skilled trade and personal service activities.

manual and elementary work. Notwithstanding the small scale of my study, I found that this changed working landscape was mirrored in the random sample of fieldwork respondents, whose distribution and type of employment will be discussed at length through chapters four and five.

With specific regard to the socio-political and cultural landscape of the South Wales Valleys, today's post-industrial society has supplanted a strong industrial tradition, which had been sustained for over a century by a coal mining industry known to be the largest continuous coalfield in Britain, and, by a large work force, which was home to over 15.000 miners in post-war times between 1945 and 1975 (Davies, John; Jenkins, Nigel 2008). However, since its collapse between the 1980s and early 1990s, the area has struggled to emerge from a situation of economic and social stagnation and decline. This reality was acknowledged by Rhodri Morgan and John Hutton, the First Minister for Wales and the State Secretary for Work and Pensions respectively, when they commissioned the 2007 report for the Welsh Assembly Government (DWP 2007:22-23):

Wales still lags behind the United Kingdom in terms of employment rate, household income and GVA per head....Although employment rates in the major cities of Cardiff and Swansea are below the United Kingdom average, the lowest rates tend to be in the valleys.

Within the same report, problems were also outlined concerning the availability of services, primary amongst which was the effective delivery of good local childcare services (DWP 2007:20):

Access to childcare is the biggest barrier to work for parents with young children, in particular lone parents who work fewer than 16 hours per week said that problems of finding and affording childcare were preventing them from working longer.

Overall, it should be noted that until the end of its term in office in May 2010, the UK Labour government had worked to increase its investment in childcare subsidies and provisions (Williams 2004, Brown 2009). Yet, difficulties and problems still persist in many areas. According to the 2008 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)⁴, within RCT (Davies 2008) several problems in providing adequate childcare were identified. These included lack of availability for disabled children or children with specific needs, the shortage of reasonably priced places and insufficient bilingual childcare through the medium of Welsh. Crucially, as the report has highlighted, there was also a shortage of flexible childcare supporting those working mothers who had irregular working hours. Similar problems were highlighted in the Cardiff CSA report (Cardiff Research Centre 2009), which stressed more specifically the uneven and biased geographical distribution of childcare provision, with the best services clustered in the most densely populated areas, whilst provisions appeared to be fragmented and less diversified in rural or less populated areas.

1.4 The research background: outlining main themes and perspectives

The research is articulated in ten chapters. Following this introduction, chapters two and three engage with the writings of a range care ethicists by analysing their theoretical and empirical works respectively. At a theoretical level, I analyse in chapter two the conceptual works of Gilligan (1982), Tronto (1993), Potter (1999), Noddings (1984),

Ruddick (1989), Koehn (1998), Sevenhuijsen (2002), Lewis (2002, 2006), Himmelweit (2002, 2005), Glover (2002), Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2001, 2002) and Held (2006). With regard to fieldwork analysis and findings, this thesis focuses primarily on the contributions of some of the major exponents of the CAVA group (Care, Values and the Future of Welfare www.leeds.ac.uk/cava) such as Williams (2004), Smart (2000, 2003), Neale and Smart (2002), Duncan (2003), Duncan and Edwards (1999) and Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003), who are discussed in chapter three. CAVA conducted a five years research programme between 1999 and 2004 centered mainly on changing family practices and negotiations within a variety of socially challenging environments and contexts.

By and large, all these theoretical and empirical works have positioned the family within the framework of an ethic of care that is essentially viewed in binary opposition to an ethic of work. That is, these authors have analysed the endurance of a certain type of family environment and found that the domestic sphere is still on the whole reflecting and reproducing women's experiences. In it, domesticity, intimacy, informality, caring activities and relationships find their natural 'habitat' since they are supposedly valued and lived for their own sake. By contrast, the marketplace has been identified by care ethicists as the quintessential locus of men's experiences, a 'man-centred' world. Within is social structure and organisation, self-regarding individualism seems to be valued over communitarianism, competitiveness over cooperation, independence over interdependence, abstract and universalistic notions of values over concrete, contextualised realities,

⁴ The CAS has become statutory requirement to be undertaken every three years by local Authorities following the Childcare Act 2006

generalisations over the particular and the personal, and separation over inclusion (Potter 1999).

In underlining the nature of this polarisation, care ethicists stress the unfairness and artificiality of gender relations so compartmentalised, and emphasise the notion that a work ethic and a care ethic have become the symbolic representation of those areas of life that men and women have influenced the most. In this characterisation, the holistic and integral 'moral point of view' (Tronto 1993: 26) that emerged from the Aristotelian 'virtue ethic' has been hijacked and then lost altogether in the hands of powerful and privileged minorities (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998, Koehn 1998, Held 2006). Attempts to free moral philosophy from the shackles of male-centred, deontological (duty-based) theories began to emerge in the 1950s from the teleological (action-based) works of Anscombe (1958), Williams (1985), MacIntyre (1985) and Foot (2001). Attempts were also made by the exponents of the counter-culture revolution of the 1960s, which was guided intellectually by the 'cultural Marxists' of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer) who called for the dissolution of abstract humanism in favour of a much more concrete humanism.

Notwithstanding the raising of these and others counter-culture political movements, a male-centred ethic of work has emerged to dominate the public sphere and become the embodiment of a particular 'moral point of view'. This is primarily concerned with the economic expansion of free markets whereby goods, activities and people have become increasingly 'commodified' (Held 2006, Crompton 2006, Himmelweit 2002, Glover 2002). That is, the value of everything seems to be increasingly measured and regulated

by the norms of the market via the production, exchange and enjoyment of any given 'product'. From this standpoint, Held (2006: 111) and many more who share her ethical platform, exhort discerning moral actors to protect true human flourishing by 'strongly resisting' the distortion of 'true' human values.

One way in which this misrepresentation of social realities has found moral justification within the wider society has been through the social engineering of separate spheres of life: thus the 'excesses' of one (namely the public sphere) could be absorbed and tempered in the nurturing dimension of the other. At the same time, whilst caring concerns and practices remain chiefly a 'private' affair, the growing engulfment of private spaces by an ethic of work is transforming the domestic sphere, making it more susceptible to the level of commodification already present elsewhere. The seriousness of this concern is backed up by a commonly shared and deeply held persuasion amongst all care ethicists, that care is and remains the most basic, fundamental and universal value to qualify all human societies throughout people's life cycle (Tronto 1993; Smart and Neale 1999, Held 2006). In all its expressions, care defines the nature of all personal attachments and meaningful relations and, as such, is the maker of identities and the source of the social capital available at a community, national and global level. The seemingly inexhaustible nature of this particular 'capital' is often visibly manifested in the underlying ethos and activities of civic societies and charitable organisations, which are constantly working to address and respond to a growing variety of human needs. The consistent institutionalised disregard and undermining of care, as both a social value and a practice, ultimately impoverishes and erodes the values and practices that define

people's common humanity and hold societies together.

Latching on to this general argument, care ethicists like Duncan and Edwards (1999), Smart and Neale (1999), Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2002), Lewis (2002, 2006), Sevenhuijsen (2002), Barlow, Duncan and James (2002), Glover (2002), Williams (2004) and Himmelweit (2000, 2005) have articulated specifically-located discourses from clearly defined European and British contexts. The general contention is that the intervention of the previous New Labour government to facilitate women's access into the labour market through 'welfare to work' policies has been an important step forward, and policies have recognised mothers' need to work. However, the public sphere is operating on conventional, gender-neutral assumptions based on the notion of the 'adult worker model' (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002, Lewis 2002) as the prevailing 'moral point of view'. This ethos has emerged from the concept of the 'rational economic man' that qualifies the stereotypical characterisation of 'good citizenry'. From this standpoint, care ethicists within CAVA argue that even though work is a vital pre-requisite for achieving self-sufficiency and economic independence, the continuous emphasis on paid work alone has distorted the concept of 'productivity' and the value placed on social/human capital. As a result, they argue, mainstream cultural norms and political discourses, which many of them see epitomised in the works of Giddens (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a), Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), are misconstrued because they ignore the vital importance that care occupies in people's lives. As such, they do not present an accurate reflection of the 'reality' that ordinary people, and particularly women, experience in their daily lives.

Given these premises, CAVA's grounded work on the family has been important. Particularly relevant to the development of this research endeavour has been the work of Duncan and Edwards (1999), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart (2000, 2003), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Neale and Smart (2002)⁵. In their writings, these authors indicate that in spite of changing family forms, there is still a 'palpable moral texture to people's lives...which is normally negotiated within certain guidelines according to the context they find themselves in' (Williams 2001a: 4-5). Families, it is argued, are connected by a kind of 'practical ethic' (Williams 2004: 8) defined as a set of common values (such as respect, care, fairness, communication and trust), the most noticeable of which, fairness seem to underline all social interactions within various family formations. Within the current normative framework, the CAVA group argues that what is increasingly emphasised is the notion that the contemporary family is no longer simply defined as a social institution based on the diversity of its form. Rather, the interest in the family has shifted to what family members do and how they interact with one other. Thus, family practices, which include issues of intimacy and care, have become important topics of investigation. Against this backdrop, the empirical evidence within the CAVA group points to the widespread finding that (lone) mothers do always prioritise their children's needs above their own (Duncan and Edwards 1999, Williams 2004).

⁵ With reference to these authors, some of their works slightly pre-date CAVA's research (Duncan and Edwards 1999; Smart and Neale 1999). In the context of this research however, they are analysed because 1) their research outcomes are similar in essence to those produced by CAVA, and 2) under the wider paradigm of an ethic of care, their chosen topics of investigation are particularly relevant to this research.

These empirical findings however appear to be somewhat contradicted in the theoretical insights of Glover (2002) and Himmelweit (2002, 2005). Glover focuses her attention on women's well-being. In this context, she hypothesises that the possible levels of strains and stresses (described as '*charge mentale*') that many mothers seem to experience, may be the result of an institutionalised inability to acknowledge the impact that 'uncommodified' activities and concerns from the domestic sphere (namely, the unpaid labour and caring work from home) may have over the public sphere and over women's general sense of well-being. It is because 'uncommodified activities are embedded in commodified activities' (Glover 2002: 255), that the stress levels experienced by women in the workplace are on the increase. Thus, in order to avoid an increase in '*charge mentale*' and preserve a healthy 'balance' between the two domains, mothers tend to decrease their uptake of paid work, which typically shifts from full-time to part-time jobs. The failure to understand and account for this phenomenon, Glover argues, represents one of the main factors to hamper the vertical and horizontal progression of women in the workplace.

A complementary argument is then posited by Himmelweit (2002, 2005) who theorises about the difficulties faced by men and women in today's world. Himmelweit stresses the need to realign and reposition the axis of the public/private in such a way as to give a new and deserving space to the priority of care. Additionally, Himmelweit (2002, 2005) points out that men and women find themselves 'out on a limb' in that women struggle to negotiate their space in the public arena and men struggle to find a more involved role within the private arena. This conceptual 'in between' space has pushed men and women

outside their conventional roles, forcing them to reassess and redefine their identities through uneasy negotiations. As family responsibilities are no longer so clearly defined, it becomes easier to theorise a ‘care gap’ or a ‘care deficit’ within this uncertain terrain (Himmelweit 2002).

In analysing these perspectives, what emerges are some conceptual divergences that demand deeper understanding and clarification. These tensions can be identified in the inconsistencies of the following claims. On the one hand women are seen as caring for their children by responding to a moral imperative that transcends context and circumstances. This apparently undisputed conviction resembles an act of faith in women’s predisposition and attitude to always do their best for their children, which brings to the fore a rather static concept of motherhood⁶. In this context, what mothers *do* seems to be linked primarily to a general notion of ‘good enough’ mothering. Drawing from Finch and Mason (1993), but also from Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), the implications are that within their specific circumstances, women deal with their own problematic situations not so much by asking themselves ‘what ought I to do?’ but rather ‘how can I best manage this?’ (Williams 2004:8). In other words, by using a ‘practical ethic’ women are aware that there may be more than just one ‘right answer’ to a moral dilemma (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002: 119). This fluid interpretation of women’s actions depicts a continuous process of negotiation and reconstruction that appears to be so mobile and changeable as to arguably give rise to a degree of epistemological relativism, making it more difficult to map out common

⁶ Arguably, this position could be in part explained as a reaction to the strong prescriptive agenda of present and past governments at war with the ‘workless class [that needs to be brought] back into society and

patterns of moral agency.

On the other hand, there is the notion that women (as well as men) are susceptible to the pressures and conflicting priorities elicited by the changing social environments they inhabit. The conventional boundaries that separate social groups as well as the norms that supposedly characterise them become less defined and more permeable. This could give rise to a degree of ontological confusion and insecurity about one's role and social identity. Relevant to mothers, it has been postulated that this phenomenon could have negative repercussions over the quality of care that mothers are able to exercise in relation to their children (Himmelweit 2002, 2005) and to themselves (Glover 2002). The conceptual tension between these two different ontological positions gives way to different epistemological frameworks which appear to be at odds with each other. That is, if on the one hand, traditional assumptions of 'motherhood' are still underpinning many studies amongst care ethicists (Noddings 1984, Held 2006), on the other, a less 'structuralist' and a more individualised, fluid approach (Smart and Neale 1999), is increasingly shaping normative descriptions of 'good' mothering, qualified in many accounts by the amount of 'good enough' care provided (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002). To date, against the backdrop of these various strands no substantive study has been produced to work out the effect that the articulation of public and private spaces may have on the quality of mothers' management of the private sphere and on their quality of care. Thus, whether there may be 'caring gaps' or a 'care deficit' in mothers' daily practices, needs to be empirically investigated. This research aims to provide a much needed contribution to this important empirical question.

useful work' (extract from Blair's speech in Barlow, Duncan and James 2002: 110).

1.5 Summary

This introductory chapter has identified and outlined the personal and sociological basis for undertaking this research. In it, I have explained how my personal moral dilemmas and my individual development came to be increasingly framed and understood in a wider social context. As a social actor amongst many, both my personal questions and their answers have arisen and have been shaped by the complex interplay of wider socio-political and cultural contexts and circumstances, by which I am continuously affected and, in a limited capacity, I also affect. Against this backdrop, the working, un-partnered mothers in this study have been investigated because they are seen as occupying a critical position within the temporal and spatial articulation of the public and private domains as largely defined in contemporary western societies. From this standpoint, the focus of my research has been identified as the concern to establish the ways in which *care* is perceived, expressed and experienced by WLMs in relation to their children, to themselves and to their social environment under the often strenuous condition of modern life. Thus, although the social context for this investigation is set within WLMs' family domain and amongst the relational network of close family and friends, emphasis will be placed on the fluid and inter-dynamic process that exists between the public and private sphere, the formal world of work and the informal world of care, to ascertain whether the quality of care at home is affected by the demands placed on lone mothers from their working environments.

This introduction has also outlined some of the most significant themes and discourses

defining an ethic of care from the standpoint of the social, political and cultural contexts of modern western societies. Although an ethic of care is applicable to virtually every field of human endeavour, the theoretical discourses highlighted here reflect the particular interests of this research, namely the temporal and spatial management of public /private work and its effect on the type and quality of care practiced at home. This scope defines the conceptual and empirical boundaries of this endeavour. Within this framework, theoretical discourses and empirical works seem to converge and occasionally diverge on a number of issues.

There is a general convergence of views over the realisation that women's voices need to be heard and understood from the many and varied contexts in which women now work and live, so that a more concrete and practical morality can be allowed to emerge and be championed through feminist research. There is also widespread consensus over the notion that the public/private boundaries that shape social life have overall a deleterious effect on family management and family relations. These boundaries are distorted and need to be redrawn by taking more into account women's moral concerns, responsibilities and practical realities. But there are also some discrepancies in the general output of theoretical analyses and empirical findings. In this research a nodal point of tension has been identified in the ambivalent description of mothers' identities and moral agency as they become increasingly engaged in the negotiation of competing responsibilities between domestic and non-domestic labour. As indicated earlier, one of the main objectives of this thesis is to contribute towards a better understanding of the latter point.

Having now completed the ‘scene setting’ in chapter one, chapters two and three will illuminate the sociological landscape of an ethic of care in relation to some of the most significant discourses that have emerged within this field since its inception in the early 1980s (Gilligan 1982). This will be done by structuring the literature review in two parts; in the first I will introduce and analyse the most relevant theoretical contributions to an ethic of care, in the second I will discuss its application through some of the most significant empirical works conducted within post-divorce families over the last two decades. Chapter four will introduce the sample of respondents and will explain the methodology undertaken; chapter five will develop by considering first the position that WLMs occupy in the workplace, and then, by addressing the direct effect that the workplace has on their caring arrangements. More specifically, I argue for the persistence of (what I have termed) ‘disabling flexible arrangements’ or negative flexibility at work.

From this standpoint, further data analysis in chapter five will illustrate how the lack of ‘enabling flexible arrangements’ at work impacts WLMs’ ability to care. In chapters six, seven, eight and nine the fieldwork analysis will illuminate the inner dynamic of WLMs’ work in the domestic sphere by bringing into sharp relief the type and quality of care that WLMs are able to exercise in their particular family situations, whilst also paying attention to the negotiation of the spaces in between. At home, clear routines and patterns will be identified, as well as the inner tensions and difficulties that undermine WLMs’ caring work and their sense of well-being. The analysis points to the high level

of relational networking present in these women's lives and to the considerable amount of support that selected families members and close friends are able to give to each other. Ultimately, by exploring these relational processes through the moral narratives of WLMs, this thesis offers an updated understanding of an ethic of care while aiming to expand its sociological, political and cultural base.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical perspectives of an ethic of care

2.1 Introduction

Although traditionally belonging to the sphere of philosophy and religion, moral and ethical discourses are such overarching paradigms as to encompass and colour every field of human activity. In this respect, because of the wide scope of their application, ‘ethics’ and, even more so, ‘morality’ have been notoriously difficult to define. In addition, the terms are often used interchangeably, so that we may be equally addressing moral/ethical concerns or checking on the validity and implementation of moral/ethical principles. Aware of this difficulty, Ossowska (1971) argued that perhaps a ‘sociology of morality’ could have been articulated to a large extent even without the need for such a conceptualisation. As a way of facilitating a better understanding, Potter (1999) suggests that one of the most common ways to differentiate morality from ethics is by describing ethics as the study of the morality of human conduct. In this way, ethical concerns are often seen underlining traditional philosophical discourses through the emphasis placed on fulfilling certain standards and aspirations against the inconsistencies of unpredictable and destructive human behaviour. From this standpoint, ethicists have been preoccupied throughout the centuries in formulating and prescribing social models of behaviour that would justify and promote a constructive living for all as the essence of the ‘good life’ (Frazer, Hornsby and Lovibond, 1992, Grayling 2003). Particularly in contemporary Western societies, both ethical standards and moral considerations have come to underlie much of the language and posturing of political discourses and social policies. Against

constant media exposure, politicians are often compelled to present ‘moral’ arguments and justifications to explain and defend their motivations and actions to an increasingly sceptical and media-savvy public. Within all these contexts, ethics are perceived as providing ideal precepts of how people *ought* to live their lives, whilst morality would describe what actually people *do* in their daily lives to fulfil their goals and achieve their particular interpretation of the ‘good life’. Thus, if ethics have typically informed an idealised context for human conduct, to speak of moral concerns, moral issues and moral dilemmas has become more typically associated with the language that defines social change as seen through the eyes of ordinary people (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002).

Given this premise, the general contention from a feminist point of view is that the ways in which ethical principles and moral values have been filtered, interpreted, prioritised and acted upon are only giving a partial and distorted representation of the complexities of social realities. Because the reality of what actually matters to people has never been fully explored, championed and represented in legal and political contexts within the public sphere (Sevenhuijsen 1998, Smart and Neale 1999), the moral agent is often forced to experience a deeply contradictory life in a fractured society. In this respect for instance, Held (2006: 59) cogently underlines how social life and moral thought have mirrored one another in justifying and sanctioning the historical segregation of women:

In the long history of philosophy...it had been thought that, [for] reason to establish its honoured place in human development and history, [it] had to overcome and leave behind what were seen as the female and dark forces of unreason, passion, emotion and bodily needs. [Thus], a long line of thinking about women has seen them as defective, deficient, and dangerous.

From a feminist standpoint, conventional philosophical and moral theories have been dictated from the premise of being inherently ‘gender blind’. This problematic approach was famously encapsulated in the influential works of the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology (Weber, Marx and Durkheim) whose formation and social outlook was rooted in classic philosophical thought (Hughes et al. 1995). In time, gender blindness morphed first into a ‘gender biased’ society and then into a ‘gender neutral’ society. The latter expression of gender relations is currently re-defining the ethical platform of the modern workplace. Through their search for ideological solutions to humanity’s problems, the founding fathers’ interpretation of what is morally relevant, by and large, did not take into account women’s realities and women’s values. Thus, feminist philosophers and political theorists such as Benhabib (1992), Tronto (1993), Noddings (1984), Held (2006) and Sevenhuijsen (1998), have criticised some of the assumptions and main tenets of traditional theories.

In exploring the theoretical works of some of the major care ethicists that have influenced public discourse, this chapter analyses the theoretical contribution to an ethic of care given by such political and ethical theorists like Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984), Ruddick (1989), Held (1993, 2006), Tronto (1993), Cohen (1998), Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2002), Himmelweit (2002, 2005), Glover (2002) and Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2002). In addition, this chapter will outline some of the theories that have defined the historical boundaries of the ethic of work and the underlying principles on which it is based. In the next chapter this theoretical exploration will be followed by an

analysis of the empirical work of Duncan and Edwards (1999), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001). More specifically, relevant to these authors I will analyse their empirical findings concerning post-divorce family practices. From these combined theoretical and empirical explorations, what will hopefully emerge will be a first glimpse of two very different understandings of social life, stemming from contrasting interpretations of the meaning of the 'good life'. Today's dominant 'moral points of view' (Tronto 1993), which is rooted in well-established normative and political theories like 'rational choice' theory, the 'social contract' theory and utilitarianism has provided only partial and inaccurate diagnosis and solutions to social problems and social malaise. These theories and their application to every aspect of social life have been taken to task by feminists of various persuasions, and most noticeably, by those who operate within the theoretical and empirical parameters of an ethic of care. Through their critical analysis, these feminists are gradually mapping out an alternative worldview, which finds its primary and most important impetus from an increasingly widespread and systematic study of contextualised caring practices within a variety of social settings.

2.2 The historical background

In broad terms, from the perspective of political and moral theorists of feminist persuasion, theories like 'rational choice' theory, the 'social contract' theory and utilitarianism, with their respective political applications present a view of social actors as individualistic and detached people, who are preoccupied, above all, to maximise their own personal gain and egotistical aims. From this perspective, the main objective is how to survive and protect the autonomous and independent 'self' from a society that is

perceived as fundamentally deviant and harmful. From this standpoint, for instance, a 'rational choice' model assumes that people choose a course of action in a calculated and rational manner based on the returns that they expect to obtain. Within this context, individual well-being is primarily understood in terms of financial gain and is based on the individual ability to secure for oneself easy access to the consumption of goods and services (Himmelweit 2002, 2005). Starting from similar premises, the main thrust behind 'social contract' theories is to perceive individuals as isolated entities struggling to assert themselves through predominantly inhospitable social environments. Thus, in order to obtain protection and safety, people are encouraged to enter into a contractual agreement with the state and each other. Originated as a social theory in the 17th century by Hobbes and further popularised in the 18th century by Rousseau, the 'social contract' theory was perhaps best adapted for the 20th century by Rawls (1971). For Rawls, principles of morality and justice can only flourish if they would be agreed upon by rational agents using a kind of enlightened egoism as a mode for social interaction. A contract is reached when all the participants agree on the kind of moral and political principles with which they want to rule themselves and be ruled. This process is pursued out of rational self-interest, within which, Rawls argues, it is logical to assume that compromises will be found since it will be in everybody's interest to do so.

In his conceptualisation, Rawls places his participants in an 'original position' (Rawls 1999:17). This means that all those involved are stripped of every form of identity and removed from their actual contexts in order to enter the negotiation from the most detached and objective position possible. In so doing, the participant will be theoretically

shrouded under a 'veil of ignorance' to ensure that no one will be advantaged or disadvantaged from the negotiation. In the author's own words (Rawls 1999: 11):

Amongst the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conception of the good or their special psychological properties. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favour his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain.

Thus, the kind of justice that emerges from these settings results from a type of impartiality that is based on self-interest. In Rawls's theory of justice it appears markedly evident the vital role that he attributes to reason, universalism, abstraction and detachment, all of which are seen as the necessary pre-requisites to successful outcomes. As a number of care ethicists have pointed out (Benhabib 1992, Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998, Koehn 1998, Held 2006), in this 'sanitised' version of the social world, the concept of the 'good' is subordinate to the achievement of justice and becomes defined in utilitarian terms as the 'satisfaction of rational desire' (Rawls 1999: 27). From this particular standpoint, the freedom of choosing how to satisfy one's 'rational' desires presumes that human beings will be able to live by elevated ambitions and aims alone, and that these will be tempered by and filtered through the contractual 'fair agreement or bargain' that civil societies and their governments will be able to achieve centred on 'justice as fairness' (1999:27). Rawls's views have been strongly criticised by care ethicists for an unrealistic utopianism that rests on the purely theoretical and

arbitrary assumption of 'what if?' As such, principles so formulated can never be acted upon because they presume a reality that cannot be contextually recreated.

By the same token, and taken to a high level of abstraction, Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984) proposes a form of communication amongst conflicting parties that is heavily centred and dependent on the power of rationality. In view of this persuasion, Habermas (1984: 10) claims that:

...communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated convictions, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld.

Habermas however is aware of the divide that exists between what social actors say they will do and what they actually do. This is because (Habermas 1984: 398):

Communicative reason does not simply encounter ready-made subjects and systems... [The process of] reaching understanding is limited not only by the force of competitive interests but also by the weight of systemic imperatives of self-preservation.

Following these considerations, he then goes on to explain what kind of conditions two acting subjects need to fulfil to reach an understanding. For Habermas, communication needs to proceed in such a way as to meet with the agreement of all concerned. For successful communication to occur, each individual must overcome the egocentric point of view. For this to happen participants need to be placed in a context-free zone where

people can speak by giving literal meaning to their words without any interference from outside references. Only when communication is performed at this level, Habermas contends, can people reach an equal and perfect understanding of a speech act and this alone can translate into fruitful action. Even from this sketchy account it is apparent how the lack of a concrete base, whilst appearing to offer the chance for a more dispassionate and objective exchange, does not guarantee real solutions. This is because the actual assessment of problems is once again sought through a highly abstract and top-down conceptualisation of people's lives. Thus, by crediting and supporting a dialogical formula based on a Kantian morality (Grayling 2004) and/or on contractual models, philosophical discourses of modern times have postulated unsatisfactory solutions to the destructive power and selfish impulses of individuals and collectivities alike. Indeed, from a point of view that derives from women's experience of moral issues, the liberal, the dialogical and the Kantian propositions for a good society are seen as being too tied up to the 'disembedded, distorted and nostalgic ideal of the autonomous male ego which the universalistic tradition privileges' (Benhabib 1992: 3).

Although starting from a very different standpoint, a utilitarian model, originally derived from the philosophical insights of Bentham and Mill, can be viewed as prescribing a morality that is defined by impartial and decontextualised calculations, used to establish what will produce the most happiness for the most people. From this position, how individuals ought to act in order to support the common good comes to be defined in terms of its instrumental utility, which, however, is markedly shaped by those in positions of authority. Similarly, the type of exchange encouraged by contractualism

relies on a type of social interaction that is defined from the generalised and idealised contexts of the state and the market. Its values are formulated from a theoretical-juridical perspective that privileges non-interference, self-determination, fairness and rights whilst devaluing notions of interdependence, relatedness and involvement in the lives of others. In the light of these general considerations, theorists operating within a moral discourse centred on an ethic of care have come to the conclusion that a radical transformation is needed to reformulate engrained ideas of personhood, identity and society (Tronto 1993, Koehn 1998, Noddings 1984, Held 2006).

This said, within the framework of an ethic of care, there has not been a wholesale denunciation of traditional philosophical and sociological perspectives. In this context, some care ethicists have articulated a degree of affinity to the Aristotelian 'virtue ethics' (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998, Grayling 2004) and to Hume's 'active virtue' (Noddings 1984), since in their pursuit of human well-being, they tend to incorporate a more varied spectrum of moral registers. Namely ethical discourses are seen as grounded in practical morality, which emphasises individual excellence and the flourishing of one's character through social action. From this viewpoint, value is given to emotional well being, to friendship, and to the need to develop a virtuous self not only for one's benefit by also as a necessity for good community life.

From more recent perspectives, the influence of Bauman (2001, 2003) has also been considered for making morality relevant again to mainstream sociology and for attempting to free the moral investigation from the shackles of excessive abstractions,

generalisations and calculated rationalisations. Bauman does this by valuing the importance of human spontaneity, drives, impulses and emotions in the messy business that is 'being with' and 'being for the other'. But whilst acknowledging his contribution to a general revival of a more humanistic and quintessentially post-modern understanding of morality, Bauman is criticized (Sevenhuijsen 1998) for his almost total disregard of the position that 'care' occupies, both as value and practice, in the activity of being with and for the 'other'. Finally, much consideration has been given specifically by care ethicists to the works of Beck (1992, 1994) and Giddens (1992, 1999, 2002b) for helping to bring the family and some of the moral issues that surround family life more into the centre of sociological enquiry. In so doing, together with many feminists, they have contributed to opening up this quintessentially 'private' aspect of social life to public scrutiny. Beck and Giddens have been criticised by care ethicists, such as Smart and Neale (1999) and Sevenhuijsen (2002), on other grounds. The essence of their arguments however will be explored later on in this chapter when addressing more in depth their particular contribution to the contemporary discourse of an ethic of care.

2.3 The development of an ethic of care

At its most basic, the greatest moral quest and challenge for humankind has been how to develop and sustain a quality of life that is equitable, fair and good for all. However, moral and ethical discourses have developed in contradictory and often polarised fashion to endorse dominant agendas without being able to reflect at a comparable level the different realities, priorities and interests of those who 'have not'. Therefore, what is under scrutiny is a fundamentally faulty or dysfunctional way in which human nature has

been and is commonly understood. In this context, the notion that men and women embody different values and that they have different ways to engage with people and life in general has taken hold and has developed in seemingly a polarised opposition. One of the most striking manifestations of this historical polarisation has been epitomised in the socially engineered compartmentalisation of public and private domains. As a result, the impetus to counteract and bring an alternative moral view to this particular narrow concept of human flourishing whilst striving to overcome the distortions and division between domestic and non-domestic spheres of work, ultimately has come to define the moral tension around which an ethic of care has developed in these last three decades. As discussed previously, these conceptual nodes have also provided the background for this thesis.

Bearing these preliminary considerations in mind, throughout the 20th century and primarily amongst the industrialised nations of the world, the social condition of women has substantially changed and, particularly during the last four decades, there has been a significant development in women-centred perspectives. Significant in this respect has been the development of moral theories that have attempted to counteract the predominance given to the cultural imagery and allure exercised by the Durkheimian ‘anomic’ man. In this respect, the values that underline feminist ethical theories are emphasising the particular and the specific, the value of personal narratives within concrete experiences and contexts and, more recently within the perspective of an ethic of care, the values of nurturing, caring, intimacy, interdependency and cooperation (Potter 1999). To its major exponents (Gilligan 1982, Benhabib 1992, Noddings 1984, Ruddick

1989, Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998, 2002; Williams 2004, Held 2006, Smart and Neale 1999, Smart and Wade 2001), an ethic of care provides a type of morality that offers a much closer fit to life as experienced by most people on an everyday basis. In this respect, feminists operating within these theoretical parameters have argued that the social landscape within which people's lives are embedded has been so rapidly changing that definitions of what constitutes a 'right' moral action is increasingly layered with complexity and requires therefore a more sophisticated understanding of contingent environments and situations. Moreover, considering that there may be more than just one 'right' way to tackle a problem and more than just one solution to a moral dilemma (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002), care ethicists have come to stress the social importance that lies in 'thick' networks of close relationships and in building up bonds with others, which 'must be viewed not only as generalised but concrete others' (Benhabib 1992:10).

Thus, feminist ethical and political theorists are branching out to establish a wider base for an ethic of care that carries these universal values well beyond the boundaries of a domestic theory. As a result, what is gradually taking shape are representations of 'ethics of care' striving to weave together the personal, the political and the global, while starting from a central and undisputed general acknowledgement, namely that 'care is the most basic moral value' (Held 2006: 17) consciously shared by all human beings. In stressing the vital importance of care in society, Held (2006: 71) states that 'as a practice we know that without care we cannot have anything else, since life requires it...and as a value, care indicates what many practices ought to involve'. Whereas care, as a daily moral practice,

can only be expressed in a limited and narrow way, as an ethic, it has the potential to bring about radical change at every level where human beings interact with each other and with the natural world. Together with the need to map out and share the many dimensions of caring relations as they are lived and experienced in a variety of localised settings by ordinary people, the need to formulate valid alternatives to the current worldview is now emerging as the main challenge for care ethicists in the global arena.

It was Gilligan's (1982) landmark book *'In a Different Voice'*, which opened up the international debate on the ethic of care. As a psychologist, Gilligan's (1982) contribution was particularly directed to the cognitive moral development associated with the studies of Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969). Piaget postulated a fixed sequence for the moral developmental of the child that progressed through three stages. To advance through these stages meant to develop the capacity for ever-greater levels of universal abstractions in moral reasoning matched by a development from egocentric to unselfish, generous behaviour in the third stage. Drawing from Piaget, Kohlberg charted human development through six stages which he derived from his empirical research. These stages of development saw a child progression into adulthood starting from a basic level of obedience, which was induced primarily for fear of punishment. It progressed to a stage of learned reciprocity, encapsulated in the ability of meeting the needs and expectations of others; in the final stage, the young adult becomes the embodiment of a deontological (duty-based) Kantian morality, within which he is no longer ruled by self-interest but rather by self-imposed universal principles.

Gilligan disputed Kohlberg's findings and rejected his conclusion by turning the argument on its head. She argued that to privilege a certain type of moral reasoning like abstract and universalistic thought over the particular and contextual is the reflection of a gendered biased society that advantages men over women. She then proposed a new account, one that included women's sensitivity, the value they attributed to relationships and the ability to care for each other, all aspects which required imaginative thinking when dealing with moral dilemmas. In turn, she proposed a different development model that comprised pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional levels. From her perspective, these stages characterise different moments in a person's evolution describing a first egocentric state (overemphasising the interest in the self), followed by an altruistic state (overemphasising others' interest), before reaching a balance between the two. From this position of maturity, and having developed the kind of thinking that should guide moral deliberation, women should be able to balance out their own needs with those of all significant others. Throughout the stages of development, Gilligan (1982:171) emphasises the importance of responsibility by arguing that when we reach maturity (post-conventional stage) 'the ethic of responsibility becomes a self-chosen anchor of personal integrity and strength' through which care for the self and others can be better articulated.

Ultimately, Gilligan is committed to find a middle-of-the way standpoint on what appears to be a rather polarised position. The desire to find complementary aspects in the different moral postures assumed by men and women brings Gilligan to the conclusion that all people should join forces when proclaiming their commitment not to do harm,

which she sees as the foundation for an ethic of care. As Gilligan states ((1982: 174)

While an ethic of justice proceeds from the promise of equality - that everyone should be treated the same – an ethic of care rests on a premise of non violence – that no one should be hurt. In the representation of maturity, both perspectives converge in the realisation that just as inequality adversely affects both parties in an unequal relationship, so too violence is destructive for everyone involved.

In more recent times, Gilligan (2002, and Gilligan and Richards 2008) has launched several studies on men's moral behaviour within the context of the American society. Her conclusion has been that the sensitivity of boys and men is still stifled by a society that does not yet see care and nurturing as important qualities in the full development of an individual. Thus, if on the one hand men are perceived as being largely unable to articulate their moral concerns in anything other than the moral language of justice and rights, women are described as nearly fluent in both 'languages' of care and justice. Latching on to this concept, Orbach also came to the same conclusion, although from the different standpoint of her psychoanalytical perspective. Orbach argued against Giddens' (2002b) concept of an 'emotional democracy', which in his view has become the dominant framework for the modern family, to point out that relationships and domestic life are not simply about equality, identity and domestic labour. They are also about how to reproduce emotional life, and if on the one hand there has been an increased sexualising of relationships, on the other, men are troubled by and seem to struggle with the concept and practice of emotional dependency.

The major contribution made by Gilligan has been to bring to the attention of the

academic community a recognition that not only women had a voice of their own, but also that they were indeed speaking ‘in a different voice’, articulating a different moral language; a language that subverted the dominant value structure. This language spoke of a deep appreciation for togetherness, connections and community; it invested heavily in dialogue, intimacy and the search for consensus; it spoke of the importance of the particular, of the subtleties of an emotional life constructed by overcoming, in an unfettered way, the moral dilemmas that accompanied daily tasks. An ethic of care has emerged therefore from the personal involvement of women in relationships. It is the nature of such involvement that in turn generates commitment and responsibility for the other and underlines the moral injunction not to cause harm or hurt. From this standpoint, what becomes increasingly evident is the *holistic* nature of an ethic of care, which, sits uncomfortably on a number of socially constructed dichotomies (such as those allegedly present between justice and care, subjectivity and objectivity, rationality and emotions and male and female morality). It is also true however that a first step to overcome embedded and normalised preconceptions is by making them visible and, in a way, accentuate their characteristics, as Weber did in his exemplification of the ‘ideal type’.

By attempting to respond to this necessity, Potter has formulated a grid (1999: 13), headed ‘Contrasts between care and justice perspective’, in which she outlines the different normative frameworks that have typified the social environments that men and women have occupied and shaped.

	Care perspective	Justice perspective
Characteristics	contextualised particular informal concrete practice	generalised universal formal impartial principles
Conflicting priorities	contextualised content social responsibilities concrete other	formal abstraction individual rights generalised other
Self-identity	relational	autonomy
Moral concerns	equity and need inclusion fulfil responsibility	equality and fairness balancing of claims rational resolution
Moral requisites	mutual recognition compassion contextual adaptation	equal reciprocity obligations entitlement

The grid above illuminates the distinctiveness of public and private domains and their conflating ethos as embodied respectively by the ‘justice’ and ‘care’ perspectives. Drawing from Frazer, Hornsby and Lovibond (1992), Potter (1999) starts from the premise that women, like men, are moral agents because they are obviously capable ‘of taking up the subjective viewpoint, of making moral judgements, acting decisively, exercise will and controlling desire’ (Potter 1999:21). In her analysis however, Potter (1999) raises questions about the need to clarify the conceptual parameters of an ethic of care. To this end, she draws an initial distinction in the fields of enquiry that diversify a ‘feminist ethic’ from an ‘ethic of care’. This distinction broadly comes down to a

different emphasis placed on various features. Thus, for Potter a ‘feminist ethic’ is primarily defined by the greater relevance given to personal experiences, context and nurturing relationships while ‘an ethic of care’ seem to be better defined by an interest in personal narratives and a commitment to solve conflicting priorities against the difficulty of integrating abstract and formal principles with the practice of care.

In posing the same question, namely, how to differentiate between various ethical discourses, Tong (2004) seems to be offering a further distinction. Overall, she argues, feminists tackle ethical discourses by positioning them within a political framework, which often implies taking a political stand. From this position, feminist ethicists of all persuasions are primarily determined to end women’s subordination, and the subordination of other oppressed groups of people, from all forms of exploitation and dominations. Tong (2004) argues that although feminists approach their subject from a woman-centred view, the exponents of the ethic of care are more likely to belong to a ‘feminine’ or/and ‘maternal’ ethical perspective, which aims to support a conceptualised image of mother/child relationship as *the* best theoretical model and practice for caring. Within this group, she indicates Noddings (1984), Ruddick (1989) and Held (2006) as the most prominent representatives.

2.4 A ‘feminine’ or ‘maternal’ ethic of care

Although a ‘feminine’ or ‘maternal’ approach to an ethic of care illuminates some of the defining values and characteristics of the discourse on care, it has however emerged in a distinctive fashion attracting both praise and criticism from feminists and non-feminists

alike. Mindful of this, Noddings' (1984) approach to an ethic of care appears to offer a systematic conceptualisation of a 'feminine' or 'maternal' approach. For Noddings (1984), care speaks of a two-way relationship between the 'one caring' and the 'cared-for'. This activity is not precluded to men; however, she argues, care arises more reliably from women's traditional experience of care and from the particular type of attachment that girls are able to maintain with their mothers whilst growing up (1984: 97). The care that Noddings evokes is both a practice and an ontological expression of one's identity. Therefore, if on the one hand, to care for someone needs to be validated through substantive action, on the other the one caring and the cared-for find their *raison d'être* and their identity in the totality of the experience of being with one another. Thus, for Noddings, caring means 'to receive the other' and be totally engrossed and absorbed in the other person. By entering into a receptive mode, individuals allow themselves to be transformed by the relationship, which is lived fully for its own sake. In order to be productive, Noddings argues, relationships need to be uncluttered. That is, they must be entered in a receptive mode and with a quiet and clear mind. The alternative to this will bring a 'degradation of consciousness' (Noddings 1984: 34) and a lower state of mind, expressed through non-reflexive emotive reactions.

This said, Nodding warns us that there is no recipe for caring as there is no recorded prescription in traditional philosophical accounts or for that matter, in moral manuals. How to care cannot be construed, say, like a Kantian moral imperative, since the caring experience always needs to refer to concrete and contextualised experiences. However, she argues, the maintenance of caring relations is a universal practice and in caring for

others all moral agents should always act to create, maintain, or enhance caring relations. In her view, the caring impulse is a natural and innate impulse that only waits to be gradually developed. The moral 'I must' reflects this natural impulse distinguishable from 'ethical caring' that derives from responding to the obligations of care and the 'I ought to' (2003: 83).

Noddings' 'feminine' interpretation of an ethic of care can be criticised for a number of reasons. First, it has been argued that Noddings seems to overstress the importance of an unconditional and sacrificial care without being able to determine when 'enough is enough' for the giver. In addition, the carer seems to emerge as the one who does most of the action whilst the receiver of care assumes a rather passive role. Thus, whether the cared-for is receiving adequate, right and even wanted care is not really properly considered and addressed. Second, she seems to radicalise the caring activity to the point of maintaining that the self is nothing but a relation, implying that the individual is somewhat meaningless unless s/he is engrossed in a caring relationship. Following this, the boundaries that define individual choice and participation in a caring act become rather blurred and problematic. It is mostly for this particular view, namely for endorsing what appears to be a rather unilateral form of abnegation on women's part, that Noddings makes herself vulnerable to criticism.

Gilligan (1982) also distances herself from the predominantly 'feminine' approach postulated by Noddings by placing women's achievement of moral development at the third stage (post-conventional) of their maturity process. From this perspective, maturity is achieved precisely because a woman has developed the awareness and the balanced

capacity to care and take responsibility not only for the needs of others, but also for one's own. In this respect, the women in Gilligan's theory retain an autonomy that Noddings' women have not. Although focusing also on the mother-child relational dynamics as the best example for moral life, Ruddick (1989) argues that her work should not be confused with some kind of moralising about the beauty of motherhood. By the same token, society should not trivialise the importance of maternal practices which like any other human practice, has its peculiar logic, vocabulary and form of thinking. Ruddick approaches the subject of 'mothering' with the objective of making visible and explicit the relationship between an ideal description of motherhood and the often stark reality of mother/child relations, which she is capable of capturing in some depth. Ruddick argues that the three major tasks constituting women's work as mothers can be summarised in mothers' commitment to work to preserve the life of a child, in fostering their growth and in training them to develop their social acceptability. She analyses all these functions to find that they constitute the kind of regulatory framework within which daily routines are structured. Firstly, a child needs feeding, clothing, sheltering and being cared for in every aspect since an infant is and remains for a considerable time very vulnerable and dependent. Secondly, a mother needs to foster her children's growth by giving them the opportunity to develop without forcing or imposing any already written scripts. A child should find that he/she is loved and appreciated regardless of his/her limitations and imperfections, and, in order to achieve that, a mother should cultivate a realistic, compassionate and cheerful attitude whilst maintaining for herself a sense of perspective. A third and final aspect of Ruddick's maternal practice is embodied by the mother's activity of training her children and preparing them for the world. Ruddick stresses that

in the current social climate this process of socialisation is not an easy task. It means that the mother will need to work toward careful compromises between what she believes to be the right thing to do for her children's needs and the demands of a world that is overly competitive, hierarchical and individualistic. Ruddick tries to describe the kind of difficulties which mothers have to battle with on a regular basis by offering a 'job description' for a 'good enough' mother (1989: 160).

If there were a job description for mothers, it might read in part: teaches her children – and herself - when to fight and when to make peace. When battle occurs, she prevents her children – and herself – from deliberately or predictably perpetrating or submitting to techniques of struggle that are damaging. Learns to distinguish serious harm from permissible hurt and teaches her children this. [She] names violence when it occurs and teaches her children to take responsibility for their violent assault. Maintain conditions of peacefulness so that her children may grow safely. [She] is available, when called on, to help her communities to develop policies and strategies for minimising and resolving conflict.

Ruddick sees herself as a person governed by ideals of non-violence similar to those that animated the moral philosophies of Luther King and Gandhi. She is however perfectly aware of the difficulties of trying to live and apply such pacifist ideas in family relations since mother/child interaction is usually characterised by an underlying power struggle defined by the various techniques used by the powerless (children) and the powerful (mothers) to try to get their way. Children, Ruddick argues, in their vulnerability elicit either aggression or care, whilst mothers attempt to get their way by engaging in non-violent techniques such as prayer, persuasion, appeasement, self-suffering, negotiation, bribery, invocation of authority, ridicule and many other sorts of psychological manipulation. Beyond and above all such difficulties however, Ruddick points to one

quality that preserves relationships through all these processes; this is described as the meta-virtue of ‘attentive love’ (Ruddick 1989: 119). This is the kind of love that she sees as indispensable for developing realistic and healthy attachments. Thus, ‘attentive love’ is needed for guiding the children through many difficult moments, particularly when faced with ugly and scary realities.

Conversely, ‘inattentive love’ creates an unreal ‘peace and quiet’ in the home, which is really describing a lack of real communication and proper interaction. This situation is, in her view, symptomatic of mothers who idealised their children to the point that they cannot face the possibility of ‘disappointing’ realities. Ruddick’s ultimate goal however, is not simply to develop a maternal practice as a form of guidance to inspire struggling mothers. Rather, she wants to demonstrate that anyone, male or female, who engages in caring practices, can develop the kind of ‘maternal’ thinking that needs to be transferred from the private into the public world. In other words, Ruddick reasons that if men spent as much time caring for children as women do, men would be developing a similar sensitivity and attention as women have, and this would certainly be a change for the better. On this account for instance, she argues that men would think much more carefully about risking the lives of even a single individual in war situations when taking into account the huge amount of time and the emotional and physical work that goes into preserving, nurturing and training a child.

In echoing these views, Held (1993, 2006) positions herself also as an important contributor to a ‘feminine’ or ‘maternal’ ethic of care. With Ruddick, Held shares the

view that men can be as competent as women in moral matters, but, she argues, women's morality has been historically discounted in favour of men's and yesterday's disempowerment has been replaced by today's proclaimed gender neutrality. A gender neutral society however is casting an even blanket of disregard over the unequal situations and positions in which women find themselves. In this respect, to favour a male-centred moral discourse in the public sphere means that modern democracies overrate the values and benefits of a contract model, to which men seem to relate much better than women. In earlier publications, Held (1993) argued that an ethic of care would be best expressed and practiced in the private sphere of life through mothering work. Over time however, her conceptual position has changed and more recently Held (2006) has ventured into an exploration of public spaces speculating how an ethic of care would be best suited for every area of the public domain, with the exception of the field of law and the legal system, where an ethic of justice seems to play a more pertinent role.

In attempting to bring together the care-centred values of the private sphere with the abstract and universalistic principles of justice and equality that dominate the public sphere, Held's (2006) analysis reveals some conceptual ambivalence in finding ways to reconcile the seemingly polarised 'care/justice' ethical perspectives. Conceptual difficulties arise from the need to develop and realise the vision of a very different model of social life for which no precedent model or blueprint was ever formulated. This is new and uncertain terrain for care ethicists and it is particularly so for those who attempt to graft caring principles and practices into a social reality that philosophically, historically and politically has systematically devalued this most essential value. For Held (2006),

care is a more inclusive value than justice and precedes justice as well. In short, the abstract, generalised principles that have framed and informed the rational and moral life of present and past democracies have not provided those societies with the adequate means to forge a suitable 'good life' for all. Against this backdrop, the practice of care, conceptually embodied in the Weberian 'ideal type' of mother-child relationship, together with its expansion on the world stage, are seen as absolutely paramount. As she argues (2006: 132)

Unless the presumption of care is met people seem not to be concerned enough about others to care whether their rights are respected or even recognised. The history of disregard for and of domination and exploitation of those not strong enough to threaten the self-interests of rational contractors indicates how unpromising it may be to hope for respect for human rights to encompass the globe without building the caring relations such respect seems to presume.

Held (1993, 2006) repeatedly emphasises that care remains the most fundamental value there is, since without it an infant would not survive, relationships could not be sustained and people would not be able to respect one another. Life, she argues, is more than just competition, conflict and getting what one wants, it is also about cooperation, community, meeting other people's needs, and mothers know that intrinsically. Like Ruddick, Held admits that relationships between a mother and her children can be even more oppressive than contractual relationships, in the measure in which parents can pressurise their children with unrealistic expectations, taking advantage of the unequal power relation that is inbuilt in the relationship. Held therefore proposes parenting relations capable of combining the cognitive and emotional elements of reason and compassion, general principles and specific care and an appreciation for children's

unique features. Like principles, she argues, relationships can be qualified and evaluated as good/better/best or bad/worse/worst, and, as such, they can be improved upon. It is on the nature and quality of parenting that the quality of gender relations depends on and the future of our world rests. In Held's view, therefore, it becomes essential to invest properly and seriously in children's development, which should be as much as possible free from the negative interferences of self-centred capitalistic interests, whose main objective is financial gain and the commercialisation and commodification of values.

Held (2006) advocates for a society free from the proselytising of market values, particularly in those areas where people's direct involvement is particularly important, namely in the state provision of childcare, education, hospitals and so on. Held is not against competition or the promotion of productivity and efficiency *per se*. On the contrary, she asserts that these are valuable assets providing that they are viewed instrumentally to achieve higher aims based on what has real priority and primacy in life, namely, relatedness, interdependence, intimacy, trust and care. Because of these considerations, social systems should be based on the full acknowledgement that 'persons *are* relational and interdependent' (Held 2006: 72). In contrast to Noddings (1984) however, for whom the individual exists solely as part of a relational unit, Held (2006) ascertains that we are not 'composed entirely of the relations we are in' (2006: 135). As individuals, we make and remake, change or sustain various relationships and even though they are part of what we are, we are still capable of navigating through them by maintaining our autonomous self.

Notwithstanding the different conceptual approach to care theories articulated by the ‘feminine’ or ‘maternal’ care ethicists discussed above, at this juncture it may be useful to outline some of the main objections directed to the ethic of care from feminists and non-feminists alike. Particularly with reference to a ‘feminine’ ethic of care, Koehn (1998) and Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2002) stress that even the best maternal practice is not sufficiently taking into account the bigger socio-political factors that interfere with the actual caring process. In this respect, for instance, Koehn (1998) considers particularly damaging the patriarchal culture from which the maternal role has evolved and the unequal balance of power that underlines even the most caring relationships. Consequently, she argues, no caring relationship can be viewed as free-standing. Due to her systematic approach to these issues, in the next section I will elaborate further Koehn’s (1998) critique to the ethic of care as it offers a well structured argument against some of the ways in which an ethic of care has been conceptualised and understood in its practical delivery.

2.5 A ‘dialogical ethic’ as a critical perspective

Koehn (1998) places considerable emphasis on the virtues of a ‘dialogical ethic’ to compensate for some of the alleged weaker conceptual elements of an ethic of care. It is worth noticing here that the importance of dialogue as one of the chief ingredients in caring relations has been highlighted already by a number of researchers (Benhabib 1992, Tronto 1993, Smart and Neale 1999, Smart, Neale and Wade 1999, 2001, Williams 2001, 2004), but it has never really taken a central stage position, as it does in Koehn’s argument. Koehn addresses the problems pertinent to the theory of the ethic of care by

referring almost exclusively to the theories of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984). At a closer scrutiny her criticism is predominantly aimed at Noddings who, as it has been pointed out earlier, expresses a particular ‘feminine’ view of an ethic of care. Notwithstanding, Koehn’s analysis provides a useful conceptual framework, which will allow valid points to be drawn out for reflection. Koehn attacks the ethic of care on nine different points; these are listed below (1998: 28-52), and will be broadly explained and discussed in the subsequent section.

Problem 1: not every ethical act need be a caring one.

Problem 2: little guidance in particular cases

Problem 3: political naiveté of the care ethic

Problem 4: caring cannot be specified in purely formal terms

Problem 5: inadequate self-suspicion in this ethic

Problem 6: worrisome privileging of the earth mother

Problem 7: the diminution of responsibility

Problem 8: the overlooked value of selfishness

Problem 9: too easy dismissal of autonomy

Koehn draws attention to the idea that caring, as portrayed by many care ethicists, seems to be the ethical activity *par excellence*. As such, to care for someone seems to automatically qualify a person to be a good moral agent. Koehn argues that the argument presented to justify this position is supported by the apparently unquestioned claim that people are always dependent on one another and as such they must naturally desire

interdependence. Following this line of reasoning, if I want to be cared for I must also strive to care. Koehn contends that the main problem with this view is that the scope is too narrow because it does not explain, for instance, the love for justice or the desire to be loved by God in a religious context. Furthermore, she argues, what defines 'good' care is unverifiable because it is never specified in any detail what makes a good act actually 'good'.

Koehn speculates about the therapeutic value of suffering as another way for learning important lessons in life. The belief that some suffering may be good for us, she argues, is deeply embedded in our culture, and this is the reason why, presumably, Christians accept the death of Jesus on the cross. In addition, to refuse in some cases to meet others' needs may be the right thing to do. Koehn refers here to the particular attitude taken by Noddings when she explains that the cared-for should be received in their own terms. It is often the case, she argues, that a person may not know what he/she really needs. Moreover, what if that same person is actually violent or deceives and manipulates others? What all of this implies is that the nature of desire itself should be seriously scrutinised whilst the nature of good judgement is called into question. Moreover, 'an excessive maternalistic commitment to nurturing people may lead the caregiver to impute needs that people do not have and to take steps to curtail their freedom' (Koehn 1998: 30). In this way, Koehn is criticising the particular approach to care that is encapsulated by the early 'feminine or maternal' approach and by those who share a similar persuasion. Following this line of reasoning, Koehn reaches therefore the conclusion that simply to desire to care and to be cared for cannot be considered to be intrinsically good

per se. As a response to these considerations, Koehn underlines the importance of good communication and advocates for the implementation of a ‘dialogical ethic’.

In her argument, Koehn (1998) contends that women’s critique of traditional ethics has employed selective and abstract frameworks whilst glossing over other aspects of social life. When biased and partial perspectives underscore reality, the risk is that reality itself becomes distorted and occasionally suppressed to suit one’s particular ends. In Koehn’s view however, the crucial issue is not determined by the degree of abstraction that various arguments may pose, but rather by the principles to which we may appeal. In order to safeguard their integrity, principles must be validated by a ‘dialogical ethic’ that is based on the depth and accuracy of the dialogue and on the necessary level of attentiveness that must be granted to all the participants and to all the relevant issues under discussion. Thus, an ethic of care (as well as an ethic of trust and empathy) should be best understood as the commitment to include and not to mislead others, especially when such people have little political power. How this can be best achieved is a question open to all feminist theorists and Koehn’s criticism and disdain for sterile conceptualisation is clearly expressed below in no uncertain terms (1998: 151)

For all their talk of holism and inclusion, female ethics reproduce much of the rigidity and repression they ascribe to traditional analysis because they ignore individuals’ erotic longings, lock people into potentially manipulative and violently abusive relations, and provide little or no basis for challenging other people’s perspectives and prejudices.

A dialogical ethic, as proposed by Koehn, ‘begins with the principle that a good practical judgement cannot be reached unless: 1) parties affected by the action ...in

question have a chance to voice their concerns and 2) all parties to the dialogue... are committed to never doing wrong' (1998: 153). In order to avoid doing harm, the parties involved in a discussion are compelled to listen and be responsive to others' concerns as well as explore all aspects and sides of a given argument to ensure a full understanding of a situation and the best possible outcome. The nature of such a responsible and committed dialogue therefore, is based on the desire to preserve connections with others through multilateral negotiations but still within concrete and well-defined frameworks. To this, Koehn adds a commitment to a 'shared process of discovery and interpretation in which individuals continually adjust their position in light of what others have said and done' (1998: 155-156). Within this context, a chosen action becomes the 'right' moral action, not simply because it is right to care for oneself or others, but more so, Koehn contends, because such a choice is exercised 'at the right time, in the right place, and with respect to the right person to qualify as praiseworthy' (1998: 156). In view of these considerations, the most important quality required in the delicate mechanism of Koehn's dialogical process is a state of continuous 'thoughtfulness' (1998: 158). It is this thoughtfulness, she argues, that allows us to ascertain the rightness of an act.

In assessing Koehn's criticisms, it could be argued that there are evidently real possibilities for misconstruing and manipulating care at many levels in actual relationships, as well as there is always the possibility of misinterpreting and misrepresenting other people's care practices and processes in research. Relevant to the latter point, it has been ascertained (Maynard 1994; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994) that it is essential for researchers to reveal all aspects of the interviewing process and the

epistemological approach to data analysis in order to overcome embedded biases and 'blind spots'. It is also evident that caring interactions could be fashioned into morally questionable rapports, such as for instance the extremes that underline sadistic/masochistic relationships, which are based on consensus and reciprocal care for each other, but they often entail serious physical and mental abuse. In spite of the fact that Koehn's critical analysis is primarily addressing a 'narrow' concept of care, namely the 'maternal' or 'feminine' approaches of Noddings (1984) and Held in her earlier work (1993), it is useful to highlight here Koehn's contribution to the development of an ethic of care through her 'dialogical ethic'. Through it, she attempts to bridge the conceptual gap between the traditional philosophical and sociological approaches of Rawls and Habermas (who emphasised rigorous abstract reasoning and universalisation to validate the communication process of their moral actors) and the personal and involved approach to dialogue as it is usually envisaged in the context of an ethic of care.

The growing commitment amongst care ethicists to catapult an ethic of care on the wider stage brings to the fore the crucial role that politics plays in all these contests. In this respect, Tronto (1993) has presented an ethic of care that has emerged as an alternative and compelling moral argument against the backdrop of established moral discourses. These discourses are deeply embedded in the fabric of society, sustained by past and present political structures and ideologies. Thus, according to Tronto, a care-based moral discourse cannot surface without exposing at the same time the limitations and boundaries that characterise present political systems.

2.6 A 'just care': overcoming moral boundaries

Tronto's ethic of care emerges from an historical critique of moral and philosophical theories, through which she traces the political shift of a hierarchical world into a more democratic one. For Tronto, an effective ethic of care needs to find its proper place in the heart of the political process of democratic societies. In these contexts, Tronto's work has much to offer when compared to conventional moral theories. To begin with, she notes how moral and philosophical theories are constantly intertwined to influence and reflect the political situation of their time. Yet, they have not been able to offer any satisfactory explanation or reasonable alternatives for change. For Tronto therefore the most important moral question to which society needs to find an answer is how to resolve the question of 'otherness', or in other words, how to go along with those who are not like 'us'. In view of this, Tronto contends that we need to stop talking of men and women's morality and begin to promote instead an ethic of care that is also inclusive of values traditionally associated with women. In addition, the paradigm range of this inclusiveness needs to incorporate all that we do within the social and physical worlds, as underlined in the following definition (Tronto 1993: 103)

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

In Tronto's view, the main reason why the world is so deeply unequal and unbalanced is because moral, philosophical and political discourses have been articulated along the lines of misconceived boundaries, which do not reflect the reality of most people's lives,

yet they have come to represent them. On this account, she reflects on the notion that partly due to the profound changes in the economic structure of society, the classical notion of the Aristotelian virtuous life (what we are), has been gradually replaced by a much thinner, rule-oriented ideal that emphasises and values what we do. At the same time, the value of human agency has become primarily associated with the maximisation of economic prosperity whilst using a ‘minimalist morality’ (Tronto 1993: 29). The outcome of this process, Tronto claims, has been a gradual disconnection of the political life from moral life.

According to Tronto, the implicit association of the ‘public man’ with the ‘economic man’ helped to sever the connection between politics and morality. That is, considerations about what it is important to do, in what ways, and how to conduct one’s relations with others, which are primary concerns of morality, have become subordinate to the utilitarian and universalistic ideas that dominate the public sphere. As such, the Aristotelian ‘morality first’ view of life, in which issues of power and morality were intimately intertwined in the pursuit of a ‘good’ and moral life, has been lost and has become subordinate to a ‘politics first’ point of view. In this way, she argues, a kind of ineffectual moral minimalism sets in and social conflict can be more easily accommodated and regulated. Because of this prevailing reality, to take a ‘morality first’ stance within current political contexts would appear to be naïve and inappropriate. This impasse will persist for as long as politics remains primarily concerned with protecting *interests* rather than responding to *needs* (emphasis added), which is the prime concern of an ethic of care.

Thus, in line with these outcomes, political disputes regarding the allocation of resources and the preservation and upholding of public order may or may not take moral considerations into account. Against the backdrop of market-centred political systems, this notion is reinforced by a concern that the canons of morality displayed in the public place are chiefly used as means to an end rather than as a legitimate end in itself. As Tronto puts it (1993: 8): ‘ethical questions may arise, but they will only arise when power disputes have been resolved, or when there is a strategic advantage to be gained by appearing to be moral’. The historical persistence of the moral boundaries between politics and morality have secured the endurance of others, namely the separation of moral thought from moral action, the schism between reason and emotions and the disconnection of public life from private life. The full fruition of these processes has given way to what Tronto describes as the development of *the* dominant ‘moral point of view’.

In depicting a society so divided and conflicted it is important to note that Tronto is not advocating erasing or abolishing completely these moral boundaries since doing so would imply a too radical alteration of the political infrastructure as well as an inability to distinguish and separate any aspects of public and private life. In this respect, contrary to the majority of care ethicists who view an ethic of care and an ethic of justice in polarised opposition, Tronto believes that an ethic of justice is relevant and necessary to an ethic of care and that the two complement each other. Her objective is simply to cast a new light into women’s morality and by bringing women’s perspective into full view effect much

needed social and political change. This is necessary since it is now clear that these conventional moral boundaries cannot alone inform and shape the attainment of the ‘good life’ for all.

In her critical analysis of historical socio-political processes, Tronto argues that the moral boundaries in place today came to be constructed in the 18th century. This was the time when global and commercial societies emerged, the concern for the distant ‘other’ became significantly relevant and moral sensitivity became gendered. Following the intensive patterns of the industrialisation process, the gendered division of labour that followed transformed the household, which was no longer viewed as a collective unit of production. At the same time, family life began to be romanticised and the ‘sentimental family’ appeared to be the only protection against the corrupting desires of self-interest and the self-flattery and vanity of the public world. Thus, as men in growing numbers came to occupy the public sphere of paid work and women were left to care for the children and the household, women’s moral agency and moral legacy came to be fixed by a moral argument that first confined and then successfully contained them in the private and much less influential domain of a domestic life. In this way, the private domain became the locus for intimacy and emotions and synonymous with the particular, the contextual and the personal.

In order to stress the considerable differences that characterise the ethical and moral discourses of the public and private spheres, Tronto draws on the theoretical insights of Rawls’ Theory of Justice, of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development as well as referring

to Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' and points out to the remoteness and detachment of their conceptual positions from everyday morality. Even Gilligan, in Tronto's view, falls to some extent in the conventional trap of making sweeping assumptions and generalisations when describing white, middle-class young girls of her research as representative of the totality of women's 'different voices'.

Against this conceptual backdrop, Tronto develops the theoretical underpinnings of an ethic of care, which should provide the moral actor with a moral standard by which to judge the adequacy of his/her caring work. The distribution of care is seen by Tronto as developing in four phases: caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care-receiving. Tronto has positioned these care activities in specific social domains. The first two are the manifestation of the 'public' and nominal willingness to care. To care for and to care about are typically expressed in political deliberation by those in position of power and are commonly translated through the allocation and mobilisation of resources. The last two forms of care – care receiving and care giving – are relegated to the less powerful and describe the physical act of doing caring work. Tronto contends that, in contrast to the conventional stance of moral and philosophical theories, the unequal power relations that characterise societies can be better highlighted through the uneven and unjust distribution of care and the often demeaning ways in which care comes to be articulated. Tronto stresses the notion that from an historical perspective 'who cares, in what way and within which context, has distinctive gender, racial and class dimensions' (1993: 113). Furthermore, the unresolved moral and political problem of the 'other' is further exacerbated by the realisation that, in its involvement with the concrete, the local and the

particular, care practices can be misunderstood and misrepresented. For instance, parochialism in caring is one expression of a common propensity to care for the 'near and dear' rather than for distant 'others'. This creates difficult and unanswered questions, such as: why should I care more for the starving children of Africa rather than my own?' or, in paraphrasing Hume (cited in Grayling 2004 and in Tronto 1993): we tend to care more for the broken mirror in our own house than for a burning house elsewhere. Also, care-givers may well come to see themselves as more capable of assessing the needs of others and on this account they could become too paternalistic or maternalistic in their caring work, running the risk of infantilising those who they care about and care for.

Even more conspicuous and threatening however is the misuse of care through privilege. Tronto stresses the notion that in modern societies the caring process is not well integrated and appears instead to be fragmented in its formulation and delivery. This is not accidental as it reflects the unequal power distribution, which by being structured along the lines of conventional moral boundaries, favours the powerful. She is not asserting that the powerful deliberately obscure care, but rather that, by the virtue of their privileged position, care is either given from a position of superiority, which usually implies delegation to others, or is received without acknowledging its true value. This attitude, she argues is linked to complex ideas of individualism, autonomy and the concept of the 'self-made' man. From this conceptual standpoint, Tronto contends (1993: 111-112):

These 'self-made' figures would not only find it difficult to admit the degree to which care has made their lives possible, but such an admission would undermine the

legitimacy of the inequitable distribution of power, resources, and privilege of which they are beneficiary. Nevertheless...it is no threat for the powerful to recognise the care they receive; they need simply to evoke it within its properly contained social place. Thus, because care is devalued and contained it poses no threat to the way we think about the social order.

This said, it remains difficult for Tronto to explain how the powerful would willingly let go of their privileges for the sake of a more just and caring society. Nonetheless, by viewing care both as an alternative ideology and a concrete practice, Tronto's proposed solution is expounded through her description of a 'just care', whereas the principles of justice and care are merged. In order to exercise a just care, she argues, the processes of 'caring about', 'taking care of', 'care-giving' and 'care-receiving' need to be validated by their defining attributes. These are respectively: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. An attentive care is expressed through 'caring about' something or someone by recognising a need. Failure to notice needs at any level, results in a state of ignorance, which *per se* (especially when it is chosen) qualifies as a political statement of moral failure (i.e. sexual slavery in Thailand, starvation in African countries existing alongside capitalist indulgence, and so on). Responsible care highlights the commitment to 'taking care of' a person or a situation in a responsible way. Responsibility is an important feature of care particularly as it advocates the notion that actual care requires serious involvement, a commitment of time and resources, which goes well beyond a simple impulse or emotion to care.

A competent care underlines the actual 'care-giving' process. This, she comments, is often a contentious and 'sticky' point, particularly in large bureaucracies where the

inadequacy of good care often highlights contradictory and ambiguous political aims. Likewise, a responsive attitude to care in ‘care-receiving’ should give back power to those who receive care, since from their response we should be able to judge the quality of the caring work. In turn, an honest appraisal at this level should also prevent the possibility of abuse that arises in social circumstances underlined by different social status (as defined for instance in the power dynamics of parent/child, teacher/student, doctor/patient and employer/employee relationships). Thus, if a non-exploitative ethic of care becomes a better established normative practice in both spheres of life, the boundaries that have perpetuated the disempowerment of women and other marginalised groups can begin to fade away and allow a better society to emerge.

2.7 Towards a new realignment of public and private domains

Theorising along similar conceptual lines, the moral philosophy of Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2002) draws in part from the works of Gilligan, Ruddick and Held and more substantially from the political vision of Tronto (1993), Fraser and Lacey (1993) and Smart (1992). With these authors, Sevenhuijsen stresses the paradigmatic nature of ‘care’ and the urgent necessity for a theory and a practice of care to be developed within a more coherent and better supported political and legislative framework. As with the scholars mentioned above, Sevenhuijsen’s concept of ‘care’ has been developed under the overarching condition of post-modernism and as such, in her political analysis she tends to emphasise typical post-modern features. Namely, there is a distinctive focus on the fluidity of interaction rather than on fixed identities and definitions of roles, emphasis is placed on equality through diversity and greater appreciation is given to a multiplicity of perspectives, approaches and

experiences as opposed to static grand themes, ideologies and narratives.

More specifically, from this standpoint Sevenhuijsen (1998) analyses the 'needs' that an ethic of care aims to confront by questioning from a social constructivist point of view both the functionalist and communitarian approaches to caring theories and practices. Functionalism is critiqued on the basis that within family constructs, it appears to be too statically fixated on identities and roles. Similarly, communitarianism, and more specifically the particular brand popularised by McIntire (1981), emphasises an idea of togetherness, belonging and identity, which is too biased towards a type of care that privileges homogeneous and conservative communities. Sevenhuijsen (2002) takes also to task Giddens' 'middle of the road' ideas of the family. Placed somewhere between neo-liberalism and old-style social democracy, Giddens (2002a) is criticised for sustaining a normative philosophy of social life and social responsibility, which is in part responsible for the ambivalences that have underlined the social policies to which the previous Labour government subscribed. The crux of the matter for Giddens is how to help citizens to navigate their way through the major changes of our time. Some of the main challenges deriving from change are embodied in the many uneven facets of globalisation, in the ways in which personal lives are been transformed and in the destructive relationship with nature (Giddens 1999). Against the uncertainties of our time, Giddens exhorts us to preserve and enhance the key values of freedom and autonomy of action. However, he argues that individual desires and wants need to be better balanced with one's personal involvement and participation in the wider community. For Giddens it is also increasingly evident that old-style social democracies

can no longer adequately cope with the growing demands of overstretched public services. Thus, by clashing against the traditional socialist values that emphasised primarily the collective and undisputable rights of an egalitarian working class, Giddens (1998) claims that new social democracies require a new definition of rights and obligations. This, he argues, should be based on a new contract between the citizens and their governments underlined by the notion that no rights can exist without corresponding responsibilities and obligations.

In counteracting Giddens' argument, Sevenhuijsen (2002) points out that the call to develop such an active and participatory democratic base is hampered by an undercurrent of conservatism that runs throughout Giddens' sociological insight. That is, whilst on the one hand he acknowledges change and embraces the transformative power of human agency through a reflexive process (structuration theory), on the other, he seeks to recreate social solidarity by looking back at history in a retrospective mood. Sevenhuijsen (2002: 131) highlights how this retrospective mood is coloured by a palpable sense of loss that permeates his language as he describes the need 'to *re-establish* continuity, to *recreate* social solidarity and *repair* social order'. Sevenhuijsen (2002) observes that Giddens' contrasting perceptions underline an important point: the view that societies are embedded in dichotomous interests, within which individuals must struggle and compete in order to secure limited resources and services. From this, Sevenhuijsen asserts that a feminist ethic of care promotes different views and she envisages the development of an alternative 'political sociology of care' (2002: 131) within which, care, understood as a moral disposition and a daily practice, is seen as incorporated in the political process of improving the social life of all communities.

In bringing an alternative point of view to Giddens' analysis, Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2002) subscribes to a common understanding amongst feminist writers. That is, women have been struggling with the historical weight and consequences of a deeply embedded male-centred view of life. Through institutionalised laws and embedded cultural norms, such views are still deeply affecting by various degrees and forms, women all over the world. Sevenhuijsen explains that from a male-centred perspective the moral subject approaches moral dilemmas from a rather 'top-down' perspective. The existentialist question that arises from this position can be articulated in the following terms: how can I maintain and preserve my autonomy and freedom whilst engaging in relationships? From this position, responsibilities and obligations are stipulated by contract, maintained and enforced through laws, whilst civic values and moral and religious prescriptions attempt to appeal to a common sense of 'duty' to honour them. Along similar lines, nations are constitutionally framed to uphold individual rights whilst laws are seen as the main guarantors of both rights and morality. Drawing from Bauman, Sevenhuijsen (1998: 132) argues this notion in the following terms:

Modernity is fuelled by a deep-seated mistrust of the moral capacities of its subjects and thus aims to press its claims to moral truth by laying them down in legal imperatives, which are then supposed to educate those who are beyond the boundaries of 'proper morality'. Hence the continual urge to derive legal obligations from notions of rights.

Contrasting this argument, Sevenhuijsen (2002:132) maintains that care ethicists formulate the moral question in different terms; this can be expressed as it follows: 'how can I achieve some freedom and yet remain connected?' Seen from this point of view, questions of responsibility and obligations to others are confronted and dealt with as situated practice.

This implies that within their specific circumstances, people deal with their own problematic situations and contingencies by asking themselves: ‘what is the proper thing to do?’ (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002: 119; Finch 1989, Finch and Mason 1993, Williams 2004). They act upon their resolutions aware that there may be more than just one ‘right answer’ to respond to a moral dilemma (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002). To counteract the entrenched mistrust that so typifies modernity, a feminist ethic of care views responsibilities and obligations as a normal part of life, woven into the fabric of daily human practices. Therefore, Sevenhuijsen argues, the nature of the ‘relational ontology’ that characterises social life demands a more sophisticated insight in terms of framing policy-making. What is required, is a better and deeper understanding: ‘into the way in which people frame their responsibilities in actual social practices and how the moral dilemmas that go with the conflicting responsibilities of care for self, other and the relation between them are handled’ (2002:133).

Sevenhuijsen contends that Giddens misses both the social and political importance of care. In fact, in his ‘third way’ politics, ‘his normative image of citizenship is still principally grafted on to that of the wage-earning independent citizen’ (2002:136) who can secure relationships and responsibility primarily by contractual means. In this respect, she argues, Giddens fails to capture the message underlined by contemporary feminist theories, particularly with relevance to the imbalances existing between paid work and informal care. Indeed, as the debate on finding a better ‘life-work’ balance became increasingly centre-stage in social, cultural and political settings in the late 1990s, Sevenhuijsen stresses that the search for a balance between the two must take into account the fact that caring activities should not

be understood simplistically as something that weak and dependent people (as opposed to self-reliant and independent people) passively and constantly depend on. On the contrary, everyone needs to give and receive care. This need, she argues, is part of who we are and it shapes and qualifies our humanity. Moreover, it is one element of social cohesion that, more than any other, can bring together homogeneous and heterogeneous social groups. It should therefore, be valued as ‘an important human practice that contributes to the potential for moral agency’ (2002: 135). For Sevenhuijsen as for Tronto, to care, does not mean to follow a feminine impulse on behalf of the other, as it was earlier explicated by Noddings (1984), nor is a response to fulfil one’s duty (Kant’s categorical imperative). The ethic of care that she envisages is completely grounded in the contingencies of specific contexts.

But what a grounded analysis of contextual realities does, when considered in relation to caring work, is to expose the degree of inequality present in the distribution of care giving/receiving activities. Thus, by echoing Tronto’s concerns, Sevenhuijsen tackles these issues by focusing her analytical insight on the family. She does this by posing the following question: in what way should an ethic of care be developed in order to affect social policies and offer better support to families in their present circumstances? To begin with, she argues, an ethic of care would not be concerned with family relationships only from the moment in which they come to be classified as a problem. In a society guided by the principles of an ethic of care, families will be freed from traditional gendered roles. Furthermore, they will assume a centre-stage position with a clear focus and attention paid on the articulation of caring relations in and out of family structures, and this, in turn, will attract much social and political investment. In her words (2002: 138):

[An ethic of care] would prioritise social and political arrangements that enable adults of both sexes (and regardless of their sexual orientation) to participate in different forms of care: care for dependent children, care for partners and friends, care for dependent parents, and last, but not least, care for the self .

In all of these respects, the family institution, whilst understood primarily as the realm of domesticity and informality, is no longer perceived as an enclosed space. Families would have very soft, permeable boundaries, making them more open to the influence of the wider society. If more attention was paid to the well-being of family relations, Sevenhuijsen contends, it would be more likely that functional relationships would be maintained after separation and divorce. Such an outcome could facilitate a better co-operation from fathers, who, by becoming more accustomed to the daily practices of care would be more inclined to support their children emotionally and financially. To this end, Sevenhuijsen calls for a reorganisation of social arrangements and for a new realignment between the public and private that prioritises equality of access to both givers and receivers of care. In order to achieve this, Sevenhuijsen envisages the possibility of an alliance between the ethic of care and Giddens' 'third way' politics. Amongst her recommendations and as a way to develop a caring society, Sevenhuijsen (1998, 2002) advocates more flexibility in everyone's working hours with a view to adapting them to the caring responsibilities that men and women undertake for the young, the old, the sick and the disabled. Whilst supporting the idea that men should develop stronger caring identities and practices, Sevenhuijsen emphasises the importance of encouraging and expanding relational networks within communities, in the school life of children and in fostering inter-generational communication by building caring facilities (recreational centres and social clubs for all age groups) within neighbourhoods.

In order to facilitate the development of these relational networks, Sevenhuijsen calls for an initial attitude of trust in the moral subject and for an ability to listen. These should qualify as part of a rostrum of ‘public virtues’, which requires that those with public responsibilities in public places need to exercise a ‘caring attitude’. Indeed, she argues, there is no logical explanation why such an attitude should be confined to, and expected to be practiced in the domestic sphere whilst assuming that the public arena can be controlled and shaped by different sets of rules and behaviours. On this account, Sevenhuijsen acknowledges the strength of Tronto’s conceptual clarity by stressing that the values to support the activities of caring about, caring for, taking care and receiving care as described by Tronto (1993) are indeed descriptive of what giving and receiving care is all about.

Sevenhuijsen also sees these caring activities equally well complemented by their respective qualifying attributes: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. To these four values, which for Sevenhuijsen represent the core essence of an ethic of care, she adds ‘trust, honesty, respect and relational autonomy’ (2002:133). Throughout her theoretical analysis, Sevenhuijsen stresses that the act of giving and receiving care should hinge around the pivotal question of needs. It is around the crucial issue of how to interpret and fulfil the needs of moral subjects that public discussions, centred on an ethic of care, should evolve and increasingly occupy the mind of policy makers. How ‘care’ is understood and managed in the private sphere and in its articulation with the public is also central to Himmelweit’s sociological theorising.

2.8 Acknowledging the possibility of a ‘care deficit’

Himmelweit (2002, 2005) throws useful light on the issue of care by disclosing her findings on working mothers and their care preferences. Himmelweit questions the nature and substance of the parent – child relationship at a number of levels. By applying the model of the ‘rational choice theory’ (2002:236) she argues that parents may care for their children for a variety of reasons: 1) because it is in their financial interest to do so (children seen as an investment); 2) because added to the financial reward there is also an added element of pleasure in caring for them (the pleasures of parenthood); 3) because children’s well-being is seen as part and parcel of their own well-being, in the interdependent process of compensating for each others’ demands and consumptions (altruism); 4) because, echoing maternal care thinkers (Ruddick 1989, Noddings 1984, Held 2006), parents - mothers in particular - have developed a strong bond with their offspring which lead them to care for the well-being of those children and find the process rewarding (developing a taste for childcare), 5) and lastly, because parents have so deeply internalised societal norms and sanctions in terms of what is meant by ‘good’ parenting, that they feel deeply responsible to fulfil their roles and respond to their own and collective expectations (accepting moral responsibility).

Giving relevance to this final point, Himmelweit comes to the conclusion that a rational choice model, as a broad canvas for understanding parents-children relationships, can only offer a very limited explanation for why parents often sacrifice themselves for their children, even when there is no reasonable or rational advantage (economic or otherwise) to be derived from the practice. In developing this theoretical framework, Himmelweit

links her reflection to the concept of ‘moral rationalities’, first introduced by Duncan and Edwards (1999). She explains that ‘altruism and caring for children is a taste that can be developed’ (2002: 246) by building on our ‘personal capital’, described as our personal experience with them, and by investing on the ‘social capital’, understood as the development of a more caring society.

However, in order for this to happen, namely, for individuals and society to work together in creating a caring environment for children, there is a compelling need to overcome what she perceives as a contemporary deficit of care. Himmelweit (2002) found that in determining mothers’ long-term behaviour and attitudes as conditioned by choice and preferences, the scope of policies introduced by the state is of a crucial importance. In this respect, she makes a distinction between coercive and enabling policies and reaches the conclusion that the latter have a much greater ‘multiplier effect’, in that mothers feel that they can make choices more suited to the circumstances that fit better with their identities. In other words, they could feel comfortable about following their own convictions in terms of what may be the ‘proper thing’ to do for themselves and others.

As a final point, Himmelweit (2002) corroborates Sevenhuijsen’s conclusions as she proposes to move away from a gender-divided society both for caring and working practices. In her argument however, she contends that before reaching this ‘equal society’, where gender discrimination will be regarded as a shameful relic of the past, men and women will undergo a transitional stage within which neither group will be able

to sit neatly within their usual, conventional space. In other words: women may no longer identify themselves as the predominant care providers, just as men may no longer see themselves in the role of breadwinners. Himmelweit contends that it is within the context of this uneasy tension, which has traditionally characterises the life of the modern industrialised West, that a care deficit can be identified. Ultimately, it is this condition that could be causing a 'care gap' (2002: 231). Taking these views into account, Glover (2002) expands further this vision of 'restless women', who navigate through their demanding lives striving to maintain a difficult 'balancing act' between their commitments to paid work and their commitments to their families.

2.9 The 'balance model' of work and care

Glover (2002) theorises about women's employment behaviour by asserting that the factors behind women's employment mobility may be determined by their need to find a balance between commodified (paid) and uncommodified (unpaid) domestic work. In addressing 'employment mobility' she refers specifically to the movement: 1) from outside the labour market into paid work, 2) from part-time into full-time work, 3) and, through promotion, from lower to higher posts. All such activities, she points out, require a certain consumption of time and space. Glover's suggestion is that by increasing the spatial-temporal availability of women to paid work, mothers in particular end up experiencing a growing tension or pressure, which in turn promotes a continuous search for 'a balancing act'. For Glover, it is the need to avoid the risk of becoming imbalanced that pushes women to 'choose' to decrease paid work (Glover 2002: 251). To speak of the difficulties of increasing spatial availability is simply describing the real restrictions

experienced by many women (especially by those with very young children) to be geographically mobile. Indeed, for women, the consequences of this inability to be flexible in the marketplace have been translated into chronic vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, reflected in the gendered employment patterns of past and present labour markets. As a result, women are holding a disproportionate number of part-time jobs and noticeably fewer managerial posts. The knock on effect of this situation is that - even thirty years after the 1974 Equal Pay Act - women are still receiving lower pay than men. Indeed, according to the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), which recently investigated more than 43,000 employees across 200 organisations, it has been found that when compared to the rest of Europe, Britain retains worse than average records on gender pay gap: typically women are paid 79 per cent of male rates, while the European average is 82 per cent (Shackle 2010).

Following this, and wanting to understand better the reasons behind this problematic situation, Glover (2002, 2005) cast a deeper light into the evolution of women's role within the family context through the latter part of the 20th century. In this respect, she shows how the 'two roles' approach popularised in the 1950s was gradually replaced in the 1970s by the perception that men and women were now more capable of fulfilling a 'dual role'. If the first concept implied a separation of roles, the second postulated a sort of reconciliation between the two, based on the assumption of a higher degree of equality that couples in the 1970s should be able to enjoy, at least within the private domain of their homes. Oakley (1976) however disputed that notion and advanced the idea of a 'role conflict', as a more realistic expression of actual family life. Drawing from

Haicault (1984), Glover (2002, 2005) captured the growing strain from attempting to manage the conflicting interests arising between paid and unpaid work by talking of a '*charge mentale*' (2002: 255), understood as a type of stress which is experienced by women who are routinely exposed to high levels of conflicting demands. Glover explains that the difficulties of these women may be intensified because: 'uncommodified activities are embedded in commodified activities' (2002: 255). In other words, although, physically, women change their working environment, say going from home to a factory and *vice versa*, in practice they take their concerns, worries and anxieties with them, as they move back and forth from one environment to the other. It is the intensity and conflicting nature of this overexposure, characterised by continual and competing demands for time in a daily juggling of obligations to significant others and against limited individual resources, that is causing this '*charge mentale*'. Echoing the stress theme in gender roles, Sichtermann (cited in Glover 2002: 255) talks about 'functional incompatibilities', term used to describe the attempts by women of making sense and manage, in a functional manner, those irreconcilable aspects of a public/private articulation that exist within flawed spatial/temporal frameworks.

Within this context, Glover notes that whereas much feminist literature has been developed around the three areas in which women are principally active, namely, paid work, children and housework, there has been hardly any reference on the position that leisure occupies in the lives of these women. It has been suggested (Sullivan 1997 in Glover 2002) that in the light of their many commitments, the leisure life of women is unsurprisingly fragmented. In accounting for this aspect also, Glover describes the

private domain that women inhabit as divided in sub-spheres within which women perform many roles - as mothers, wives/partners, daughters and friends, and many caring activities - by managing the house, doing housework and being involved in direct and indirect care. By 'direct and indirect' care, Glover is referring to a type of care that is either directly met by the carer or is more indirectly managed by delegating various tasks to other people in the household or to outsiders (i.e. childminders, cleaners). In both cases however, women remain in charge of their environment and consequently they tend to feel fully responsible for the outcome of theirs' and other people's actions regardless of whether they are directly or indirectly involved in those caring tasks.

Taking all the above into account, Glover (2002) sets out to analyse the effects that derive from the broader interdependence of public and private spheres as they interface with one another. In this respect, Glover reflects on the notion that the balance between the public and private domains can be easily unsettled by new and sudden priorities, which could push personal commitments in one direction or the other. This would be the case for instance, if a parent or child becomes infirm or if the level of dependency of a sick family member increases, which would usually intensify the level of strain between social environments. Likewise, a higher investment at work could provide the incentive for replacing much of the direct care for children and partners with indirect care, a phenomenon described by Hochschild (2001) as 'outsourcing'. In addition, depending on the family's gender arrangements, the husband/partner could likely take on more of the housework responsibilities. Even when changes of this kind may be just temporary, relationships between parents and children and partners could become more demanding

and increase the level of *'charge mentale'*. In postulating ways forward, Glover reaffirms the notion that gender relations can change by adjusting to changing lifestyles and commitments. Amongst the social structures with the power to affect the occurrence of 'life-work' imbalances, Glover (2002) names the welfare state, the degree of flexibility relevant to gender roles and power sharing, and the prevailing cultural norms that dominate the management of family life. All of these factors, she claims, will have an effect on housework arrangements and the sharing of caring responsibilities. The latter is seen as deriving from the level of flexibility and sensitivity that may (or may not) be present in the workplace from the point of view of employers understanding this kind of conflict and taking steps to minimise it.

Glover's research shows that even when care systems 'kick in' in a more substantial way, for instance, by supporting better childcare provisions (as was the case for France, Italy and the Northern European countries in late 1990s), there still remains a substantial amount of management of indirect care to be done. As Duncan and Edwards (1999) emphasise in their discussion of 'gendered moral rationalities' that will follow later in this chapter, policymakers should be careful not to fall into the assumption that a policy can actually change a certain behaviour if this is based on the wrong assumptions about what people may think to be morally right or wrong. Furthermore, cultural inferences in the configuration of working patterns still emphasise that men should be less inclined and available to make concessions to family life, especially against the backdrop of the long-hours culture that has characterised the British way of life in these last decades (Fagan 2001 in Glover 2002).

By analysing the nature of employment and its management, Glover draws a distinction between ‘task-oriented’ and ‘clock-oriented’ occupations and she concludes that task-oriented occupations are usually describing high status and high paid jobs, which in theory should offer more flexibility and a greater autonomy of management. However, Glover points out that this is not often the case. The notion that working hours are not usually fixed, simply means that they can be extended without notice. Work then can be taken back home where often it overshadows and interferes with family life and family relations. In addition to these difficulties, looming large is also the possibility for relocation and the need to be geographically mobile, which explains why the labour market draws upon highly skilled and flexible people, arguably a euphemism for unattached and single. If we also take into account that the higher the managerial position the less appropriate it will be to take private and personal problems into the workplace, it becomes understandable why there is such marked vertical segregation for women in the labour market.

Consequently, in line with the above analysis, as women struggle to maintain balanced and healthy relations between public and private domains, Glover is intrigued by the conditioning that structural factors exercise over the individuals concerned. In this context, she poses the following question: ‘are individuals seeking to retain equilibrium in their lives and those of their households [by] merely maximising personal utility and calculating opportunity costs?’ (2002: 262). In response to this she proposes the ‘balance model’. The ‘balance model’ theorised by Glover (2002) stresses the notion that what primarily motivates women’s moral reasoning is not dictated and determined by the

mere logic of self-interest as stressed by rational choice theories (Himmelweit 2002). According to Glover, to act purely out of self-interest presumes a freedom from the usual contingencies and constraints of the moral agent and it implies a detachment from others. However, because women's lives are validated through 'ontological relations' there is no such thing as a 'free' choice of action; women's decisions are socially negotiated within the boundaries of their particular circumstances.

Within their particular contexts, she argues that women strive to do their best by taking into account the needs of all of those individuals (partners, children, parents, relatives, friends, work associates and so on) who gravitate around their circle of influence and concern. In this respect therefore, the 'balance model' postulated by Glover (2002) can be described as an attempt by women divided between many responsibilities, to minimise the impact of unanticipated and uncontrollable outcomes in the midst of constant uncertainty. This is obtained by taking a certain course of action out of self-preservation, which, in turn, pushes them towards retaining their *status-quo* for the sake of stability. But since this self-preservation emanates from an ethic of care, their judgments, priorities and commitments are framed within particular 'moral rationalities', which interpret the need for self-preservation as a desire to safeguard the well being of others together with their own well-being. In this respect, women's moral reasoning should not be equated with the kind of rational choice that neo-classical economists accept unproblematically. Instead, the concept of utility, usually associated with materialistic considerations, should be seen as linked to social goals and objectives that are inclusive of others' needs. In this context, Glover argues (2002: 263):

[Women's rational choice] is a 'contingent choice' which has been rationally arrived at in the light of a particular set of circumstances as they are perceived by the actors. The term 'contingent choice' acknowledges that women are not helpless victims of circumstances; rather they are active decision makers. At the same time it needs to be recognised that the economic decision making of many women is affected (either constrained or freed) by a number of structural factors.

In the light of these observations, it is evident that Glover seeks to reaffirm a basic, but important point central to an ethic of care discourse and to the moral narratives central to my own research, namely that women's agency is deeply influenced and intrinsically dependent on structural and relational factors. In addition, even though Glover's portrayal of women's dilemmas will need to be empirically tested, her theory has some important ramifications. By drawing attention to the struggle of many women who seek to manage their conflicting responsibilities between paid and unpaid work, Glover proposes to analyse the problem of their vertical and horizontal segregation at work from a new and more nuanced perspective that takes more closely into account the difficulty realities in which these women operate. In her words (2002: 264)

But while this cautious approach [maintaining the status-quo through self-preservation] may make sense to the individual, there are implications to those individuals (largely women) who decide that the maintenance of balance must take priority over employment mobility. These implications relate primarily to the labour market and include such things as male-female pay differentiation and vertical and horizontal sex segregation: features that are the basis of women's disadvantage in the labour market.

Whilst Glover is interested in understanding how women's moral agency can be affected by conflicting responsibilities between public and private domains, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2001, 2002) offer an historical overview of the different

conceptualisations of the two domains, questioning whether the public/private distinction has outlived its usefulness. In tracing the historical and academic discourses on the two domains, the authors underline the quintessentially masculine vision of the private that has been depicted by mainstream sociologists like Giddens (1992), Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995).

In their theorising, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2001, 2002) interrogate a more male-centred description of the private that emphasises concepts of individualism, privacy, personal freedom and rights, whilst the public sphere is seen as the forum for shared interests and concerns. In their argument, they stress that these collectivities are based on a particular individualistic vision of social actors that appear to be independent, unattached and disconnected. From their standpoint, one way to overcome the dualistic and polarised relationship between the two is by differentiating the concept of the private from the personal. The ‘personal’, they argue, is the expression of one’s internal world; as such it can be linked to both domains and be ‘ontologically experienced by the individual in relation to a person’s own sense of being or existence’ (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002: 209). By focusing on the individual’s internal world rather than on the structural conceptualisations of these spheres, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards visualise people articulating ‘personal’ relationships in every given context. In this respect, the private and ‘public’ notions of people’s lives can exist and be harmonised within both formal and informal settings because they are expressions of the ‘social’ self.

So far, this chapter has considered the conceptual stand of care ethicists in contemporary

Britain and has highlighted the uneasy position that women occupy against the backdrop of diverging interests, epitomised in the polarisation of public/private spheres of life. Within these contexts, Sevenhuijsen, Himmelweit, Glover, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards have conceptualised women's experiences in the world of paid and unpaid work by highlighting the difficulties experienced in harmonising the two and by drawing attention to the high level of tension and stress that many women experience following their inability to achieve satisfactory levels of this harmonisation. In this respect, if on the one hand these difficulties seem to be absorbed and rationalised, on the other, they are seen as the main trigger to a possible 'care deficit' (Himmelweit 2002: 248) within the family. It was also highlighted that women's 'rational choices' do not appear to be free standing since calculations and moral decisions are made from the position of an ethic of care, whilst embedded in substantive relational network. As such, women's moral agency and sensibility is explicated towards all those for whom they care and with whom they are connected. But if it is difficult for conventional, traditional families to deal with the challenges and demands of modern living, how much more difficult could it possibly be for lone mothers? In order to address this question, the next chapter will now turn to consider the empirical contributions of Duncan and Edwards (1999), Duncan (2003), Smart and Neale (1999), Neale and Smart (2002), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003), in order to ascertain the position that working (lone) mothers occupy within the complex social contexts described above.

At this junction however, it should be pointed out that the themes and concerns that have emerged thus far have been shaped by well defined economic, political and cultural

contexts within advanced capitalist societies. In turn, these contexts have been informed by the assumptions of a distinctive ethic of work. In the light of these considerations, it is important to place the development of work and its ethical constructs within a concrete historical framework in order to gain a sense of why the world of work has developed the way it has. Since normative definitions and social understandings of what counts as ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ are both contingent and adaptive (Grint 2005, Edgell 2006), it becomes important at this juncture to gain an insight (albeit brief) into the ways in which an ethic of work has been historically engineered to reflect and support the ideological assumptions of the ‘economic rational man’ and of the ‘adult worker’ model. Thus, the next section will provide a brief introduction to the ethic of work that has shaped advanced capitalist societies, and Britain amongst them, over the last hundred years.

2.10 The ethic of work: a critical introduction

Emptied of its social meaning the term ‘work’ could simply describe various kinds of physical and/or mental activities directed to achieve a particular end. But the experience of work is so intrinsically part of all human life that, to a great extent, it has come to define it. However, many sociologists have argued that changing working practices and the corresponding adaptive interpretations of what constitutes ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ (as well as all the variations in between) in the articulation of public and private spheres, have been historically shaped by the combined forces and interests of patriarchy and industrial capitalism (Tronto 1993, Held 2006, Grint 2005, Edgell 2006, Crompton 2006). These in turn have provided developing industrial societies with the ideological, institutional and normative frameworks for propelling the interests of ‘powerful groups’

(Tronto 1993, Grint 2005: 390) into the central stage of public life. So outlined, this theoretical platform has been widely acknowledged within feminist groups of various persuasions from the mid 1960s onwards (Oakley 1976, 1998, Walby 1990, Tronto 1993, Lewis 2002, Sevenhuijsen 1998, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002, Hochschild 2001, Reynolds, Callender and Edwards 2003, Williams 2004, Held 2006, Crompton 2006).

An ethic of work defined in terms of a male monopolisation of economic resources has been linked to various forms of patriarchal power; patriarchy however has roots that pre-date industrial capitalism. Its development was charted and explored by early feminists like Firestone (1974) and Delphy (1977). These feminists argued that the effect of patriarchal authority (the social and political exploitation of women) intensified with the advent of industrial capitalism (the economic exploitation of women and some men). Following these considerations, if in the early stages of British industrial capitalism work opportunities for women initially increased (Edgell 2006, Crompton 2006), by the end of the 19th century the combining forces of patriarchy and industrial capitalism came to be identified with the emergence of a dominant work model, namely that of the male breadwinner and female homemaker, which formalised and sanctioned women's segregation at home (Walby 1990). This work model and its accepted variant, the male breadwinner/female part-time worker, became well established in mid 20th century Britain following the advancement of Fordism, Neo-Fordism and the application of Taylorised methods of work production and management throughout the early stages of industrial capitalism in developing Western countries (Crompton 2006).

The gender division of labour outlined above shaped the public and private spheres in terms of sanctioning their separation and raising one sphere above the other. As a result of this, Hakim (1998, in Edgell 2006) points out that the activities performed in the domestic sphere by women (as well as much of the informal and voluntary work in the public domain) were seen as so secondary and marginal as to be excluded from the official statistic of 'work' up to the 1980s. In all these contexts, work became synonymous with waged employment within the Taylorised framework of a 'technocratic-determinist' work management. The term 'technocratic determinism' was devised by Grint (2005: 114) as a useful 'short-hand' expression to describe a certain type of work ethic. In his theoretical analysis of work organisation Grint (2005:114) conceptualises 'technocratic determinism' as one side of two interlocked axes, the other being 'critical interpretativism'. The former encapsulates an ethic of work that stresses the systematic need to rationally increase organisational efficiency and effectiveness. Within this particular framework, Grint (2005: 113) argues that 'the impact upon the lives of organisational members or the wider society is subsidiary at best, and irrelevant at worst, to the need of maximising profits and efficiency'. On the other hand, a 'critical-interpretivist' work ethic supports a worker-centred model that encompasses most conventional sociological approaches to organisations since it is much more in tune with the importance attributed to human agency and to the multiple contingencies affecting individual and collective lives. Underpinning these polarisations there is the overt and covert tension that arises from a polarisation of interests since a 'technocratic determinist' management model focuses uncompromisingly on advancing the financial prospects of an organisation, whilst for a 'critical interpretativist' model of work ethic, the

‘improvement’ of an organisation is defined in terms of wider and more comprehensive frameworks, which are inclusive of both employers’ and employees’ interests. Against this backdrop, Grint (2005) contends that the contemporary organisation of paid work within advanced capitalist societies is not so much defined in terms of its polarised extremes, but rather in the many variations in between. Amongst them is the technocratic, but moderately deterministic managerial approach of ‘Human Relations’ and ‘Neo-human relations’ approaches. Likewise, the popular managerial model of ‘Organisational cultures’, whilst appearing to be necessarily interpretativist for its emphasis on supporting a variety of cultural organisations, remains fundamentally technocratic since it is anchored to a power culture that is placed in the hands of an individual or a small elite (Handy 1985 cited in Grint 2005).

The work ethic that has emerged and crystallised in the work management, ideologies and practices of late 20th century within advanced capitalist societies was perhaps best encapsulated in the research that Hochschild (2001) carried out in the late 1990s. In her empirical study, she analysed the structure and management of a large American firm that prided itself for its ‘family-friendly’ policies. In spite of the availability of ‘family friendly’ features, Hochschild (2001) found that very few people were taking advantage of what their company had to offer in that respect. Hochschild (2001) concluded that the main cause for this behaviour was linked to the ‘technocratic’ orientation of the firm, which demanded a high level of commitment and loyalty from its employees under the implicit threat of losing one’s job or the chance for promotion. Furthermore, Hochschild (2001: 212-215) found that many of her respondents described the time spent doing paid

work (termed by the author 'the first shift') as less taxing than the time spent at home. Parents (primarily mothers) found themselves returning home and being swamped with a 'second shift' (domestic and care work) followed by a 'third shift' (dealing with the emotional consequences of their time deficit), which required them to notice, understand and cope with a too hurried, rationalised and compressed 'second shift'.

Thus, the 'Taylorised family' of modern times (2001: 209), as she defines it, has been gradually time-impoverished and 'deskilled', since more and more mothers respond to time shortage by making use of commercial substitutes for many of the activities that women used to do themselves at home. In short, she argues, much of housework and caring work has been 'outsourced' and done by others. This observation closely relates to Glover's description of 'indirect care', as care managed by mothers but not exercised directly by them and Tronto's (1993) concept of 'caring for', which implies taking responsibility for activities, which are usually delegated to others. Hochschild's findings highlight two important points: firstly, the factual and conceptual impossibility of compartmentalising and separating the public and private spheres; secondly, the extent by which one environment (the public) is overpowering or 'infecting' the other (the private).

The workplace in the 21st century has been described as enjoying a multiplicity of employment combinations and these varying working arrangements are reflected in the different types of gender relations and work-care arrangements present in British households. Crompton (2006) has identified five of these possible arrangements; they range from the traditional male breadwinner/female carer or male breadwinner/female

part-time earner to the dual earner/state or marketised carer. As a possible solution to the inequalities and imbalances that are inherent to the above configurations, Crompton (2006) proposes a dual earner/dual carer model that does not take its inspiration from the work/care practices of advanced socialist states, such as Sweden and Norway. Northern European states have emerged from a number of longitudinal studies within a predominantly feminist literature, as more equitable in providing better 'work-life' arrangements to men and women alike (Williams 2004, Gornick and Meyers 2008). Against this backdrop however, Crompton (2006) emphasises the value of the 'balance model' practiced in the Netherlands. This is centred on the 'part-time' management of both work and care instead of supporting the more conventional (but well subsidised and structured) 'full-time work/part-time care' arrangements typically used in Northern European countries. In addition, with Himmelweit (2002), Hochschild (2001) and others (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Williams 2004; Reynolds, Callender and Edwards 2003), Crompton presses the case for greater flexibility and for a reduction of working hours in paid employment. To implement a greater flexibility and shorter working hours would enable 'men to increase their contribution to the work of caring [whilst] women would be better enabled to avoid the "mummy track" of part-time work' (Crompton 2006: 218).

To this end, and in order to deter a new cultural trend amongst working parents in the USA that glorifies the pursuit of 'self-care' and 'independent living' for a growing population of 'stay-at-home-alone' children, Hochschild (2001: 226-228) invites parents to unite and form a 'time movement' with 'time activists' and unionised workers intent at clawing back the time that has been gradually eroded from the home. A shorter and more

flexible working week, she argues, would help to redress the balance between public and private priorities whilst undoubtedly increasing employment for all. Along similar lines, Gornick and Meyer (2008) also stress that a reconfiguration of employment with family life must also take into account a more equal and generous allocation of parental leave, which, they argue, is too woman-centred. Whilst accounting for these hopeful and inspiring propositions, statistical evidence stresses that Britain holds the highest proportion in Europe of one and half earner households (Crompton 2006), and that these traditional family arrangements are placed against the backdrop of a 'long hours culture' which is experienced by the majority of full-time workers (Taylor 2002).

Indeed, the continuous growth of technological means of communication has brought an intensification of paid work whilst blurring further the boundaries between public and private spaces. This has allowed paid work to stretch well beyond the 'here and now' into the 'anywhere, anytime' time/space continuum. Against the backdrop of an ever-expanding global context, the modality of work is increasingly characterised by newer forms of 'computerised Taylorism' (Thompson and Warhurst 1998: 8), which is forcing new rhythms and flexibility from employees, thus reshaping organisational relationships and the production and distribution of products and services (Edgell 2006, Thompson and Warhurst 1998, Held et al. 1999). Against these growing pressures, the argument is that the ethics of current working practices in advanced capitalist nations has become increasingly 'individualised' (Beck 1992, Edgell 2006, Crompton 2006), micro-managed (Thompson and Warhurst 1998) and 'feminised' (Taylor 1998). The individualisation of work is expressed in contradictory fashion within increasingly micro-managed working

structures. That is, current organisational policies seem to emphasise a progressive human resources agenda that values diversity and personal career development. As Hochschild (2001: 206) describes it, today's participative management techniques, such as those invested in Total Quality Management (TQM), no longer attempt to coerce mind and body, rather they appeal to workers' heart through a process of 'empowerment', which ultimately leads workers to become effective 'decisions makers'. 'Choices' may be stark, leading to either individualised financial incentives and benefits for full participation and compliance, or to the daunting prospect of unemployment or a stagnant career. The latter possibility can be justified on the ground of the uncertainty of a changing market and on growing competitiveness. Similarly, career development becomes an individualised practice that is no longer set in fixed and overarching bureaucratic systems. Today's micro-management appears seemingly fluid and flexible; it encourages employees' 'self-development' and the advancement of the 'entrepreneurial self' (Crompton 2006: 63). In this way, it could be argued that contemporary trends emphasise an ethic of work that capitalises on subjectivity whilst pushing forcefully towards the internalisation of a technocratic work culture.

By the same token, drawing from Hochschild (1983), Taylor (1998) points out that the contraction of the manufacturing industry, followed by the expansion of the service sector and the increased female participation in western labour markets, have stimulated the deployment of 'emotional labour'. This has been typically identified as a gendered phenomenon, particularly within such organisational structures like TQM, which is effectively used within the service sector. Within this context, Taylor (1998) talks about

the ‘feminisation’ of work manifested primarily in two forms of emotional labour: ‘surface acting’ (pretending to feel what we do not feel) and ‘deep acting’ (deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others). His argument is that the modern workforce is undergoing an intensified level of emotional exploitation by being forced to ‘deep act’ in their interaction with potential customers.

Taking all the above into account, it could be argued that the work ethic that underlines the culture and practices of the modern workplace in contemporary Britain illuminates an ambiguous landscape at best, marked by a complex interplay of gendered power relations, which, to an extent, are still entrenched in conventional capitalistic and patriarchal values. The response that an ethic of work so characterised elicits is a mix of compliance, resistance, consent and rejection from a hardened workforce, as the consistently high levels of disaffection and absenteeism seem to indicate⁷. Echoing this realisation whilst addressing a more general point about the ‘new workplace’, Thompson and Warhurst (1998: 19) reached the conclusion that:

Despite their bewildering number of change programmes and grand new titles for people and practices the new workplace is still easily recognisable for the vast majority who too often remain poorly motivated, overworked and undervalued.

2.11 Summary

In conclusion, in this chapter I have considered relevant theoretical perspectives from

⁷ It is estimated that 13.4 million days are lost each year to stress, anxiety and depression alone, with 12.3 million down to back and upper limb problems (Roberts 2009) <http://www.ihc.co.uk/articles/3.html>

those moral theorists who have most notably contributed with their insights to the development of an ethic of care. In it, I have discussed the contributions made by Gilligan, Noddings, Ruddick, Held, Koehn, Tronto, Sevenhuijsen, Himmelweit, Glover, Hochschild, Compton, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards. From their different perspectives, these authors have focused on bringing to the fore women's collective moral authority and agency about the value and practice of care. From this standpoint, whilst some theorists have emphasised care as a quintessentially 'feminine' or 'maternal' virtue, others have located it increasingly more in the wider socio-political context, where it can be clearly seen used to mirror the uneven and unjust distribution of power of past and present societies.

In broad terms, what has emerged from these analyses is a critique of the male citizen-worker paradigm that has historically dominated the political and cultural scenes of western societies. Through their critique of morality, these authors take to task traditional moral theories, such as those represented by Rawls and Habermas. In their argument, it is stressed how the paradigm of the male citizen-worker has shaped the temporal and spatial separation currently in place between the public and the private spheres of life. Thus, the public moral virtues described by Aristotle as necessary prerequisites for good citizenry and good governance, never did acquire the centrality of role needed to achieve the 'good life' within the public sphere. It followed that the practice of care became a secondary concern, segregated to the marginal influence of domestic life. Against this backdrop, what is beginning to emerge is the realisation that the greatest challenge faced by care ethicists today will be met in the attempt to formulate and justify

new realistic scenarios that would effectively propel theories and practices of care into the global arena. In all of these respects, what is urgently required is a genuine contender to the dominant, but arguably flawed, ‘moral point of view’ to which contemporary western societies have unreservedly subscribed.

In this chapter, I have also discussed some of the dominant theories that define the world of work and its underlying principles. The objective has been to offer a contextual framework to an ethic of work that would bring into a sharper relief the nature of the dichotomous polarisation between ‘work’ and ‘care’ as it is understood in the first decade of 21st century Britain. In the next chapter I will turn the focus of this literature review to the empirical applications of an ethic of care to post-divorce families and to the position that mothers and, more specifically, WLMs occupy in this context.

CHAPTER 3

Applying care theories to family contexts

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will focus particularly on the empirical work that has emerged from representatives of the CAVA (Care, Values and the Future of Welfare) group and from other care ethicists who have advanced the empirical base of an ethic of care. In 1999, the CAVA group (Care, Values and the Future of Welfare) began working on a five-year programme investigating how the institution of the family is fulfilling the multiplicities of its functions through its changing form. Since this time, their connections have stretched well beyond the national boundaries and developed links with the USA and with European countries such as Spain, West Germany and Sweden. In this respect, both through their theoretical and empirical works, the CAVA group, with a few other European organisations operating with a similar ethos and objectives (ENAIP 2004), has been at the forefront of the present effort to develop an ethic of care. CAVA's body of work stands out for being amongst the first to underline the pivotal relevance of a theory and a practice of care that is valued on its own merit and transcend the private sphere to include and change the public sphere.

The CAVA programme has received substantial support from central government with 1.3 million pounds awarded through the Economic and Social Research Council, which gave CAVA much political leverage. As Patricia Hewitt, at the time Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, commented on the release of

‘Rethinking Families’ (Williams 2004):

I welcome this report, and in particular the research results, which underline the deep commitment that people demonstrate towards their friends and loved ones, irrespective of the form their family takes. Government policy should always work with the grain of people’s lives. That’s why we have put in place a range of policies which help to provide a climate that supports people in different kinds of families in carrying out their caring commitments while, at the same time, working to support themselves. I particularly welcome the proposal of promoting and valuing an ‘ethic of care’ alongside an ethic of work.

(26/19/2005 www.leeds.ac.uk/cava/news/enews.htm).

Underlying the empirical work of the CAVA group there has been one common important realisation, which, in many ways, goes against the grain of a certain type of academic culture and conventional philosophy. This realisation is that notion that the fabric of all societal and individual life is held tightly together through a thick web of interaction and interdependency, and therefore people can only exist through a ‘relational ontology’ (Sevenhuijsen 2002:132). This moral point of view is contrasted by a different perception of life, emphasised by mainstream sociologists like Giddens (1992, 1999), Beck (1992, 1994) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) to which the CAVA group refers to epitomise the defining features and shortcomings of the current moral orthodoxy. In broad terms, current orthodoxy depicts the social life that has emerged from a disappearing Judeo-Christian tradition as constituted by atomised individuals, constantly fighting and fending for themselves within highly competitive social structures and institutions. Thus, against the backdrop of an apparent radicalisation of political, cultural, ethnic, national and religious identities, the ‘other’ is increasingly perceived as a potential threat.

Contrasting neo-classic ‘prophets of doom’ and an alarmist media, the supporters of an ethic of care are asserting that people are deeply embedded in their family and community contexts. This perspective is finding growing support amongst many other feminists, who, at conceptual and empirical levels have come to see the value and practice of care as one of the most potent motivators and ‘glue’ in forming and retaining social networks (Skinner and Finch 2006, Waerness 2006, McLaughlin 2006, Millar 2006). From this point of view, the main argument is that whilst change sweeps through our social landscape destabilising individual and collective identities, people’s moral habits and norms are not so easily and radically altered. On the contrary, men and women alike are continuously treading on webs of connections with their close and extended family, with friends and, I would add, with an ever-growing ‘virtual’ community borne out of shared interests and aided by the growing sophistication, speed and accessibility of all means of communication. In coming together and engaging in personal and often informal relationships, civil societies through clubs, voluntary associations and organisations and pressure groups, cannot really be conceived as existing in ‘free-floating’ or ‘morality-free’ zones. Within the perspective of an ethic of care therefore, in terms of defining its empirical framework, emphasis is placed on the moral habits and caring attitudes that flesh out people’s behaviour, as well as on the ways in which these moral habits and attitudes come to characterise the thick web of relations in which moral actors are embedded.

Furthermore, there is a strong persuasion that an ethic of care cannot and should not be restricted to the private domain. Rather, it should be counted as a ‘public virtue’ and find a place of relevance in the public sphere (Sevenhuijsen 2002, Williams 2001a, 2001b, 2004,

Lewis 2002). Consequently, advocates of an ethic of care do not accept as given the conceptual divide that separates and compartmentalises the public and private sphere of life and they seek instead to achieve a balanced harmonisation of the two. This is pursued through grounded research and the development of theoretical analysis aimed at supporting the implementation of better and more realistic social policies designed to promote 'care'. Since the institution of the family is no longer a private concern but has opened up to social scrutiny, public debate and political manipulation, the CAVA group hoped to expand their theoretical and empirical insight by using the family as an ideal benchmark to ascertain the quality of relational networks whilst simultaneously attempting to bridge the gap between the public and the private.

One of their most important findings has been the realisation that families, in all their variety and diversity and through their daily practices, display commitment to one another by investing emotional and physical energy into their relationships and by taking responsibility for the well being of others. Agency, therefore, is seen as guided and motivated by specific moral rationalities that underscore all the care-giving and care-receiving activities of daily life. Making sense of people's actions by taking the time to understand why people act the way they do can help to tailor a welfare system capable of responding more realistically to actual needs. The importance of developing a more pragmatic and contextual understanding of social life is also reinforced by another commonly held consideration amongst care ethicists: namely that change cannot be imposed from above on a seemingly passive society. Neither can it be enforced through coercive action under the assumption that people are fundamentally weak and deviant and therefore in constant need of moral guidance and

normative frameworks. Indeed, the underlining conclusion reached by virtually all the members of the CAVA group has been that, in terms of structuring social policies, shaping lifestyles and responding to general and particular concerns, the ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ need to come into some kind of alignment. In other words, policies need to go with the grain of the moral rationalities that inform human agency. Attempts to force the hand towards deeply unpopular directions can often cause great public disquiet and may be resisted. The consequences of unilateral actions from above could have serious repercussions, which could include the imposition of great financial costs, hasty dismantling of infrastructure and the relocation and possible devaluing of the human capital involved.

In order to develop the empirical platform of the general themes highlighted above, CAVA undertook the development of six projects (Williams 2004), aimed at investigating and analysing social areas which recorded high level of tensions and encapsulated in their dynamics the difficulties of modern living. These projects focused on:

- 1) Mothers, care and employment.
- 2) Families after divorce.
- 3) Transnational kinship.
- 4) Friendship and non-conventional partnership.
- 5) Collective voices on care, diversity and family life
- 6) Values, care and commitments amongst parents of primary school children.

Of the six themes outlined above, this chapter will engage specifically with the first two. These will be addressed by analysing the empirical findings of Duncan and Edwards (1999), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Reynolds, Callender and

Edwards (2003).

3.2 Looking inside the ‘closed box’ of lone motherhood

At a theoretical level, Duncan and Edwards (1999) identify three different positions from which to understand change in families. These positions have been described as: ‘new household economy’, ‘individualisation in late modernity’, and ‘post-modern moral negotiation’. Duncan and Edwards discard the first two because their focus was on the atomised rationalities of individual actors. The third approach is viewed more favourably because it emphasises the value of socially negotiated responsibilities and values the relevance that social ties and connections bear on the life and agency of social actors. Yet it is criticised on the account that it does not give enough relevance to structural factors. In Duncan’s words: ‘there are problems where the notion of negotiation can get stretched to the point where pre-given roles and gendered discourses can be conceptualised as negotiated rather than as a non-negotiable pre-given (2003:2).

Duncan and Edwards (1999) weave together academic and political discourses to highlight the evolution of the ‘lone mother’ phenomenon. In its short history, the public image of lone mothers was a particularly negative one during the 1980s and early 1990s. Lone mothers were ostracised and vilified by right wing conservatism and by populist media as they were perceived to be potentially capable of destabilizing the traditional family order and, with their high levels of unemployment, to undermine the philosophy behind a strong work ethic. Duncan and Edwards (1999) highlight some of the common prejudices with which lone mothers were identified and labelled. Lone mothers were

described as (1999: 43): ‘going from one relationship to another’, ‘responsible for delinquent children’, ‘sitting their kids in front of the telly to go off and enjoy themselves’, ‘don’t want to work’, ‘get pregnant to go on the state’, ‘scrounging off welfare’, ‘just having babies to get flats’ and so on.

These generalisations were sustained by a climate of intolerance toward welfare dependency particularly in view of the pressing need to reform a system that appeared collapsing under the strain of increasing demands. Under the Conservative government of the 1980s and until 1997, policies reflected this general mood and benefits to lone mothers were reduced in order to ‘push’ them into employment. Through this course of action, the Conservative government wanted to achieve also other objectives; namely, to deter married mothers from considering divorce as ‘too easy’ a solution to marital problems and stop women from having children out of wedlock. Duncan and Edwards (1999) see in this a clear form of social engineering, which to some extent, was reproduced under New Labour from 1997 to 2010 under different premises.

From the standpoint of socialist-based ideologies, lone mothers are perceived more as the victims than the perpetrators of a dysfunctional social system. Thus, in response to this assumption, New Labour began the process of de-criminalising and de-victimising lone mothers by emphasising the notion that most lone mothers are ‘mature’ divorced, separated or widowed women rather than being very young and single. Their condition is not chosen but rather imposed on them and, like other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in our society, lone mothers are victims of adverse circumstances. One popular

New Labour argument that seemed to validate this notion was based on assessing the transformation of modern societies through the restructuring of industrial capitalism. This transformation has been directly linked to men's loss of a steady job for life, the consequent decline of the breadwinner model and the strain that these structural changes brought to family life. The 'lone mothers' phenomenon therefore was in part perceived by New Labour as one of the unfortunate outcomes of economic strife and financial uncertainty. Lone mothers, who had been financially dependent on their husbands' steady incomes, were seen at the receiving end of unpredictable events over which they had no control. Lone mothers would work if they could, was the logic of the prevailing argument, which identified economic issues as the most fundamental cause for the instability and changes in the institution of the family.

Furthermore, Duncan's and Edwards' (1999) findings highlight how lone mothers are prevented from working by the lack of consistent and affordable childcare and by the poverty trap into which they have been pushed. Arguably therefore, the various 'New Deal' packages that characterised New Labour's contribution to social improvement for all disadvantaged groups (of which lone mothers are part), have clearly marked this changed perception, best captured perhaps by the political slogan 'to give a hand up and not a hand out', adopted by Blair's New Labour from Clinton's election campaign in the 1990s. This slogan stands for the familiar concept that the only route out poverty is through the eradication of a 'dependency' culture from the welfare state by 'empowering' and 'enabling' people through paid work.

Duncan and Edwards incorporate two other strands to the either 'social threat' or 'social problem' discourses that have so far described lone mothers. The other two strands they propose are presented under the titles of 'lifestyle change' and 'escaping patriarchy' (1999: 27). As their titles imply, the former acknowledges the view that some women are seen as making voluntary choices out of a variety of family forms. The latter reinforces the former by sustaining that lone mothers do not want to be controlled by men and that there are greater financial and emotional advantages derived from a single status over a married/cohabiting one. Both strands emphasise how lone motherhood can be lived as a constructive experience, free from many of its negative connotations and intended to be primarily an individual and, arguably, a better choice. For these women, the argument goes, 'traditional' families are outdated, men are no longer the main providers and in this respect, they are no longer needed. For these reasons, women who subscribe to 'lifestyle changes' or manage to 'escape patriarchy' proclaim their right to work and live independent lives. Duncan and Edwards (1999) suggest that these four main discourses highlight and encompass various kinds of understandings surrounding the issue of lone parenting and the way in which 'lone motherhood' in particular is perceived as a contingent phenomenon by the general public and by the women they interviewed. The researchers further argued that these discourses are not mutually exclusive and they should not be seen in isolation from each other. Rather they are woven together highlighting, by various degrees, the diversity of individual experiences.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) define the object of their study by posing the following questions: how do lone mothers with dependent children decide about taking up paid

employment, and how they go about choosing adequate childcare? To find answers to these questions they draw attention to women's 'gendered moral rationalities'. These are socially negotiated from within particular social contexts and they represent a continuous and changeable process. The contexts that Duncan and Edwards describe are inclusive of neighbourhoods, local labour markets and welfare regimes, the personal and the social capital of the respondents and the nature of their social networks (support from family and friends). In their accounts, the researchers are also sensitive to contextualised understandings of gender, class and ethnicity. Gendered moral rationalities therefore describe a collective and social understanding of what is considered to be morally acceptable behaviour through the complex interaction of all the elements described above.

In Duncan's later words (2003:10-11):

This concept [of gendered moral rationalities] has its basis in the varying understanding concerning lone mothers' identities and responsibilities towards their children. These understandings provided answers to, or guidance on, the right and responsible thing to do as a mother, bringing up children on your own, in relation to employment. They were gendered because they fundamentally dealt with notions of mothering, they were moral in providing answers about the right thing to do, and they were rationalities in providing a framework for taking decisions and carrying out actions, in this case taking up paid work.

By analysing lone mothers' 'gendered moral rationalities', Duncan and Edwards (1999) reach the conclusion that overall, 'calculations about the perceived economic costs and benefits will be important once these understandings [of gendered moral rationalities] are established, but are essentially secondary to such social and moral questions' (1999:118). The implications of this claim are the following: the moral questions lone mothers ask themselves do not hinge around financial matters but rather around their dilemmas about

what is morally right in terms of the job to take (with options varying from full time to substantial or minimum part-time work), when and how to bring up a child and how to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. Indeed, on all of these accounts, it has been argued (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002: 110) that governments from every persuasion have made a 'rationality mistake'. This concept is generally approved and shared amongst CAVA exponents. In it, the group criticises the 'adult working model', which has come to replace the 'breadwinner model'. If on the one hand the 'breadwinner model' still lingers and contributes to preserve gender inequalities both at home and on the work place, the 'adult working model' seems to be applicable mostly to those women who have similar lifestyles to men. This is more likely to be the case for childless women who are not held back by caring responsibilities. However, the CAVA researchers have argued, it is because of the commonly held assumption that such a model is widespread and successful that other models have been automatically contested. One of the most disputed is the universal model of a 'rational economic man' (Barlow, Duncan and James 2002: 111). This view stands for the assumption that individuals (men and women alike) take individualistic, cost-benefit type of decisions in order of maximise their own personal gain. Seen in this light, paid work becomes highly instrumental because it is seen as the best, if not the only means, of achieving just that objective.

However, as was outlined above, in their empirical research Duncan and Edwards found that both lone (1999) and partnered (Duncan 2003) mothers do not respond to these 'rational economic man' assumptions. Using their concept of gendered moral

rationalities, they found that (lone) mothers act on morally and socially negotiated views, which compel them to act, in the best possible way they know, in the interest of their children. Thus, by putting their moral responsibilities for their children above all else, many (lone) mothers found that being a 'good' mother was often incompatible with significant paid work. Similarly, (lone) mothers found that formal day-care provision was patchy in its delivery, expensive and too rigidly structured. In these situations, care provision did not match lone mothers' moral ideas of what they considered to be the most appropriate care for their children. In underlying all these aspects, it has been systematically pointed out that lone mothers emphasise the notion that they: 'do not view care simply as a constraint on paid work. Rather, they feel morally obligated to care, and often wish to do so' (Duncan 2003:4).

The evidence of such accounts has been often used by other CAVA researchers to underline the tension between a more 'grounded' approach to social reality and the erroneous conclusions reached when social issues are assessed from the detached vantage point of the 'rational economic man'. Drawing from this particular understanding, Barlow, Duncan and James (2002: 115) have concluded that:

By forcing its own version of rationality upon lone parents, the government risks making large numbers do what they [lone mothers] consider to be morally wrong. In this way the 'rationality mistake' – the false assumption that people act like the rational economic man – is compounded by a 'morality mistake' the false attribution of particular normative views.

According to this argument, in approaching the conundrum of lone motherhood New Labour has made a number of mistakes. These were conceptualised as the 'rationality

mistake', the 'economic mistake' and the 'geographical mistake'. Based on what has been explained so far, these 'mistakes' indicate respectively 1) the notion of 'the rational economic man' as the only viable alternative to 'good' citizenry and moral responsibility, 2) the presumption that employability will guarantee employment, and that any kind of work should be able to free lone mothers from poverty and welfare dependency, 3) the assumption that the number and types of jobs available are equally distributed to the various local areas to suit lone mothers needs and demands. In addition, by analysing the relationship between motherhood and paid work Duncan and Edwards (1999) were able to differentiate three different models of gendered moral rationalities: 'primarily mother', 'primarily worker' and 'mother /worker integral'. As Duncan later explains (2003:11):

Within an unquestioned responsibility for doing their best for their children, lone mothers could hold gendered rationalities towards paid work that gave primacy to the benefits of physically caring for the children themselves (a 'primarily mother' gendered moral rationality), or to paid work for themselves as separate to their identity as mothers ('primarily worker'), or to full-time employment as part of 'good' mothering ('mother/worker integral').

Simply put, the basic attitude to underscore a 'primarily mother' position would advocate a rather exclusive dedication to one's children. This type of mother (seen by the authors as an ideal type in the Weberian sense), would embody the traditional view that 'if you have children you should be with them'. This position is sustained by the strong persuasion that a mother is the best and most qualified person to take care of her own children and that no one could or should replace her. Moreover, to care for the children is a job in itself, and is one that requires a mother's full attention. Time spent away means to miss out on the children growing up. On the other hand, the ideal type of

a 'primarily worker' mother finds that her identity and sense of personhood is constructed predominantly around an ethic of work. These are stereotypical career women, who feel trapped by the unassuming life of routinised domesticity, whilst their work, on the other hand, gives them dignity, status and self-respect. Breaking with the traditional polarisation that views women as either mothers or workers, Duncan and Edwards introduced a middle position, conceptualised in the ideal type of the mother/worker integral. Within this 'ideal type' conceptualisation, lone mothers value work for its instrumental importance (as a way to provide for their children and improve their quality of life) and for its formative value (good, hard work as a way to set an example to lead honest and dignified lives). For these mothers therefore, full time work is the best moral choice to make in order to provide for their children and offer them good role models to follow. This was the conceptual framework within which Duncan and Edwards (1999) interpreted and analysed the narratives of all the lone mothers interviewed. These narratives highlighted the following patterns (Duncan and Edwards 1999: 176):

Those lone mothers who subscribed to traditional views of motherhood and employment, were the least likely to be in paid work. Those black lone mothers with less conventional views... are more likely to take paid work, especially full-time.

The researchers stressed that the 'new right' response to lone motherhood, as outlined in earlier sections of this chapter, was misplaced, as were the problematic assumptions of the 'new left', in its interpretation of lone motherhood within the context of the 'social problem' scenario. Both scenarios, they argued, present at least two misconceptions. The first concerns a degree of economic blindness, which is the outcome of two

combined factors: the dominant trends of the labour market and the persistent levels of gender segregation within it. This has created a situation whereby many of the jobs available to lone mothers are not secure or adequate enough to support them and their households. The second misconception underpins a form of spatial naivety. That is, there are too many 'long -distance' assumptions made at a national level in terms of jobs availability, which, much too often, do not seem to match local realities. Consequently, Duncan and Edwards (1999: 197) argue that 'the social problem reform scenario not only forgets that many of the jobs available to lone mothers are inadequate, it is missing the fact that many are simply in the wrong place'.

The authors also reflected on the position that lone mothers occupy within the welfare system in Britain. They noted that the present welfare state, in its make-up and delivery, is ideologically and politically reactionary since it tends to respond to standardised norms which - as has been previously shown in this chapter- are fundamentally male centred. It has been by maintaining this historical gender blindness that the working behaviour of men has become the standardised norm. The work ethic that has emerged over this last century has gradually been translated and encoded in its institutionalised form through the social policies that characterise the modern British welfare state. Thus, by drawing from their critical analysis of 'neo-classical' (right wing) and 'new left' socio-political postures, Duncan and Edwards assessed the political approach of the 1997 New Labour government and criticised its ideological stand and the practical delivery of its welfare reform system. From this standpoint, they viewed the former New Labour government as advocating and promoting an agenda of social cohesion that was essentially reductionist

because it endorsed an ethic of work that elevated ‘paid’ employment to be the *only* solution to all kinds of social afflictions.

As a way to bring corrective action to this problematic approach, they proposed the following recommendations: firstly, it must be acknowledged that ‘welfare to work’ policies need to take into account and value local definitions of good mothering and understand the particularly acute sense of responsibility that mothers feel towards their children. In this respect, the relationship between care and paid work cannot be successfully addressed and resolved without seriously considering the needs of the children as truly paramount. Secondly, these needs are seen as varying with changing social contexts and environments, therefore policies and services need to be sensitive and adaptable to localised situations. Thirdly, mothers, as recipients of policies, need to be able to participate in the process by being allowed to express their needs and understandings and, in so doing, become capable of exercising a degree of control over these processes and over their lives. Fourthly, all the best policy initiatives should be targeted to reach not only lone mothers but also all mothers, in order to avoid any form of stigmatisation through the differentiation of practices and services.

In addition, Duncan and Edwards stress that ‘top-down’ social engineering could be harmful when it is built on the wrong premises⁸. On the other hand, a ‘bottom-up’ welfare to work strategy could risk perpetrating class and gender inequalities, which would occur if 1) the distinction created between part-time informal childcare and the

⁸ This was for instance the case with regard to the disastrous urban regeneration projects of the 1970s and 1980s, which displaced entire communities and replaced them with badly constructed housing estates

better equipped, professionally run, full-time childcare was to be maintained (underlining a class distinction); and 2) if informal and formal childcare services continue to be run almost exclusively by women (thus perpetuating gender inequalities and stereotypes). Drawing upon these considerations, Duncan and Edwards conclude that what is needed is a redefinition of what is meant by 'work' and 'welfare' (1999: 295):

If we were to redefine 'work' as not just paid work, but also work to care for the children and the elderly, and at the same time to redefine welfare as to include the receipt of care, then we can see that 'welfare to work' is a misnomer: 'Welfare' is not opposed to 'work' because most people receive and carry out both: welfare and work are mixed; nor is care simply a barrier to paid work.

To value care as much as work would go some way towards removing the unequal and gendered valuations existing between full-time and part-time work and between paid and unpaid work. Indeed, 'rather than erecting paid work as a moral duty it would be better to move towards moral and financial neutrality, towards all forms of socially necessary work' (1999: 296). Thus, the question with which to address lone mothers' predicament should sound more like this: 'what do lone mothers need to care well for their children without this conflicting with their economic independence?' (1999: 295). In all these respects and for all the reasons illustrated above, Duncan and Edwards exhorted the New Labour government during its first mandate (1997-2001) to redefine its communitarian aims along more pluralistic, voluntaristic and redistributive lines if lone mothers are to balance successfully their responsibility to their children with the opportunities of paid

(Hanley 2007).

work. Consequently, they recommend restructuring the national ‘welfare to work’ approach into a more locally sensitive ‘welfare *and* work’ approach.

The need to develop a fairer articulation of public and private spaces was also stressed by Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) in their study of 37 partnered mothers and 30 fathers with pre-school children. The researchers wanted to determine how different working environments impacted on couples’ material and emotional relationships and on their parental role. What they found tends to reinforce Duncan and Edward’s (1999) empirical findings. Namely although family-friendly policies are widespread in the public sector and in large private organisations, they do not often deliver what they promise. The main reason underpinning this problem was found in the embedded gendered assumptions informing the up-take of family friendly policies in the workplace. In practice, these policies were aimed exclusively at mothers and had to be negotiated individually by the respondents. In addition, although employers helped some of them to manage the demands of their work and their families, it was found that to reduce the amount of working hours without making a distinction on how time is used, exposes a too narrow and simplistic understating of women’s contexts. Thus, issues concerning the intensification and management of work as well as how to retain a necessary amount of autonomy and control in the articulation of work and family life, remain a problem largely unsolved. Indeed, Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) found that overall, the workplace was still subscribing to traditional assumptions about maternal and paternal roles. Consequently, it was more difficult for fathers to ask for flexibility at work because many of the fathers in their research were employed in male-dominated organisations,

which were oblivious to the fact that these men were also fathers with family responsibilities.

3.3 The 'new moral terrain' of modern post-divorce families

A different way of rethinking the impasse articulated by the above care ethicists was proposed by Smart (2000, 2003), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Neale and Smart (2002). The group's theoretical underpinnings were constructed around the interplay of two related elements. These were 1) the nature and intensity of change and 2) the ways and means by which change is managed through negotiation amongst family members and against the backdrop of the imbalanced articulation of public/private domains. For these care ethicists, it is the fluidity of change and the inner dynamics of family negotiations rather than structural constraints and facilitators that define the nature of their enquiry. In this respect, the structural conditions and roles lived within any family group are never assumed as pre-given. Drawing from the sociological insight of Finch and Mason (1993) and influenced by the theories of 'individualisation' (Beck 1992) and of 'reflexivity' (Giddens 1992, 1998), the researchers' approach to social issues is particularly telling in their definition of the family (Smart, Neale and Wade 2001:19):

Families 'are' what families 'do'...They appear as fluid networks of relationships and practices, and it seems preferable to think of them in this way rather than resorting to institutional definitions... Viewing families in these more nuanced and qualitative ways makes transparent a further feature of contemporary family relationships: they are negotiated over time rather than fixed by duty, law or the positional status of their family members.... While they may well be influenced by public notions of morality, they have essentially a contingent quality. As reflexive agents of change, family members may or may not nurture relationships and develop commitments over time, but

either way these relationships have to be worked at rather than taken for granted.

It is clear from the argument above that individuals hold more fluid and negotiable identities as they are envisaged 'knitting their own lives' or 'cobbling together their own biographies' (Smart and Neale 1999: 10). Following on these premises, the 'new moral terrain' care ethicists criticise the backward moralising postures of political parties for viewing high divorce rates as a threat to social cohesion and as an indication of moral decline. Smart and Neale (1999), for example, argue that these concepts derive from the idea that any departure from the nuclear family is still perceived as 'deviant'. This view is reinforced by the perception that what goes on inside the family is 'essentially non-social, existing in a private sphere of life, which is governed by (supposedly) instinctual human drives such as love, sexuality and affection, which are, in turn, assumed to be quite independent from the public sphere' (1999: 185).

However, whereas family life is treated as a private matter, divorce is seen as a social problem perceived as arising from personal failure or immoral behaviour. As such, it has to be endured and managed by society at large. In part with the objective to counteract these erroneous assumptions, Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (2001) and Neale and Smart (2002) set out to investigate how patterns of parenthood and employment are maintained or transformed after divorce and how well children fair under these difficult circumstances. Separation and divorce represent the point whereby an 'intact' family is transformed into a lone parent family. Through this process, the familiar boundaries that had once regulated family relationships, their lifestyles, their routines and their prerogatives are forcibly reassessed and renegotiated. In this respect, the separating partners and their

children are forced to enter 'new moral terrains' (Smart and Neale 1999:3) and have to work hard to negotiate their way through every stage of this transformation.

In view of the wide scope of their enquiry, throughout their empirical work, Smart and Neale (1999) and Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) did not focus on lone mothers *per se*, but rather, the subjects under scrutiny were all the members of post-divorce families: mothers, fathers and their children. Consequently, samples included a mixed combination of divorced men and women who were either living by themselves or were already settled in second marriages. Amongst those who had not remarried, some lived with residential partners, others were 'seeing someone' whilst others did not have a partner. In general terms, the marriages of many of the former couples interviewed were rather conventional in regard to their earning and caring patterns. The researchers were intrigued to find out how after separation and divorce men, women and their children moved beyond those conventional, familiar boundaries. Thus, they set out to enquire what moral issues and imperatives characterised that change. The underlying objective of their work was to show that the alleged deviancy that appears to be part and parcel of post-divorce families and other family forms should not be presumed. In other words, what is taking place within families is only indicative of social change and is not symptomatic of moral lassitude and decline. From this conceptual standpoint, it was argued that the emphasis should shift from what families *are* to what families *do*.

Smart and Neale (1999) and Smart, Neale and Wade (2001) conducted their empirical studies on post-divorce families against the backdrop of 'family friendly' policies. Family policies include improvements of both paternal and maternal rights in the shape of

increase flexibility of working hours, longer family leave after the birth of a child for both parents, better conditions for part-time workers and an improvement on child care strategies. Smart and Neale stressed the notion that policy makers have been working to redefine not just motherhood but fatherhood also, in order to incorporate the role of ‘carer’ into the traditional ‘worker’ role of fathers. However, conventional family law has proved to be too prescriptive and lacking the flexibility to come to grips with actual concrete situations that would be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the people involved. In this respect, for instance, the endorsement of co-parenting for post-divorce families when there are persistent patterns of bad relations and hostility can be damaging for the women and children involved. Overall, notwithstanding the measures introduced by the first New Labour government to push co-parenting as the preferred way of caring for children in post-divorce situations, and in spite of enhancing the position of women in the workplace, Neale and Smart (2002: 184) found that the imperative of caring and earning after separation or divorce remains overwhelmingly gendered, with ‘mothers more likely to start from an imperative to care, while fathers start from an imperative to earn’. Thus, the kind of normative fossilisation that Duncan and Edwards (1999) and Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) found dominating the workplace was seen being reproduced in the domestic sphere by the ‘new moral terrain’ care ethicists.

Even against the backdrop of dissolving family units, the ‘new moral terrain’ care ethicists found that an ethic of care was the prevalent attitude and practice to emerge amongst post-divorce families. Furthermore, the texture of care expressed in these contexts underscored their pre-given assumption that there is always more than one way

to do the right thing, as it was pointed out earlier by Finch and Mason (1993) and other care ethicists. Because people do not have written manuals about how to care they often learn by being reflexively engaged with the process and through their shortcomings. Underscoring this challenge there is also the difficulty for parents to find better ways to balance their needs with those of their children. In view of the complexity of these difficulties, Smart and Neale (1999) and Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) warn about the risk of falling prey to easy categorising by reducing parenting styles and standards to the simple notion of 'good' or 'bad' parents. Indeed, they argue, concepts of 'good' parenting need to take into account the particular social context in which post-divorce families are placed. In this respect, the ethic of care that emerges is clearly informed by the nature and strength of people's connections and relations (Smart and Neale 1999: 121):

Mothers and fathers are not actually autonomous and 'unencumbered' but deeply enmeshed in a caring relationship with a dependent child, who is, in turn enmeshed in historical family relationships which make radical transformations of the self exceedingly difficult.

The thickness of these connections amongst all the moral agents in question (which also include the children) in pre-and post-divorce families is based on an ethic of care, which, they contend, is a crucial part of everyday morality. This, however, has not been acknowledged in traditional legal and political representations and in the ideologies that sustain them. As Smart and Neale (1999: 3) state:

Although questions of power, justice, fairness and rights were also important in how parents traversed this new moral terrain, we argued that there is not enough

recognition of the former concept [an ethic of care] which seem so vital in successfully negotiating (and continuously re-negotiating) post-divorce parenthood and family life.

Neale and Smart (2002) further pointed out that not all moral concerns were rooted and emerging from an ethic of care; some parents were operating primarily from the perspective of an ethic of justice, whilst others were simply seeking retribution as a way of punishing their former partners for their infidelities and perceived betrayal. Their research also indicated that considerations for the material assets brought by the children were also an important factor, which produced a certain amount of calculative thinking and affected the attitude and behaviour of both men and women. Particularly in relation to financial concerns, Neale and Smart (2002) noted that in those instances where relationships were underlined with hostility and mistrust, many parents avoided making too clear or direct remarks about financial issues because of the supposedly 'pure' social value attributed to the parent/child relationship. In considering therefore the extent by which arrangements between ex-partners were imbued with symbolic meanings, Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Neale and Smart (2002) came to see that moral concerns and financial arrangements were very much part and parcel of more complex interactions, where all these aspects were tightly intertwined. One of these complexities, for instance, has been emphasised by some lone fathers who argue that mothers now 'have it all' because they can combine caring with earning. This particular point of view however does not account for the widespread view that by being non-resident, fathers have much more personal freedom and earning potential than lone mothers have.

For ‘new moral terrain’ care ethicists the process of negotiating new patterns of parenting is based on a number of combining relevant factors, which include: the pre-existing history of the ‘former family’, the nature of the existing relationship between former partners, childcare availability, support from other family members, the potential for new partnership and new family commitments, financial assets and housing tenure and the opportunities or constraints of work. In this respect for instance, it was observed (Neale and Smart 2002) that the conceptualisation and practice of ‘motherhood’ and ‘fatherhood’ were deeply linked. Consequently, a ‘transformation in fathering cannot take place without a corresponding transformation in mothering and in the identities of mothers’ (Neale and Smart 2002: 194). For this to take place, they argue, it is time that family law frees itself from a narrow concept of welfare and broadens its understanding of care. Family law must become sensitive to actual realities and contexts and respectful of people’s individualities and sense of selfhood. This must be inclusive of the needs of all those involved in a post-divorce negotiation and not only to the children. It should include also recognition of the sense of loss that follows a break up, the need to rebuild a ‘true’ self and an acknowledgment of the time required for that transition to occur.

To summarise, if on the one hand the ‘new moral terrain’ care ethicists considered the dichotomous opposition of ‘atomistic economic’ fathers versus ‘caring mothers’ as a little too simplistic, on the other hand, they found that old masculine and feminine stereotypes were still strong and surprisingly resilient to changing trends. This is why they concluded that both the working and non-working mothers involved in their studies still saw their children as their prime responsibility and tried as a result to change and adjust their

working schedule around them. By the same token, this was also the prime reason why fathers - regardless if they were at work or were unemployed - saw themselves bound up primarily to a worker and provider identity and, as a result, fathers tended to accommodate their caring responsibilities around their individual working schedules and lifestyles.

The transformation in family forms highlight the development of new family practices to which the children interviewed demonstrated an overall ability to adapt. Children are resilient and capable of high levels of self-awareness and growth even as they go through practical and emotional turmoil. Throughout these processes, Smart, Neale and Wade (2001: 173) explain that:

[Children] need to acquire new skills and the cultural capital that will help them to manage the personal and social transformations associated with family change. [Consequently] in seeking to create family policies more suited to the 2000s than the 1950s, we need to import different ethical guidelines.

These have to be based on an ethic of care that values the contextualised and concrete realities of all the members of post-divorce families and is appreciative of the dignity and worth encapsulated in each person. It is against the empirical and conceptual backdrops highlighted above that my empirical work on WLMs has developed.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter I have explored some of the most relevant empirical contributions made by care ethicists to an ethic of care primarily within the context of post-divorce families

and a predominantly British socio-political landscape. Specifically, I have analysed some of the 'grounded' work carried out by scholars who, by various degrees, have been operating within CAVA's influence and perspectives. Significant in this context, has been the research of Duncan and Edwards (1999), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) and Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003). In their writings Duncan and Edwards (1999) have focused on lone mothers and have investigated the circumstances under which mothers with dependent children decide if and when to take paid employment and childcare. Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001) have continued the exploration on the family by analysing post-divorce families. They do so by giving a voice to various members of former family units (mothers, fathers and children) in the attempt to understand what happens to kin relationships after divorce.

On the other hand, Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) focused on partnered mothers and fathers with pre-school children. They intended to draw attention to the imbedded tensions that characterise the modern negotiation of public/private responsibilities and their impact on couples' relationships and parental roles. What they found reinforced the empirical finding of Duncan and Edward (1999), Smart and Neale (1999) and Smart, Neale and Wade (1999, 2001). Namely although family-friendly policies are widespread in the public sector and in large private organisations, they do not often deliver what they promise. This is primarily because working policies, cultures and practices are still, in most cases, operating along traditional gender lines and, as such, they tend to reinforce and consolidate pre-existing boundaries. As a result, the notion of finding and achieving a 'family/work' balance remains still a rather elusive concept

amongst many families, creating various kinds of hardship and conflicts particularly amongst working (lone) mothers. Overall, findings amongst these researchers draw attention to at least one overriding theme. In spite of the fact that families are changing in their structure and form, the so-called ‘family values’ with which families have been typically associated, have not changed. Indeed, parents and children alike remain ‘energetic moral agents’ actively involved in negotiating and weighing possibilities, alternatives, consequences and outcomes of their actions. Bearing these considerations in mind, the next chapter will now turn to a detailed description of the methodology used to carry out my investigation.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Methodologically this research has been carried out within the framework of ‘feminist research practice’ (Maynard 1994; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1994). From an ontological perspective, feminist research is distinctive because beyond its epistemological underpinnings, it focuses above all on the persistent condition of gender division and inequality in society. Within this, the primary drive has been towards promoting new levels of awareness aimed at unhinging distorted and fossilised attitudes and behaviours whilst encouraging political and cultural change. Furthermore, a ‘feminist research practice’ implies an ontological and epistemological openness to consider and scrutinize *all* aspects in which research is conducted.

Drawing from this conceptual framework, Kelly (1988, cited in Maynard 1994: 15) argues that it is not primarily the method that is representative of a feminist stance, but rather is the way in which ‘the questions are asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work’ that gives feminist research its distinctive character. In advocating the need for transparency in research, Maynard (1994:16) stresses the importance of including the ‘researcher’s intellectual autobiography’ into a ‘feminist research practice’, thus facilitating a move towards the democratisation of research (Kelly, Burton and Reagan 1994). This democratisation occurs on two different levels: firstly in relation to the interested and informed reader (the academic world,

practitioners, politicians and so on) and secondly, in relation to the respondent, with whom the researcher engages in a non-exploitative way (Mies 1993).

In the light of these considerations, the crucial question is not simply how to best ‘see’ through the eyes of respondents and then mirror and magnify their concerns. It has to do also with an ability to understand and interpret those concerns, taking into account that researchers will have assumptions of their own, upon which to base an understanding of the social world (Clarke 2006). ‘To imply otherwise’, Maynard (1994:23) argues, ‘would be disingenuous’. Indeed, ‘no feminist study’ (or any other for that matter) ‘can be politically neutral, completely inductive or solely based on grounded theory’ (Maynard 1994:23). It follows that within the landscape of ‘feminist research practice’, academics have become aware that feminist methodologies do more than just mirror or describe the social world. In addition, by bringing women’s contingent realities to the fore, feminist research and their methodologies, intend to illuminate the embedded nature of the ambivalent and fractured social contexts that many women inhabit today. In so doing, within qualitative and quantitative research frameworks, feminists are attempting to bring a new balance and redraw the conceptual lines of what should constitute and qualify the dominant ‘moral point of view’.

This said, because a description of the world cannot be divorced from its interpretative process, even under the best research practices, description could amount to prescription, in which embedded biases are unwittingly concealed. Thus, it becomes rather self-evident why, from the outset of fieldwork activity, the researcher’s personal assumptions

should be accounted for and made explicit. Following this line of reasoning, it has been pointed out that the process of qualitative data analysis is frequently unclear since 'it is often not obvious how the analysis was conducted - and what the researcher was actually doing when the data was analysed and therefore how the study's conclusions were arrived at' (Bryman 2001: 283). Similarly, Kelly, Burton and Regan (1994) speak out against the compulsion of producing 'hygienic' research. That is, 'the censoring out of the mess, confusion and complexity of doing research, so that the accounts bear little or no relation to the real events. [This is the reason why so] many of our accounts are full of silences too' (1994: 46). Mindful of these concerns, I entered my fieldwork aware of the importance of possible biases and 'blind spots' (Clarke 2006) that could affect or even compromise a researcher's work.

Consequently, at the onset of my fieldwork, I consciously endeavoured to maintain an open-minded approach, accepting as a realistic possibility the notion that many WLMs, who may be exposed to similar conditions to my own, could enjoy satisfying lives with very different experiences and outcomes. To my mind, this prospect was also equally interesting because it would have generated a diverse scenario and opened up the study to a wider field of enquiry. All these autobiographical features, which ultimately should help clarify my position as a researcher, were discussed at length in chapter one. Hence, I will now proceed into the next section and address the socio-political context in which the research has developed.

4.2 The research focus

Seen from this conceptual standpoint, WLMs seem to be standing on a symbolic fault line of unstable plates. These represent the practices, culture and ideology that underline the social construction of formal paid work on the one hand and of informal unpaid work on the other. By being both primary carers with relatively little support in the private domain whilst employed in the public domain, WLMs are strategically positioned to bring into full light the hidden contradictions and the moral paradoxes of a flawed system that most people, unquestioningly, attempt to absorb, rationalise and normalise in their own lives. As the literature review has indicated, the concept of ‘paid’ work has been tailored to fit the most reductivist interpretation and criteria by simply describing the ‘productive’ cycle of the (male and unattached) ‘adult worker’ (Lewis 2002, 2006; Barlow, Duncan and James 2002). This is an abstract rationalisation that stands as the latest incarnation or latest evolutionary stage of a process that has emerged from the historical struggle of female subordination (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998). As has been discussed earlier, the outcome of these processes has meant that under the universal and undisputed banner of the ‘adult worker’ model, the formation of distorted alignments, which currently underline the ethos of advanced industrial economies and the likely re-emergence of neo-classic ‘extreme’ capitalism (Crompton 2006), will probably increase and intensify (Hochschild 2001, Glover 2002, Himmelweit 2002, 2005). Against this backdrop, if working mothers with (presumably) supporting partners are experiencing serious difficulties (Hochschild 2001, Williams 2004) in terms of finding the time to perform their caring responsibilities, how much more difficult can it be for WLMs to maintain this difficult balancing act? In bringing together all these various strands, what

emerges is a picture of a social group that more than any other group of women (such as non-economically active mothers or full-time carers) is best investigated within the methodological parameters of a critical case study (Baxter and Jack 2008). That is, by being generally vulnerable, most exposed and susceptible to the extreme demands of both environments, WLMs are ideally positioned to embody and, at the same time, draw out the conflicting and often paradoxical underpinnings of ‘paid work’ and ‘unpaid, informal care’ as they have been constructed within their particular local contexts.

In so doing, the wider social ambivalences, power relations and structures that implicitly or explicitly endorse the clash between the two ethical discourses of work and care (the ‘tectonic plates’ to continue with the analogy) should be also more clearly identified and exposed. The focus on WLMs as a critical case study becomes even sharper if considering that the majority of the fieldwork respondents seem to embody equally strong worker/carer identities. This means that contrary to other models (Hakim 2000, Duncan and Edwards 1999) whereby (lone) working mothers oscillated from possessing *only* mothers’ or workers’ identities to displaying a mix of the two, the majority of WLMs sampled here manifested a keenness to present themselves as both, ‘good’ workers *and* ‘good’ mothers by responding as best as their could to reflexive understandings of their equally strong worker/mother identities. Thus, by ‘choosing’ to sit uncomfortably on this seismic ‘faulty line’ and through interrogating their moral paradoxes, concerns, victories and shortcomings, WLMs can shed a new and revealing light on the wider distortions and deep problems faced by society today.

Another way in which this conceptual ‘faulty line’ can be depicted is by using the language and concepts of moral philosophy. From this perspective, it could be argued that WLMs exist and function in the teleological context of utilitarian principles. That is, WLMs exercise their moral agency in a normative framework that is action-based and designed to achieve well-defined ends. Conceptually however, WLMs are positioned and/or position themselves much more within a deontological context. Namely narrative processes are embedded in moral frameworks that are defined and bound by the rule of law and by duty and obligation, which can act as categorical imperatives. WLMs’ deontological context is deeply rooted in the socially constructed role of ‘natural’ carers and homemakers. However, the particular nature of contemporary teleological concerns, which reflect the privatised and marketised self-interests of technocratic-interpretivist practices in the world of work, grants very little space to the flourishing of deeper moral imperatives lived and enjoyed for their own sake. The tension that arises from not being able to respond to what is perceived to be a woman’s ‘natural’ call is what ultimately defines the depth and intensity of WLMs’ *charge mentale*, colours their daily moral dilemmas and becomes instrumental in preserving a too often irrational sense of guilt.

4.2.1 Framing the research

Having justified the underlying reasons for choosing WLMs as my ‘unit of analysis’ or critical case study I will now proceed to outline the background that shaped this thesis. To begin with, it should be noted that an empirical study that explores the social environments and the interaction *between* ‘work’ and ‘care’ presents some epistemological challenges. This is because the conventional spatial/temporal separation

of spheres, as well as their management and perceptions, from the 1970s have been increasingly less valid in post-industrial Britain (see section 3.9). In these respects, the more fluid the demarcation line between private and public spaces, the more blurred the boundaries will be. This in turn could make more difficult the process of momentarily ‘freezing the frame’ in order to reproduce a snapshot, or an image in time, of public/private dynamics.

One way in which this methodological difficulty can be circumvented is by considering the area under investigation as a single case study with embedded units (Yin 2003). A single case study such as this is defined by the specificity of the single object of investigation (WLMs), the particular conceptual area (as perceived through the eyes of the WLMs concerned) and the fields within which the research is carried out (the public/private domain). From an epistemological point of view, to focus upon embedded units means to deconstruct a large framework into sub-themes, which can then be analysed separately, by considering the links *within*, *between* and *across* component parts of the case study before attempting to reconstruct its various parts into an organic whole.

Thus, in attempting to define both the boundaries that should frame and limit this research and the questions to be asked, I have developed a number of themes to be analysed *within* each of the two spheres. In this respect for instance, from *within* the public sphere the following sub-themes were emphasised: the negotiation of paid work commitments, their management, the nature of ‘flexibility’ in work arrangements and WLMs’ calculation of their benefits’ entitlement. *Within* the domestic sphere, some of

the most meaningful sub-themes to emerge were: the type and quality of care WLMs were able to provide for their children, care for self, the importance of their partial life history, the effect of a pervading sense of guilt and the value of WLMs' relational networks.

As the analysis progressed links were made also *between* various sub-themes in each section as well as *across* (Yin 2003) the public/private divide. On this account, the spaces in *between* public/private could be identified in WLMs' management of going to and from schools and nurseries, to pre- and after- schools events and in the family pursuit of 'outside' recreational activities and outings with family and friends. Thus, new sub-themes or categories were created in the process of doing the fieldwork. These new themes emphasised the link *between* spheres as well as underlying WLMs' reflexive understanding and active management of those situations. Finally, by comparing and contrasting WLMs' moral narratives, I cut *across* sub-themes and drew conclusions about the effect that one environment (the public) exercises above the other (private). Such a holistic approach provided this critical case study with a stronger platform for analysing the underpinnings of an ethic of work and of an ethic of care as they are perceived and articulated by the WLMs concerned.

4.3 The research questions

From this description, it is evident that most of the sub-themes mentioned above have been generated inductively, from a grounded approach. With regard to the research questions however, I have already clearly stated my personal and sociological interest in

this research. Indeed, in this respect, I had a preliminary set of questions to begin with. This said a much more focused set of research questions came to be actually formulated and finalised later on, through the early stages of the fieldwork, during the first pilot interviews. Broadly speaking, the objective of this research has been to offer through theoretical and empirical exploration, a meaningful contribution towards an understanding of an active ethic of care as it is derived from the perceptions, the decision making process and the moral agency of WLMs in contemporary south Wales. This was to be achieved by investigating how WLMs manage to care, whilst at the same time accounting for the effect that local and national contexts have on their ability to respond to multiple and complex demands.

More specifically, I linked this general research aim to a specific theoretical point, in part raised by Himmelweit in her theoretical work. Himmelweit (2002, 2005) cautions about the potentially conflicting demands that changeable contemporary lifestyles are generating for men and women alike. She contends that as gender roles and identities become increasingly blurred, the potential for a certain 'care deficit' or caring 'gap' within the management of family practices could also increase. In other words, due to the growing commitments of women to the workplace and the alleged confusion that is following the restructuring and managing of the domestic sphere, she has postulated that modern dual-parent families could be positioned as generating a 'caring deficit' or a 'caring gap' in relation to the care that they are able to give to their children. This notion could raise some delicate questions about WLMs' ability to care. That is, if, as Himmelweit (2002) contends, the current situation is potentially problematic for dual-

parent families, who (presumably) can rely on each other's help to perform shared responsibilities within the household, how much more difficult would it be for WLMs to invest fully in their caring responsibilities when they are generally more at a disadvantage than their married or cohabiting counterparts? Thus, mindful of the above considerations, the questions that this research has addressed are both empirical and theoretical. They can be articulated as follows:

- 1 Evaluate the shape that 'care' takes in the contextualised practices of WLMs' daily lives in relation to their children, to themselves and to their 'relational network'.*
- 2 Based on the empirical evidence from fieldwork analysis, propose new understandings of the ways in which 'care' is perceived and exercised by these WLMs.*
- 3 Assess the current perspectives on an ethic of care in contraposition to an ethic of work and propose new ways to enhance and support the former within the contemporary UK socio-political context.*

Within this scope, I have been primarily concerned with two points of tension that influence directly WLMs' moral agency. The first concerns WLMs' ability to bring a degree of stability and balance into their households and into their lives (Glover 2002) whilst responding 'successfully' to the demands that their multiple roles entail. From this, the second issue has been to ascertain how WLMs manage to care for their children first and foremost and then for themselves when increasingly less time is available to achieve any of those roles at adequate levels (Hochschild 2001, Himmelweit 2002).

Throughout the fieldwork, these themes were addressed and developed by listening to the respondents, by recording the interviews and by providing a supportive feedback to their in-depth reflexive accounts. Thus, following my line of questioning, the respondents focused in their narratives on describing their working environments, their difficulties in managing to prioritise and maintain their various commitments, their interpretation and practice of 'good' mothering, the amount of 'active' and 'passive' care practiced at home and the types of activities shared with the children.

4.4 The research process

4.4.1 Defining the sample

From the fieldwork data collection, I have conducted 30 in-depth and five partial (pilot) semi-structured interviews in the southwest area of Wales between the Rhondda Valley, Pontypridd and Cardiff. My target population consisted of un-partnered and separated/divorced lone mothers, between the ages of 25 and 50, all of whom had been living on average for five years without a resident partner, had children aged 16 or under and were in full-time or in long part-time employment (25 hours per week and above). In defining the parameters for 'work', I also took into account the variable amount of studying and retraining that working lone mothers added to their paid work, in order to improve their employment prospects. I felt that it was relevant to understand why working lone mothers, who already feel pressurised with their paid and unpaid work, take on further 'work' commitments of this kind, and how more work (albeit unpaid) could further impinge on their caring responsibilities. Contrary to the original estimate, by which I had envisaged interviewing 40 lone mothers, I became convinced that a smaller

number of about 30-35 respondents was sufficient to complete this research. This conclusion was reached following the careful examination of the 'thickness' and quality of the 35 interviews, which lasted on average between 1.30 to three hours (in transcribing terms, between 5.000 and 10.000 words). Based on that, I came to the conclusion that I had reached data saturation and that presently there was no more relevant information to be added.

All the 35 working lone mothers interviewed self-defined as white. There were a mix of middle class and working class women belonging to a wide range of professions, including nurses, receptionists, office workers, teachers and social workers (for a detailed demographic description of the sample see Appendix 8). In addition, 13 of them were retraining, whilst ten WLMs were studying at an undergraduate level or above. A preliminary fieldwork analysis has highlighted a shifting notion of class as well as the prevalence of an ethnically homogeneous sample population (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk> 2006). Undoubtedly, it is a shortcoming of this research that all the women interviewed were white; different cultural traditions, with their varying family support systems, could have enriched and diversified this study. Regrettably, neither the snowballing process nor the various contacts with local organisations generated any meaningful results in terms of attracting lone mothers from different ethnic backgrounds.

It should be however noted that the Rhondda Valley is disproportionately homogeneous, with white people peaking at 98 per cent of the population in most areas

(<http://www.statistics.gov.uk> 2006). Even so, I am in no doubt that, had I been a member of an ethnic community myself, I would have had a more realistic chance of finding potential respondents. Having said this, within this all-white group there were a number of WLMs with different national backgrounds. Specifically, there were a few women of mixed European heritage, a Canadian, a Norwegian and a few English women. Whilst some of them were totally integrated within their group and community, others lived away from their closest family members and felt uprooted from their country of origin. These women, as my analysis will go on to argue, came to rely much more on their 'family' of friends.

Following Duncan and Edwards' lead (1999), who applied self-definition criteria in relation to the concept of class, it seemed appropriate to let the respondents define themselves in their own class terms. This was done by simply adding the question 'how do you see yourself in terms of class or status?' to the questionnaire used to collect basic biographical information at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix A7). Although notions of status, class, ethnicity, race and religion were not used as defining categories for sample selection, the replies given by the respondents with regard to class and status were interesting and revealing. Sixteen of the lone mothers interviewed considered themselves belonging to the working classes, eight saw themselves as part of the middle classes; others however defined their class status in the following terms:

- 1) Working/middle class (4 WLMs gave this class description)
- 2) Working class?
- 3) Upper/working class
- 4) Classless
- 5) Unconventional/outside the class status
- 6) None
- 7) Working class background, but I don't see myself belonging to any particular class
- 8) Lower to middle class

These responses stress further the notion that beyond the conventional discourses that have dominated class analysis (such as the grand narrative of class consciousness), the current uncertainty in describing one's class derives from the complexity of changing and interlinked factors, which include concepts of social mobility.

4.4.2 Gaining access

At the onset of the fieldwork, I contacted the local Gingerbread Association (part of the National One Parent Family Organisation). Secondly, through phone calls and internet messages, I contacted a number of individuals in local institutions and public places such as 'Communities First' regeneration centres, libraries, schools, Sure Start nurseries and so on. The institutions targeted were all located in three towns: Tonyrefail East and West,

Pen-y-Graig and Rhydfelen. The reason for their selection was based on the following combined criteria: a proportionally higher number of lone mothers resident in those areas (2001 Census), their closeness to Pontypridd (where I am located), and a list of contact numbers that I received from a coordinator of 'Communities First' centres, based in the University of Glamorgan. Particularly in the early stages of my fieldwork, I took action to meet in person those key individuals who, by being the gatekeepers of organisations and institutions, could facilitate my access to a larger sample of WLMs.

Overall, the outcome of this exercise was rather disappointing and the results were negligible. In the event, 70 per cent of the lone mothers interviewed were approached through snowballing methods by contacting friends and acquaintances. At the same time the geographical area for the fieldwork spread from the Rhondda Valley to Cardiff, where I found a third of the respondents. During that period, every reasonable opportunity for socialising that I had was for me a potential chance for expanding my fieldwork. This was for instance the case in my local sport centre, where I had the opportunity of interviewing two WLMs. The remaining 30 per cent was found by 'throwing the net' as widely as possible, in the hope of gaining also access within specific organisations who dealt primarily with lone parents. The summary list below describes the contacts that I made, mostly between the winter of 2006 and January/February 2007, both at a more formal and semi-formal levels, in the early stages of my fieldwork.

- 1 I placed posters in strategic locations (places of high public visibility) such as post offices, libraries and windows of busy shops. This was most intensively and

- systematically carried out in the Pontypridd area.
- 2 I contacted coordinators and directors at the YMCA, Home Start and Barnardo's centres in Pontypridd. All of these centres relate in some capacity, directly or indirectly, to working lone parents and their children.
 - 3 I visited numerous times the two community centres in Rhydfelen and I did speak with their co-ordinators. Through them I managed to contact and interview two WLMs.
 - 4 With my children's help, I 'carpet bombed' with fliers a few residential areas which are within a two mile radius from my house (see an example in appendices A1 and A2). Early in the fieldwork, the flier A2 came to replace A1, which was too long and difficult to read. I also did some canvassing in my residential area with modest results. On this occasion two WLM responded, one of whom lived just at the end of my street.
 - 5 I used the information in the flier to contact the new director of the Gingerbread group in Wales. She placed this information in the media website section of the Gingerbread association. At the same time, she contacted the groups in Cardiff, Llanharan, Newport and Risca asking interested members to contact me directly. My high expectations were dashed here because only two WLMs replied.
 - 6 I addressed my Italian classes by revealing to them my 'double identity' as teacher and researcher. Then after explaining my work, I solicited their participation. The sample from this particular group (seven in all) was made of Welsh WLMs from Cardiff.
 - 7 I briefly introduced the research to the women in my tutorial groups at the

university. In this context, I did not so much solicit their participation because it is unlikely that lone mothers who are in full time education may be also working in full time or long part-time jobs. Also, as their tutor, it would have been unethical to seek their direct participation. Nonetheless, I did find three lone mothers students who fitted these criteria and who were happy to participate. Within the campus, I also had the opportunity of interviewing another four WLMs who were employed at various levels in administration.

- 8 An offshoot of this exposure resulted in being afterwards contacted by the local press (*The Pontypridd Observer*). Following a short conversation on the phone with a local journalist, a small article was then published (Appendix A4). Through this medium, one WLM contacted me and she was later interviewed.

As mentioned earlier, in attempting to gain access to my target population, I found that the most effective method was to rely on direct, informal approaches. Interestingly however, this was also possible in those formal working environments where I was known either as an Italian teacher or as a lecturer. Within all these contexts, the boundaries between formal and informal environments became somewhat blurred in terms of my own teacher/lecturer/student/worker and mother identities. The conceptual underpinning of this correlates with Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards' (2002: 211) theory, in which the 'personal' element (that is, the constructed sense of the self built through social interaction), is seen as potentially capable of bridging - through a degree of harmonious overlapping - the public and private spheres of life.

4.4.3 The interviewing process

Following the requests and preferences of my respondents, the 35 interviews were conducted in various locations. WLMs were interviewed in the University of Glamorgan's campus - either in my office or in areas designed for this purpose - and in their work places (i.e. offices and training centres). However, by far, the greatest number of respondents were interviewed in their own homes. Typically, I would make an appointment by phone and be at their door with a bottle of wine and a 'panettone' cake (the second item was an added extra during the Christmas season) on a day that was most convenient to them. The wine and cake were only a token, a symbolic act that subscribed to the unwritten codes of respected 'good' social conventions. Nevertheless, these tokens were invariably received with much appreciation (again responding to established norms and expectations). For me, they represented a way of exchanging something (my modest gifts) for something else (their time and availability) and bring a degree of balance in the fieldwork process.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, open conversations lasting on average between one hour and a half to three hours. To begin with, I introduced myself by explaining what I was doing and why. Normally at that point, I reinforced what I had just said by producing the flier for them to read. I further reassured the respondents of the confidential and anonymous nature of our conversations and explained my need for using a recording machine. No one ever objected or appeared to feel uneasy with it. My impression was that the tape recorder was forgotten immediately after the ice was broken, which was usually a few minutes into the interview. Prior to starting the interview, I

asked the respondents to complete the autobiographical questionnaire (see Appendix A7). On this account, when stressing the confidential nature of this research to the participants, I also suggested signing under a different name. During the conversation I would glance occasionally at my checklist, which was modified to address more appropriately the chronological order of the questions posed (see appendices A4 and A5), and to make sure that I was not missing any important details. In order to improve on transparency, I also provided a biographical summary for each respondent with information that was obtained from the questionnaires (see Appendix A8).

Throughout my fieldwork, I have endeavoured to maintain an attitude of sympathetic understanding as well as refine an ability to listen. Mindful of this, the level of my 'participation' during the interviewing process became increasingly limited to specific situations. Namely to encourage and support the participants if they stumbled on difficult and emotional issues, to invite them to be clearer or more detailed about the points that they were making and to verify that I understood them correctly and I had not misunderstood the meaning of their words. On all of these accounts, the concept of 'democratisation' in communication (Mies 1993) throughout the interviewing process - as I came to understand it - is meant to be experienced as an attitude or a state of mind, rather than as a practice to be exercised in 'conversation'.

This research is 'grounded' in situational practice, thus it supports the notion that new knowledge (through the exploration of uncharted, under-explored or misunderstood social issues), can arise from the process of *doing* fieldwork. In the very early stages of

my fieldwork, this served to sharpen and finalise my research focus. The sense of evolution and progression that characterised the beginning of the fieldwork was thus reflected in a few adjustments made to the wording and the sequential order of my interview checklist and to the flier. As a result, the final streamlined version of the interview checklist came to be organised in two sections under the headings ‘care for the other’ and ‘care for the self’ (see Appendix A6). These few and simple modifications did not affect the substance of my questions but improved considerably the logical and sequential order in which I was posing them. This in turn allowed the clear and unobstructed emergence of significant patterns and themes, which were reviewed, coded and analysed at a later time.

In addition, early on in the fieldwork, I was presented with an epistemological dilemma. When first approached, a common reaction amongst many WLMs was to present a ‘good picture’ of their current situation and of their lives in general. This state of affairs seemed to be clearly linked to a pervading uneasiness of being potentially assessed and judged on their individual ‘performance’ in their roles as both mothers and workers and being found not good or competent enough. Although in the current climate such an attitude is not surprising, I was potentially presented with a serious methodological problem. For how could I possibly think of developing a better understanding of working lone mothers, if the women in question gave only a sanitised portrayal of their lives? I gradually began to overcome this problem by implementing a number of strategies, which included the rephrasing of some sensitive questions. So, for instance, the question: ‘what is a good mum for you?’ which occasionally was perceived by some of the

respondents as too direct or difficult to qualify, was replaced with the more open and neutral ‘What kind of life are you hoping to give to your child/ren? or ‘What do you feel you need to do to help your children to achieve that?’. I further introduced questions like ‘In terms of taking care of your children, what you would say has been the most difficult time that you have experienced?’

Although quite specific, questions posed outside a specific spatial/temporal framework create a perception of openness and, therefore, are less confrontational. In other words, to think in terms of a ‘before’ and ‘after’, could help the respondents to feel more free to engage in an exploratory investigation of their life events and attitudes without feeling pressurised into giving accounts of the ‘now’. However, since life experiences cannot be so neatly compartmentalised, the present will be naturally drawn into the context of the discussion, thus allowing for the development of a more complete narrative and a better sequential understanding of current events and behaviours. Soon after the first few pilot interviews, I reached a fairly stable and consistent interviewing technique, which peaked to its optimum level approximately half way through the interviewing process. For me this meant to combine effectively the ‘know how’ with a better understanding of the order and relevance of the questions to be asked and explored, the ‘right’ attitude to address them and interact with the respondent, and an heightened sensitivity toward maximising the situational setting in which the interview took place. This included checking that the respondent was physically comfortable, that the interview took place in a relatively quiet part of the building, and that the respondent had allocated enough time for the meeting. In this way, she could take the necessary time to think and address all

the important points that would have emerged without feeling rushed and constrained by time or other contingent situations, such as those arising from the children's immediate needs.

Relevant to this latter point, I found that the majority of WLMs had made provisions about such a possibility and they had either a friend or a relative who took charge of the children during the interview. In addition, a minority of WLMs were interviewed in their work place because they felt that their working environment was more conducive to the interviewing process. This was indeed the case for a woman who worked for a charitable organisation and for a few more employed in the public sector within the educational department under a 'flexitime' regime. This said there were also times when communication became loaded with intense emotions and respondents were visibly distressed. In such cases as these, I found it very helpful to rely on a clearly structured and well 'signed posted' interview checklist. This allowed me to navigate through some delicate moments without getting lost in the narrative of WLMs' accounts whilst being able, at the same time, to empathise with the respondents without becoming too 'technical'. A confirmation of this balanced approach came directly from some specific comments and general feedbacks that I received from respondents who commented on the very positive and 'therapeutic' effect of being able to talk at length about deeply felt issues and concerns. This was particularly important to them as they observed that much of what was said during the interview would not normally feature in ordinary conversations.

As the fieldwork developed, so did the interviews, which seemed to evolve through more nuanced and layered conceptual stages. As a result, the first set of interviews (the first five-six), whilst addressing issues of care within the family domain, placed particular emphasis on WLMs' 'life-work' reconciliation and on the ways in which working and family environments were interlocked to affect one another. In the second set, although accounting for the working circumstances that affected individual family arrangements, I focused much more decisively on the 'care' dimension within the home environment. In the third set, my interviews were streamlined to encompass, in a comprehensive and methodical fashion, the three major areas of concern of this study, namely the management of working environments, the negotiation of public and private spaces and the dimension of care towards the children and the self, both articulated within the contexts of WLMs' relational networks.

4.5 Method used for interpretation

Because of the richness of the data that usually typify qualitative research, Bryman (2001) warns that one of the biggest challenges with which the researcher is confronted is in the difficulty of finding 'analytical patterns through that richness' (2001: 388). He also alerts researchers against the risk of getting lost in the thickness of the prose that makes up transcribed interviews. To add to this difficulty, it has been suggested (Miles 1979) that there are not many well-established rules about the best way to handle and analyse the usually vast amounts of data collected. As a result, all that is generally offered are some broad guidelines. The most common strategy for analysis entails the breaking down or fragmentation of the data into definable and manageable components.

These components are those themes and concepts which have been emerging inductively from transcriptions. In the framework of this research, the small sample of respondents made it easier to carry out this process manually and not electronically.

Thus, I began by moving back and forth from a micro to a macro perspective (and vice versa) by listening to the recorded tapes again, reading through my data and making notes about significant emerging patterns. These conceptual patterns or main themes, were separated, compiled, structured and coded in order to allow for the development of meaningful categories. From this process six core categories emerged and they came to define the thesis within the following parameters:

- 1) *WLMs' organisation of paid work*
- 2) *The calculation of benefits' entitlements*
- 3) *WLMs' spatial and temporal negotiation of public/ private spaces*
- 4) *the type and quality of care given to the children as perceived by WLMs within their family domain*
- 5) *the dimensions of the relational networks in which WLMs find themselves*
- 6) *the type and quality of care WLMs allocated to themselves*

Based on this classification, in chapter five, I will address the first three themes, in chapter six and seven, I will explore the fourth, while chapters eight and nine will develop the remaining two areas respectively.

4.6 Ethical considerations

As briefly outlined in session 4.5.3 ('the interviewing process'), this research complies

with the BSA ethical guidelines currently framing and informing both quantitative and qualitative research. Within this context, my primary concern has been to carry out a research that safeguarded first the interests of the respondents. This was done mainly by engaging the WLMs of this study in a responsible and moral manner and by striving to report my findings as accurately and truthfully as possible. In epistemological terms however, within a feminist research practice, fieldwork began with a need for transparency.

This I believe was achieved in this research by placing my personal and sociological interests within the research methodological framework and by clarifying the nature and objectives of the study to the respondents throughout the fieldwork. Secondly, I strived to uphold the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This was particularly important since, as it will be highlighted in the following chapters, the interviews included some harrowing accounts of attempted suicides as well as intimate stories of betrayal and of physical and emotional abuse. This sensitive material was transcribed and analysed with care whilst the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents and of all the material produced was protected by the anonymous nature of the autobiographical questionnaires. In those cases where respondents did not follow my recommendations and used their own names, I changed them myself. Similarly, whenever possible, most working environments remained unidentifiable. At the end of the fieldwork, I encrypted the 35 interviews and safely stored them with the electronic copies of my fieldwork notes and observations. Paper documentations and audio cassettes have also been securely archived.

4.7 Critical reflections

At the end of my fieldwork, I looked back and reflected over the content of some of the observations made whilst writing chapter four. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear to me that some statements were grounded more on theoretical presuppositions than practice and, as such, they appear to be perhaps too simplistic and idealised. In view of this, I will briefly review my position and offer a more ‘realistic’ evaluation regarding some statements made earlier at the introduction of this methodological chapter. The issues for review include the unquestioned notion that a ‘feminist research practice’ subscribes to a ‘democratisation’ of research (Kelly, Burton and Reagan 1994), which, I argued, ‘occurs on two different levels: firstly in relation to the interested and informed reader (the academic world, practitioners, politicians and so on) and secondly, in relation to the respondent, with whom the researcher engages in a non-exploitative way’ (see 4.1: 126-127). It is my persuasion now that both these statements should be revisited and assessed in a more critical light. Firstly, it is disputable how ‘democratic’ the access process may be since power relations within the academic world are no different from those existing elsewhere (Letherby 2003). As such, they impose hierarchies of approaches and outputs (Stanley and Wise 2000). Secondly, throughout the interviewing process, I was keen to subscribe to a kind of feminist orthodoxy claiming that in ‘feminist research practice’ the subject-object relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee must be defined, amongst other things, by a clear ‘democratic’ framework (Mies 1993). Part of this conceptualisation, is the basic idea that as a feminist researcher,

I am acting as a conduit to give women a voice and a stage in which to express and articulate their experiences and concerns. In that capacity, I was serving a feminist cause from an implicitly 'democratic' standpoint. Whilst the desire and commitment to channel WLMs' experiences and prerogatives has fundamentally motivated, inspired and guided my journey, I am more hesitant about making claims over the 'democratic' nature that should supposedly define the interviewing process and subject/object relations. I question my earlier theoretical assumptions on two fronts.

First, I realised that how I 'read' and interpreted the stories that I had been told was left to my ability as a researcher to do my job well and do it with integrity. This in itself required a sense of moral responsibility towards a genuine pursuit of knowledge and the 'honest' representation of one's respondents. As I came to realise soon enough, this sense of moral responsibility is important because, in spite of claims of 'democratisation', it is evident to me that the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is inherently based on an unequal power relation that places the interviewer in a predominant position of power and authority. Furthermore, I should also point out that an understated objective for doing the research in the first place, was not so highly 'altruistic'. Simply put, I needed to complete the research to gain a PhD in order to be able to move onwards and upwards in life. On this account at least, I was not different from all those WLMs, who were attempting to carve a place of their own in their respective social environments. Overall, whilst these contingent realities do not detract from the value of the research, it is helpful to develop an ever more concrete and contextual understanding of social problems and realities, free from 'sanitised' accounts,

ideological postulates and power struggles that could potentially affect the outcome of genuine research effort.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological underpinnings on which this thesis rests. In it, I have first described the socio-political context in which WLMs are situated and I have justified the reasons for selecting this group as a critical case study. Crucially positioned at the crossroad of diverging ethical discourses and, often starting from a position of disempowerment, WLMs are often immersed in ‘technocratic- interpretativist’ working environments, where there are expected to perform according to the cultural and political aspirational model of the ‘adult worker’ model. Yet, the expectations for their ‘performance’ at home are just as high. It is against these underlying cultural and political contexts that I have designed my fieldwork to study WLMs’ caring practices.

This was done by clarifying first the research questions. This research endeavoured to ascertain the type and quality of the ethic of care that WLMs were able to exercise first and foremost towards their children. From this standpoint, the research focus shifted to investigate WLMs’ attempts to manage to care for themselves whilst embedded within their communities of close family and friends. In this context, when describing WLMs’ communities, the fieldwork illuminated two main areas, one relevant to the level of ‘structural’ support (such as the number and quality of schools, nurseries and after-school clubs) that WLMs could access, the other concerning the kind of interaction and communication articulated through the relational networks in which WLMs were situated and which they helped to shape. After having clarified and finalised the research

questions, I defined and located the sample to be investigated. In this respect, I tried a number of conventional and less conventional approaches. As the section 4.5.2 ‘gaining access’ indicates, the best results were generated by the latter. The chapter continues by providing a systematic description of the interviewing process, which was developed within a clear spatial and temporal framework.

Thus, between 2006 and 2008 I interviewed 35 WLMs who lived without a residential partner with children under the age of 16 and were located between the Rhondda Valley and the Cardiff area in South Wales. The interviews were carried out by using snowballing methods, which allowed me to take advantage of the personal links and connections that many WLMs had with each other. However, this limited to some extent the racial/ethnic variety of the sample, which ultimately appeared to be rather homogenous, since the respondents were all white and distinguishable primarily on a class basis, with some diversification in terms of nationality. They were more representatives from the working class than from the middle classes, although a number of them felt belonging somewhere in between conventional class definitions or even outside the class system altogether. The WLMs concerned were either employed in full-time or in long part-time jobs within the public, private and Third Sectors.

Following the description of the methodology used to carry out my research, I went on to develop a systematic exploration of the fieldwork data. The findings came to be articulated following the logical interviewing sequence that emerged through the fieldwork. That is, WLMs were first asked to describe their working environments and

the particular arrangements within the sector in which they were employed prior to describing their home environments and their work there. In the following chapter therefore, the discussion will continue by providing an in-depth analysis into WLMs' world of paid work.

CHAPTER 5

Working Lone Mothers' organisation of paid work

5.1 Introduction

Most of the feminist research currently developed concerning mothers in general and lone mothers in particular, has been conducted empirically by either emphasising the structural platforms on which they operate, such as the availability of and closeness to paid work and child care provisions (Duncan and Edwards 1999), or by evaluating their responsibilities in relation to their children, especially when children are caught in the aftermath of post-divorce negotiations (Smart and Neale 1999, 2002 and Smart, Neale and Wade 2001). At the same time, the interest in the shifting articulation of public and private spaces has resulted in increasing amounts of literature being produced analysing the potentially conflicting and polarised dynamics of the two spheres (Himmelweit 2002, Sevenhuijsen 1998, 2002; Glover 2002, Reynolds, Callender and Edwards 2003; Williams 2004, Held 2005, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002; Crompton 2006). However, as Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) have argued, too many accounts about this dynamic tension and, more specifically, about the effects of mothers' working on family relationships, have been articulated mainly at a theoretical level. As such, the debates about work-life balance that occupy the contemporary public arena and the discussions articulated in academia and policy formulations are still framed in largely non-representational contexts and rely primarily on taxonomic data (Glover 2002, Himmelweit 2002, Sevenhuijsen 1998, 2002).

This thesis has investigated these issues in some depth and the data that emerged have been organised into four interlinked and overlapping themes, the first of which will be explored in this chapter. The four themes are:

- *WLMs' organisation of paid work*
- *the type and quality of care allocated to their children as perceived and experienced by WLMs within and outside the family domain*
- *the dimensions of WLMs' relational networks*
- *the type and quality of care WLMs allocated to themselves.*

In this chapter I will discuss the findings concerning WLMs' organisation of paid work.

This section is divided into four categories:

5.2 Negotiating the commitments of paid work

5.3 The management of paid work

5.4 Calculation of benefits' entitlement

5.5 WLMs' spatial and temporal negotiation of public/private domains.

5.2 Negotiating the commitments of paid work

The negotiation of paid work commitments describes the working arrangements 'chosen' by WLMs in their various working environments. These were defined by the sector in which WLMs were employed and by the type of work undertaken. In this sample, 18 of the respondents were employed in the public sector, 14 worked in the private sector, two held jobs in the Third Sector and one woman was self-employed. With relevance to the types of employment, 14 of the 35 WLMs interviewed were in full-

time employment and the remaining 21 were employed in long-part time work (25-30 working hours per week). Of the 35 WLMs employed in either full or long part-time jobs, three of them had been working with the same employer for over ten years, whilst 21 had been with the same employer for five years or less. Amongst the latter group, 11 WLMs had been in their jobs for two years or less. The fact that many respondents had changed their jobs in relatively recent times provided their accounts with insightful longitudinal data as the respondents were often inclined to compare and contrast their previous working environments and experiences with their new ones.

The nature of WLMs' employment varied considerably; nine women worked in administration, four as teachers, three worked as assistant managers in private firms, two women were shop assistants. There were also: a special skills and work officer, an adult teacher/accountant, a cleaner, a nursing home inspector, a civil servant, a mentoring coordinator, a social worker, a call-centre worker, a support worker, a computer analyst, a nurse, a travel consultant, a PR manager for a Charity organisation, a pole-dancer instructor, a delivery driver and a mother with varied responsibilities who worked in her uncle's firm. Overall WLMs in the Third Sector (albeit the smallest category) fared better than those working in the public sector, and those in the public sector did better than the WLMs employed in the private sector. That is, within the Third Sector, WLMs seemed to enjoy the greatest freedom and best working relations. The public sector seemed to offer the most stable, structured organisation and support for WLMs, which was much valued by some of the respondents. The private sector, on the other hand, presented a much more uneven picture and within it there were a higher number of

WLMs who worked under considerable amounts of pressure and felt exploited by their employers. This was particularly the case when WLMs worked in unstructured full or long part-time work in the private sector under the assumption of doing ‘flexible work’. This experience was shared, in different ways, by both the professional group (engaged in task oriented occupations) and by manual/routine workers.

Furthermore, whether the nature of the work was task oriented or was manual/routine work, there was an impact on working relations. As could be expected, professional WLMs, and particularly those who worked in the public sector, held a much stronger bargaining position in terms of requesting and obtaining more reasonable (that is less antisocial, shorter and more flexible) working hours, better pay and work satisfaction. They also generally enjoyed a better working environment. Within the professional group (teachers, social workers, community leaders and so on) the hierarchical relations between employer and employee were characterised by a more ‘personable’ approach, which worked particularly well when the employee had much to offer to the organisation and had a strong work ethic. Gwyneth, a middle-class social worker, exemplifies this point:

Gwyneth: If you have been around a lot as a social worker you are valuable...you are quite a valuable commodity. So basically you negotiate around that. The manager was leaving anyway and there were a number of people in the team who were doing three days a week, four days a week...different arrangements. They got temporary agency staff, covering. And I knew that they were in the process of renegotiating things with the agency staff. When I spoke to him I said ‘I know that you are in the process of renegotiation ...so I am talking to you now about it to see for possibilities around it’ [getting a shorter working week].

But such 'personable' relations seem to also emerge in the context of small firms and in family-style private companies, where the staff seemed to interact more directly with one another and to be implicitly more dependent on one another's support. This in turn, seemed to have direct consequences on the way in which some of these WLMs were allowed to articulate and structure their working schedules. The remark below is from Morgan, a working-class delivery driver, who highlights this particular point.

Morgan: It's a family run business, I know his mum and dad and everyone just comes together if anyone is off...everyone comes together and sort it out. There is always cover, well almost always. If one of the drivers is sick or ill or whatever...sometimes there is mayhem and people go oh, there isn't enough back up.... yeah, but generally is a very lovely place to work. It's very, very laid back.

Furthermore, particularly amongst the professional groups, it emerged that WLMs preferred having a woman and, even more so, a mother as their manager.

Laura: Well, yes. My previous employer was pretty good because she had children herself. You have to find an employer that is sympathetic to your situation. You know, where I am now is all male orientated.

Good working arrangements and 'personable' relationships were also achieved by those WLMs who, through negotiations, asked and obtained reasonable working routines from their employers. This was reached however at the expense of their income-generation capacities as these WLMs were effectively underselling themselves. Two examples below are illustrative of this situation. Caroline and Carey were employed as secretaries, one in a private firm and the other in a non-profit organisation. Both of them were over-qualified for the jobs for which they had applied, the first coming from a translating

business and the other from engineering. They both took the initiative to explain their circumstances, they established good relations with their potential employers and then they asked and obtained working arrangements which matched their family commitments.

Caroline: Well, when he was one year old I got a very, very low paid job in the clinic, working in the reception. And because it was so low paid I was able to take my own hours. So I said to my boss I work for you but because I'm massively over qualified for this job these are the hours I want to work. So I got that. But I had to sacrifice a good job for it. You know I had to give up working at the BBC because I wanted to have such...malleable working hours.

Carey: I came across perhaps as being from a certain status or social class. I know the tools to use to open the doors for me. Whether they are mine to use or not, I don't know, but I use them. But I worked hard for it as well... So, I saw this job advertised in the paper. It was 25 hours a week, flexible. They wanted someone with a non-traditional background to support women working and studying in non-traditional areas and it seemed absolutely perfect for me. I did the interview, got the job and my whole world shook when I realised how easy an employer can make life for you if they are open to you working from home.

The women in question presented themselves as confident and self-assured. They knew that they had much to offer their respective organisations in terms of experience and expertise. But they were equally aware that by not working to their full potential and qualifications they were also taking massive cuts in their income-generation potential. Yet, at that particular stage in their lives, this was seen by them as the 'right' thing to do as these jobs offered them shorter hours and the flexibility they needed to prioritise their family commitments over their paid work. In this context, by 'choosing' lower paid, long part-time jobs, more WLMs were prepared to put up with a *temporary* (albeit lengthy)

‘set back’ rather than give up on their long-term ambitions altogether. Caroline and Dwyn further reiterate this point.

Caroline: I didn't want to work nine to five for two reasons, the most important one for Chris. So, I made a choice. Kids grow up so quickly don't they? Sacrifice by being with him now and then if I want a career and be a homeopath, I'll do that later.

Dwyn: Obviously earning more money would improve our standard of living, but until they are a little older, I would not contemplate changing my job as my place of employment and working hours fits in so well with my family life at the moment. Hopefully, in the future I will be able to think about the many different courses available to me through my workplace, which will improve the money situation and give me more job satisfaction.

These remarks highlight both the moral and the temporary nature of these WLMs' ‘choices’. That is, whilst these WLMs were not prepared to give up on their ambitions altogether, they were nonetheless putting their long term career aspirations ‘on hold’ for their children’s sake. It further highlights the notion that for these respondents, the nature of this particular commitment to their children was perceived as a temporary phase - albeit a very important one - in their life cycle. By the same token, as children grew older, other WLMs were able to change their circumstances and felt justified to invest more in better jobs prospects. Morgan, Paula, Julia and Glenys for instance, did so by either upgrading on previous working experience (Morgan and Paula) or by studying and/or retraining (Julia and Glenys).

Morgan: I had an interview with BSM, British School of Motoring...so I am in the process of hopefully getting the money to do the training to become a driving instructor. I am, now that the children are that little bit older and they go to play groups and after

school clubs....So they are slightly easier to look after.

Paula: I have applied for a caring job at the hospital, something that I could do now that the children are a little bit older.....

Julia: Well, I felt I was capable of doing more, something a little more taxing...and the children were growing and I had become a lot more stable, even though it was tough financially. I was quite happy to try something different.

Glenys: I was working as a dental practice manager and I was a business manager before that [but] I wanted to get better qualifications and a job I really wanted at the end of it and I thought to myself, the children are grown up enough now to look after themselves a little bit and it was just something I really, really wanted.

In the same vein, a sizable number of respondents found that they were re-assessing their family needs and priorities in order to improve the structure and the management of their paid and unpaid work commitments. As a consequence, about a third of WLMs felt the necessity of becoming geographically mobile and indeed, to be so readily 'on the move' emerged as a striking feature of these women's narratives. The search for a type of job that would not obstruct and frustrate their caring commitments was a recurrent theme in WLMs' talk. In this respect, the following quote from Dawn exemplifies both the evolutionary nature of this 'quest' as well as illustrates some of the working structures available to WLMs in the workplace.

Dawn: I worked in the university for ten years and in that time I did three different jobs. The first job that I had was with the UGS commission services. It was very structured, very nine to five, I couldn't change it and that was that. Then I took a job, which was lower paid in the conference office in the business centre. That was totally unstructured, a lot more hours, a lot more responsibility and that was almost 24/7, 365...you didn't switch off. I would be here on weekends, I would be here on late nights and then I applied for a job here...and now I have flexi time, which means that I do have to attend

meetings (late in the evening), I work all day tomorrow but... it suits me.

The last two quotes from Glenys and Dawn point to at the emergence of an important feature identifiable in the value that many WLMs attributed to the availability of ‘flexi-time’ in the workplace. The relevance of this and the nature of its changeable application will be the subject of the next section.

5.3 The management of paid work

The management of paid work came to describe those features that most prominently affected WLMs’ attitudes in regard to their paid work. In this context, the most important aspect to emerge from the data was the nature of flexible work. Depending on the sector and occupation, ‘flexibility’ at work displayed very changeable features, the nature of which, in most cases, did not prove favourable to WLMs. For this reason, all the meaningful themes that have emerged in this area of analysis are explored as variable features interacting against a constant one: namely, the practice of flexible work as described and understood by the WLMs concerned.

In describing their work, the greatest majority of WLMs felt that a traditional full-time and rigidly structured nine to five type of working schedule was usually not compatible with the levels of involvement and commitment that their family life demanded. Nearly all of them emphasized the need for fewer working hours and more flexible working arrangements as the most important pre-requisites for a more ‘manageable’ lifestyle. Against this backdrop, different types of flexible working practices have been exposed. Under the over-arching concept of ‘flexibility’, findings have uncovered a number of

variations and interpretations bringing into question the nature and practice of ‘flexible’ work arrangements for WLMs in contemporary labour markets. Presently there are various working patterns⁹ available. However, as a way to conceptualise and simplify these variations, within the framework of this thesis I describe these employment configurations as ‘*enabling*’ and ‘*disabling*’ flexible arrangements.

5.3.1 Enabling flexible arrangements

Previously, I have contended that WLMs experienced a more positive or generally ‘enabling’ flexibility if they had or presented themselves as having good negotiating skills and bargaining power. This was usually determined by the sector in which they worked, by their occupation and status within the organisation, and by the nature of their ‘personable’ relationship with their direct manager. In this context, the most significant ‘enabling’ flexible arrangements to emerge were either ‘flexi-time’ or a reduced working week. ‘Flexi-time’ refers to a particular flexible way of grading and using the hours of any given working month. It is based on a concept of ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ hours. Whilst the core hours are fixed, the peripheral hours can be manipulated and restructured by employees in such a way as to be suitable to both the employer (because required tasks will be completed) and the worker (because of the freedom that they enjoy in shaping their own working schedule). In this context, the time for paid work can be re-arranged in order to complement, in a mutually supporting way, the hours usually dedicated to the unpaid work of managing family life. Emphasized by the WLMs questioned, the most critical times where paid and unpaid work overlapped and often

⁹ The most common working patterns include: flexible working hours, annualised working hours, reduced working week, term-time working and job sharing. The latter is viewed as an exclusive feature of part-time work, while a

encroached upon each another, were usually the hours at the beginning and at the end of the working day.

In view of these considerations, the application of 'win-win' solutions in respect to enabling flexible arrangements was found mostly in the case of WLMs working at the administrative level of public educational establishments and amongst those mothers who worked in the voluntary sector. Throughout these processes, some of the respondents effectively moved from full-time into long part-time work. The remarks below exemplify how 'flexi-time' is implemented and managed in some of these contexts. They highlight a sense of appreciation that WLMs have for these particular arrangements. Further, they offer a hint of some of the structural and managerial differences existing between a 'statutory' framework (Jane) and a 'negotiated' one (Diane and Rosalind).

Jane: There are core hours between which we must work and those are between ten and 12 and two and three thirty. But if I wanted to come at half past nine, ten o'clock one morning, that wouldn't be a problem. The hours go by what you do per month and not by what you do per day. So I tend to come early because I tend to be up with the children, so I tend to come up at a quarter to eight in the morning. You can come as early as half past seven and you can come as late as ten o'clock. So, if I got to go to school for a reason then fine. I just go to school and I'll be here by ten. Also the earliest that you can finish is half past three and the latest is seven o'clock. You do have to clock in between certain times but you can build your flexi time up and have one day off a month to use, as you like. I couldn't cope without the flexi-time.

Diane: I think I am really lucky because I have been in this job for nine years and they like me. If I had been in another job I don't think I would be allowed ... and I have a good relationship with my boss, I am quite close. So, because I wanted more time with him [her son] and my hours were different as well I just changed them every time to suit

me and to suit other people as well.

Rosalind: I am quite lucky because I set my own timetable; I got a lot of flexibility. So if I have a meeting and I go over the meeting and I say ' I really have to leave at half past four' if I were in the Rhondda. I did work in a post in the press and there I was required to stay until seven o'clock. But this is why I am now in this particular job, because of the flexibility that I can have. So I picked it up because I knew I was my boss in this job. I do have a manager, but he is good.

In the first instance, Jane simply acted upon a set of established and standardised regulations, however, in the cases of Diane and Rosalind, a certain amount of 'flexibility' with their daily working schedule had to be negotiated. Thus they reached satisfactory agreements based on the combination of various requisites. These included structural (the employment sector) and personal factors. The personal factors here described refer to WLMs' cultural capital, expressed through their educational achievements matched by a certain ability and confidence to engage in successful, personable relationships with significant employers. The reliance that some WLMs had on their personal capital and the value they placed on their educational development, even later on in life, for the sake of progressing in their chosen career, is highlighted by Julia in the next extract:

Julia: you always try to make the best of what is going on around you and it's tough with all the financial commitments. But as I said from the very beginning, I am a very strong person, so I get there in the end, whichever way I am going to go. Hence, I am pushing to do this degree because if they [her employers] allow me to do it, first I can prove to them that I 'can' do it, but also it would be a big step into the department. And if I don't do it now at 43, I am never going to do it. It will be a challenge, but if you don't ask you don't get. What I hope now is that they will fulfill what they said, but I'll get there whether by hook or by crook. I was a little dithering whether I could step over that threshold...but it should be good.

Overall however, it is the rather unpredictable and ‘individualised’ nature of these negotiations and their outcomes that prompted Diane and Rosalind to describe themselves as ‘lucky’. As mentioned above, from the data emerged that the majority of the WLMs in question opted for flexible arrangements within which the working week was reduced to four or even three working days, thus turning full-time jobs into long part-time ones. The examples below are illustrative of this situation.

Gwyneth: I think she [daughter] is really struggling with the multiple child arrangements in terms of the different things that are happening every day. So I sat down and talked to my ex-husband about it and I went back to work and I explained the scenario and asked that temporarily for three months I would go down to three days a week.

Sarah: I work for a charity. I am a press officer and I do lobbying, stuff like that. Sometime I have to work evenings and I have to work the odd weekends.... So, from time to time it can be quite difficult... but my employer is most of the time reasonably co-operative and I work four days, which is about right, I think. I work from Monday to Thursday and sometimes I work on Friday.

Amongst the WLMs who were able to manage a fairly ‘balanced’ routine, there was also a professional group who, contrary to others, were successful in setting very strict time/space boundaries that clearly separated their paid work from their care and housework. The quotations below highlight both the latent tension of uneasy negotiations as well as the strength of these mothers’ determination to set up clear temporal and spatial demarcations between their paid and unpaid work. Most of these women worked in the public and voluntary sectors, enjoyed supportive flexible arrangements and good personal relations with their employers. Still, they had to take some work home with them, which they were usually pressurized to complete by the

following day. However, the fact that these mothers would not mix paid work with care meant that many of them would end up postponing their paid work to a later time of the day, typically after the children had gone to bed.

Gwyneth: I am very clear about my work, I enjoy my work and I am committed to it. But also I am quite ruthless about where the work is and where the life is. I never work when the children are around. God no! They would never allow me, they would constantly interrupt me. I could never work when they are up and running about. And it's particularly difficult now because this area is all an open plan...It's not very practical. I do my work either after they have gone to bed or on Tuesday, when they are not here.

Carey: I sit in front of the computer normally from nine (in the evening) to half past ten-11 o'clock. And that's fine...I am awake and that's when I make sure that the people to whom I talk professionally know that that is my 'golden time', this is when they can phone me, I will be answering e-mails, and my eight o'clock to 20 past eight is my 'golden time ' as well. Nobody can ring me from a quarter to three till nine o'clock. I will not answer the phone. I am not going to get stuck on the phone when I am at home alone with my daughter, talking to somebody...when I need to be spending time with her.

The two observations above stress a clear separation made by WLMs between their paid and unpaid work. However, because the bulk of their work was carried out away from home, they could choose to postpone whatever was left of their working commitments to a later time, when the children were in bed. Although not ideal, this neat compartmentalisation made their dual responsibilities manageable. The following respondent however, had been working from home in a self-employed capacity. Thus, she had to devise different strategies in order to cope with the reality of having her child at home during her working time.

Rebecca: I think it improves the quality of care the separation because I know even now William says 'oh mummy is working' if I am on the phone and 'mum has to do this and

mummy has to do that'...and in a sense he knows that that corner is 'work corner'. I don't know if this is positive or negative.

Better and more flexible working practices seemed possible also when WLMs worked in small, family oriented firms where people seemed to know each other better and cooperated more, as a group, to overcome difficulties. The example below highlights the kind of informal support that Dwyn is able to receive from her colleagues whilst working in a small, council-run sports centre:

Dwyn: I think that I am very fortunate in that my working environment helps greatly in balancing my commitment to my children and my work. For instance, on the few occasions my children have been taken ill in school and there was nobody else to have them, I have had the teacher bring them to my workplace and they have been able to have a lie down in the first aid room until I finish my shift. Work colleagues have been fine about this and have all rallied around at some time or another to give me their support.

Not unsurprisingly, enabling flexible practices were also to be found amongst some of the working arrangements of the primary school teachers interviewed. Four mothers worked as teachers, there were, however, considerable discrepancies amongst them. Two of them worked as infant and primary school teachers and their working schedule was compatible with their management of home life. In this instance, the mothers concerned pursued their jobs well aware that their teaching hours could be harmonised with their domestic responsibilities. Rachel and Louise address this point:

Rachel: Well, I just knew that I had to retrain, I was a hairdresser first. I went back and retrained so that I could eventually get a job in the school where I did supply for four years. And now I am employed by that school with regular hours, just that I can make ends meet and I could still be there for the children.

Louise: [My working schedule] is from nine to half past 11 and then I do 1 hour with the six-seven year olds. Then I have a quick lunch break for a half an hour and then I work in the afternoon with the six-seven year olds until the end of school. And then I collect my children and we walk home...Well, I sort of planned it ahead. When I knew that they [her children] were going to that school. I went and did some voluntary work before hand. So the head mistress knew me. So when a job came up I was on their list. So.... it was lovely and it's the only option as far as school holidays and things like that are concerned. This was perfect!

5.3.2 Disabling flexible arrangements

If the above arrangements proved very favourable to Rachel and Louise, the same cannot be said for the other two teachers (Kathryn and Anne), who struggled under different working conditions and, as such, experienced disabling flexibility at work. In this context, the term 'disabling' indicates the negative use of flexible practices within the labour market. The remark below refers to the experiences of Kathryn who worked term-time as a support teacher in the local college. She operated within a semi-privatised school system, which was predominantly managed along the lines of free-market values. In this context, flexible working arrangements translated for this respondent as a contract that was both temporary and unstable.

Kathryn: What I am finding difficult is employment. It seems to be temporary employment, all the time. There seems to be a lack of adequately paid jobs for women in a position like me...and it's going to happen again at the end of term. I am laid off again until the new college term starts again. So in the summer time I don't get paid. And then, if I go to sign on I cannot get help with my mortgage because you have to be out of work for nine months before you get any help.

Similarly, Mary, who worked as a nurse in a busy NHS hospital, felt that she was part of a system, which although had adopted 'family friendly' policies, was not inclined to

enforce them unless the employees pushed for their implementation. In the following quotation it is evident that Mary is struggling to assert her rights against a predominantly ‘technocratic-interpretativist’ working culture.

Mary: They have a ‘family friendly’ policy. It’s on the board, I have seen it, but they can’t do anything ...it doesn’t count for anything. It’s part of the service but they don’t do it. But even though it’s shit the ward where I work...I can still go to the woman who writes the shifts. She does it one month in advance. I go there and I say ‘Adele, I got problems. This is what I can do this month.’ She checks that there are enough hours and then she gives me the shift that I can do. She will do it because she knows that if she doesn’t, I can’t work.

This remark seems to indicate a straightforward negotiation ending with a positive outcome. However, it is clear that without reaching this compromise, Mary would have been unable to do her job. Furthermore, faced with occasional staff shortages, NHS managers may feel compelled to be more understanding and accommodating towards their staff in order to retain them. Mary highlights this point when she recalls the words of her former ward manager in the extract below. At the same time she stresses the need for enabling flexible arrangements as a crucial pre-requisite for good work practices:

Mary: It is in their interest [the management] to look after the people they’ve got. She [the manager] said ‘look, if we are not more flexible we are going to lose all these nurses. They’re all going to go somewhere else. So, we all got to make it more attractive or people are not going to do it’ [the work].

This said, what emerges also from this particular quotation is the notion that notwithstanding her evident criticism and scepticism, Mary knew that she was entitled to ask, as she did, for more suitable hours. That is, although Mary felt that she was working

‘in a shit ward’, she worked in the relatively safer, unionised and more transparent framework of the public sector and that gave her better negotiating power. In contrast, many WLMs employed by private firms in the private sector felt that they had very little or no voice at all concerning the management and organisation of their paid work. As a result, whilst some struggled under adverse circumstances, others felt they had no choice but to leave their jobs altogether. The following comments intend to draw attention to the management of paid work within an *unstructured* framework, where ‘disabling’ flexibility seemed to be much more commonplace. Leanne had been initially contracted to work 16 hours a week as a shop assistant in a food store. However, without her consent, her weekly hours were increased from 16 to 56 and then to 62 in a short time. In this particular instance, the respondent’s attempts to assert her rights were met with verbal abuse from her manager.

Leanne: I am contracted to do 16 hours per week, but this is not the case. I have done on average 56-62 hours per week because of staff shortage. When I pointed out this to my supervisor that I was contracted to do 16 hours I was told ‘tough’, if I wanted to keep my job I would have to work the hours they wanted until they could find somebody else. The supervisor... doesn’t call me by my name. He refers to me as ‘oh! Silly cow’ and clicks his fingers for me to respond. When I told him that I will not answer to those names he threatened me with a verbal warning. I told him, never mind the verbal warning, I will resign and that is what I have done. I have one more week left and then I am out of there.

Another WLM was working as an engineer within the unstructured context of a private firm. Carey was asked to work long hours from her office. She felt however that there were no good reasons why anyone should not be allowed to work from home, unless the organisation was customer-facing and required shop-front management.

Carey: I worked seven days a week, no lunch breaks, no breaks, male dominated.... long hour culture, I was operation manager for a large commercial gasworks network, the only woman manager in the office, I had to be there. From my point of view there was lots of work that I could have done from home, and I could have had a communication link to the office through my phone at home with the computer, but it's unheard of....all the men have to come in and sit in the office all day. Why should I have that privilege of working from home?

With Carey, the length, intensity and incompatibility of her working hours meant that she felt that she no longer knew her daughter or how to relate to her. From her particular perspective however, Carey draws attention also to the persistence of a male-centred, 'long-hours' working culture. Within these contexts, some WLMs have experienced the tension of gender biases, which took various forms. Carey lived in a cultural framework that, (based on the masculinisation of the workplace under the assumption of pursuing gender equality) underpinned an 'adult worker' model and as such, it negated gender power relations. On the other hand, by stressing her sense of unease about working in an environment that did not uphold more understanding and inclusive practices, Dawn highlights the persistence of more conventional gender biases that hinge around the traditional assumption that women are defined by their relationship to their partners, on whom they are assumed to be financially dependent.

Dawn: I find it very, very hard. But I think that society is still not geared for women to be in this position. We still assume that people are couples and that the husband is the breadwinner, even though it is not like that at all. There is still this perception that this is what it's like, and it's not.

The practice of disabling flexible arrangements was also experienced by Victoria, a full-time manager, who was relatively new in her firm. The persistence of disabling

flexibility in her workplace meant that Victoria had to work without breaks during her lunch hour in order to achieve two objectives, namely, to recover the half an hour of lost productivity caused by starting to work at nine thirty instead of nine (this had been previously negotiated with her manager and it accounted for the time needed to drop off her child to a nearby nursery), and to build pockets of time, a sort of 'time credit' needed to cover for emergencies at home. This practice, which in its cumulative effect was costing the respondent her health (she had been hospitalized twice suffering with illnesses induced by exhaustion) had nevertheless become part of her working routine.

Victoria: I will be able to start at nine thirty instead of nine, which I know will mean me working half my lunch hour. I don't take my lunch hour now anyway because I always think: if I work my lunch hour, should I need to take a day off or needing to leave due to Ben, at least I have built my hour...I have my sandwiches in the back and I don't leave the office.

The intensification of work, as experienced by Victoria, could be further increased to critical and unsustainable levels when target-setting is incorporated into the ethos of the workplace. The remark below exemplifies this situation in regard to the travel agency where Carla worked.

Carla: I work part-time from nine to five thirty three times a week. I love my job...but I am going to give it up now because it is too much stress. That is, my target is 54.000 thousand pounds in a month, part-time. You get targets every month. If you don't hit your target this month it goes on into the next month. So it builds up. So if you don't hit it in three months you get a warning, then another and then they sack you. It wasn't always like this with this job. It was ok until three years ago and then ...all changed.

It would be reasonable to assume that, by working only three days a week, Carla was

more likely to enjoy better flexibility at work. However, the '*charge mentale*' (namely the cumulative effect of high levels of tension and stress) that she had to cope with seemed to be too high for this respondent. As task-oriented activities are not limited by temporal and spatial frameworks, the '*charge mentale*' that impending deadlines could generate can easily spill over for WLMs into the conventional working spaces and 'migrate' from the public into the private domain. Similarly, an intensification of working commitments can alter the use and the management of time, which becomes increasingly less 'porous' and more condensed. Thus, a time consumption so intensified can contribute both to an increase of disabling flexibility as well as to the exclusion of any kind of flexibility.

WLMs argued against the application and preservation of disabling flexible arrangements specifically because of the negative repercussions on the management of their family life. Below, Leanne and Laura stress the rigid and unrealistic approach of some employers when presenting WLMs with unworkable timetables. In this respect, the accounts of Leanne and Laura are consistent with those of other WLMs who pointed out that the 'nine thirty- two thirty /three' time period was seen as '*the*' best and most compatible working time to achieve the desired harmonisation with family commitments.

Leanne: Why employers don't realise that with children your window is really after half past nine and before half past two? But they have.... no, you start at eight and finish at 11, that's your job share 'option'. Or you can do a whole day Monday and a whole day Tuesday. I mean, who takes a child to school, who picks him up if you are a single parent?

Laura: I am finding it too much now. If I could find the ideal job where I could take the

girls to school, do all the after school stuff with them, swimming, whatever they wanted to, that would be great...but to find that job, where they let you start at half past nine up to three or whatever, it's hard! I don't just want to tick along in a nine to five type of job, so I don't see myself in this type of job for very long ...I am looking for something else.

Furthermore, working in unstructured and loosely defined long part-time jobs, meant that some WLMs would miscalculate or underestimate other factors, such as the time required to travel to and from various job locations. This happened to Kathryn, who found that the unexpected extension of her working hours began encroaching upon her family commitments.

Kathryn: I had a job actually in 'Dash' training in Tonypany. But it made me travel to Cardiff. So, even though I had an office there, they took me to do assessments in Cardiff, Bridgend and Barry.... And even though I was doing four days a week in that part-time I was travelling such a lot. I was getting home.... I mean, Peter was home and he was just sitting on the step...waiting. So I did that for six weeks because I just couldn't do it; I said 'this just isn't working'. But luckily my boss asked me to come back to the job which I am still doing, the job I had been made redundant from.

The types of problems encountered by WLMs when working under disabling flexibility were occasionally compounded by the added difficulty of finding nurseries and schools with compatible timetables. This difficulty was particularly experienced by those long part-time workers, who did not fit into a neat 'nine to five' working schedule. In this respect, some WLMs complained that some nurseries also seemed to be structured and managed along commercial lines, as the respondent below points out.

Carey: Childcare providers will automatically take children that are in from eight till six all day or before and after school every day of the week. That's where their priority is, that's who they save their places for rather than let you have Monday and Tuesday before

and after school. Because then they have to find somebody else who fits in Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. It's all about money and they are running a business. So, it's very, very difficult to find part-time childcare to fit with your part-time work.

Earlier, I highlighted some situations where to bring work home, within a more supportive framework, was seen by some WLMs as an enabling feature that added to their perception of control and flexibility. Some WLMs however were carrying out multiple tasks from home because, as the examples below highlight, they were involved in study or training programmes that required them to invest time and resources well above their normal working hours. In this way, some WLMs were often juggling two or more 'jobs' (or work-related activities) at an unsustainable level. Amongst these respondents, most experienced various levels of disabling flexible work from within their home environment. In these cases, the extension and the intensification of paid work into the domestic domain was clearly perceived by these WLMs as having negative repercussions on their 'family time' and on the time they could invest for themselves. For Glenys, this literally meant that she would be 'crawling up the stairs thinking oh, please, bed!' late at night in a state of total exhaustion, whilst Leanne would be 'totally shattered by Thursday'.

Leanne: My home life has changed and my routine is all over the place. It doesn't matter how organised I used to be, it just never goes to plan anymore. First and most importantly, my children suffer because they hardly see me since I started work...so they [the children] have asked me to give up work and university and I have explained that mummy is going to carry on doing university to better our lives. And hopefully mummy will be able to get a better paid job that will help others.

Glenys: There isn't one night that you can go home really and think, oh I got nothing to

do now, because there is always something to do, there is a lot to do with the university, and I am in a call-centre, at 'T-mobile' and it's horrendous...I'm looking for another job, and I have been doing it only for the last three weeks... and it's not working out at all because it's in Merthyr as well. I finish at ten, but by the time I get to the car, out of the car park and back home, it's 20 to 11.00 by the time I get in. My daughter is already in bed, so I don't even see her...She ends up complaining ...a lot.

Situations of this kind highlight the respondents' difficulties in managing their many commitments and cast some light on the ways in which multiple and conflicting responsibilities can impinge on WLMs' caring work. Not surprisingly, at the time of the interviews, both of these WLMs were making plans to leave their jobs for more suitable ones. To work from home also appeared to be a difficult choice for one self-employed lone mother. Rebecca worked at home for a few years before moving her business into the public domain, which occurred soon after her child started school. The observation below emphasizes these two distinctive stages in Rebecca's working life and depicts the changing patterns of her management of work.

Rebecca: having a child with you under the age of five and trying to get things done at home is extraordinary difficult. So you work in short, fast patches, particularly during the two hours nap he used to have. In those situations I would be working frantically when I probably should have been asleep myself or taking the time that I needed to do the things I needed to be doing. I would work at night and do lots of the business planning, project proposals and stuff. I worked between two or three o'clock in the morning in the early hours, usually with a lot of nicotine and a few glasses of red wine to help the process, just to keep going... After Bobby started school, there was a massive transition for me because you have that set period in the day when I worked from nine thirty to two thirty and I worked incredibly intensively within that period and I got much better in managing my time, in dividing my time. By the time he got into his second year of school I was able to get a shared office space and actually separate some of my working life from home, which made a fantastic difference.

Although Rebecca appeared to be well organised and in control when working from home, as she succeeded (to some extent) in separating and managing the ‘where’ and ‘when’ of her paid and unpaid responsibilities, her working patterns appeared to be primarily characterised by unstructured hours and disabling flexibility, which led to a temporary neglect of her child’s needs and her own. Her situation improved only when she was able to organise a clearly structured routine away from home. Rebecca drew attention to the notion that just as the majority of WLMs were sacrificing their work opportunities for the sake of their families, others, for very similar reasons, did prioritise their paid work:

Rebecca: I was working 17-20 hours a day, it was insane, absolutely nearly killed me and I hardly saw Bobby that year. But I had a certain amount of success, which allowed me to start up a business completely on my own. It took me two and an half years of work to get the money to buy my house. But I did it because I wanted to do more... for my child. I felt that he deserved more, that we deserved more.

To summarise so far, WLMs’ ethic of work illuminates different understandings and approaches to their uptake and management of paid work. This appears to be dependent on their personal interpretation of care and on their management of the private sphere. In analysing the management of paid work, what seemed to affect women’s responses the most was the type of flexibility they experienced within the workplace, which impacted directly upon WLMs’ ability to exercise a degree of control over their working arrangements. Under the condition of ‘enabling’ flexible arrangements, WLMs appeared to be motivated, engaged and well capable of managing a (usually) well structured daily routine. Conversely, the alternative scenario created by ‘disabling’ flexible arrangements seemed to provoke considerable logistical difficulties in the management of

public/private spaces, which, in turn, intensified WLMs' *'charge mentale'*. Data analysis also brought to the fore another element that impacted on WLMs' uptake of paid work. This concerns their calculation of their entitlement to benefits. In consideration of this, the next section will address some significant issues surrounding the relationship of WLMs with the benefit system and, more specifically, with the ways in which Family Tax Credit (FTC) appears to have promoted the uptake of paid work on the one hand and apparently induced a limitation on their working hours on the other.

5.4 Calculation of benefits' entitlement

Financial matters were an ever-present concern in many WLMs' lives¹⁰. The two quotes below highlight some of their causes for concern.

Kathryn: It's the constant worry... *all the time* wondering 'Oh God, am I going to have a job? Am I going to repay my mortgage?' Knowing that you got to work...you haven't got the luxury to think 'oh, I leave a bit for my husband'. It's all down to me.

Susan: I have missed out on other important things like trying to get a pension...you concentrate so much on your child that other things just go by the waste line. And all the sudden you hit 50 and you think ... 'oh, what am I going to do?'

As described by Kathryn and Susan, concerns over their financial security were motivated by the problem of finding well-paid work, being unable to maintain financial commitments (such as mortgage repayments), a fear of finding themselves excluded from meaningful career opportunities or from the labour market altogether. Within

¹⁰ This section is not addressing issues concerning WLMs' income levels or their income-generating capacities. Rather is dealing with WLMs' perceived level of poverty, their relationship with the benefit system and the ways in which Family Tax Credit affected their uptake of paid work.

this context, Susan was not unique amongst the respondents, in realizing that she was facing old age without the ‘safety net’ of a ‘living pension’. These concerns were particularly felt when the anxiety experienced from the uncertainty of the labour market were compounded by the condition of living on low incomes, as Victoria describes:

Victoria: The job in which I was paid me £18,000 plus benefits. In this job I started with £14,000. But since then I have been able to work my way up and now I am back at £18,000. But at the time when I started for a single mum with a mortgage it was very, very tight...very tight.

Against this backdrop, some WLMs experienced getting in and out of the benefit system as a result of the unpredictable ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ of the labour market and their changing family circumstances. In this context, a few WLMs were considering the viability of living within the provisions offered by the welfare state. Susan, for example, calculated that she would probably be better off living on benefits.

Susan: If I was on benefits, like all those people with their rented houses, their council houses paid for them...I don’t know, maybe I would be better off. They get their dinner money paid for them; they get 100 pounds voucher for free uniforms every summer. My children keep wearing the same old uniforms; I just got them new tops, that’s all.

On the other hand, for Belinda, a life lived under the financial limitations and constraints associated with being ‘benefit-dependent’, was considered to be utterly impossible.

Belinda: I was on benefits for a period of ten months and I had 27 pounds of disposable

income. By the time that I had paid water, gas, electricity, the rent...no, it wasn't a life that I could possibly have. I gave it up and we moved into a one bedroom house, me and my son in order to move forward.

Others, still, pointed out that it could be easier and more advantageous to live on state benefits, but they would not do it because of the social and moral value they attributed to paid work.

Paula: I would be better off if I was on the dole because I would get help with my mortgage, I would have to pay hardly any council tax, I would get free [children's school] dinners, for which at the moment I am spending 120 pounds a month... I get 35 pounds per week to live on after that. If I was on the dole, I probably would get myself less income, obviously, but I wouldn't have to pay council tax, I would save myself 120 pounds. But I have worked all my life and don't want to be on the dole, and even though I like to be at home and do things at home, I like the socialising in work.

Underlining these considerations there was also a sensitivity to the stigma still attached to this form of dependency. Before she was able to find work again, Kathryn recalls this notion by describing the sense of humiliation she experienced following the fortnightly ritual of 'going to sign on' after losing her job at the age of 46.

Kathryn: I don't want to be on benefits. That's no life. Lots of people can manage...because they have to. But there is no pride, it's awful! When I went to sign on I felt 'Oh, my God! I am 46 and I have come to this. What is my future...what am I doing?' It was like a real smack in the face. When you've done a certain amount of college and you have a 20 year old behind the desk you just want to burst into tears.

For Louise, on the other hand, it was more a question of wanting to dispel and normalise some of the lingering pre-conceptions, which have typically depicted lone mothers as

particularly dependent on the benefit system.

Louise: I think single parents are a phenomenon of our time, particularly as there are more and more of us. I think also that lots of people look down on single parents and assume that that is a decision you made to get a free house and free benefits and all of this. But very, very few make that choice.

These observations cast some light on the disparity of views and understandings in regards to WLMs' approach to the welfare system whilst illuminating the nature of their concerns over financial matters. These views highlight the notion that these respondents were acutely aware of their financial circumstances and that, by comparing their economic predicaments with others, they were reflexively evaluating the best way forward. Amongst the respondents, a number of WLMs received Family Tax Credit (FTC) (One Parent Family: 2002b, 2004 and 2005)¹¹. By and large, the women interviewed felt a real sense of appreciation for this policy provision as they experienced the positive aspects of this entitlement. In the following remarks Dawn expresses her approval for the introduction of this policy.

Dawn: I was earning about 13/14,000 pounds at that time and during that time they brought in family tax credit which did improve the situation.

Gwyneth also stated this same point, but in doing so she underlines the point that, based on current 'New Deal' policies, it appears financially more advantageous to be a lone mother rather than a partnered one.

¹¹ FTC was introduced in 2003 and combines the benefits of Child Tax Credit, which is given to all parents with children under 20, and a Work Tax Credit, which is paid to parents who works over 16 hours a week.

Gwyneth: for the record I think that what has really, really helped are the child tax credit and the work tax credit. That's one thing that Gordon Brown did. When Miles and I were together it made no real difference because our joint salaries took us over that real input. As soon as I came on my own I did really well because I was at the top end of that thing, but also benefited to the maximum in terms of my childcare cost. I was making £23,000. If I had made £26,000 I would have been out of that bracket, but in this way virtually all my child costs were met, and that was terrific help really. And still is a big help at the moment.

Presently, in order to qualify for the work tax credit component of the FTC, WLMs need to be working at least 16 hours per week. Findings indicate that based on this calculation some WLMs changed their working commitments and reduced their working hours. Mary points this out when speaking about herself and other WLMs employed as nurses in the NHS.

Mary: If I do any extra shifts the tax credit will take the money off me at the end of the year. And actually I may end up working for nothing...because whatever I make they take off me. Because say that you make £20,000 this year, but you make 22 by working extra time. They will deduct next year's money by the actual £2,000... That's why lots of the girls [in my ward] won't do full time. They do three days a week. Because if they do three days a week or five days a week the tax credit makes the difference. If they work five, they may not get any. If they work three they get tax credit.

On this account, the calculation of benefits' entitlement is understood primarily in connection with the notion that, when working at least 16 hours a week, the WTC component of FTC provides cash payment that should raise low incomes to 'acceptable' levels. The respondents were aware of this policy and for this reason they were keen to remain within the threshold of this entitlement. Here Celia stresses this issue further:

Celia: the government now asks you to work more than 16 hours a week. So I work four days. I don't work on Friday, which is a big help.

WLMs' benefits calculations were made with the primary objective of wanting to bring a degree of economic stability to their household. Overall therefore, WLMs strive to work fewer and more selective hours (when that was possible) in order to obtain the maximum financial benefits that WTC entailed at the lowest possible cost to their family life and to its management. This notion is corroborated by the fieldwork data, which found that about two-thirds of the WLMs in this sample preferred long part-time work over the full-time alternative for the reasons described above. These observations are also consistent with the use that WLMs made of Child Tax Credit (CTC), the second component of FTC. That is, just as WLMs made use of the financial support available through WTC to further their caring objectives, similarly, relevant to the use of CTC, WLMs operated in accordance with the moral imperative of seeking the best deal for their children when in need of a childcare provider. In this respect, depending on their situational needs, WLMs made decisions that were only instrumentally (that is, as a means to an end) affected by financial considerations. Indeed, as result of this 'calculation', over half of the WLMs interviewed made use of informal and non-registered childcare by depending on family members and close friends. Gail below summarises the feeling of many of the respondents who selected this form of childcare support.

Gail: I get great family support from my parents, who live next door. So, I couldn't do it [her job] without them to be honest, because my hours are such that I couldn't pick up my children up from school.... well, I suppose I would have to pay childcare, which would

affect my wage and would not make it worth my while working.

In doing so however, these WLMs forfeited their eligibility for the financial help available from the state. Currently, under existing policy, a non-registered carer does not receive any financial support from the government. Mary was well aware of this as she struggled to find a competent person that would take care of her children during her unsocial working hours.

Mary: ...it does have to be someone who is registered, because family tax credit can be paid towards it. If she is not registered, I cannot get any help to pay for it.

During the time of the fieldwork, State benefit contribution towards the payment of childcare cost were increased by the New Labour government from 70 per cent to 80 per cent to cover nurseries/child minders' charges¹². In this respect, the few WLMs who used formal childcare providers were mostly appreciative of this, as Helen, Belinda and Caroline explain:

Helen: Yeah, the government pays 70 per cent. It does help...otherwise I wouldn't be working. I couldn't afford childcare on my own.

Belinda: It was 70 per cent until last year and now is the 80 per cent. That means that it was 200 pounds of my money last year and about 100 pounds now.

Caroline: All my family tax credit, all of it went on nursery fees. I got the most expensive nursery that I could find, which is just here. This was my priority.

Relevant to the two components of FTC, WLMs' 'choices' rested on financial

¹² In the spending review for 2010 however the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit has been

calculations that were shaped and defined by one dominant priority: to secure the best possible outcome for their children. That is, pertinent to the WTC element, the majority of the WLMs concerned worked towards accessing sufficient financial resources to enable them to limit the time spent doing paid work and increase the time spent at home doing unpaid/caring work. This action was deemed necessary by many of them in order to obtain a more effective harmonisation of the two domains. It is however evident that this option has only become viable because of the financial backing provided by WTC.

In calculating their benefits entitlements, WLMs also had to take into account the inconsistencies and problems in the delivery of FTC. It has been clearly documented that the payment of the FTC is very complex because it is based on income from the previous year. Problems are both intrinsic to the calculation system (because it presumes overpayments if families' circumstances have changed from one year to the next) and to errors by HM Revenue and Customs. For these reasons, from its inception, the system has been modified a number of times in the attempt to simplify it. Below, Anne and Susan highlight some of the problematic issues that were raised when dealing with FTC operational structures.

Anne: If I had had a nine to five job it would have been simple but I teach in the evening to adults and the hours fluctuate, depending if the course is run, if there is a holiday. So depending on the numbers of hours I work, I can get more or less help with my rent. But sometime I do 25 hours of teaching and other times I don't do any. In this respect to go on and off the benefit system is.... murder. Filling the forms, hand everything in and then things come back.... so at this moment in time I really don't know which way to go forward.

returned to its previous 70 per cent level.

Susan: when I started working I had lots of problems...they didn't believe that I was living on my own. I don't know what I have to do to prove it, you know. They were treating me as if I was cheating on the system. As they were keeping on losing my paperwork all the time I ended up sending my forms through registered post. And still they would say 'we didn't receive it'. So my claim was being deleted and the arrears are still outstanding at 2000 pound.

Furthermore, most of the WLMs interviewed expected a degree of financial support from their ex-partners. Even with this provision, about half of the respondents had experienced or were, at the time of interview, experiencing some financial hardship caused by either the non-payment or the inconsistencies in payment of child maintenance by non-resident and/or absent fathers. Most of the participants deplored the lack of financial support from their ex-partners; for some, the anxiety caused by latent or actual economic hardship was ever-present. Indeed, findings reveal that just 22 WLMs received some kind of child maintenance or informal financial support from their ex-partners. However, with relevance to the amount of childcare contribution paid by ex-partners, the picture that emerges is more complex than appears at first glance. For instance, amongst the ex-partners who did not contribute financially, there were a few who co-parented. In the following quotation, Carey articulates the reasons why she would not accept anything else beside equal shared responsibility:

Carey: I'm really not happy for a man to think that he has a 'role' when he plays around in the park on the Sunday afternoon for two hours and throws me 500 pound a month... and that is being a father. I can't accept that, so we are actually co-parenting. We got joint responsibility [for the child]...she is not resident with me...we have a joint residency between her father's address and his new partner and my house.

On the whole however, the majority of fathers occupied a middle range position between full co-parenting and absenteeism. Vanessa for example, who had been married and divorced twice, highlights two different types of relationships that the non-resident fathers had with her children. In the first instance, her first ex-partner paid some regular maintenance money but was emotionally unattached and unavailable. The second ex-husband gave only pocket money to his two children, but he was more involved with their upbringing:

Vanessa: I don't have much contact with their dads at all. I get 100 pounds maintenance a month [from one]. But he just wants sort of a tag on 'I got a daughter', basically. That is his attitude, just not interested basically. And I don't get anything for my other two children from their dad. He just gives them pocket money, I believe it is ten pounds a week but he got them phones and they sort themselves out.

Some fathers took advantage of the ineffectiveness of an over-bureaucratic Child Support Agency (Bourn 2007) prior to its collapse and subsequent restructuring. This problematic situation is highlighted by Paula.

Paula: When I phoned the CSA he was due to give me a big lump payment ...and he said to the children, I have to stop working because your mother makes me. So he has been working for a month now but it takes the CSA so long to get hold of the employer and to work out the amount that he should pay, and then he wouldn't pay, and the CSA goes back to the employer before they come back to me, and it takes them months and months before is worked out. But at that point he finishes with that job and he moves on into a different job...

Others gave small and sporadic contributions because they had moved on and were financially contributing to their new families.

Kathryn: Oh. I had money paid in today from his account and that was 37 pounds for two months. So I got something. But the problem is that he has remarried and he got a new baby. And he has another child from another relationship.

Some fathers did not contribute financially because they were out of work, while others expressed no interest in parenthood and, on this account, refused both emotional and financial commitments. Below Diane and Mary respectively raise these issues.

Diane: [My ex-partner] doesn't work. And he is on disability because he has hurt his hands and he is suffering with anxiety and depression...so I cannot rely on him financially

Mary: No, I get no financial support from him. I was at the end of my second year [of training] and he said 'I want to go'. He was never a supportive husband...he used to say 'I shouldn't have had kids, I don't want to be a family man'. It's bloody late now, isn't it? So, he wouldn't have stayed, really.

For a few fathers the estrangement from their children proved to be more of a gradual process as the remark below exemplifies:

Carla: He usually goes five or six weeks and then comes back. This time he went a few weeks before Easter, we received couple of e-mails and a little money...but this time he didn't come back and I don't think he is ever going to come back. Alex has been talking to him through e-mails, but it has been very hard for him to accept that.

Finally, a significant minority of fathers fail to give any kind of support following their history of violent and dangerous behaviour. Indeed, a number of them were forbidden to see their children altogether either by the mothers concerned or by court injunctions.

Victoria describes her situation in the following terms:

Victoria: He is not actually allowed any contact with my son. We split up when I was pregnant because of his violence. I actually went to court against him and he went to prison for six months for actually bodily harm, harassment, threat to kill and criminal damage to my house.

The difficulties caused by the frequent lack of child-care maintenance by the non-residential fathers were further compounded by the emotional distress in which a sizable minority was left by their ex-partners. In this respect, some respondents were left humiliated, confused and under the strain of severe debts. Kathryn and Rebecca exemplify some of these situations.

Rebecca: There are lone parents who become lone parents and have good divorce settlements and they have a property that they shared with their partners and they remain in the property.... but I think for those who lose their home, or become homeless or have to move....I got on the train with a pushchair and two bags. I left everything behind and I had absolutely nothing. One thing that I had was car insurance money because before I left London, my car had been stolen. That money gave me the deposit for a flat.

Kathryn: I was cleaning pubs ...I did so many jobs. Essentially because when my husband left, he left me with this huge debt. And I had to plough my way through, I had to sort it out. He just put everything in my name and just disappeared for one year. I didn't know where he was, I didn't know his address...you cannot comprehend how bad it was. I had no money for Christmas, they froze my bank account, because I said 'my husband is gone' oh! Alarm bell ringing... So they froze my bank account with all my money in.

Confronted with these situations, a sizable minority of respondents had to re-start their lives as lone parents from a position of considerable disadvantage. In the light of this, it is evident that many respondents were anxious about their financial situation and were keen to find some financial stability and security. As the findings underline, it did not

help that the majority of them, who were primary careers, received little or no financial (or emotional) support from their ex-partners. These uncertainties turned the economic reliance on the State into a form of dependency for some. Yet, the data produced indicate that WLMs disliked ‘staying at home’ benefits and opted instead for the kind of financial support associated with employment, namely Work Tax Credit, the work-based component of Family Tax Credit. The majority of WLMs interviewed wanted to work for economic, social (as a means for sociability) and personal (as a means for self-realisation) reasons, but most of them also opted to minimise the impact of paid work in favour of a better management of their home responsibilities by ‘choosing’ long part-time employment over full-time work.

These findings go somewhere towards validating Glover’s (2002) postulation of a ‘balance model’, discussed earlier in chapter three. However, the notion that WLMs’ ‘choices’ were enabled and encouraged by the particular ways in which current welfare policies are designed and implemented is key. As the analysis above indicates, most WLMs were aware of their financial entitlements and the majority acted on this knowledge in order to maximise the successful outcome of their objectives. Entwined in all these concerns, the WLMs were also very keen to develop as best they could a functional, temporal and spatial articulation of public/private spaces by ‘bringing it all together’. What is meant by this and how was this accomplished will be the subject of the next section.

5.5 Spatial/temporal negotiation of public/private spaces

Many of the WLMs interviewed were keen to minimise any time ‘wastage’ that they could accumulate as they travelled to and from work. In this respect, WLMs’ spatial and temporal negotiation of public/private spaces emerged as an important feature in these women’s organisation of paid work. Within this context, this chapter has begun to explore WLMs’ strategic processes in evaluating the ways in which, by drawing from their economic resources and personal capital (such as their level of education and skills, energy and ingenuity), they could make best use of the social infrastructure available to them. Their reflexive negotiation of their social environments offer a first glimpse of the particular character of the relational networks so strongly advocated by Sevenhuijsen (2002) and by the supporters of an ethic of care. Thus, for the majority of WLMs, the closeness of home to their work place, to the school/nursery and after-school activities, as well as the easy access to family and friends, was seen as an absolute priority. My analysis of this particular theme reveals the extent to which WLMs’ went in order to achieve the objective of ‘bringing it all together’. In turn, their proactive initiatives in doing this, allows some of WLMs’ deepest concerns and priorities to be unearthed.

Fieldwork analysis has revealed that the WLMs interviewed worked to bridge gaps, to interlink people and places and to ‘bring it all together’. As part of this process, WLMs actively worked to restrict and limit the spatial locations where their *total* (paid and unpaid) work took place. For many of them, this required a considerable amount of planning, financial resources and skills. For Louise for instance, the ‘plan’ was carefully considered, particularly as she did not have a car and she was keen to have her children involved in extra school activities on a daily basis. Not incidentally, she found a house

close both to the significant people in her life and to a good school, thus underlining her priorities.

Louise: I was pregnant and I had a child that wasn't one yet.... He then decided that he wanted something...teenage...instead of his wife. I thought, I need my mother, and then I moved back. I picked up this place because I was close to my mother, she only lives a couple of streets away... and because I had friends here, like Claire, who I have known since I was little. And the school is only about 25 minutes walk, so, it's not too bad. And then I did decide in my five years 'plan' where I was going to concentrate.

When planning their temporal/spatial 'spread', WLMs aimed at minimising and narrowing the time frames and spatial locations in which they were regularly active. This meant that many of the places where WLMs lived and worked were carefully selected. For a few of them, everything hinged around the selection of a good child minder/ nursery, school and after-school clubs. Caroline illustrates this point and how her child-centred strategy pivots precisely around these priorities.

Caroline: If he [her son] was ok and sorted in a decent environment I could fit my jobs around that. And when he moved to school, I found a child minder for the holidays and the morning club and after school clubs to cover for early morning starts and working late and it's local you know. I live just up the road, the nursery is there and my work there, all within a mile. I didn't want to drive long distances every day with a child in the car.

For others to raise their children in a 'good' community was absolutely paramount. Belinda's neighbourhood for instance was made up of 'teenagers sniffing glue, lighting fires in the back' and vandalising properties, including her own. Thus, for security and support, Belinda was eager to move into a safer area surrounded by the people she knew and loved.

Belinda: My baby was seven months old and I had to take two buses, it would take an hour and an half just to get to school, I was miles away from friends and family. All my friends were completely on the other side of Cardiff. So, I would have been completely isolated. The council refused to re-house us. But then within three weeks I had found a private property... then I moved into a two bedroom and now I live in a lovely area, in a semi-detached, three bedrooms house, you can hear a pin drop, it's so nice.

It is also apparent that a considerable minority of WLMs valued the closeness to family and friends above all else. These views were expressed by Vanessa and Gail. Whilst Belinda did stress her desire to be close to her friends, other respondents made it clear that they wanted to be close to their mothers, still seen by many of the respondents as their closest and most reliable ally when faced with serious difficulties. In the examples below, both, Vanessa and Gail highlight this issue.

Vanessa: Basically, my mother is my backbone, if it wasn't for my mother I couldn't go to work...I couldn't do a thing, she is not far from me. So, she either comes over the house to watch the children so that I can go to work, or vice versa, I take them over to her.

Gail: I started to live down the bottom and then I moved up and up and then I moved on the same street, I was five doors away and then the lady who lived next door to mum passed away ...and basically I begged them until they gave me the house. I pestered them and I shouted at them and I cried at them basically whatever it took to get that house and finally I got it. And that was mostly for the children.

WLMs clustered their activities based on the need to maximise their resources whilst attempting to minimise 'waste' of their perceived time and energy. In all of these respects, it is interesting to note how time was carefully calculated and activities were planned and structured. For Cathy for example, to be able to leave half an hour earlier

made all the difference. As a result, she would not be caught in the rush of the five o'clock incoming traffic. This allowed her to be at home with her son at an earlier time, which in turn provided with a more balanced outcome to her life.

Cathy: I finish at about half past four. I'll go home and take over the caring again. It's good because in my old, previous job I didn't finish until five o'clock. It would take me an hour to get back home and I would barely see him [her son]. Whereas this way, because I finish a lot earlier, it's 25 minutes down the road.

For Glenys, the pre-calculated closeness of her house with her children's school and her mother's house meant that very little time was spent in travelling and that she could enjoy the full extent of her mother's support. This in turn, compensated for the inflexibility of her working schedule.

Glenys: I did a nine to five job and that would fit me fine actually. Because I live just ten minutes from school, I would drop them off at 25 to nine and then I would be at work at ten to nine or five to nine. It would be absolutely great. They would go to my mum from school then. I would come back from work, pick them up and go home.

In those cases when the precise and complex organisation of spatial/temporal structures collapsed, some of the respondents, like Carey and Gwyneth, felt strained and frustrated. Both respondents had worked hard to restructure their spatial/temporal arrangements. Below Carey describes what her routine was like before and after she implemented the changes she deemed necessary to achieve a better 'work-life' balance. These changes were the outcome of Carey's shift of priorities: from a work-centred to a mother-centred approach, and, from working long hours with disabling flexible arrangements to finding a long part-time job with enabling flexibility. A crucial part of this transformation

however, was Carey's ability to bring together all the activities and places that she deemed important under her new focus.

Carey: My day used to be horrific. I was up at six o'clock and it used to take an hour and an half for me in the morning...I would take him [my ex-partner] to his school at about eight o'clock in the morning and then take my daughter to her nursery at half past eight and get me to work for nine, and that was all the way around Cardiff. And then I had to work all my way back. Usually ten to six I managed to get out of the office, no lunch breaks, no breaks. So I picked her up and battled through the traffic. I would be properly at home at about seven...Now in my typical week we wake up at seven and we leave the house at five to nine. Within three minutes we are at the school gate, and then I come to work. Because they are very, very flexible I find that sometime I can do some shopping before I go to work. I can get to work say anytime between half past nine and half past ten. I finish working usually at about half past two, except on Thursday, so I have plenty of time to get my daughter from school at half past three.

Conversely, Gwyneth was still in the middle of that transformative process. For Gwyneth the difficulty of managing a balanced routine was caused primarily by her changeable arrangements, which occurred almost every day. Her caring arrangements were equally very 'staggered' because different people and institutions (she received help from her ex-partner, her mother, her child minder, the occasional friend and a few after-school clubs) were only able to help for a few hours a day on different days of the week and not always in the pre-established order. As such, Gwyneth was struggling to cope with the pressure of organizing and managing the logistics of a complex 'plan', within which the possibility for a stable and functional routine was increasingly sacrificed. In other words, the temporal/spatial 'spread' in which Gwyneth operated was too vast, too complicated and too difficult to coordinate. At the time of the interview, Gwyneth was seeking to improve this by specifically restructuring and limiting the time-frame of her

activities. An important part of this improvement was based on her determination to temporarily reduce her working hours and, at the time of the interview, she was negotiating this with her manager. This, in turn, was to be followed by a more direct involvement in her children's lives, thus limiting the amount of 'help' that she would require from her formal and informal network of support. Her ultimate aim was to develop a routine that would bring a degree of much-needed stability into her children's lives.

Gwyneth: I think one of the problems that I have is that it can be a different schedule almost every day. So that creates its own tensions in terms of childcare arrangements that are happening in different days...and I am also changing things again [at work]. So a lot of my issues are really mental energy, issues about keeping the organisational stuff in my head. Now there are situations when you just want to scream and shout...instead you have to be the adult, it seems, in every scenario to make sure that life can run smoothly.

5.6 Summary

To summarise so far, the data analysis presented in this chapter indicates that WLMs defined their priorities around various interests and concerns. Their being positioned as working lone mothers in *this* society at *this* time, given *these* labour market conditions and particular welfare benefits entitlements, shapes WLMs' 'care' ethics in specific ways. The difficulties that many encountered in their workplace induced most respondents to work towards simplifying and harmonising conflicting schedules and routines. The rationalisation of these processes includes either one or a combination of the following: moving house, changing neighbourhoods and changing jobs followed by a re-structuring of working routines and lifestyles. Through these changes, many WLMs

were able to reduce ‘pockets’ of ‘wasted’ time by compressing and condensing time and space within well- defined spatial and temporal boundaries. When WLMs could not take steps towards this kind of harmonisation, they often felt unbalanced, out of control and experienced various kinds of difficulties. These findings have emerged against the backdrop of the considerable gravitational pull exercised by paid work in the respondents’ lives. On this account, depending on the sector in which they worked, on the type of employment they took and on their individual bargaining potential, respondents experienced the effect that enabling or disabling flexible arrangements had on the structuring and management of their caring work. In this context, to be able to access favourable flexible working arrangements proved to be the most valued aspect of their working lives. In addition, it emerged that WLMs favoured long part-time to full-time work and that their preferred working time was between nine-thirty to two-thirty /three o’clock.

Within this, whilst some women (predominately those who worked in the public and Third Sector) were more likely to experience enabling flexibility, others (primarily those who worked in the private sector) experienced disabling flexibility. Amongst the WLMs interviewed, the latter scenario proved to be the most widespread. Some of the WLMs to be worst affected were those who were also studying and/or retraining. WLMs’ uptake of paid work was also conditioned by their calculation of benefits’ entitlement. In this respect it was highlighted how the payment of work and child tax credit improved considerably the financial situation of many whilst, at the same time changing the working patterns and behaviour of others by promoting both the uptake of paid work and

a limitation on the number of hours that the respondents were prepared to work. This chapter has also considered the financial contributions that WLMs received from their ex-partners for the maintenance of their children. Here the scenario appears to be varied and multi-faceted. Overall, if a few WLMs were able to share the full-responsibility of co-parenting with their partners, the majority experienced inconsistent support, financial and emotional neglect and even threatening and violent behaviour. Finally, a number of them were left financially destitute at the time of their separation/divorce.

So far, it has been my argument that it was primarily the need to improve on the use of available resources and to minimise the inherent conflict of interests between diverse responsibilities that has turned WLMs into a very mobile, adaptable group of people. The implicit and explicit objectives behind their actions seems to point towards a desire to achieve better routines and more balanced lifestyles that would directly benefit their children. Thus, in spite of their vulnerabilities and relative poverty, most WLMs in this sample appear to be very active moral agents, determined to be in charge and exercise a degree of control over their immediate circumstances and over the broader direction of their lives. This seems to signal a positive evolution in the ‘right’ direction; one characterised by less dependency (particularly towards society and the state) and more self-reliance (on individual personal capital). However, these features comprise just one of the many facets that exemplify WLMs as active moral agents. How this agency is explicated within the framework of WLMs’ caring work in regard to their children will be the subject of the in-depth analysis of the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 6

Working Lone Mothers' care for the children

6.1 Introduction

Prior to entering into an in-depth analysis of WLMs' moral agency in relation to their children, it is useful at this juncture to return briefly to the definitional parameters used throughout this thesis to describe the experience of 'care'. Drawing from Tronto's (1993) analytical insight, this thesis has approached the concept of care as a type of action and a process that describes the willingness and the desire to respond to individual and/or collective 'needs'. These are defined in the acts of 'caring about' (taking notice, recognise a need in the first place); 'taking care of' (assuming the responsibility to care); 'care-giving' (doing the actual work of caring); and 'care-receiving' (Tronto 1993: 127). Drawing from this conceptual framework, this chapter explores WLMs' moral agency by analysing how WLMs recognised, took responsibility for and exercised their moral agency in order to respond to their children's needs.

To position the research within this conceptual framework provides the basic platform from which to analyse the empirical findings concerning the type and quality of care that WLMs allocated to their children. To define WLMs' caring work in relation to their children means to envisage this process and ground it primarily in the wide-ranging practice of 'being there' for their children. The importance of 'being there', that is, to be primarily at home when perceived necessary, highlights a significant and conventional pre-requisite of care-giving. Literature from the developmental (which have chiefly focused on the child) and traditional sciences, as well as from feminist research, has well documented this phenomenon. In this respect, this finding is no exception in confirming

that the 'need' for mothers to be physically present in their children's lives and to be 'at home' at crucial moments (for example, when the children come back from nursery/school), is still very strong and clearly articulated amongst WLMs, as well as being acted upon as a moral imperative. Jane emphatically highlights this issue and in doing so links her current understanding of 'being there' with her childhood experiences.

Jane: What I find difficult...the caring for them is everything isn't it? It's strong. It's from being there. If I have a day off, they just like me to be there. They don't particularly want to do anything. They go with their friends, but they like to know that I am in the house. I used to be like that with my mother. I didn't particularly want to spend time with my mother. But I loved to come home from school and know that my mother was there. There is something nice about that isn't it? It's strange. Just to be there to talk to, do their washing and ironing...do home cooking...

This said, given the specific circumstances under which this group of WLMs has been studied, I would argue for the value of a new and perhaps more nuanced understanding of the importance of 'being there'. Based on this premise, the following two sections will first analyse WLMs' definition of 'being there' for their children through the dynamic interplay of 'active' and 'passive' care. Once the conceptual framework for care has been established, the analysis will continue with particular reference to the temporal framework for its application. The four themes below map out how this chapter will develop. Throughout the various sections, WLMs will describe how their 'active' and 'passive' care within the domestic sphere has been affected by the cumulative and intensifying effect of the instrumental practices, structures and values that qualify the world of paid work. Against this backdrop, what will be emphasised is how these processes are transforming the social landscape of informal care.

Based on WLMs' narratives, care for their children was expressed by:

6.2 'being there' through 'active' and 'passive' care

6.3 converting commodified values and practices of the workplace in the private sphere

6.4 providing a structure

6.5 confronting potential risks to informal care from the excesses of commodified values and practices

6.2 'Being there' through 'active' and 'passive' care

An inability to be present in their children's lives was perceived by many WLMs as a form of neglect and, as the respondent below indicates, one of the principal causes for the unruly behaviour of children.

Susan: To tell you the truth, in the period when I was working full time she became quite rebellious and quite attention seeking. It's because I wasn't there...that I believe is the reason why we are having so many problems. I swear it...because the parent isn't there for the child. And she [my daughter] would say 'oh, we haven't got the time to do anything together anymore!' And if you are working all day your child is quite lonely, you know? She doesn't want to be left watching television or playing on the computer. She wanted to get out there and do things...physically. And I had to explain to her 'I have to go to work because we are not getting enough money. If I can't save any money for you for the future, you can't have any money'. But if she was feeling bad and I didn't have enough time for her, I felt guilty.

This quotation highlights Susan's feelings before switching from a full-time job to a long part-time one. It brings to the fore the moral dilemma faced by many WLMs who struggled with complex contradictions in their lives. For Susan, work in general and full-

time employment in particular brings financial security and rewards. But money is not just needed for day-to-day living; it is also the means to a better future for the children in order to guarantee, for instance, an easier access to the housing market and/or to higher education. In this respect, it appears that work can acquire enough significance to provide WLMs with a moral justification for not ‘being there’, thus supporting the predominant political argument that paid work is the only viable route out of poverty (Brown 2009, Osborn 2010). Yet, as the remark above underlines, Susan is torn by this situation since not to be able to ‘be there’ for her daughter when perceived necessary, denied her the possibility to perform her primary responsibility as a carer. In turn, the tension caused by this ambivalence triggers her sense of guilt. On the other hand, Louise’s guilt comes from snapping at her children when under pressure from work and study commitments and consequently from missing out on ‘being there’ for them.

Louise: I felt time was slipping through my fingers and I wasn't spending it with them. I felt a huge amount of guilt for not being with them and I was snappy as well because I was so tired.

‘Being there’ for their children typically meant that within the day-to-day living, WLMs worked to put their children’s needs before their own and before housework. However, the time spent at home was usually perceived as restricted by too many competing responsibilities. The variable ways of ‘being there’ for the children and caring for them has been explored in this research in terms of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care. I have used the terms ‘*active*’ care to describe time used by WLMs to interact *directly* with their children. Much more common however was to use home time to dispense ‘*passive*’ care. By this term I describe the time that WLMs spent caring for the children through *indirect*

activities (such as cleaning, cooking, washing and so on) that WLMs performed on their own. In the following quotation Gayna illuminates the ambivalences and tensions that often characterise the interaction between 'active' and 'passive' care.

Gayna: I find that the free time that I have is taken up by domestic chores, you know, trying to get things organized for the following day. It's just a treadmill really. When I go home I just would like to be able to sit down and chat [to my children] about their day or watch a film together. I try and I try to ignore the piles of washing or whatever and sit down and chat. But you are conscious that you got so much to do all the time, and I cannot sit down until ten, ten thirty in the night, and then...to bed.

Gayna would prefer to spend more time with her children by talking to them and finding out about their day ('active' care), but this caring activity can be easily superseded by the urgency of completing the daily portion of housework tasks ('passive' care). Overall, most WLMs quantified 'active' and 'passive' care in the ambit of 25 per cent and 75 per cent respectively. Belinda describes this in the following way:

Belinda: I would ashamedly say that 75 per cent of care is 'passive' and 25 per cent 'active'. I'm talking about reading to them, conversations and activities like playing games together or setting up, bowling, playing hide and seek and stuff like that.

When asked, some WLMs however found it difficult to describe in statistical terms the amount of 'passive' and 'active' care they were able to exercise. Diane highlights this when describing her daily interaction with her three year old son.

Diane: It's difficult to say... but I try to do quite a lot of 'active' care, you know. He [my son] is in Welsh school and he gets quite a lot of Welsh books and I don't know Welsh. So I learn with him. I make sure that we have the whole week to practice on

what we need to do and we practice a lot. I take the play-dough out and I make shapes with him. I want to be interactive with him as much as I can.

By contrast, Caroline's perception of the importance of 'being there' and of how 'active' and 'passive' care should be exercised, appeared to be affected by the meaning she attributed to 'good' mothering, which was noticeably influenced by her upbringing.

Caroline: I would say that the weekdays are very difficult to quantify because we don't really see each other that much. But if it was a day off, it would probably be 75 'passive', 25 'active'. Say a day like this.... maybe even 70-30. But again and this also makes me very unpopular, I'm not a great believer in being a kid's best friend. You know, when I was growing up in the 70s, we didn't see our parents. We played, we looked after ourselves. My mum wasn't my best friend, sitting on the floor, cutting shapes with me. It would be weird.

This view is antithetical to that of a previous respondent (Belinda) who was 'ashamed' about the little time she was able to spend with her children. In this respect, Caroline presents a contrasting view of 'good mothering', one that does not include 'being there' as a necessary requirement to ensure quality of care. In stating this however, Caroline is aware that she is presenting a view that is generally perceived as divergent from the norm and her narrative needs to be understood against the backdrop of her past experiences, which (as will be illustrated later on) are relevant in shaping WLMs' moral agency. The dynamic articulation of 'passive' and 'active' care was also experienced in a different way by Rebecca, who for a time worked as self-employed from home.

Rebecca: I used to say, I am here, I am here, but...I wasn't really because I was so absorbed in everything else that I was doing. So, he [my son] was more on his own, he would be in his room watching television, playing computer's games, yeah! And it is 'passive' [care] because you are so engrossed in what you are doing that you are less

aware of them. It's a very different kind of dynamic then when you say 'right, I cut off now, come on, this is your time' ... but we cannot do it all. If I have to be honest, if I should assess my quality of care in those two years [when working from home], I think 90 per cent of it was all 'passive'. It was just survival. I was on autopilot. And how this is going to affect your child.... I don't know.

Through her observation Rebecca brings more clearly to the fore further evidence that when conflicting commitments of paid work and care co-exist within the same temporal and spatial boundaries, it becomes more unlikely that WLMs can manage to 'do it all'. For the respondent above, the initial comforting notion that she 'was there' was marred by the realisation that to be 'so absorbed' and 'engrossed in what you are doing' leads inevitably to a loss of awareness of her child's presence and, arguably, of his needs. As Rebecca realised the unsuitability and unsustainability of working in that way, she moved her office outside her home and changed her daily schedule.

By and large, WLMs felt constrained by time limitations and under pressure from endlessly multitasking. In this respect, they were aware that in order to be a positive, active presence in their children's lives, it was not enough to simply 'be there'. In practice this means that WLMs had to find effective ways to differentiate between the two elements of 'passive' and 'active' care throughout their daily routines and learn how to prioritise between them. As a result, some WLMs who identified housework as a type of 'passive' care, decided to do the minimum amount needed when their children were around and then carry out the bulk of the housework after their children had gone to bed.

Laura: I want to be there for them when they need me, I suppose, as any mother would... being able to have quality time ...enjoy their company rather than getting

frustrated, like I got to do the dishes, I got to do the washing, I got to ...the house is a mess... you know? I get always frustrated with things like that. So, I do all my housework when the children are in bed and I cook their tea when they do their drawing and colouring...

For these WLMs, housework turned into a secondary concern, whilst their ‘active’ focus on their children loomed very large. Subsequently, some learned to distinguish further between a ‘messy’ house and a ‘dirty’ house. They would not live with dirt, but they had learned to be very flexible about the amount of mess that they could tolerate. The quotation below highlights this issue.

Gail: My mother goes mad, because she is a clean freak and she goes everywhere around and puts things back, but my outlook on the house is - and only recently has been like this... it will do, as long as I have clean plates and dishes, even though there is a pile of laundry that needs ironing and many other things to do, the kids need a story, you know. To me that's more important than ironing and running around the house tidying up.

In postponing their housework, Laura and Gail made a choice that favored ‘active’ care over ‘passive’ care but these moral decisions were not always easily reached as often the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ elements of care-giving could not be so neatly compartmentalised and prioritised. This was one of the most recurrent complaints amongst WLMs, who felt compelled to prioritise housework (‘passive’ care) over ‘active’ care. In this respect, problems were caused in the first place by the limited time they had at their disposal when at home and by the frustrating feeling of playing constantly ‘catch up’ with their housework. This was the case with Rachel, the mother of three boys, who in the following quotation explains:

Rachel: I do get tired and stressed out...I time my work in the house, still I come to the end of the month knowing that there is still so much that I have to do!

As a result, when housework (general house cleaning) and other forms of 'passive' care (such as cooking, washing and ironing) took too much of their home time, they came to be resented by some WLMs because they were seen as impinging on time better spent: namely, developing and consolidating quality 'active' care. In the following remark, Glenys exposes this issue.

Glenys: It was difficult because I found that even when I was in the house all day, like in the weekends, even though I spent time with the children, there was the ironing to do, the washing, the cleaning, the dog to walk, all those things that you need to do in a daily routine.

Furthermore, some WLMs had to work to defuse the latent tension arising from the realisation that house chores were unfairly distributed. In the following quotation, Celia unearths some of these points of tension.

Celia: The first thing that I do when I get home is taking care of the food...that takes priority. Then there is washing and drying.... washing the dishes.... I do try to get them [the children] to wash the dishes.... but it does seem to take too long. I'm getting stricter now, especially with the older two because I haven't got time. They expect me to take them everywhere...how can I do that and do anything else at home?

Celia realises that if on the one hand she needs help with her housework, on the other, due to the limited time at her disposal, chores need to be done in a fast and efficient manner, something that her children are not apparently able to do. Celia hints at the unfairness of her situation, since she feels that responsibilities should be more equally

shared. Namely, if her children expect to be taken everywhere by their mother, they should also be prepared to compensate for the travelling time by doing a certain amount of housework themselves. These tensions forced some of the respondents with older children to enter into negotiations for the sake of finding workable compromises. In seeking to find solutions, WLMs promoted the development of an 'active' care within these conventionally 'passive' constructs. In the remark below, Carla illustrates this progression.

Carla: They are starting to help. I said 'right, between the two of you, one of you does the vacuuming and the other does the sweeping downstairs. Decide between the two of you'. And they did it! And I put all their clothes in separate piles and I say 'the clothes are there if you want them ironed you get the ironing board out' Sometimes it lapses, but it works most times.... they are not too bad. In the weekend the middle one has been doing the hoovering and Tom does the room downstairs. The young one is quite good on the dishes really. Tom also takes the bins out for me... there is even now the occasion when they don't need to be asked.... they just do it.

What these remarks underline is WLMs' attempts to negotiate reflexively a moral definition of 'being there' where mothers and children can be more actively involved in each others' lives through such activities. What these comments also stress is the notion that notwithstanding the changing interpretations of 'being there' for their children, through their 'active' and 'passive' agency, WLMs were providing care-giving work for their children.

For some WLMs who had not seen their children for the most part of the day, to 'be there' often turned into a yearning for 'togetherness'. Yet, WLMs were also sensitive to the notion that it is possible to be together without experiencing 'togetherness', a notion

that entails a shared awareness of and sensitivity towards each other's presence as a prerequisite in defining the meaning and value of 'us'. In the following quotation, Glenys, who is both a WLM and a student, realised this when she commented:

Glenys: I had an essay to hand in last week. [My daughter] came down, sat on one end of the dining table and did her homework. Alyssa was sitting at the coffee table doing hers, and I was sitting there stressing over this essay. That again was a family thing. We were all together ...but not really together.

Within this context, it needs to be pointed out that, crucially, when disabling flexible arrangements were compounded with unsocial working hours, the tension of conflicting commitments increased further. The following remark brings to the fore some of the elements of this underlying tension. Leanne studied in the morning and worked in the afternoon until late at night. She was troubled by the realisation that her daughter was sacrificing her sleep waiting for her to come back from work.

Leanne: She is constantly complaining that I am not there [at home]. For instance, when I got home last night, it was a quarter to 11 and she was still awake and then she goes... 'mum, can I come down for half an hour?' And I think 'Oh bless her...maybe because she hasn't seen me'. Generally she goes to bed at half past nine and she is usually asleep by ten at the latest, because she likes her sleep. I cannot do this to her. It's not so much that I don't want to work. I don't mind working, but is the effect that it's having on her, because she is staying up late as well and then it is difficult to get her up in the morning. And obviously her concentration in school is going to go. At the moment she is a grade 'A' student, she is doing so well. For me to jeopardise that really, just for a part-time evening job... I need to get something different!

It is evident that Leanne valued her daughter's education and she did not want to see her under-performing in school. At the same time however, it was difficult for Leanne to

enforce a strict bed-time regime since she understood and justified her daughter's need for closeness and for wanting to spend time with her before going to sleep. However, when WLMs were either too tired or too busy, the tendency amongst some respondents was to 'switch off'. Belinda below emphasises this issue when describing the particular circumstances in which she practices this 'art' form.

Belinda: I am not the only one. The number of mothers who say that their radio goes full blast in the car because 'I can't listen to the rabbiting that is going on about this and the other'. And my mother always said to me.... because I asked her 'did we drive you mad?' And she said 'no, you have to learn the art of switching off'. And I said 'what is that?' and she said 'is when you go ...aha! Uhm! Ooh!' which I've done time and time again. The kids are in the back of the car and I have agreed to the most ridiculous things because I'm doing the art of switching off.

As Belinda illustrates, being attuned and listening to their children was something that mothers were asked to do anywhere they would go with their children. In the example above, a trip in the car, which potentially could have included a certain amount of interaction and 'active' care, turns into an experience to be endured by a tired and busy respondent. Time spent together in outdoor pursuits or by assisting children with their outdoors activities was also seen as an important aspect of WLMs' caring work, which however not everyone could pursue. In the next quotation Vanessa attempts unsuccessfully to explain her daughter the reasons why she cannot be present at her horse-riding lessons.

Vanessa: [My daughter] started horse riding lessons on the weekend and I am not there to take her. My mother takes her but she wants me to do it. So, I am trying to say to her 'if I take you I am not in work. If I am not in work, we got no money. If we got no

money, you cannot go to horse riding lessons'. I feel as if I am the horrible one at the minute because I am not doing things with her. She says 'when are you coming to see me mum...?' But I can't. I am working. [She says] 'take a holiday!' But you can't take a holiday. She doesn't understand...

So far, this analysis has been considering how 'being there' for the children was explicated by WLMs' moral agency through 'active' and 'passive' care. In this respect, findings have highlighted the predominately conflicting relationship of these two elements. One pivotal reason for this can be found in the ways in which time was used and managed by the WLMs in question. Indeed, as it has been pointed out, how much time WLMs had at their disposal at the end of their working day often shaped their choices and their attitude towards their caring work. This will now be explored more in detail in the following section.

6.3 Converting commodified values and practices of the workplace in the private sphere

In investigating how WLMs exercised 'active' and 'passive' care by 'being there' for the children, the fieldwork data has indicated how particularly the growing shift towards an intensification of commodified values and practices in the workplace is increasingly impacting and impinging on the structure and management of the private sphere and on the amount, quality and use of 'free', 'personal' or 'family' time that WLMs have at their disposal to care. This impact is manifold. As discussed in chapter 5, against a growing private sector which is largely de-unionised and unregulated, there are increasing demands on working (lone) mothers from their employers to work for longer hours and to take work at home. Furthermore, the pressure exercised by working commitments tends

to become acute amongst those WLMs who take their studies at home. This is because students/workers have the tendency to embed their work study in their uncommodified home activities and treat it accordingly. As a result of all of this, time has been steadily ‘squeezed’ out from the domestic sphere (Hochschild 2001) forcing many WLMs to constantly re-think how to best prioritise and organise their care-giving work in order to improve the efficiency of their delivery and of their outcomes.

This said, in adopting temporal frameworks, instrumental rationalities and practices from the world of paid work, WLMs are also creating caring structures and routines, which tend to mirror the ethos and mentality of the workplace. That is, the delivery of care, which has been primarily expressed through task-oriented and action-oriented activities, has been increasingly constructed and finalised to mimic the methods and rationalities of the public sphere. It has been mainly within the contexts of these highly structured events and rituals more than in the unstructured times ‘in between’, that an attitude to nurture has been fostered and actualised by WLMs. From this standpoint, it will be highlight how this shift has been instrumental in modifying the type and quality of care that WLMs are able to understand and experience in relation to their children in and out of the family domain. In the practically of day-to-day living amongst the respondents, this translates into a use of ‘time units’ – fixed slots of usable time – which have become rationalised and routinised to such an extent that some WLMs were planning their daily schedule ‘on the hour, every hour’.

Glenys: I will be starting this job as soon as possible, and we are going to have a better quality of life for all of us. It's all time management in the end. I have to plan on the

hour, every hour.

The effect of this steady and continuous ‘migration’ of temporal structures and ethical/normative practices from the public into the private sphere highlights the ‘thinning’ down phenomenon of the public/private divide, as well as stressing the artificiality of this separation.. This appears to be particularly odd when considering that the majority of the respondents speak of their daily work in terms of the *totality* of their tasks and responsibilities. In the following extract, Victoria epitomises this notion of the *totality* of a typical working day, whilst describing her daily routine, which is punctuated by precise, repetitive actions and by the careful, purposeful allocation and management of many units of time:

Victoria: My alarm goes off at half past six in the morning I go downstairs for a cup of coffee and make the baby a bottle of tea...I take it up to him. As he drinks his tea I get myself washed and dressed. Then I go downstairs and I get myself some breakfast. Then I put him in the bath, give him a quick wash and get him dressed up for the nursery, gather my working things together. Then after I have done that, is the case of quickly cleaning around, do the dishes.... leaving the house at around a quarter to eight to eight. Then I drop Ben at the nursery, it is on my way to work, half an hour from here, at about half past eight and I come to work at a quarter to nine to nine...finish to work at half past five, pick him up from nursery at a quarter to six, getting him home, bath...playing with him for a little while...bed. He normally goes to bed at around eight. Then it’s the case (sic) that I get ready for the next day, if there is anything that I need to do or write up. Have a bath, get my clothes ready, do the washing, do the ironing and then go to bed by half past ten. Not very exciting isn’t?

It is evident that within this context, actions are not casually performed. All time units described by Victoria are distinctive but interconnected in such a way as to achieve maximum returns and efficiency whilst minimising wastage of energy, resources and, of

course, time. For Victoria this meant to be attuned to the ‘big picture’ and ‘bring it all together’ while multitasking and streamlining down to the smallest detail through continuous adjustments and modifications, both structured and unstructured activities. In order to achieve these objectives and carry out successfully the *totality* of her work, Victoria needed to negotiate reflexively her priorities and maintain a clear focus throughout her day. Victoria describes her activities in and in between the private and public sphere in the same fluid and sequential manner. Along similar lines, the following quotation intends to draw attention to the intensity of the activities taking place in and out of some of the WLMs’ households. As a support teacher, Dawn’s working life was well organised and compatible with her caring work. Below, she gives a detailed account of this ‘thick’ articulation.

Dawn: So, we come back at around half past four. The time depends on the things that I need to do in school at the end of the day and how fast they can walk back. But then, Monday night is Cubs...so we take Richard to Cubs and I got one evening with Eli on my own. Tuesday Richard plays football right after school, so Ely and I wait in the park while he does his football training. They got karate on the Tuesday evening, and that's from half past six to eight...and that's my hour and an half off, then I go down the gym. On Wednesday, they go to a friend's house after school, and then they go to a bike club with that friend. They do crafts and things, but they used to fix bikes there, so is still called the bike club. Thursday is Brownies' day and table tennis. So they do table tennis in an after school club.... come home and then I take Ellie to Brownies, while I have Richard. Friday is karate night again...

The intensity of Dawn’s routine underlines the ways in which after-school activities have been rationalised and combined to extract maximum benefits under the careful management of every usable time unit. Thus, Dawn is able to take care of her children’s interests as they diversify or come together along complex and complicated lines. Dawn

does this by creating ‘pockets’ of ‘active’ care where she can spend time with each child individually, whilst managing to find also a little time for herself.

Dawn: It's just.... ticking boxes really...it sounds awful but these [after-school activities] are things that I think are going to be useful to them. They have been doing these activities since they were five or six.

The highly structured nature of daily routines was not a localised event amongst WLMs but rather a common scenario. Managed in this fashion, units of time are used in a similar ‘functional’ and ‘productive’ manner not unlike the ways in which time is thought about and maximized in structured paid work. From this standpoint, time is perceived in the shape of many blocks, measured and assessed by their utility. Within these contexts, WLMs do not seem to negotiate the spatial/temporal dimensions of public/private domains as separate or divided entities. However, given the gravitational pull that the public sphere exercises over the private domain, it appears that Dawn’s ‘home’ life has increasingly come to reproduce the time structure and organisation of the public sphere by the way in which family life and family activities in general are carried out. In the following quotations, Belinda and Celia attribute the reasons for their perceived failure to their ‘busy lifestyles’ and to the need to have to constantly multitask.

Belinda: I have no patience. I'm really aware that I snap and I think that that devalues them as well. But is this busy lifestyle...that's all there is. It's not because I don't value them because I see each one of them as very different people with very different needs and they all give me something different in return. But I think I fail them, as every mother does. I think all mothers fail their children in some way, in one way or another, in little ways...during the day. I got time set aside... but in between, life is so busy...it's such a quick pace.

Celia: I feel pressurized at times. And I shout at them...I tend to shout...I try not to...I feel guilty...I feel I shouldn't have done it. Is when you got many things to do and then something comes on top of that and it becomes difficult to manage it...Yeah...I need to learn how to prioritize more and not to do everything at once, but it's not the easiest thing to do.

All the remarks made in this section illuminate some of the ways in which the prevailing commodified structures, rationalities and values of the workplace, within which WLMs are embedded, have been internalised by the respondents and are 'migrating' from the public to the private sphere. These are now increasingly shaping and informing WLMs' understandings and practices of their care-giving work. Against this backdrop, the objective of the next section is to provide a deeper understanding of the structures that qualify WLMs' caring practices.

6.4 Providing a structure

In defining the characteristics of care relevant to the structure implemented, some dominant features can be identified. WLMs pursued strong structures in order to promote stable and consistent routines, create and maintain substantive relationships with their children and present themselves as a reliable centre of moral authority. On these accounts, care-giving emerged as a sequence of well structured activities to which WLMs attributed great significance and value on the grounds that they would bring order and stability to their children's lives, as the following respondents emphasise.

Leanne: Because the lifestyle is so busy you have to be organised. If you are not organised it goes all out of the window and I cannot function, I just cannot function....

because I'll be everywhere and accomplish nothing.

Carey: [the children] want your time and they want their routine. We never break from the routine.

Rachel: [The children] know every week their routine, so they don't get confused by things. Because when things do change they don't like it. They like their routine, they like to know that.... coming to six o'clock they have half an hour to bath time. They know what programme they are going to watch before.... then there is bath time, milk and snack time and then bed.

When describing the daily organisation and management of their time, one respondent spoke in terms of a 'military operation'. Victoria is a full-time WLM, whose priority at the time of the interview was to have her child settled in a good quality nursery. To that purpose she had changed her job and had moved house to be close to her supportive relatives. The quotation below refers to the organisation arrangements that she has in place for her son, after he leaves the nursery.

Victoria: It's really like a military operation. My grandparents or one of my aunts every week take him home. They go to get him earlier before he gets too tired. My grandparents have milk and biscuits in the car [to keep him awake]. Then on Friday is a different scenario again because my grandparents take him to my aunt who has him until half past five – a quarter to six. Ben sees my family every day. I live there too, my aunt is two doors down, my father is across the road and my grandparents are on the next street. This means that when I get back at a quarter to six - six o'clock I can pick him up, give him a bath and put him to bed by seven. And because he has his clothes there, my aunt also prepares him for bed. So, he either stays there or I just carry him couple of doors down. That means that I can catch up with the housework and do some washing and ironing.

Whilst stressing the organisational aspects of this account, it is evident that Victoria was

able to manage her situation by devising a functional structure that in 'bringing it all together' reduced time wastage (particularly in relation to travelling time) and maximised the level of cooperation of her close and extended family. For Victoria this was of a crucial importance since her child had been suffering with convulsive fits and high temperature on many occasions and she was struggling to hold to a job that supported a strong 'technocratic-interpretivist' working environment with disabling flexible arrangements. Thus, her closeness to the nursery and the availability of her extended family in case of sudden emergencies were an absolute priority for this particular WLM.

Structured routines were used by WLMs both for organisational purposes and as a means to an end. WLMs valued 'structure' because it was seen as promoting and encouraging their children's socialisation, discipline and their physical and mental wellbeing, whilst 'routines' helped to establish a sense of normality, familiarity and stability within their household. For Gwyneth, for instance, this translated into the moral imperative to reduce temporarily her commitment to paid work in order to help her daughter to overcome her confusion and insecurity at a particular difficult time.

Gwyneth: Basically what Marie Claire needs is a mummy that takes her to school every day, picks her up and brings her back home... I think she is really struggling with the multiple child-care arrangements in terms of the different things that are happening every day. So, I sat down and I talked to my ex-husband about it and then I went back to work and I explained the scenario and asked that temporarily, for three months I would go down to three days a week. So I'm going to work on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and then, Thursday and Friday I will be at home. So Marie Claire is going to know that for the first three days we are going to have this arrangement, but then from Wednesday night, Thursday and Friday it will just be me and I will have more time and energy to spend with her, focusing on her really.

‘Stability’ was particularly important to those WLMs who had experienced in relatively recent times a considerable amount of turmoil and upset following the breakup of their relationships with the fathers of their children. Amongst several respondents, this emerged as a notable feature since there was a relative high number of WLMs who had experienced significant physical violence at the hand of their former partners¹³.

Dwyn: My major concern for the future is the effect that my divorce from their father will have on my daughters. I get by believing that I am doing the very best I can for them under difficult circumstances. Obviously earning more money would improve our standard of living, but until they are a little older, I would not contemplate changing my job as my place of employment and working hours fits in so well with my family life at the moment and the children need a good routine.

By the same token, Julia fought to keep her children in the same school where they had established good relationships with their peers and their teachers. Her application was initially rejected because the children were no longer living in the same catchment area. Julia then went before an independent board and pleaded her case; eventually her children were allowed to remain in the same school. Below she explains her reasons for pursuing that course of action.

Julia: I felt that they needed that connection [with all that was familiar to them and with their friends], and that routine to stay in the same school. I felt that with all that upheavals and the fact that we lost our home...I felt that was enough to cope with. I worried about Rhiannon and I wanted to have the minimum upset. To move home and still stay in the same school was the right thing to do.

The importance that WLMs attributed to the management of a good daily structure was

¹³ Within this sample, 12 out of the 35 WLM had been exposed to serious physical violence and a similar

nowhere more apparent than in the organisation of after-school activities, which most WLMs undertook in order to provide their children's lives with repetitive yet, stimulating activities. As previously pointed out, amongst all the daily rituals observed by WLMs, after-school activities loomed very large in the lives of mothers and children alike and seemed to absorb and channel much of WLMs' caring work. The quotation below captures the intensity and complexity of these arrangements.

Rachel: we get home from school, a quick bite to eat on the Monday because my daughter got Brownies, a quick bite to eat on Tuesday because my son got judo, a quick bite to eat on Thursday because my son...no my daughter has piano at four o'clock. My son has Beavers at half past five; my daughter has drama at six o'clock. Then I pick my son up at half past six and I go back and pick my daughter up at seven o'clock. On Friday we go to school as normal, I'm working full day at the moment, we come home, we have a quick bite to eat, then my son has football and my daughter has got dance. When I take them to classes and clubs I don't leave them on their own. I am there. I don't tend to just go off. They know I am there. So, the time that I am there is quality time and I do think is enough because I don't see how I could give them more.

As a primary school teacher, Rachel had the financial means and the time to do more than most WLMs could with her children. Nonetheless, her account is not too dissimilar to that of many other respondents. What is however distinctive about her account is her level of involvement with her children during the after-school activities. In this respect, Rachel is an exception because extra-school activities did not usually require WLMs' presence or participation. Indeed, a number of mothers used their children's after-school activities as 'free-time' to do food shopping, go swimming or catching up with housework. The quotation below illustrates one of these situations:

number has experienced emotional abuse and neglect in relation to their children and themselves.

Mary: Like yesterday Alex said, I am hot I want to go down the park. And I say, no...because if we go to the park I won't get any peace [since it would require her direct supervision]. Instead if you go to the club [which includes a certain amount of adult supervision] it is an hour and an half; [in that time] I can run the dog, I can make the sandwiches, I can run the Hoover around and there is no one in my ear. If we go to the park they will be there until eight o' clock, they want to go into the water and they will want this and that and they swim in shit...and I feel guilty to have to say: no.

The notion of WLMs enjoying some 'free time' should not detract from appreciating the often tiring, expensive and time consuming task of having to take their child or (as often was the case) two or three of them back and forth from one activity to the next. These activities were usually initiated and promoted by the respondents and they involved working out complex 'dropping off' and 'collection' arrangements on a daily basis. Most of the children were so involved and occupied by scheduled activities (from which a sizable minority was not spared even on weekends) that they hardly had any 'unscheduled' time left. This scheduling included also the 'free time' spent at home, as the quotation below indicates.

Rachel: They know and every Friday night is a 'duvet night'. On the weekend, the rule is we don't go out of our pyjamas until nine. We tend to take our time and have a quiet breakfast because there are no clubs on Saturday. So, that's our day. Saturday night is family night, we do whatever we like...like last Saturday we went to the cinema the three of us and it was nice. We go bowling...it may not be an expensive thing...it may just be playing connect four or rummy, my son is really into that. Sunday is a bit more complicated. My daughter is a Brownie. So she is often in church parades. So we go to church at nine o'clock on Sunday morning and then I tend to go to the gym for an hour, well, forty-five minutes. While I am there, the children go into the 'amazing world of fitness', a club which is open to anyone from four to eleven and they play games, team games.

The quotation above outlines the organisational nature that characterises the weekends in Rachel's household. Whilst unstructured activities were typically 'planned' for weekends, such as Friday nights, Saturday mornings or Sundays afternoons, a number of mothers also picked an evening in the middle of the week with the objective of breaking up the pace and intensity of their routine.

Glenys: We tend to meet on the Wednesday night with Joel, my ex-mum in law and we go swimming the four of us together in the Maindy pool. We always do that, I make sure...and then we have a McDonalds on the way home and we love it! This is my time with the girls...on my own. Wednesday night is our night.

Home routines were typically punctuated by familiar and well-established little rituals such as: a 'girly nights', 'pyjama days', 'duvet nights', 'DVD and munchies afternoon' and 'stay in bed' mornings, a favourite amongst some really exhausted lone mothers. Rachel describes one such activity.

Rachel: This is the only night they stay up really late, up to half past nine to a quarter to ten. They always choose a DVD from the video shop and we get popcorn and every Friday night, without fail, we have a big duvet quilt and we sit on the settee, lights off and we sit there with our pop corn and sweets until we feel sick. They choose the movie. They know that that is their treat at the end of the week.

Part and parcel of providing and maintaining a 'good structure' was the management of the bed-time routine, which was clearly defined and strictly implemented by at least two thirds of all the WLMs interviewed. This practice was supported by the indication that at the end of a long and busy day the majority of the children came back home tired and ready for bed, as Gayna explains:

Gayna: The children go to bed at around nine thirty. The older one is exhausted; he eats, has a shower, and then he goes to lie down on his bed and reads. Within five minutes he is asleep. And then the younger one is ten. She is also quite happy to go to bed at that time.

Because at the end of the day most WLMs had reserved the last useful ‘units’ of time for themselves (as will be shown in chapter nine), the bed-time routine was never left to chance. It involved a short winding down period followed by brushing-bathing-changing-tidying up and getting into bed. WLMs came to define this time as the most important and rewarding part of their day, as it was seen by the majority as *‘the’* time for talking and for cuddling, for ironing out disagreements and misunderstandings, for intimacy and for bonding. Thus, by structuring their children’s day in such a way, WLMs created stable normative frameworks through which they hoped to shape their children’s behaviour and project themselves as stable centres of moral authority. This attitude was epitomised by one WLM with the expression ‘I am their rock’, whilst another completed her narrative of her children’s daily problems and difficulties by arguing:

Julia: But then when things are not right they should say, and they do, and they know, that mum will fix it.

By using routinised situational activities as they did, WLMs were able to create various ‘release points’ throughout their day. These ‘release points’ were used by WLMs instrumentally and in a very effective manner as a way to better channel their ‘active’ care through the careful planning, actuation and completion of tasks and activities within well defined temporal and spatial settings. In short, by investing their time, energy and

resources at specific times and in a specific manner, WLMs ensured maximum ‘returns’ and the best outcome for their ‘investments’. In this respect, the more time and resources were depleted, the more WLMs made use of these ‘release points’ to optimise their chances for a better delivery of care. In this manner, both the *physical* and *emotional* aspects of the care-giving work were rendered more manageable. In their narratives, WLMs described how their daily schedule came to be regulated by familiar acts that allowed the consistency of caring arrangements. At the same time, this gave the women concerned the ability to exercise a higher degree of control and defuse the building up of potentially high levels of ‘*charge mentale*’.

In line with the logic of this, the following quotation underlines a fairly common scenario within WLMs’ households. In it Belinda highlights the difficulties of confronting a typical everyday crisis *outside* her normal and well-established ‘release points’.

Belinda: My five years old gave a massive kick to his brother and I was screaming and shouting at him and vice versa and things went right out of hand. So, I sent him to his bedroom for time out...I was doing dinner...I came down after five minutes and in the busy going of everything, I thought ‘ that started because he said to me four times mum.... mum.... mum.... mum..’ . And I was on the phone and I was trying to lower the saucepan and I said ‘look, stop a minute!’ But he kicked off and things escalated. So I caught him down the stairs and I said ‘listen, I didn’t listen to you. I am sorry. The phone was ringing and ...but you know what? When you were speaking to me I should have let the phone go. If it was important they could leave a message’. And I said ‘sometimes I get it wrong, sometime I don’t listen and sometime you don’t listen to me’. So I acknowledged it. At the age of five, although he couldn’t verbalise it, I could see that he appreciated the fact that I acknowledged it and he didn’t know what to say, so he just hugged me. But there wasn’t always time for that. If I had an hour every day to sit down and listen... that wouldn’t happen, you know?

In presenting a snapshot of Belinda's everyday life, the quotation above highlights the difficulties of multitasking under stressful conditions. It shows how, within *unstructured* conditions, WLMs can be caught off guard and consequently, are not able to respond well to unpredictable occurrences and growing pressures. In these situations, through 'the busy going of everything', it is likely that WLMs' will miss important cues and consequently act hastily whilst getting caught in negative, reactive interactions with their children. Seen from this perspective, it is evident that quality care demands actual time because it is both *real* and *difficult* work. Belinda also stresses the challenging notion that if such quality of care was not in such a short supply, potential problems and crisis would be more likely solved at their inception. 'If I had an hour every day...' hints at Belinda's longing for a different rhythm and quality of life.

One pressing question that seems to emerge from Belinda's account and from the moral narratives of many WLMs faced with similar scenarios (namely the need for unrelenting multitasking against a chronic shortage of time) is how to best prioritise one's moral agency. More specifically, the issue is how to prioritise in such a way that more important matters (such as addressing a child's need) are not cast aside or neglected by less important but apparently more urgent matters (such as answering the telephone whilst preparing dinner). In addition, what seems to emerge from this context is the notion that an attitude to nurture can be fostered and actualised by the WLMs concerned *only* through the structural frameworks of task-oriented and action-oriented activities more than in the unstructured times '*in between*'. In view of these considerations, I

would like to outline some of the potential risks and outcomes to informal care, which appear to be directly linked to the excesses of commodified time, values and rationalities of paid work.

6.5 Confronting potential risks to informal care from the excesses of commodified values and practices

An ethic of care should not be entirely dependent on the ‘release points’ articulated through ‘active’ care. Rather, ‘active’ care should be intersperse and permeate normal daily interactions in and out of the family domain. However, when WLMs are divided by too many conflicting demands and lack of time constrains their caring work, there is the potential risk of:

- *turning both ‘active’ and ‘passive’ elements of the care-giving work into onerous extensions of paid work,*
- *creating pockets of ‘care deficits’ by decreasing ‘active’ care in favour of ‘passive’ care,*
- *developing ‘fractured care’.*

In the first instance, following the increase colonisation of the private sphere by the public, and the cumulative effect of living for too long under intensifying working commitments, WLMs could end up finding that they will have increasingly less time to spend exercising ‘passive’ and ‘active’ care for their children. As the time spent providing informal care becomes more compressed and rationalised, care-giving practices could be increasingly perceived as ‘performing’ tasks whereas care work becomes nothing more than an extension of paid work, another ‘job’ or responsibility that ‘must’

be fulfilled amongst many others. The risks associated with this particular scenario is that the pleasure and rewards of caring could be reduced or lost altogether if social, relational and individual capitals undergo through a systematic, prolonged and cumulative impoverishment (Tronto 1993, Hochschild 2001, Himmelweit 2002).

This was the case of Rosalind, who came to the realisation that there was no pleasure in her caring work because under the cumulative effect of living for too long in the ‘fast lane’, both ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care appeared to be like one ‘job’ too many.

Rosalind: I think my relationship [with my child] suffered because of my busy lifestyle. I was probably too caught up with what I was doing to see it. And I saw everything in the home as ‘oh, this is another job! This is another task! Oh gosh, this needs to be done’ instead of enjoying the little things and not find them like big problems, big issues.

In this respect, although WLMs were predisposed to do ‘the right thing’ for their children, the reality was that in some situations, the ‘best’ they could do was not always ‘good enough’. In such cases, under duress the ability and even the willingness ‘to do the right thing’ were tested. The second type of risk describes a scenario that appears to be progressively deteriorating. It concerns WLMs’ perceived inability to give their children the time and attention they deem necessary to care for them appropriately. Thus, if the first risk underlines more the macro-structural constraints under which WLMs operate, the second focuses more on the micro-interactive framework and stresses the risks of a ‘care gap’ scenario. Belinda is aware of the importance of valuing her children. However, even to listen properly to them proves to be a rather difficult task under the typically ‘normal’ circumstances described below.

Belinda: I try in my busy day [to value my children], but I don't come anywhere near it. I think a good mother is someone who values her child as an individual person. And simple things.... like bending down to talk to your three year old and to look at him in the eye and listen. They may be wincing because their toy fell on the floor, but that's their little world, their bubble. Value what they're saying and listen, because then you are teaching them to value and listen to other people as well. So I think a good mother is someone who prioritises that. But in the everyday running of the home it's not easy you know. When I get back home... I put the washing on, I do the housework, I cook the dinner, and the boys are speaking to me...they are speaking on the side of my head and I'll give the occasional ' yeah.... yeah' . If I was a good mother I would hear what they are talking about, I would value whatever they were saying. And I think one would be ...patient, and I have no patience. I'm really aware that I snap and I think that that devalues them as well. But it is this busy lifestyle...that's all there is. I got time set aside at teatime...but in between, life is so busy...it's such a quick pace that I fail to do it a lot.

The third risk describing the consequences of transferring the excesses of commodified structures and values from paid work into the private sphere could be depicted as a caring state that has degraded further, thus opening the possibility of a 'care deficit' scenario. From this standpoint, parents seem no longer able to know how to give and even how to relate to their children. In describing this difficulty, Helen illuminates a caring landscape full of awkward silences and uneasy interactions, a situation captured and conceptualised in this thesis as the development of a '*fractured care*'.

Helen: I would love to have more time with him, but when I had time off work and it's just me and him , we struggle, we don't know how to put up with each other all day ...he is just as bad as me. We are not used being with each other all day every day... neither of us is used to it. But I got the child minder to chat to about what he has done at the nursery before we leave, and in the weekend we get to do whatever...

Whilst Helen experiences some difficulties in expressing 'active' care for longer than

the short time to which both mother and child have become accustomed, Belinda is troubled by her realisation that much too often she is not available for her children. Similarly, Rosalind is concerned that she is losing the 'taste' for caring. Within these contexts, it is possible to imagine how, not only WLMs, but parents in general, could end up using fewer 'release points' when pressurised by a multiplicity of commitments, thereby unwittingly thinning down or even eroding the quality of 'active' care.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter I have analysed the fieldwork data to ascertain WLMs' understandings and practices of an ethic of care in relation to their children. From this analysis, a number of important features and considerations have emerged. Starting from an acknowledgement that the management of home environments is directly linked to and conditioned by the structure and management of the workplace, how much time WLMs had at their disposal at the end of their working day shaped the quantity and quality of the care practiced at home. Care for their children was expressed in and out of the home environment through the articulation of 'active' and 'passive' care. 'Active' care describes WLMs' care-giving work by 'being there' for the children through direct interaction. Examples of this kind of care are epitomised by time spent together through recreational activities, doing homework, sharing housework's chores and so on. A 'passive' care describes 'being there' for their children through activities done for the children and with the children in mind, without however requiring any direct involvement or interaction with them. At an empirical level, these findings highlight some of the differentiations in moral value that WLMs attribute to their caring practices. Within

these contexts, strong structured routines were used by WLMs both for organisational purposes and as a means to an end inside and outside the home setting. A typical representation of WLMs' caring work within the home environment was quite short and comprised the evening meal, homework, followed by a gradual and ritualised 'slow-down' routine in preparation for bed-time. Most children were usually in bed between seven and nine o'clock as the bed-time routine was strictly implemented by almost all the respondents.

Thus, by constructing and managing their day to day lives in this manner, WLMs were able to create numerous 'release points', which were instrumental in shaping their care work. 'Release points' in this context indicate the structured and planned channelling of 'active' care through routinised situational activities such as 'meal time', 'bed-time', 'recreational time', 'chat time', 'together time', 'story time' and so on, with the objective of minimising the dispersion of their limited time, energy and resources whilst maximising on their investment and outcomes. The structured management of daily routines punctuated by 'release points' was used by WLMs to bring order, discipline and stability to their children's lives, to foster stable relationships with their children, to simplify the daily lives of mothers and children alike and, last but not least, to present themselves as a stable centre of moral authority.

By exercising their moral agency as described thus far, both the physical and emotional aspects of WLMs' practice of care work have come to be redefined. Within all these contexts, my argument has been that the temporal and spatial organisation of caring work

has been increasingly managed to reproduce and mimic those of paid work. In other words, the experience of care relevant to the care of their children has come to be increasingly re-defined in terms of the terminologies, methodologies and utilitarian ethos and functionalities of the world of work and of the public sphere. In the light of these findings, I have pointed out to some of the potential risks and consequences of transferring into informal care the excesses of commodified values and practices. Linked to the growing influence of the world of paid work in the domestic sphere and the increased amalgamation of the two, the ‘active’ and ‘passive’ elements of care-giving in the private could be experienced by some WLMs and parents in general, as a too onerous extension of their paid work and viewed just like another ‘job’. This in turn, could foster the development of a ‘care gap’ and/or ‘care deficit’, whereby the more important but time-consuming demands of ‘active’ care could be reduced and then sacrificed to the less important but more pressing needs of ‘passive’ care. The compounding effect of all these factors could produce a ‘fractured care’, which I have described as the situation whereby parents are no longer capable of or do not know how to relate and how to provide ‘active’ care for their children. In the next chapter I will consider how WLMs exercised their moral agency through ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care in order to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Chapter 7

Elements of nurturing care

7.1 Introduction

The need for two separate chapters on the subject of ‘caring for the children’ responds to a methodological necessity created by the richness of the data provided, their relevance to the central theme of this thesis (namely qualifying WLMs’ care for their children), and the multi-faceted dimensions of their articulation. Whilst chapter six has provided the platform to describe WLMs’ moral agency, this chapter will articulate some of the ways in which WLMs qualified their ethic of care by nurturing their children. This chapter is not offering a comprehensive account to the many dimensions of nurturing. Rather, the objective is to highlight the most significant elements of nurturing care that emerged from the narrative of the respondents. Other features, such as WLMs’ life histories and the sense of guilt that permeated so many of their accounts, will be also analysed in this chapter since they contributed characterising WLMs’ care-giving practices. For conceptual clarity, and when possible, findings will be still articulated in the qualifying terms of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care. Within the routinised structures that shaped their daily living, WLMs spoke of their ‘nurturing’ care as defined primarily through:

7.2 ‘Good communication’

7.3 Food preparation and consumption

7.4 Providing protection

In addition, in their narratives WLMs emphasised the notion that the desire to compensate for or emulate past experiences influenced their perception of their nurturing role as care providers. Furthermore, data analysis highlighted how a diffused, and at times, crippling sense of guilt affected WLMs’ moral agency. Both these factors therefore will be analysed in this chapter under the titles of:

7.5 Compensating for or emulating past experiences

7.6 Dealing with the 'sense' of guilt

7.2 'Good communication'

If the need to give 'structure' and 'stability' to children's lives was identified by WLMs as a defining expression of their caring commitments, so was the moral imperative to 'nurture' them. How WLMs worked to nurture their children was expressed by the respondents in a number of ways within a variety of contexts. Central to this, was the very 'active' manner in which WLMs endeavored to cultivate 'good communication' with their children in spite of the difficulties and challenges that impinged on their busy lifestyles. To illustrate this point, the following quotation describes a conversation that takes place between a mother and her daughter. In it, the mother encourages her daughter to think freely for herself and to develop her own moral reasoning and reflexive thinking. She encourages this by posing non-confrontational open questions with complex but realistic scenarios.

Rosalind: We see something on the TV and I say 'is that a good or a bad thing'? And this is how simplistic our conversations were. And then you start develop deeper conversations, more meaningful. I think yesterday or the day before, she said: 'mum, I think to save the planet we have to stop people using their cars'. So I said 'oh yeah, that's really a good idea, how are we going to do that?' 'They can go to the hospital, they can get their food, but they stop using their cars if it is under a mile'. [And I said] ' Oh Rose, I am a pregnant woman, I need to go down the town, I have run out of baby food because even though I had enough I dropped it and it's all over the floor...'. 'Well, if it has to do with babies and young people you can use the car'. 'Grandma needs to go to the hospital...' 'Well, I say that you can take people to the hospital, the hospital is important, is for your health!' We had this conversation this week, so she is thinking. Sometimes I

don't want to say too much to her because there is so much sadness and suffering and difficulties in the world. You don't want that to affect their childhood, so you protect them to a degree, don't you?

The following quotation highlights how Sarah's focus on 'a good and open communication' defuses, through early intervention, a potentially problematic situation allowing her to shield her daughter from emotional harm.

Sarah: I like to think that we have a good, open communication. So, for instance, one year ago my daughter was bullied in school. It was nothing.... well for her I guess it was major, she wasn't physically attacked or anything like that. Some kids were ...she has really curly hair and two girls started to be really ...rude about her hair, telling her that her hair was a real mess and things like that. These girls were couple of years older than her. She told me about it. I went to the school and I didn't make a big fuss, but I said 'look, you need to know that this is happening. This is what my daughter is saying. It clearly needs to be addressed'. And it was because essentially the class teacher got these two girls together to come to him with my daughter. The class teacher said 'Kelly has been saying that you have been saying this. What have you got to say?' Later one of the girls apologised and the other girl didn't say anything.... but it stopped.

As the examples above indicate, most WLMs were attuned to understand their children's needs, and this was particularly expressed through 'active' listening and 'good communication'. For some WLMs the best and most popular 'talking times' were meal times (usually the evening meal), on the way back from school (although this did not always prove successful) and at bed-time. The quotation below describes one of these 'talking times' articulated as the expression of 'active' care through a carefully structured 'release point'.

Carey: I make sure that every single day we sit down at the table for a hot cooked dinner... That's the time when she talks to me. She gets thrown off her guard and she

doesn't realise what I am doing ...and she goes 'do you know mummy, in school today this thing happened...' I can ask her when I go to pick her up at the school gate and I usually say: 'how was school Drew? Anything happened?' 'No'. 'Everything ok then?' 'Yeah!' But then when we sit down around the table and we have dinner together she will tell me all sorts of marvelous, wonderful things. So that is my single chance and I do it every single day religiously, no matter what's happening and no matter how tired I feel. I make sure that we do that.

In identifying this as the most congenial time to probe into her daughter's emotional state, Carey is effectively creating a framework that allows her to better understand her child's needs. A similar ideal conversational time was created during the bed-time routine, which, as discussed earlier, constituted an important moment for WLMs and children alike for strengthening their mutual ties of closeness and intimacy. Indeed, for many WLMs it was important to end the day well and impress on their children the feeling that 'all is well' as the last memory of the day. Belinda underlines this aspect of nurturing through repetitive and reassuring consistency, by verbalising her love for her son *every* night. Her words were intended to boost his sense of confidence, which is particularly important for a child with dyspraxia.

Belinda: My oldest son has dyspraxia and if you spoke with him you wouldn't think that there was anything wrong with him. So, it's at this quiet time of the night that he has a kiss, I'll tell him that I love him and I whisper in his ear 'oh, I am so proud of you, you make me so proud' . I want that to be the last thing...

A sense of comfort was derived also from such activities as 'story time' at bed-time amongst younger children. Below Carey illustrates how reading stories made this a special time for both mother and daughter.

Carey: I look forward to the bed- time story just as much as she does.... it's great. And that's the time we do get close, we cuddle and we say how much we love each other and..... how much we love the cat, the cat comes up for the story as well, he is at the end of the bed. He knows when the time is because I say 'come on then' and I always clap my hands and he knows that it's a time for a story and he comes up. He is part of the family...he is her brother. We don't really talk then. All that she wants is a cuddle. All that I want is a cuddle. I don't think that this is the right time to be talking about whether there have been any problems. This is a nice time for winding down.

In this context, nurturing feelings are created and maintained through the reinforcement of positive expectation. Some WLMs pointed out that bed-time was special because that was the only time of the day in which there were no interferences or distractions to interrupt the free flow of conversation.

Rachel: Yeah! They are both very cuddly children, you know. That's the time when for the three of us there are no distractions, there is no telephone, no television, there are no friends or clubs. It's just the three of us and that's my favourite time with them.

Some WLMs implemented a 'separate rooms' policy between children in order to encourage individual 'heart to heart' communication.

Rachel: I want to know what is going on in their day. I want to know that everything is OK. I want them to understand that we got to have a close relationship, because if anything is wrong, I cannot help them if I don't know about it. So, that's why I insist on having separate rooms for them. I want them to trust that what they're going to say to me is not going to go anywhere.

From these examples, it is clear that WLMs' care-giving work was not expressed in a generalised way. Within the same household, children were often very different and, as such, had different needs and required different approaches. In emphasising this,

Gwyneth clearly draws a distinction between the different personalities of her two children and in doing so, she stresses the need to give children some individual time, perceived here as an important requirement of her care-giving work.

Gwyneth: I think what you need to give is individual time, as well as being the mother generally with children in the household. For my son in particular I know that time is very important to him, because he needs to verbalise, he needs to talk through things to understand them, and for them to have significance because this is the kind of child he is. So, when I put Marie Claire to bed at about eight o'clock I come downstairs and at that point I am really tired, but that is very much Mark's time until he goes to bed at around nine o'clock. And that's about talking together, sitting and watching something on the television together, getting snacks, he drinks his chocolate and that is uninterrupted, undivided time with him, which he needs.

It is interesting to note how this kind of personalised 'active' care, in its most traditional articulation, was delivered as a 'release point' comprising of a number of 'nurturing' features, all conducive to create a relaxed atmosphere and illicit a positive disposition for a good 'chat'. Other WLMs utilised routinised and repetitive housework to get some practical help from their children whilst attempting to create a useful platform for talking, exchanging views and generally, 'catching up' with the day's events. In this way WLMs could also acquire relevant information on their children's mood and general sense of wellbeing. The quotations from Sarah and Dawn epitomise these situations.

Sarah: What I am trying to do is to get them involved ... if I make tea, they have got to lay the table and they got to make drinks and stuff like that. So, we do it together which helps me, it teaches them some responsibility and I guess....it's easier if they help me because we communicate, we chat. You know, they lay the table and they tell me what happens in school, they ask me what has been happening in work...what plans we got for the weekend and staff like that. So we do it on the go really!

Dawn: Because of all the parties that I prepare, I do a lot of catalogues and preparation in the evening and Catherine helps me...she can do paying slips for the bank. But this week she had a lot of homework to do, so I asked her if there was something that I could do. She asked me if I could do some colouring for her. So I sat down and did that. I was so lovely! But we are always together doing things and she realises that if she helps me then we get more time together.

On both accounts, it could be argued that Sarah and Dawn were able to create the conditions to practice ‘active’ care. Conversely, some more conventional ‘quality’ time seemed to be disappearing. A few WLMs remembered the joy of playing family board games as children but they felt that they were no longer able to take the amount of time required to play in that way with the own children.

Victoria: I mean I can't remember the last time when we sat together and played a game, I mean, one of those family board games I used to play when I was little, you know, things like that...

Others lamented the fact that this ‘privilege’ seemed to have become an exclusive prerogative of their ex-partners, who typically would spend only a few, but carefully selected, ‘quality’ hours with their children.

Sarah: They always complain that I never play games with them. For instance, I enjoy playing Scrabble with them. But to play Scrabble takes an hour. If I had the time to do the chores, make the tea, sort myself out and have time for Scrabble, then I would. The kids always complain that I don't have time to play with them and they say ‘oh, dad always plays with us’.

7.3 Food preparation and consumption

If to give their children good, healthy food was seen by many respondents as an

important feature of caring, and more specifically of nurturing, the time required for food preparation was not always perceived to be so. Within this context, when describing some of the ways in which WLMs nurtured their children, findings stress the ambivalent relationship that WLMs had with food on the ground that it was difficult for some of them to compartmentalise the ‘active’ and the ‘passive’ elements of care-giving in food preparation, when the desire to prepare good quality food clashed with the time required for its preparation. Thus how to feed their children well without spending too much time in the kitchen was for some WLMs a constant dilemma. Gwyneth articulated this in the following manner:

Gwyneth: If you want to cook good food, it takes time to prepare that in the kitchen and do it. I mean, they do have fish fingers, chips, sausages and stuff. But you know, you can shovel that in a half an hour and you could be doing things with them [the children]...or you could be spending that time in the kitchen. So, it's always the case of.... where is my time better spent?

A few WLMs appeared to be particularly receptive to the strong pressure currently exercised by the government, the media and practitioners over the escalation of obesity in Britain and on its deleterious effect on children. Yet, the lack of time prevented some WLMs from confronting this issue in a successful manner. Below, Gail is faced with a moral dilemma and in the following quote she explains what the crux of the matter is:

Gail: There are lots of ingredients the children are not used to. So the problem is introducing them to new things [fruits and vegetables] and I wish I had done this years ago because now it's much harder. It's becoming a problem because it's eating into the time I got. And I find that I spend more time trying to have them eating a decent meal than ever before and this eats into their quality time. So sometimes I think ‘all that they do is arguing over their food!’ You know what I mean? It makes me feel like wanting

to give up because, to be honest, it's hard!

In working to introduce her children to good, healthy food Gail recognizes the health benefits that this change will bring. But in order to do so, she needs to change her children's eating habits and this, in her present situation and with her time limitations, is proving to be challenging. In contrast, for one WLM, to prepare good food 'from scratch' qualified her as 'being there' and thus became synonymous with 'active' nurturing care.

Dawn: Before going to university I was a nanny and I was cooking everything from scratch, so I can cook. Obviously there was the time element...but I realised that I was bringing up my daughter differently from the way I brought up somebody else's children. I wouldn't dare to give the other children that, and yet, it's ok for Catherine because we haven't got the time. I do no longer cook ready meals.

To cook good food for her daughter was perceived by Dawn as an integral part of her nurturing work. Specifically for Dawn, this meant to apply a standard of care comparable to that given to the children of her former employer. To change her job and lifestyle however aided this realisation and gave Dawn the time, the money and the opportunity to make the adjustments she aspired to achieve.

7.4 Providing protection

The care-giving work of nurturing often involved 'protecting' their children most noticeably from emotional harm. Within the framework of this thesis, WLMs were clearly using their resources to 'protect' their children and this was done systematically, as a daily expression of their 'active' and 'passive' moral agency. Perhaps one of the most

widespread manifestations of this desire to ‘protect’ their children was identified by those WLMs who were very keen to shield the children from the harmful effects of separation and divorce. This included the difficult but consistent (and generally successful) attempt to never ‘badmouth’ their ex-husbands or ex-partners, to encourage better contact and relationships between the children and their non-resident fathers and to obstruct or even stop access altogether if children were clearly thought to be at risk or if the relationship was seen as visibly affecting their wellbeing. The remarks below highlight some of these forms of ‘protection’ as evidenced in WLMs accounts.

Kathryn: On Saturday he actually had my son after a gap of three months. But I’m not going to put barriers in Peter's way. I will not have him saying ‘oh, you stopped me from seeing dad’. And I have never said anything bad about his father, so he can relate either ways. But it's very hard because he [my ex-husband] has never apologised, never given an explanation, never said anything.

Kathryn had been left suddenly by her husband without any explanations and with huge debts. In spite of this, she spoke of how she had taken the difficult decision to refrain from judging her ex-partner in front of her son and of her refusal to drive a wedge between father and son. Experiencing a different situation, Gwyneth and her ex-partner had been working hard to put their children first, which meant working towards maintaining close communication between ex-partners geared to preserve a united and unambiguous front to their children.

Gwyneth: I do still have a good enough relationship with my ex-partner for us both to bring our own perspectives and to be able and sit down and talk about the children and how to help them. So for instance it has happened that Mark comes back and says ‘oh, dad let me do this and that...’ And I say ‘oh really? Does he now? Ok. We’ll get him on

the phone right now'. And I'll do it. So, I'll back Miles up against Mark and Miles will do the same for me. Particularly for Mark that is important, because he is a bright kid and he is always working on 'angles' to get something.

In contrast, Vanessa felt that her ex-partner has been so uncaring towards his daughter, that, in her view, he had forfeited his 'right' to see her.

Vanessa: Maybe it's selfish on my part, but I don't think he should have the right. He doesn't deserve to be called dad and he definitely doesn't deserve the pleasure of seeing her. That's the way I feel.

In order to 'protect' their children's space and emotional well-being, some WLMs took the decision of avoiding any emotional involvement with new potential partners. The nature and extent of this commitment will be addressed at length in chapter 8.2 where it will be shown how WLMs' moral imperative to care for their children first and foremost affected their attitude and ability to care for themselves. Within the context of this section however, it will suffice to point out that particularly in the early stages of post-divorce life, when children were emotionally more vulnerable and sensitive to change, some WLMs took the decision to temporarily sideline their emotional and physical needs in order to be better positioned to protect and nurture their children. As one mother put it:

Dawn: I couldn't just have a boyfriend...I should have her approval [her daughter's] as well. He couldn't just move in! It's a big thing to take in... and I have been on my own for so long and I think 'I don't need a man'. But even if I did, it has to be someone really special to add something to *our* lives.

Whilst still feeling strongly about the need to 'protect' their children, other WLMs

opted for less radical approaches and decided instead to expose their children to a very gradual introduction and familiarisation to the new man in their lives. The quotation below highlights the sensitivity of Victoria's approach on this regard.

Victoria: We don't even kiss or hold hands in front of Ben. He [my boyfriend] knew that, I will always protect him [my son]. This is a promise that I made to him and myself. My boyfriend would stay sometime overnight on Saturday morning when Ben is not there [at home] but because I go to bed at nine many times he doesn't even bother.

A different and perhaps more 'passive' expression of WLMs' commitment to protect and nurture their children was manifested in their keenness to place their children within safe yet stimulating social environments. This was often achieved by investing in good relationships with significant family members and by being considerate and inclusive of selected groups of friends, as Julia points out in the following description:

Julia: Jeffrey, his godfather is a big influence in Oliver's life. I think he likes sitting with Jeffrey watching sport and having discussions on rugby...football, whereas here he is surrounded by women. And because he has that 'man-boy' thing, I don't think he is missing on anything. And even though he knows he is not his dad and all the rest of it, he can turn around and say to Jeffrey 'oh, Jeffrey would you come and watch me playing rugby?' Even though he knows I am there...because lots of the times many other dads are there.

The notion of nurturing by providing at the same time a 'protective' environment for their children's development is also highlighted in Caroline's account as she expresses her desire to free her dyspraxia suffering child from potentially 'claustrophobic' relationships where only women are involved.

Caroline: He has to grow up with male role models. That's why [he does] judo... because it's part a male thing and part a dyspraxia thing...to get the coordination under control. Tuesday with the Boy's Brigade is self-explanatory. He is with boys... He needs to be with boys and Wednesday is for his coordination. So is not a competition, it's a two edge thing, one is to get him with males and two to help him with dyspraxia.

In analysing WLMs' moral agency and the ways they promoted their children's well-being, two more elements need to be taken into account. The first concerns the importance of WLMs' individual life histories and how past experiences of care-receiving colored their practices of care-giving; the second deals with WLMs' perceived sense of guilt and how this affected WLMs' perception and practice of a 'good enough care'.

7.5 Compensating for or emulating past experiences

The need to compensate for or emulate past experiences emerged as a significant feature in WLMs' narratives. WLMs' endeavoured to either compensate for or emulate their past experiences by responding to internalised experiences and values which were either rejected or assimilated from childhood. In this respect, the relationship between the ways in which WLMs grew up and their understanding of what 'caring' is all about came to be emphasised by their historicized accounts. Many WLMs were keen to emulate and reproduce those experiences that had left a positive mark on their lives. Conversely, many more felt compelled to provide their children with what had been missed or had been noticeably scarce in their own childhoods. For example, Julia was particularly aware of the importance of a 'good communication' between mother and children because as a child she was not given that opportunity. The remark below outlines Julia's

sensitivity to this issue and captures her determination to consciously turn this feature into a central element of her care-giving work.

Julia: We do have chats.... the relationship that I want is one where they can come and talk to me, especially when they get older. Because I know with my mum, I could never approach my mother at all to talk about things... and I don't want that to happen with my girls. If they want to talk to me about anything, so they can. I want them to feel free to do that.

By the same token, Sarah felt that the lack of 'active' care from her parents corresponded with her mother's failure to 'be there' for her (and presumably for two of her siblings) at a time when she felt she really needed her mother's attention.

Sarah: I would like my children to look back at their childhood and think 'she was a good mum. We could always talk to her. She was always very open to us and very honest ...and she was always there for us', because when I look back at my childhood I think 'my parents could have done that better!' I got this thing from my childhood...my parents had a pub and they weren't there in the evening. They had four children but they didn't have any time for the first three. They only managed to have time for my much younger sister. My mum always said 'oh, I brought you up to be independent'. But you know children don't have the capacity to make their own decisions. I cannot remember one instance when my mum stopped and listened to me or gave me a hug or anything like that. So maybe I am 'the other way' because I cannot stop hugging them, in my house there are lots of hugs and kisses...

It is evident how Sarah's past experiences influenced her understanding of 'good enough care' and how this qualified her moral agency. Amongst those WLMs who experienced a more deprived upbringing, there was a greater likelihood of viewing the pursuit of material goods and that of a better job and education as a substantive demonstration of 'active' care. For these WLMs it was particularly important to achieve

financial security and to pass to their children the economic benefits of this achievement.

Dawn: My priority for the next ten years will be to prepare for Cat, for when she wants to go to university. I'll sell the house and we'll downsize and I will have funds for her to go, and that's my plan. But I want things; I am driven by possessions because I never had them. I have been poor and this kind of things count to me because I didn't have them when I was growing up. For instance, my mum couldn't drive, my sister couldn't drive, I was the one who passed the test first. These things are quite shallow really, but people who already had that don't think anything of it. But they mean a lot to me.

WLMs' commitment to provide for the well-being of their children by responding to their material needs emerged from the data as an important 'nurturing' feature for many of them. As the previous quotation underlines, for many respondents this commitment translated into the necessity of giving their children material rewards, such as designer clothes, regular holidays, the latest electronic gadgets and generally good lifestyles. 'This is what I am working for', was often the general comment and this understanding was in many cases fuelled by children's demands for the fulfillment of their perceived 'needs'. The next quotation illustrates this general commitment as well as hinting at some embedded tensions and ambivalences; these appear to derive from a strong desire for a 'balanced life' that would allow 'togetherness' against the dominant gravitational pull exercised by her demanding job.

Christine: I work to provide a lifestyle...provide for Lea...It's the only reason to do it. I want to give her the best that I can. But still to have that balance where I can give it to her.... and be together. So I work because I got no choice because I want to give her a better standard of living, a better lifestyle, but at the same I want to enjoy that lifestyle with her.

Also drawing from her historicised narrative, Gail expressed her sadness on the realisation that she did not share enduring and meaningful memories with her busy parents whilst growing up. As a result of this, Gail's account is particularly sensitive to the importance of creating lasting and positive memories for her children that they could both cherish and share throughout their lives.

Gail: I have no lasting memories of anything creative happening in my house when I was younger, none at all! I mean I was 'hipped' with presents...but I don't remember any time really spent together because they [my parents] started with the tenant associations and they were heavily involved with the community and there never was enough time. So I don't want my daughters to grow up and not remembering me spending time with them. Especially because I am working now, I am doing more things with them than I ever did. I think it is to compensate for the fact that they have been moved around a lot.

Conversely, other WLMs wanted their children to experience what they felt they had been privileged to enjoy as children themselves. This was usually associated with a sense of being loved, protected and safe within their families. In the following quotation, Susan compares her situation of financial distress with that of her parents, who did not have much, but they were still able to give their children a 'good home life'. In spite of her financial difficulties, it is the substance of that 'good home life' that Susan tries to impress on her daughter.

Susan: We didn't have food sometime from one week to the next and my mother and father didn't have a lot to live on either. But we had a very good home life had a good family life. And it was always comfortable and clean. So, I used to tell her, there are other things in life that are more important you know? And those are respect, dignity, the way you treat a person, the way you are as a person is far more important than all these [material] things because they don't make you a good person. I think it really, really stuck

with her.

In all of these respects, WLMs' perceptions of care varied to mirror the different levels of reflexive understandings they achieved with regard to their past experiences. As mentioned earlier, another important aspect that emerged from WLMs' narratives and shaped their understandings of care was a pervading 'sense' of guilt. The next section will stress how this coloured many of WLMs' relationships with their children.

7.6 Dealing with the 'sense' of guilt

A pervasive and embedded sense of guilt seemed to affect WLMs regardless of their actual ability to care for their children. Many of them spoke of a sense of guilt that was associated with a perceived inadequacy to provide 'good enough' care for their children. This view was magnified by their concern that there were not enough hours in a day to invest in their children's care and to 'be there' for them. As previously discussed, many WLMs attributed this situation to the imbalances created under disabling flexible arrangements in their workplaces. In the quotation below, Dawn draws attention to the sense of guilt that accompanies her through her rushed daily schedule.

Dawn - She hated summer clubs and things like that. She hated them because she was often the oldest there. They would close at six o'clock and I had to rush like mad to get there and of course I felt guilty leaving the office, guilty leaving my colleagues, guilty leaving Catherine there as well. It was an awful thing to go through.

The following remark highlights how fewer hours spent at home could directly affect children's behaviour and in turn change the relationships between WLMs and their

children. Glenys's sense of guilt derives from this realisation, which in turn prompted her to change her working arrangements and look for work elsewhere.

Glenys: I can see that this situation is affecting Alyssa. I can see it by the way she is. Like last time when I came back from work she was still awake and she was very cwtchy (Welsh for cuddly) I went to the bathroom and she was behind me...she was practically on my lap... she is 11, I mean, there is a definite change. I like a cwtych, I like...' mum I love you and whatever', but this it is not the way she normally is. Right now she is very clingy.

For some, this sense of guilt was seen as part and parcel of simply being a mother. In this respect, guilt was endured with a sense of inevitability and resignation as the respondent below exemplifies.

Louise: You know that if you are a mother...it's your job to feel guilty. That's all that you can do. Again I feel a bit bad now, just by talking about it. I think 'why didn't I marry a man who loved them [her children] the way they deserved?'

For others, guilt was a debilitating and paralysing force, engendered by a realisation that even if they could explain where it originated from, they were incapable of finding a solution or a way out. This was particularly the case when WLMs believed that it was too late for intervention on the ground that their children had grown up and had become impervious to their words and influence.

Claire: I have been on my hands and knees, I begged and begged her...but it's a power thing. Jade has power over me because of my guilt. Because I blame myself for this and that and the other...when she was 13 all of a sudden she came with ...and you can stick this and that.... so it went on until now.

In the light of this, it should be noted that, despite their best intentions, there were a few situations where WLMs felt powerless to change their children's lives. These circumstances had been triggered by traumas that related primarily to the violence used by abusive husbands on their former ex-partners and on their children. This powerlessness to protect emerged in the relationships with older children, some of whom were developing into troubled teenagers and had been labelled as 'disruptive' by the social agencies involved. Against this backdrop, a distraught WLM described her recent years as 'literally three years of hell' with her young teenage daughter. Anne's daughter Kelly was a 'big and a quiet girl' who had been subjected to serious 'bitchy, girly bullying' at school for some considerable time. As her daughter's behaviour worsened and become more destructive, Anne approached various agencies (namely, the school and the police) and practitioners (a child psychologist) for support. Unable to receive help at a level she deemed adequate, Anne was left dealing with a sense of personal failure in her ability to care.

Anne: She is so badly behaved that I was told to kick her out and she will learn her lesson... and I said 'what if something happens to her? She is on the street, I couldn't live with myself'. So I have the guilt of a mother and yet she is giving me the grief.

7.7 Summary

In this chapter I have continued to analyse WLMs' understandings and practices of an ethic of care centred on their children. From this analysis, some relevant considerations have emerged. To begin with, it is through the organisational structure of ritualised and routinised events more than in the unstructured times 'in between', that an attitude to 'nurture' and protect has been fostered and actualised. In this way, WLMs are able to

construct workable frameworks through which they channel their care-giving work. Overall, to ‘nurture’ means that WLMs exercise their moral agency to provide their children with:

- physical and intellectual activities to support their physical and mental development both inside and outside the domestic arena
- safe neighbourhoods in which to grow
- good nurseries and schools
- shielding from the negative aftermath of separation and divorce
- encouragement to build better relationships with their non-resident fathers whilst at the same time, obstructing or even blocking access if the relationship was seen as visibly affecting their children’s wellbeing
- opportunities to socialise on a regular basis with significant family members and close friends.
- a focus on their children’s emotional needs, which meant that in entering new relationships with potential new partners, most WLMs prioritised their children emotional well-being over their own desire for emotional fulfillment.
- material well-being and comfortable life-styles.

WLMs’ caring work was also influenced by their life histories, which informed their choices and had a considerable impact on their moral attitude and agency. WLMs reacted to their past experiences (especially those from childhood) by incorporating the lessons learned into their care-giving work. Drawing from the past often translated into attempts to compensate for bad experiences or emulate the good ones. In this respect, for

instance, it was found that amongst those WLMs who spoke of having experienced poverty in their childhood, a considerable minority placed a high currency on the value of promoting their children's material wellbeing. Notwithstanding the considerable level of investment into their children's well-being, many of the respondents spoke of a widespread sense of guilt, which seemed to affect them regardless of their actual ability to care. Many WLMs associated their sense of guilt with a perceived inadequacy to provide 'good enough' care for their children and to protect them against adverse circumstances and events. In spite of these potential and actual difficulties, the data analysis stresses how WLMs used their reflexive understanding to weigh up their options and exercise their moral judgment, to learn from personal mistakes and shortcomings whilst attempting to make the best of generally difficult circumstances.

The relationship between WLMs and their children cannot be understood outside the contingent reality of the extended family and circle of friends, who gave a considerable amount of support by relieving them from some of the caring responsibilities and by providing an enriching, and at times vital, network for mothers and children alike. In view of this, the analysis will now continue by providing an explorative overview of WLMs' contextual situations as experienced within their relational networks of family and friends.

CHAPTER 8

WLMs' relational networks

8.1 Introduction

Typically, WLMs described themselves as embedded and actively involved in their relational networks. This chapter will highlight how WLMs' caring practices were only possible thanks to the underlying substantive support that many of them received from

close family and friends. Within these contexts, the particular nature of WLMs' relational networks comes to be defined in part by the desire to please those close family members with whom many of them are deeply connected and upon whom they are emotionally and/or financially dependent. By speaking of a 'desire to please', I am referring here to an attitude and a practice by the WLMs concerned of being attuned and responsive to the needs and desires of their closest family members and friends whenever it was possible. A 'desire to please' appeared to be perceived by some WLMs in a rather 'utilitarian' way, as a means of exchanging something of value for something else. In this respect, findings draw particular attention to the 'symbiotic' nature of many relationships and considerably less to interactions valued and enjoyed purely for their own sake. As it will be discussed, these elements also have come to shape and inform the standard for 'successful' care-giving.

8.2 The articulation of WLMs' relational networks

At close inspection, data analysis seems to suggest that most of WLMs' relationships were lived 'instrumentally'. That is, close relatives, the extended family and close friends were often *selectively* 'targeted' as a means to an end: namely, to provide informal childcare for those WLMs who valued and trusted their close relatives and friends above formal providers. This was such a concern and a priority amongst WLMs as to exercise a gravitational pull of its own, which affected the nature of WLMs' relational networks. The quotation below illustrates the kind of complex management that WLMs were able to orchestrate for their children's benefit with the help of a considerable number of family members.

Glenys: I can walk to my parents' house in less than five minutes. My grandparents and the rest of my family live in Tonypany, which is 20 minutes drive from where I live. So, if my dad is having an afternoon shift, he is having my son all morning and he will take him to my grandparents in the afternoon and they will have him for a couple of hours and then my mother will take him back when she has finished work, because that's where she works. So I'm really lucky, I got lots of people to help me out.

The attention given to their children's schedules and to their day-to-day care shaped to some extent the relationships amongst those adults who, in various ways and measures, were involved with their upbringing. Whilst the remark above stresses the involvement of the closest family members in Glenys's life, the one below underlines the benefits of living in a close-knit community where close friends and good neighbours are in close proximity and can effectively lend each other meaningful support. Within these social environments, children represent a cohesive force that brings family members, friends and good neighbours together within long-established communities, as the one described below.

Gail: Yesterday I was going up and down with the children from school to the clubs and back home. I don't have a car and yesterday there was a torrential rain. My brother phoned telling me that there had been a death in his partner's family and he said 'Can you pick up our girl from school?' She is in a different school. So by the time we got home we were absolutely drenched and we had to go out again! But we have quite a close community and my next door neighbours could see what was going on and she said 'oh, hang on, I'll help you'. And the one opposite said 'look, I'm taking my little boy down, let me take Morgan as well' and because we are so close I trust her. So she took one down and I was about leaving the house with the other one when another of my friends phoned and said 'listen, Keith is taking us down [by car], so...as it was I didn't have to take any of the children down in the rain.

The following quotation underlines a type of relational network that exists within a newly established community, which gravitates around the primary school that is located on the same street as the respondents' house. This neighbourhood is held together by the common concern that various families share for the well-being and safety of their children. Gwyneth describes her appreciation for the support that she knows she will be able to receive if ever help should be needed.

Gwyneth: This is a lovely street...the neighbours have been great, and there are quite a few families on this street whose children are in the same school. So, I know now that if there was a problem or an emergency the neighbours would help me out. There are particularly two or three families in the street...they haven't been here that long themselves...I knew them vaguely before moving here through the school... I know that I could knock at their door and it would be fine.

Emergencies would occasionally materialise in those cases when children were unwell. On these occasions, selected family members and friends would be most supportive, whilst within the circle of friends WLMs found that they could receive more support and better understanding from other working mothers who shared similar difficulties. The remark below exemplifies this point in the relationship between the respondent, a teacher, and her son's teacher.

Louise: I went to see his teacher at the start of the day and I said 'he not feeling well but I have to work' and because she is a working mother as well and she is a friend she said 'that's fine' and she let him sit at the back of the classroom.... which is awful.... I felt guilty all day but this was better than.... nothing.

This kind of solidarity was particularly evident amongst the WLMs whose relational

network existed independently of their geographic location. Support amongst the WLMs was fairly widespread and it points towards successful 'symbiotic' relationships, in which lone mothers exchanged favours in a balanced, effective and democratic manner, thus acknowledging their counterparts as their 'family of choice'. These women did help each other in a variety of ways. Some came together in small groups to organise regular outings with all the children. Others would have movies-munchies-sleeping-in on weekends and some adopted open-house policies and would go in and out of each other houses with no formalities or conventionalities. Similarly, when needed, WLMs and their 'family of choice' would rally around each other to provide vital and decisive help. Help of this kind for instance was gratefully received by Belinda at a time in which her father and mother were both in hospital, one with cancer and the other with a broken arm. It was summertime and she was juggling a cleaning job, visiting and caring for her parents and taking care of her three children, who were on school holiday. Childcare was too expensive for her and her brother and sister lived in London. Under these difficult circumstances, her friends stepped in.

Belinda: Lots of my friends are single mothers. So I'm lucky that they understand. The ones who are married did not offer to help because they don't understand that there isn't somebody there to help me, whilst the single mums went 'oh my god! Right, we'll go by rota. If you can get to so and so on that day I can take them on this day' as good as gold. They all got together, which is something because all my friends know each other through me. So they did a rota between themselves to help me out...really lucky.

For the majority of WLMs however, the most important relationship was with their own mothers who generally played a major role in supporting their daughters practically, with house cleaning and by caring for the children and babysitting; emotionally, by offering

moral support and being a stable presence in their lives; and financially, by offering – usually with no strings attached – financial support when needed, which was primarily linked to the cost of raising the children. In the remark below, Leanne experiences the beneficial influence of her mother’s ‘active’ presence in her life.

Leanne: My mother is my rock. And I think [she is] the reason why my children are spoiled...and they are spoiled because they don't need anything. I don't have to say, ‘oh...I cannot afford to buy shoes until next week or until the end of the month’. She posts them down and says ‘look, I got a lovely pair of leather shoes and they are in the post. I left the price on so if they don’t fit just send them back to me’. She loves bargains! So I do get a lot of emotional and financial support from my mother.

But although this mother/daughter relationship was crucial in determining Leanne’s attainment of her lifestyle choices, in some cases these relationships were marred by emotional tension, arguably a consequence of grandmothers’ intense involvement in co-raising their grandchildren. This was often the shape of the symbolic ‘payment’ that grandparents expected when asked by WLMs to support them caring directly or indirectly for their grandchildren. WLMs’ accounts indicate that to be practically and emotionally involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren, and consequently have a say in the way a child was raised, held a high currency amongst grandparents. Since WLMs had much to gain from ‘pleasing’ their parents and relatives, many WLMs strived to achieve happy ‘symbiotic’ relationships with their extended families. The nature of this cooperation will be highlighted and analysed further in the next chapter where it will be shown how WLMs entered into various negotiations in order to strike mutually supportive bargains (particularly with their mothers) and negotiate also some time for themselves. For some WLMs, the negotiations with their close family members appeared to be more nuanced

and less open than those articulated in a 'democratic' fashion with their 'families of choice'.

In the light of this, occasionally, amongst close family members, embedded power struggles and generational divergences seemed to flare up particularly when contradictory standards of what was considered to be 'good' and 'proper' in terms of care-giving arose in the practices of day-to-day living. The following quotation highlights the nature of some of these conflicts. Helen is a full-time WLM who has been taking her child to nursery since he was a few months old. According to Helen however, her mother is a traditional 'stay at home' mum, who resents her daughter working on a full-time basis.

Helen: The one thing that makes me struggle is my mum. She puts so much pressure on me. I have done everything she wants me to do. She upset me over Christmas when she turned around, after that I asked her to help me with him [my son], and she said 'you are not just used to being a proper mother' and that really upset me...I think she means a full-time mum, at home with him...as she was with my sister.

When expectations on either side were not met and relationships soured, WLMs would occasionally uproot themselves or stop any connection with a particular family member.

Julia illustrated this situation:

Julia: I am from a small family and my husband is from a big one. My mother died when I was 25 and I was with them [her in-laws] throughout the best part of my life. They became ...my stability if you like, but things changed. I felt that something was building up, that something wasn't quite right. There was this big party, was something like a 50th wedding anniversary, a milestone. So they came to me and they said, 'oh, you know the party? It would be better if you didn't go'. So, I just flipped, I suppose and I ended up cutting all ties. For me it was the right thing to do,

no regrets.

Similarly, there were some WLMs who did not talk to their own mothers, but had a much better relationship with their fathers. Others had less than cordial relations with their own parents but had a very good rapport with the parents of their (often abusive) ex-partners. One WLM managed three sets of grandparents fairly successfully by bringing together in a constructive way her three children's fathers and grandparents, who previously had acrimonious relationships.

Morgan: So now all three sets of grandparents are really nice to each other. They never forget birthdays, they give presents at Christmas time and Jordan is always invited to all family events and treated just like all the other grandchildren even though she is not biologically their grandchild. But usually it works much better when the grandparents of my two little ones invite her rather than the other way around.

All of these processes are held together by a common denominator and moral imperative: that is, WLMs' determination to find socially supporting frameworks for themselves and their children. In the light of these considerations what seems to emerge is not so much the profile of a traditional type of 'community', but more of a community of 'choice' where WLMs selectively interact and build strong relationships with families and friends based on the communality of their interests and needs. This said, the overall trend that emerges does not indicate dispersal, but rather points to a consistent move (underlined by the intense geographical concentration discussed in chapter five) towards integration and interdependence. This was the case since the majority of WLMs did take concrete steps to 'come together' spatially with their families and friends and in this way enhance the kind of practical and emotional support they could provide for each other.

In all the contexts highlighted above, WLMs' relational networks are maintained for a multiplicity of reasons, included amongst these is the immediate or long-term 'utility' they offer. In this sense, they worked when everyone played their part, by giving and receiving in comparable terms. When they became unbalanced, relationships began to suffer until they were gradually dissolved. There were however exceptions to this pattern. These were epitomised by some WLMs who, in their own ways, began to interact with their communities with the objective of wanting to know the people around them and, in the process, were hoping to become more integrated into that community. With this objective in mind, few WLMs became catalysts for significant change. The quotation below refers to Carey, whose primary concerns and priorities had recently and drastically changed. Carey switched from a work-centred to a care-centred approach to life and, consequently, decided to become much more involved in her neighbour's lives. In so doing, she initiated a process that eventually led to the development of a new sense of 'community' in her neighbourhood. The remark below outlines the progression of this process.

Carey: I used to do garden clearance for my neighbours and odd jobs around the place. I laid a few floors, I am quite handy, I can do electrics and I can do plumbing, I would swap them for luxuries like bottles of wine ...a hair kit...or someone had a bike that hadn't been used much and I would say 'oh that's lovely for Drew'. And that is when I got to know my neighbours. I had no idea who my neighbours were. I had no idea about what was going on in my community before then because I left my house when it was dark and I got home when it was dark....I built some very strong relationships with my next door neighbours on both sides and opposite. I found out where the children on the street lived, where the other single parents were, where the other young families were.... suddenly it was as if I had just moved in the street, and I had been there four

years. So now we have open-door policies...in and out of each other houses and it was never like that before because before nobody spoke to anybody else...it came all together when I was there...because I spent a lot of time...and me and Drew we were always outside.

Carey also spoke of taking an active part in the planning and organisation of street parties and carnivals with the residents of her area. Prior to those events, adults and children would work together for their preparation and the whole neighbourhood was galvanised into action. A different way to elicit 'community spirit' was promoted by Paula. Her street had only one row of about 30 houses and within her locality she was popular. This became obvious throughout the course of the interview as a variety of parents and a few children walked in with various queries or simply to say hello. Below Paula describes a fairly typical afternoon in her home and some of the activities that normally characterise her preparation for the Christmas season in her neighbourhood.

Paula: [After school] my children and their friends come in, they take a drink and pop out, or they may come in and have something to eat or a snack and their friends have a snack as well. I really like to make them feel welcome...like the other day I started making pancakes and in the end the whole street had pancakes...and at Christmas time we make cup cakes, we shape them into Christmas things and then we make our own Christmas cards and we give them all around. The children really enjoy doing it!

Whilst Carey and Paula conducted activities in their neighbourhood that included their children, who came to experience on those occasions a fair amount of 'active' care, Cathy experiences a type of sociability amongst adults, whose primary objective is to enjoy each other's company and give each other emotional support. Undoubtedly, the close proximity they enjoyed (they all lived a few doors away from each other) gave this group

the chance to develop a closeness, which was defined by the problems they shared as women and mothers, and not by their marital status.

Cathy: I got really good neighbours who are really very good friends. We'll go around to each other's houses, we'll have a couple of drinks, we'll order a Chinese and we'll have a girly night and we'll chat, and he [her son] goes to sleep in their houses upstairs and I'm staying there as well. There are five of us and it's great! There are no lone parent families; one is on her second marriage, but the rest are all normal families. They all got their problems and we are all there to talk to each other. So we are very good friends as well as neighbours.

For Leanne on the other hand, her concept of 'neighbourhood' extended far beyond a conventional geographical area. At the time of the interview, Leanne was a working student with three young children, who was committed to doing voluntary work by supporting families in need. The remark below captures the kind of support that Leanne was able to offer in one of her typical rounds.

Leanne: After taking the kids to school, I go straight to support one of my families. In this one, they have three children all under the age of three, they got twins, you see, and they are just finding things very hard...basically it is just sleep deprivation. They live in a little overcrowded two-bedroom house and the twins don't sleep very well. So I give her [the mother] basic support. Sometime it's about filling forms, other times it's to show her how to budget. I get her wash in and out of the machine or I just look after the three children while she has a bath or catches up with one or two hours of sleep. So, I stay for about two hours with her and then I go and see my other family. This is a single mother who is new to the area. She hasn't got any other support apart from 'Home start' and 'Sure Start'. I spend an hour and an half with her. I think she is just looking for a chat and a cup of tea.

The families that Leanne was able to help received continuity of care from this respondent. From the data collected it is unclear if Leanne was able or willing to bring

people together through her voluntary work. For this reason, it is not possible to speak of a 'neighbourhood' as such. Nonetheless, Leanne was developing a network of relations with people she 'cared about' and 'cared for' and with whom she shared meaningful and personal experiences. Although presenting very different scenarios of 'communities' or 'neighbourhoods', the four quotations above epitomise types of relational networks where the primary objective is not so much to seek, negotiate and exchange resources and support. The objective here, if there is one, is to simply discover one's 'community', by making the time to do it and by investing in it. In other words, through these variable contexts, relationships were not lived primarily in an instrumental way, as a means to an end, but rather they were valued for their own sake and thus, they were enjoyed as an end in itself. It is noteworthy, in this context to note that all these WLMs were involved in long part-time work that did not monopolised their lives. In other words, they could 'choose' to care as they did because they could afford the time, they had the financial means to do it and enough personal capital to invest in their communities.

In different settings, this desire of 'getting together' for the sheer pleasure of enjoying each other's company and socialising was also found within the relational networks of WLMs' close and extended families. For some WLMs, this was typically represented by the occasion of the 'Sunday lunch'. In the following remark, Paula gives an enthusiastic account of one such time. In her narrative, it is evident how the whole extended family of brothers and sisters with their respective children and partners enjoys this mother's care-giving work and how well she seems to hold her family together.

Paula: You know, every Sunday she [my mother] cooks for all 14 of us. The house is

really small, but it is like if it was Christmas every Sunday. She has candles going, and she got...I don't know, mellow songs and music going and we are all there and ...it's brilliant. And you know, although my mother works full time she takes pride and joy in what she does. To cook for all of us makes her happy. And then Claire [my sister] and I do the dishes after dinner. And it's nice for all of us to have a chat together and get together every Sunday. This is good for us, our children and my mother.

Whilst Paula above is the recipient of her mother's care, Carey is the initiator and the gravitational centre for a very social Sunday lunch gathering. Below, she gives a flavour of this event, which for the people involved has become a cherished tradition.

Carey: Sundays are big family days. I tend to do a huge roast dinner on Sundays and my mother, my aunty and my brother will come, they all live on their own...my ex-sister in law and my other two sisters will all come to the house with all their children. And we also have Alex, who is Dawn's [her daughter] best friend; she is eight and lives four doors down the road. She comes and brings Loren who is three doors down and sometimes Daniel, who lives next door. The kids make their own tables.... it's lovely. But it's better in the summer because I have big patio doors and we can all spill out all over the place. They are not allowed to turn up until half past one because dinner is ready at two and they have to go one hour after we finish eating. It gives me the chance to get the house back together. I'll buy the meat and they'll bring all the 'veg' and all the 'afters'. So we'll split between us. My sisters will bring all the vegetables, the spinach, broccoli, the carrots, and potatoes...all cooked and prepared, that's their job. And then my mother will usually bring the afters and then somebody else will bring the drinks....I absolutely love our Sundays, that's what I live my life for and it's becoming like a religious event.

It is interesting to note how much thoughtful preparation, planning and cooperation go into these joyful and seemingly spontaneous events to make them the success they are, and how, depending on circumstances and expectations, everyone is expected to play their part. For Paula and her sister this involved washing the dishes after lunch. For Carey's extended family, this entailed bringing parts of the meal and respecting the rules

of their host. Both remarks however illustrate how these family events are made possible on the premise of negotiated understandings to which all the participants, implicitly or explicitly, have subscribed. These features also define the nature of WLMs' relationships and cast some light over the contextual environments within which WLMs articulated their relational networks.

8.3 Summary

To summarise, within their communities WLMs lived in relational networks which, at that particular time in their lives, were primarily centred on their children and on the need to provide affordable and informal quality childcare for them. This was such a concern and a priority amongst WLMs as to exercise a gravitational pull of its own, which affected the nature of WLMs' relational networks. In this respect, it could be argued that relationships were lived chiefly in an instrumental manner. For the majority of WLMs the most important relationship was with their own mothers who generally played a major role in supporting their daughters practically, emotionally and financially. Support between WLMs was fairly widespread and it points towards successful 'symbiotic' relationships, in which lone mothers exchanged favours in a fair and balanced manner. Against this backdrop, a closer investigation has revealed a more nuanced landscape. When possible, WLMs enjoyed giving to, and interacting with their communities and with selected circles of families and friends. On these accounts, WLMs acted on their moral agency and contributed to the development of relational networks that existed, had meaning and were valued also for their own sake.

CHAPTER 9

WLMs' care for the 'self'

9.1 Introduction

It would seem obvious but, in order to care for others and oneself, people must have enough time to do it. Given their busy lives, WLMs never seemed to find 'enough' time for all the things they wanted to do with their own children. It is hardly surprising then that they had even less time for themselves. This chapter will analyse this important aspect of the ethic of care by assessing the shape that 'free time' took for these busy

women. Overall, what has come to light is a sense of ‘self’ that is intrinsically tied up to WLMs’ understandings of their mother and worker identities. In this respect, it appears that the kind of care that WLMs are usually able and willing to give to themselves is dependent on the amount of time, energy and resources available at the end of their *total* (paid and unpaid) working day. Yet there are indications that WLMs are becoming increasingly resourceful and, when possible, they take action to offset the potentially high levels of ‘*charge mentale*’ embedded in their day-to-day living. This appears to be the case even when, by and large, WLMs’ recreational activities appear to be highly structured and routinised and dependent on their relational network of families and friends.

9.2 Caring for the ‘self’

The notion of ‘free time’ or time for oneself held a high currency for these time-starved WLMs. Julia stresses this notion in her quotation below:

Julia: I really need some time for myself to relax... time when I can do perhaps a manicure or a facial,...read a book, go for a walk...whatever...laying in the bath for 20 minutes, that's so important ...that little bit of time.

Usually however, time for themselves came at the end of their working day, when children were finally asleep. Since the whole day is lived by being attuned to and responding to children’s needs, the ‘bed-time’ hour was perceived by the majority of WLMs as a clear and non-negotiable demarcation line between their children’s time and their own. As a rule, this was strictly implemented because WLMs felt morally entitled

to it since 'caring about', 'taking care of' and 'care-giving' for their children were lived and experienced by WLMs as real and substantial work. Caroline emphasises this notion.

Caroline: At the end of a working day my boss says to me 'oh, it's four thirty, let's finish work... this is not so bad isn't it?' But my real work is just starting.... my son is a toddler and as soon as I go back I still have three-four hours on my own. That is the 'real' work, not sitting on the desk all day, and it's full time work as you know, until they go to bed.

The actual bed-time however varied with their children's age and these variations seemed to follow standardised patterns. Typically, young children would be put in bed between seven and eight pm, older children (in the age group between nine and 13) were usually in bed by nine. Teenagers would stay up longer, and with some of them bed-time was more a matter of negotiations which occasionally led to disputes. In some households, a compromise with older children was reached when they were sent to bed with an understanding that they could stay up a little longer watching television, using the computer, reading and so on in their own rooms. However, as previously discussed in this thesis, this was more an exception than the rule since, according to their mothers' narratives, children of all ages would typically be so tired at the end of the day that they happily welcomed their bed-time.

In this way, WLMs could claim some time and space for themselves. In part as an expression of this, many WLMs would use the early hours of the evening to do housework and at the same time re-establish a degree of their own order and control over the family domain. It was also evident in their accounts that certain things had to be

done, such as the washing up, ironing and the preparation of uniforms and lunch boxes for the next school day. A few WLMs commented on this and explained how the evening hours after the children had gone to bed were in fact best suited for housework. Furthermore, from an organisational point of view, to do all the necessary housework at this quiet time of the day would alleviate the hectic rush of the following morning, as Rachel explains:

Rachel: Once they are in bed I tend to do all the tidying up and I do all the dishes. I tend to do the lunch boxes and prepare the snack for when we go to clubs. So that's all done. And I put them away in the fridge ready for the next morning.... because otherwise it would be too much of a rush in the morning and I would be grumpy, whereas if I do them the night before I can sit at the table and have breakfast with them.

But even when alone, some WLMs spoke of how they managed their 'own' time in a highly structured manner. Indeed, in these contexts also, time was rationalised for maximum benefit to avoid 'waste'. In the quotation below Caroline outlines how an intensifying commodification of time in one sphere (the public) has been internalised to shape her perception, use and management of 'free time' in the other (the private).

Caroline: I am ultra, ultra, ultra organised. So, if I have a five minutes gap I will 'scan' all the stuff that needs doing and I will do it. But it's not in an uncompromising, rigid way. It just means that you can enjoy your free time more because you are not looking at a big pile of ironing or you are not looking at a big pile of paper work. You can actually totally have switch off time then.

This description hints at the intensification and compression of time units whilst highlighting the need to plan even such 'switching off' times. The necessity for 'time

off' was also felt by another group of WLMs who were pressurised with care work, paid work and/or studying commitments and deadlines. For them, the housework was usually divided with that portion of work that had been put aside for that particular quiet time of the day when they could finally concentrate on their studies. Those WLMs, who often worked into the small hours of the night, were chronically overtired but they accepted this as the *only* way towards fulfilling their ambitions in the world of paid work. Student workers like Liz, stress the importance that many WLMs attributed to the studies undertaken, perceived as important and necessary 'stepping stones' into better job opportunities and careers.

Liz: They [my parents] were very unhappy with me for doing this Masters and they said 'why are you putting more stress on yourself?' But, potentially, I still have 20 years of work before me and I just know that I have to have this award to be an inspector. It's going to be compulsory, so why not do it now and get it out of the way? Also, it gives me the stepping stone to do something else, to go somewhere else and be part of something different. So, yes, it's hard, but it was never going to be easy.

Some WLMs would typically finish their day slouching in front of the television and regularly falling asleep in front of it.

Louise: I always have plans and then I usually fall asleep on the settee and then one of the children comes down for a wee and they go 'muumm' and I go 'oh, I am ok' and I go back to bed. I don't do too much reading.... it is more like television or anything where I don't have to use too much of my brain and just sit there and flop.

For some, the actual idea of 'switching off' was a rather unrealistic notion because they always felt that, as mothers, they were constantly in charge and responsible for their children.

Louise: As a single parent, the hardest thing is that you are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So, even when you are relaxing you are still ...on 'call' really, isn't it? So you never get time off. But when they are ill is the hardest thing, because you have no one to talk to you, you have to make all the calls. It's the constant responsibility and the weight of the responsibility.

Most WLMs however, could take the time to enjoy a proper meal and a glass of wine; a few more preferred to have long and soothing baths or just go to bed with a book. Others still used this quiet time to catch up with a friend on the phone or on the internet. In the following remark, Gwyneth exemplifies the sentiments and activities of many WLMs when she argues:

Gwyneth: If Miles has the children on Saturday night, I'm quite happy to sit in front of the telly, make myself a nice meal and just spend time on my own. Because spending time on my own is actually a means to de-stressing. No one is making any demands on me and is the time to do things properly, or cook a meal or just sit for two hours on the sofa and read a book...you know, that's the way for me. I don't need to go out and find things. And I always liked pottering around the house. So the luxury of actually being able of doing this... is something I am quite happy about.

For Gwyneth, simply to be by herself, with no immediate demands and responsibilities to fulfil equated to being given a chance to relax and make that time her 'own'. Thus, to have some time for themselves in these cases meant to be able to slow down to their own requirements and needs and do things 'properly', like enjoying a meal, a television programme, a book. Even more appreciated were the longer breaks that some WLMs could enjoy when relatives or ex-partners would have the children overnight or on weekends. The observation below captures to some extent Carey's satisfaction in being

able to enjoy the small pleasures of life and having the time and freedom to do it.

Carey: So when I don't have her [my daughter] on the Friday night.... I try not to work at all on the weekend. So if on Friday I go out with my friends I have a very lazy Saturday...maybe I do some light DIY, painting or something.... or catch up with my mom for lunch and literally on Saturday I don't take my dressing gown off, and it's lovely. I have a three hour bath...I drink a whole bottle of wine.... and it's great.... and my candles are there, I eat toast, watch the telly or read a book with the telly on while eating a toast ...all at the same time in bed. Well, that's what I can do for myself.

To have some 'free time' also meant that, often for the first time in the day, WLMs were able to reflexively look at themselves. In this respect, this was also the time (often at night) when deeper and unsettled feelings would surface. On this account, a number of WLMs struggled with physical problems and with latent and actual depression. This would be a fairly common occurrence amongst those WLMs who endured tough schedules under conditions of disabling flexibility in the workplace and/or were recovering from abusive and traumatic break-ups. The quotation below encapsulates Rosalind's reaction and feelings relevant to the latter situation. It relates to the period in her life when she came to realise that following her husband's 'betrayal', she had suddenly become a 'single mother'.

Rosalind: When I got married 'single mother' wasn't even in my vocabulary! It's not something that you think you would be when you get married. So when you are ...it's quite shocking to the point that it becomes totally crippling. I was on the floor. I couldn't go any lower. I was totally, utterly and clinically depressed for a long time. That depression doesn't go away like that. It lingers ...

Whilst Rosalind had managed to find a stable and sustainable position in her life, Mary

was still struggling to find that balance and stability. Mary worked as a nurse, doing a job that she loved, but she could not find suitable childcare to combine with her shift work and with her 'early' and 'late' working hours. She felt unable to fully trust most of her extended family and her ex-husband had left her to go and live in a distant country. As a result, Mary felt that she was essentially alone in her difficulties and this emerged particularly late in the evening, at a time when other WLMs were finding ways to de-stress and recharge themselves.

Mary: The problem is that there is no break. I feel exhausted. Like this afternoon, I put the rubbish out, I was down the steps and the bag broke...it can be the final stroke. I was like that and I thought 'I cannot cry in the street. People think that I have gone mad...' and I went to have a shower. It was nine o'clock at night and the shower wouldn't work. I lost it. The kids were in bed, luckily, I am sure they heard me anyway ...but I lost it. 'Can't cope, can't do it, I can't fix these things. Even if I could fix these things, when could I do it?' When I didn't have them [the children] on the weekend, at least I could go out. If I wanted to do some shopping I could do it on my own. I cannot do that now.

Some mothers expressed feelings of loneliness as they missed having a partner with whom to communicate and share the joys and responsibilities of parenting. The quotations below are illustrative of some WLMs' lives without residential partners.

Sarah: I have been separated for three and an half years; my marriage was in trouble for a good three years before that. So it has been six, seven probably eight years since I have been in a loving relationship and I can't remember what it's like...sometimes I see couples chatting together and I think 'oh yeah! I forgot about that!' It is just like coming home and chat to somebody, you know? And sometime I come home and I'm busting to tell something to somebody, whether is good or bad, and sometimes I tell the kids and sometimes you can't tell them. So, I am reminded of that ever so often.

NV: Looking back I can see that I was so driven to make money...but also I think it becomes a substitute for companionship and that's perhaps why I work obsessively, to the point of becoming a perfectionist... it fills a very empty period in the evening when you feel very isolated.

Rachel: It would be nice to have someone who would cook us a meal...once a week. One less thing to worry about...you know? Just to be able to share the workload.

But whilst some WLMs spoke about feeling more vulnerable by the absence of a partner, others felt empowered for regaining possession of their 'own' time and space and made it clear that they were no longer willing to compromise their own values and their newly found autonomy. In the following remark, Carey expresses her appreciation for rediscovering her entitlement to personal time and space.

Carey: When you live in the same house as partners, you have certain expectations, when you are on your own you don't have expectations about...there is only you to do things, so you just do it. I never had any time to myself at all, ever! I got it now and to some extent I got myself into a situation where I don't want to share my house with anyone else...I wouldn't get that time to myself. I tried boyfriends in my time off. They have come to my house and they expect your undivided attention whether you are with your child or working ...I can't be like that now. I don't know.... perhaps I don't have time for an emotional relationship.... a very intimate emotional relationship.

As Carey hinted in her final remark, it was also the case that a large minority of WLMs felt that at this particular juncture in their lives, they were neither willing nor able to make the emotional commitment to being or becoming involved in intimate relationships with potential new partners.

Laura: I got time for my daughter, time for my career, time for myself. I do not have

time for an intimate emotional relationship with another adult human being.

In terms of reevaluating the use of a personal time and space, Rosalind adds a further dimension to this. In rediscovering the value of her autonomous and enterprising self, Rosalind could not understand why lone mothers seem to be pressurised to enter into new relationships as soon as possible. In this respect, she comments:

Rosalind: [It seems like that] this is not normal [and that] you've got to be with someone! But I have stopped doing that...thinking like that. Do you know when you see so many people becoming single and within months they are with somebody else again, I think... 'how do they do that? How do you give up yourself for somebody else and share your space with somebody else?' Oh! It's a really difficult thing. And I have become so independent now that I wouldn't want someone to tell me 'no, you can't have this, you can't do that, you cannot spend your money on that...' Do you know what I mean? Is a change in the way I conceive relationships and after being on my own for so long, I wouldn't want anyone treading into that area.

In a similar vein, Belinda and Rachel stress the benefits of streamlining time, unfettered by the demands of their ex-partners. What also transpires in the following observations is a sense of weariness about the unequal sharing of parental and domestic responsibilities, which had been a feature of their previous married/partnered lives.

Belinda: Probably I am closer to my children as a single mum than I was as... [a married woman] because it's all that I got. I'm not distracted by cooking dinner for some bloke or picking up some bloke's washing, worrying at what time he is coming back from work.... you know when I was married it was...' oh, do his dinner... I wonder what time he finishes.... oh, I can't plan anything for Saturday in case he can't get a day off as well'. I don't do any of this now. It's just me and my three boys.

Rachel: I never had it any different. My life hasn't changed in any way, shape or form. The only thing that has changed in my life is that I put the bins out once a week. He used to say 'you don't buy a dog and bark yourself'. In other words...it's women's work.

He has never read my son a story and he is nearly seven, he has never bathed my daughter and she is nearly ten. He has never read their school reports; he has never gone to their school concerts...never. That's why when people say 'you are doing so well', I say 'but it's no different to me'.

As previously discussed, a primary cause of this attitude was determined by WLMs' moral imperative to prioritise their children's needs over their own. In line with this understanding, the majority of WLMs made it clear that they had no intention to upset the sense of 'us' and the spirit of 'togetherness' which they had worked hard to achieve with her children. As it will be recalled, this process was identified by the WLMs concerned as an essential component of nurturing and protecting their children. In the remark below, Carey describes how personal desires and 'romantic ideas' are put aside and become secondary to her responsibility to her daughter. In the same breath however, the remark underlines the apparent short-term nature of this particular commitment as the respondent looks forward to a time when she will be able to 'explore the world' on her own terms.

Carey: Drew is still six, but I do have romantic ideas that perhaps when Drew will be 16 or 18 and she is off studying or working and starting to move away I will find a lovely friend and companion, a true friend who will come to explore the world with me and comes on adventures...

As discussed previously, the majority of WLMs understood and described this exclusive dedication to their children's needs as a stage, albeit a very important one, in their life course. This phase characterised WLMs' lives primarily at the time in which the children were young, typically from birth to around the age of ten. As the children grew older,

most of the WLMs interviewed talked of gradually claiming back their commitments to paid work and to themselves. Gwyneth stresses the progressive and evolutionary nature of this stage in WLMs' lives.

Gwyneth: You have to prioritise really and the main priority for me was to manage this break up in the best possible way and make sure that the children were safe and secure. My needs will be met through that, so the time to be involved with someone else is somewhere... down the line. There will be times when I will be able to think of other relationships, maybe in the next year or so and maybe spend a bit of energy and time on that...because it takes time and energy to do that... and I am aware that you can't do everything.

It is interesting to note how the length of WLMs' commitment to their children can vary when comparing the two remarks above. Similarly, the sacrifices that WLMs were prepared to make varied, since they were affected by situational circumstances, WLMs' personal experiences and their reflexive understanding of all these factors combined. Notwithstanding, it can be argued that at this particular stage in their lives, a sizable minority of WLMs tended to identify and incorporate notions of their 'free-time' with those of their children. This is one reason why for instance, holidays during school breaks were not usually visualised and experienced as an 'individual' chance for a break, but rather as opportunities for the whole family to get away. In this respect, the quotation below describes the exception rather than the rule amongst the respondents. In it, Gwyneth hints at her conflicting emotions as she struggles momentarily to reconcile the apparent ambivalences of her mother/person identity.

Gwyneth: On May last year I went away for a week by myself! I went away before, but only for three or four nights, that was the longest I have been away. I went to this fantastic place in Spain and it was an alternative therapy centre that had lots of course

work and stuff. So I did some dance there and it was lovely. But I really struggled in my fourth night because that was the longest that I have been away from the children. Afterwards I was ok, but it felt like a very long time away from the children. But also it felt like a very important time for me to be completely on my own, away from everything.

In order to protect their precious family time and space, if and when potential new father figures were introduced into their children's lives, the respondents demonstrated a particular sensitivity to their children's perceptions and feelings.

Pam: I have a new boyfriend now, who is marvelous with the children and my daughter adores him. If she doesn't see him for a while she really misses him. I haven't been with a man for a long time because I had three children to care for and they were my priority and any new person in my life must like my children as well. I wouldn't have it in any other way.

This said some WLMs found that they had become unwittingly trapped in the safety and comfort they had so successfully constructed for their children. For example, in her five year 'plan' Louise was exclusively dedicated to her children and totally involved in her children's world. But as the children grew older, Louise found that she had lost a certain amount of connection to the 'adult' world. As her primarily mother identity started to change and adjust to new realities, Louise was wondering how to exit from her predicament.

Louise: ...and then when I came at the end of the five years [of my plan], I realised I didn't know any single men. And I work in a job where you don't meet any single men. And all my friends are married, so I don't go in any of those places where there are single men. And then all the sudden I felt... 'oh! Ok...never mind'.

Taking a completely different approach from Louise and contrasting to some extent these general patterns, Vanessa draws attention to the problematic issue of WLMs living on their own often for very lengthy periods. In this respect, while a number of respondents were involved in successful relationships with non-residential partners, others, like Vanessa, sought to achieve a satisfactory compromise by living her relationship on a 'part-time' basis. Thus, by allowing limited commitment with little or no emotional involvement, Vanessa did not sway from her primary focus, which remained firmly on her children.

Vanessa: My boyfriend.... I let him help...sometimes. But I don't want a full commitment, I don't.... oh, this sounds terrible; I just want a shagging partner really. It sounds terrible, but it's not like that. I got barriers. I don't want a man living in my space...so I opt for a part-time relationship...[I'll see you] when 'I can fit you in' so to speak ...that sounds terrible...but at the end of the day I am doing it for my girls.

Some WLMs had to work hard to reconstruct their sense of 'selfhood' since the dominant identity of being married/cohabiting working mothers had often retained negative connotations which lingered long after their divorce. For this reason, in their post-divorce lives a number of WLMs were still grappling with self-confidence issues. The seriousness of some of these issues was highlighted by two respondents who, at the lowest point of their married life, had considered taking their own lives. Below, Paula recalls this harrowing time.

Paula: I have been through the mill and back... I even wrote a letter to the children for when they were old enough and I had pills there and everything but then I thought that it was pretty selfish to do that, and I thought if my children are without parents, what kind of life would they have? It was awful, awful...

As I pointed out earlier in chapter eight, many WLMs were actively involved in sustaining 'thick' relational networks that pivoted around close family members and friends. Still, some WLMs complained for the lack of opportunities and time to meet new people and potential partners. This was the case for Laura, who felt more acutely the restrictions imposed to her social life because she lacked the basic support from her parents and extended family, all living in England, and from her ex-partner, who proved to be not reliable enough to care for her children.

Laura: For myself for instance, I would fancy doing salsa classes...just for myself.... but. I can't do it. I don't know, different people may have different views, but I am on my own, I am just with the girls and I just have to go on with that.... really. So I have to put them first and I have to take the back seat.... personally.

Others socialised only with their close and extended family and relied on just a few intimate friends. Christine, who was struggling to get herself out of a deep state of post-natal depression, experienced the value of being able to depend on just such a close and supportive network of friends.

Christine: The first year I was shattered, in the second I began to spend more time chatting to my friends. Friends became very important...not to share stuff..but they were just there and you could ring them up and they tell you their problems and then you think, my goodness, that's normal! But friends, my family have been so important throughout all of it. So my mother would ring everyday from Spain, my sister...fantastic, my friends, my family.... even when there were times when I didn't want to speak to anybody. They kept me going.

Some WLMs explained that they had the opportunity to go out and socialise but lacked

the energy and motivation to step out of their familiar surroundings. In spite of this, in order to preserve a sense of 'selfhood' and exist not only as 'mothers' but also as 'persons', the majority of WLMs attempted to build and maintain a social life outside home. Consequently, about once a week, half of the respondents were able to go out with friends in the evening. This typically consisted of a few hours spent at their regular pub for a drink and a chat. In this regard, a few of them described how good it felt to be able to get out and lose their 'mother' identities, if only for a short while.

Helen: I go to pubs, cinema. I went to a pub last night, and it's nice to be 23 again! It's nice to be like a normal 23 year old, go out with my friends and have a bit of fun...and not worry about Morgan...I know that he is safe with my mum.

Christine: ...that is when I thought 'hang on a minute, I'm not just a mother, I am a person ...I am an individual!'

Anne: I cannot stand to sit next to someone who would talk about their kids all night. I came to get away from ...the house responsibilities.... I want to be me! For a little while I don't want to be the mother, the breadwinner...

A few professional mothers opted for alternative 'time-out'. Here is Gayna describing her way to relax during the time in which the children are with their father.

Gayna: I joined the Village Hotel. My boyfriend bought me an Easter gift because he said: 'you need to relax because you are doing too much. Go, just go and have time to yourself'. So, religiously now I leave from work and I go there for an hour and I'll have a swim, a sauna...I am not very good at exercising. I go in the lounge to read a book. I don't go home to do that because if I go home I am so tempted to do housework. I do that a couple of times a week and on the weekend and I have become very good at it now. It actually benefits me!

In analysing the ways in which WLMs manage to care for themselves I have addressed the issue from two different perspectives, both of which hinge around the ways in which WLMs identify their ‘needs’ and attempt to satisfy them. On the one hand, as a number of respondents have argued through the data analysed in this chapter, WLMs are eager to free themselves from multiple responsibilities and carve some time and space for themselves towards more individualised forms of self-development and self-expression. On the other, other WLMs appeared (at least for a period of time) to merge their own needs and interests with those of their children and, in the process, enhance the spirit of ‘togetherness’, as it was the case when going on holidays together or having ‘fun nights’ at home. This said, within this polarisation most WLMs sought to achieve a balance between individualised and ‘family-centred’ ways to fulfill needs and satisfy personal interests. On all of these accounts, what transpires is that, although managing through difficulties, WLMs were actively attempting to create a time and space of their own by using their moral agency to elicit ways and strategies to care for themselves. Yet this could not be possible without careful planning and organisation on their part and without the support of close relatives and friends, who would be often involved in the childcare process.

All these scenarios have not taken into account that by being active moral agents in their own right (Smart, Neale and Wade 2001, Williams 2004), children are also good care-receivers as well as care-givers. In this respect, it should be pointed out that by valuing the expressions of their children’s love WLMs were also nurtured by it. Thus, it is also

by being reflexively receptive that many WLMs were able to enhance their sense of well being. This was manifested through daily occurrences in the normal ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ of daily living. Below Sarah and Christine hint at the importance and the joy of being able to receive a often very ‘tactile’ manifestation of this affection from older (Sarah) and younger (Christine) children alike.

Sarah: If my children want a hug they will get it from me. But also, if I feel a bit down and I say ‘I want a hug’ they are both on top of me...

Christine: Oh, it's fantastic! Best feeling ever...I wasn't maternal to start with. I struggled to bond with Lea because of all the stuff that happened when she was born. But afterwards...it's just the best feeling ever! Just to have her arms around me to give me a big kiss!

9.3 Summary

In this chapter I have approached WLMs’ attitude and agency to the issue of caring for the self. In this respect, it has emerged that in order to carve some time for themselves, the decision about *when* to send the children to sleep was perceived by the majority of the respondents as an important and non-negotiable imperative. WLMs needed time and space for themselves and the later hours of the day supplied that vital time and space. However, in the hours after bed-time there was still work to be done. For most of them, this consisted of variable amounts of housework, for others this included work and/or study. But even when alone, many WLMs managed their ‘free time’ in a highly structured manner whilst a number of them would regularly end their day by falling asleep in front of the television. Most WLMs, however, could take the time to enjoy a proper meal and a glass of wine; a few more enjoyed going for long and soothing baths

and others selected to go to bed with a book. In all these contexts, relaxation was identified with having no immediate demands and responsibilities placed on them. On the other hand, some WLMs could not relax at all as they perceived themselves being ‘on call 24/7’, as one mother described it. This also was the time of the night when deeper and unsettled feelings would surface, amongst which most prominent were feelings of loneliness and of actual or latent depression. A few WLMs struggled to overcome depression as they attempted to recover a sense of ‘selfhood’ following a history of violence and abuse in their married lives, whilst others found that they had become unwittingly trapped in the safety and comfort they had created for their children.

On this account, some WLMs spoke about feeling lonely and missing having a partner with whom to communicate and share the joys and responsibilities of parenting. But whilst some felt more vulnerable without a live-in partner, others felt empowered for regaining possession of their ‘own’ time and space and made it clear that they were no longer willing to compromise their own values and their newly found autonomy. As a result, whilst the lives of some WLMs had been considerably simplified and streamlined by excluding the demands of their ex-partners from their daily routine, for others life had not changed at all since their ex-partners had never assumed an ‘active’ role in sharing child care responsibilities. In addition, a sizable minority of WLMs stated that they were neither willing nor able to get involved with potential new partners because this would detract from their limited time and energy, already divided between caring for their children, their paid work and the daily running of their households. One important reason for this choice was linked to WLMs’ determination not to upset or disrupt the (at times

fragile) sense of ‘us’ and the spirit of ‘togetherness’ developed between themselves and their children. On this account, the respondents demonstrated a particular sensitivity to their children’s feelings if and when potential new father figures were introduced into their lives.

Finally, WLMs highlighted in their accounts that children were not just passive recipients of their love, they were also active care-givers themselves. Many WLMs understood and experienced this by being sensitive and receptive to their children’s love and attention. In this manner, they found important ways to be nurtured in turn, and thus, enhance their sense of well being. In all of these respects, in times of crisis and through the ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ of their daily lives, WLMs demonstrated that not only were they able to give care, but they were also able to receive it from significant ‘others’, namely, family members, friends and their children. In this way, by availing themselves of that support, WLMs exercised their reflexive thinking and moral agency to find a time and space of their own and, through that, attempt to respond also to their personal needs.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

The objective of this research has been to offer a meaningful contribution towards a better understanding of an ethic of care as articulated by the WLMs concerned. More specifically, based on the outcome of the empirical findings, this research intended to offer new understandings of the ways in which care is understood and lived by WLMs

first in relation to their children, and then in relation to themselves and their relational networks. This was done against the backdrop of the theoretical and empirical perspectives that have shaped and informed this thesis. An ethic of care does not presume to resolve the complex realities of our time by proposing new 'truths' or new formulas with which to eradicate societal problems. As a developing theory, an ethic of care only appears to be 'new' because it is emerging from the 'private' world of women. From this vantage point an ethic of care is articulating women's thoughts, feelings, values and experiences. In the process, an alternative moral point of view to the current dominant worldview has been gradually taking shape. It speaks of the day-to-day living of women centred on personal and informal sharing of practices of care and in finding meaning and identity through 'thick' relational networks.

These contextualised processes are descriptive of a social life that is primarily sustained and nurtured by the quality of the social capital (Duncan and Edwards 1999, Himmelweit 2002) that these relational networks are able to provide. In this context, the emergence of an ethic of care that illuminates the practices of mothers in general, and, WLMs in particular, within the private sphere is relevant because it can be directly linked to the convergence of two social phenomena. Firstly, there has been the massive entry of women in the workplace from the 1970s onwards, which, combined with the push and pull of market forces, have transformed the traditional concept of the 'job for life' (Crompton 2006) and have turned the working place into a more fluid but unstable environment. Secondly, the idea that, on average, the employment rates between men

and women have nearly leveled¹⁴ has opened up an intense and changeable two-way flow between the allegedly self-contained public and private spheres, thereby considerably reducing the conceptual distance between the two.

Against this backdrop, much research has been dedicated to a better understanding of family forms and practices. Likewise, there is an extensive literature on the world of paid work. However, not enough has been done to understand the relatively new and intensifying dynamic that binds the two worlds together or to identify how current working practices are impacting on the quality of family relationships. Within this specific context, one of the main objectives of this research has been to respond to this need by capturing and framing the complex and fluid articulation of these interactions. Crucially, to re-position families within this wider framework also means to re-conceptualise the domestic sphere and the nature of WLMs' relationships in it. In this thesis this objective was pursued by exploring in some depth the type and quality of care that 35 WLMs were able to articulate in relation to their children, to themselves and to their communities of family and friends. In this last chapter I will summarise and re-conceptualise some of the most significant features that have emerged from my findings from chapters five to chapter nine before focusing more exclusively on the crucial plank of my argument concerning the extent by which WLMs' internalization of commodified values and practices from the workplace have been transferred to the private sphere affecting their caring experiences and practices. In capturing and articulating WLMs' experiences and practices of care primarily in relation to their children, these findings can offer a meaningful insight into the ways in which the private sphere is transforming under

¹⁴ 16 million men and 13.6 million women were employed in the UK in 2008 (Social Trends 2009)

the considerable influence of the public sphere within contemporary western societies.

10.2 Re-conceptualising the dominant themes

One of the first features that emerged from my findings was the notion that for the WLMs in this sample, working arrangements were not particularly conducive to harmonising the needs and demands of the domestic environment. Mainly (but not exclusively) within the private sector, working conditions are embedded in predominantly ‘technocratic-interpretivist’ working cultures (Grint 2005), geared towards disabling flexible arrangements. This is creating considerable logistic problems for those WLMs who are attempting to coordinate school/nursery opening and closing times with their work and organise their limited home-time through a variety of recreational after-school activities. In view of the great importance that most WLMs attach to these activities, it was found that the time actually spent at home was reduced to a minimum, with some children (particularly amongst the young and very young) just managing an evening meal-bath-bed routine all within a two-hour period span. On the other hand, the way in which Family Tax Credit has been designed and delivered (with clear financial incentives to those mothers who work for at least 16 hours and above) has allowed many WLMs to combine the two elements of Family Tax Credit (Child Tax Credit and Work Tax Credit) and receive enough financial support to allow them to ‘choose’ (long) part-time work over full-time work. The WLMs in this research appeared to be well versed over the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of the welfare system and seemed to take full advantage of the financial support provided by the state since 22 out of 35 respondents had opted for long part-time work. Thus, in taking advantage of this apparent choice,

WLMs seem to indicate that by reducing their uptake of paid work, they are putting their children's needs above all else. However, whilst these decisions indicate a commitment to their care work, it is important to note that much of the uptake of long part-time work is done to a great extent at the expense of these women's future career prospects and employability.

Indeed, a number of WLMs made it very clear that in order to properly care for their children, they had to make a real choice between career and care. In so doing they had to down-scale considerably from the incomes and lifestyles which many of them had become accustomed to prior to their separation/divorce. By the same token, other WLMs concentrated all their skills and resources to actively seek to secure 'family-friendly' jobs. On this account, a few WLMs actively pursued teaching jobs because they knew that their own time-tables at work and those of their children in school would be well matched. With the exception of some WLMs who worked in full-time jobs, the 'plan' of many WLMs who had chosen long part-time work and were also retraining and/or studying, was to readdress their priorities and reassess the trajectory of their career development at that moment in time. This calculation was made on the assumption that they would resume their careers or embark on new ones once their children had become older. Importantly, the rationale behind this prioritisation resided primarily in the idea that their situation and their sacrifices were only *temporary*. For most, this sacrifice was cast against the sharp realisation that children grow much too quickly and that the window of opportunities opened to them to influence their children's lives was as precious as it was brief.

This does not mean that the desire to progress into better and more suitable jobs had become a secondary concern. On the contrary, many of them were driven by a strong ambition to succeed both as mothers and workers, but in making contingent choices whilst using their particular ‘situational logic’ (Glover 2002: 263), almost two thirds of the respondents came to the conclusion that, *at that time*, (most predominantly when children were still young) family commitments had to take priority over their paid work. Bearing this in mind, data analysis from chapters five to chapter nine highlights the notion that the WLMs concerned were living their family and working commitments by strongly identifying themselves with both their mother *and* worker roles. The strength of these ‘double’ identities was expressed through their ‘choices’ and in the ways in which their moral agency was articulated in their day-to-day living. In this respect, out of the 22 WLMs who undertook long part-time jobs, 13 of them were retraining, whilst ten were studying at degree level or above. The rationale behind these ‘choices’ was articulated by a number of WLMs, who envisaged this particular time in their lives (as separated/divorced/ex-cohabiting mothers) as the ideal time to redefine or change their ‘career’ and reshape their lives and the lives of their children whilst at the same time attempting to change unsatisfactory paid work. WLMs’ training and study was mainly conducted at home and, as such, it was largely embedded in their housework activities and commitments. Crucially, in this respect, neither their employers nor the mothers concerned acknowledged this as ‘work’ because it was lived in an ‘uncommodified’ way as an unpaid, semi-structured, informal activity, which was both self-determined and managed.

From this standpoint, the intensity of this uncommodified extra work from home, combined with the exposure to inflexible working arrangements in the workplace (which tended to affect mostly, but not exclusively, poorly paid part-time WLMs in privatised or semi-privatised industries) against the persistent moral imperative to care, was particularly difficult to bear for some. Often time-starved, many of these WLMs struggled to manage their workload in and out of the family domain and, in some instances, the quality of care in relation to their children and themselves was negatively affected. This was articulated by some WLMs who could not ‘be there’ for their children or could not pay enough attention to their children’s needs. For some chronically tired WLMs both elements of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care became a ‘task’ too many, whilst one WLMs could relate to her child only through pre-determined short burst of ‘active/passive’ care (‘fractured care’).

Mainly as a calculated response to a too high dispersal of energy and resources against severe time limitations, the greatest majority of WLMs planned, organised and managed very carefully their spatial/temporal activities as they moved back and forth from home to nursery/school and to the workplace on the daily basis. In this way, WLMs worked to bring close together, within a narrow geographical spread – often no wider than a mile - all the meaningful places and activities of daily use and interaction. This course of action was chiefly induced by WLMs’ concern for the well-being of their children and the desire to minimise potential stress factors for themselves.

As a result of this, many WLMs were busy seeking out better nurseries/schools, better and safer neighbourhoods, a closer proximity to their close relatives and friends and more suitable employment. Along similar lines, the desire to minimise potentially stressful situations and time 'wastage' motivated many respondents to invest their energy and resources to bring about a reduction of the travelling time spent going back and forth between home, school/nursery and work in congested traffic. This was deemed important by the WLMs concerned for the negative 'knock on' effect on their caring work since these situations decreased further their already limited time at home. Thus, on all of these accounts, it emerged that an unusually high number of WLMs (about a third) were highly mobile, with a number of them in the process of moving home whilst others had just done so. In short, to better co-ordinate their activities in a tight spatial field, WLMs worked towards minimising conflicting schedules and in this way 'bringing it all together'. In order to achieve these objectives and make the best use of their relational network of family and friends and of the social structure available to them, WLMs drew from their economic resources, from their personal capital and from their ingenuity.

In terms of making the best use of the social structures available to them, the requirement for good and trusted childcare provision emerged as paramount amongst WLMs. The findings from this study have highlighted that in seeking the best deal for their children, WLMs made decisions that were only in part affected by financial considerations. In this respect, in confirming what has been already underlined by other researchers (Lewis 2002, Barlow, Duncan and James 2002, Williams 2004), it was pointed out that over half of the WLMs interviewed made use of informal and non-

registered childcare, most in the shape of grandparents' support. A few sisters helped each other and, similarly, close friends were at hand to provide valuable and stable support. Last but not least, when possible, WLMs expected and asked the financial and emotional involvement of their ex-partners in raising their children. This, however, materialised only in about a third of all cases, with fathers offering a mixture of financial and emotional support that varied from being occasional and unreliable to being limited, but regular and consistent, reaching a level of full co-parenting only in two instances. When possible, WLMs with older children made good use of after-school activities¹⁵ as an alternative provider of cheap, reliable and informal (yet structured) supervision. In addition, one third of WLMs combined various childcare arrangements, which were chiefly a mix of formal and informal arrangements.

Ultimately, out of the 35 respondents concerned, only three WLMs made full use of formal childcare providers. Overall, WLMs found that formal childcare was too expensive and rigidly structured. Notwithstanding the argument that puts trust and affordability as the main reasons for this choice, WLMs underlined also the lack of flexibility in childcare provision and arrangements as a cause for real concern. These findings corroborate what feminists and social analysts have been arguing in recent times when they emphasise the need for the state to recognise though financial subsidies the value of informal childcare as the preferred form for the majority of women (National Council for One Parent Families 2002a, 2005; Skinner and Finch 2006, Waerness 2006). Furthermore, the WLMs in this research have further underlined the notion that by operating chiefly along business lines, formal childcare providers appear to be much

¹⁵ Some WLMs complained that the availability of after-school clubs was patchy in a number of areas.

more responsive to full-time working mothers, who typically require long, stable and regular childcare as opposed to those mothers in long part-time jobs who typically subscribe to irregular and changeable working patterns.

Data analysis brought sharply into relief the different levels of impact that enabling and disabling flexibility had over WLMs use of time and resources at home. Enabling flexible arrangements were seen as the most influential factor in facilitating WLMs caring responsibilities since mothers had some control over the management of their time and schedules (primarily through the use of flexi-time), which allowed them to regularly adjust their work commitments to their family needs. This kind of arrangement was possible primarily within the public and Third Sectors. Conversely, at the opposite side of this spectrum, working conditions were particularly difficult for those WLMs who worked in low-paid jobs for private firms. In some cases, extreme disabling flexible arrangements translated into acute stress levels, an array of physical problems and chaotic households for the WLMs involved. Not surprisingly, most of the WLMs interviewed when in such employment situations were unhappy and frustrated with their circumstances. Thus, whilst a few were in the process of leaving their jobs, others were seriously considering that possibility.

To summarise so far, findings have illuminated a social landscape of mobile and engaged WLMs who are 'using' welfare policies and financial incentives to decrease their time at work and maximise their benefits in order to pursue two primary objectives: exercise a better care for their children by 'being there' for them and maximise their

employability by studying and/or retraining for better jobs. However, as it has been demonstrated, the prevalence of disabling flexible arrangements compounded with the persistent cultural hegemony of a market-oriented ethic of work in the workplace has had direct repercussions on family activities and on the way in which care is practiced by the WLMs concerned. These empirical findings tend to cast some useful new light upon the tense and complex dynamic that characterises the public/private articulation of time and space. They tend to highlight also a more nuanced approach over the ways in which the public sphere is 'colonising' and 'infecting' the private. Within this context, findings have brought into a sharper relief the actual and potential risks that transferred commodified values and practices from the public sphere could have on WLMs' caring sensitivities and practices when these are combined with intensified strains, stresses and a chronic lack of time. By the same token however, findings have also shown how the problems and moral dilemmas drawn out from these particular contexts were often challenged and reflexively negotiated by the majority of the respondents.

On all of these accounts, this thesis has corroborated (Glover 2002; Himmelweit 2002; Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002; Reynolds, Callender and Edwards 2003; Crompton 2006) and expanded (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 2002, Held 2006) on the current empirical and theoretical discourses developed in chapter two and three. Throughout the course of this exploration, the focus has remained chiefly on exploring the ways in which the public sphere, so firmly hinged around the current work ethic of advanced capitalist societies, has impinged on WLMs' experiences in their day-to-day practice of care. To that end, this thesis will now continue by addressing how caring

practices (that is, what WLMs *do* for their children) have been affected and how they are changing against the backdrop of the socio-political landscape depicted thus far.

10.3 The changing experience of informal care

In terms of caring for their children, WLMs expressed a distinctive preference for caring that pivoted around certain values and practices. Above all, to ‘care’ meant to be able to ‘be there’ for them by providing variable amounts of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ care. These terms were used here to better distinguish and qualify different kind of caring involvements that WLMs had in their children’s lives. Time shortage was an important factor in determining how much ‘active’ and/or ‘passive’ care WLMs could give to their children. Overall, within the context of their busy lives, a third of the respondents were able to quantify the ‘passive’ and ‘active’ elements of care and by their own definitions, ‘passive’ care dominated daily interactions whilst ‘active’ care occupied on average 25 per cent of their weekly routines, including weekends. Many respondents felt deeply troubled by their inability to dedicate more ‘active’ time to their children.

If to be present in their children’s lives was perceived by the majority of WLMs as a non-negotiable moral imperative and their first duty of care, many realised that it was simply not enough ‘to be there’, particularly in view of the consideration that home time seemed to involve considerably more ‘passive’ than ‘active’ care. In this respect, how WLMs managed to use their time was perceived as a sensitive point and findings do emphasise the dominance of some caring features above others. These were identified in WLMs’ desire and commitment to protect and nurture their children first and foremost.

In order to do so, the majority of WLMs developed common approaches and strategies, which pivoted around the tight organisation of their daily routines. These were characterised by the regular weekly articulation of clear tasks and finalised activities, carried out in and outside the home environment.

In this context, great importance was given to after-school activities, which WLMs pursued with single-minded determination. To immerse their children in structured routines and busy lifestyles was an important way in which WLMs intended to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. Indeed, WLMs underlined the importance of carrying out repetitive activity as a way to create around their children regular, consistent and familiar patterns needed to bring stability and a sense of reassurance into their children's lives, particularly in the aftermath of the harmful effects caused by separation and divorce. Within all these contexts, what gradually began to take shape was the notion that 'to care about', 'to care for' and to actually express care in the context of WLMs' family domain was being reshaped and redefined in a number of ways to mimic the utilitarian rationale, frameworks and ethos of the world of paid work. What is meant by this is that by constructing and managing their days in this manner, WLMs were able to create numerous 'release points', which shaped and channeled their caring work. I have termed 'release points' the planned and structured channeling of 'active' care through routinised activities. This was typically done by bringing together all the limited resources (primarily time and energy) within the 'right' settings and circumstances under clear (and often strict) pre-defined temporal frameworks.

In this way, WLMs were much more in control of their circumstances and could better determine their outcomes. Through such routinised situational activities such as ‘meal times’, ‘bed-times’, ‘recreational times’, ‘chat times’, ‘together times’ and so on, WLMs spoke of how they had a better chance to attune themselves to their children’s needs. They also spoke of finding the best predisposition to be responsive, attentive, considerate, sensitive, encouraging, patient and nurturing. So ‘targeted’, the impact of WLMs’ moral agency could be magnified and optimised whilst, at the same time, the *modus operandi* of their care-giving work was reduced and simplified. In all of these accounts therefore, the delivery of care, which has been primarily expressed through the structural frameworks of task-oriented and action-oriented activities have become in part descriptive of the utilitarian methods and functions used in the workplace.

These distinctive processes illuminate a particular use of ‘units’ of time that finds its roots in the powerful marriage of technology with industrial capitalism, outlined in chapter three. For the WLMs concerned, caring activities must have an in-built clear sense of purpose, finality and utility accompanied by a sense of successful accomplishment of the task at hand. As stressed elsewhere, the organisational nature of their care-giving work was nowhere more apparent than in the management of after-school activities, which most WLMs undertook with determination and clarity of purpose. Following the intensity of these engagements, it emerged how limited the actual ‘home’ time had become for many children and how structured the ‘unstructured’ ‘home’ time had become as well. Within these contexts, the concept of utility is evident in WLMs’ moral reasoning and it permeates all they do, even ironically the ‘free’

unscheduled recreational time spent together with the children.

In short, it appeared quite clearly that without such a strong ritualised and routinised framework, WLMs would not have been able to care for their children in ways that they perceived to be meaningful. On all of these accounts, it could be argued that both the *physical* and *emotional* aspects of WLMs' 'active' caring practices have been gradually redefined through a number of 'release points' used in and out of the home environment. Seen from this perspective, it appears that whilst gaining in organisational structure, moral agency may have lost in part the kind of spontaneity that has been conventionally associated with the informality of the domestic sphere. In the light of these considerations, the following section will now address the extent to which WLMs' moral agency has been redefined on the basis on these findings. I will begin by summarising the main tenets that have defined WLMs' ethic of care from the standpoint of their daily practice. This will be done against the backdrop of the literature that has most significantly shaped the development of this thesis.

10.4 WLMs' 'discerning care'

To articulate how certain practices from the public sphere are reproduced in the private sphere adds new levels of nuanced understanding to the discourse of the mother-child relationship within the family context. From this standpoint, whilst for instance the general position taken by the CAVA group underscores a fairly blanket assertion that (lone) mothers always put their children first, no matter the circumstances or contexts in

which they find themselves, Himmelweit (2002) argues in favour of a more multilayered approach that takes into account the rational choice model of human behaviour. Whilst this model seems inappropriate to evaluate parent-child relationships because internal motives and external incentives and constraints cannot be so clearly separated, Himmelweit argues that it has nevertheless been used by some analysts to understand the apparent 'irrational' behaviour of caring for children. In her investigation, she came to realise that the 'rational choice' model can offer only a very limited explanation on the reasons why parents 'sacrifice' themselves for their children when, as often is the case, there is no reasonable or rational advantage (economic or otherwise) to be derived from the practice.

Of the five possible reasons she outlined, only the last two find credibility in her view. The fourth model highlights the notion that some parents may care for their children because they have developed a strong bond with their offspring and, as a result, their children's well-being is perceived as part of their own (echoing maternal care thinkers like Held 2006, Ruddick 1989, and Noddings 1984). In the fifth, Himmelweit (2002) describes the act of caring as elicited by the need to be a 'good' parent, a concept that she sees deeply internalised through the historical and cultural assimilation of societal norms and sanctions. As a consequence, she argues, parents feel deeply responsible to fulfill their roles and respond to their own and collective expectations by simply accepting this as their moral responsibility. The WLMs in this research seem to capture the essence of these last two models. It is indeed because they had assimilated and internalised so well societal norms about 'motherhood' that they lived this moral responsibility with the

strength of a Kantian moral imperative. It also seems plausible that many WLMs may have bonded with their children in such a way as to see their children's well-being as an extension of their own.

But by extending their moral parameters to their children, WLMs' *modus operandi* became also their children's *modus vivendi*. In short, as epistemological frameworks come to increasingly shape the ontological ones, it becomes fair to postulate that the children in these households were learning from their mothers to live their lives in a deeply structured and purposeful manner centred on utility¹⁶. In the light of these arguments, it needs to be pointed out that WLMs' reflexive understanding, namely, their willingness to reflect and learn from their experiences and circumstances, combined with the richness of their human capital came to inform their moral agency. This rather fluid and 'interactionist' approach is echoed in the insights of Smart and Neale (1999), Smart, Neale and Wade (2001) and Neale and Smart (2002), who in turn drew from Finch (1993) the notion that there is more than just one way to do the 'right' thing, and from Giddens (1998) and Beck (1992) the notion of a 'cognitive' sociological turn. From this perspective, social actors are both shaping and being shaped by their social environments through heightened reflexive thinking. Within this particular argument, what this thesis emphasises when considering WLMs' general attitude and behaviour, is the notion that in order to make responsible and competent choices in the practice of care, WLMs had to learn how to weigh up and negotiate between many pressing needs and priorities in and in between paid and unpaid work. This also implied the need to determine the 'right'

¹⁶ The extent by which this kind of socialisation may impact on the children in the long run would need to be empirically tested, as it should be defined by the children themselves. This objective was beyond the

time and place and the most suitable course of action with the knowledge that mistakes could and would be made. Following these considerations it was found that the respondents in this study proved able and willing to:

- *Reflexively ponder over their circumstances and learn from their experiences*
- *Weigh up their options by consistently attempting to find morally suitable compromises, and*
- *Exercise, as best as they knew how, their moral judgment.*

Mindful of these outcomes, I have described WLMs' practice of care as a type of 'discerning' care since the majority of WLMs were able to confront and deal in a discerning manner with the moral dilemmas and unpredictability of their caring responsibilities within their contextualised settings and circumstances. Part and parcel of the 'discerning' quality of their care-giving work are the ways in which WLMs were able to commodify their time and their care in order to meet their caring commitments. On all these accounts, the first priority was given to the children's physical and emotional well-being, followed by tackling housework demands and study commitments (for those WLMs involved in study programmes). Furthermore, being able to exercise a 'discerning' care also meant that, in spite of time pressure and challenging circumstances, many WLMs were adamant in wanting to create a time and a space for themselves in order to rest and recharge ahead of a the next busy day. How important this time was for the WLMs concerned was ascertained by the rigorous implementation of children's bed-time routines, which marked in a physical and symbolic sense the reclamation of all the shared spaces in the household.

On all these accounts, a ‘discerning’ care was demonstrated by the WLMs in question through their ability to reflexively devise strategies to cope with potential and actual difficult circumstances. In this respect, and as I point out in chapter six, the marked routinisation of daily activities that has emerged from the analysis, whilst qualifying to a good extent WLMs’ ethic of care, stresses a daily repetition of functions, which, in their anticipated predictability, intended to be reassuring for the children whilst representing an energy-saving strategy for the WLMs concerned. In this way, WLMs managed to minimise the rise of conflicting issues, the clash of competing priorities and the likelihood for unpredictable (and possibly) unpleasant events to occur. So ‘ring-fenced’, all the activities carried out in and out of the home environment were typically more manageable and controllable, giving way to an important reduction of the ‘*charge mentale*’.

Throughout this thesis it has been stressed how WLMs managed to exercise their moral agency by drawing from the instrumental values, methodology and practices of their workplace and by adapting these to structure and manage their caring priorities. On all of these accounts therefore, it could be argued that the moral agency articulated by WLMs in their various informal contexts emerged as an epistemological answer to an ontological question: namely, how to respond most effectively and efficiently to their children’s needs against a backdrop of limited and finite resources. Thus, whilst it could be argued that the WLMs from this sample are undoubtedly striving to live by such values as those postulated by Tronto (1993) and Sevenhuijsen (2002), and empirically substantiated by

other researchers in the CAVA group¹⁷ (Williams 2004), the findings in this research have shifted the emphasis to other aspects. By charting and analysing the latest epistemological evolution of time and care (how to care), caring practices were redefined in ontological terms (what caring meant to them). How WLMs articulated their caring practices and understandings can be summarised as it follows:

- *WLMs understand and live their caring commitments as real, substantial and important work, as both active and passive care (hence the ‘temporary’ sacrificing of their careers from a considerable number of them).*
- *WLMs stress the crucial need to make time to care.*
- *WLMs express their care by stressing the importance of ‘being there’ in order to be able to protect and nurture their children through acts of ‘active’ care.*
- *WLMs emphasize a desire for inclusiveness – ‘togetherness’ as well as expressing themselves in relational autonomy.*
- *WLMs express caring practices in a contextualised manner by responding to both individual/ personal needs as well as to collective/general ones.*
- *WLMs value emotions, which however are primarily placed, understood and managed within a structured moral framework.*
- *WLMs are committed to their children’s personal growth, understood in a holistic sense as the development of the whole person centred on ‘being’ more than on ‘having’. There are however exceptions to this general pattern. These are epitomised by those WLMs who had experienced poverty or a degree of economic deprivation in their birth family and had a tendency to identify well-being more with material possessions.*

Himmelweit argued that ‘altruism and caring for children is a taste that can be

¹⁷ Amongst the most important values identified by the group in relationship primarily to the women involved, but also to the moral agency of the children (Smart and Neale 2001) the moral subjects demonstrated: attentiveness, sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of others, being non- judgmental,

developed' (2002: 246) by either building up on 'personal capital' (our personal experiences) or by increasing the 'social capital' (the development of a more caring society). She concedes however that in order for this to happen, families, the state and societies need to work together to create a caring environment for children. In this respect, it could be argued that WLMs' personal capital is inter-dependent on the wealth of the social capital available locally and nationally. Thus, whilst expressing an ethic of care that embodied the values illustrated above, it is important to reflect on the notion that, from the point of view of managing to undertake their family responsibilities, only a minority of WLMs spoke about being able to actually balance successfully public/private commitments and being facilitated rather than hindered by their working environments. The majority of them were operating more from a defensive standpoint, many were tired and stressed, while a number of them had a defiant and combative attitude, wanting to prove at all costs that they had what it takes to make it against difficult circumstances. Some of the WLMs who struggled the most held jobs with disabling flexible arrangements and lived away or were disconnected from their relational networks of families and friends. This general 'mood' underscores a commonly held notion amongst care ethicists: that the investment in care and its social value has been for far too long unacknowledged and undermined.

Against this backdrop, and as discussed above, this research has brought to light some potential risks linked to the growing commodification of the public sphere and to its growing influence over the world of informal care and domestic work. For these reasons, an ethic of care should not be entirely dependent on the 'release points' articulated

through 'active' care. Rather, 'active' care should permeate normal daily interactions in and out of the family domain. However, when 'time starved' WLMs are systematically pressurised by too many demands, the risk is that caring work could morph into an extension of paid work and, as such, it could be perceived as another 'job' amongst others. The persistence of this situation could in turn trigger 'care deficits' by systematically decreasing 'active' care in favour of 'passive' care. At this level, it is easy to imagine how further strains and stresses in the already busy life of WLMs could tip the scale towards the expression of a token 'active' care. In short, the fewer the moments of 'active' care, the 'thinner' the care-giving work becomes. This, in turn, could potentially translate into forms of emotional neglect or into a full-blown 'care deficit'.

Another likely risk that came to be exposed from this particular social context was found in what I have termed 'fractured care', which occurred when the potentially powerful bond between a parent and a child is broken or it is never allowed to develop. In my sample there was one particular example of this kind and the relationship between mother and child was a difficult one (section 6.5: 238). However, because WLMs spoke of *all* these potential risks as embedded in their caring practices and occasionally flaring up and being acted upon under strained conditions, it becomes important to question the state and future of informal care from the standpoint of the contingent social, political and cultural frameworks in which WLMs in particular, and women more in general, find/position themselves. I will address this pivotal issue by beginning to reassess WLMs' position relevant to mainstream academic and political discourses in contemporary Britain and then by making the necessary links to the issue at hand.

10.5 Re-positioning WLMs in the contemporary socio-political landscape

As stressed throughout this thesis, most of the respondents have strong mother/worker identities. On both of these accounts, the intensity of their feeling and perceptions of their dual roles made them particularly sensitive and vulnerable to prevailing societal expectations. Within the contemporary socio-political landscape, public expectations are concerned with the interplay of a number of potentially polarised discourses, which are obstructing and diverting the development of a balanced ‘work-life’ articulation that should instead be centred on a quality of ‘life’ emphasising care as its most valuable expression (Tronto, 1993, Sevenhuijsen 2002, Williams 2004). On the one hand, social imagination, cultural conventions and arguably political expediency converge in cultivating a persistent identification and idealisation of womanhood with motherhood. On the other, there is a growing identification of women (by men and women alike) with the ‘adult worker’ model embodied in the abstract rationalisation of the ‘rational economic man’ (Lewis 2002, 2006; Barlow, Duncan and James 2002).

Within the framework of an ethic of care, feminists have argued that the right won by women to work and be financially independent has to some extent been hijacked by a work ethic that in equalising women to a standard ‘adult worker’ model professes a gender blindness that appears to be unacknowledged at cultural and legal levels (Smart and Neale 1999, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2001, 2002, Barlow, Duncan and James 2002, Held 2006, Crompton 2006, James 2007) whilst being thinly disguised in

those ‘family friendly’ policies, which, most noticeably in the private sector, are left to the subjective interpretation and discretion of the employers. Currently, within the public sphere of life, the exemplar ‘adult worker’ model seems to underpin most public and formal relations (Sevenhuijsen 2002), thus endorsing a type of working culture that privileges a ‘contract model’, whose primary values are expressed in the civic virtues of responsibility, duty and obligation (Giddens 1998).

Against this political landscape, families - and lone-parent families amongst them - find themselves under the intense gaze of public scrutiny. In this context, whether WLMs are perceived as social threat or as social victims (Duncan and Edwards 1999), whilst rooted within the reductionist interpretation of the ethic of work as described thus far, there will remain a persistent and powerful ‘need’ to ‘perform’ by producing and re-producing excellence in every domain centred on marketised and privatised self-interest. For many of the WLMs in question, a keenness to conform to current codes of ‘good citizenry’ and ‘good mothering’ can be formulated in the following moral imperative: I ‘must’ care and I ‘must’ work. Both of these attitudes can be seen as determined by the strength of the social sanctions and incentives that accompany social norms.

In this respect, for instance, Himmelweit (2002) argues that there is a certain amount of utility to be gained by conforming to social norms. Above all, moral actors are keen to gain the respect and esteem of others, to which ‘it is assumed people are sensitive’ (2002: 241). When social norms are finally internalised, they become embedded in people’s consciousness (Clarke 2006) and they no longer need to be enforced. It is at this level of

identification with normative standards about what is 'good' and 'proper' that people 'want to do what they are supposed to do' (Cancun 1975, cited in Himmelweit 2002: 241). Viewed from this particular perspective, my findings seem to corroborate Himmelweit's theoretical assertion, particularly with regard to the notion of guilt, which was a palpable emotion experienced by the majority of WLMs. That is, within the context depicted above, guilt can be better understood as the price paid for lack of compliance and conformity to prescribed values and norms. Amongst WLMs, guilt was triggered mainly from a pervading sense of inadequacy to perform up to the moral standards underpinning the ideals of 'good' mothering and of 'good' citizenry. By and large, guilt was particularly acute when WLMs found themselves spending more time than they deemed acceptable doing paid work away from home. But also, since the WLMs concerned embodied both the identities of mothers and workers, the reverse was equally true. That is, just as much as an inability to spend enough time at home was associated with a failure to 'be there' for their children and thus, to protect and nurture them, not to spend (and not to be seen spending) enough hours in the workplace equated to a visible demonstration of a lack of commitment and loyalty to one's job/employment.

In addition, to further strengthen the gravitational pull exercised by paid work, there was an understanding amongst WLMs that their commitment to paid work and their investment in their careers (such as working long hours, studying and/or retraining) was done to give more to their families in terms of economic stability and financial rewards whilst at the same time fulfilling their personal aspirations and ambitions. Relevant to this latter point however, paid work was also understood by a considerable minority as

‘something that I do for myself’, which in turn triggered other shades of ambivalences and guilt. Indeed, it is precisely because some WLMs *only* perceived paid work in this dichotomous opposition, namely, as a commitment to one’s ‘selfish’ desires against the ‘altruistic’ commitment to care for one’s children and others, that a sizable minority did ‘choose’ to sacrifice one - their personal preferences and ambitions - for the benefit of the other.

Much of the ontological conflicts underpinning WLMs’ experiences are linked to a false dichotomy, whereby paid work, defined within the current interpretation of a work ethic, is elevated to represent the most socially ‘productive’ activity. Underlining this type of work ethic, there is a materialistic culture of competitive and individualistic aspirations that culminates presumably when an individual will reach the apex of the employability ladder (Brown 2008, 2009). In this respect, it is not just paid work that is important but also the type and quality of paid work that an individual is able to obtain throughout the trajectory of one’s life course. For WLMs these dominant discourses have been translated into an intense aspiration to succeed as individuals by improving their professional qualifications. As it was discussed on various occasions throughout this thesis, more than half of them used their time at home not only to care but also to work towards rebuilding or reconstructing their life by retraining or (re)-entering (in their 30s and 40s) new careers paths or education. This was done under the assumption of improving their chances in life whilst learning to cultivate new interests. The importance of continuing education for all age groups has been consistently emphasised by the previous New Labour government, which did make this option easier for mature students

with childcare responsibilities since their education was in part subsidised by the state. Indeed, to upgrade or improve one's education whilst preparing for new and (presumably) more rewarding occupations seems to offer one of the most logical paths out of poverty. This path for self-realisation to good citizenry is thus mapped out as being centred on an ethic of paid work that promotes a continuous cycle of ever-higher educational attainments and more prestigious occupations with the promise of ever-higher income-generating power.

In this highly 'individualised' model of social life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), paid work loses its social functionalist relevance to become primarily an individual item of consumption and a status symbol for social 'success' (De Botton 2004, Grint 2005). However, contrary to paid work, a study programme only infers the promise of future financial rewards. In this respect therefore, if on the one hand to study for higher qualifications was perceived by WLMs as an extension of their working environment (understood as the preparation required for better paid work), on the other, because most of the study was carried out in the informal domain of the private sphere it was, by all intents and purposes, an unpaid activity, and as such it was incorporated by the majority of WLMs in the sub-sphere of uncommodified (unpaid) domestic work. These findings tend to compliment Glover's (2002) theoretical observations.

Glover postulates that uncommodified activities, such as those typically carried out in the private sphere are embedded in the commodified (paid) work of the public place. As a consequence, she argues, when women go to work, they take with them the many

worries and concerns that arise from the domestic sphere. Conversely, by coming to perceive their study/training programmes within the conceptual framework of their work ethic, the WLMs concerned took the dynamic and tensions associated with commodified work into their living rooms, thus reducing quite drastically the time to care that WLMs would typically put aside for themselves (usually defined after the children's bed-time). However because their work was carried out outside the normal parameters of a typical working structure and resided instead into the confines of the ethos and management of the private sphere, it was not perceived as 'work' as such by the employers and crucially, by the mothers themselves. This in turn, resulted in a considerable intensification of the '*charge mentale*' amongst some WLMs. These realities underline once more how fictitious and artificial is the apparent divide that is allegedly separating the two spheres of social life.

10.6 Summary and conclusion

Based on these findings, it appears evident that for a considerable number of respondents, the post-modern dream of 'individualisation' is difficult to achieve as it requires considerable sacrifices on their part and the outcome is uncertain. This is because a process of self-realisation so conceived can make sense and perhaps can only be achieved by the unencumbered, independent and single 'individual' within an ethic of work centred on the abstract ideal of the 'adult worker' model. This concept is particularly marked in the writing of Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2002: 211) who draw attention to the notion that not only the ethos of one sphere dominates the other, they also contend that the private sphere of life has been effectively colonised by 'white,

western, middle-class masculinist views based upon a particular understanding of the individual'. Currently, the only way forward postulated by current political discourses from both sides of the political spectrum, is through paid work (Brown 2008, 2009; Cameron 2007). Singled out by the previous Labour Party and now by the current coalition government as the panacea to a whole host of social evils, paid work is endorsed from the point of view of a 'social contract' (Giddens 1998) that emphasises the civic values of duty and obligations as an attempt to counteract the generally perceived 'something for nothing' way of life of previous decades. Furthermore, in claiming to make 'work' pay by increasing the incentives to 'work' whilst reducing the incentives of staying out of 'work' (Osborn: The Budget 2010), the present coalition government is continuing the consolidation of New Labour's ideological agenda. In other words, the coalition government is re-enforcing once again the notion that the prosperity and the well being of a nation and, of all the individuals in it, can only be defined in economic terms and pursued by economic means. From this narrow and limited perspective, which reiterates the deep-rooted assumptions of the 'dominant moral point of view'¹⁸ described by Tronto (1993) and other care ethicists, the *only* acceptable definition for 'work' remains the category describing a 'paid' job carried out in the public sphere, outside the interference of 'private' concerns.

Against this backdrop, directed towards lone mothers and to all the other potentially 'less productive' members of society (such as the aged and disabled), the social pressure to respond to societal expectations and become more economically 'productive' is high

¹⁸ A pseudo-moral language and rationale remains a feature of many political discourses and is partly used to justify some of the 'austerity' measures introduced by the current government. As important and topical

indeed and is underlined by a whole rostrum of increasingly restrictive ‘welfare to work’ policies and programmes. Within these contexts, whilst further undermined by the economic pressures unleashed through the recent ‘credit crunch’, the value, the practice and the development of informal caring work risks being downgraded, privatised and outsourced further to become exclusively experienced as a means to an end. In other words, informal ‘care’ could cease to exist as a free-standing value, valuable enough to be experienced as an end in itself. Instead, it could become a subsidiary commodity used to enhance political and economic objectives. This is in contrast to a type of care that should be pursued, nurtured and lived as *the* most important element to qualify the collective social/human experience in *every* social environment.

In the light of these considerations, it could be argued that family policies would fare far better if there was a deeper and more contextualised understanding of complex social realities from the standpoint of all the moral agents involved and in consideration of their actual ‘needs’. On this account for instance, family laws emphasise the well-being of children as a primary concern; in this way they attempt to interpret and embody the overall concerns of a well-meaning society. New Labour policies in particular have done so by focusing on developing anti-poverty measures in order to abolish child poverty. The previous government claimed some initial success on this regard, which was primarily achieved through the implementation of New Deal policies aimed to take lone parents from unemployment or employment and from part-time work into full-time work (Thomas 2007). As addressed earlier, whilst my findings stress the ambivalent response of WLMs to these policies, Smart and Neale and Wade (2001) and others have pointed

this subject is, it is beyond the reach and scope of this thesis.

out that child policies, such those highlighted in ‘Supporting Families’ (1998) and ‘Every Child Matters’ (2003), need to take into account the context in which the children are placed and not view them in isolation, as abstract entities or problems. This means also that the well-being of children must be understood as part and parcel of the welfare and happiness of all the members of the household. This said my analysis has highlighted how these priorities need to be constantly negotiated, often within conflicting environments and in difficult circumstances, the most noticeable of which was an evident lack of time to care.

In view of all these considerations, an argument must be made for an ethic of care that should no longer be understood and lived as a moral theory and practice for the ‘private’ sphere. Extrapolated from the moral agency of WLMs as responsible and sensitive moral actors, what I am advocating is an endorsement for the best qualities that characterise a ‘*discerning*’ care to be allowed to emerge and be included in the cluster of ‘public virtues’, such as those advocated by Sevenhuijsen (2002). A ‘*discerning*’ care, as was discussed earlier, describes the moral attitude and agency of WLMs, who confronted, prioritised and devised solutions to the numerous situations with which they were regularly confronted, based on a desire to respond competently and effectively to their children’s needs. It also refers to the ways in which WLMs established their relationships with significant others and managed to respond to their own needs. On all of these accounts, WLMs expressed an ethic of care based on an understanding that caring work is real and substantial work. As such, it requires time, and enough of it, to do it well.

However, for these values to be carried through into the public sphere of influence what is required is a *shift* in attitudes and perspectives, described by Tronto (1993) as a ‘paradigmatic shift in values’. Such a qualitative moral shift must encourage individuals to cross beyond the socially constructed divide of micro/macro spaces and allow the sense of the ‘personal’ (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards 2002) to be carried through together with all those significant virtues (Sevenhuijsen 2002, Williams 2004) that are valued in an ethical framework of care. The more informal and genuine concept of the ‘personal’ does not hold any of the negative connotations associated with individualism. As such, it could in part begin the *cultural* transformation of the often too formal, hierarchical and ‘technocratic’ (Grint 2005) world of work.

An ethic of care, if sufficiently supported by a critical number of people in its theoretical underpinnings and through normative practice, could pose a realistic and timely challenge to the current social ‘order’, to the power relations embedded in it and to the values that this ‘order’ claims to represent. A first step in this direction could be made by arguing for the need to break down the socially constructed boundaries that have historically separated moral thought from political action and have compartmentalised public and private spaces with their apparently diverging needs. At the same time, an ethic of care wants to give an important platform to the best values that have qualified the informal domain of the private sphere by giving a new and a more powerful ‘voice’ to women. Revolving around an ethic of care, these values can act like the social ‘glue’ needed to hold civil societies together by allowing the development of less competitive, more

interactive and harmonious communities. To this end, an ethic of care, as a moral theory and a social practice, needs to meet and overcome a number of crucial challenges:

- 1) It needs to leave the peripheral area of moral, philosophical and sociological investigation in academia and acquire a central stage position in mainstream discourses, where good minds can work together to develop reasonable scenarios and solutions for communities, nations and the planet, centred on ethic of care.
- 2) Public debates need to promote new levels of cultural and political sensitivity around the values that define the practice of care. These should be articulated emphasising the values of cooperation over competition, the pursuit of a holistic well-being over a material one, the importance of promoting ‘togetherness’ (at inter-generational, inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-religious levels and so on) over separation and individualism to foster in turn new identities and new understandings. These values have emerged from the contextual settings of the WLMs interviewed and, as such, they represent a bottom-up view of what matters in life.
- 3) In order to avoid an increase in the harmful effects of transferring and adapting commodified values and practices from one domain into the other and begin to reverse the process, an ethic of care needs to achieve a political dimension. In gaining political influence and relevance, a socio-political perspective centred on care can help in reshaping policies to respond to the *actual* and diverse needs of *all* social actors within *every* social dimension. In this way, both in public and private

contexts, an ‘active’ care will no longer appear to be a scanty expression in a hurried landscape of ‘passive’ care.

In formulating social policies that would improve the social life of everyone, it is important to be reminded that the difficulties and hardship experienced by WLMs are the social product of well established, but quite limited, imperfect and continuously evolving, social, political and cultural structures operating on the premise of specific ideological assumptions: namely, the current interpretation of an ethic of work, as described at various stages of this thesis. The WLMs in this research have demonstrated a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to both the allure of promises and the fear of sanctions that a ‘privatised’ and ‘marketised’ ethic of work seems to entail. Through their attitudes and actions, WLMs have indicated a strong desire to ‘belong’ and to do the ‘right’ thing in the micro/macro frameworks of their public and private lives, thus responding to the current cultural and political standards of ‘good’ behaviour as citizens and mothers. These shared commitments however do not always imply a fully compliant or a passive response to their environments and circumstances. On the contrary, the variable process of internalised social mores has been reflexively negotiated and, on occasions, has been actively resisted by the WLMs concerned. This has been particularly evident in relation to WLMs’ high geographical mobility and to their opposition to the implementation of ‘disabling flexible arrangements’ in the workplace. The complex interplay of all these factors has informed and defined the nature of WLMs’ *discerning* care, which found its most evident manifestation in the way in which time, and more crucially, care, are been actively transformed in a variety of ways and settings by all the respondents. Thus,

within the above contextualised frameworks, by bringing to the fore significant ways in which the commodified values and practices of the workplace are infiltrating the experience of informal care, this thesis has empirically identified and fleshed out some important situational practices and values through which the care-giving work is being transformed.

In the light of these realities, the social and political change advocated in this thesis involves the formulation and implementation of policies that must reflect much more closely different kind of ‘gender-neutral’ reforms. These must take seriously into account women’s perspectives, prominent amongst which is the crucial importance given to care. In striving to develop a more equitable balance in people’s lives, care should no longer be perceived as *the* prerogative of one gender alone, just as paid work no longer is. True gender ‘neutrality’ in this context means that just as the workplace is now occupied by men and women alike, engaged with comparable skills and commitment to their professions, so the domestic sphere needs to be also. The model that I am advocating here is not a reproduction of the socialist Scandinavian model, where gender equality has been pursued based on the centrality of paid work, with care requirements formalised and standardised in state-run public institutions (James 2007). Rather, what is being proposed as a result of this research is a more radical approach. From the perspective of an ethic of care, gender equality and social justice can only be properly expressed under a paradigm that holds an *attitude* and *practice* of care as central to all social development and human flourishing. Important ‘stepping stones’ towards this objective would include a statutory shift from disabling flexible arrangements to enabling flexible arrangements within all

sectors in the workplace and the equalization of parental leave (Gornick and Meyers 2008, The Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009) for men and women with parental responsibilities. Ultimately, if men and women were called to contribute in equal measure to both social environments (the public and the private) with an emphasis on increasing and enriching the quality of *all* human capital in its holistic sense, it would be possible to begin re-setting a social order that would reflect more closely the genuine concerns, priorities and commitments of moral actors in contemporary societies.

APPENDICES

Appendix A1

Number of Mothers and Lone Parent Mothers

Numbers (rounded) (1)

Year	Rhondda Cynon Taff			Cardiff		
	Lone Parent Mothers	Jon Lone Parent Mothers	Total	Lone Parent Mothers	Jon Lone Parent Mothers	Total
2006	6,800	21,800	28,700	12,000	25,500	37,500
2007	7,000	22,100	29,100	14,000	23,700	37,700
2008	8,300	21,000	29,200	11,100	28,200	39,300
2009	9,200	20,400	29,600	12,200	27,000	39,200

Number of Mothers and Lone Parent Mothers in Employment

Numbers (rounded) (1)

Year	Rhondda Cynon Taff			Cardiff		
	Lone Parent Mothers	Jon Lone Parent Mothers	Total	Lone Parent Mothers	on Lone Parent Mothers	Total
2006	4,100	15,400	19,500	5,300	17,600	22,900
2007	3,900	16,700	20,600	7,000	17,300	24,200
2008	3,800	16,200	20,100	6,400	20,300	26,700
2009	5,000	12,900	18,000	7,100	18,100	25,200

Percent of Mothers and Lone Parent Mothers in Employment

Percent (rounded) (1)

Year	Rhondda Cynon Taff			Cardiff		
	Lone Parent Mothers	Jon Lone Parent Mothers	Total	Lone Parent Mothers	Jon Lone Parent Mothers	Total
2006	60%	71%	68%	44%	69%	
2007	56%	76%	71%	50%	73%	
2008	46%	77%	69%	58%	72%	
2009	54%	63%	61%	58%	67%	

Source: Annual Population Survey 2010

Appendix A2

So much of the joys and heartaches of life have to do with the demands and the failure of giving and receiving care.

Dear friend,

I would like to introduce you to an important study carried out on behalf of the University of Glamorgan with the objective of understanding how lone mothers manage to care within the context of their busy lifestyles. More and more, as many mothers, and lone parent in particular, are faced with the growing difficulties of trying to combine work with family commitments, a number of important question are beginning to emerge:

- 1 *How do you manage to care?*
- 2 *How do you balance the sometimes conflicting commitments between you responsibilities to your children, your need and your responsibility to your working life?*
- 3 *How well do you feel supported by your network of family and friends?*
- 4 *What are your greatest concerns and greatest hopes?*
- 5 *If you could, how would you like to change and/or improve your life?*

My name is Claudia and I am a lone mother and a researcher. In order to find answers to these crucial questions I am interviewing a number of lone mothers who are in full-time or long part-time work, live with children under the age of 16 and without a residential partner. My objective is to give you a voice to express your thoughts and feelings on such important matters. Because your experience is unique, your contribution is very valuable and you could help improving the understanding on what 'life-work balance' actually means. The interviews will be informal, completely anonymous and confidential, lasting on average no more than one hour. If you think that you can contribute to this valuable project, please contact Claudia at the number below and I will be available to see you at the time and place of your choice.

01443 651817

Thank you

CAN YOU HELP?

Do you know, or are you, a working lone mother with children under the age of 16? Would you be interested in sharing your life experiences?

I am a researcher in the University of Glamorgan interested in finding out how working lone mothers manage to balance their working and caring responsibilities. This is a great opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of what ‘life-work balance really means from a working lone mother’s point of view. The interviews will be informal, completely anonymous and confidential, lasting on average no more than one hour. If you think that you can contribute to this valuable project, please contact Claudia at the number below and I will be available to see you at the time and place of your choice.

01443 651817

Thank yo

Appendix A4

Study of mums

A UNIVERSITY of Glamorgan student hopes that research into the valley's single mums will yield some very interesting results.

PhD student Claudia Corsetti wants to talk to single mothers with children under the age of 16 about how they juggle their work and family life.

Though it is early days yet, initial findings may help lay to rest negative stereotypes of single mums.

Ms Corsetti said: "I'm trying to understand how difficult it is for lone mothers and my focus is on the type and quality of care. Ideally, I'd like to speak to some women on minimum wage to finish my fieldwork, but I won't say no to any opportunities.

"The women so far have said it's therapeutic to talk about it when I turn up with a bottle of wine!

"Society's expectation of a lone mother is very high. They're very hard working and are in competition to prove themselves.

"They're not perceived at best but I think there's a wind of change and we'll move into a proper balance of work and life."

If you are a lone mother with a child or children under the age of 16 and want to chat about raising children alongside working life, call 01443 651817.

Appendix A5

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST 1

- 1 What does it mean to you to 'care' for your children (description of daily routine)
- 2 What are the most important values that you associate with caring for your children (what is care for you?).
- 3 What are the usual signs or indicators that help you to understand when your children are doing well and when they are not?
- 4 Throughout your daily routine, how much time can you usually dedicate to caring activities (seen in relation to playing a more 'active' role (as being directly engaged as opposed to a more 'passive' one (just 'being there'))?
- 5 Are there some caring activities that you consider to be more rewarding than others in terms of the benefits that they can produce?
- 6 Are there some caring activities that you see too demanding (which could be beneficial, but you do not have enough time or resources to carry them out)?
- 7 How patient do you feel you are with your children and in responding to their reasonable demands and needs? (Child's time-scale vs. the parent's time-scale).
- 8 Do you get any support from your local social infrastructure?
- 9 Do you get any support from your extended family and/or friends? Is either their involvement helpful?
- 10 What do you do when you get sick or when unpredictable events affect your routine?
- 11 What does 'caring' for yourself mean to you?
- 12 How much time can you dedicate towards improving your personal sense of well-being?
- 13 What do you actually do to help yourself? To what extent are you taking positive steps to sustain your own self-development? And how important is this to you?
- 14 What strategies or coping mechanisms do you have if you get overtired or if you feel stressed out

Appendix A6

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST 2

CARE FOR THE OTHER

- 1 Can you describe your daily routine?
- 2 Can you manage to balance your work and family life? How?
- 3 Do you get any support from the local public infrastructure?
- 4 Do you get any support from your extended family and/or friends?
- 5 When at home, how much of your time, do you think, is spent doing things with your child (children) and how much is spent just supervising?
- 6 Are there some activities that you do together that you find more rewarding than others?
- 7 Are there some activities which you consider to be very good, but which you feel are too time consuming or too demanding on your general resources and therefore difficult to do?
- 8 Can you find time to talk?
- 9 How can you tell when your children are doing well or not?
- 10 In general, what does mean to you to be a 'good' mum?
- 11 In terms of taking care of your children, what has been so far the most difficult time that you have experienced?
- 12 What kind of life are you hoping to give to your child (children), and what do you think you need to do to achieve it?

CARE FOR THE SELF

- 1 Do you get stressed out or over-tired? How do you deal with it?
- 2 What do you usually do to recharge yourself?
- 3 Can you find time for yourself when you need to? When?
- 4 Do you have time for a social life? Do you schedule it?
- 5 What 'caring' for yourself means to you?
- 6 How important your own personal care is to you?

Appendix A7

Questionnaire

Your name _____ age _____

Nationality _____ Ethnicity/race _____

Are you separated? _____ divorced? _____ ex-cohabiting? _____

How many children do you have? Boys: _____ Girls: _____ How old are they? _____

How long have you been a lone mother? _____

Education/qualifications _____

What is your occupation? _____

Do you work part-time or full-time? _____

How long have you been in your present occupation? _____

Do you work within a clear structure/timetable (i.e. shift work, nine-five Mon/Fri)? _____

Are you currently studying or retraining? _____

How do you see yourself in terms of class and/or status? _____

Appendix A8

WLMs' biographical data

Laura - British, working class - aged 33. Laura was married for five years and divorced for three; she has two girls aged six and five. She has obtained A-level qualifications and she has been working for four months as a full-time assistant manager. Laura is not currently studying or retraining, her job is strongly structured and it is characterised by disabling flexible arrangements.

Sarah - Welsh, middle class, aged 44. She was married for 11 years and she has been separated for the last three and an half. She has one boy and one girl, aged seven and nine respectively. Sarah holds a degree and works 30 hours a week as a PR manager in the Third Sector. She swings from full to long part-time work and her arrangements benefit from enabling flexibility.

Louise - Welsh, working class, aged 36. She has been separated for nine years and she has two children, one boy and one girl aged ten and nine respectively. Louise has A level qualifications and she is currently studying to improve her standing in her occupation. She has been working in the last year as a part-time teaching assistant. Her job allows enabling flexible arrangements.

Paula - British, class status described as 'none', aged 31. Paula has been married for seven years and divorced for five. She has one boy and two girls aged nine, 12 and 13 respectively. She has A level qualifications and she is currently studying. Paula holds a long part-time job as a clerical assistant in her family firm, her work is clearly structured and timetabled but she enjoys enabling flexibility.

Gwyneth - British, middle class, aged 44. Gwyneth was cohabiting for ten years before becoming a lone mother in the last two. She has one boy and one girl aged ten and six. She holds a degree in history and a CQSW in Social Work. Gwyneth has been working as a social worker for 14 years; her timetable is structured, but features enabling flexibility. That is she is currently working for four days a week, soon to be dropped to three following some serious family problems that she needs to address. This change will be for a short period only.

Morgan - British, working class, aged 34. Morgan has been a lone mother for five years; she has one boy and two girls aged 15, seven and five. She holds GCSE's qualifications and has been working for five years as a delivery driver doing 30 hours a week for a small, family-run business. Her job allows enabling flexible arrangements. She is not currently retraining, but she will be soon since her plans are to become a driver instructor.

Kathryn - Welsh with no descriptive class status, aged 46. She has been divorced for six years and she has one boy and one girl aged 12 and 22. She holds a degree and she will soon start a training course to improve her work prospects. Kathryn works as a support teacher and alternates full-time with long part-time work. In her present work experience as in the previous one she has been struggling with disabling flexible arrangements in the workplace.

Jane - British, working class, aged 39. Jane has been divorced for five years and she has two girls aged 15 and 12. She is currently studying at a degree level and she is working in a full-time capacity as a team leader in the administrative department of an educational institution. Her team works with 'flexitime' management, thus she is enjoying enabling flexible arrangements.

Vanessa - British, middle class, aged 38. Vanessa has been separated for five years and has three girls aged three, ten and 13. She obtained qualifications in office technology and she is employed in a long part-time job (23 hours) as receptionist within a council-run local sport centre. She does shift work (morning or afternoons) and her work is manageable thanks exclusively to the considerable support that she receives from her mother.

Susan - British, 'working middle class' (her definition), aged 49. Susan has been divorced for over ten years and she has one girl aged 15. Initially qualified as beauty specialist/consultant, Susan has been working for the last two years as a part-time customer services in a department store where she is experiencing the difficulties associated with disabling flexible arrangements. She is currently retraining and she planning to go back into full-time education.

Dwyn - British, working class, aged 48. Dwyn has been married for 20 years and divorced for one; her two girls are aged 12 and 15. She holds four GCE's and she is not currently retraining. Dwyn is employed in a long part time job doing shift work (mornings and afternoon shifts) as a receptionist. Although the hours are not conducive to family work, she finds that she can manage because her house is just across the road, so her children spend the time away from school in the sport centre where she works. In addition, it is very helpful that her colleagues are very supportive of her after-school arrangements.

Christine - British, middle class, aged 33. Christine was cohabiting before her separation, which occurred two years ago. She has a three year old boy. Christine holds a degree in business computing and works in a part-time capacity (25 hours, for three days) as an IT analyst in a private firm. She describes her work incredibly condensed, so that in three days she manages to reach the goals of a full week. Thus, her working arrangements are based on disabling flexibility, rendered manageable only thanks to her shorter working week.

Rebecca - Canadian, working class, aged 37. Rebecca is a separated WLM who has been living on her own for seven years with her daughter aged ten. She is a self-employed post-graduate and she has been working in marketing over four years. For considerable time Rebecca worked from home and she had no clear working routine or structure. This situation caused considerable problems as her work commitments overtook almost completely her life and her caring work. Since she has moved her work in an office outside the house and has allocated a strict timetable to her working routine, things on the 'home front' have improved considerably.

Victoria - British, middle class, aged 26. Victoria had been both married and divorced for three years and she has a three year old daughter. She has acquired a number of GCSE's and NVQ's qualifications and she is planning to start a business university degree in the new academic year. She works as a full time client sale executive in a private company; Victoria is immersed in a highly 'technocratic-interpretivist ' working environment with disabling flexible arrangements.

Gayna - Welsh from a 'work/mid class', aged 40. Gayna was married for 17 years and has been divorced for one. She has two boys aged 11 and 13. Gayna holds A level qualifications and she is a full time administration worker within the educational establishment. She enjoys a 'flexitime' management with enabling flexible arrangements.

Belinda - British, working class, aged 39. Belinda has been divorced for five years and she has three boys aged five, eight and ten. She is currently studying for a degree course whilst working on a part-time basis as a cleaner over the last two years. Although poorly paid, her work allows her a degree of flexibility and the opportunity to benefit from the Work Tax Credit component of FTC.

Liz - British, middle class, aged 45. Liz was married for 14 years before her divorce, 13 years ago. She has one boy and one girl aged 16 and 20. Liz is a registered nurse currently pursuing a work-based Master degree. She is busy working as a full time inspector of Nursing Homes. Her work is flexible because it allows her to work long hours in order to free some time for other activities. Typically Liz manages to squeeze the work of five days into four and study in her 'free' day.

Anne - Welsh, working class, aged 42. Anne has been divorced twice and she has been a lone mother for 14 years. She has two girls aged 14 and 17. Anne has a certificate in education and in these last ten years she has been holding two part-time jobs as an account clerk and an adult tutor. Her work is structured but her working hours are unsuitable to sustain her family commitments. She has only been able to manage with the support of her close relatives, especially her father.

Mary - British, working class, aged 38. Mary was married for 12 years and has been divorced over three. She has a boy and a girl aged nine and 11. Mary holds a nursing diploma and works as a full time nurse doing shift work. She is very troubled by the lack of enabling flexible arrangements at work and the lack of childcare support during less conventional hours. Since she lacks also the support of her family, Mary is experiencing real hardship in her chosen profession and in the management of her family commitments.

Julia - British, 'lower to middle class', aged 43. Julia has been divorced for seven years after 14 years of marriage and she has one boy aged 13 and a set of twins aged 17. She holds a two year secretarial course and she is a full time PA to a management team. Her work is structured and does not allow any flexibility. However, the children's godparents have in all effect taken the role of surrogate parents to her children and they have been actively present in the children's lives every time that it was needed.

Leanne - British, working class, aged 35. Leanne was married for 18 months and has been divorced for 3 years. She has two girls aged eight and seven. Leanne is a qualified hairdresser; she has done a course in social welfare and is currently undertaking a degree course. She works as a part-time shop assistant under very disabling flexible arrangements.

Glenys - British, working class, aged 32. Glenys has been divorced for nine years and she has two girls aged 11 and 15. She is currently studying for a degree course and she is working 25 hours a week in a call-centre doing the afternoon shift (five to ten pm). Since the working hours in the call-centre do not support her family responsibilities Glenys has applied and found a more suitable job doing secretarial work.

Gail - British, working class, aged 35. Gail was cohabiting before becoming a lone parent a year ago. She has two girls aged six and eight. She is currently doing a degree course and she is employed as a part-time administration worker doing 20/22 hours weekly. She enjoys enabling flexibility at work.

Dawn - Welsh, 'working-middle class', aged 36. Prior to becoming a lone mother 11 years ago, Dawn was cohabiting. She has an 11 year old girl. Dawn holds a degree in management and business and she has been working for three years as a full-time development officer. He job requires late evening meetings and she is finding this difficult to sustain.

Claire - Welsh, working class, aged 36. Claire has been divorced for ten years and she has a 16 year old daughter. She has obtained a degree and she is currently studying for an NVQ in care work. Claire works

as a full-time support worker; this requires taking shifts and sleeping in, which she can now do since her daughter is older.

Carla - British, middle class, aged 43. From unsuccessful cohabiting relationships Carla has had one boy and three girls, aged nine, 14, 16 and 17. Carla holds a number of GCE's and a 'Contact Travel Exam', which has allowed her to become a travel consultant currently working on a part-time basis (25 hours in three days). In spite of the fact that she is working only three days a week, Carla is looking for another job because she finds the target culture in her workplace extremely oppressive.

Diane - British, working class, aged 27. From her cohabitation Diane had one girl, aged three. She has been a lone mother from the birth of her child. Diane holds a high school and college qualification and has two part-time jobs as VDU operator/telephonist and pole dancing instructor. Her part-time jobs are built around her child's schedule.

Rachel - Welsh, working class, aged 30. Rachel has been a separated lone mother for 9 months. She has one boy and one girl aged seven and nine. She is a qualified hairdresser and a teacher and has been working for the last six years as a part-time (sometimes full-time) primary school support teacher. She enjoys enabling flexible arrangements at work.

Helen - British, middle class, aged 23. From her cohabitation, Helen had a girl, aged four. She works as a full-time civil servant and her life appears to be very structured in and outside work.

Caroline - Scottish/Norwegian, 'working middle class', aged 33. Caroline has been a divorced lone mother for six years and she has one girl aged seven. She holds a degree in homeopathy and she has been working in this profession for two years on a part-time basis whilst holding another part-time job as a receptionist. Both jobs rotate around her child's needs. However, if the homeopathic work is used to 'fill' pockets of usable time and is completely unstructured, her receptionist job is structured, but it has a different timetable every day of the week. She is currently retraining.

Rosalind - Welsh, 'upper working class', aged 44. Rosalind has been a divorced lone mother for eight years and she has an 11 year old girl. She holds a post-graduate diploma and she has been working for four years as a Welsh language training and development officer in a full-time capacity. Although her job is managed within a 'flextime' timetable, she is currently retraining and looking for a job elsewhere. The main reasons for her dissatisfaction are linked to the excessive amount of work that she has to take home with her and carry through later at night and the sense of isolation that defines her occupation.

Cathy - Welsh, working class, aged 30. Cathy has been married for a year and separated for ten months. She has a 15 months old boy. She holds a degree and works as a full-time enquiries and administration assistant within the educational establishment. She works 'flexi hours' and with the added support of her father and her ex-partner (who provide part of her childcare requirements); she is managing her work/family routine fairly well.

Carey - 'Welsh/mixed', 'outside the class system', aged 35. Carey has been a divorced lone mother for four years and she has a six year old girl. She holds a degree and she is a qualified mechanical engineer. She worked in her profession for a number of years before becoming a mother. Afterwards she found the 'long-hour' working culture incompatible with her caring commitments. She is currently studying with the Open University (level three Environmental Modeling) and has been working in the last two years in a flexible part-time job as a mentoring coordinator within a council-run charitable organisation.

Celia - British, working class, aged 45. Celia has been divorced for five years and she has three girls aged nine, 14 and 16. She has been working as a full-time administrator with a flexi-time scheme for seven years. She finds this management very helpful in terms of helping her to negotiate fairly successfully her work and family commitments.

Pam - British, middle class, aged 43. Pam has been divorced for 17 years and she has two boys and one girl, aged 21, 18 and eight respectively. She holds 13 computer NVQ's, an NVQ in Advice and Guidance

and an A1 Assessor Award. All these qualifications have been acquired whilst in employment. Currently she is the centre manager of six centres and she works full-time within a nine to five time structure. Pam has a very strong loyalty to her firm that operates along the lines of TQM.

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