'Lone fatherhood: Experience and perception, choice and constraint'

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Abstract

This thesis explores men's experience of raising children alone, and addresses a central question for men's engagement in care: Can men mother? If men can mother, what makes this possible? To what extent are breadwinning identities and mothers' care for children barriers to men's engagement in caring? If mothering is a constitutive activity based on a response to the perceived needs of children, what does caring mean to fathers, and what is the impact of caring for children in the absence of maternal mediation?

Based on evidence from an in depth qualitative study of fathers raising children alone, the study explores men's experience as primary carers for their children. Men's experience of paid employment, childcare and social and structural supports are examined, as is their experience of parenting and relationships with their children.

Research into men's participation in childcare and domestic labour in two parent families demonstrates that women continue to do most childcare and unpaid domestic work, and there is significant difficulty in engaging men in care. The psychological literature has underpinned a 'deficiency' perspective of fatherhood, and casts doubt on men's capacity to care, while evidence from social policy research casts doubt on men's willingness to care. The policy response to women's labour market participation has been slow, leaving a gap in care.

The findings of this study show how contemporary constructions of fatherhood impact on men's experiences. It will argue that, for men parenting alone, these constructions create a challenge to men's identities, which in turn creates tensions in men's perceptions of caring labour. However, these tensions do not need to be resolved in order for men to experience their parenting as positive, rather, the experience of *doing* care has the most significant impact on how men experience fatherhood, and having taken responsibility for care, fathers would be reluctant to relinquish it.

CONTENTS

Introduction

For any human society to survive, it is essential that children are born, nurtured, cared for and protected. Yet who should have this responsibility, in what circumstances, how and to what extent this responsibility should be exercised, remains one of the most contested areas of social life. Childrearing, as a central concern of all societies, affects all its members, but is overwhelmingly carried out by women. For increasing numbers of women, responsibility for childrearing (and other forms of caring) not only affects their labour market participation, but also has a lifetime economic effect. (Hakim, 1996) It is women as mothers who overwhelmingly undertake the 'second shift' of domestic labour, (Hochschild, 1989) regardless of their labour market participation. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000)

Profound changes in family structure during the latter part of the twentieth century have provoked both academic and political interest. Broad changes have occurred in patterns of partnerships, parenting and employment, prompting one commentator to observe that 'the nature of the family has been transformed in the course of a generation'. (Berthoud, 2000:3)

In the context of these changes, the growth of lone parent families, and debates about the demise of 'the family', women as lone mothers were demonised during the 1980's and early 1990's by New Right ideologies, in which lone motherhood was constructed as one of the most pressing social problems of the era. This was largely connected with economic pressures on welfare regimes, although many of the debates focussed on the perceived irresponsibility of lone mothers, (and the debate later shifted to include 'feckless fathers', defined primarily as young, unemployed men.)

However, contemporary UK policy has shifted, and the New Labour government is now pursuing policies designed to encourage the labour market participation of all adults. (Lewis, 2002)

In the context of changing family structures, however, children are almost always cared for by their mothers. Nevertheless, the two parent, sole male breadwinner model of family life was a phenomenon that peaked in the 1950's, and does not reflect the reality of contemporary family life. (Hobson and Morgan, 2002) One in five children now live in a lone parent household. (ONS, 2000)

In two parent families, mothers also continue to do the bulk of the caring and domestic work. Research into the gendered division of paid work, childcare and domestic labour shows that this is still primarily 'women's work', and although fathers are said to want to be 'more involved' with their children, (Warin et.al, 1999) many see their role primarily as 'breadwinners'. Thus, significant social and economic change has not been matched by similar shifts in men and women's caring activities and the maintenance of the environment in which family life takes place.

Moreover, essentialist constructions of mothering, originating in psychological research, underpin the notion that mothers find the challenges inherent in childrearing 'easier' or are 'naturally' the better parent to care for children. Motherhood is conceptualised as 'instinctive', unlike fatherhood, which is seen as dependent on learned behaviours. This means that essential elements of 'new' or 'involved' fatherhood (for example, nurturing and emotional sensitivity) may be regarded as particularly problematic for men. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997)

Fathers do not, however, need to have a great deal of involvement in the day to day workings of the family in order to be seen as adequate fathers. (Backett, 1982, 1987) The persistence of constructions of fathers as primarily providers, although desiring more involvement in family life, is said to present men with a 'conflict of responsibilities'. (Warin et al, 1999:40) However, the same research also suggests that a provider role places fathers in a position of authority in families, which they are reluctant to accede.

Some of these debates have also been reflected in notions that fatherhood and masculinity more generally, is in crisis. (Whitehead, 2002) This 'crisis' is perceived to

be the result of changes in the nature of employment, including the decline of 'traditional' industries such as coal mining and steel working, (Hakim, 1996) the shift towards service sector jobs, and the impact that this has had on men's employment opportunities.

In the context of changes in family life, around 40% of working age women are in full time employment, and one in four in part time employment, and the hours that women work (full or part time) are highly contingent on the number and ages of their children. (Taylor, 2000) Men's working patterns are much less likely to include part-time work; indeed, part time working is most likely for men aged less than 25 years with no children. So the evidence seems to suggest that a provider identity is a significant barrier to men's 'involvement' in parenting and family life.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear what actually constitutes 'father involvement', or what fathers 'should' do in order to become 'good' fathers. Moreover, much of the political and ideological debate around fatherhood during the last two decades has focussed on non-resident or 'absent' fathers and their purported abdication of responsibility, although the situation is much more complicated than this suggests. (Bradshaw et.al., 1999) Rights based politicised father and men's rights groups have countered these debates, arguing that both structures and social attitudes discriminate against fathers, and father involvement. (See, for example, Burgess, 1997)

There are then, three key issues that are central to men's 'involvement' as fathers. The first is that in two parent families, there is evidence that men's involvement in care for their children may be limited by their adherence to a provider identity. The second issue relates to the linkage between a 'provider' identity and paid work. This may be elaborated to consider the distinction between two forms of work, that is paid work, and unpaid care giving work. These are of significance to everyone, not just the employee or care giver, and as I have discussed, both are intertwined in the lived experiences of many mothers. The third issue, then, is of unpaid work, that is, care, and in the context of fatherhood, caring for children and all that this entails.

Although some fathers clearly are actively involved in their children's day to day care, the question remains as to why some fathers are engaged in caring for their children, and others are not. Women's increased labour force participation has not lived up to the promise of gender equality, and, as discussed, women bear the greatest responsibility for childcare and domestic labour. Moreover, the 'traditional' family, in which one (male) adult breadwinner supported a (female) adult and children was a relatively short lived phenomenon, and contemporary families reflect complexity and diversity in every day life.

Although men's identities as parents in two parent families are linked with their 'breadwinning' role, some authors have suggested that responsibility for children after divorce may mean that fathers have to 'rewrite their parental script.' (Smart and Neale, 1999a: 55) Further, it is argued that family relationships may themselves be a source of change in gender (ed) experience. (Morgan, 1996:79).

These aspects of father's lives have received relatively little research attention. The focus on 'rights' has detracted from a focus on men's caring for children. As discussed, one in five children are growing up in a lone parent household, households that are overwhelmingly mother-headed. Of all dependent children living in lone parent families in 2000, only 2% lived in a lone father household. (ONS, 2000)

Further evidence comes from the 1958 British Birth Cohort Study, (also known as the National Child Development Study, or NCDS) which shows that of all women who were mothers by the age of 33, lone motherhood had been experienced by 23% of women. Of all men who were fathers by this age, only 2% had experienced lone parenthood. (Payne and Range, 1998)

While care needs to be taken with this statistical evidence, for reasons that I elaborate in the following chapters, it is clear that a small, but significant, number of fathers are raising children alone. Previous lone father research has suggested that lone fatherhood may be a social problem (Barker, 1994; Greif, 1985; O'Brien, 1984; George and Wilding, 1972), and indeed, there seems to be a perception among some lone fathers

that they are viewed somewhat negatively. (Gingerbread, 2001)

However, in the context of changes in family structure, questions around men's participation in parenting, and women's continuing responsibility for care giving, in this study I approach lone father families from a somewhat different perspective. This is a study of post divorce parenting, which addresses questions around men's capacity to care.

My central question is, then, can men mother? By mothering, I mean a constitutive activity, which is based on a response to the perceived needs of children. If fathers can 'mother', what makes this possible? Caring for children is work that is primarily done by women, and fathers are still seen (and often see themselves) as 'providers', even though the 'traditional' family has undergone enormous change. Further, arguments around the notion of 'maternal mediation' suggest that fathers do not feel responsible for care if mothers are available to care for children. If fathers feel that they are primarily breadwinners, what are the implications for men who become primary carers, and have responsibility for both providing and care giving?

A series of arguments from psychology, sociology and social policy suggests that fathers may find caring for children difficult. Psychological perspectives suggest that fathers may be distanced from their children, and although they may enjoy playful interactions with their children, they are less likely to demonstrate emotional sensitivity. Sociological arguments suggest that structural factors prevent fathers from becoming engaged with their children and family life, while evidence from policy suggests that men may be reluctant to engage in caring.

In the context of the present study, how might these arguments impact on men's experiences? Contemporary psychological theory relates to the notion of 'fatherhood in crisis'. Frosh (1997) for example, suggests that men may find all relationships with their children difficult, because 'traditional' fatherhood has been undermined by economic and structural change, including changes in family structure, and the loss of 'traditional' (masculine) jobs. This perspective suggests that fathers' relationships with

their children (particularly their sons) are undermined by broad social change, which makes secure, stable and intimate father-son relationships less likely. [1]

Other writers have suggested that fathers might find nurturing difficult because they have been 'deskilled' by maternal expertise, (Burgess, 1997; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996) and this perspective has also been quite influential. A key question for this study is the extent to which this is an accurate analysis of the reason why there appear to be so many difficulties in engaging men in caring for children. To what extent does maternal care inhibit men's engagement in caring?

Much of the literature that underpins contemporary perspectives of fatherhood and fathering suggests that caring for children may be problematic for fathers, or that there are limitations to fathers' care-giving work. Psychological research suggests that mothers' and fathers' roles are 'differentiated', that is, that there are specific elements of gendered difference between men and women that influences their relationships with their children.

Motherhood is conceptualised as expressive (caring and nurturing) while fathering is seen as instrumental, (for example, in providing a 'bridge' to the outside world for the child). Thus, fathers might be seen as 'playful' in their interactions with their children, while mothers are typically seen as having a 'gentle' approach through nurturing behaviours.

Consequently fathers might be able to (or need to) be more 'detached' from their children (Parsons and Bales, 1955) as agents of children's primary socialisation, role models and mentors. (For example, Lamb, 1976) Influential theorists Bowlby (1954) and Winnicot (1957) (both of whom regarded fathers as peripheral to the mother-child relationship) endorsed these perspectives; it was maternal care that was seen as important for children.

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A second aspect of contemporary psychological theory, though, is that although men may find nurturing difficult, they do have some 'special' attributes, which are particularly important to their children, again, especially to sons. (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997; Snarey, 1993) This suggests two things: the first, that the sex of the child might make some difference to men's caring in lone father families, and secondly, that fathers offer their children something that mothers do not.

Other psychological theorists argue that although fathers may have to 'learn' to nurture, they have particular attributes that mothers may lack. (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) The construction of mothers as 'naturally' nurturing suggests that this is specific to mothers, and not something that fathers are 'naturally' able to do. The psychological paradigm, although considering fathers as important agents of children's socialisation, does not allow space for the notion that 'men can mother'.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence that men are able to become highly involved parents, although it appears that their orientation to parenting is highly dependent on social conditions. (Gerson, 1997), and as discussed, men's labour market position is crucial: 'performance culture', for example, may undermine men's commitment to caring. (Dienhart and Daly, 1997)

Nevertheless, several studies, (including that of Gerson, cited above), suggest that in some circumstances, 'men can mother'. This is a claim that is sometimes made in the conclusion of lone father studies (for example, Greif, 1997,1985; Barker, 1994) In arriving at this conclusion, the authors suggest that this is because lone fathers are doing the work 'normally' undertaken by mothers in two parent families.

Research into men's parenting in two parent families also shows how, despite claims of significant change in men and women's engagement in childcare and domestic labour, as mentioned above, mothers do a disproportionate share of both. Although mothers have increasingly entered the labour force, there has not been a corresponding entry of men into care and domestic labour. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000)

Moreover, social research also suggests that men in two parent families are adherent to

a 'breadwinning' identity, and that this limits their engagement as 'involved fathers (Dienhart and Daly, 1997; Dienhart, 1997; Warin et. al., 1999)

Although studies have explored men's parenting in the context of changing family structure, and men and women's negotiation of post divorce parenting (for example, Smart and Neale, 1999a) we know very little about how fathers construct meanings for their *caring* activities, and the circumstances of men's caring.

As I have discussed, some studies have suggested that, in some circumstances, 'men can mother', and there is indeed evidence that some men are engaged in caring across a range of contexts. However, the way in which men experience this is less well researched, and this study focuses on how men constructed meaning in fathering through doing care.

The study explores not only the practical circumstances in which a small sample of men became primary carers, and the day to day practicalities of doing care, but also what doing lone fatherhood meant to men, and ways in which primary responsibility for children meant that men were doing maternal work. (Ruddick, 1990; 1994)

As discussed above, research into men's work and caring in two parent families suggests that men's orientations to parenting are highly dependent on social conditions. For fathers who become primary carers for their children, three key challenges might be seen as emerging from rapidly changing social conditions. The first is to meet the unmediated needs of children, the second to negotiate the practical domestic context, and the third is to negotiate both in and around their position in the labour force.

As the following chapters show, fathers in this study came to lone parenting from a range of situations, and in different ways. Fathers had varied experiences of fatherhood in two parent families, and differing life experiences. The experience of caring for children was fundamental to men's subsequent fathering, and sense of self. The shift that men made from primarily 'caring about' their children prior to their separation or divorce to 'caring for' their children had a significant impact on their fathering in a lone parent family.

This thesis argues that, although doing care challenged men's social identities as providers, this was not an insurmountable problem. In many cases, men were 'mothering', in the sense that their response to the perceived needs of their children shaped their caring, and the meaning that fathering had for them. For men raising children alone, mothers' absence meant that they experienced care without a mediating maternal presence. For many fathers, this experience changed their perspective on fatherhood, what fatherhood meant to them, and their orientation to paid work and care. Fathers enjoyed their caring, and none would willingly relinquish it.

In the following chapters I explore how men raising children alone negotiated their way through both practical fathering, and cultural, social and ideological assumptions about work (both paid and unpaid) and childcare, and the impact that this had on men's identities as fathers, care givers and workers.

In Chapter 1, I begin with a discussion of psychological and sociological theories on gender, parenting and identity, and consider their impact on constructions of motherhood and fatherhood. I examine ways in which psychological explanations for gendered behaviour perpetuate notions of differentiated mothering and fathering, and imply that gendered identities are an inevitable consequence of biological difference, and not subject to change.

I consider ways in which these perspectives suggest that there may be difficulties for men doing care work, which is seen as 'belonging' to women, a theme that re-emerges in Chapter 4 when the impact on fathers of becoming primary carers is explored. While 'fatherhood' and 'manhood' are separated from each other, 'motherhood' and 'femininity' are seen as inherent in each other, (Silva, 1996) and I consider how women's and men's identities are also shaped both across and within a range of contexts, and what this might mean for father involvement.

I go on to explore the concept of 'transformations' in contemporary social life, in personal relationships and in the context of fatherhood as an experience which is (potentially) transformative for men. I discuss the implications of notions of change in

fatherhood, and in the context of fathering and ways in which this may impact on men's experiences as primary carers for children. These themes re-emerge in Chapters 4 and 6, in which men's experiences of doing 'mother's work' are further explored.

I continue Chapter 1 with an examination of public and political representations of fatherhood, and ways in which father and men's rights groups have been influential in what Smart refers to as 'the discursive reconstruction of fatherhood'. (Smart, 1991) I consider the relationship between discourses of 'new fatherhood' and their influence on constructions of men's post divorce parenting and relationships with children, a theme that continues in Chapter 6.

In the final sections of Chapter 1, research evidence around men's and women's parenting and the division of paid work and domestic labour in two parent families are considered. This links with Chapter 5, in which men's experience of combining a 'provider' role with caring for children is explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of lone fatherhood in the political, legal, social and cultural contexts.

Chapter 2 discusses the way in which I set about exploring the experiences and perceptions of a small sample of men who were heading lone father families. Practical and methodological issues are discussed, and the place of the present study in existing research literature is considered.

In Chapter 3 I consider the processes whereby men became lone parents. Differences between fathers who were divorced and separated are examined, and those who had previously been in cohabiting relationships. The immediate impact on men's lives is considered in terms of their response to becoming primary carers.

In Chapter 4, themes of day to day responsibility for children are considered. In this chapter, ways in which fathers negotiated around practical responsibility for the domestic environment and caring for children are discussed, and themes of gendered skills and competencies are explored.

In Chapter 5, I consider the importance of paid work in men's experience of primary

care giving. The chapter explores ways in which a provider role impacted on men's caring, and the practical difficulties that fathers negotiated. The responses of employers to men's practical situations are discussed, and the relationship between breadwinning identities and caring responsibilities are explored.

Men's relationships with their children are explored in Chapter 6. The chapter explores some of the ways in which public and political discourses around men, fatherhood, mothers and children impacted on lone father's experiences, and ways in which men's caring for children influenced their perceptions around doing fathering.

The central question of this thesis is, then, can men mother? If men can mother, what makes this possible? Are breadwinning identities and maternal mediation significant barriers to men's engagement in caring? Arguments from psychology, sociology and social policy suggest that engagement in care may present difficulties for fathers, although there is evidence that in some circumstances, men can, and sometimes do, care for their children.

In Chapter 7, the discussion is broadened out beyond the discussion of lone fatherhood, to explore the implications of men's primary care giving for fathers, mothers, and issues around caring for children and gender (ed) constructions of caring.

While women have taken their place in the labour market, there has not been a similar movement of men into caring and domestic labour. In the context of changing patterns of employment, this inequality is increasingly becoming one of the most pressing issues for contemporary social policy. This thesis will argue that men can mother, and it is the experience of doing care, regardless of the choice that men exercise, that transforms fathering. Overall, I hope to show how the study of how fathers themselves perceive their fathering reveals the importance of men actively 'doing fatherhood', and the implications for policies around gendered work and caring.

Chapter 1

Lone Fatherhood: Experience and Perception, Choice and Constraint:

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

This thesis is focused on the experiences and perceptions of fathers raising children alone. Men's experience as lone parents is related to wider issues concerning the nature of fatherhood, and doing fathering: responsibility for childcare, paid work, and social identity. This group of fathers is of interest for several reasons. The first is that the political debates that are outlined in the introduction to the thesis have been mirrored in contemporary 'family' research, which has tended to focus on how non-resident or 'absent' fathers, and men in two parent families, negotiate fatherhood, and how domestic responsibilities are allocated between co-resident partners. The practical context of childrearing has wide ranging implications for the way in which mothers and fathers experience parenthood: unpaid work (caring and domestic) is overwhelmingly carried out by women, while paid work appears to be inherent in men's social identities as 'good' fathers.

Lone fathers have multiple responsibilities: for practical provision, domestic labour, and childcare, in an environment where their relationship with each is unmediated by a partner. In the context of women's increased labour market participation, and a political environment that seeks to encourage 'father involvement' it is important to understand the processes whereby fathers might share responsibility for childrearing and the concomitant domestic labour required to care for children, on an egalitarian basis. Men

1

raising children alone offer an opportunity to explore how theoretical boundaries between 'traditional' and 'involved' fatherhood, caring, and unpaid work are negotiated within the context of normative expectations of fatherhood, and the practical demands that responsibility for children implies.

Secondly, although lone parenthood has been almost continuously reconstructed as a 'problem', changing patterns of marriage and cohabitation, and the growth in the number of lone parent (primarily mother-headed) households in Britain means that lone parent households are now one of a range of family forms. However, although the number of lone father families has increased during the previous decades, as a *proportion* of all lone parents, lone father headed households have not. Nevertheless, it is also the case that more fathers have some responsibility for children through post-divorce 'shared care' arrangements and thus primary responsibility for some of the time (although this may be shared with a new partner). The study of men raising children alone offers the opportunity to explore ways in which post divorce fatherhood is negotiated between fathers, their children, and others, when mothers are not the primary source of childcare.

Policy making constructs fathers as both 'the problem' and 'the solution', (particularly with regard to their relationships with their sons) yet, as discussed in the introduction, post-separation and divorce fatherhood is often seen as marginalising or excluding men from meaningful relationships with their children. Moreover, existing research suggests that some constraints on father's post divorce parenting are experienced in a particularly acute way by men raising children alone. Feelings of marginalisation, social isolation, and exclusion from social networks that are generally available to mothers, appear to be particularly related to lone fatherhood. We need, then, to explore how fathers negotiate the social context of childrearing, and how this connects with men's experience of parenting.

In this chapter, I examine three perspectives on fatherhood and parenting that have been highly influential in contemporary constructions of fatherhood. The first is the psychological discourse, which underpins sociological constructions of 'family' and

'parenting'. Psychological research suggests that men and women's ability to care for and nurture children may be very different, and that fathers may be constrained in their parenting by essentially 'instrumental' roles, which require a degree of detachment from their children, in contrast with mothers who are seen as 'expressive', and therefore nurturing and empathic. This discourse is linked with the notion that women have a particular propensity to care.

The second perspective relates to social and cultural constructions of fatherhood. In this discourse, fatherhood is conceptualised as being in a state of transition, in the context of wider processes of democratisation and individualism, and is also linked with the notion that fatherhood is 'in crisis'. One of the most important aspects of the notion of a crisis in fatherhood is the challenge that contemporary life creates for men who adhere to a 'breadwinning' identity, while motherhood is assumed to be rooted in an essentially feminine identity.

The third perspective relates to the political and economic context of contemporary fatherhood. In this section, fatherhood is explored in the context of the political discourse around fatherhood, men's safety in the domestic context, and rights – based arguments about fathers and post-divorce parenting.

Psychology and fatherhood

This section begins with an examination of influential discourses of fatherhood and parenting within psychology, the way in which these discourses have been instrumental in establishing contemporary constructions of fatherhood, and the ways in which they may be problematic in attempting to understand men's fathering experiences. While, as Lewis (1986) points out, it is incorrect to claim that fatherhood was only 'discovered' by researchers during the latter half of the twentieth century, Robinson and Barret (1986) have argued that until the 1970's, fathers were 'taken for granted' in both psychological and sociological literature. However, an important characteristic of this literature is the emergence of claims about *changes* to fatherhood, notably men's (actual or desired) increased participation in childcare and domestic life, and changes in the way that men relate to their children.

Fatherhood and psychology

As Ribbens (1994) points out, the psychological discourse has increasingly linked psychological processes with childrearing, particularly during the latter half of the twentieth century. I am concerned here with two key psychological perspectives on parental roles and behaviours, both of which have not only influenced the way that fatherhood and motherhood are conceptualised, but are also embedded in contemporary social policy.

The first, and probably most enduring, perspective suggests that mother's and father's roles are 'differentiated', having distinctive elements of parental behaviour that are particular to men and women's relationships with their children. Broadly, differentiated perspectives mean that the social expectations attached to the status and position of each parent influence the patterns of behaviour that are expected of them. Motherhood is thus conceptualised as expressive (caring, nurturing) and fatherhood as instrumental (for example, playful, providing a 'bridge' to the world outside 'the family'), and facilitating the healthy development of the social and psychological self.

So, for example, Parsons and Bales (1955) argued that the 'instrumental' role of men needed both personal detachment and control to survive in harsh economic circumstances. Differentiated perspectives attributed an important and 'special' role to fathers as the 'instrumental' parent: as agents of primary socialisation, role models and mentors. (See, for example, Lamb, 1976) Thus, fathers had a unique contribution to make to children's healthy psychological development and subsequent psychological adjustment in adult life. In comparison, women's roles were passive, nurturant and family centred, or 'expressive'. This view was further endorsed by influential theorists Bowlby (1954) and Winnicot (1957) both of whom regarded fathers' roles as somewhat peripheral to the central task of maternal care. In other words,

> 'The mother nurtures her children with statements of empathy, offers the
> emotional security necessary for them to create healthy relationships with others,
> and teaches them about their emotions; the father, on the other hand, leaves the
> family to venture into an exciting and often dangerous world. In his instrumental

4

role, the father provides a linkage between the emotional security provided by the mother and anticipated challenges in the outside world that require skill and intellect; he enables his children to gradually move from dependence on the mother towards the autonomy necessary to survive as an adult.' (Robinson and Barret, 1986:6)

Nevertheless, Lamb (1979) suggested that father's roles should, and indeed were changing, but only in the context of a 'secure gender identification'. Thus, as long as fathers felt secure with their masculine identities, they would, through their own fathering, be able to challenge values and assumptions about what it means to be a father. Much psychological theory during the second half of the twentieth century, then, meshes with contemporary perspectives on fatherhood which assert that men's parenting is undergoing an evolutionary process in which 'generative fathers' are developing relationships with their children in 'new' ways. (See, for example, Dollahite, Hawkins and Brotherson, 1997; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke, 1997)

Although 'traditional' fatherhood represents one facet of multiple ways of 'being a father', social and economic change is often seen as undermining men's positions in the family. (Frosh, 1997) Frosh hypothesises that contemporary life makes it harder than ever for boys to experience relationships that are secure, stable and intimate enough for them to be nurturing in their turn. The clinical paradigm, then, suggests that as fathers, men may be 'emotionally and relationally deficient', and likely to repeat patterns of fathering that have a negative effect on their offspring. (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997:5) In a contrasting view, Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke argue that, rather than undermining father's positions, structural and economic change means that breadwinning is no longer a 'synonym for masculinity'. (1997:4)[1] Thus, structural and economic change may offer fathers the opportunity to break away from traditional, prescriptive roles, and discover 'new' ways of being fathers.

Nevertheless, although the potential for men's greater involvement in family and domestic life remains a contested issue, ' involved fatherhood' has become established

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[1] For a perspective on raising boys in popular books see Phillips, 1993, and Kindlon & Thompson, 1999)

5

in the contemporary discourse as given. This is evidenced, for example, in both claims that fathers are now 'more involved' with their children than in previous generations, and the adoption of 'father involvement' as a desirable aim for social policy. Yet 'involved' fatherhood is a blurred concept, lacking clarity and definition: it is also difficult to 'know' the quantity, or 'measure' the nature of, father involvement from a historical perspective. Indeed, historical patterns of fathering are highly likely, then as now, to have varied according to social and structural factors (social class and geographical region, for example). (McKee and O'Brien, 1982)

Further, although writers in the fields of both psychology and sociology have argued that fathers have a unique and 'special' role within the family and particularly in relation to their children, (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997, Snarey, 1993) the nature of that involvement remains a contested area in the contemporary discourse. Moreover, the assumption that mothers will be *primary* carers for their children, or at least take most responsibility for them (particularly young children) inheres in both differentiated and emergent perspectives of fatherhood. So, although fathers may want close and nurturing relationships with their offspring, this cannot be taken for granted.

Likewise, if, as Frosh suggests, wide-ranging social and economic change means that fathers are unable to follow 'traditional' patterns of parenting, yet do not have an available alternative model of 'nurturing' fatherhood, the assumption that mothers will (almost always) care for and nurture their children is unlikely to receive much serious challenge, and father's caring will continue to have a significant degree of voluntarism. (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; Ferri and Smith, 1996)

The suggestion that a propensity to care can be traced to the development of gender roles and identity on an individual level, ignore the range of influences that bear very directly on people's experience of parenting. The two themes of 'differentiated ' parenting and 'emergent' fatherhood in analyses of parenting 'roles' suggest that not only are fathers essentially different from mothers in their parenting, but also that caring for children is something that has to be 'learnt' (by fathers, although rarely by mothers). (Anderson et. al, 2002; Campion, 1997) These analyses themselves perpetuate the

notion of male parenting as an adjunct to women's caring. If maternal caring is seen as 'natural' in a way in which fathering is not, the activity of 'fathering' may be reduced to a biological act, whereas 'mothering' conveys a complex set of meanings. (Silva, 1996)

The notion that men find caring (and the intimacy involved in caring tasks) difficult, (Jamieson, 1998) is, then, perpetuated by perspectives in which women are seen as 'natural' carers. Nevertheless, feminist psychology has pointed to the fact that mothers may also feel ambivalence towards their children, and that we should not assume that *all* mothers will be warm and nurturing; (Holloway and Featherstone, 1997) maternal care is also subject to individual variation. Further, arguments which assert that the reproduction of gender specific behaviour, such as caring and nurturing, are mainly psychological, unconscious processes, do not take sufficient account of the social construction of gender; as Graham argues, gender is not a 'psychological entity.' (Graham, 1983)

Moreover, there are important limitations to role theory, although it is often used as a conceptual and analytical tool in the literature on fatherhood. Although role research set the scene for 'questioning a single, unchanging masculinity', (Whitehead, 2002:21) and the concept of 'roles' may be useful as a metaphor to explore fatherhood, it may also imply 'an external persona that men choose to or are compelled to put on or take off.' (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997: 14-15) The discussion, then, needs to be extended to consider what other processes are involved in the construction of contemporary fatherhood and men's social identities.

The social and cultural context of fatherhood

Challenges to 'traditional' gendered parenting roles are evident throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, and are therefore not new concepts, rather ideas that have been re-stated, albeit in differing forms. For example, in a challenge to the 'conventional paradigm' (of 'traditional' gendered roles) Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz, (1977), argued that children being cared for by mothers are not immune to difficulties, and that mothers themselves may experience significant distress associated with motherhood. Further, participation in the labour market by both parents is not

inevitably associated with family 'malfunctioning', and relationship breakdown occurs in 'conventional' families. (1977:350) The authors argue that:

> 'Social changes in occupations, in domestic life, in the conceptions and values we have about men and women and their developmental experiences have brought about a situation where a new formulation is required about the nature of men and women and of the family as a social institution.' (1977:361)

Although the changing nature of the 'the family', work and parenting that Rapoport and Strelitz (and others) highlighted more than twenty years ago has effected some change in the way that we think about men, women, and the family, parenting (and other forms of caring) remains a highly gendered activity. (Graham 1983, 1993; Ungerson, 1983, 1987; Symonds, 1998) Moreover, men's caring work consistently attracts higher prestige than similar work done by women. (Cameron, Moss and Owen, 1999; Tronto, 1994: 116) We need, then to consider the nature of a possible 'new formulation'.

The transformative impact of becoming a father is documented in much of the literature that explores men's transitions to fatherhood. (See, for example, Lewis's 1986 study) More recently, writers have considered the impact of other 'transitions', particularly the 're-discovery' of fatherhood after separation and divorce. (Smart and Neale, 1999a, 1999b) I will return to this discussion later in this section.

Shaping fatherhood: transitions and transformation

Meanwhile, the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section make several sometimes contradictory, claims for the nature of fatherhood. I want here to focus on notions of change and transformation, that is, the notion that fatherhood is 'changing' in the context of wider social processes of democratisation and individualisation. Analogous with these claims is the notion that this process is multi-directional – in other words, that fathers are transformed by fatherhood, and that these transformations in men will have a commensurate impact on the wider social environment.

A generalised belief in the power of fatherhood as a potentially transforming experience for men (and for children, especially boys) can be observed in the context of policy

measures to 'involve' fathers in their children's lives. This is nowhere more evident than in the (re) emergent debate around 'father absence', educational under-achievement and youth crime. Thus, for example, in a debate in the House of Lords, Baroness Young argued: 'There is considerable evidence.... that in families without fathers, boys are seriously handicapped. It is not a question of money but of having a father in the home'. (Hansard, 15 June 2000:C 1755)[2]

There are nevertheless inherent tensions in the notion that fatherhood has 'changed', or is 'changing'. Although there has been a shift from the notion of fathers as economic providers to encompass the notion that fathers can, and indeed should, become 'involved' in their children's lives, and policy makers have attempted to 'shift men's understanding of familial commitment' (Collier, 2001:532), these ideas are not without contradictions. It may, for instance, be that shifts in normative prescriptions for fathering do not accord with men's practical experiences and behaviours. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) I will return to these points in the following sections, but probably the most striking example of this dissonance lies in evidence that the ability to earn a 'decent wage' for men in two parent families is in tension with the notion that fathers are, should be, or want to be, 'more involved' with their children. (Warin et. al., 1999; Gerson, 1993; Walby, 1990)

Nevertheless, while 'transformations' in men's *behaviours* in two parent families may be open to question, in the context of social and economic change, including women's increased labour market participation, more attention has been paid to change in interpersonal relationships. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998) Beck and Beck Gernsheim argue that, as the basis of an industrial society, prescribed gender roles support social structures. There is thus a direct relationship between increasing gender equality and decreasing social stability. Moreover, change and increasing individualism means that both men and women seek close relationships because they appear to be more reliable than other social bonds.

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[2] See also: Boys, young men and Fathers, a Ministerial Seminar (Home Office, 1998), and 'Dads and Sons Give an Hour Programme, in which Stephen Twigg, Minister for Young People and Learning, is said to be 'Urging bosses to give fathers an hour off work to spend time with their sons'. (DfES Press Release, 8th August 2002)

Nevertheless, the best interests of one person in a household (regardless of household type) are not necessarily in the interests of others.

The possibility of making choices forces the realisation that there are different consequences for men and women, and as such, choices have consequences (economic dependence for one partner, for example). (Beck and Beck – Gernsheim, 1995:24-25) Nevertheless, although increased gender equality and women's greater economic independence means that there are no longer the same pressures on men to be sole earners in families, this does not generally alter men's behaviour, in terms of participation in domestic chores, for example. Where it does make a difference is at the point of separation or divorce:

'This is when men, who suddenly rediscover their fatherly feelings, are hit by their legally backed absence from the family, which during the marriage seemed perfectly normal. The father becomes the victim of the inverted inequality with which he has hitherto lived quite cheerfully. Now the mother has the say in everything, legally and actually, and the father has to make do with what she grants him, usually as little as the law allows'. (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995:154)

Thus, at the end of the parental relationship, fathers focus on the child as a constant and irrefutable reality. Although the authors argue that this presents new opportunities for fathers to 'seek new ways of being', fathers rarely take the opportunity to do this. Beck and Beck Gernsheim see the power in adult relationships being inverted at the point of separation; women have both the child and employment choices. This poses interesting questions for the study of lone fatherhood: how might men raising children alone negotiate responsibility for children and employment choices, and what are the implications for father's relationships with the non-resident parent?

While contemporary mothers may have more employment choices than the preceding generation, women's employment opportunities are significantly constrained by responsibility for children, and mothers experience significant ambivalence around paid work and the demands of family life. (Skold, 1988) Further, as Smart and Neale (1999)

point out, this account of father's reactions at the point of separation and divorce does not account for the disparity between the *'perception* of a child as a provider of permanent unconditional love and the actuality of parent-child relationships'.(1999a:18) Raising children requires the investment of time, energy and emotions. It is, above all, work, (even if it is not always acknowledged as such). (Ribbens, 1994; Ruddick, 1990; Boulton, 1983) There are, then, both physical and emotional consequences and implications inherent in responsibility for raising children. We need to consider what this means for fathers, and the implications for men raising children alone.

Gendered identities and father involvement

As discussed in the previous section, fathers are not generally assumed to have the 'instinctive' feelings and behaviours that are taken for granted in analyses of motherhood and mothering. Thus, men do not need to be seen as 'nurturing' parents in order to be seen as perfectly adequate fathers. (Backett, 1982, 1987) Many writers therefore argue that although fathers may be capable of nurturing behaviours, fatherhood nevertheless requires a process of 'learning', or, as Lupton and Barclay (1997) argue, 'mastery of action.' [3]Thus, motherhood is still portrayed as primarily instinctual, and mothers are assumed, (even if they are not 'experts' themselves) to be able to combine 'instinctive' knowledge with 'expert' information and thus accommodate their maternal status:

> 'While women are also encouraged to seek out information about pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, motherhood is still commonly seen as more essentially a part of femininity, not as a split from womanhood as fatherhood may sometimes be split from manhood. Men and women, therefore, are negotiating parenting arrangements in a context in which it is still considered that the mother is more important to her child's welfare than the father and 'instinctively' possesses a greater capacity for nurturance.' (Lupton and Barclay (1997:147)

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[3] This is not to say that mothers are always assumed to 'know' everything, rather that their skills build on what is learned throughout childhood through socialisation processes, and that learning is consolidated 'on the job'. (Campion, 1997)

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Motherhood, then, is not only portrayed as being rooted in instinct, but as part of femininity, being a mother is a 'natural' phenomena for women, and certainly not one that would be expected to threaten women's social identities. Lupton and Barclay argue that the same is not true for fathers: 'fatherhood' may be split from 'manhood', and so not incorporated into a coherent whole. The question, then, is not only how men make the transition to parenthood, and for the fathers in this study, to lone parenthood, but also what are the processes involved in the assimilation of a fathering identity into men's social identities?

The separation of 'manhood' from fatherhood' that Lupton and Barclay identify has been an influential idea in debates around fathers and fatherhood, primarily in terms of its impact on men. One result has been in the emergence of the notion that both masculinity itself, and consequently fatherhood (as an expression of masculinity) is 'in crisis'. (Burgess, 1997; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996) Some sociological writers, echoing contemporary psychological theory, explain fathering behaviours as an expression of identity confusion.

We are invited to consider, for example, images of masculinity in contemporary society as evidence of identity confusion in boys and men, (O'Donnell and Sharpe, (2000:113) while Trefor Lloyd suggests the need to counter cultural stereotypes in the popular media, with its tendency to depict fathers as playful or incompetent, heroes or villains. (Lloyd, 1995)

Nevertheless, intimacy between fathers and children is now commonly portrayed as having a 'humanizing and civilizing effect on men themselves'. (Jamieson, 1998:45) It is, however, not possible or desirable to separate analyses of family and gender from the social conditions in which they exist. Indeed, some writers argue that the concept of 'masculinity' obscures the real questions about gender(ed) relationships.

'Instead of questioning whether men should change their behaviour, a debate has been constructed around ideas of men 'wrestling with the meaning of masculinity' as 'domination' is seen as an aspect of masculinity, rather than something men

simply do. Even practice-based analyses of masculinity find it hard to avoid constructing masculinity as some kind of thing-in-itself.' (Collier, 2001:538-539)

We need, then, to consider fatherhood from a viewpoint in which both social and economic change is acknowledged, while attempting to avoid the reification of 'masculinities' as an over-arching explanation for what men do as fathers. Studies of fatherhood reflect a diversity of men's fathering practices, and the negotiation of fatherhood takes place in historically and culturally diverse settings. (McKee and O'Brien, 1982) Moreover, there is no one unified model of 'good fatherhood' that men can follow, and, in common with broader aspects of gender relations, father's relationships to families are 'likely to undergo yet more change, most of it unplanned and unpredictable'. (Whitehead, 2002:155)

As the following chapters show, lone fatherhood for men in this study was always the result of unplanned and frequently unpredictable change both in their own lives and in wider social structures and processes. Moreover, it was also, by definition and in practice, a gendered experience. That is, men raising children alone were influenced both directly and indirectly by discourses of power, 'appropriate' behaviours, feelings and emotions, and the way in which they constructed gender difference. Nevertheless, gender identity is not a fixed characteristic of men and women: as the sociologist Steven Seidman argues, 'There is no core gender identity based on common psychological dispositions, cultural values, or social positioning that neatly marks off women from men.' (Seidman, 1998:264)

However, as mentioned above, satisfaction with the gendered role of fathering has been linked with 'secure' gender identities. (Lamb, 1979; Dollahite, Hawkins and Brotherson, 1997) How then might a gendered identity be understood in relation to men's solo fathering experiences? Seidman argues that the contemporary discourses and social practices that position women and men as 'unitary gendered selves.... do not mirror an objective reality, nor do they engender mutually exclusive masculine and feminine selves.' However, through the production of social norms and cultural codes,

and their absorption into language and social practices, the lives of men and women are shaped by their meanings. Thus, he argues that:

'We imagine ourselves in their images; if they do not serve as mirrors of ourselves, they function as templates in relation to which we fashion ourselves. Although social forces conspire to shape our lives in the image of these models, and although we often describe ourselves by these gender simulations, our psychic and social lives lack the coherence of the model.' (Seidman, 1998: 260-265)

Contemporary fatherhood, then, is seen to be 'changing', in the context of wider social and economic change, and 'transformations' in human relationships and understandings of gender (ed) identities. Although the precise nature of these changes remains a contested area, the consequences of change differ for men and women, (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) especially after separation or divorce. This is particularly so at the intersection of employment choice and constraint, and responsibility for children. (Moss and Deven, 1999; McKee, Bowlby and Gregory, 2001) Moreover, there is disagreement about the extent of gendered differences in men and women's capacity for nurturing. (Biller, 1993)

Consideration of the extent to which 'manhood' is separated from 'fatherhood' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) or inherently essentialist views of motherhood suggest the need to explore the dynamics of gendered identities in lone father families. Nevertheless, 'gender' is not straightforward; if, as Seidman (1998) suggests, unitary gender categories function as templates for gendered selves, there are strong implications for men raising children alone. These include the way in which fathers might negotiate around gendered identity, how they perceive the template for contemporary (if, indeed, one exists) fatherhood, and the impact that these have on lone father's perspectives. [4]

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[4] Although it is possible to argue that there is a political template for 'good' fatherhood, the extent to which this might accord with men's actual experiences remains a contested issue.

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Gendered identities might then be seen as the product of the interaction between contemporary discourses and social practices.[5] Moreover, this analysis may be extended beyond notions of 'primary socialisation' that are characteristic of earlier sociological and psychological analyses. The domestic setting, for example, is only one site of the development and negotiation of identity, but it is also one which may constrain opportunities for exposure to external interactions. (Jamieson, 1998)

These constraints are instrumental in binding day to day domestic tasks with gendered identities and the 'taken for granted assumptions that surround and arise out of their performance'. (Morgan, 1996:75) For Morgan, 'gender may be understood in terms of difference or in terms of inequality, while 'family' obscures, but also constructs and modifies gender. He argues that we should conceptualise gender as 'a process rather than a thing'. Gender identities, though, are continuous with 'wider constructions and understandings of gender identities ...fleshed out or given substance through their anchorage in domestic identities'. (1996:71-74) Morgan argues that gender is best understood as a process; that is people 'do' gender rather than 'have' gender. Thus, instead of expressing notions of the family in structural or institutional terms, we ought to think of actions as 'family practices'. This notion of fluidity allows for a more open-ended understanding of both gender and the family, and the sometimes-contradictory nature of both.

Morgan suggests that care should be taken not to allow sociological analyses to obscure the nature of gender 'difference' or inequalities, arguing that 'key terms', or the language of social science, may be used in ways that conceal differences. One example of this is the use of the term 'parenting', which, Morgan argues, 'emphasises the work of parents rather than their formal statuses', and, moreover, 'smooths over gender differences'. (1996:78) This observation touches on one of the most contested areas of research into 'the family' and 'parenting', which extends beyond epistemological questions into questions of both meanings and understandings in gender(ed) activities.

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[5] It could be argued that policy attempts to 'involve men in fatherhood' also include attempts to intervene in men's identities or sense of self

Writers in the field of parenting research rarely differentiate between 'fatherhood' and 'fathering', although these differences are clearly significant. 'Fatherhood' and 'fathering' are both used to describe the biological fact of 'being a father', while there are no dictionary definitions of 'fathering' (or, for that matter, 'mothering'). However, the conflation of 'woman' with 'mothering', means that 'mothering', as discussed in the previous sections, not only *conveys* a range of cultural assumptions and constructions, but also frequently *defines* gendered experience, as Morgan's analysis suggests. 'Fathering', although it is sometimes used as a term to describe male parenting behaviour, is not conflated with *caring* for children as 'motherhood' and 'mothering' is. 'Fathering' may nevertheless express both the biological fact of fatherhood, and the work of *actively caring* for children, and this is the meaning that I take throughout this thesis.

At the same time, some feminist writers have been highly critical of the notion that only mothers can 'do' mothering, a notion which is underpinned by the language of caring which positions women and mothers as carers. Silva argues that 'mothering' (as opposed to motherhood) is a more useful term in relation to analyses of women's social relationships with their children, (1996:12) as it 'widens the definition of mother to encompass the active endeavour of caring labour.' If 'mothering' is active caring work, the 'active endeavour of caring labour' may be usefully employed to describe the activity of fathering. Indeed, Dollahite, Hawkins and Brotherson (1997) extend this definition, describing the caring work of being a father as 'generative fathering', or 'fatherwork'. These ideas are examined in more depth in the penultimate section of this chapter.

Fatherhood: the political and economic context

Fathering (and mothering) takes place across public and private boundaries and spaces. These distinctions are not fixed, however; as Morgan notes, 'Supposed overlaps between public/private, men/women and work/home are not complete, fixed, or unambiguous'. (Morgan, 1996:81) In the context of men's interactions with immediate family members (children and partners) however, there are several important areas

16

where 'public' and 'private' are both situated, and overlapping, in ways that may have a particular impact on men's experience. Public representations of fatherhood were alluded to in the previous section, and in the current section, three aspects of contemporary constructions of fatherhood which have been highly visible in the public domain, are examined.

In the first, high profile media campaigns implying that no child is 'safe' are coupled with claims that childhood itself is 'in crisis'. (Davis and Bourhill, 1997) Nevertheless, children's 'rights' remain a contested area, (Scraton, 1997) while political and ideological debate has focused on 'absent' fathers and their financial responsibilities, or 'deficiency' perspectives of fatherhood, (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) and the (re) emergence of debates which were very much a feature of the 1980's and 90's around 'father absence' and youth crime. (See, for example, Morgan, 1995; Murray, 1994,1990; Dennis and Erdos, 1992) However, the nature of 'good' fatherhood is less clear, although the political father is constructed as a man who both provides for his children (before and after divorce) and is also 'involved' in family life.

Further, as Lloyd (1995) notes, men may be perceived or portrayed as either inadequate/incompetent or unsafe as providers of care for children, (although representations of 'new' men are not uncommon). However, essentialist views of women as 'naturally' better at caring for children (especially young children) may mean that it is 'but a short step to see men in general as ill-equipped, or deficient for the task of caring for young children'. (Cameron et.al., 1999:12) Nevertheless, there is some evidence that male abusers may deliberately seek out access to children, and that screening may be inadequate to counter the tactics that are employed to gain this access. (Barker et.al., 1998) The whole issue of men's safety in the context of contact and relationships with children has implications for men raising children alone, impacting on both public and private life.

This thesis is not based on a study of domestic violence, nor do I want to suggest that the lone fathers in this study were perpetrators of abuse of women or children. Nevertheless, the second issue is one that cannot be completely ignored, because it is

not only bound up with public representations of fatherhood, but also inextricably linked with the policy response to the perceived 'problem' of non-resident fathers. (Lewis, 2002; Collier, 2001) Relationship break down may by definition involve highly troubled relationships with partners, and conflict may be a universal feature of divorce. (Richards, 1999) There is no evidence to suggest that lone father's experiences are an exception to this. (Barker, 1994; Greif 1985; O'Brien, 1984; Mendes 1976).

In the context of post-separation fatherhood, divorce is much more likely to be initiated by women than men, (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998) and men's violence to women is linked with relationship breakdown, (Bradshaw and Millar 1991) while a more recent study suggests that fathers may be reluctant 'to acknowledge or admit violent behaviour'. (Bradshaw et. al., 1999:29) One in four mothers in Smart and Neale's (1999a) study of post divorce parenting had experienced sustained and/or destructive violence. Domestic violence, primarily perpetrated by men, is linked with the abuse of children (Mullender and Morley, 1994); while Hooper shows that children may be more vulnerable to sexual abuse from both their fathers and other men in the post divorce context. (Hooper, 1994) The evidence then suggests that in some circumstances, fathers may not be 'safe' carers for children. (Hester and Radford, 1996)

The third 'public face' of fatherhood concerns politicised father and men's right's groups, which have been highly influential in the implementation of legislation affecting post-separation parenting in the U.K., particularly the father's rights group Families Need Fathers (FNF). Although FNF now increasingly adopt the language of 'parenting' (rather than fatherhood), (for example, Secker and FNF, 2001; see also Harne and Radford, 1994) fathers' and men's rights groups continue to depict men as disadvantaged in comparison with women post divorce or separation.

There is, then, a need to consider the impact of these public and political representations of fatherhood on men's perceptions of their parenting. While 'rights based' arguments have received less prominence during recent years, and have been balanced by political

attempts to get fathers 'involved' in parenting, as discussed above, the father's rights lobby has, both historically and currently[6], a direct interaction with the policy interface.

Although the language and rhetoric of 'men's rights' is less overt than in the early 1990's, father's rights – based claims are increasingly accepted as given in both policy and practice. In the political context there has been a proliferation of organisations aiming to 'reshape' men's understandings of the nature of fathering and family commitments. (Collier, 2001) These tend to imply that 'fatherhood' is amenable to the manipulation of both the context of men's parenting, and *content* of normative prescriptions for 'good' fatherhood.[7]

There is, then, a need to consider both the extent, and the nature of 'new' fatherhood, in the context of somewhat contradictory evidence. In the context of day to day parenting, the involvement of contemporary fathers with their children is counterbalanced by the practical and emotional work that mothers do. Fathers may, for example, take a substantial share of caring for children, (particularly in dual earner households), but mothers retain responsibility for organising childcare. (Burgess, Clarke and Cronin, 1997)

In the political context, it has been argued that the 'new' ideology of the 'new' fatherhood is composed of 'competing and contradictory strands'. (Smart and Neale, 1999b) Smart and Neale cite the tensions between the psychoanalytic approach which suggests that boys in female headed lone parent households cannot become 'properly masculine' without a male role model, and New Right arguments which suggested that, without fathers, lack of discipline would result in an exaggeration of boy's masculinity.

According to the New Right perspective, such a boy would become 'a barbarian with no sense of responsibility.' (See, for example, Morgan, 1995) However, the main argument of the Father's Rights movement was that 'men could be just as good at

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[6] The recent Home Office funded FNF publication 'For the Sake of the Children' (Secker/FNF 2001) suggests that professionals work from the presumption that the mother needs protecting, even when she has been abusive or initiated a 'domestic incident'.

caring for children as women, and that the principles of sex equality demanded that they should have just as much right to the residence of children on divorce as mothers.' Thus, even contradictory positions on fatherhood 'seem to constitute an ideological whole which valorises fatherhood no matter what form it actually takes.' (Smart and Neale, 1999b: 123)

The authors argue that 'new' fatherhood' is thus an 'ideal and undifferentiated social phenomenon', comprising of four elements. The first is fathers as providers of masculine identity, (which Smart and Neale argue is a highly regressive stance), the second as enforcers of patriarchal power (reactionary and backward looking); the third as carriers of rights (self interested, individualised power) and the fourth as sharers of responsibilities, which is a collective, potentially progressive stance. (Smart and Neale, 1999b: 123)

Nevertheless, a fourth form of fatherhood has no political underpinnings, namely, fatherhood that is genuinely involved and equitable, entailing both shared care, shared responsibility for children and shared 'masculine privileges'. The four elements of 'new' fatherhood that the authors identify are, as they state, commonly invoked as 'ideal types', which is a major criticism of much writing about fatherhood.

A key area of interest for the present study is how political constructions of fatherhood impact on the lived experience of men for whom the more typical pattern of post separation maternal care and primary, day to day responsibility for children have been reversed. As the following chapters show, although strands of each 'ideal type' that Smart and Neale identify were discernible in lone father's accounts, as might be expected, no father neatly conformed to any single element of this account of 'New' fatherhood. This suggests that any attempt to explore *why* fathers do as they do needs to also include some exploration of the development of father's own fathering practices, and men's perceptions of this process.

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[7] The former includes, for example, European Union Parental Leave Directive (96/34) 'helping people to balance the demands of work and family life', while the latter includes Fathers Direct in the UK; see also Gavanas, 2002, for an international perspective.

Mothers and fathers, sameness and difference

Motherhood, then, is clearly under pressure, both politically and ideologically. Nevertheless, it remains central to the debate around paternal involvement. In addition to the political and ideological arguments around fathers rights has been the emergence of arguments that fathers are constrained by maternal expertise, which has 'deskilled' and marginalised men as providers of childcare. (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996) Moreover, the mere presence of a mother may limit the responsibility that men take for children. How might fathers experience these contradictions? While Biller (1993) argues that maternal and paternal roles have more similarities than differences, namely to protect, nurture, and care for children, the question of similarity and difference remains a highly contested issue.

Some writers have argued that nurturing, caring fatherhood might require men to do the kind of work that women do in relation to their children. (Ruddick, 1990; Silva, 1996) This perspective has been criticised as one that does not facilitate the development of men's relationships with their children based on their own masculine identities. (Burgess, 1997) However, as discussed in the previous section, men's masculine identities have been central in the growth of 'new father' ideologies, and the most (potentially) progressive stance in which fathers genuinely share responsibilities has been conflated with rights-based ideologies. (Smart and Neale, 1999b)

The notion of fixed gender(ed) identities is problematic, because it detracts from focusing on children as requiring nurturing and care. Nevertheless, it follows the contemporary logic of father 'involvement', which suggests that fathers need to 'learn' to be good fathers (and that this might be prescribed by policy) and that fathers cannot 'mother', although (or because) mothers are seen as 'natural' carers.

However, if gender is understood, as Morgan suggests, as something that people 'do', it is possible to analyse fathering and mothering as two facets of (caring) parenting practices. So some fathers might demonstrate qualities traditionally associated with women's mothering, (Gerson, 1997) while some mothers have stronger links with paid work, for example. (Dienhart, 1998) The notion that children 'need' mothers is

21

embedded in both policy and practice, but this does not validate arguments about biological difference and propensity to care. What is important, however, is to explore ways in which men and women can meet children's needs in the context of changing family structure, and across parenting environments.

The 'ideology of intensive mothering' is embedded in both law and social policies. (Arendell, 2000). 'Good' mothering is dominated by ideologies in which maternal care is seen as child-centred and exclusive, requiring sensitivity, responsiveness, and success. (Ribbens, 1994). Children's emotional and physical dependence can engender close relationships and be uniquely rewarding for mothers; nevertheless, the demands of caring for a dependent child may also be experienced as a burden. (Boulton, 1983) Seen in this context, notions that are embedded in popular perceptions of motherhood, (for example that women find childrearing 'easier' than men), become highly questionable.

Moreover, father's perceptions of their caring activities is a significant factor in the amount of caring that they do, (Burghes, 1997) while other evidence suggests, as discussed in the previous sections, that fathers' relationships with their children are qualitatively different from the relationships that mothers and children have. We should not, therefore, assume that fathers' caring is the same as mothers' caring, but neither can we assume that gender(ed) caring is a fixed phenomenon. Moreover, as Gerson points out,

> "Equal' does not necessarily mean 'identical', but it does imply that fathers shoulder a fair and equitable share of the work of childrearing.' (Gerson, 1997:37)

Fathers' understandings of their children's needs and requirements for care are central to any analysis of fathering. Concepts of children as needing care and protection are highly dependent on how children and childhood are constructed, (see, for example, Campion, 1995; Jenks, 1982) and maternal responses develop in response to this understanding. The feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick argues that mothering is made

through the constitutive activity of caring. Further, while preservation of children's lives is the 'central, invariant aim of maternal practice',

> 'Maternal responses are complicated acts that social beings make to biological beings whose existence is inseparable from social interpretations. Maternal practice begins with a double vision – seeing the fact of biological vulnerability as socially significant and as demanding care.' (Ruddick, 1990:18-19)

Ruddick goes on to argue that the demand to 'preserve life' is rapidly supplemented by a second demand to nurture the emotional and intellectual growth of the child. This second demand is culturally and historically specific in a way that 'preservation of life ' is not. Further, the concept of 'mother' is dependent on the existence of the concept of 'child', which is also historically, socially and culturally specific.

So, although children exist everywhere, maternal practices may not; even amongst mothers there may be disagreement as to appropriate maternal responses. Moreover, mothers are not always committed to their children's protection and nurturance; in Ruddick's words, this commitment 'is far more voluntary than people like to believe.' (Ruddick 1990:22) Ruddick's central thesis is that maternal work is work that can be taken on by both men and women:

> 'Biology' is not fixed: we have no idea of the potentialities and limitations of male and female bodies in a society free of gender stereotypes and respectful of female humans'. (1990:41)

Mothering, then, is work that transcends gender, and the biological fact of giving birth needs to be conceptually separated from mothering work, which involves active commitment to protection and nurturing. It is the act of committing to these goals that is important; thus mothering is a corollary of the development of maternal thinking in response to children's needs. Because this thinking develops in response to children's needs, maternal work does not have to be confined to biological mothers. (Ruddick, 1990:47-51) So although caring relationships generally involve women, and have strong associations with the private sphere of 'home' and 'family', (Graham, 1983) it is

possible to see, as Morgan argues, how 'family relationships may themselves become the source of change within the wider gender order':

'Individuals within family situations are capable of evaluating and responding imaginatively to the forces and processes that confront them. Gender is not wholly 'given'. Insofar as family relationships constitute one major arena where women and men meet and interact, it is not surprising that it is here also that some people may seek to bring about modifications in their day-to-day workings of gendered themes. A minority of men head single-parent households and elsewhere women and men may work together in order to develop non-sexist or less sexist patterns of childrearing.' (Morgan, 1996:79-80)

Limited research evidence exists to suggest that in two parent (heterosexual) families, some women and men are negotiating 'equal and interchangeable' sharing in both childcare and the domestic sphere. (Dienhart, 1998) There is further evidence that as women increasingly move into the workplace, men show an increased willingness to participate in childrearing, although in two parent families, women remain primarily responsible for both household tasks and childcare. (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996; Graham, 1993; Burghes et. al., 1997; Warin et.al., 1999)

Thus, although there is clearly a *potential* for 'modifications' in the 'day to day workings of gendered themes', (Morgan, 1996) evidence for concrete changes in day to day gendered practices is, as I have said, somewhat contradictory. In the following section, some of the key themes in research around parenting, paid work, domestic labour and childcare are examined, and consideration is given to the implications of existing evidence for the experience and perceptions of men raising children alone.

Divisions of labour in two parent families

Despite the changes that have taken place both in the way in which families are structured, (Robinson and Smith, 1993) and in women's labour force participation, there is evidence, as mentioned in the previous sections, that in two parent families the situation is less than egalitarian when the experiences of men and women are compared.

24

The *distribution* of domestic labour between men and women remains relatively unchanged, and despite women's increased participation in the labour market, women's paid work is relatively disadvantaged. (O'Brien, 1995; Hantrais and Letablier, 1996) Moreover, unemployment levels are not only higher for women in almost every European state, but are likely to be underestimated, because of women's eligibility for earnings related benefits. (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996)

Women's relative disadvantage in the labour market when paid work is combined with responsibility for children, (in terms of shorter hours and lower earnings) is manifest in an overall loss of lifetime earnings. (Pascall, 1997) Changes in women's labour force participation have not been accompanied by a similar 'revolution' in the division of domestic labour and childcare, (Struening, 2002) and although declining fertility rates mean that there are fewer children, this does not mean that less time and energy are expended on childcare. Contemporary constructions of both childhood and adequate childcare mean that a modern family may demand as much time and energy as a Victorian family, where expectations around, for example, the attention that individual children received, were very different. (Fox Harding, 1996:31)

While it is difficult to measure historical shifts in paternal involvement, existing research into the gendered experience of caring has tended to suggest that it is women who make major adjustments to their lives to accommodate paid work, domestic and caring responsibilities, while men make only minimal accommodation. (Backett 1982) Further, most people, both men and women, as mentioned above, tend to experience the division of household labour and caring responsibilities along 'traditional' gendered lines. (Warin et.al, 1999) Moreover, some writers have argued that the 'performance culture' undervalues men's parenting commitments, and that to overcome temporal demands requires a very deliberate effort on the part of both men and women. (Dienhart and Daly, 1997)

Further to the notion that caring is essentially 'women's work', the arena in which caring takes place (the home) has been seen as female territory. Female psychology, female territory, and caring have thus become inextricably connected. In discussions of

the role of fathers, a recurring theme is that of maternal expertise, which, it is often argued, undermines men's abilities to take on childrearing tasks. (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996; Burgess 1997)

Moreover, the conflation of mothering and the domestic sphere into ideologies of 'women's work' may mystify domestic tasks, thus providing justification for men's absence from this arena. (Speakman and Marchington, 1999) The cultural prescription for gender(ed) work is highly dependent on the way in which societies perceive both mothers and children. How does the construction of the emotional and practical commitment of mothers to their children affect father's caring, and their involvement in maintaining the domestic environment?

A substantial body of research suggests that father's involvement in parenting is strongly linked with their labour market position. (Lewis, 2001; Warin et. al., 1999) It has been suggested that this relationship means that a father's *willingness* to adopt a 'caring identity' may be more likely to relate to their labour market position than for women. (Smart and Neale, 1999a) For fathers raising children alone, labour market position was undoubtedly a highly significant variable, and is further explored in Chapter 5.

However, longitudinal evidence from the National Child Development Study, (NCDS) does not support claims that there have been fundamental shifts in father's participation in childcare. For example, in 1965 NCDS sweep, six out of ten fathers were described as 'playing an equal part' in managing their children, while in 1991, half of fathers were said to share equally in the general care of their children. (Burghes, Clarke and Cronin, 1997)

There are also differences in mothers and father's reporting: for example, where both parents worked full time, 72% of father and 66% of mothers said that care was 'shared equally', while 24% of fathers and 32% of mothers said that care was mainly the mother's responsibility. However, in the case of specific aspects of childcare, 'teaching good behaviour' or 'discipline' was much more likely to be shared between parents. (Ferri and Smith, 1996)

In terms of domestic chores, the evidence is that women are overwhelmingly responsible for cooking, shopping and cleaning. In dual earner households, the only area where fathers have more responsibility is for household repairs and DIY. (Ferri and Smith 1996, in Burghes, Clarke and Cronin 1997:61) Moreover, work such as shopping for and preparing food, is delineated along gendered divisions of labour. Men's involvement in these tasks is seen as 'helping', in the context of the perception that this is 'women's work'. (Charles and Kerr, 1999) Moreover, attitudes to technology in the home are also gender-differentiated, and this may create opportunities for men to avoid some aspects of housework. (Speakman and Marchington, 1999)

Some writers, however, have conceptualised a more egalitarian approach to childcare and household tasks as having the potential to both extend women's choices, and promote richer experiences for men. In a study of dual earning American couples, Coltrane argues that parenting is 'in transition', and there is a weakening of the normative prescription that men are only (or mainly) 'breadwinners'. As fathers become more attached to parenting, and thus take more responsibility for routine childcare, a significant minority will move beyond the role of 'household helper'.

Coltrane found a clear relationship between men's participation in domestic tasks and the hours that they were employed. The hours that their wives were employed were of equal importance, however, as were wives with less 'traditional' attitudes, and wives who earned a greater percentage of the family income. Although the variables differed for childcare, participation in housework and childcare were the strongest predictors for each other. (Coltrane1996:165)

In a study of 130 American men (again, in two parent families), Gerson found that men's expectations as they grew up did not necessarily conform to reality once they became fathers. (Gerson, 1993; 1997) Contrary to their previous expectations, about a third of the sample became highly involved or 'generative' fathers. Of this group, a further third became 'equal' or 'primary parents'. While the majority of fathers in the sample did not follow this route, (indeed, some men became *more* adherent to a

'breadwinning' role), Gerson suggests that for those who were transformed into 'generative' fathers, three social conditions were particularly significant.

The first was a commitment to an egalitarian relationship. This was often linked with a partnership with a 'work committed' woman, and fathers in these relationships developed not only a commitment to the relationship, but also 'a moral commitment to fairness and gender justice'. (Gerson, 1997:41)

The second social condition was linked with paid work, and has two distinct strands. The first of these occurs when men have limited work opportunities, and look for other sources of 'meaning and fulfilment'. These fathers may see their children as a source of a primary identity (or even a vicarious identity). The second work-related condition is when men choose more satisfying paid work, and begin to see time, rather than money, as 'the essential ingredient in good fathering.'

The third social condition that Gerson identifies occurs when men are directly 'involved' with their offspring from the beginning, or undertake some other form of childcare. In these conditions, satisfying involvement with children may lead fathers to 'discover' new skills. (Gerson, 1997:41-44)

However, assessment of 'father involvement' is also susceptible to the perceptions of participants in family life. In a study of two parent families in Scotland, Backett (1982) found that the perceptions of spouses were very important in evaluations of father involvement. Moreover, these evaluations varied over time and in different contexts, and were important in terms of maintaining a *belief* in the direct involvement of the father.

> 'for father involvement to be subjectively satisfactory it did not tend to be measured against some abstract set of behavioural ideals. It was negotiated and evaluated in terms of the paternal behaviour *perceived as appropriate by the spouses* within their own special situation at any one point in time'. (Backett, 1982:196, my emphasis)

Key themes, then, in studies of two parent families relate to both social conditions (primarily those relating to paid work) and the attitudes of men's partners. However, one of the most important variables in men's participation in both parenting and domestic work is that men themselves are prompted to *physically undertake* practical caring and domestic tasks, and that abstract ideals about 'good' fatherhood may not make very much difference to men's behaviours in these contexts.

For men raising children alone, however, there is by definition no resident partner to mediate men's relationship with either children or the practical chores involved in maintaining the domestic environment. As discussed in the previous sections, although 'breadwinning' represents a potent ideology of fatherhood, there is no clear ideology of nurturing fatherhood. As the following chapters illustrate, for men raising children alone, practical responsibility for childcare and day to day domestic tasks was highly significant in men's conceptions of the possibilities for, and meanings of, fatherhood.

Lone father families, paid work and domestic responsibilities

The relative lack of differentiation between parents and children in discussions of 'the family' is linked to notions of interdependence in 'the family unit'. Difficulties and problems have historically been seen as problems of 'the family' rather than related to the behaviour of individuals. (Hardy and Crow, 1991; Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz, 1977) This has particular implications for lone father headed families, in terms of separating issues that are connected with the gender of the primary carer (see the discussion above) and the conceptualisation of (female) lone parenthood as a social problem.

On major difficulty encountered in this exploration is variation in definitions of 'family', both across national contexts and within governments. (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996) The concept of 'family' implies a 'natural' grouping which does not necessarily accord with social reality, (Smart and Neale, 1999a; Edholm, 1991) and, as Morgan

(1996) points out, obscures issues around the construction of gender and relationships in households.

There is a clear political preference in the UK (and elsewhere) for two parent families, including a highly pro-marriage stance as part of wider attempts to 'reconstruct' fatherhood. (For example, see Gavanas 2002) In the UK, the explicit aim of Government is to strengthen marriage as 'the surest foundation for raising children'. (Supporting Families, 1998:4.8) Nevertheless, representations of the idealised (married, two (heterosexual) parents) model of family life does not accord with social change. A fourfold increase in births outside marriage between 1974 and 1998 (ONS, 2000), means that the number of lone parents has increased proportionately.

There is evidence that, while cohabitation may now be very similar to marriage in many respects, it differs in that cohabitation is less durable than marriage. (McRae, 1999) moreover, there are specific issues for lone father families relating to their unmarried status. (Kiernan and Estaugh, 1993) Unmarried fathers have not historically had their legal rights as fathers enshrined in law, (even if both parents registered the birth.) The Family Law reform Act 1987 allowed fathers to apply for a parental responsibility order, and extended the rights of biological fathers to enter their names on the register of births without the consent of the mother (although they needed a court order to do this.)

This legislation placed unmarried fathers on a more equal footing with married fathers. The Children Act 1989 enabled unmarried fathers to acquire parental responsibility with the agreement of the mother, and to obtain contact orders if his children were in care. (Burghes, Clarke and Cronin, 1997:35) Nevertheless, there is some evidence that unmarried fathers have been unaware of this right, (McRae, 1993) and from April 2003, following sustained lobbying by father and men's rights groups, unmarried fathers will automatically acquire parental responsibility if the birth is jointly registered with the mother.

Cohabitation breakdown is now the fastest growing source of lone parent families. (Marsh and McKay, 1993; Marsh, Ford and Finlayson, 1997) Lone motherhood (and

fatherhood) because of relationship breakdown is, however, relatively new, although as a proportion of all children, those raised by both parents 'was probably at its peak for the generation born during the period between the end of the Second World war and 1960.' (Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998)

Female lone parenthood has historically been seen as problematic. (Ford and Millar, 1998; Friedman, 1995) Women with children living in lone parent households are at high risk of poverty and consequent social exclusion. (Lewis et. al., 2000; Finlayson and Marsh, 1998; Oppenheim and Harker, 1996), while the conceptualisation of lone parenthood as a fiscal, moral and social problem has historically been linked with the demonisation of lone motherhood. (Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Morgan, 1995)

In the previous sections, some of the elements of the political and ideological framework for contemporary fatherhood were outlined. What seems clear from many of these debates is that the problematic nature of 'traditional' fatherhood is revealed after divorce or separation. We need, then, to consider the implications that this might have for men who have primary responsibility for children, particularly in the context of the notion that men 'rediscover' fatherhood at the point of separation or divorce. (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995; Smart and Neale, 1999a, 1999b)

This study aims to explore some of the issues around the contemporary constructions of fatherhood, and the situations of men raising children alone. As discussed in the previous sections, 'change' in fatherhood and fathering behaviours needs to be evaluated in the context of political, economic and ideological change in the way that fatherhood is constructed. Lone father research is of particular interest in this respect, because it illustrates change over time in the way in which fatherhood is conceptualised in ideology and policy.

Assumptions around normative prescriptions for childcare were embedded in early lone father research, when the problematic of lone fatherhood was primarily perceived as 'mother absence'. (George and Wilding; 1972; Murch, 1973)

The contemporary ideology of fatherhood includes the notion that fathers may be excluded from relationships with their children after divorce or separation. Although the process of gaining primary responsibility for children may indeed be one in which fathers actively seek primary care of their children, (see, for example Rhoades, 2002;) it has not been possible to locate any study which specifically explores this issue. Men become lone fathers in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, lone father studies have sought to explain the ways in which men become lone parents, and include proportions of fathers who actively sought residence of their children.

Mendes (1976) defined the 32 lone fathers in her study as 'seekers' or 'assenters'– that is, men who were positively oriented to parenthood, and men who were reluctant lone fathers. O'Brien (1983, 1984) developed Mende's typology further, defining lone fathers as 'passive acceptors', 'hostile seekers', and 'conciliatory negotiators'.

Post separation and divorce lone fatherhood is, however, typically because the mothers are unable, or unwilling, to care for their children. When lone mothers lack resources, their children may experience decreased life-opportunities. This has meant that 'these linkages seem obvious and pre-given'. (Moore, 1996) While some features of men's lone parenting may be quite similar to women's in some respects, there are features of men's parenting experiences and structural positions that differ substantially from those of mothers.

While some men refute 'macho ' culture (Greif, 1985) carers in both paid and unpaid contexts are still predominantly female. Further, women may be resistant to expecting men to do 'feminine' work. (Speakman and Marchington, 1999; Coltrane, 1996) What are the implications of this for lone fathers?

Further, lone fathers are generally regarded in a more favourable light than their female counterparts. This view is supported by research findings which, for example, suggest that lone fathers generally have more 'community support' than lone mothers, (Greif, 1985:60) and are likely to be seen as a 'special case', more likely to be 'doing well' in doing what is taken for granted if done by a woman. (Barker, 1995:214)

This study will focus on the comparatively small numbers of fathers who have primary caring responsibility for their dependent children. While there has been a focus on lone mothers as a social problem both in policy terms (Speak et. al., 1997) and in terms of the effects of father absence (Dennis and Erdos, 1992) lone fathers have received less attention, possibly reflecting the fact that they constitute fewer than ten per cent of all lone parents. Nevertheless, just over six per cent of all fathers in Britain live alone with all or some of their biological children. (British Household Panel Study, 1992)

As discussed in the previous sections, research evidence suggests that models of fathers as either deficient and problematic, or involved and committed to their children, is an over-simplified perspective. Existing research indicates that most fathers fall between these two extremes, and that the amount of involvement that fathers have in caring for their children might be more accurately conceptualised as a continuum of care. However, research also suggests that in two - parent families, fathers are also able to avoid carrying out parenting tasks.

Further, after divorce or separation, some fathers have very limited relationships with their children (both quantitatively and qualitatively.). The main limitations of existing research into fathers and fathering is a tendency to be narrowly focused, failing to take into account the complexity of father's experience, and are generally limited to studies of what men do in two parent families. Running counter to this is the argument that many men who would otherwise 'choose' involved and caring fatherhood are prevented by social, cultural and political constraints from doing so.

These factors may facilitate fathers' relative freedom from responsibility for children in two - parent families, and may also act as barriers or constraints on fathers' post separation relationships with their children. There is evidence that fathers who want to maintain their relationships with their children after relationship breakdown may find that considerable effort is involved. (Gerson, 1993) This area, however, remains relatively unexplored.

Many questions arise from these debates. Relatively few men raise children alone, and existing evidence suggests that it may be difficult for men to do so, not only because of

social and cultural processes which mean that women are seen as 'natural' carers for children (particularly young children), but also because of a reluctance by men to take this kind of responsibility for their children. The traditional role of breadwinner may have been eroded by changes in patterns of employment, but research suggests that the belief that breadwinning is a father's role remains powerful enough to represent a serious dilemma for many men. (Warin et. al, 1999)

Chapter 2

Methodology

1. Summary of the project

During the latter decades of the twentieth century, and particularly during the 1990's, fatherhood came to the fore as an area of public debate and policy interest. The 1990 Child Support Act and the surrounding debates about fathers and men's rights contrasted sharply with historical perspectives on, and treatment of, lone motherhood and issues around raising children alone. Most of these debates focused on the moral and welfare aspects of lone motherhood, and the perception of lone parenthood as a 'social problem'. (Murray, 1994, 1996; Morgan, 1995)

The emergence of new claims around fatherhood, although often couched in the language of 'rights', and focused on men's financial responsibility to maintain their children, nevertheless had limited engagement with what fathers do in families. However, one emergent claim was that fathers were constrained by social, structural and cultural factors from becoming 'involved' parents. Moreover, it was argued that 'maternal mediation' was a primary source of men's perceived lack of engagement with their children. (Burgess, 1997) The study of lone fatherhood suggested itself as one way of exploring some of these issues. If the element of 'maternal mediation' is removed, how might men negotiate parenthood as primary carers, in a political climate in which lone motherhood was seen as profoundly problematic. These issues formed the basis of an examination of fatherhood in lone parent families, where men had primary responsibility for a dependent child or children.

The issues that I set out to explore included men's routes into post divorce and separation solo parenting, the processes involved in becoming the primary carer for children, the processes around paid work and unpaid domestic responsibility, and men's relationships with children, kin, and the wider community.

35

2. Sampling

2.1 Sample criteria

The following criteria were defined for the sample:

- Men who were the primary carer for least one child aged sixteen or younger

- Men who were not living with a partner

- Men who did not have shared care arrangements with the non-resident parent

2.1. a. Defining 'lone fatherhood'

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms 'lone fatherhood', 'solo parenting', 'men raising children alone' and 'men who are primary carers'. These terms describe the situation, and sometimes the activities, of fathers in the sample. I use these terms because 'lone fatherhood' is, in itself, a contested definition. For example, I found that many fathers who care for their children on a part-time basis, through regular contact visits, were self- defined as 'lone fathers', and that this definition was generally accepted by lone parent support groups and other fathers. While I agree that, to all intents and purposes, these men are caring for their children alone, their practical responsibility for care is not necessarily 'day to day care.'

The problematic issue of definition may be an outcome of issues raised as a consequence of the implementation of the 1991 Child Support Act. Where claims are made for child maintenance, the amount of time that the child(ren) spend with each parent is important in terms of the maintenance liability of the non-resident parent. These issues meant that I had to define 'lone fatherhood' in a way that was meaningful in terms of this study, while acknowledging that not all fathers would agree with my definition.

The 'official' definition of 'shared care' is that the non-resident parent has care of the qualifying child(ren) for 'not less than 104 nights in total during the 12-month period ending with the relevant week'. (Regulation 1(2) of the Child Support (MASC) Regulations 1992) However, this definition has caused some controversy, particularly

among fathers and men's rights groups, who argue that once a child reaches school age, for example, the amount of day to day parental care diminishes. It is argued that the person defined as the parent with care (PWC, usually the mother) may spend relatively little time actually physically in contact with, and caring for, a child during a school week.

Contested definitions of 'shared care' have primarily been linked with disputes around maintenance assessments. The emotional and time costs of preparing for, and facilitating, both children's attendance at school, and out of school activities, for example, tend to be ignored. Both of these may involve not only travel time, but also shopping, planning, and preparation time, all of which may happen when the child is at school, but nevertheless may be seen as an essential requirement of maintaining children's wellbeing on a day to day basis. So any attempt to measure the amount of time that either parent spends engaged in caring for their child(ren) post-divorce or separation may be difficult.

Concepts of 'shared care' may create some ambiguity around responsibility for children versus practical, day to day care, which is not necessarily the same. For example, in a recent survey, the lone parent's organisation Gingerbread defined lone fathers as men who had care of their children for at least 50% of the time. (Gingerbread 2001) However, how this worked in practice was not clear in terms of the division of caring tasks between parents.

Parenting in both dual and lone parent households thus requires an investment of time and energy in practical and emotional tasks that extend beyond the hours that the child is physically present, in planning, preparing and facilitating children's day to day lives. (Hertz and Ferguson, 1998; Ribbens, 1994; Piachaud, 1984) I therefore decided to base my definition on criteria defined by Barker, (1994). Barker (1994) defined lone fathers as: 'men who were single fathers, that is, who had the caring responsibilities for at least one child of 16 years or younger, and who were resident in households where no adult

women - kinfolk or non-kinfolk - were resident'. (Barker, 1994:34) This definition was extended to exclude fathers who had 'shared care' arrangements. [1]

2.1.b Developing the sample criteria

Existing research on lone fatherhood includes a wide range of experiences. Most studies have included some members of the sample who are widowers, while others are lone fathers because of divorce or separation. Lone fatherhood merits particular consideration in the contemporary policy context because men raising children alone are demonstrably 'involved' fathers; moreover, they are parenting across a range of social and economic contexts. Consideration of my research focus, the dynamics of post-divorce and separation fatherhood, and the somewhat different dynamics of bereavement,(See also Section 4.3) led me to decide to focus on lone fatherhood as an (albeit minority) contemporary family form, and as a facet of men's post divorce and separation parenting experiences.

I thus focused on men who were lone fathers because of divorce or separation, rather than men who had been widowed. Barker (1994) found that widowers may have very differing experiences during the period leading up to their subsequent lone fatherhood. Some fathers may have undertaken significant amounts of caring for their partners during a terminal illness, while others may have experienced a sudden bereavement. Although a sense of loss and mourning can also be a feature of divorced and separated lone father's lives, (O'Brien, 1984; Greif, 1985) the way in which widowers approach their solo parenting is mediated by their bereavement, as is their subsequent adjustment to, and satisfaction with, their lone parenting. (George and Wilding, 1972)

As I began my fieldwork, it became apparent that fathers who were also primary carers sometimes had far more complex caring responsibilities and experiences than my original criteria allowed. I subsequently decided to include a father who was caring for his two children, and an adult relative. This adult had a physical disability, and was reliant on the father in question for care. Although the relationship was mutually

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[1] O'Brien, 1984, pointed to the need to exclude men who had returned to their parent's home. Barker's definition means that this group was automatically excluded. Although several fathers had spent some time in their parent's homes after their separation, all were living independently with their children at interview.

38

supportive, it was, nevertheless, a relationship involving caring responsibilities, rather than one in which the 'other' adult was available to care for the children, which is implicit in Barker's definition.

However, some men felt that I was excluding an important group of non-resident fathers who were, despite their non-resident status, highly involved in their children's lives, and that by doing so, I was colluding in what some fathers believed to be a process of marginalisation of father's and men's issues post divorce and separation. While I agreed that it is important to consider men's experiences of fatherhood in the context of non-resident parenthood, there is a growing body of research in this area, to which a small-scale qualitative study was unlikely to make a useful contribution. (See, for example, Bradshaw et.al, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999a)

Further, I would suggest that non-resident fathers have had a 'voice', (particularly during the last three decades) through politicised father and men's rights groups, extensive media coverage, and studies such as the work cited above. Moreover, ongoing research continues to explore post divorce parenting. I was interested in exploring the way in which fathers who were in situations more comparable to lone mothers than non-resident parents negotiated the day-to-day work of doing lone fatherhood. However, some fathers remained unconvinced by these arguments. Nevertheless, by adopting rather narrow criteria for my sample, I was able to explore some of the specific aspects of men's post divorce and separation parenting, in which men were 'atypical' post divorce and separation parents, in that they were neither 'absent' fathers, 'non-resident parents', or partners in 'shared care'.

2.2 Methods of recruitment

Although fatherhood *per se* has become more visible in the policy domain in recent decades, as a group, lone fathers comprise around ten per. cent. of all lone parents. (BHPS; Ford and Millar, 1998) Their visibility in the general population remains low, and so sampling was purposive and opportunistic.

Previous British lone father studies (George and Wilding, 1972; Barker, 1994) have recruited fathers from the Department of Health and Social Security (subsequently the Department of Social Security) Child Benefit database.

This had the advantage of identifying men who, because they were primary carers for children, received Child Benefit, which is a universal benefit. Moreover, as a universal benefit, unlike some means-tested benefits, there is no stigma attached to claiming it, and it is therefore much more likely that it will be claimed.

Barker's respondents were exclusively recruited from this source, although George and Wilding also used information from Children's, Education, Health and Probation Departments in the East Midlands. (George and Wilding, 1972:14-15) O'Brien recruited from a range of referral agencies, including Gingerbread, advertisements, informal contacts and heads of local schools. (O'Brien, 1984:117)

Barker (1994) argues that the use of Child Benefit records minimises bias, and based his sample on a 3% random sample of Child Benefit recipients in the North East of England, from which a further random sample of 35 men were selected for interview. Thus, he argues, his own sample was 'probably the most representative sample of lone fathers in Britain of any used in social research'. (1994:36)

There are, however, some criticisms that may be made of this claim. For example, regional variations in the geography of gendered 'dominant work roles' in the UK impact on lone mother's experiences, and there are strong patterns of gendered orientations to work, which vary regionally. Duncan and Edwards argue that

> 'it is not just spatial divisions of labour that define women's roles, it is also people's own *gendered expectations*, negotiations and demands about what being a woman or a man is, and what they should do in consequence'. (Duncan and Edwards, 1999:202, my emphasis)

Gendered expectations of appropriate roles affect fathers as well as mothers, and suggests a need for a much larger study of patterns of lone fatherhood, in order to be able to claim that a sample is in any way nationally representative[2] [3]. In the context of Duncan and Edward's work, and men's adherence to 'breadwinning' identities (for example, Warin et. al. 1999) that I discussed in the previous chapter, I would

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[2] O'Brien (1984) also suggested the need for a national survey of lone fatherhood.
[3] It would, for example, be interesting to explore the geographical dimension of paid work and domestic labour for both lone fathers and men in two parent families.

question whether it is possible to have a truly 'representative' sample of lone fathers, certainly in a small-scale study. Nevertheless, one of the most interesting aspects of the characteristics of my final sample was the diversity of men's experiences, (despite striking consistencies in some father's accounts).

I therefore, as discussed above, chose potential participants on the basis of their parental status. Fathers were eventually recruited from a wide geographical area, including the Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West and South West England.

I produced a flyer to give to potential participants. This was circulated in several ways. Firstly, through family and health centres, and through colleagues and contacts in community settings. I also posted a request for potential participants via both the Gingerbread online notice board, and the online discussion group. This is a forum for lone parents, accessible to the general public, and frequently includes requests for information by both the media and the research community. About five months into my fieldwork, I interviewed a lone father who offered to post a flyer in his local Public house. Three fathers offered at interview to pass information about the project on to other men known to them who might be willing to participate. I also placed two advertisements in a local (county) newspaper.

At the outset, personal contacts included health visitors and community workers. Lone fathers are, as discussed, not an obviously identifiable group, and I had hoped to be able to locate potential participants who would otherwise be difficult to reach. This approach met with very limited success, because, as discussed in the following chapters, lone fathers often had no contact with health visitors or community groups. I had initially hoped that this approach would 'snowball', but the strategy was only partially successful, in that most of the fathers in the sample were not aware of any other men in their situation. Nevertheless, both my own networks, and those of friends and colleagues, continued to point to potential participants, although again with limited success.

My second approach, via the Internet, proved more fruitful. I was initially concerned that this approach would skew my sample in favour of fathers who were members of a

lone parent's support group.[4] However, in the event, only one respondent was a member of the group. Most of the men who responded to my request on the website had encountered it while 'browsing' for information about lone parenting.[5] This approach did, however, have the unintended consequence of eliciting two approaches from journalists representing national newspapers. Both were writing 'stories about fathers', and requested an interview with myself, and information about lone fathers who would be willing to be interviewed. Both requests were declined. (I return to issues of confidentiality in Section 5.2)

Approximately six months into my fieldwork, I was unable to locate further potential participants. It seems likely that this was due to a combination of factors, not least of which was that this period coincided with school summer holidays, and holiday plans meant that fathers were unable or unwilling to commit to a (potentially time-consuming) interview process. I therefore placed two advertisements in the local county press. This was the least successful (and most expensive) method of recruitment, yielding only one participant on each occasion. Nevertheless, the process began to 'snowball' after the second of these interviews, and I was able to recruit the final participants. [6]

2.3 The Sample

I interviewed 30 men raising children alone. Further details of the sample are provided in Appendix 1.

Each father completed a background questionnaire. This included details of fathers' ages, occupations, income and education. I also asked the ages of both fathers and their ex-partners when their first child was born. There were also questions about the age and sex of children, both those currently living in the lone father household, and any other children not living with the father. There were also questions about the length of

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[4] Lone fathers are slightly over-represented in Gingerbread's membership, at 11%, although, as discussed above, variations in definition, or in how fathers self-define their status, is likely to mean that not all of this sub-group would meet my criteria.
[5] I was also contacted by the ex-partner of one father who subsequently took part in the study.
[6] The final 'snowballing' phase was so successful that I could have substantially increased the total number of participants. However, I was coming to the end of my timetabled data collection period, and was unable to pursue all of these potential contacts.

time fathers had spent as lone parents, and their current status. (Married/divorced, married/separated, cohabiting/separated).

Further questions related to housing tenure, and the length of time that each father had lived at his current address, and race/ethnicity/nationality. The final questions related to the non-resident mother. These included questions about paid employment, geographical distance from the lone father household, and frequency of contact (if any) with the children living in the lone father household.

Father's ages ranged between 25 and 63 years, with the majority of the sample aged between 30 and 50 years. The sample thus reflected the overall pattern for men and fatherhood in the UK – that is, the older men are, the more likely it is that they will become fathers. (BHPS; Burghes et.al., 1997)

While most of the children living in lone father households were men's biological children, three fathers were raising stepchildren, (boys aged 9 and 3 respectively, and girls aged 10 and 13 years). All of the stepchildren were the biological children of the non-resident mothers. Eight fathers in the sample also had other children, who did not live with them, ranging in age from 4 to 32 years. Most of the children in the sample (n. 58) were aged 10 or younger when their father became their primary carer. (n.50) Nearly one third of the children (n.18) were aged 5 years or younger when their fathers became their primary carer, and these youngest children were divided equally into girls and boys. (n.9 and 9 respectively) Fathers had been lone parents for periods ranging from 8 months to 13 years.

At the time of interview, half of the fathers worked for an employer. There were no part – time employees. Three fathers were self-employed, one was in full-time education, and one other had recently retired. A profile of father's occupations and occupational status is included in Appendix 1.

- Nine fathers had no educational qualifications, but of these, two had received some work-based training in manual occupations, (although not in formal apprenticeships).

- Eleven had O-levels or basic vocational qualifications.

- Three fathers were educated to A-level, and two of these had a professional qualification.

- Two fathers had HND or equivalent qualifications

- Four fathers were educated to degree level, including one recent mature graduate

- One was a student

The sample consisted mainly of white fathers. (28) Two fathers identified themselves as Black African Caribbean. One father had a congenital disability.

3. Methods

3.1 Identifying appropriate methods

Much previous lone father research has involved large samples (for example, Greif, 1985; George and Wilding 1972) or highly structured interviews and/or questionnaires. (O'Brien, 1984; Greif, 1985) There are some limitations to these approaches: for example, George and Wilding felt that they had

> 'sacrificed depth for breadth...we have no way of knowing what the effects of the wide range of the questions were on the fathers' responses...we suspect that detailed practical questions may have added to the structured nature of the questionnaire and may well have had an inhibiting effect on fathers' responses'. (1972:21)

However, in order to focus on men's day to day fathering and lived experiences across public and private spaces, I considered qualitative methods the most appropriate.

Examination of existing research into fatherhood indicates that it is embedded in theoretical perspectives which are highly dependent on psychological and sociological understandings of, not only fatherhood and motherhood, but also the nature of 'the family'. I was concerned to explore how men negotiated in and around embedded assumptions about, and understandings of, fathering both in and 'outside' families, which for fathers in contemporary British society, appears to mean paid work, or 'breadwinning'.

Ribbens (1994) points to feminist concerns about the limitations of notions of 'public' and 'private' spheres, arguing that these concepts may,

> 'like the concept of the 'family'..be used *ideologically*, such that in using the concept we may implicitly be giving a sense of reality to what is in fact an ideological device'. (1994:29)

Nevertheless, if people themselves regard 'the family' as private, the effect of this on their actions must be taken into account in attempting to understand social life. Moreover, Ribbens argues that we also need to take account of social and historical constructions, one example of which is the way in which 'work' and 'family' have been ideologically separated by the division between public and private.

I wanted, therefore, to explore men's experiences in a way in which, while these ideological divisions were acknowledged, also sought to gain a holistic sense of lone fathers everyday lives, in which the importance of men's 'private' (fathering) lives was not diminished by the importance of the 'public' ideologies of fathers as workers and breadwinners.

Reinharz argues that 'interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher'. (Reinharz, 1992:19) In this extract, Reinharz is referring to feminist research with women, arguing that interviewing can be an 'antidote' both to ways in which women's ideas have been ignored, and to men's speaking for women.

I needed to consider the implications of this for researching fatherhood. Feminist research has much to offer in the field of family and parenting. However, there is a need to address the claim made by some fathers and men's rights groups that research into fatherhood is often done 'by women for women'. This claim is demonstrably untrue: a substantial proportion of highly influential fatherhood research has been carried out by men.[7]

I want to argue that fatherhood research can help to move some of the contemporary debates about women and men's responsibilities for parenting forward. Research is,

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[7] For an overview, see Lewis and Warin, 2001

45

above all, a process, in which gender-based inequalities may be 'uncovered' (Reinharz, 1992:58) and eventually effect change. Moreover, as the previous chapter shows, existing research suggests that, while notions of 'change' in men's fathering may be contested, social, political and economic change impacts across the lived experience of both mothers and fathers, and children. I return to the issue of gender and the research process in Section 4.

3.2 Identifying questions

The process of identifying an appropriate methodology, however, was not a discrete process, but rather it was linked with identifying the areas that I wanted to explore, and thus the questions that I wanted to ask. My research questions link with each of the areas that I identified in Chapter 1 as offering an explanatory framework for contemporary fathering practices, and men's engagement in day to day family life. Existing evidence suggests that lone fathers parent in the absence of some of the social and structural factors that mediate men's experiences in two parent families.

3.2.a The psychological and sociological context

As discussed in Chapter 1, highly influential discourses in psychological and sociological research are embedded in contemporary understandings of fatherhood. Thus, men's 'traditional' role as fathers has historically been as agents of primary socialisation, role models and mentors (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Lamb, 1976) who made a unique contribution to children's psychological development. Nevertheless, nurturant, family centred work was clearly defined as 'belonging' to women. (Bowlby, 1954; Winnicot, 1957)

The 'emotionally and relationally deficient father' of the clinical paradigm (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) suggests that fathers are limited in their capacity to care by a process of socialisation which does not facilitate emotional expressiveness, although they may have a unique and 'special' role within 'the family'. (Snarey, 1993) Psychological research has affected the way in which fathers are perceived, conceptualising the roles of parents as differentiated along gendered lines.

Psychological perspectives suggest that men may not generally be well prepared for primary responsibility for childrearing, and that this might present challenges in their day to day experience of caring for children. I therefore set out to explore how fathers experienced their relationships with their children, and through men's retrospective accounts, how these relationships developed over time.

3.2.b. The social and cultural context

Psychological theory underpins a range of social and cultural assumptions about the nature of fatherhood. Thus, for example, fathers are not assumed to have 'instinctive' feelings and behaviours, being an adequate father does not require men to demonstrate 'nurturing' capabilities. (Backett, 1982, 1987)

'Fatherhood' and 'manhood' are not seen as synonymous, unlike motherhood, which is seen as part of femininity, and so regarded as a natural phenomenon. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) This might be seen as allowing men's 'core identity' may be expressed in terms of breadwinning, rather than fathering, (for example, Warin et.al., 1999) a notion that fathers themselves seem generally unwilling to challenge.

Some writers have argued that nurturing, caring fatherhood might require men to do the kind of work that women do in relation to their children. (Ruddick, 1989; Silva, 1996) However, vigorous debates have emerged around the importance of preserving masculine identities, (Burgess, 1997) and notions that 'men can mother' are received with limited enthusiasm. Evidence also suggests that father's participation in childcare is closely linked with their perceptions of that role, and how fathers see their caring activities is significant. (Burghes et.al., 1997)

It is important in this context to explore lone father's experience of doing fathering, and ways in which this may challenge conventional understandings of post divorce and separation fatherhood. This includes exploration of ways in which men approached caring for children, how this work was sustained, and ways in which paid work was integrated (or not) with responsibility for children.

Lone mothers' experiences have been well documented, and the importance of practical and social support in raising children alone established. While mothers are expected to

care for their child/ren after divorce or separation, a similar expectation does not exist for fathers. This expectation is linked with a range of assumptions about who may be considered as an appropriate carer, particularly in situations involving young children, (see Chapter 1). Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is evidence that men can (and some do) [8]become involved, nurturant and committed fathers, although this is highly dependent on social conditions.

Gerson (1997) argues that there are three key elements of social conditions that influence men's orientation to parenting. The first is to meet the unmediated needs of children. The second to negotiate the practical domestic context and the third is to negotiate both in and around their position in the labour force.

However, it is also important to understand how men experience these social conditions, which may not be a matter of choice. For example, fathers may not 'choose' where they live, or the work that is available, or, indeed, whether or not they are lone parents.

These issues were explored in relation to lone fathers' experiences. This included an exploration of men's structural and social situations, the practical supports that men accessed in caring for their children, their negotiations around paid work, and processes around accessing help or support.

3.2.c. The political and economic context

The policy context, with its emphasis on 'father involvement', (particularly throughout the 1990's), has highlighted questions about men's willingness to take responsibility for their children. We need to see this also in the context of 'transformations' in peoples lives, particularly in the context of intimate relationships, (Jamieson, 1997; Giddens, 1992); and men's 'rediscovery' of fatherhood at the point of separation or divorce. (Smart and Neale, 1999a, 1999b; Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995)

Further, debates around the notion that masculinity, and consequently fatherhood, is 'in crisis' (Burgess, 1997; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996) have underpinned policies which aim to 'get men involved' in parenting, (See Chapter 1). Much of the contemporary discourse appears to be based on the assumption that father 'involvement' will have

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[8] Smart and Neale (1999b) point out that these fathers are less visible than other groups.

positive benefits for all concerned, which, as Coltrane (1996) points out, is not necessarily the case.

While policy has always explicitly addressed lone motherhood, lone fathers have been relatively ignored, although they now tend to receive a passing acknowledgement as representing a contemporary family form.[9] Lone fathers represent a minority of all lone parents, and are therefore less visible in policy terms, (although they may be highly visible in their communities, a point that is discussed in the following chapters).

Issues affecting men with caring responsibilities (rather than negotiating childcare in two parent families) have been explicitly addressed in the context of elder care, or caring for a disabled person, (for example, Finch and Mason, 1993; Ungerson, 1987, 1983). Most fatherhood research that specifically looks at men's caring for children explores this in the context of two-parent families. There is also an assumption that, despite changes in family formation, the preferred arrangement for childrearing is the two parent (preferably heterosexual) model; moreover, as the preceding chapter showed, this caring is predominantly an activity carried out by women.

Essentialist notions of maternal care, (albeit contested), underpin many political, social and cultural assumptions around caring for children. As research into two parent families shows, maternal care has become inextricably linked with maintaining the domestic environment, in the 'private' domain. However, one influential focus of recent literature around the family and parenting has been on 'maternal expertise' as an inhibiting factor in the development of men's relationships with their children. (Burgess, 1997; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996)

'Breadwinning' is widely recognised as one of the most important factors in men's experience of family life, although as discussed, fathers are said to want to be 'more involved' in fatherhood. These notions may be experienced by fathers as tensions in day to day life, and there are limited settings in which it is possible to explore both the potentialities and limitations of how this might work in practice. The study of lone fatherhood offers an opportunity to illuminate some of the processes involved in doing both breadwinning and parenting.

Finally, in the context of post-divorce and separated parenting, many non-resident parents do not maintain, or have limited, contact with their children when parental relationships break down, for a variety of reasons. (Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; 1999) This project thus includes an examination of the way in which lone fathers negotiated relationships with the mothers of their children, including the amount and frequency of contact that the non-resident parent had with the child/ren, and the impact that this had on fathers in lone parent families.

3.3 The Interviews

I was concerned to explore men's experiences in ways that allowed fathers to tell their own 'stories'. Although there are many examples of women researching men's experiences in the context of 'family' research, interviews at the pilot stage of this project suggested that this approach might present some difficulties.

The study of lone fatherhood involves, by definition, interviewing men, and I return to this issue in the following sections. In developing a framework for my research, I utilised ideas and theory from feminist research into women's lives.

From my reading of the literature, and through the process of piloting the interviews, it appeared that the accounts of men raising children alone were sometimes constrained by the 'public' accounts of fatherhood that I discussed in Chapter 1. In a discussion of interviewing women, Miller describes the difficulty of enabling women to voice their 'personal narratives – which may not resonate with public and lay accounts and therefore be difficult to voice'. (Miller, 1998:58) I learnt that men's narratives were not only influenced by 'public' accounts of fatherhood, but also by men's perceptions of my own agenda. This point is discussed in greater depth in Section 4 of this chapter.

O'Brien argues that face to face interviews may disadvantage participants who have difficulty expressing themselves, and that multiple methods provide participants with other avenues of expression. (O'Brien, 1984:118) These insights influenced my choice of methods, and I decided to use multiple methods in which fathers themselves were not

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[9] This is particularly the case in textbooks for practitioners: see, for example, Daniel and Taylor, (2001)

only actively involved in constructing 'their' data, but which also encouraged a high degree of participant reflexivity. (Parr, 1998; Robson, 1993) This last point is discussed in more depth in the following sections.

I used four techniques to gather information: Background questionnaires (see section 2.3), Genograms, Eco-maps and individual interviews. All interview sessions were audio-taped and transcribed.

I carried out a total of 60 interviews. These comprised 30 questionnaire, genogram and mapping exercises, and 30 depth interviews. The first interview with each participant included completion of the questionnaire, followed by the genogram and mapping exercises. Each of these interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours, although most were completed in 1 ½ hours. I originally planned to make an appointment for a second interview on completion of each first interview. However, in practice, this met with limited success.

Paid work (including shiftwork) and children's' schedules meant that not all of the participants were able to commit to two separate interviews, and sometimes expressed a preference to complete the process in one day. Moreover, as discussed in Section 2.4, participants were recruited from a broad geographic area, which meant that individual interview time was often more than doubled by researcher travelling time.

I thus made the decision on a pragmatic basis to carry out both interviews in one session if two separate interviews presented a problem for a father, or if geographical distance made two separate interviews impractical. The longest (combined) interview lasted for a total of 4 ½ hours. I return to these issues in Section 5.

3.3.a. Genograms

Originating in social work practice, a 'genogram' is a method that can be used as a way of exploring family relationships, and understanding family systems. Developed by Hartman (1979) the method involves drawing a family tree, or map, of three or more generations of a family. It can be used to record genealogical relationships, and family events such as births, deaths, divorce and re-partnering.

The genogram is constructed using a large piece of paper. Each family member is indicated by age, sex, and relationship to other family members. One major advantage of mapping families in this way is that it is possible to build a visual representation of what may be a complex family structure; indeed, several participants in the study had extended families that would have been very difficult to describe verbally. I used a simplified version of Hartman's genogram to map out membership of each lone father household. (See Appendix 2)

Genograms were constructed with the participation of the respondents. Generally, fathers were interviewed alone, but on three occasions, the first interview was carried out with children present. In these cases, the children were keen to be involved in plotting the genogram and eco-map of their extended family and support systems. Having ruled out the possibility of including children in this study (a point that I return to in Section 4) meant that active decisions had to be made during the first interview when children were present. The fathers in these cases were happy for their children to 'join in'.[10] While children's participation at this stage was based on my own 'ad hoc' response to the situation at interview, it does suggest the need to explore children's experiences of growing up in lone father families.

Lone father households are the result of changes in family structures, and relationships can be extremely complicated. A genogram is a very good way of identifying 'who lives with who' in households. Hartman's (1979) starting point is that people are deeply immersed in their families, and that this affects their perceptions of not only their own identity, but also how they see others. The construction of a genogram not only enhanced my understanding of the dynamics of individual families, but was also a useful way of organising family history. (Fahlberg, 1994) Each genogram included at least three generations of each family, including both biological parents, step-parents, grandparents, and step-children.

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[10] The children in question were aged 6-11 years, and their involvement highlighted interesting questions around who 'counts' as a family member.

52

3.3.b. Eco-maps

Spatial maps of relationships offered a way of exploring who was important to fathers. Jane Ribbens, for example, used them to explore dimensions of motherhood. (Ribbens, 1994) Eco-Mapping is a slightly more structured form of spatial map, and also originates in Hartman's work with children and families in a social work context. Eco-maps are a way of looking 'ecologically' at a family, which involves an exploration of the 'two-way' transactions that families have with the outside world, and an exploration of connections that are stressful to family members, or supportive of them.

Again, this involves visually 'mapping out' the household and the environment that it operates in (see Appendix 3 for an example). Connections can be drawn between the household and other organisations, extended family, formal agencies, or any other relationships that members of the household have. Connections may indicated by the use of different colours, a word or brief sentence, according to the quality of the relationship, (for example, 'stressful', 'supportive').

Eco-maps were constructed with each respondent, focusing on how they saw their wider relationships with outside agencies. Hartman used this method to explore the resources available to families who were considering adoption, but the method lends itself equally well to exploring the resources available to lone fathers, and the supports that are available to them.

An Eco-Map shows relationships with structures and agencies 'outside' the lone father family that might be stressful, or that fathers see as making their parenting difficult. Conversely, these relationships might be highly supportive.

I asked fathers to indicate everyone that they had contact with, regardless of the quality of the relationship. This might include siblings', (grand)parents' and friends' households; places of work (for employed fathers) and representatives of formal agencies (e.g. schools, health visitors). Social activities were also included (for example, specialist interest clubs, lone parents organisations, public houses) as were organised activities for children, (for example, Cubs or Brownies; holiday play schemes).

53

I then asked each father to describe the quality of their relationship with each contact that they identified. This was indicated by fathers with a brief sentence or single word, as mentioned above. (These sessions were also audio taped, which proved essential, as descriptions and explanations of relationships often extended far beyond 'simple' descriptions.)

Where children were involved in constructing the eco-map, their perceptions were not necessarily congruent with fathers' accounts. This may have been because fathers' notions of 'support' were at variance with children's. So, for example, a father might say that 'no one helps' or that there was no significant person who was particularly supportive, only to be contradicted by a child who was able to cite someone important to themselves. Children, for example, might cite their own 'best friends' as being particularly important to them, while members of their extended family tended to be 'taken for granted'.[11]

3.3.c. In depth interviews

The interviews with fathers were semi- structured around key themes. (See interview guide, Appendix 4). In preparing the guide, I combined features of interview guides (topics and broad questions which can be explored and probed) and the more detailed set of questions typical of a schedule format. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 83-95) This meant that I developed broad topic areas, and open-ended questions for each one. I also developed a series of detailed questions and probes for each topic area. I explored men's experiences of responsibility for children in the context of both pre and post separation parenting, and men's subsequent experiences of lone fatherhood.

Topics covered in the interview included:

- Life changes: processes involved in, and feelings about, becoming a lone parent, moving house, changes related to paid work.

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[11] On one memorable occasion, a father said that he did not have anyone close to him, whereas his child said 'Dad's best friend is Janet, and she's going on holiday with us next week'.

- Childcare: children's practical care before and after separation or divorce, and changing relationships with children.

- Organising practical domestic tasks.

- Paid work, and feelings about balancing this with primary responsibility for children.

- Relationships: with kin, friends and the non-resident parent.

4 The Research process

As discussed in the previous sections, research into families and parenting has focused on men in two parent families (for example, Dienhart, 1998; Coltrane, 1996) and non-resident fathers (for example, Bradshaw et.al, 1999). Although there is a substantial body of research into mothers and mothering practices, (for example, Garey, 1999; Ribbens, 1994; Boulton, 1983) most research into men's parenting and fathering practices is grounded in psychological theory. This positivist influence on research into men's fathering is problematic because it inheres in understandings of what fathering is, or how we think it ought to be. It may be more difficult to ask the questions that need to be asked if, in asking them, we challenge conventional wisdom about fathers and fathering.

This lack highlights what Harding argues is a significant difficulty in social science: that social science has focused on 'questions about social life that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for men'. (Harding, 1987:6) However, as Harding also points out, what is problematic from the perspective of men's characteristic experiences may not appear problematic from the perspective of women's experiences. Nevertheless, the reverse is also true, and women may experience phenomena that do need explaining, one example of which is men's (lack of) participation in childcare and housework. (Harding, 1987)

However, as discussed in the previous sections, family and parenting research may be reaching the stage where fatherhood and fathering practices may also be seen as 'a problem' for men. Fatherhood *per se* has now achieved a high political profile, which

is not matched by a commensurate change in what fathers actually do in families. Profound social and structural change, including women's increased labour market participation, has not been matched by changes in men's fathering and family practices. (Berthoud and Gershuny, 2000)

Concerns about gender differentials and the disadvantage of women in diverse social situations retain a high profile for research agendas. Moreover, the contemporary reflexive trend by qualitative researchers emphasises the potential for the unequal empowerment of participants in research. This raises political and methodological questions around the accounts of male respondents, and their 'authentic voice' in the research process. I was concerned that my methodological approach did not limit the potential for developing an understanding of men's solo fathering experiences.

While the notion of interviews as 'conversations with a purpose' has been criticised as deceptively simple, (Robson, 1993), by semi-structuring the interviews, I endeavoured to maintain a focus without taking a directive approach. This meant that emergent themes were grounded in father's experiences. Thus, for example, I understood from my reading of the literature that father's identities as 'breadwinners' were in tension with expectations around greater 'involvement' of fathers in two parent families, (Warin et.al., 1999) and that fathers sometimes appear to 'switch' identities at divorce or separation. (Smart and Neale, 1999a) However, the importance of social identity in relation to men's reluctance (or otherwise) to commit to responsibility for domestic work and childcare emerged as a very strong theme in men's accounts, which then influenced my understanding of subsequent interviews. Data analysis was thus not a discrete process, but one in which I moved between the data, analysis and literature throughout the project.

The strengths of this approach, including flexibility and the opportunity to probe questions around father's work and caring experiences undoubtedly outweighed the difficulties that I experienced. (I return to this discussion in Section 4) I considered other interview strategies, including a structured interview format. Existing studies of lone fatherhood have, as discussed above, have often had highly structured elements. (Grief, 1983; George and Wilding, 1972; Speak et.al. 1997) Nevertheless, as George

and Wilding argued, there is a 'trade off' between breadth and depth when a structured interview format is adopted.

I also considered group interviews, (Morgan, 1993) although I rejected these on two grounds. The first was that there would be practical difficulties involved in setting up such a group, (assuming that I was able to recruit fathers willing to take part). Moreover, lone fathers have, by definition, childcare (and probable work) commitments. I considered the possibility of arranging group interviews through the lone parent's organisation Gingerbread, but as discussed in the previous sections, wanted to avoid skewing the sample towards fathers who were members of support groups.

A second reason for rejecting this strategy is that I believed that a group setting would not be an appropriate forum for airing what my pilot work suggested may be intensely personal experiences, and that confidentiality would be an issue in this case. (Morgan, 1993: 11-12)

In my initial research proposal, I planned to use structured time-diaries. (Gershuny, 2000; Bell, 1998) I had initially envisaged asking participants to complete diaries for two periods of time: one during term-time, and one during the school holidays. Time diaries may be useful where direct observation is not possible, (Robson, 1993:254) and I planned to develop a time budget approach to lone fathers' day to day lives. I hoped that these would generate a picture of what fathers actually did, rather than relying on men's perceptions of daily activities.

However, during the pilot stage of the interview process, I began to realise that this probably demanded more time and commitment than I could reasonably expect from participants. [12]Moreover, in retrospect, I also underestimated the amount of time needed to process the amount of data that was eventually generated by the research instruments that I used. As mentioned in Section 3.3, all the interviews were audio taped and transcribed prior to analysis, which was again a time-consuming exercise. (Mason, 1996; Robson, 1993; Burgess, 1984)

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[12] Nevertheless, this would be a worthwhile exercise in a future project.

4.1 Recruiting fathers to the study

As discussed in Section 2.2, fathers were recruited to the study through a variety of sources. Having worked as a community based tutor in Adult Education, I initially planned to gain access to participants through a variety of contacts in formal agencies and community groups. These included 'Homestart', which receives joint Health Authority and Social Service funding, and supports families in their homes; the head teacher of a local school which has an active Family Centre, and the lone parents' organisation Gingerbread.

Preliminary work in terms of informal discussions with 'gatekeepers' in these organisations was promising. However, in the event, only two participants were directly contacted in this way. I can only surmise why this approach was relatively unsuccessful. I think it likely that, as I subsequently discovered in respect of the men who were successfully recruited, fathers may have limited contact with formal agencies. This may be particularly true of men's use of Family Centres, which are often thought by men to be 'father-unfriendly', (Longstaff, 2000) although this is likely to be only one of a number of reasons.

The most successful method of recruitment was, as discussed in Section 2.2, via Gingerbread's online discussion groups, with 'word of mouth' as the second most successful.

Initial contact with respondents was mainly by telephone or e-mail. Telephone contact was made on a line to which only I had access. At the first contact, I outlined the study, and offered fathers time to consider whether they would be prepared to participate. Approximately half of the fathers contacted in this way agreed to participate during the initial telephone conversation. The remainder either requested more information, or time to consider their possible participation.

Several of the latter group needed time to consider on pragmatic grounds; I indicated to each father the possible length of each interview, and some suggested that time constraints might be a barrier to participation. Fathers who requested further information were mailed a letter, (Appendix 5) which outlined the study, and stressed the confidential nature of the interviews.

58

Of the 'needed time to consider' group, around a third subsequently did not respond, or contacted me to decline to participate. Again, I can only speculate as to the possible reasons for this, which may have included a reluctance to discuss painful or sensitive issues, or time constraints. One further reason may have been because fathers did not meet the criteria that I had set for participation in the study, and had not made this explicit when they initially contacted me. [13](See discussion in 2.1.b)

4.2 Trust and accountability

A key issue for fathers who agreed to participate (and probably those who did not) was that of trust and accountability. Arranging the interviews involved a degree of trust on both the part of the fathers and myself. I am not referring here to 'rapport' in the research relationship, but the rather more pragmatic issue of gender, and broader issues around building a research relationship in which fathers believed me to be trustworthy. (This links with the discussion in Section 3.1, and issues around who the research is for, and the purpose of research).

The issue of gender in research relationships is discussed in more detail in Section 5. However, in the context of the present discussion, my gender was clearly an issue, for some fathers, at the point of first direct contact. Some fathers were clearly distrustful of my motives in undertaking the project, and the possibilities of a 'hidden agenda'. For example, one father said, during an initial telephone conversation, 'Well I expect you'd be a feminist, leftish sort of person, and what might you say?' (This father subsequently did decide to participate in the study).

In terms of first direct contact with fathers, I sometimes spent considerable time engaged in e-mail and telephone conversations. While these conversations did not, in themselves, constitute usable data, I was conscious of their potential impact on the interview data itself. Nevertheless, engaging in these conversations prior to the actual interviews, there were two distinct benefits.

The first was that they were an essential element of establishing trust with some of the fathers who subsequently participated in the study, both by establishing my integrity

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[13] One father appeared to feel very angry and upset by the exclusion of fathers with 'shared care' from the study, and this had further repercussions. These issues are discussed in depth in Section 5

(enough to convince fathers to take part in the study) and by establishing a verifiable link between fathers and myself. Fathers could (and did) telephone at any time, and were able to either leave a message on an answering machine, or speak with me directly.

The second related to my own safety. I was also able to contact fathers who had initially contacted me, and while this was not a guarantee of safety, it did give me some means of checking that fathers were who they said they were, if I felt at all uncomfortable about meeting a potential participant. (Safety issues are discussed in more depth in Section 5.1.)

I was also concerned about the impact that these conversations might have on the interviews, primarily because I did not want to impose my own understandings of lone fatherhood onto participants. I attempted to keep my side of the conversation friendly and neutral, and in reality, many of the exchanges that I had with participants prior to interview were related to men's feelings of isolation, loneliness or sometimes anger, and a desire to talk to an understanding listener. I am aware, however, that even neutral 'listening' involved some reflecting back to fathers of their speech.

However, this was not necessarily a disadvantage, because one possible outcome is that fathers may have considered their situations and given more reflexive accounts as a result. Thus, for example, some fathers said at interview that they had 'been thinking about' the telephone conversation, and this reflection sometimes acted as a stimulus for thoughts, feelings and memories.

Moreover, these conversations were an important element in establishing trust between participants and myself. A general wariness that I might be in some sense 'checking up' on fathers was also evident in many of the conversations, reflecting a general mistrust of 'officialdom', particularly social workers. (Father's experiences of formal agency involvement are discussed in the following chapters.)

4.3 Pilot interviews

I carried out pilot interviews with six respondents. Initially, I carried out two exploratory interviews around the theme of 'What is it like to be a lone father?' One exploratory interview was with a lone father of two children, and the other with a health visitor who was involved in the local planning and development of parenting education programmes.

I carried out the second interview because during the early stages of formulating my research questions, I considered whether I could explore broader issues of what I initially conceptualised from my reading of the literature as 'supports' and 'barriers' for lone fathering from the dual perspective of fathers and formal agencies. (For example, Speak, Cameron and Gilroy, 1997; Greif, 1985)

However, as I progressed towards 'firming up' areas that I wanted to explore, I realised that any attempt to incorporate agency perspectives into the project would detract from the focus on men's perspectives on their primary responsibility for children. I therefore decided to abandon this element of the project.[14]

The exploratory nature of these first two interviews meant that maintaining a focus on the topic was difficult for two reasons. The first was that both respondents were keen to talk about their life experiences, some of which were inevitably peripheral to lone fatherhood. Secondly, I had not fully developed an interview guide, and needed to consider my interview strategy to take account of this.

The next stage thus involved the development of the interview schedule and mapping techniques. I piloted these in single interviews with four lone fathers, all of which were audio taped and transcribed. In this phase of the research, I needed to address several methodological issues. The first relates to the ordering of research questions.

Conventional wisdom for ordering questions suggests that interviews need to start with 'safe' or non-controversial questions, saving potentially 'difficult' questions for later in the interview. (Patton, 1990) However, Maykut and Morehouse argue that it is the interviewee who sets the sequence of the questions, and that 'it is the qualitative

researcher's job to be alert and responsive, to sense an opportune time to ask a question, and to know when a question has been answered out of sequence'. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:94)

However, I did not want to impose rigid sequencing of questions. Moreover, not all 'factual' questions are non-threatening. I wanted, for example, to explore how fathers negotiated the process of becoming lone parents, and this inevitably involved accounts in which fathers sometimes expressed distress. This left me with something of a dilemma. It seemed clear that this exploration could not be relegated to part way through the individual interviews. However, during the pilot interviews, by beginning with men's routes into lone fatherhood, expressions of distress and/or anger could take over the interview, and I felt that fathers were talking 'at' me rather than 'to' me.

Barker argues that the start of the interview is an appropriate place for this question, because participants know the research focus in advance of the interview, and welcome the opportunity to talk about their experience. (Barker, 1994:45) While I agree that most fathers did welcome the opportunity to relate their experiences, a focus on routes into lone fatherhood at the beginning of the interview process sometimes inhibited further exploration of men's day to day fathering. This experience is echoed in other lone father research. O'Brien, for example, found that a small number of men in her sample became very 'controlling' during the interview process: 'They all knew I had a series of questions to ask them but seemed to feel the need to get the story of their marital separation 'off their chest'.' (O'Brien, 1984:550)

I found, however, that beginning with the questionnaire ('factual' questions) and then proceeding to the mapping exercises, overcame these difficulties to a certain extent. The mapping exercises built up a picture of fathers in individual social contexts, and although some fathers still expressed distress or anger, this was less likely to 'take over' the interview. Moreover, the first stage facilitated the development of a degree of trust and rapport, by, I believe, reassuring fathers that I was not 'checking up' on them in a covert way.

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[14] Nevertheless, agency responses to post-divorce fatherhood is an under-researched area, and merits further exploration.

The issues discussed above also link with the methodological issues of class, race and gender. While I discuss these issues in greater depth in section 5, they are clearly relevant to the present discussion. Feminist researchers have argued that in undertaking research on men, feminists are likely to demand less and disclose less because of the unequal power relationship between women and men. (Reinharz, 1992:42) The research, it is argued, is less likely to encourage disclosure by male subjects where the researcher is a woman.

Similar arguments are proposed by Barker (1994), who argues that the fact that he was the same race and gender as his interviewees (white, male) meant that: 'the impression gained was that men in the sample disclosed more information because they were being interviewed by another man than they would have had they been interviewed by a woman, and that this information 'encompasses and expresses' their experiences as men more effectively as a consequence'. Barker thus seems to suggest that his gender and race meant that his interviews were both quantitatively and qualitatively 'better' than if he had been a woman.

Although Barker stresses that his own relationship with participants did not constitute a 'patriarchal bonding process' between interviewer and interviewee, he further argues that lone fathers would be more likely to present a picture of themselves 'more congruent with hegemonic masculinity' if interviewed by a woman. (Barker, 1994:45-46)

Although I initially wondered if this might be the case in my own research, I now have doubts about the accuracy of Barker's perception. While fathers did, at times, express positions more 'congruent with hegemonic masculinity', (indeed, it would have been surprising if they had not) this was only one of a range of expressions of social identity in men's accounts, as the following chapters illustrate. Moreover, one could make similar points regarding age and social class, both of which are areas that Barker does not address.

Importantly, the pilot interviews showed how chronological accounts could stimulate memories of the sequence of key events, and prompted connections with men's current situations. In conducting these interviews, I encouraged men to tell their own 'stories.'

By this, I do not wish to imply that these accounts were in any way fictitious, rather that they represented men's perception of their own social reality at a particular point in their lives, and were stories which gave 'meaning to lived experiences'. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). In the context of men who are primary caregivers, 'storytelling' can, for example, also be 'a device that allows expression of love for a child or an explanation of the rationale for parenting strategies.' (Dilks and Fox, 2000)

This enabled me to be alert to emerging themes, and to explore ways in which these were congruent with existing research findings. For example, fathers conformed to the typology of lone fathers as either 'assenting' or 'seeking'. In this typology, 'assenting' fathers become primary carers because of the death or desertion of the mother of the children, rather than actively 'seeking' care. (Mendes, 1976; Greif, 1986) However, the pilot interviews indicated that these processes were far more complex than those suggested by existing typologies, and I became more alert to these complexities as the project progressed.

Another strong theme that emerged from the pilot interviews was the perception that a close relationship between fathers and their children was made possible by high levels of involvement in their care. This was congruent with research which suggests that when fathers have been involved in caring for their children prior to lone fatherhood, they seem more likely to have a positive attitude towards them when they became lone parents. Moreover, such fathers appear to find the task less difficult than fathers who had low levels of involvement prior to divorce or separation. (DeMaris and Greif, 1993)

However, during the process of piloting the interviews, some contradictions emerged. Two of the four fathers in the second stage of piloting indicated that they had done 'most' or 'almost all' of their children's care prior to the end of their relationship. Nevertheless, their partners had not been in paid employment, although they themselves had been in full time paid work.

This introduced another dimension that I had not thoroughly considered, although Gerson (1993), for example, found that fathers' and mothers' perceptions of what fathers actually did in families were not always congruent with each other. This also

affected my subsequent analysis, as I began to probe questions around ex-partners' employment situations both before and after separation or divorce.

One further area of questioning emerged around the notion of hypothetical 'barriers' to lone fatherhood. Much of the literature around fathers and parenting conceptualises men's experiences as fathers as full of 'barriers' that need to be surmounted in order for fathers to become 'involved' parents. I found that fathers did not appear to conceptualise their situations as linked with 'overcoming barriers'.

I began to feel that I needed to question the notion of 'barriers'. Reflecting on her study of mature women students returning to education, Parr makes a similar point, raising two further points about this issue. Firstly, to what extent could barriers be said to exist if the participant does not perceive them, and secondly, the need to question the extent to which the researcher imposes her own categories on the experience of participants. (Parr, 1998:92)

This insight had a significant impact on the subsequent direction of my thinking about men's solo fathering, and the implications for the direction that the project took. I subsequently came to understand men's solo fathering as a process in which men were negotiating in and around choice and constraint in both public and private contexts, rather than 'overcoming barriers' or obstacles.

This does not mean that I assumed from then on that lone fathers would not experience difficulties, rather, it meant that in subsequent interviews, I paid more attention to focusing on fathers' perceptions around doing fatherhood and paid work, which helped me to focus on men's own understandings of 'being a lone father'.

5. The interview process

5.1 Settings and Safety

A key practical issue for my research was where the interviews should take place. Half of the participants were in full time paid work, and this introduced other constraints around their availability for interview. Despite my initial intention to use Family Centres as potential venues for interviews, it became apparent that this was not always a

practical proposition. I travelled long distances to interview some respondents, and many interviews had to take place during evenings and weekends, depending on men's work schedules. I therefore had to adopt a much more flexible approach to the location of interviews.

I eventually interviewed twenty-four of the thirty participants in their own homes, four in Family Centres, and two in Public Houses. The latter interviews were with fathers who lived in suburban areas of major cities, and involved train journeys lasting several hours on my part. Meeting in an agreed City centre location meant that I did not have to make a second journey to where they lived. In both cases, the interview location presented fewer difficulties than I had anticipated, and because the interviews took place during the day, it was possible to find a quiet space for the process.

The Family Centre was also an unproblematic location for interviews. The four participants interviewed in this setting were attending the centre in any case, and I was offered a private room to conduct the interviews.

The remaining twenty-four interviews took place in participants' own homes. This setting inevitably raised issues about safety. I therefore had to make decisions about what might constitute an unacceptable risk, and what safeguards I needed to put into place before undertaking the interviews. I therefore devised a series of safety measures to meet various possible contingencies. (See Appendix 7)

I do not, however, wish to overstate the perception of 'danger'. On the surface, a woman, travelling alone to the home of a man that she has never met, and sometimes spending several hours in that setting appears to be a very unsafe strategy. However, as an undergraduate, I worked for some time in the Home Care section of Social Services. My work, and the work of other women, involved very similar processes. Moreover, although most clients were 'regulars' and thus known to the Care staff, female home care assistants[15] were regularly sexually harassed, and sometimes physically assaulted by clients.

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[15] All the Home Care staff were female

The point that I am making is not that dangers in this kind of fieldwork should be ignored, or that the impact of incidents such as those outlined above should be either understated, or seen as acceptable in any way. Rather, I want to argue that a realistic appraisal of possible danger means acknowledging that in many settings and situations in everyday life we may be vulnerable. Fieldwork sometimes may involve taking a 'calculated risk', and unlike situations encountered in everyday life, in a research setting, encounters are planned. Moreover, had I not been prepared to undertake interviews in this way, I would not have been able to gather the data that I did.

5.2 Ethical issues, confidentiality and consent

All the lone fathers in the study had experienced relationship breakdown. While I had considered how some of the interview data was likely to touch on sensitive or painful topics, some other areas emerged which merit further consideration. I felt acutely aware of my responsibility to potentially vulnerable respondents when I began the research.

The British Sociological Association's ethical guidelines state the need to safeguard the proper interests of those involved in or affected by research, and to protect the anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of respondents. Moreover, participants also have the right not to take part in the study, to withdraw at any time, and to reject the use of tape recorders during interviews.

In practical terms, the negotiation of access was a continuous process. I needed to gain the informed consent of individual respondents for both interviews. Mason (1996) suggests that gaining informed consent is a complex process, even in situations that seem quite straightforward. For example, whose consent should be gained? This became particularly relevant for my research in the situations that I outlined in section 3.3. Briefly, these were situations in which children were present during the first interview, and wanted to take part in constructing the Genogram and Eco- Map. Researching children involves particular ethical issues: should, for example, a parent give consent on behalf of a child? In any case, the children were not themselves the subjects of my research.

In these cases, the parents and children both consented, and I explained the purpose of the mapping exercises to both in ways in which I believed that the children understood. In the circumstances, I also felt that I could not reasonably refuse to allow the children to have any input into the maps. However, after the first occasion when children were present during the mapping exercise, I made a point of discussing this issue with subsequent potential participants, suggesting that they may wish to consider whether their children should be present during the interviews. As a result of this, one father who was only available for interview during times in which his children were at home, declined to take part in the study.

Gaining 'informed' consent may in reality be quite problematic. Mason (1996) argues that there are limits to the adequacy with which all participants can be 'informed' of all aspects of the research process. While I agree with Mason, I applied the principle of 'fully informed consent', (Robson, 1993) which, while it was not a perfect solution, did address some of these issues. I developed a form, which detailed the purpose of the research, and emphasised both confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Each participant was given a copy of this agreement, which had been signed by the respondent and myself. (Appendix 6) This represented an agreement between individual respondents, and myself and clarified the parameters of their participation in the research.

One aspect of issues around confidentiality and consent again related to children in the household. At the outset of the research process, I had to consider what course of action I would take if I discovered, or had reason to suspect, that a child in a lone father family was being abused. There are no neat 'textbook' resolutions to this dilemma. Some researchers address this problem by making their position explicit at the outset. Thus, confidentiality and consent agreements would include a statement to the effect that, were any illegal activity discovered during the course of the research, this would be reported to the appropriate authorities.

However, as discussed in the previous sections, several fathers were initially highly sensitive to the fact that I might have a 'hidden agenda', and that I was, in some sense, 'checking up' on their fathering competence and behaviours. This presented me with

something of a dilemma, because I believed that any explicit statement that I would take action if I 'discovered' anything untoward might be seen by some participants as tantamount to saying that I was, indeed, intending to monitor their activities with their children.

However, one defining characteristic of adult - child relationships is that the adult is in a position of power relative to the child. I did not doubt that if I believed or suspected that a child was being abused, this would not present a dilemma, because I would feel compelled to act to protect the child as the least powerful person in the relationship.

Further issues around the research relationship involve issues of the relative power of researcher and researched. As discussed in the previous section, fewer demands may be made on men by women interviewers, who may also disclose less, because, as Reinharz argues, 'self disclosure diminishes ones' power'. (Reinharz, 1992:42) I return to this issue in Section 5, but in the context of the present discussion, I want to argue that there are important ethical issues around disclosure in the research relationship.

I was asking fathers for not only their time, but also an insight into their thoughts, feelings and experiences, and many of them disclosed minute and intimate details of their lives. Indeed, this was what I was effectively asking them to do, and it seemed to me that this should not be a one – way 'hit and run' process. I decided that I would answer any questions as honestly as I could, unless these questions compromised my safety in any way. In reality, then, these were situations that I had to judge as and when they occurred, and I rarely felt uncomfortable about anything that I was asked about myself.

During the pilot stage of interviewing, I explored the possibilities of offering interview transcripts to respondents, to give them the opportunity to discuss any areas where they felt that their meaning had been lost in the interview process. The first father that I discussed this possibility with indicated his unwillingness to read the transcripts. The reasons that he gave were twofold.

1. That the integrity of the research would be compromised if he was involved in any post hoc discussion.

2. That reading the transcripts would involve more reflection on his own life events than he was willing to undertake.

I found this father's reluctance to read the transcripts of his interviews interesting. While I disagree with his first point, I believe that the second reason given to me may have more accurately reflected the actual reason for not wanting to see the transcript, and that issues had been raised with which he felt uncomfortable. I continued to offer copies of the interview transcripts to all respondents, but only three fathers asked for copies. Fathers' reasons for declining the offer of transcripts is a matter for conjecture, but as the following chapters show, men's situations as lone fathers often involve complex, and sometimes uncomfortable or distressing life experiences.

I also offered fathers feedback on the completed project, and this was positively received by all the participants. I therefore plan to produce a brief 'summary of findings' which will be mailed to fathers who participated in the project.

6. Analysis and Writing up

As previously indicated all the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Analysis, however, was not a discrete process, but continued throughout the process of collecting data as new themes emerged from fathers' accounts. I also kept a research diary. I found that when I drove to participants' homes, it was helpful to take a spare audio-tape, which I used on my homeward journey to record a verbal form of field-notes. This allowed me to record ideas and thoughts that I may otherwise have forgotten by the time I came to a convenient place to write these down.

As my starting point, I adopted a grounded theory approach to data analysis. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) I began my analysis with each transcript, and endeavoured to understand each account as Ribbens (1994) describes, 'on its own terms'. As the research progressed, I became increasingly immersed in the data, and began to explore emergent topics and themes using the 'constant comparative method' described by Glaser and Strauss (1967)

I was drawn to this approach because, as Parr (1998) points out, 'The strengths of grounded theory are the emphasis on open-mindedness and a willingness to listen, hear and act on the results at all stages of the research process, grounding the analysis in the research data rather than trying to fit the data into an a priori framework.' (Parr, 1998:90) This was entirely consistent with my approach to the research which, as discussed in previous sections, I wanted to ground in lone fathers' lived experiences, rather than imposing my own categorisation on these.

I initially planned to use a computer package to code the data. However, I discovered that as I became increasingly familiar with the transcripts, I began to identify ideas, themes and concepts in the data, and was able to make links with the data generated by successive interviews. I used a system of colour coding categorise data, doing the same with data from the mapping exercises. The mapping exercises complement the interview material, and helped to build a substantive background to lone fathers' experiences.

As this process progressed, I became increasingly interested in the contradictions and tensions in fathers' accounts. This led me to begin to explore relationships between structural factors in lone fathers' parenting, and social factors, and the way that these both constructed lone fathers' experiences, and sometimes cut across each other in contradictory ways.

During the process of analysis and writing up, I have also come to recognise how my own understandings of fathering have developed. For example, when I began the project, the notion of 'barriers' that I discussed in Section 4.3 seemed to offer one reasonable explanation for men's lack of participation in day to day childcare. There seemed to be an almost intuitive logic in the notion that father's limited participation was the result of structural factors which could be seen to be beyond their control. Although this is a partial account, I now understand fathering as embedded in competing and often contradictory ideologies, while expressions of fathering, (or men's 'doing fathering'), is often contingent upon how men feel about what they are doing, or men's social identities.

I am also aware that my experience as a woman and as a mother, in addition to my academic experience, has informed my attitudes and perceptions of the world, and of gender relationships, and that this has had some impact on my understanding(s) of fathering. I have also to acknowledge 'the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorising research data.' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1994: 121)

'Parenting' is not gender specific, (although doing parenting is constructed very differently for men and women.) I have tried to understand fathers' experiences on their own terms. Men's outlooks reflect their experiences as men 'rather than as prototypical humans.' (Gerson, 1993:12) In this research, I have examined ways in which both social constraints and social opportunities shape the lives of men raising children alone.

7. Interviewing men

In this final section, I want to consider some further issues around research relationships and gender.[16] While respondents may be vulnerable in the research relationship, this may not always be the case; power relationships vary depending on the researcher and respondent's relative positions in wider society. (Cotterill, 1992) Feminist researchers have documented the effect on researchers interviewing women, and the stresses that inhere in discoveries of pain in interviewee's lives. (Reinharz, 1992:36) However, very little seems to have been written about engaging in research with men. How, for example, should women researchers respond to perspectives that cause concern because of their misogyny? While it may be important for women to research men as a way of, for example, understanding the impact that men in positions of power have on women's everyday lives, (Reinharz, 1992) there are issues around interviewing 'ordinary' men that merit further consideration. While I did not always agree with respondents, I was also conscious of the impact of men's voices in the external social and political world.

During the process of interviewing fathers, I also became very conscious that some fathers spoke quite differently about their lives with their children, and their

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[16] See also Dilks and Fox, 2000

relationships with their ex-partners. O'Brien touches on this issue when she notes that her interviews with lone fathers sometimes seemed to evoke 'latent' feelings including anger, aggression and bitterness. She notes that these feelings sometimes seemed to be projected onto her as 'the representative of all women and all wives'. (O'Brien, 1984:553)

I found that O'Brien's account had a somewhat familiar ring. I am aware that there were occasions, for example, when I did not probe as much as I would have liked, sometimes because I had clearly touched on an area that was painful to the respondent, and I felt that it would be unethical to continue along a particular route, but sometimes because I was conscious of a father's suppressed anger.

These issues raised questions about the research relationship that developed with participants: to what extent should, or indeed is it possible, to challenge misogyny in a research setting? And if misogyny is not challenged, then to what extent are research agendas dictated by these dynamics? There may be occasions when the researcher's outward agreement allows male respondents to manipulate the interview. (O'Brien, 1984:550)

Although I did not experience direct aggression or harassment in an interview setting, on one occasion during the research, I was the object of direct hostility from a man whom I did not know. I also received hostile e-mails and several anonymous telephone calls, which ceased when I was finally able to persuade this person to reveal their identity during a telephone call.

On another occasion, I arranged to interview a 'lone father' in a city centre coffee bar. Approximately half an hour into the interview, this man revealed that his children in fact lived with their mother some 200 miles away. This father appeared to be very depressed, and said that he had contacted me because he needed 'someone to talk to'. I spent the next hour and a half listening to him while he talked about his recent divorce. In this case, I passed on contact details for a local fathers' support and self-help group, and although he requested further contact, he accepted my refusal without any difficulty.

While it is difficult to quantify the impact that these encounters had on me, and I do not wish to overstate their traumatic nature, I increasingly recognised that research relationships do not occur in a vacuum. In contrast, many of the interviews did include feelings of rapport, although I was interviewing respondents whose structural positions were very different from my own in both their public and private lives.

I am not able to propose any neat solutions to these questions. A minority of fathers in interview situations did express views that were sexist or misogynist, and some I was able to challenge, for example, by asking for clarification, or further explanation. Nevertheless, this did not always feel like a satisfactory solution, raising further questions about the relationship between the personal, political and professional in social research.

Chapter 3

Becoming a lone father.

Introduction

Research into lone fatherhood has historically attempted to categorise men raising children alone according to, for example, whether fathers actively sought care of their children, (Greif, 1985) or whether orientations to gender roles affect the likelihood of men becoming primary carers for their children. (Barker, 1994)

The accounts given by participants in this study, however, suggest that both the nature of the contemporary family, and the way that people interpret their responsibilities as parents, combine with practical factors to create new complexities. There are no neat categories to describe men's routes into lone fatherhood.

The period of transition to lone fatherhood is one that may encompass months, or even years, of post-separation parenting. Conversely, the process may be one of rapid decision making by official agencies, a process in which father's input may sometimes be very limited or non-existent. Men make the transition to lone parenthood from a range of positions and in a variety of ways. Both the speed and the manner in which the transition to primary carer takes place varies, whether or not fathers are actively involved in gaining care of their children, and regardless of the amount of contact that previously existed between the father and child. Men's accounts of events around the break up of their relationships with the child's mother offer some indication of the reasons why this happens.

Choice and constraint: how men become lone fathers

For this group, events around the breakdown of the parental relationship followed one of four patterns. The first was that the woman left without the children. This was the least ambiguous situation, and also the most common, (17 cases). The second most common scenario, accounting for around a third of respondents, was that the man

moved out alone, but subsequently became the children's main carer. (9 cases) When non-resident fathers became primary carers, it was always precipitated by a life event or crisis in the parent with care (the mother's) situation. In more than half of these cases, fathers became primary carers as a direct result of Social Service intervention.

The least common situation in this sample was a parent leaving with the child or children. This accounts for only four cases in this sample, two where the mother initially left with the children, and two where the father left with one young child. While mother's accounts of the process are unavailable, the circumstances of one father who left with his young child were very difficult. Daniel Bates had been primary carer for Thomas, (aged three at the time of interview) for two years. However, because of his partner's illness, Daniel had cared for Thomas from the age of three months.

Although there was some ongoing contact with the local community psychiatric team, Daniel felt that the health service had failed the family, and that he needed to continue to physically supervise contact between his ex-partner and child because of a history of difficulties in the relationship.

> *... it wasn't the best **healthy** childhood...it wasn't until it was out of control is the best way to describe it, and it tended to get out of control before, I could see from that, now it's too late... she's **sorted** but it's too late. (Daniel Bates)*

Although this father had the *means* to leave the family home with his child, he believed that this was the only course of action open to him. Daniel's account is one of a personal response to crisis (he described leaving with very few personal possessions *'the clothes that we stood in'*); lone fatherhood was thus a consequence of circumstances beyond his control.

The second father had experienced difficulties in his relationship with his partner for some time. There were regular arguments, usually involving alcohol consumption, and the police had been called to the house several times in the early hours of the morning.

> *Every Sunday we're breaking up, and the police are called and most times I was asked to leave, and after that it became normal. (Jason Coombes)*

On two occasions, the mother was arrested and kept in temporary custody. This father had moved into his partner's house when their child was born, but retained the tenancy of his previous accommodation. He left with the child after a particularly intense argument, during which the police were again called.

Events around the breakdown of the parental relationship consequently affected the pattern of responsibility for continuing care of the children. Either the father was left with sole care of children, or the mother initially had primary care, which was subsequently acquired by the father. Issues around, and arrangements for, contact or shared care may complicate parenting in either of these situations.

Thus men's routes into lone fatherhood impacts on their experience in a number of ways. For some fathers, the end of the relationship with their partners initially meant new accommodation and patterns of parenting, involving a range of contact arrangements. For fathers whose partners left without the children, the transition to lone fatherhood usually meant adjusting to a new role within the established framework of the family home.

When mothers leave

The most common pattern in this sample was the mother leaving alone, without the children.[1] This pattern coincides most closely with the notion of maternal abdication that has underpinned much of the contemporary discourse around 'good' parenting. It is also a course of action that left fathers with very little choice, although in practical terms meant that fathers could continue, at least initially, with established household routines.

When the mother left, the transition was nevertheless typically abrupt, with little time to reflect on the implications of what, for most fathers, represented a significant change in

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[1] Most lone father research, (and UK Divorce law) has characterised this as 'desertion'. The more cumbersome 'left home alone' is used here because the complexity of men's experiences suggests that 'desertion' over-simplifies the account, and is, moreover, ideologically loaded with constructions of 'good' parenting.

the structure of their everyday lives. This clearly impacted on both the practical and emotional level of men's experience.

I'd got back from work and she'd gone, to the other side of the country' (Richard Prince)

'The ex left without any warning…I had to trace her and we talked on the phone and she said the kids would be safer…better looked after with me' (Matthew Arden)

It was one of these…one day you come home from work….and found the 'Dear John' letter (Dave Bishop)

After separation or divorce, shared parenting may be inherently problematic, involving a shift in responsibilities for both parents. Parents need to adjust to a new balance in their relationships with both the child and the 'other' parent. For fathers experiencing primary responsibility for their children for the first time, this presented particular challenges. 'Shared care' arrangements are, in any case, particularly vulnerable to diminish over time. (Smart and Neale 1999:59)

Some fathers become lone parents when an existing arrangement for 'shared care' broke down, and contact with the non-resident parent decreased until the father had care of the children for most or all of the time.

It was sp'osed to be joint custody, but then she suddenly stopped it…she said 'oh, I'll see them in the holidays', but then that dropped off as well, so it just landed on me. (Paul Jones)

A variety of factors are known to influence continued contact between non-resident *fathers* and their children, (Bradshaw et.al. 1998), which suggests that a range of factors also impact on non-resident mothers' experience, (although this area is under researched). Significantly, where there had been gradual erosion of contact, none of the non-resident mothers were in paid employment, suggesting that lack of access to

resources may have limited their ability to physically stay in touch with their children (although most maintained telephone contact).

Conversely, almost all of the mothers who left *without* their children were in some form of regular, paid employment; for these women, a degree of economic independence may have enabled them to leave. While the accounts given by fathers were inevitably one-sided, employment patterns among the non-resident mothers in this sample suggest that women may experience the same sorts of difficulties that fathers claim with regard to maintaining contact with their children.

When fathers leave

Fathers who initially left the family home when their relationship with their partner broke down tended to characterise this as a normal response to social and cultural expectations.

> *It always seems to work out that way...I'm not sure if that's just because it...I'm trying to say this in the best possible way...it's the expected thing, you know, we've been shaped in that way, it's something that happens so we carry on with what seems to be the norm. (Ian Miller)*

> *I just moved out...it's what happens, isn't it? (Adrian Wright)*

Where the children had initially remained in the care of their mother after the end of the parental relationship, there was a wide range of patterns of contact between father and children. An examination of the arrangements that were in place prior to this group of men becoming lone parents illustrates this diversity. Father's experiences varied from telephone contact with occasional visits, to regular physical contact.

Becoming a lone father for men who initially left the family home was sometimes a lengthy process. More than half of this group had become primary carers for their children because of social services intervention. In three cases, intervention was instigated by the father and in one case by the parent with care, (the mother). This process had involved men in varying degrees, although fathers did not necessarily

expect to become their children's primary carers because of their involvement. One father had contacted Social Services after a telephone call from a friend, who told him that the children had been left in a high-rise flat alone.

> *(Social Services) phoned me up and said, we've got the kids, can you come and collect the kids, do you want the kids? And I said, yeah, no problem, and like 15 minutes later I was up there (Peter Norman, daughters aged 4 and 7)*

In cases where the mother initially retained care of the children, fathers described their continued involvement with their children. They characterised this as 'shared care' (which in practice usually involved less than fifty percent of the time), or gave accounts of 'traditional' contact arrangements. ('Staying' contact every other weekend, for example.)

When non-resident fathers became lone parents, it was frequently because there were difficulties in a new relationship that the mother had entered into. One father in this group had maintained regular weekend contact. He also collected the child from school once a week, spending the evening with his son before returning him to his mother's house.

> *Basically she abandoned him ... one Friday I went up and it were sp'osed to be the Friday he were coming to stop with me, pick him up from school, leave the car at their house and walk him back and pick up his clothes for the weekend and he said 'Dad I'm coming to live with you'... and we knocked at the house, and (ex-wife's new husband) turned round and said 'She's left me' and what turned out, she'd took Liam to school that morning and (gone) and I thought 'Can't leave him up here' so I brought him back ' (Philip Brown, father of Liam aged 8)*

Fathers who left the family home typically experienced a period of living in rented accommodation, or with relatives. Most of the fathers in the sample did not have sufficient resources to purchase another house, for example, and some were paying maintenance to their ex-partners during the period of separation.

Having left the home that they previously shared with their partners, fathers did not return when they became primary carers for their children. Housing is of key importance to this group of men. While this theme merits further consideration (see Chapter 4), it is relevant to the purposes of this discussion to note that fathers who lacked suitable accommodation for themselves and their children were faced with particular challenges when lone fatherhood was initiated by a crisis.

Men's narrative accounts often highlighted a sequence of events which, from an 'outsider' perspective, suggested that women who did 'abandon' their partners and children almost always did so after extra-ordinary events, in which some women began to characterise their own mothering as 'bad' or 'inadequate'. It is useful to consider why most father's accounts did not consider linkages between these difficulties and women's subsequent actions. I think that this is important, because some men's accounts suggested that when mothers felt that they were not doing a 'good' job of caring for their children, they ceased to do so almost completely.

Difficulties that mothers experienced after separation meant that children may have been exposed to potential abuse, (often by a new partner), or neglect, which was typically linked with mental health problems or substance abuse involving the mother. Interestingly, more than a third of fathers in the sample said that there had been particularly challenging circumstances around the time of pregnancy and birth ranging from maternal postnatal depression, multiple births, to factors involving children's health, (developmental problems, for example.)

A further three children had been admitted to specialist neonatal units immediately after their birth. We therefore need to consider not only the impact that these traumas had on the relationship between parents, but also whether fathers in the sample had become sensitised to caring for children by their early fathering experience, which may have made their subsequent willingness to become primary carers more likely.

Although the evidence is contradictory, (Brotherson and Dollahite, 1997) some research suggests that fathers of disabled children are more likely to engage in practical childcare and to interact more with their children than fathers of non-disabled children.

(Turbiville et. al., 1995) Moreover, in situations where children are identified as having special needs, fathers, as additional caring adults, are often regarded as assets. (Daniel and Taylor, 2001)

However, as Daniel and Taylor point out, fatherhood in these circumstances may also mean an increased sense of financial responsibility for breadwinning fathers, introducing further tension between caring and providing identities. So while fathers in this study may have had a heightened awareness of the needs of their children because of an intensification of experience around the time of birth, most of the fathers had adhered to a breadwinning identity prior to the end of their relationship with the mother.

However, these experiences would also impact on the mothers of the children, and in families where men were primarily 'breadwinners', mothers were likely to bear the brunt of, for example, the needs of a particularly demanding infant.[2]

Father's preparation for lone fatherhood

How prepared were men for taking on the responsibility for full time care of their children? Although contemporary fathers may no longer be kept at 'arms length' during the process of pregnancy and birth, (Lewis 1986) subsequent involvement with their children is mediated by external factors, the most significant of which are work, (Warin et. al., 1999) and the mother's presence. (Smart and Neale, 1999; Backett, 1987; 1982)

Most of the fathers in the study said that they were highly involved with their children from when they were born, and almost all said that they were present at the birth. Nevertheless, there was much more variation in the amount of time that fathers had actually spent with their children during the intervening years. Most fathers had been in quite 'traditional' relationships in which the children's mother was primarily responsible for childcare, (whether or not the mother was in paid employment).

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[2] A recent (if unscientific) survey published in a popular parents' magazine found that 49% of fathers rarely get up at night, mothers got an average of four hours sleep a night during the first four months of their babies lives, and 83% of working mothers said that tiredness affected their performance at work. (Mother and Baby Magazine, May 2002)

Fathers who had initially left the family home had not lived with their children for up to two years.[3] Father's experiences could accordingly be quite limited, although most fathers had undertaken childcare at some point, particularly while their partners worked. This is consistent with research, which shows that fathers predominantly provide childcare when the mother is in paid employment. (Ferri and Smith, 1996)

The withdrawal of a maternal presence meant that fathers were faced with the unmediated needs and demands of their children. Men who were less practiced at meeting their children's need might be expected to find the process of transition to primary carer difficult. For this group of fathers, however, the way in which each father negotiated the transition process depended very much on their individual circumstances, a theme that will be returned to in Chapter 4.

For fathers whose partners left the family home alone, the transition to lone fatherhood, as discussed above, usually took place with very little warning, (although, with the benefit of hindsight, fathers' accounts often mention 'warning signs'). Many fathers felt (perhaps unsurprisingly) apprehensive about their new situation.

Well initially I moved into my mum and dad's you know. I couldn't see, I couldn't say how I could cope at home with two kids and keep a job as well' (Dave Bishop)

Children too may be unprepared for the change in parenting, so some fathers had to negotiate not only their own practical and emotional challenges, but also the children's distress. Bill Green worked with children, and had planned how he would break the news to his own daughters when his wife said that she was moving out of the family home. In the event, he found that the first time he was alone with his children was during a car journey, and felt that his carefully chosen words were lost:

I was just driving my car and the girls were in the back and I just blurted it out.... I get flashbacks thinking about it, it was appalling, I really didn't want it to happen to them, it was really sad, really sad, and it bothers me still. (Bill Green)

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[3] The length of time that fathers lived apart from their children varied from a few weeks to two years

Identity, paid work and parenting

The decline in areas of 'traditional' male occupations is well documented. Because these are structures that have historically supported patriarchy, some writers have suggested that patriarchy itself may be 'in retreat', particularly amongst the working class, who have been most affected by structural change. (Sharpe and O'Donnell, 2000) A further body of literature argues that as more women enter the labour market, couples are re-negotiating their relationships, which may mean a process of losses and gains for both men and women. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992)

However, while research evidence around men and women's relative experience of caring and unpaid work suggests that women make major accommodation to caring responsibilities, men tend to make rather less. (Backett, 1982; Ungerson, 1983, 1987) Moreover, parenting practices are constrained by gendered identities. (Dienhart, 1998)

While working class women in particular have always engaged in productive labour outside the home, (Coltrane, 1996) motherhood remains central to constructions of femininity, so differences in men and women's expectations of 'family' and 'parenthood' are unsurprising.

Research evidence suggests that young women appear to be more comfortable with their identities than their male counterparts, although there is also evidence that young men remain more committed to the idea of marriage and family life. However, young women tend to see the inability to bear children as a lack in men's lives, rather than a disadvantage for women. (Sharpe and O'Donnell, 2000) Thus expectations around becoming a parent might be anticipated to be very different for men and women, for whom ideology may be at variance with practical experience.

If identity is consequently understood as relational – to gender, class, race, age and social structures, and is, moreover, influenced by prevailing ideologies, what are the implications for this group of men? Fathers in this study often expressed an awareness of contemporary ideological themes of 're-emerging' fatherhood, family change and the

'new man', which some fathers related not only to themselves as individuals, but also to wider social change.

I'm a new man...I'd make someone a wonderful wife (Richard Prince)

I suppose in some respects I feel guilty that they're not growing up in a normal family situation, but then again I think, what is a normal family situation? (Adrian Wright)

Further, some men said that the idea that they might keep their children when the parental relationship ended was 'at the back of their minds', which they saw as easing their transition to primary carer. However, reference to 'new manhood' was typically made in a joking way, which tended to dissociate men from this identity.

Recent research has suggested that men's involvement in family life is primarily constrained by 'breadwinning' identities. (Warin et al, 1999) Further, there is some evidence that men's *willingness* to assume a 'caring parent' identity is more closely linked with their labour market position than it is for women (Smart and Neale, 1999:54)

What impact does the cultural importance of a 'breadwinning' identity have on lone fathers? While men's relationship with paid work will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, it is worth mentioning that there was a wide variation in the practical experience of fathers in this sample. Some men were able to vary their work patterns with relative ease when they became primary carers, while others were in less flexible situations.

So despite apparent challenges to the idea that caring is essentially 'women's work' and the home 'women's territory', evidence is contradictory. Although the position of fathers in the labour market is undoubtedly highly significant in terms of men's practical ability to become primary carers for their children, this is only a partial account of men's experiences.

Fathers in this group gained primary responsibility for their children *regardless* of their labour market position. As I have argued, these men had not chosen lone fatherhood, although their willingness to consider becoming primary carer may well have been influenced by a variety of factors, of which labour market position was one.

The challenge to identity

Although it is frequently asserted that a growing number of men are 'more involved' with their children, contemporary constructions of fatherhood involve notions of a 'crisis of masculinity', in which uncertainty characterises men's experience. (Burgess, 1997). Thus, while some respondents were perhaps reflecting a broader 'rights-based' political ideology, notions of 'unfairness' in 'the system' tend to be conflated in fathers' accounts with positivist biological interpretations of parental roles, which support the position of mothers as 'natural' carers.

> *People just couldn't understand that she hadn't taken David with her, everybody*
> *said 'how could a mother?' because I could never leave him like that she*
> *just...stopped bothering.... I could understand it in a man to be honest but I can't*
> *imagine any woman leaving her flesh and blood like that.... and not bother*
> *(George White)*

These fathers might be seen as appealing to the 'dominant cultural ideology, which idealises motherhood'. (Smart & Neale, 1999:52) Further, as the authors point out, it is now seen as acceptable for men to opt for either identity: 'new man' fatherhood, or 'good provider' fatherhood, which offers men concomitant opportunities for engaging with their children in different ways.

This represented a difficulty for fathers who found themselves in the position of breadwinners *and* carers. One possible way of resolving this dissonance was for fathers to position themselves outside the social structures that were seen by men as supporting motherhood.

> *It must happen to many I always think a lot of fathers do not even try for their*
> *children not because they don't necessarily want them or think they can't cope*

with um bringing them up on their own it's just that they don't think they've got that chance in the first place so there's no point in trying. (Graham Dodds)

Fathers in the study frequently expressed the belief that structures inherently favour women more than men, not only after divorce and separation, but also in two parent families: women were often seen as getting the 'better deal'.

Because we're not the natural mother we've got.. second best...the mother can be violent and a drug addict, alcoholic, completely unfit and...it's very very unfair, its, um, you'll have to excuse me, whether I offend anyone I don't know, but everyone says women have got equal rights but it is when it suits them, like with kids and that, it's always the women, and if that's the case, it's not equal rights, is it? You know, the father's got just as much rights as (the mother) (Brian Thorpe)

They're (women) worse than men... I mean I'm just assuming that. A lot more stigma's around blokes, you know, and kids and stuff. (Ben Stevenson)

Richard Prince made a similar point to Brian Thorpe (above) in which his ex-partner's lack of parenting skills was used to support his own position. This was further underpinned by the attribution of the observation to his sister in law, whose position as a 'knowledgeable outsider' might be seen as supporting Richard's case:

I've since been told that she didn't look after them (children) properly and I think that's some of the reason that the stepdaughter went off the rails in the end. And the kids would be better off with me, and that came from her sister (Richard Prince)

While the majority of fathers in the study said that they had 'always been involved' in childcare, a small number maintained that they had done as much as, (or more than) their ex-partners. As discussed in the previous section, most of the fathers had been present at the birth of their children, and mentioned changing nappies, childcare while their ex-partners worked, and in four instances, getting up to help with night-time feeds.

However, the question, 'Before the divorce/separation, who mainly looked after the children?' evoked the response 'She (ex-partner) did' from the majority of respondents. Most fathers consequently described 'traditional' arrangements, whereby their ex-partners had done most of both the childcare and the domestic work.

While many of the fathers in this group said that women (as mothers of the children) were 'natural' carers for the child, justification was needed to support their own position. By characterising their ex-partners as deficient in 'maternal instinct', some fathers were consequently able to claim both identities ('breadwinning' and 'new man' fatherhood) for themselves.

There are thus tensions in the accounts that men gave, in terms of the amount of time that they spent with their children prior to the relationship breakdown, and their labour market position *during* the relationship. Bill Green and his partner both worked full-time (Bill was still in full-time employment at the time of the interview, including 'on call' work and shift work.)

> *I was very settled within the family environment, I mean I loved it, I loved having the children and I wanted to do absolutely everything with them...right from when they were tiny.*

However, Bill also described his ex-partner as lacking in 'maternal instincts':

> *I think Tracey was always more interested in going out...she didn't have sort of too many maternal instincts and basically I just found myself in the position of being with the children **most of the time** (Bill Green, my emphasis)*

Men and their fathers

A significant element of the contemporary debate around fatherhood is the notion that men's relationships with their sons are particularly significant. (See, for example, Lewis and Warin, 2001) While this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, it is worth noting that many of the men taking part in this study spontaneously mentioned their relationships with their own fathers.

While this may in part be attributed to their sensitisation to the topic of fatherhood more generally, men's relationships with their fathers appeared, for some men at least, to become more important once respondents became primary carers, and three men had been brought up primarily by their own fathers.

Several respondents reported rifts between themselves and their male parent that had been repaired once the younger man found himself in a crisis situation, most typically when they found that their partner had left them with the children. These fathers were attempting to 'build bridges' with their own male parent, in something of a reversal of classic psychoanalytic theory which conceptualises the role of the father as a bridge between the child and the outside world.

One lone father described a troubled relationship with his own father, who had left his mother on several occasions (they had actually divorced and remarried when he was a teenager) Dave described his relationship with his father prior to becoming a lone parent as characterised by feelings of anger and hostility. However, his father was the first person that he contacted when his own marriage broke down.

Well initially I'd not spoke to my dad for nigh on about two years...so on the day she left, even before I'd picked the children up from where they were I rung my dad up and I just turned round and said "Look, I've never needed you as much in my life, I need you, now" he said "Why, what's the matter?" so I told him. He said, "Right, I'll be there in five minutes". (Dave Bishop)

However, not all adult father-son relationships achieved this resolution. Jason Coombes described his relationship with a father who was largely 'absent' throughout his own childhood because of the nature of his work in the building trade.

Even today I see my dad regular, but I just can't communicate with him, it's 'Alright Dad, how's work been'...me mum and I can sit for hours, I can sit and talk with me mum, but with me dad I just can't ... only because I don't know him, I mean I've got to know him better since I've had my children cos he knows what he missed out, he really does, so he tries to make up with his grandchildren, you see,

which I can understand and I can respect that but only as a father meself now, I couldn't respect that as a kid or his son. As a father, I can respect what he did, put clothes on my back and a roof over my head and food in my belly, but I lost a lot, and he realises that, I know I do, I missed it all. he might be me dad, but he's not me dad, he's my mum's husband. (Jason Coombes father of daughters aged 7 and 11))

For some fathers in this study, becoming a primary carer had thus effected a shift in their understanding of their own father's part in their lives. Several men expressed reservations about their fathers as 'breadwinning' rather than 'caring' role models, and had come to see this as a deficiency in their own childhoods.

While this point will be discussed further in Chapter 6, it is pertinent to the present discussion that men's relationships with their own fathers were clearly important in terms of how men constructed their own identities. The impact of this process was, for some men, to cause them to not only reflect on their relationships with their own fathers, but also on their own fathering practices.

Demography of lone fatherhood: the characteristics of lone father families

Change and diversity were key themes in the lives of the fathers in this group. The process of becoming a lone father meant that father's positions undoubtedly changed in relation to their children. However, despite pervasive contemporary ideology that fathers are particularly important in the lives of their sons, (see, for example, Lewis and Warin, 2001) the sex and ages of the children in these lone father families did not appear to be as important as expected.

Diversity in lone father family forms is illustrated by an examination of the composition of the families in the study. Three fathers in the study were caring for stepchildren as well as their own biological children. The youngest child was three at the time of the interview, and had been cared for by his father since he was eleven months old, while other families incorporated a father and teenagers. Some families had teenaged children

and a much younger child from the father's subsequent relationship. One father was caring for daughters aged 2 ½ and 5 respectively, and also for his disabled mother in law who lived in the household.

The presence of stepchildren in lone father households raises interesting questions about children's agency. Children are often constructed as 'victims' of family dissolution. Smart and Neale (1999a), for example, argue that there is a widespread presumption of harm to children where parents separate or divorced. Further, there is an assumption that after divorce, children are 'likely to be subject to parental manipulations'. (1999a:95) However, while many fathers gave accounts of apparent manipulation by the 'other' parent, they also gave accounts in which children's views were seen as important.

In all three cases where there was a stepchild in the family, the child or young person had indicated that they wanted to live with their stepfather. Men also described a process of active 'choice' by biological children. One nine year old, for example, was taken abroad by his mother, and communication between father and child was limited to telephone contact. This father had received a postcard from his ex wife, announcing her intention to remain overseas with their son.

> *Adam stayed there with his mother six months until I got a phone call*
>
> *here...that's when he came back. I said, 'Do you want to come back?' and that*
>
> *was that.' (Graham Dodds, father of Adam and Carl, aged 15 and 12)*

One of the fathers who left with his child described how his daughter, then aged three, had witnessed turbulent scenes between her parents. These often ended when her mother told her father to leave.

> *She said 'If my mum says to get out again, just tell me and I'll get my clothes and*
>
> *come with you, it's not very nice', and I says 'Alright, baby' and fair enough,*
>
> *three or four weeks later it happened again, and she (partner) called the police*
>
> *and this policeman was asking questions, and he advised me to leave, but he said*
>
> *'Do you think she'll (daughter) be alright with her?' and I just looked at him, and*

my daughter, she was following me all over the place, and she said 'I'm going with my dad' (Jason Coombes)

Some respondents had other children not living with them.[4] Again, fathers sometimes said that this was the child's choice, often citing a particularly close relationship between the mother and child as the reason for the arrangement. For some fathers, non-resident children were children from a previous relationship, where fathers had followed 'traditional' patterns of post-separation fatherhood, and the child had remained with the mother. Fathers may thus have left more than one relationship in which children were involved[5], yet still found themselves in the position of primary carers.

Conclusion

A body of research evidence suggests that fathers are in a position to exercise choices around the amount of involvement that they have with their children both before and after separation and divorce. (See, for example, Smart & Neale, 1999a, Ferri and Smith, 1996; Bradshaw and Millar, 1991) The lone fathers in this study all had lone parenthood thrust upon them through a complex interplay of factors. While father's accounts described some events as within their control, most were seen as being inescapable.

Different elements were interwoven to create men's situations with their children in lone father families, and combined with multiple permutations of arrangements for the care of children to create a complicated picture. This complexity extended to decision-making processes in which it is difficult to distinguish between men who sought care of their children, and men for whom lone fatherhood was an involuntary process.

Although it would be inaccurate to argue that they did not want to become sole carers for their children, none of the fathers had planned this course when they separated or

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[4] 9 fathers had children not living with them
[5] Some fathers have had children with several mothers (one father had four children with different mothers – two mothers were more usual.) Some of the fathers had married or cohabited with women who already had children from a previous relationship.

divorced. Most fathers in the study had simply not considered the possibility until circumstances changed, or events occurred which pre-empted the choice.

Chapter 4

Day-to-day care

Introduction

The characterisation of fathers as relatively powerless, particularly in contemporary psychological explanations of the 'crisis of masculinity' (Frosh, 1997) reflects a more general social and political movement. This movement sees fathers as marginalised and excluded from involvement with their children both on a day to day basis because of their breadwinning role, and in the wider context of social structures which are seen as failing to support paternal involvement. (Burgess, 1997)

While there is a body of literature that argues that an emphasis on maternal care has 'deskilled' fathers (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996), research in two parent families indicates that women remain primarily responsible for both household tasks and childcare, (Graham, 1993; Burghes et. al., 1997; Warin et. al.,1999) while contemporary fathers have a choice of identities open to them, (Smart & Neale, 1999a) that of 'caring parent' or 'provider'.

Further to the notion that caring is essentially 'women's work', the arena in which caring takes place (the home) has historically been constructed as women's territory. Caring for children involves meeting their physical needs in the context of a domestic environment. However, despite changes that have taken place in the way in which 'the family' is constructed, the distribution of domestic labour has remained structured along gendered lines. While the ideology of 'new manhood' supports the notion of masculine domestic competence, this is in tension with ideologies around motherhood and maternal roles.

Fatherhood has been situated in the public domain by both fathers' and men's rights groups and policy makers. In practice, women almost always carry out the physical

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work of caring for children, an activity that, as Graham (1983) and others have argued, remains invisible until it is not done. The practical position of lone fathers thus impacts on their identities in a number of ways, not least in tension between notions of 'good' motherhood and fatherhood.

Lone fathers are thus in a position where practical change has challenged the validity of prior experience. Nevertheless, once fathers become actively involved in the day to day care of their children, the limitations of a model which assumes that women have a special propensity to care, and a corresponding lack on the part of men, becomes apparent. Again, the way in which men adapt to the practicalities of day to day care is influenced by a variety of factors, which may be quite complex.

The practical challenge

For fathers who initially left the family home (see Chapter 3) there were particular practical challenges at the point at which they acquired primary care of their children. Where the family home was rented, there were sometimes difficulties with rent arrears. The situation was further complicated if men's names had not been removed from the tenancy, in which case they remained liable for any arrears. This meant that some fathers had to negotiate with landlords (frequently Local Authorities) in order to accommodate themselves and their children.

> *They said "Because you're still officially a joint tenant then (even) if you can't pay it then you're going to have to pay it," and I said "Well look I haven't lived there for however long," they said "Yeah we know that," and they did some constructive accounting and said "It's all been lumped onto her name", because my application for housing was blocked, and then they unblocked my application. (Peter Norman)*

For fathers who initially left the family home, the need to find accommodation for themselves and their children was an overriding imperative. Where fathers were living in single accommodation, or with other family members, strained relationships or lack of space created other difficulties. Three fathers in the sample stayed with other family

members before securing separate accommodation. Although one father spent a year in his parent's household with his children, the remaining two spent two months and two weeks respectively in other households.

One father initially spent two months with his sister and her family, until relationships became strained and he approached the Local Authority for accommodation. This father had returned to the area that he had grown up in, because he felt that he would be able to mobilise support for himself and his son, and had also secured employment in the area. He was initially housed in temporary accommodation, which he described as 'a little miniature Beirut, not the most pleasant place, it's got such a filthy name', and believed that he was discriminated against by the housing allocation officer.

I phoned this woman up (housing officer) who was dealing with it and I said I was fed up with being mucked about cos like I was being put to the bottom of the queue because I'm a single dad, and I said all the single mums in here have come and gone...I know exactly what's going on I said, and I said 'you've got two weeks to sort it out, or I'm going to the papers' and I got a flat in two weeks, but you had to sort of bully them, if you see what I mean. (Daniel Bates)

Daniel's story is interesting, because as one of only two men in the sample to have left the family home with a child, he was also the only father to be placed in temporary accommodation with his child. Although he felt that the Local Authority had been discriminatory, he was nevertheless able to elicit a prompt response, securing permanent housing after six weeks, during which time his sister continued to provide support that enabled him to continue with paid work.

As discussed in Chapter 3, men in this group who left the family home alone typically became primary carers as the result of a crisis in the life of their ex-wife or partner. This meant that accommodation was needed at very short notice: some father's situations changed within a matter of days or even hours.

Although fathers in the sample who had sought Local Authority accommodation often felt that they had been discriminated against by housing officers in favour of lone

mothers, this seems likely to reflect pressure on social housing, rather than discrimination per. se. Further, as the majority of lone parents are mothers, fathers were more likely to be able to draw on both personal experience and anecdotal evidence to support a belief that mothers find it easier than fathers to access social housing.

However, one father had experienced particular difficulties that were clearly associated within being male. Having been housed by the Local Authority in an urban area, he became the target of local residents who accused him of child abuse, and surrounded his house one evening. He left the house, with the children, late at night, walking approximately two and a half miles until he reached the local hospital, where, believing himself to be followed, he 'lost' his pursuers by getting into lifts and out again on different floors. Carl eventually flagged down a police patrol car, which waited with him until his parents arrived to collect him and his children.

However, Social Services had been heavily involved with Carl's ex-partner and the children, (who had in fact been the subjects of Care Orders when Carl became their primary carer). The circumstances surrounding the case had been very difficult, and the children had been hospitalised because of neglect; continuing Social Service involvement might therefore be expected. However, Carl experienced this as constant interference in his daily life, and attributed frequent visits by social workers to his home as the reason why neighbours were suspicious of his motives in caring for the children. [1]

They (social workers) were making my life hell, they put me into a depression and I became suicidal, it was, they just made my life hell, and with social workers coming to the door all the time they people were thinking, well social workers been there, what's he been up to? So I mean, when I was at (inner city housing estate) they just outcast me, it go so bad a lynch mob come to my house wanting to finish me off (Carl Monroe)

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[1] This episode took place during the height of media 'scare' stories around the 1997 Sexual Offences Act. which introduced a requirement for sex offenders to register with their local police force in their area of residence.

Housing is thus a key issue for anyone who is left with responsibility for children after relationship breakdown, indeed, men who remained in owner-occupied marital homes were also likely to experience difficulties associated with loss of income where ex-partners had been in paid employment.

The only exception in this sample is a father who, having left the family home and lived apart from his ex-wife for two years, decided that he wanted to move back into their former marital home. His ex-wife announced her decision to move house when she received a promotion at work; this father was in a strong financial position, and able to achieve his aim.

I think my ex-wife expected that I would sell the house and then I would probably have no option other than maybe, for him to, I think she was probably then looking for a house for him to go and live with her ... but that didn't happen, I decided that, well, the relationship is good, I can cope with the problems, so the decision was made. (Ben Stevenson, son aged 8)

Men's experiences in terms of housing thus varied according to their individual circumstances. For men who had adequate resources, there were fewer hurdles to negotiate. However, housing tenure is a key variable in the experience of lone parenthood, (Rowlingson and McKay, 1998; Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998) and fathers on low incomes, or state benefits, were more likely to rely on Local Authorities for housing, or to experience practical difficulties in securing suitable accommodation. Fathers seeking accommodation for themselves and their children were in completely new situations in which housing was the first step in organising life in reordered circumstances.

So far as this group of fathers is concerned, it is not possible to argue that Local Authorities had discriminated against them because they were lone fathers, despite perceptions to the contrary. Although there is a lack of research in this area, it is apparent that the practical challenges that fathers face in many ways mirror the difficulties that women experience when relationships break down, and they remain sole carers for a child or children, for whom housing is also a key issue.

The challenge of day to day care

As I argued in Chapter 3, there are no neat categories to describe lone fathers' experience. The apparent inconsistencies in some accounts (claims of domestic competence and involvement during the relationship, and accounts of practical challenges when the relationship ended) are illustrative of this. A claim of domestic competence prior to the breakdown, coupled with accounts of practical difficulties when men became lone parents suggests that the practical, domestic domain is also the site of a challenge to men's identities.

For men in the early stages of lone parenthood, an immediate practical challenge was the organisation of household tasks. Most of the fathers in this study had, as discussed in Chapter 3, been in quite 'traditional' relationships where their ex-wives or partners had taken overall responsibility for running the household.

> *I mean, no matter what went off between me and my wife, I came in from work and she always cooked my tea, whatever, and suddenly that wasn't there any more ... for the first two months it was just chip shop.... I just thought, ah, I must get in to practise, I must cook. (George White)*

Dave Bishop moved in with his parents when his partner left. Although he said that he had taken over the running of the household when his ex-partner had been hospitalised, he found that he had limited practical skills when he first acquired a home of his own:

> *When she had this operation, I had to do the washing and the ironing and the cooking and cleaning and things like that and she milked it for a long time then left....I would say initially it was just a case of I didn't have, well I had a clue how an iron worked, I'd got a semi clue how a washer worked but you know I'd not had to do it for nearly 12 months with living at mum and dad's. (Dave Bishop)*

While practical tasks presented a challenge to fathers in varying degrees, some found the loss of relative freedom from childcare responsibilities prior to the relationship breakdown the most difficult challenge.

It was just that, I suppose it was just the fact that I, it was my responsibility 24
hours a day whereas it wasn't before er I suppose it takes away your freedom
which is a horrible thing to say, but it does obviously. (Richard Prince)

One strategy adopted by many fathers was to attempt to involve their children in the day to day running of the household. While this will be further explored in Chapter 6, it is relevant in the current context to note that many fathers said that they expected their children to help with household chores.

I'm trying to get them to do more and more because I keep telling them there's
only one pair of hands in this house and I can't do everything and as they get
older they shouldn't expect me to do. But yeah they're doing more and more but
it's still a struggle to get out the house for 8.30, 8.35 sometimes. (Richard Prince)

Although a recurring theme throughout the literature on parenting, and indeed, as an embedded assumption throughout family policy is that fathers are more likely to be able to be 'disciplinarians', (Utting et.al., 1993; Burghes et.al., 1997) fathers in this study consistently described difficulties with persuading their children to do their share of household chores.

They (sons) have a small job, and that's supposedly, um, Jack will empty the bin,
while James prepares the pots. And then Jack will wash and swill the pots, while
James dries them and puts them in the cupboard. That's fairly straightforward, I
think...and, uh, you constantly have to remind them to do it...you know, like they
don't forget when it's pay day, but they do forget to do the jobs. (Ian Miller,
father of boys aged 15 and 13)

This is one area that was affected by the age of the children involved; older children were expected to do more, whereas fathers of younger children appeared more likely to see the day to day running of the household as part of their overall parenting responsibilities. This has implications for men's relationships with their children, a point that will be returned to in Chapter 6.

What is, however, relevant to the current discussion is that this highlights the dynamics of the way that fathers constructed their responsibilities as parents. For men whose children were younger, expectations were different. These fathers were able to make connections between their children's learning and age-appropriate behaviour, and their own practical activities.

> *He's very good kid, he's a very affable person, uh, to put it politely he tries to help me (laughs) he is very good, you know, he comes out with stuff he's been watching me do. (Richard Collins, father of 3 year old)*

The practical and mundane characteristics of day to day domestic life had thus become, for this group of fathers, the arena in which many aspects of their relationships with their children were explored and developed, and connections to a new mode of parenting were forged.

However, not all fathers said that they had regarded the initial task of establishing domestic routines as a challenge. Some fathers (n5) said that prior to the separation or divorce, they had been more involved in domestic life than their ex-partners, while a further three fathers said that this had been shared between themselves and their ex-partner.

When fathers said that they had been highly involved in domestic life prior to the end of their relationship with the children's mother, this may not, of course, mean that domestic work was shared equally in the household. This question of quantity over quality is one that has been extensively debated in the literature around domestic labour; what is relevant in the context of the present discussion is the fact that men's perceptions were that they had done 'their share' of household and caring tasks in the home (and in some cases, more than their fair share.) Reflecting on his situation, one father observed that he had not been at home as much as, with the benefit of hindsight, he would have liked.

> *It's (lone fatherhood) probably made it more acute, probably more aware of it. I don't think I'd necessarily have thought..it's very different, when we were*

together I don't think I spent much time with the children but that wasn't out of choice that was the sheer number of hours I worked (Graham Dodds)

While, as discussed above, some father's claims to having 'done everything' in the home were not always consistent with the accounts that fathers gave of patterns of paid work prior to the end of the parental relationship, previous experience in the domestic environment could be seen as validating their position. These fathers were able to claim both a caring and a providing role in this prior context. Lone fatherhood, however, meant that they had no choice about the activities associated with these roles, indeed, were in a position where they had to adopt both, a point to which I will return in the following sections.

Social isolation

While contemporary fathers are the most common source of childcare when women work, (Lewis and Warin, 2001) the availability of maternal care in two parent families may be equally important in enabling fathers to socialise outside the home. Almost all the fathers in the study cited the lack of practical opportunities for social activities once they became primary carers for their children.

The role of women as 'kin-keepers' has been well documented; (Stack and Burton, 1994; Finch and Mason, 1993) The social isolation that some fathers

experienced when they became lone parents may also reflect the additional role of women as friendship builders on behalf of the couple. The analysis of emotional labour is amenable to extension beyond those activities associated with caring. Indeed, Morgan argues that both emotional labour and caring tasks are central in the construction of both gender identity and sexual difference. (Morgan, 1996)

In the context of men raising children alone, like practical care itself, the emotional labour of establishing and maintaining close relationships outside the family becomes visible only when it is not done. While most of the fathers in the sample had contact with other men, either in the workplace or on a social basis, men tended to see these relationships as separate from their domestic responsibilities.

The work of making and maintaining friendships outside the immediate family was typically within the maternal domain, reflecting fathers' physical absence from the household during the day. The practical impact of this absence was felt in issues around men's perceptions of the practical support available to them as solo parents.

Well, I mean you've got mates that you can go out with, but you wouldn't really leave the kids at their house..the thing is it's much harder for a single parent because most.. most women have got, like other friends whether they're married or single, they've got children of a similar sort of age, but when you're a single male parent that just don't happen. I mean, you might come across the odd one, but you can hardly just drop in and say can I just leave the kids with you while I fetch a pint of milk like women can, so that, I think that's what makes it difficult. (Paul Jones)

When the mother had mediated relationships with friends outside the immediate family circle, some fathers found that relationships changed. This process sometimes began when the relationship between the father and his ex-partner deteriorated, and existing friendships were eroded.

We did socialise with friends, but they were more because of my wife, I mean I wouldn't really class them as... I was sort of friends with them, but they're not my friends. I was already being pushed out a little bit, and that was a bit because she was also using our friends so she could do other activities, so friends...so I suppose I was getting a bit more isolated before I became a single parent. (Howard Johnson)

Fathers mentioned the lack of spontaneity in their social lives, and the need to plan outings, whereas before, they were able to go out in the knowledge that their ex-partners would be available to care for the children. Women's emotional labour and the practical, day to day work of caring for children were thus inextricably linked.

Social life instantly became more difficult; it's hard to do anything with a 2, 5 and 7 yr. old in tow. (Matthew Arden)

103

Fathers who had moved to a new area as a result of becoming a lone parent had to embark on forming new friendships. For some men, this was quite problematic; while this related in part to a sense of isolation in their new status as lone parents, for others, geographical distance from established friendships was a difficulty.

I don't have a social life as much, because where I live I've been there about 8 months and my local, like what I'd class my local pub I speak to people in there, and of course you meet people and I speak to them, but I don't have a social life as such, you know, where I can go out and have a night out with the guys. (Peter Norman)

Fathers accounts characterised their experience of social life in two parent families as the freedom to go out if they wanted to, even if this was for relatively short periods. Whatever the previous patterns of social life men had, therefore, they were likely to say that they felt unsupported as lone parents, which again relates to the challenge to identity that primary childcare presents to fathers. The association of maternal care with an assumption of maternal *availability* offered fathers a freedom that they may not have considered until their separation or divorce.

I used to sort of go out pretty often, whereas if I want to go out (now) I have to stay in... and I think it's the fact that I can't go out makes me think as I'd like to go out..that sounds funny but you're more of a prisoner, because even though you probably go out as much as what you did before, it's just that, uh, you have to, there's a rigidity about it, you've got to premeditate. (Paul Jones)

While prior experience in terms of their involvement in the care of their children could give fathers a degree of confidence in their practical ability to parent alone, feelings of social isolation were compounded by the physical restrictions imposed by primary responsibility for the children.

Identity challenges: how practical change challenges men's identities

Having made the transition to primary carer, lone fathers are in a position where identity choices that are available to men in two parent families (caring parent or

104

provider) are less clearly defined. Although lone fathers may retain a 'provider' identity, particularly in relation to the social world outside the home, away from paid work, caring responsibilities define their activities. A central question is thus, how do fathers resolve the tension between identities which are located in differing domains, the public domain of work and the 'providing' father, and the private arena in which most parenting takes place?

While, as Smart and Neale argue (1999a) argue, fathers generally have a choice about which identity they choose to adopt, lone fathers' situations are somewhat ambiguous. Their responsibilities clearly lie in both domains, as caring fathers and as providers. There is a sense in which lone fathers in this study positioned themselves as 'other', that is, outside the conventional boundaries of family and parenting. However enjoyable and rewarding fathers found their relationships with their children, stereotypical notions about parenting roles, and lone parenting, also underpinned much of the way in which fathers interpreted their situations.

Lone parenthood and motherhood were thus conflated in men's thinking about their situation, which compounded their sense of being 'outsiders'. Although there is evidence that lone fathers are more likely to be seen as 'doing well' than their female counterparts (Barker, 1995:214) the lack of a cultural template for a dual identity means that the way in which others might interpret their situation was often perceived in negative terms.

I think it's all very different between a man and a woman sometimes I feel very, uh, I spose ashamed would be one word.. I don't like being a one-man family, I don't like being..what goes through other people's minds, I think there's so many women I have to say who do enjoy being one-parent families, but I'm not like that (George White)

Fathers who lived in close knit communities appeared particularly vulnerable to anxieties around other people's perceptions of them. These communities were sometimes rural, or on housing estates where 'everyone knows everyone else'. Potential sources of support were conversely a potential source of difficulty for fathers

in this group. Graham Dodds, who is mentioned above, had lived in the same rural community for fifteen years, and felt that he was the subject of speculation by mothers in the village.

They couldn't help knowing cos women talk between themselves don't they..they discuss their lives.. not the same as men...anyway, women are different like this, so yes of course they discussed it between themselves.. I mean they must have.. I know..you can tell by the looks people give you..I did find that.. I still find it to this day (Graham Dodds)

There is a body of literature which suggests that men's experience of parenting is mediated by mothers, (for example, Backett, 1987) and many fathers had been supported through the initial stages of lone parenthood by mothers who had been friendly with their ex-partners. This may have taken the form of a continuation of practical support in terms of after school childcare, for example.

With very few exceptions, fathers who had just become lone parents were unlikely to be entirely aware of the detail of their children's everyday lives. Other mothers maintained this awareness, and so fathers had to develop an ability keep their own mental diaries, which included the activities of other household members.

Three men were supported through the early stages of lone parenthood by their ex-partners closest friends. These women were in a position of having special 'insider' knowledge of the difficulties that the couple was experiencing, which could, in itself, create further difficulties. Mutual knowledge and experience combined with feelings of loneliness and isolation meant that, for some fathers, friendship evolved into an intimate relationship. Two fathers formed brief relationships with the ex-wives of the men that their own partners had left them for.

I actually became involved with his ex-wife, we got thrown together really, we were both lonely, we enjoyed each other's company..but it became too complicated so we just hit it on the head. And I miss that really 'cos she was the

one person I could pop up of an evening, have a cup of coffee and a natter because we were so close. (George White)

However, once fathers became established as lone parents, relationships with other parents (mothers) tended to decline, which increased men's feelings of isolation and loneliness. This was partially because of what some fathers identified as a fundamental problem in having close friendships with women:

I think it could be because, well it's the male-female thing, if you're talking to a woman you're trying to pick her up or whatever, I think that it sort of comes across whereas all you want to do is talk or whatever. (Richard Prince)

Graham Dodds had received both practical help and emotional support during a lengthy court battle from a friend of his ex-partner. Graham's subsequent interpretation of the reasons for local speculation and a perceived (albeit low-level) hostility was that in some sense, his situation undermined the position of other parents with care (mothers) in the village.

Well the only thing I can put it down to is.. well p'raps that they're (mothers) in a bit of a threat to their own position.. what I said to you just now about what Annette said when she was helping me, about she'd of killed anybody who'd tried to take her kids off her.. which is a bit of a double-edged thing isn't it? She obviously thought she was the only person to look after her children (Graham Dodds)

Whatever practical situation men found themselves in, discomfort with a 'caring' identity may be bound up with feeling unsupported. Women were seen by some fathers as having sources of support through social networks, in a way that remains unavailable to men who parent alone. However, analysis of the support that fathers actually received suggests that many women also appeared willing to help and support men, particularly through the initial stages of establishing themselves as solo parents, a theme to which I will return in the following section.

Caring for a child is work which requires both emotional and physical resources. The way in which mothers manage time and resources has been well documented, but less is known about the way in which fathers do this.

For fathers in this study, however, there were similarities between their own position and that of mothers: multiple responsibilities, to children, employers, and other family members meant that some fathers said that since they had become lone parents, time had proved the biggest constraint to doing what they felt that they would have liked to do. Having been precipitated into the role of primary carer, there was often little time to reflect on how best to approach their new situation.

Many fathers, as discussed above, felt themselves particularly vulnerable to outside scrutiny. The challenge that time and resource management presented to fathers thus became a site for challenges to identity. The blurring of boundaries between maintaining the domestic environment and caring for children meant that fathers gave accounts of the early stages of lone parenthood in which they sometimes felt significant anxiety about the need to be seen as competent caring parents.

Tracey basically decided she didn't want the responsibility, but even then I still felt I could lose them at any time.. I felt that the, and I still do think with the system that it's stacked against men, you know, it is , and I felt that I was on eggshells for a while, and I know that Tracey and her mother used to come up and they used to criticise an awful lot, and it used to bother me, and if I knew they were coming, I'd make sure the house was spotless , I would, seriously , because I didn't want them to think that I wasn't managing. (Bill Green)

Despite the problems that had led to the end of men's relationships with their ex-partners, the fact of lone parenthood, that is, being alone in what has been described as the 'cultural norm of coupledom' (Hardy and Crow, 1991:1) was seen as problematic by some fathers. This did not, however, mean that they necessarily wanted a new relationship; rather, it might be seen as an idealisation of their prior situation, when faced with the realities of daily responsibility for children.

I think that's probably the difficulty.... for any single parent, that you have to start taking two roles on...that's very hard for one person to do in any circumstances...because I think with a couple, you always find a balance, you know, in successful relationships you find a balance...and um.... you can't find a balance on your own so easily (Ian Miller)

Practical resolutions

Once fathers in this study had actually made the transition to fully fledged lone parenthood, and became established as the primary carer for their children, most said that they felt comfortable with the practical aspects of their domestic lives. While this did not necessarily mean that they enjoyed household chores, these were seen as a 'necessary evil', and men developed routines to cope with the competing demands of children, paid work, and in one case, the needs of a disabled relative who also lived in the household.

*It's totally new, I used to come in at half past five feeling **tired** and suddenly I was having to come in at half past five, then cook tea, then go out to play, and then get up for work the next day...I was worn out for a while, but I've just...I've got used to it now. (George White)*

Fathers were, as discussed above, able to draw on practical skills that were developed during the relationship; three fathers said that their mothers were in paid employment and that their own fathers had regularly undertaken household chores. These fathers were able to cite their own fathers as role models, although only because of special circumstances, that is, because their mothers were in paid work.

For one father, sharing the housework with his father was an opportunity to develop their father-son relationship. Dave Bishop lived with his children at his parent's house for a year after his partner left, and shared household tasks with his father while his mother was at work.

Me and dad would, you know like take it in turns, me and my dad would do hoovering up and dusting things, so I'd still keep my hand in and do things. (Dave Bishop)

A further sub group of fathers said that parental illness had meant that they were expected to help with domestic tasks throughout their own childhoods. Just as fathers said that they were able to draw on their experience of sharing household tasks during their relationship with their partners, fathers also related their childhood experiences to their position as primary carers.

I always had to do things at home when I was young..from about ten on I had to do an awful lot because me dad was ill (Daniel Bates)

Nevertheless, practical skills can be learned, and most fathers in this sample said that they had not had too much difficulty in this area.

*I can't really say that the practical side of things is a problem…there are some things that you might not know how to do, but they're just skills, aren't they, like anything else, and you can learn them, well in my situation, and other blokes like me, we **have** to learn them…but you can do it. (Howard Johnson)*

As the challenges that each father perceived varied, the way in which they felt that they had dealt with their new situations thus varied. What is clear from father's accounts, however, is that their position in relation to both their children and the world outside the family shifted, challenging what for most fathers had previously been taken for granted.

Meeting children's needs

The practical change in men's lives meant that their position in relation to their children had changed in the process of constructing a new, lone parent family. For some fathers, expectations also changed as they became increasingly immersed in a caring identity. One sub group of fathers had initially expected that their partners would want to care for their children as soon as they were able.

However, these fathers found that physical responsibility for their children changed their original perspective, and what had initially seemed to be an impossible task very quickly became normalised. These men appear to have adopted a caring identity because they had physical care of their children, in situations that they had not contemplated as a possibility when the relationship with their ex-partners broke down.

I envisaged me just seeing David at weekends.. I never thought that she would not try and take him..after a couple of months had gone 'oh, she's not coming back for him' (George White)

Several fathers who found themselves in this situation thus assumed that the mother of their children would eventually be reinstated as primary carer. However the assumption of primary responsibility for a child did not, as mentioned above, necessarily mean that fathers abandoned a provider identity. George White, in the above example, continued to work full time for the same employer. Nevertheless, changes in fathers' practical responsibilities for children may mean that their own construction of a 'provider' role is modified to assimilate responsibility for childcare, a point that I will return to in Chapter 5.

Having accepted primary responsibility for their children's care, (albeit by default), fathers were able to begin to construct new relationships with their children. Fathers had to shift from traditional breadwinning roles, in which they saw their children during the evenings and weekends, to one in which they were required to be available, (even if not physically present) twenty four hours a day. This involved enormous changes in both day to day life and men's relationships with their children.

Everything comes to me..the good news, the bad.. school letters, their wants and wishes, the moans and groans, everything. (Matthew Arden)

For some fathers, as discussed in previous sections, their changed situation provoked both anxiety, and a determination to 'get it right'. However, once these initial anxieties had passed, a more relaxed attitude to dealing with the demands of the domestic environment became a potential strategy for coping.

It's supposed to be their little contribution to, you know, I'll cook a meal sometimes, and you (sons) do this sometimes.... it's supposed to be every day, but sometimes is the norm now...and, uh, I mean at one time I wouldn't have allowed it to happen, I'd have been there, hands on hips...and they would have got washed. (Ian Miller)

Responsibility for the day to day care of children and household labour meant that fathers needed to engage with the needs of their children on levels which they had not previously experienced. Because the responsibility for meeting the children's needs now devolved to their fathers, the skills that were required were not only basic, practical skills such as the ability to cook, but rather skills which required an attentiveness to the wants and needs of the children.

*I just took over the, how to put it, I could already cook anyway and so I would say I learned to cook **different** things from some of the things like..I mean this might sound silly to you but I could cook a Sunday dinner but I didn't know how to cook spaghetti bolognaise, I had to learn silly little things like that cos they liked spaghetti bolognaise, I had learn to buy other foods which they like which I perhaps wouldn't eat myself, (Graham Dodds)*

As discussed in the previous sections, many fathers had attempted to engage their children in household tasks. Individual solutions to practical problems involved, in some cases, a relaxation of previous intentions. Matthew Arden felt that his household was happier because of his approach:

I do it... every now and then I have a tantrum and they eventually pull their weight, you know, but it never lasts for long.. to be honest it's not organised at all... I run a house with, what shall I say, as few rules as possible, and all four of us prefer it that way. (Matthew Arden)

The social construction of 'women's work' is characterised by the conflation of caring with responsibility for domestic labour. Lone fathers are in a position where, having taken primary responsibility for their children, they also have to accept responsibility

for ensuring that the domestic environment is maintained, which is the practical aspect of meeting their children's needs.

These two activities are inextricably connected, as many of the fathers in the study discovered. The household was therefore the site of both challenge and change for many men, who on one hand found themselves immersed in 'women's work' which challenged their relationship with the wider social world, while on the other needed to relate to the private, domestic world in new ways.

Support networks

As discussed above, caring responsibilities and the emotional labour involved in sustaining relationships with others outside the immediate family had, for the fathers in this sample, been the primarily the domain of their ex-wives or partners. When fathers became lone parents, it might be expected that their relationships with friends and colleagues would also be under pressure because of the practical constraints of caring for children.

As discussed in Chapter 3, where men's relationships with their own parents had been strained prior to the men's becoming lone parents, these sometimes improved, in some cases quite dramatically. While the role of grandparents in the contemporary family is under researched, for six fathers in the sample, both paternal grandparents played a significant role in providing both practical and emotional support.

However, the availability of grandparents to help with childcare is highly dependent on their own circumstances. Grandparents may themselves be in paid work, and cannot be assumed to have the time (or the inclination) to take on childcare responsibilities. This may be a reason for the diversity of men's sources of support. While men's mothers might be expected to continue their maternal role by offering practical support to their sons, (and indeed, some do), this was by no means a universal arrangement.

My dad retired through ill health a couple of years before then, so you know he sort of took on board the mothership if you like of Jamie..he became the sort of

113

like main carer if you like, took him to play school and took him out with him while I was still at work. (Dave Bishop)

The impact of changes to the contemporary family have remained a contested area. (Lewis, 2000) However, some of these changes may involve reassessment of the way in which relationships are formed and sustained. While some grandparents lose touch with their grandchildren after separation or divorce, some manage to preserve good relationships with both grandchildren and 'ex' sons in law.

In two cases, 'ex' mother in laws remained involved with the family, again providing both practical and emotional support. A further five fathers were supported by their widowed mothers, and four by their fathers. Three were supported by siblings, while four said that friends and neighbours had offered most support.

Three fathers said that they had received no support at all. However, in response to the question 'Who would you ask for help if there was a crisis?' all but one of the fathers was able to cite a person who they would expect to be available to help.

Interestingly, a third of the men in this sample said that they would ask their ex-wife or partner to undertake childcare in an emergency. Although fathers were sometimes highly critical of what they saw as their ex-wives abdication of maternal responsibility (a point to which I will return in the following section) this did not necessarily mean that all communication between the couple had failed.

Ongoing contact with the non-resident parent could sometimes be problematic, particularly where non-resident mothers were described as unreliable in adhering to contact arrangements. Nevertheless, several mothers did have regular contact with their children, and some fathers were able to rely on maternal availability if a problem arose.

She'd have to have them..I mean, I know she would, there'd be no problem with it whatsoever. (Brian Thorpe)

While, as discussed above, social isolation was a serious problem for some fathers, for others, their status as lone parents had elicited significant offers of practical help.

114

Again, these reflected women's ongoing attentiveness to the needs of both the fathers and their children. James Gough had the help and support of both his extended family, and friends and neighbours.

In fact, in a way it made it easier with all the offers of help and especially babysitting, mainly from women, I found meself able if I wanted to go out, more, a lot more, because when I was having him every other weekend I was stopping in all weekend to be with him, it was the only time I saw him.. but now I'm seeing him all the time, it's not that I feel that I want to go out but I have got far more opportunity. (James Gough)

While the support systems that fathers had developed were often contingent on external factors, some choices were open to men, and five fathers had moved house in order to be near family and friends. Where, as discussed previously, fathers had moved for a variety of other reasons, geographical distance from established friendships exacerbated men's social isolation. However, some fathers came to value time to themselves.

It's really strange now. I mean when they go to bed I know I've got the television, I've got the computer, I've got the phone, you know, so there is people there that I can communicate with. (Dave Bishop)

For some fathers, the lack of spontaneity in relation to their social lives had not been resolved at the time of interview. Having to make arrangements in advance if they wanted to go out was an ongoing issue, although fathers did not necessarily experience this as a difficulty. The following exchange with Adrian Wright is illustrative of this point.

A.W: Maybe just at night time when I've got work I'm pretty organised for going out to pub, it's arranged like with a break of two weeks in advance.. that's probably why I don't go out often (laughter) Mum babysits

Interviewer: So if you had a crisis?

A.W: Well it'd not be a problem because of mum

115

Interviewer: And when you first had Leanne, did you make any other changes in your life?

A.W. Well that's when I stopped going out (laughter)

Some fathers stressed that although they were supported, both practically and emotionally, they remained independent in most respects. This may be related to a caring identity to the extent that non-reliance on others is an outward expression of self-sufficiency. Fathers were thus able to demonstrate to the world outside the home that they were, indeed, 'doing well', and in doing this, validate their position as primary caretaker for their children.

No, I threw meself in at the deep end, and I wasn't gonna ask for help ...if I was gonna ask for help, I never would've stopped asking for help, and I didn't want to get into any routine, where I was taking washing to somebody and getting somebody to cook, I done it all myself, that was the best way I wanted it, yeah.. I spose things that the woman would normally do. (George White)

This was expressed in somewhat contradictory ways by some fathers; Paul Jones, for example, employed a babysitter, but explained that this did not mean that someone else physically cared for his children.

I've got a babysitter that comes..but generally I put them to bed at eight o'clock and by half past eight they're fast asleep, so the babysitter don't really have them (Paul Jones)

As discussed in the previous section, relationships with women friends could be problematic because of the potential for an intimate (heterosexual) relationship. Dave Bishop dealt with this, as did other fathers, by characterising a close woman friend as 'more like a sister'. When fathers said 'this person is more like a sister to me' the relationship could be distanced from the potential complications of intimacy.

Several lone fathers put women who did not have a biological relationship with them into this 'safe' category. This also meant that the relationship could be maintained both

as a source of support for individual fathers, and as one in which the father could also feel that he was offering support to the woman. The relationship would thus be characterised as one of reciprocity, on an equal basis, in which fathers could also share their parenting expertise with mothers, thus aligning themselves with other people (women) who cared for children, without compromising their own masculine identity.

And we're more like brother and sister than friends if you like so we're, she's one that will, she can talk to me openly and I can talk to her openly, you know, we get a lot sorted out that way. (Dave Bishop)

Fathers found a range of resolutions for the practical challenges that lone parenthood presented. Overall, as discussed above, most fathers in this group had some form of practical and emotional support for their role as primary carer, and in some cases were very well supported by a range of family, friends and neighbours.

Most men also had some domestic skills, and although four fathers regularly received help with domestic tasks, only one father had someone to regularly do all the cleaning and shopping for the family. Practical resolutions were, however, inextricably linked with the way in which fathers constructed their identities as carers, a point that will be considered in the following section.

Identity resolutions: Choice and constraint

A further sub group of fathers had been able to exercise significant choices over the amount of time that they spent at home. While fathers and paid employment will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, it is significant in the current context that although these fathers had not chosen lone parenthood, their response to their new situation was to take steps which enabled them to spend more time at home.

The fathers in this sub group were in a strong position to adopt a caring identity. They were either self-employed, or in a situation where their employers had approached the workforce with a view to negotiating voluntary redundancies. Reflecting the expansion of communications technology during the last ten years, another two fathers had been able to continue with their current employers, while opting to work from home for

much of the time, which meant that they were available to care for their children. These fathers bear striking similarities to a sub group of men in Smart & Neale's 1999 study, in which a sub-sample of fathers 'switched' identities to a 'caring parent' on separation or divorce.

This did not necessarily mean, however, that fathers had abandoned their 'provider' identities completely; rather that a caring identity was, I would tentatively suggest, a pragmatic choice, particularly when children were young. The context in which Philip Brown had been able to give up paid work was very favourable. He received a redundancy payment, and also had mortgage protection insurance, which covered his payments on his house.

At the time of the interview, he was considering taking a third year out of paid work, until his son moved to secondary school. As a car mechanic, he also had readily marketable skills, which he could use to generate an extra income in the informal economy, should he need to do so. Reflecting on his decision to take voluntary redundancy, he said that this was a choice that had been open to him before he became the primary carer for his eight year old son.

*Yeah, I mean it's always been there for the taking really, it's just getting that kick to you know, do it, I suppose..it wasn't **that** much of a problem before actually, just very time consuming there was no time, um, work and more work. (Philip Brown)*

While, as discussed above, fathers often felt that they needed a degree of watchfulness about how they were seen to be coping with their situation, some men moved towards acceptance that others were not necessarily making negative judgements about them. However, this was much more connected with how women (mothers) might see them.

I don't think women generally feel comfortable with a man taking over the um particularly particularly if their mother is is still available or particularly if their mother, particularly if their mother wanted the children with her… I'm probably wrong inasmuch as I think that people have accepted it now and probably do treat

118

me, um look at me in a slightly different light even though we're not as I would call friendly at all.. inasmuch as they do realise no she doesn't want the children any more (Graham Dodds)

The challenge to lone father's core identity that arises from their position as primary carer is thus linked with the identification of responsibility for childcare as 'women's work'. Fathers in this group did not expect a critical response from other men, although this does not necessarily mean that lone fathers readily share personal information with other men, or indeed, that they would ever be in a position where they would need to do so. Even colleagues at a father's place of work might be unaware of their domestic situations.

The adoption of a caring identity, and its corollary of maternal responses, may mean that some identity issues are never resolved for lone fathers; rather, a caring identity co-exists with other identities. For some fathers, this may have meant that they felt unable to identify with their contemporaries.

Yes and I think it's because I bring up the kids and because I'm like I am. I don't, I'll be honest I don't identify with many of the men I meet because I don't know, perhaps it's because I do do more around the house, I always have done, I've just slotted into that and it's nothing different to me to be ironing on a Sunday afternoon rather than down the pub or whatever. (Richard Prince)

The fathers in this study, however, generally expressed a desire for acceptance on their own terms. Moreover, although many fathers said that 'the system' discriminates against fathers generally, they also expressed an opinion that more fathers could care for their children than is currently the case.

This assertion could be utilised to support the notion that men have a 'special' role as fathers, although the nature of this role was less clear. Nevertheless, the unique characteristics of fathers could be drawn on to support a caring identity.

I firmly believe that , because that is the way that the system perceives things, she's the woman, and, I mean, and I do think that they do minimise, the system

119

does, even now, minimises the role of the father, they don't see it as important.. I really believe that..it's amazing, isn't it, and you can see a lot of devastation caused, and you can see a lot of fathers I think that could, who could make a good fist of parenting, you know? (Bill Green)

The responsibility for children's development, and the maintenance of the conditions which facilitate this (Ruddick, 1990) are still situated in the domain of women. The father who takes primary care-taking responsibility for his children is therefore able to position himself as more responsible than the non-resident mother.

Mum decides to (leave), she's telling everybody she doesn't want to be a mother any more, she doesn't want to be there, she's got better things to do.' (Dennis Mitchell)

A claim to a more developed sense of responsibility could extend from the early days of a father's parenthood:

She was quite lazy.....in...in many respects...oh, she very busy girl during the day, but she liked to sleep, and James, the firstborn, was always awake at night, and he would want feeding and so on, and, um, that was just considered to be my job very quickly, and I would do that all the time for James. (Ian Miller)

The constitution of responsible parenthood remains a contested area, although constructions of idealised versions of parenting are embedded in legal and public policies. Both the 1991 Child Support Act and its subsequent reform (Children's Rights and Parents' Responsibilities, 1999) stress the notion of parent's responsibility to care for their children.

Similarly, children are socially constructed as in need of 'special treatment', (Smart, 1996:37) and, as Ruddick has argued, maternal responses can only develop if this concept exists. (Ruddick, 1989:22) The mother who 'abandons' her children is, in the context of the contemporary ideology of motherhood, morally reprehensible. Nevertheless, the notion of maternal abdication may also give men the space to 'own' a

120

caring identity, and to that extent might offer lone fathers a resolution to the challenge to identity.

Well I've adapted to the situation you have to don't you because of your life, your life's not your own and if you're not happy with it you shouldn't of had them in the first place. (Graham Dodds)

While fathers may have felt excluded by their status as lone parents, this may also have been a way of emphasising 'difference' – from non –resident mothers and fathers, and from fathers in two parent households, who may not have satisfactory relationships with their children. Although a 'new father' identity might be an option for some men, there was also significant ambivalence about 'traditional' roles in mens' accounts.

Fathers might therefore describe themselves as identifying with both traditional and 'new' fatherhood. Peter Norman originally left the marital home when his relationship with his ex-partner broke down, and had experienced a period of paying child support through the Child Support Agency.

No I wouldn't change anything because I'm sort of like, in a way I'm sort of like old fashioned, like even though we've separated I went out and worked and gave the money for maintenance and to me it's like I mean I'm not one that expects the mother to stay at home and look after the kids. (Peter Norman)

Conclusion

While the manner in which men gain primary responsibility for children was often outside their control, once they became primary carers, the practical aspects of their daily lives, as I have argued, were often contingent on external circumstances as well as the father's own knowledge and skills. For fathers whose previous experience of parenthood was in traditional, two parent relationships, solo parenting meant that previous knowledge became unequivocal 'hands on' experience.

Maternal care for children and the maintenance of the domestic environment appear to be inextricably connected in the construction of a caring identity. There are

nevertheless contradictions in the notion of, for example, fathers' exclusion from participation in parenting by social structures and attitudes, when lone fathers' accounts suggest a level of practical competence that is routinely associated with motherhood.

This might serve as a legitimate starting point for analysis of not how much fathers actually do, but rather to explore the circumstances under which fathers are likely to assume a somewhat broader caring role than that currently associated with contemporary constructions of fatherhood. Studies of men in two parent families have suggested that a breadwinning identity is one of the most important constraints on men's caring. (Warin et.al. 1999) In the following chapter, the development of a caring role is discussed in the context of 'traditional' fathers' role of providing and breadwinning.

Chapter 5

Paid Work

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I discussed the impact of becoming responsible for the day to day care of their children on men raising children alone. Fathers had to negotiate around a range of tasks that were seen, and had often been experienced, by men as 'mothers' work'. In these accounts, the importance of support networks in men's lives were discussed, and the impact of learning 'new' practical tasks. For some fathers, becoming a primary carer presented a challenge to their previous identity in two parent families, which were often highly oriented around a 'breadwinning' or 'provider' role. (Warin.et. al., 1999)

Nevertheless, Smart and Neale (1999a) suggest that men have a choice of identity as fathers, and that some men who have previously held 'provider' identities are able to 'switch' identity at the point of divorce or separation, and develop a 'caring' identity.

In the following chapter, some of these ideas are explored. For men in paid employment, becoming a lone father meant that existing employment had to be negotiated in the context of responsibility for children, and much may depend on the support networks that I discussed in the Chapter 4.

The relationship between lone parents and paid work has been the focus of discourses around both the notion of lone parenthood as a social problem, and as a significant element in the process of demonisation of lone parents (usually mothers). However, fathers' involvement in paid work is frequently cited as the most important reason for men's non-participation in childcare. (Warin et.al., 1999)

Men raising children alone might thus be expected to experience significant difficulties in reconciling the dual role of provider and lone parent, a situation that is perhaps more familiar to lone mothers. (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) While 'breadwinning' identities may go some way towards explaining why men tend not to take equal responsibility for childrearing in two parent families, fathers raising children alone are confronted by a

different range of choices and constraints in relation to paid employment than those of men in two parent households.

Although increasing attention is being paid by policy makers to men's participation in both paid employment and parenting, and recent policy measures have been designed to encourage men to become more engaged in family life, national policy may be something of a blunt instrument in terms of men's lived experiences. For example, evidence from the BHPS shows that in two parent families, the division of domestic labour is highly related to women's labour force participation, and women still carry out most domestic and childcare tasks, regardless of their labour market position. (Gershuny, 2000; Laurie and Gershuny, 2000)

While research suggests that progress towards 'more involved' fatherhood is inhibited by the perceived demands of paid employment and a breadwinning – provider role, everyday parenting is carried out in the context of both the private arena, and of wider social structures and processes. (Edwards and Duncan, 1996) An analysis of men's accounts thus needs to take into account the complexity of father's lives.

Contemporary employment policies and the concomitant debates around paid work and family life are typically focused on the notion of 'work-life balance', which encapsulates the notion of tension between paid work (and economic efficiency) and people's lives outside the working environment.

While the policy ethos might be seen as encouraging an increased participation in childcare, in reality, increased father participation clearly requires men to actively pursue this goal. Recent policy initiatives have had most relevance to fathers in two parent families, representing a 'general attempt to shift men's understanding of familial commitment' in the context of broader attempts to 'get men involved in parenting'. (Collier, 2001)[1]

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[1] For example, the establishment of the Home Office funded Fathers Direct, which aims to foster 'involved' fatherhood. Also the European Union Parental Leave Directive (96/34) 'helping people to balance the demands of work and family life'.

124

The notion of 'balance' seems to suggest an element of choice, which, the evidence suggests, is less than open to mothers. For fathers in two parent families, moreover, evidence suggests a degree of reluctance to take time off work, thus utilising opportunities to develop relationships with their children. [2] While the reasons for this are complex, a commitment to a 'breadwinning' identity is evidently crucial in constructions of fatherhood.

Analysis of lone fathers' accounts reveals that while the majority of fathers in the study had inevitably considered their positions in the labour force, the complexity of men's situations and the circumstances around their solo parenting meant that for many fathers in the study, the boundaries between provider and caring parent identities were blurred. Nevertheless, for those in paid work, the immediate practical challenge was to maintain their position in the workforce, while for others who were unemployed, there were still questions of identity which revolved around the notion that the 'good' father is one who provides for his children.

Practical challenges: The impact of caring responsibilities on men's paid work

The impact of becoming a primary carer for children is, as I have argued, complex and life changing for fathers. The effect of the shift in responsibility from mothers to fathers is accompanied by practical, emotional and intellectual shifts in men's experience and thinking about their parenting.

For some men, shifting practical responsibility meant that there was a need to negotiate with employers very quickly when the relationship with the children's mother broke down. Some fathers needed immediate time off from work, which was typically taken as 'compassionate leave'. However, these arrangements were time-limited, and more permanent solutions needed to be negotiated.

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[2] Men do not, for example, always opt to take their maximum allowance for leave when children are born, (even when leave is paid). In one recent study, fathers were found to have taken on average 7-8 days of paid leave for the birth of a child. (DSS, DfEE and DTI, 1996) 44% of fathers could have taken more time off if required; the most common reasons given for not taking the full entitlement were 'Personal reasons' (58%) and 'Did not need to' (39%). While the effect of taking time off for family related matters is often seen in terms of the effect on individual (male) incomes, the fathers in these

125

Given the established link between mothers' ability to participate in the labour force and the age(s) of their children, it might be expected that employed fathers who became primary carers would also need to make adjustments to their working time and hours. However, for this group of fathers, the relationship between the age of their children and changes that were made in their working lives is less clear. While only three fathers were unemployed at the time of their separation or divorce, this number had risen to 10 at the time of interview.

While this increase is interesting, it cannot be assumed that fathers opted for unemployment in the intervening years simply because of their childcare responsibilities. Two of the 'unemployed at interview' group had just completed courses in Higher Education, and were seeking work for the first time post graduation; for the remaining eight unemployed fathers, structural labour market change was often implicated; thus they may have been unable to find work for a number of reasons.

Seventeen fathers had become primary carers when their only or youngest child was less than five years old. Eight members of this sub-group had changed jobs or job status (opting for fewer hours, a different job with the same employer or voluntary redundancy) *since* becoming lone parents. In the sub group of fathers who had changed jobs or work status, one had become self-employed, one father switched jobs so that he could live near relatives, and a third entered Higher Education. These fathers appear to have adopted an additional (caring) identity when they became lone fathers, although, as discussed in the following section, this is an over simplification.

The remaining five fathers of under fives were unemployed at the time of interview; however, this tended to be because of a combination of circumstances that made unemployment more likely. One father in this sub-group reached retirement age when his child was less than a year old, and would have retired in any case. Three of the remaining fathers saw themselves as having insufficient skills to generate an income equivalent to benefits through paid work, while one had opted for voluntary redundancy, and relied on informal market activities to supplement his income.

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groups were entitled to paid leave under the terms of their employment. Very few fathers cited concerns

For fathers not in paid work, solutions to the immediate challenge of primary care were contingent upon the speed with which additional benefits to reflect their new responsibilities could be accessed. Fathers frequently asserted that they and indeed men generally, are marginalised by agencies with which they came into contact. However, it seems apparent that this perception of marginalisation may have been due less to discrimination by agencies, and more to unfamiliarity with having to accomplish simultaneous tasks: looking after children while negotiating with official agencies.

I sat in those (DSS) offices for five hours, and the kids was running round and being kids, they was glad to see the back of me' (Carl Monroe)

Men thus experienced the frustration of long waits in Social Security offices, which were not geared to the needs of people with children. For some fathers, this was the first experience of having to take account of their children while trying to negotiate their own situation.

For fathers who were the main breadwinners in the relationship, there was clearly a different consequence from the one experienced by the small number of men who had not been the only full time wage earner in previous partnerships. A small subset of fathers (n.4) had partners who were in full time occupations during the relationship. What difference might this make to men's attitudes to their own breadwinning obligations?

Employment 'choices' in two parent families are frequently underpinned by the pragmatic argument that men are more likely than women to be in a position to generate a sufficient income to support a family. The position of men as main wage earners has thus been represented as the result of a rational process. (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) The majority of employed fathers in the study did not question this logic; nevertheless, their position as primary carers had a significant impact on their experience of paid work.

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about employers of the effect on their careers of choosing to take their maximum entitlement.

Changing circumstances clearly had an impact on the way in which fathers saw their responsibilities as breadwinners. Analysis of men's accounts reveals clear tensions in the way in which fathers who are primary carers came to terms with new (and often competing) responsibilities. The role of mothers as breadwinners is typically seen, in policy and contemporary ideology, as a secondary activity, and indeed, patterns of work in two parent families with children support this perspective. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000) Fathers who acquired responsibility for children sometimes appeared to add a new caring identity to their existing repertoire, rather than shift from a breadwinning identity to a caring provider identity.

The language of 'responsibility' is employed by policy makers (and fathers' and men's rights groups) as a paramount element of 'good' parenting, although what it means to be a 'good' parent is constructed differently for fathers and mothers. Fathers generally expressed a strong sense of responsibility to employers. Indeed, all the employed fathers said that they had immediately informed their employers when they became primary carers.

The point at which fathers informed their employers of their changed domestic situation typically occurred when men were faced with the immediacy of day to day responsibility for their children; for several employed fathers, this might be interpreted as an appeal for assistance. Several fathers announced their new situation to their employers by telling them that they were considering resignation:

> *I said 'to be quite honest, I might be going to have to leave', cos there was no way*
> *I was going to get somebody else to do all the school work and they said, take*
> *David to school first, and then come in straight afterwards, its not a problem, we*
> *don't want you to leave, and I was like 'phew' (George White)*

Fathers thus did not always approach their lone parenthood as a problem of assimilating childcare responsibilities with their existing employment, (or indeed, the assimilation of employment into domestic responsibilities). Rather, some men apparently saw caring and providing, at least in the initial stages of lone parenthood, as somewhat polarised issues.

As discussed in Chapter 3, none of the fathers in the study had been the main source of childcare during their relationships with the mothers, although many fathers claimed high levels of involvement with their children. Analysis of fathers' accounts suggests that, in the initial stage of lone fatherhood at least, the commitment to paid employment tended to take precedence over an orientation to caring.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) argue that for mothers, decisions around paid work are based on 'what is best and morally right for themselves as mothers and for their children'. (1999:109) I would tentatively suggest that men appeared to be thinking about their employment in a different way from the approach adopted by women in a similar situation; fathers in the study rarely questioned a commitment to a breadwinning orientation. Nevertheless, as I have argued, a caring role could be added to an existing 'provider' role, which some fathers described as a logical structure of work as the basis of providing for children; the need to provide could thus transcend men's personal needs and wants.

I mean my main priority is work and the kids, that's what comes first I work so I can support the kids and the kids because they're with me because they know how much I love them. So social life it's like if I didn't have a social life it wouldn't really bother me. (Peter Norman)

It might be expected that men who were not in paid work might have a somewhat differing perspective from their employed counterparts. This was, however, only partially true. While fathers in paid employment were able to draw on a raft of political and ideological assumptions about the role of fathers as providers, fathers who were unemployed when they became primary carers were in a different position.

This difference was partially because of social and structural constraints; men who were unemployed at the time of becoming lone parents did not need to justify giving up work, or changing their hours. Instead, members of this group were more likely to see caring responsibilities as validating an unemployed status. While this issue will be further discussed in the following sections, the rationale that unemployed fathers used

to explain their situations is interesting in the context of the importance placed by fathers on the ability to provide for their children.

Employment choice and constraint

Employment policy has been firmly established as a central theme in the contemporary debate around 'the family'. The 1998 Consultation Document 'Supporting Families' for example, suggests that 'family-friendly employment' should encompass both part time work and flexible hours. (Supporting Families, 1998, par. 3.6) The gendered nature of part-time working has long been established, indeed, very few of the fathers in the study had considered part time work as a potential solution to their childcare difficulties. Despite a recent highly publicised Court Case, in which a working father won the right to work part time, it seems that government has a long way to go before fathers can be persuaded that part time working is a viable option.

However, this does not mean that fathers did not have to make adjustments in their working lives. Again, the impact of lone parenthood on paid work was experienced by fathers in a variety of ways, and was highly dependent on the type of employer that men worked for. Even among the very small sub group of self employed fathers, (n.4) there was considerable variation. For one self-employed father, lone parenthood meant that he had to employ someone else to do work that he would normally do himself.

I obviously can't take on so much responsibility...I've got a guy that works for me full time, and he does most of the work what I used to do, see (Paul Jones, Self-employed builder)

For a professional father, the combination of self-employment and lone parenthood had introduced significant anxiety about his long-term financial situation.

You've got to quantify the fact that you are becoming older as well, and things become, work becomes more important. I mean you are in a survival situation with er, with supporting yourself on your own finances so you can't afford to be frivolous or I would lose what I'd got. (Ben Stevenson, self employed, own company)

130

Nevertheless, even where fathers were self-employed, their actual work output was usually maintained, even if this meant employing someone else to do the work, or working more from home. Further, anxiety about the future appeared, in Ben Stevensons' case to have a significant impact on his impetus to continue working; he saw his role as providing not only now but also in the future, although this was not specifically related to his responsibility for his son. While space does not permit a fuller discussion of recent changes to pension legislation, this is clearly an area that may have a significant impact on father's commitment to work, and would merit further investigation. Policy that means that men will have to make a trade off between increased 'involvement' in family life and eventual pension provision seems unlikely to appeal to many fathers.

For fathers who were employees, the advent of lone parenthood meant that the responses of individual managers were crucial. These, then, were clearly different experiences than those of self-employed men. Nevertheless, immediate work place support was offered to all but one employed father. This father had a routine manual job in a large company, and felt that his employers had been less than understanding of his situation. At the time of interview, Adrian Wright had been off work for six weeks because of depression[3], and felt that he had been under a great deal of pressure to return to work, until the occupational health service intervened.

Well, they (employers) was giving me hassle, quite a lot, but then the company doctor said 'leave him alone' sort of thing, so they've been alright about it, like (Adrian Wright)

The social isolation that Adrian experienced was compounded by his belief that he was the only lone father in a company of nearly a thousand employees. Nevertheless, when talking about his work, Adrian acknowledged that his lack of formal qualifications was the biggest barrier to improving his employment situation.

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[3] Depression is not an uncommon experience for divorced/separated men (or men more generally) Nevertheless, 'depression' is a contested area, and it seems likely that the condition may be perceived as more serious if experienced by a man.

I'm stuck because you've got to have qualifications, this is my trouble. Once you're in there (company), there's no help climbing the ladder.. that's your job and that's it.. you couldn't get a chance.. they're investors in people (laughter).. No, you don't get it, you get bits, but not a lot.. that's all there is, not a lot, not enough (Adrian Wright)

The reasons for Adrian's experience as an employee might thus be linked with structures which militate against caring responsibilities on a more general level, and which, because of their impersonal nature, fail to meet the needs of individual employees, which by definition are highly personalised. Nevertheless, once Adrian had gained the support of the company doctor, his job was secure. Thus, a diagnosis of depression apparently conveyed more legitimacy than the need for time off for the organisation of the domestic scene.

Identity Challenges: Fathers as breadwinners and carers.

As mentioned above, there is consistent conflict between the notion that fathers want to be 'more involved' in family life and the perceived demands of a breadwinning identity. While the literature around mothers and paid work suggests that women often feel the need to justify their participation in the labour force, for this group of fathers, the perception was somewhat the reverse. This was, however, by no means universal, a point that will be returned to in the subsequent sections. Nevertheless, fathers' experiences were often contingent on the emotional labour of others; while there was a bias towards women in the support that men received, this was by no means exclusive of other men, (most often grandfathers).

Most of the employed fathers in the study had, as discussed in the previous section, adopted a caring identity as *additional* identity, rather than an identity in which caring and providing were integrated. This was particularly true in the early stages of transition to lone fatherhood. Existing evidence suggests that contemporary fathers have multiple choices open to them, (see discussion in Chapter 4), and may adopt a caring or provider identity. (Smart and Neale, 1999a,1999b)

132

For men who have been obliged to adopt a caring role, and are doing fatherhood both alone and on a full-time basis, options may certainly be limited by primary responsibility for children. Nevertheless, there are still choices available.

Women, paid work and the challenge to identity

As I have argued, fathers in this study had very few choices open to them about becoming lone parents; to varying degrees, all had lone parenthood thrust upon them. It should be acknowledged that many of the challenges that men experienced when they became lone parents were related to the breakdown of intimate relationships, and the concomitant emotional distress that fathers experienced. Many fathers articulated feelings of distress about the loss of the relationship, which sometimes lasted for lengthy periods of time, and three had sought professional help for ongoing symptoms.[4]

As discussed in the previous section, several fathers had made some adjustment to their hours and times of work to accommodate caring responsibilities, almost always with the support of sympathetic employers. The response of employers to men's newly acquired lone parent status thus tended to validate fathers' provider identities, by enabling men to stay in paid work. It should be acknowledged that while men's structural situations were also important, caring responsibilities were added to paid work by both employer and employee. Thus while a worker in a small firm may have experienced more *flexibility* from employers than a father working in a larger environment, steps were taken by employers to enable fathers to continue in employment, and to accommodate their caring responsibilities.

The importance of paid work to fathers was also part of a moral perspective around paid and unpaid work. While father's constructions of morality around paid work will be discussed further in the subsequent section, fathers in paid work tended to see a dual obligation between employer and employee, which may possibly reflect a general level of awareness of employment rights. Nevertheless, there was also a perception among

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[4] Feelings of distress about the end of an intimate relationship are different from the clinical depression that these fathers were or had experienced, and were often linked with a range of other factors and life events, including lengthy court battles.

some fathers (typically in manual occupations) that power ultimately lay in the hands of employers.

Oh yeah, yep, if you're hard working you've got to have a, you know, a supportive employer.. if you haven't, you lose yer job I spose in the end, or you have to find another one.. I wouldn't say it's without luck, there's a certain amount of luck in it. (Howard Johnson)

One strand of contemporary sociological thought suggests that, as more women enter the labour market, and thus gain relative economic independence, couples are re-negotiating their relationships. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992) Given the increase in women's paid employment, a willingness to negotiate could be seen as crucial to the development of integrated identities for both mothers and fathers. There is, however, little evidence of a process of negotiation in fathers' accounts, although fathers often indicated that they were aware of political debates around employment. Nevertheless, like men's accounts of 'New Manhood', fathers' accounts of dual wage earning households indicated both a breadwinning identity and a degree of discomfort with issues around women's paid work.

The process, however, is clearly a complex one; it would be inaccurate to suggest that fathers simply did not approve of their partner's paid employment, rather that their own breadwinning identities were challenged in subtle ways. Moreover, the association of women with childrearing meant that fathers were able to validate their own identities (and structural position as lone parents) by utilising gendered notions in order to characterise themselves as the 'better parent'. This does not necessarily mean that men were openly disapproving of their ex-partners' paid work, rather that fathers typically played down its importance to the household, while emphasising the importance of their own employment.

Richard Prince, for example, had studied for a BA Degree while his ex-wife worked night shifts to support the family. Having completed his course, he was employed in a well-paid job, and felt that his partner no longer needed to work; further, her paid work meant that she no longer took full responsibility for childcare, which meant that some

responsibility devolved onto himself. A 'new man' identity seemed a distant prospect in this account:

It sounds awful but in a job like that you need somebody at home because the salary was excellent at the time, I mean it was £18,000 a year plus a company car..er and she didn't want to do that, she still wanted to be going out to work every night and I ended up leaving the house at 7, coming back at 6 or 7 in the evening and then looking after the kids and putting them to bed. (Richard Prince)

While this respondent was unusual in the sample in terms of expressing the belief that his ex-wife had not *needed* to work, and further, that he needed 'somebody at home' to support his own paid work, for other fathers, discomfort with their own identities might be indicated by typically 'playing down' women's contributions to the family budget.

This might be expressed in terms of both the language used to describe an ex-partner's occupation, (for example as a 'little job' or a 'sort of part time job'.) Thus, in male breadwinning families, men generally saw women's paid work as a relatively unimportant or even selfish activity by the mother.

The employment of women (mothers) outside the domestic environment has been the site of significant debate for several decades. The entry of increasing numbers of mothers into the paid workforce has, as discussed above, variously been linked with the dissolution of 'the family' and a culture of selfishness in intimate relationships. Some fathers seemed to be drawing on these notions to support their own positions.

We weren't very happy for a while and Sue came home from work one evening, she'd been working as a barmaid in our local pub, and said that she'd met somebody, she'd got a boyfriend. (Ian Miller)

This was also linked with a more generalised anxiety around the relative freedom that women gained through paid employment. Paid work outside the home gave women the opportunity to form and maintain new social networks outside the family domain, a situation that did not actively include their male partners, and which some men appear to have experienced as a threat to their own position.

An analysis of fathers' accounts suggests that most had a prior commitment to a provider identity (that is, before the end of the relationship with wives or partners). Moreover, paid work was often the site of conflict with ex-partners and spouses. As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of ex-partners who had left home alone (without the children) had also been in some form of paid work. These two events may have been linked in terms of women's experiences outside the domestic environment (in the formation of new relationships, for example). I would tentatively suggest that conflict, or at least discomfort, around mothers' paid employment was instrumental at least in the subsequent breakdown of some of these relationships.

For women with young children, particularly in low paid occupations, hours of work are highly dependent on both the availability of childcare and the type of work available, and, in a reflection of current employment trends, most ex-partners worked in the service sector. Much of this work was done during evenings and at weekends, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, fathers typically regarded their own childcare while their partners worked as 'babysitting'.

The difficulty with this perception is that fathers saw their own care of the children during their partner's working hours as *assisting with* childcare rather than having *responsibility for* care. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, this distinction often changed when men became primary carers, and becoming a lone father meant that prior caring experience could be mobilised to support a caring identity.

Practical resolutions: Balancing paid work and caring

For fathers in paid work, access to childcare was clearly an overriding imperative. Despite the more general perception that lone fathers are unsupported in their caring responsibilities, almost all fathers had succeeded in accessing some form of practical support, with childcare being offered by a variety of sources. Very few fathers opted for registered childminders; indeed, this was rarely necessary because support was almost always forthcoming from both friends and relatives, including members of the extended family. Between 46% and 70% of childcare is provided by grandparents.

(BHPS, 1998) This is reflected by childcare arrangements in this sample, with just over half (n.17) of fathers being supported with childcare by grandparents.

Access to childcare and support networks

As discussed in Chapter 3, parents and siblings were the primary source of support for men in the sample. While women comprised the bulk of childcare providers, and were most likely to be paternal grandmothers (n. 13), childcare was also provided by 2 paternal sisters. Neighbours and friends, (including male friends) also offered both practical and emotional support, and were a primary source of support for four fathers. Ten grandfathers and one brother were also involved in both childcare and emotional support. Only four fathers in the sample were mainly dependent on paid childcare. As mentioned in the previous chapters, fathers' relationships with their own parents (particularly the male parent) often shifted when men became solo parents, a point that will be returned to in Chapter 6.

It is worth noting, however, that grandfathers who may have been relatively distant from their own children when they were growing up, often took a very active role in caring for grandchildren. Again, this reflected grandmothers' labour market participation; as mentioned in Chapter 4, several grandmothers were unavailable for regular childcare because of their own paid employment.

Generally, though, grandparents were the source of the most comprehensive support that lone fathers received, and undertook a range of tasks from childcare during the school holidays to after school care. In families where the children were of pre-school age, grandparents were often involved in taking children to nurseries and playgroups. Further sources of practical support for childcare came from siblings, and in one case, an adult step-daughter.

The level of childcare that fathers needed was clearly dependent on the age of their children. In families where children had reached secondary school age, the imperative for an adult to be present in the house with the children receded. It might be assumed that older children in a household would be expected to take some responsibility for the younger children; however, fathers in this group said that they were reluctant to allow

this to happen. Nevertheless, some children did appear to be significant sources of support for their fathers, a point that will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

There have been times when I've felt really taken for granted, I've felt like I was a slave, you know, at that point I was feeling, I don't expect me not to have to do anything, but (eldest daughter) she's quite understanding for a girl of her age, she'll leave me a note, just generally keep her eye on things, she'll mother them a little bit you know. (Steven Hill, talking about 13 year old)

While the age at which children might be expected to be safely left at home alone for a period of time is highly contentious, and fathers' accounts reflected an uncertainty about acceptable practice. Some children were often described as quite independent at an early age, and appeared to exercise their own agency in decisions about, if not their care, then certainly their supervision. One nine year old was reluctant to be cared for by a neighbour after school; his father developed a system of telephone contact between the child's return from school and his own return from work.

He was literally coming home from school to an empty house.. the only thing I can do for him was to phone up..I couldn't stop work because I was paying off the mortgage, um, I was paying off huge solicitor's bills that I'd run up over in the divorce so I had to go out to work..that was the difficult part..but he used to phone me at work as soon as he got in at four o'clock so I knew he was home and safe and if he was going to go out, wherever he was gonna go, what he was gonna do, and I was home by six anyway, so we really managed (Graham Dodds)

Nevertheless, fathers' accounts are inevitably one sided, and children's accounts are unavailable, so the weight that should be attached to the importance of children's agency in the lived experience of lone father households should perhaps be treated with caution. An element of perceptions of successful parenting might be seen as the development of independence and social skills in children, and these characteristics in children were often a source of validation for father's parenting abilities. It is apparent, however, that children's relative independence facilitated fathers' dual roles as providers and carers.

For another sub group of fathers, friends also provided significant support, both practically and emotionally. For example, the majority of fathers in the sample said that they did not know where to access the information that they needed; moreover, several fathers were unclear about their legal situation, (Pickford, 1999) particularly if they had been cohabiting.

> *I got a fortnight's compassionate leave so the Friday morning er the kids still went, you know they went to school and my friend said "Right we're going out, we're going to get you, start and get yourself sorted," so I went to Citizens' Advice Bureau and they put on, they told me all these leaflets and told me what to get, who to get in contact with...so I saw a solicitor on Monday morning, basically about the Residence Order. (Gavin Watson)*

The only area where fathers appeared to have had significant difficulties in accessing practical support was in terms of private, paid childcare arrangements in their own home. As one father reflected, this may have been because most childcare is undertaken by women, who might feel some reluctance about a 'live in' post in a lone father household.

> *They was either very young or they didn't want to live in, probably because I was a man, that was, and, uh, so it didn't work out, but that would be ideal if I had a nanny, but uh, it would've been better while the kids were young, you know, having somebody in the house then, who could control, you know, then they're a bit older, nannies tend to like them, you know, a bit smaller (Paul Jones)*

A sub sample of fathers, as mentioned above, had changed their working hours to enable them to care for their children. While this point will be returned to in the following section, in the context of support networks it is worth noting that this sub group had employment that was flexible enough to allow rearrangement of their day to day life around the perceived needs of children. Nevertheless, this was often a response that developed over time as men's relationships with their children developed.

Employers' response to lone fathers

The response of employers to men's individual situations was experienced by fathers as crucial in their transitions from being the main breadwinner in a two-parent household to being the primary carer and breadwinner in a lone parent family. As previously discussed, men who were in occupations that allowed a degree of flexibility fared best in terms of organising day to day life. The most flexible working environments appear to be small firms with a relatively small workforce (one father described his working environment as 'like a family') or self employment, although this could introduce practical difficulties in terms of having to work at odd hours to complete tasks.

I was lucky in that I was an independent office worker and, uh, I was able to take the kids into the office if they weren't all that ill i.e. not bedridden. (Matthew Arden)

I changed jobs and I was at home a fair amount during the day, in the insurance industry, I could do a lot of paperwork at home. (Ian Miller)

For some fathers, a practical solution was to work only the hours that they were contracted to work; again, men's accounts were often of working long hours in their capacity as breadwinner in two parent households. It is significant that once men became primary caretakers for their children employers appeared to accept that they were no longer available for overtime.

Although working for a very small employer could mean that men felt that an unfair burden was placed on colleagues, very few of the employed fathers in the sample felt that their job had been jeopardised by their caring responsibilities.

I used to go to work sometimes seven days a week but I now say right, I've done my 40 hours, I'm going home, and that's it. (George White)

But as I say, all the time my boss knew about it um and I had to say look I can't get here till half past nine, I have to go at three o'clock, which was still OK the

type of work I do, I was like chief (in my section) and lots of flexibility which again was probably lucky (Philip Brown)

While the initial responses of employers to men's situations were important, some fathers, having managed the initial transition to the combined task of solo parenting and breadwinning, found that difficulties appeared some months after the original event. Ongoing support from employers was consequently important, and enabled some fathers to stay in work.

I went in to see my immediate boss I would say about eight months, well I would say initially it were about three months after she left and he sort of like steered me round and I started to get back into it if you like. (Dave Bishop)

While flexible employment is clearly a support for parenting, a reduction in hours worked could mean a reduction in income. While some fathers opted for lower incomes to accommodate childcare responsibilities, most did not consider this a possibility. More than half (n.17) were owner-occupiers, and maintaining mortgage repayments was, unsurprisingly, a key concern for this group of fathers.

Nevertheless, regardless of support from employers, a sub-group of fathers found that the effort involved in sustaining dual responsibilities was overwhelming. For these fathers, there appeared to be a turning point in their relationships with their children, the point at which a caring identity ceased to be an additional identity, and began to shift towards caring as a primary identity.

I was still managing when he was at school, I was still managing to work full time, then (childminder) got a job and she did used to take him to school and pick him up and I'm thinking I'm running supersonic, everybody's got to get up an hour early, I thought when am I seeing him? (Philip Brown)

Did these fathers have a weaker commitment to a breadwinning identity than other fathers in the sample? While some fathers decided to continue working, but with fewer or more clearly defined hours (by opting to go home on time, for example), and were

usually supported in this by employers, these decisions were based both on what fathers perceived as children's needs, and their own emerging needs and wants.

Despite adequate childcare arrangements, this sub group of fathers appeared to be shifting towards an orientation to being with their children, or doing fathering, as a priority. This appears to have been another turning point for some fathers, representing a shift from 'caring about' to 'caring for'. (Graham, 1983)

Economic independence and self sufficiency

For fathers, wage earning means that they also accrue a degree of economic independence that is not as available to women in two parent families. The impact of lone parenthood on fathers' lives (see Chapter 4) often meant that men no longer had the resources to pursue previously taken-for-granted leisure activities, and that there was, as discussed above, a correspondent impact on household budgets.

Income support, it's bad, no self-esteem, but the money.. you get really really depressed, I don't think many people realise how bad it is.. HGV driving, very bad, it's alright if it's on a regular run like for Nissan up to Sunderland.. it's very very difficult. (Dennis Mitchell)

Nevertheless, for fathers who had succeeded in combining paid work and caring, albeit with a high level of support, their continuing ability to provide could strengthen their positions as primary caretakers. This is best illustrated by the account of a father who was involved in a residence dispute at the time of interview.

This father, whose work for a catering company meant that his hours varied from week to week, found that access to in-work benefits had significantly improved his situation. While it would not be true to say that his only motivation for retaining primary responsibility for his children was financial, he felt that he had achieved a level of stability in his life, in which job satisfaction played a significant part.

I said no because it would, I've worked very hard this past 2¹₂ years to get to where I am again, where I can say I've got money in the bank and I've got a job

and I'm actually enjoying life again, and if she took them then I'd have to give up my job because it doesn't pay enough to keep me, whereas me and the kids with Family Credit then you can make it pay and so I would have to give up and take a full time job. I mean that sounds awful but I wouldn't want to give up the kids anyway. (Richard Prince)

Almost all the fathers in the sample had made some changes to the way that they worked, their jobs, or the hours that they spent at work. While it might be expected that fathers who opted to spend more time with their children would be fathers of younger children, this was not necessarily the case.

Again, there is no clear route into a more child centred orientation; rather, a combination of circumstances, events and perceptions led some fathers to change the way that they managed the economic aspects of their lives. While a commitment to children undoubtedly influenced the decisions that men made, this was part of a broader process of change.

Fathers in this sample accessed both practical and emotional support in a number of ways. Some men had a strong network of support, with practical help from family and friends, and sufficient financial resources. Others had a key source of support, typically parents or a friend. Nevertheless, many continued to experience social isolation, and thus to feel unsupported in their day to day responsibility for children. A breadwinning identity could thus be a double-edged sword, and primary caretaking experienced as a continuum of work.

It's, I mean mainly when you, oh as I say I take them down to my mum's in the morning and go off to work and then when I come back from work it's like pick them straight back up you know and start again. (Dave Bishop)

Identity resolutions: challenging a 'breadwinning' identity

The ability to support a family in terms of both self-esteem and the practicalities of day to day life has been established as a cornerstone of men's identities in two parent families. (Warin et. al.,1999) This had implications for men in the sample who were

not in paid work, in that a clear role as main wage earner was not available to them. Nevertheless, fathers were able to justify their positions in ways that maintained a *provider*, if not a breadwinning, status.

While there were differences between unemployed fathers and their employed counterparts, these were primarily in terms of access to resources. The linkage between paid work and access to both economic and social resources has been well established. (Iacovou and Berthoud, 2000; Beresford et.al.,1999) While fathers who were not in paid employment undoubtedly experienced the structural disadvantage of dependence on State benefits, this dependence could be utilised in the construction of a caring identity.

Independence and self sufficiency

As discussed above, the employed fathers had support networks, or key sources of support for childcare, which enabled them to continue in paid employment. There was almost always a key person to whom fathers could turn in a crisis. Nevertheless, an important feature of men's accounts was their non-reliance on outside sources of support. This may mean that fathers were underestimating the amount of support that they actually received, or was available to them, which may in turn feed in to perceptions of lack of support.

> *Well, we'd have to juggle, if mum's about..uh I'd get quite a bit of childminding from the boss's wife, um, who's said she'll look after him, uh, and the assistant has also said she'd look after him, cos he's the same age as her son, uh, there is, (a safety net) but I don't like to, I like to be very independent really, yeah, so actually it's quite small. (Daniel Bates)*

Nevertheless, the importance of independence and self-sufficiency to many fathers might suggest both a move towards 'owning' both a breadwinning and a caring identity; and further, that ownership of a dual identity also validated their situations. Sole responsibility for children thus became a source of pride for some fathers.

144

Analysis of the accounts of those in paid employment suggests that fathers' experience was often affirmed through communicating their situation to others, thus demonstrating that they were 'doing well'. (Barker, 1995; Greif, 1985).

I spelt it out on my application form, on my CV when I applied for the job.. Well, I'm afraid that I'm not one for hiding things under the carpet, and it was spelt,.. it was an accompanying letter with my CV, which explained the situation, yeah, I felt they should be told, so, yeah, it's not too bad (Daniel Bates)

For fathers who were not in paid work at the time of interview, there were other available options which allowed the construction of a *provider* identity (as opposed to a breadwinning identity). Men were able to provide for their children's needs by putting their own needs and wants to one side, by, for example, forgoing luxuries that they had previously taken for granted. Indeed, some of this sub-group were highly critical of non-resident fathers, who were seen as abdicating both their financial and practical obligation to their children.

However, as in other aspects of lone fathers' accounts, there were some contradictions. Fathers in this study were perhaps in a rather difficult position with regard to non-resident fatherhood. It should be remembered that a sub-group of these fathers had themselves been non-resident fathers for a period of time.

Most said that they had supported their children during this period, mainly as an informal arrangement with the children's mother. Only one lone father had been formally assessed by the CSA during his period as a non-resident father; generally, fathers said that they preferred an informal arrangement (which also often meant that women had to ask if they needed money, thus enabling fathers to maintain a degree of control over the situation). However, only one father in the sample said that he felt comfortable with receiving maintenance from his ex-wife.

It's a private arrangement between us, she's extremely reliable, every single month without fail.. it is difficult financially, obviously' (Bill Green)

There was thus a general reluctance by lone fathers in the sample to ask for financial support from their ex-partners. This reluctance seemed linked with father's own identities as providers, although this became problematic when considering the position of non-resident fathers, with whom they expressed some sympathy.

Nevertheless, as lone parents men were to some extent comparing themselves with other lone parents, which meant some recognition of the financial demands of raising children alone. This led to contradictions between what parents *ought* to do (the moral obligation of non-resident parents) and their own attitudes to receiving maintenance from their ex-partners.

Generally, there was also a perception that fathers are forced to pay maintenance, whereas mothers are not. While a small number of fathers received regular payments from their ex-partners, these were informal arrangements based on women's full time work. Other fathers received occasional support from ex-partners, although generally there was a perception that women did not pay maintenance. Lone fathers thus perceived themselves as separate from lone mothers (to whom men would be happy to pay maintenance).

> *Most of these men I know who have got kids and are separated you know and the mothers have got (the children) they're more than willing to pay for the kids, more than willing, you know, the majority of them, I'm not saying all of them, the majority of them that I have, all the ones I know actually, are willing, and some women don't want to know, like for example in my case cos she don't want to know, that's the way it suits her. (Martin Hanley)*

Indeed, three fathers said that they offered financial support to their ex-partners during the period that children were visiting them, although again, this did involve a moral equation around mothers' income relative to their own. The contradictory and somewhat confused nature of men's perceptions around the issue of child support are perhaps best expressed through the account of a father who was 'officially' supposed to receive maintenance for his resident step-daughter from her own biological father.

This maintenance was not forthcoming; nevertheless, Steven continued to feel an obligation to support his children during the relatively short periods of time that they spent with their mother.

I just get single parent benefit and child benefit.. she's never ever worked.. in fact I give her money when they stay with her   (Steven Hill)

Since the issue of child support has been linked in political discourse with men's paid employment, it is perhaps unsurprising that solo fathers should make this linkage with non-resident mothers. Nevertheless, there was also a general reluctance to pursue a claim for child support from non-resident mothers, even if they were in paid work. Thus if the situations were reversed, fathers rarely took advantage of maternal offers of financial support.

She did say to me that if I wanted anything, just ask, but I'm not going to ask her for anything, no, I have too much dignity to ask. (George White)

While, as mentioned above, informal arrangements with non-resident fathers often meant that mothers had to ask for money, fathers themselves appeared reluctant to be in a position where they had to ask mothers for money. Child support thus became linked with rights and responsibilities, in which contradictions were apparent.

There is evidence that fathers see direct links between the payment of child support and the right of access to children; indeed, this has been one of the most controversial aspects of the 1991 Child Support Act. (Bradshaw et.al., 1999) Some fathers made a direct connection between this and their own situation; by accepting maintenance, it was felt that women would be able to exercise more 'rights' over their contact with their children.

I wouldn't accept it (maintenance) cos A I'm unemployed, so it wouldn't make much difference, and B she would want access, it would make her feel entitled to come to the house to see the kids...I told them (CSA) it's a free country, I can do what I please within the law ...I don't want her knocking on my door saying 'I'm giving you £50 a week to look after my children'. (Carl Monroe)

There is some evidence that fathers' perceptions around non-resident fathers, particularly with regard to the payment of child support, is informed by media stories, particularly those around men committing suicide following an increase in CSA maintenance assessments. (Bradshaw et.al., 1999:173) Lone fathers in this study were no exception, and several offered anecdotal evidence to support the claim that non-resident fathers are unfairly treated by the Child Support Agency.

A lad I used to work with um was paying her over half his wages cos he had to pay so much each week for a daughter that he didn't know where she was, and he wasn't allowed to see her..well that, to me, is wrong..he ought to see his daughter and he was being made to pay for a daughter he couldn't see. (Daniel Bates)

For fathers who were not in paid employment, contemporary discourses around father involvement could thus provide strong justification to support lone fathers' positions. This was, as mentioned previously, strongly connected in men's accounts with perceived inadequacies in their relationships with their own fathers.

While it could be argued that every generation seeks to parent differently from the preceding generation, (see, for example, Glennon, 1995) these fathers were able to situate themselves as better parents than their own fathers because of their availability to their children on a daily basis. In this, several unemployed fathers appeared to feel quite unlike the 'failed breadwinners' identified in some studies of unemployed men in two parent families. (See, for example, Warin et. al. 1999)

Further, this positive stance refuted any stigma that might be attached to unemployment more generally.

I know what I missed at the end of the day I know what I missed with my dad, cos my dad was always away working, well sod the work.. if it means sitting on my backside all day, I'll sit on my backside all day looking after my children, but as you know, you can't sit on your backside all day cos you're forever cleaning cooking ironing dusting hoovering, that's it, I've been unemployed for 10 years now. (Carl Monroe)

In these accounts, there was a perception of unemployment as a choice, a deliberate strategy which enabled men to be 'good' fathers, by freeing their working time to be spent with and for their children.

I couldn't have planned it better I couldn't believe it, you know, and everything has worked out as I hoped it would you know so I've planned to have this year off and I'm six months through it and I've got the money to relax so it's good. Eventually I'm going back to work but I'll go back part time and fit into it. (Philip Brown)

Constructions of motherhood

Lone motherhood has historically been seen as problematic in terms of both welfare provision and as a moral and social problem. (Dennis and Erdos, 1992; Morgan, 1995) Similarly, non-resident fathers have been at the centre of a vigorous political debate, in which a key theme has been the failure of non-resident fathers to meet their responsibilities towards their biological children. (Bradshaw et.al., 1999) However, the fathers in this sample were able to mobilise these competing discourses in ways that validated their positions as caring parents.

The construction of women as 'natural' carers means that motherhood is inextricably linked in contemporary discourse with the *quality* of physical and emotional care of children. To accomplish this, mothers need to be not only sensitive to the needs of their children, but also able to prioritise her children's needs while putting her own to one side. (Wallbank, 2001:134) While the notion that 'mothering' should be universally accepted as the only, or even main, source of care and nurture of children has come under pressure from both feminists (Silva, 1996) and, it could be argued, politicians, mothers remain central to contemporary debates around paternal involvement.

Further, as discussed, some writers have argued that an emphasis on maternal care has 'deskilled' and marginalised fathers as carers for children. (Burgess, 1997; Burgess and Ruxton, 1996) It is thus unsurprising that the perceived deficiencies of non-resident mothers was crucial to the way in which lone fathers constructed themselves as caring

parents. Thus women's lives outside the nuclear family, whether through paid work or an independent social life could be constructed as a failure of 'normal' mothering, or 'maternal instincts'. Maternal behaviour that militated against constructions of 'normal' (caring) motherhood could thus be defined as aberrant.

Moreover, the political and social construction of non-resident fathers as irresponsible, both as providers and caring parents, meant that men raising children alone were able to situate themselves as morally superior to both non-resident mothers *and* non-resident fathers. Thus the lone fathers in the study appeared to align themselves in a more general way with constructions of fathers as breadwinners and providers, and mothers as primarily carers.

This alignment introduced a note of dissonance into the perceptions that men had of their own positions as primary carers. While the fact that not all mothers are primary carers was self evident to this group of fathers, and indeed, supported their own sense of self worth and satisfaction with their caring responsibilities, they also had to assimilate the notion that most non-resident parents are fathers.

While father absence may be constructed (particularly by fathers' and men's rights groups) as the result of strategies employed by 'the other parent', (see, for example, Secker and FNF 2001), there was also recognition that fathers did not always take opportunities to be involved in their children's lives.

I thought too much about work before, but when she went I realised other things were more important.. (George White)

These contradictions meant that some fathers were forced to re consider these assumptions, an event in which the process of becoming a primary carer appears to have acted as a catalyst. Indeed, some fathers were able to evaluate the social assumptions around mothers' roles in the light of their own experiences.

She's always been a very loving caring mother, I think it was extremely difficult for her to..and I think that was also put upon her by other people I think the fact that, if she'd just said, 'well I don't want the children' um 'what's wrong with

150

you?' Um, you know, so she was expected to carry out this role but it was self evident, um how you actually do it, how you make it socially acceptable..it was very difficult for her because she couldn't say 'I don't want the children'. (Alan Broome)

Nevertheless, men who were primary carers were able to utilise essentially political discourses around paid work and childcare which enabled them to situate themselves as the 'better parent' – both than mothers who fail to meet the criteria of 'good' mothering, by leaving their children, and fathers who fail to meet their responsibilities as providers.

As a further consequence of the political discourse, lone fathers may also establish their identities as being outsiders, not part of the majority of lone parents, and again, attach moral value to the fact that they both care and provide for their own children.

I look at people often in my position and I think 'I can get off my backside and go out and do a day's work and look after my son.' The majority of single parents don't do that..there are so many on our estate, there are so many women who are single parent families..there are two big council estates near here and they're just full of single women.. I find it very annoying..I'm a single parent family..but because I'm working I'm paying full tax for them in the same boat as me, and I find it quite hard, I stuck it because I've gone out and kept my job and bought a house. (George White)

Conclusion

The challenge to a breadwinning identity that men experience when they become primary carers is thus part of a complex process, in which many elements combine as identities shift. While the boundaries between a breadwinning and caring identity are often blurred by practical changes in fathers lives, these are part of a broader process of social change, including women's increased labour market participation, and shifting expectations around 'the family' and parenting. (Taylor and Gershuny, 200; Coltrane, 1996; Gerson, 1993)

Further, these changes are located in a political environment in which rights and obligations may be challenged and contested. For men who become primary carers, the assimilation of a caring identity is not a straightforward process, and for some fathers tensions may remain between the perceived demands of breadwinning and caring.

The importance of a breadwinning identity, as evidenced by previous research (Warin.et.al., 1999) was important to fathers, but responsibility for care became equally important for most. Although some fathers had enough support in terms of practical childcare to continue in a 'providing' role, for most fathers, caring for their children became at least as important as their paid work, and for a significant number, care became the most important element of their fathering.

These fathers began thinking about their paid work in ways very similar to mothers (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) in that their decisions, and the rationale, on which these were based, considered the needs of their children. The following chapter shows how men's responsibility for care influenced their relationships with their children. I consider the extent to which from men's experience of fathering in two parent families shifted from 'caring about' their children to 'caring for' them, and how this meant that some fathers adopted maternal work as a primary identity.

Chapter 6

Relationships with children

Introduction

This chapter explores men's experience of doing fatherhood in the context of social, cultural and political assumptions about fatherhood, and the challenge that this presents to lone fathers. Drawing on arguments developed through previous chapters, it explores the impact of social and cultural assumptions on men's relationships with their children, their experience of parenting, and father's perceptions of supports and constraints to men's solo parenting and relationships with their children. As discussed in Chapter 1, men's relationships with their children remains one of the most contested areas of issues around 'the family' and parenting.

Constructions of fathers as 'breadwinners', (see, for example, Warin et.al., 1999), and particularly in the psychological discourse, but also in the political context, as role models and mentors (for example, Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) offer fathers templates for father 'involvement' which may not be congruent with lone fathers' lived experiences. Moreover, the rights based discourse has de-emphasised the importance of care, and this also had an impact on men's experiences.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore the degree to which lone fathers resolve the tension between perceived social and cultural constraints, and models of fathering, and their lived experience of parenting. It will show how men in this group are positive about their parenting, despite the perception by some fathers of significant barriers to lone fatherhood. It will argue that although social and cultural assumptions challenge men's identities, developing relationships with their children bring rewards which allow men to enjoy their parenting.

Moreover, although there are no neat resolutions to the tensions that lone fathers experience between a breadwinning and a caring identity, and indeed, as discussed in the previous chapters, both identities can co exist, primary responsibility for children is

instrumental in changing the way in which men perceive themselves as both workers and care givers.

Practical challenges – negotiating responsibility and change

Feminist writers have been highly critical of the notion that only mothers can 'do' mothering, a notion that is underpinned by the language of caring which positions mothers as carers. Fathers' participation in childcare is closely linked with their perceptions of that role (Burghes et. al.1997) which in turn raises questions about the nature of fathering as an 'active endeavour of caring labour'. (Silva 1996:12) In considering men's relationships with their children, we need to consider both what is required of a caring parent, and how men raising children alone perceive this requirement.

While some writers have argued that nurturing, caring fatherhood might require men to do the kind of work that women do in relation to their children (Ruddick, 1989; Silva, 1996) this remains a contested area. This perspective has nevertheless been criticised as one which does not facilitate the development of men's relationships with their children, based on their own masculine identities. (Burgess, 1997) However, this perspective has some limitations.

Men's identities in two parent families are broadly delineated by assumptions around maternal and paternal roles. While these roles may appear to be challenged by men's increased participation in childcare, for example, fathering in couple families takes place in the context of a somewhat polarised discourse around 'breadwinning' and 'caring'.

One effect of becoming a primary carer may, for lone fathers, mean that fatherhood is negotiated through increasingly blurred boundaries between a breadwinning and a caring identity. Through this process, it becomes apparent that 'caring about' (which was often men's experience prior to separation or divorce) may be transformed into 'caring for', which is progressive and focussed on the needs of the child. (Smart and Neale, 1999a)

Fathers in this sample had, as discussed in Chapter 3, become lone parents through a variety of routes, often reflecting both practical change and the complexity of shifting relationships with ex-partners. A common pattern for the sub group of men who initially left home alone was contact with children on alternate weekends. (Contact with the non-resident parent continued to be an issue for several fathers when the situation was reversed, and contact arrangements were made with non-resident mothers, a point to which I will return in the following sections.) Moreover, a key problem identified by men who are non-resident fathers is the difficulty that they experience in having physical contact with their children, often because of practical constraints such as geographic distance or lack of space to accommodate children. (see, for example, Bradshaw et.al., 1999)

For most fathers, interaction with children had been restricted both before the end of the parental relationship, and subsequently in cases where the father had left the family home. For some men, particularly those who had become lone fathers after a period of time spent as a non-resident father, there were particular challenges to becoming a primary carer. Although the fathers in this study all maintained that prior to separation or divorce they had been 'involved' in childcare, this was typically within a 'traditional' breadwinning framework, and most childcare was, with few exceptions, acknowledged as the responsibility of the children's mother.

In the context of one partner in full time employment, responsibility for children devolved primarily onto the economically inactive, or part-time employee, partner. Moreover, mothers in two parent families tend to be responsible for both emotional labour (Hochscild, 1983, 1989) and practical organisation. For example, mothers typically have responsibility for making alternative childcare arrangements when necessary. (Daniel and Taylor, 2001)

Thus, even prior to relationship breakdown, men's relationships with their children were on the whole subject to practical constraints, and fathers in this study did not question the level of responsibility for children that their ex-partners had during the relationship. Moreover, as some writers have pointed out, there are questions around

155

how much more 'involvement' fathers in two parent relationships actually want. (Smart, 1999; Ferri and Smith, 1996) The separation of day to day care of children from other activities (including breadwinning) meant that mothers mediated fathers' relationships with their children, and this mediation could continue after the end of the relationship between the parents.

Maternal mediation

The degree to which mothers mediate between fathers and their children remains a contested area, and has been utilised in support of claims by fathers' and men's rights groups that fathers may be excluded from the process of fathering precisely because mothers actively prevent this by acting as 'gatekeepers' between themselves and their children. (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996; Burgess, 1997) Nevertheless, research evidence suggests that mothers appear to prioritise paternal 'involvement' as an essential feature of contemporary fathering to a greater degree that either fathers or children do. (Warin et.al, 1999)

While fathers may not actively seek care of their children, both the structural position of the mother, and constructions of 'good' mothering (and fathering) may also militate against men's sharing childcare on anything approaching an egalitarian basis. Further, not only are men in two parent families seen as perfectly adequate fathers without a commitment to shared childcare, (Backett, 1987) equitable sharing of childrearing is not only subjective, and may be perceived differently by men and women, (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000) but also dependent on individual family circumstances. (Gerson, 1997)

Fathers who initially left the family home assumed, with some justification, that mothers would continue to care for the children as they had prior to the end of the parental relationship. As discussed in Chapter 3, lone fatherhood for this sub-group was typically the result of a crisis in the parent with care (the mother's) life. Fathers thus rarely questioned an ongoing process of maternal mediation between themselves and their children unless difficulties became apparent, or friends and neighbours communicated a cause for concern.

156

I mean any time I went down to see the kids there was always some excuse made, the first three or four times she was decorating the house, she told me they was at her mother's because of the paint she was using, and I thought I can't argue with that, but all this time they was in care. (Carl Monroe)

Because fathers in this group did not initially have relationships with their children that were independent of the mother, their prior participation in childcare had been primarily supportive, as discussed in previous chapters. The tendency of fathers' relationships with their children to be dependent on the emotional labour of the mother means that these fathers may not have known their children very well. Further, limited post-separation contact with children may not have encouraged the development of independent father-child connections.

Moreover research suggests that not only do fathers and mothers have quantitatively different relationships with their children, but that these relationships are qualitatively different, and further, are particularly influenced by the gender of the child. (Frosh, 1997) However, this issue is somewhat contested. There is some evidence that in the context of parental interaction with children, fathers are more influenced by the sex of the child than mothers, (Biller, 1993) although Lewis and Warin, (2001), suggest that this is mainly a reflection of social expectations around fathering behaviours. However, from the perspective of the child, the sex of the parent is less important in affecting child development than parental warmth. (Burghes et.al., 1997)

Nevertheless, although some writers have suggested that maternal and paternal roles are broadly similar (to nurture, care for, and protect the child) (Biller, 1993), there is also evidence that, in some circumstances, fathers are unsafe as providers of childcare. (Hooper, 1994; Hester and Radford, 1996) This aspect of a range of paternal behaviours is one that has specific implications for fathers raising children alone, particularly those who are bringing up daughters, and I return to this point in the following section.

Nevertheless, as discussed in previous chapters, the fathers in this sample were raising children of both sexes, and within a wide age range. While it might be expected that

fathers raising girls would see this as a particular challenge, this was not universally true, and there was some variation in the perspectives of men in this sub-group. Moreover, only one father in the sample expressed serious concerns about bringing up daughters.

Dennis Mitchell had become a lone father for a second time when his relationship with a woman who had two children from a previous marriage broke down. Dennis blamed the breakdown of this relationship on the behaviour of his eldest daughter, (aged 16 at the time of interview) who had resented his new relationship:

'I think you'd have to live with (daughter) to know how much hatred there is in that girl.. 'cos I spose yeah, she felt pushed out by Claire'.

Nevertheless, he found relationships with both his stepdaughter and his own daughters increasingly problematic, as they grew older.

I've always took the view that your family and your partner's family are sacrosanct, you don't, you know, up to a certain age you can have a bit of rough and tumble, but when they hit a certain age, forget it, don't touch them, because no matter how good yer moral side, your biological side will always be aroused if it's young girls, (Dennis Mitchell)

Although Dennis was caring for his children alone, and clearly cared *about* them, his identity as a father relied upon the presence of a mother who could mediate between 'biological' masculinity and his perception of a father's role as 'having fun' with his children. This meant that his relationships with his children were constrained by the absence of a female partner.[1]

And we used to have what we called crushes, where we'd all pile on to whoever, and it were a bit of fun, but beyond a certain age you can't do that. And Natasha

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[1] Dennis was probably the most depressed father of all the participants in this study, primarily because of the breakdown of his recent relationship. He felt that he was not able to make any decisions regarding the future, and his ex-partners departure was against his wishes. This might be linked with the way in which decision making 'on one's own terms' seems to provide mothers with some protection against depression. (Gilligan, 1982)

said to me the other day, we don't do crushes anymore, you're boring, but to be honest, you can't, not beyond a certain age. And with Jennifer (own daughter) she's nine going on ten and it's difficult, and that's just one aspect of being a lone father, right.

Nevertheless, while Dennis also felt that 'society' is changing, and was conscious that some changes were required of fathers: *"me mum brought me up and me dad assisted, whereas I'm trying to bring these up"* the changes that were needed were less clear to him; indeed, he saw re-partnering as a potential solution to the difficulties that he was experiencing in relating to his daughters as they grew up. Thus, post separation fatherhood involves a change not only in men's practical circumstances, but also in the *nature* of the relationship that they have with their children.

Responsibility in relationships with children

Although most of the men in the sample said that they had been involved in their children's lives in varying degrees prior to the end of the parental relationship, the pattern of care for the children was, as discussed above, almost invariably that the mother took most responsibility for meeting the children's emotional, as well as physical, needs.

The shift to solo parenting therefore meant that fathers had to make shifts in both their awareness of, and responses to, the needs of the children. This was an area where solo parenting could be quite problematic for fathers. The absence of a maternal presence meant that fathers had to consider their parenting in new and often unfamiliar ways. Paul Jones, who was raising twins (aged seven at the time of interview), said that he found this experience very stressful.

Well, uh, just keeping them occupied really, keeping them satisfied and knowing what to do, the best way to discipline, because nobody can tell you, there's a fine line somewhere, between, uh, spoiling them and, uh.. I don't know, you've got to keep them in line, perhaps a woman would be different, I dunno, but unless, you

159

know, you've got somebody telling you different, you don't know whether you're being too lenient or too hard, you know.

This father seems to be talking about achieving a balance with his children between keeping them happy ('satisfied') and the work of 'discipline' – work that no-one else could 'tell you'. Implicit in his account is the notion that not only is this an instinctive response, but that women may be 'different'. While this may clearly be related to the belief that 'children need a mother', there is also a sense in which Paul seems to be feeling his way towards a more sensitive engagement with, and understanding of, his children's needs.

Nevertheless, there were tensions and contradictions in fathers' accounts, which suggest uncertainty about the exact nature of 'mothering' and 'fathering', as fathers were having to consider both women's physical and emotional labour with their children, or at least, the space left by the absence of the mother. While, as discussed above, most fathers did not anticipate, or say that they had experienced, particular difficulties in raising daughters rather than sons, maternal absence was seen as a particular issue in the context of raising daughters, or primary school aged children. No father anticipated their son's need for a maternal presence as a source of guidance while they grew up, although again, this was in tension with the assumption that all children needed a mother's *care*.

The activity of mothering is linked with the quality of both physical and emotional care (Hardey & Crow, 1991) and many fathers in this sample were challenged in their relationships with their children, despite positive rewards. While fathers felt committed to meeting their children's needs, and most felt positive about their parenting, the absence of the children's mother was frequently seen as a gap that could not be filled by a male parent.

In the context of the (often rights- based) discourse which suggests that 'maternal mediation' is problematic in the context of men's developing relationships with their children, this perception was interesting, in that the absence of maternal mediation could also be constructed as highly problematic in some circumstances. Nevertheless,

160

the nature of women's relationships with their children was not clearly conceptualised by most of the fathers in the study, (beyond vague assertions about 'maternal instincts' or their lack). Most fathers said that they found the organisation of the practical aspects of their lives more difficult than relationships with their children, which could bring unexpected rewards.

Steven Hill, for example, was raising two daughters and a son; one daughter was a stepdaughter and half-sister to his two younger children. Men's relationships with step children was illustrative of the ties that could be developed between stepparents and their social children, a phenomenon that has also been observed in other contexts. (Smart and Neale, 1999a; Burgoyne and Clarke, 1984) Steven described very close family relationships, which he characterised as mutually supportive. However, he also expressed anxiety about the absence of a maternal presence as his daughter reached adolescence.

Well it's not the ideal situation, it's the best of a bad situation, the only one bad feeling I've got is though I can really try me best I can never do the mother bit, cos I don't feel that..cos the kids are growing up.. but having said that, yeah, it's going very well, but I do feel that I can't.. it would have been nice at times if I was with someone to guide me...specially the little girl, I wish she had someone who she could go shopping with, that's the only thing I spose at the end of the day. I shouldn't feel guilty, I spose, but I do (Steven Hill)

As discussed in Chapter 4, many fathers could access help through a range of social supports; (in fact, her aunt, a discussion of which prompted Steven's observation, had taken Steven's daughter on a recent shopping trip.) Nevertheless, Steven appeared to express a desire to do 'everything' as a parent, including tasks that he regarded as 'mothers work'. His eldest daughter had recently reached the menarche, and he felt that he had dealt very well with this transition, because communication between them was so good.

We always have talked about everything and it was like 'Dad, I've got something to tell you' and when she said it was like, wow, she's really growing up, she's becoming a woman (Steven Hill)

Anxieties around raising girls might therefore be seen as based in more generalised assumptions about the activities that a mother would (normally) do, a point to which I will return in the following sections. In reality, however, fathers who had raised children through adolescence had not found this particularly problematic, and not all fathers of younger children anticipated that this would be a problem in the future.

Again, this also related to the way in which men conceptualised their children's ability to make decisions about their own needs, and thus to fathers' constructions of childhood. As discussed in the previous chapter, some children exercised a considerable degree of autonomy in decisions about their everyday lives, and this was also part of a broader process of negotiating new relationships. The following exchange is illustrative of this:

I. Is it a problem shopping for clothes?

R. (Sounds surprised) No..usually when we get clothes she comes with me..she knows what she wants..she'll say 'I want that one'. (Adrian Wright, father of Leanne, aged 8)

While Adrian felt quite comfortable with his daughter's relative autonomy, and indeed, saw it as part of his successful parenting, for other fathers, daughters were seen as having particular needs that would be better met by their mother. This did not, however, mean that fathers were not doing what they saw as 'mothers' work', rather this reflected anxieties about girls in particular lacking a mother.

Nevertheless, as discussed above, the transition from a two-parent family to solo fatherhood meant that the quality of men's relationships with their children shifted. For a father who was accustomed to spending time with his children during the evenings and weekends, responsibility for the broader aspects of their care, (rather than primarily

162

'fun' or voluntary involvement), could act as a constraint on his relationships with his children.

> *What I didn't like was the way that becoming a single parent to me started to put barriers up and get in the way that I felt I'd developed with them, because of the way it sort of took time away and that you haven't got the time to sort of do every day ...and I think that certainly for a few years it became a barrier not having that time and that was one of the worst things about being a single parent, I wasn't able to carry on with them the way I had been. (Howard Johnson)*

While the demands of the practical care of children combined with domestic responsibilities figure very large in the lives of men raising children alone, physical responsibility for day to day care of a young child did appear to engage fathers in a new way. Thus there appears to be a strong relationship between lone fatherhood and a changed perspective on fathering work, in which the absence of a maternal presence seemed to act as a catalyst for change.

Only one father in the sample had worked part-time prior to his divorce; his wife had a full time career, and he was trained in catering, which left a great deal more flexibility in terms of the hours that he worked. Gavin Watson said that he had been very happy with this arrangement, which made sense in the context of the importance of his ex-wife's career, and his enjoyment of his caring role.

Nevertheless, the needs of his youngest daughter (aged 2 ½ at the time of interview) meant that solo parenting, even after a period as primary carer during his marriage, created new challenges. This father said that, although very little had changed in practical terms, his caring was now:

> *All the time.. and Laura, Laura's going through this clingy stage, well you saw her just then, she has these phases and she's a bit shy and a bit clingy sometimes she won't leave you alone, she's round your legs all the time (Gavin Watson)*

Gavin's account was interesting, because despite his prior involvement in his children's care (he had undertaken more practical care than any other father in the study had),

becoming a lone father still had an impact on his relationship with his children. His account suggested that he was developing an attentiveness to his children's needs in 'new' ways, through doing 'maternal work', (Ruddick, 1990; 1994) and was a striking example of a father who was 'mothering' his children. Nevertheless, this was a development that began prior to his wife's departure, but was consolidated by his primary responsibility for 'all' of the children's care 'all of the time'.

The way in which fathers conceptualised their children's needs was, as discussed in previous chapters, dependent on both external circumstances and men's constructions of childhood. The level of engagement that men had with their children prior to the end of the relationship, while clearly important, may have been somewhat obscured by issues around the end of an intimate relationship.

Nevertheless, while themes of anger and loss characterised some men's accounts of the transition to lone fatherhood, and some fathers continued to parent against a background of resentment towards ex-partners, most of the fathers in the sample had experienced profound shifts in their relationships with their children. These shifts seem unlikely to have occurred had they remained in two parent families.

Identity challenges – the perceptions of others; initial relationships with children

As discussed above, most of the fathers in the sample had been in 'traditional' male breadwinner households before they became lone parents. This had not only acted as a constraint on the amount of time that they spent with their children, but also meant that they were able to rely on conventional constructions of the 'good' father as one who provides for his family. Men's existing relationships with their children at the time of relationship breakdown were thus also constrained by the amount of time that was available out of working hours.

What this meant in practice was that mother's work was largely invisible in terms of the amount of time and energy expended on caring for children, and the emotional labour involved. Indeed, very few fathers acknowledged the amount of work that mothers had done, and were much more likely to minimise the effort that women had

invested in the work of maintaining the family. In doing this men were able, as I have argued, to draw on social constructions of both motherhood and fatherhood to support their positions.

Becoming a lone parent undermined the basis on which fathers had parented in two parent families because the demands of breadwinning were challenged by the demands of physically caring for children, not as a secondary activity, but as an activity which demanded direct attention. Parenting (mothering) is a taken for granted activity that is, as has been argued, invisible unless it is not done. Similarly, professional attention to parenting is usually linked with perceived difficulties in the parenting process; thus it might be expected that fathers would see professional involvement as a challenge to their parenting ability.

As mothers are usually at the forefront of debates about the *quality* of caring, and indeed, more likely to interact with professionals in childrearing, fathers in two parent families are less likely to be called upon to justify their own parenting abilities. Indeed, while mothers willingness to prioritise their children's needs is an essential characteristic of the 'good mother', (Ruddick, 1990) the indirect nature that frequently characterises men's relationships with their children means that father involvement with children is more likely to be seen as an 'value added' element of family life.

Thus, although fathers might be 'functionally absent' in two-parent families, (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) it is frequently argued that their contribution to child development as agents of primary socialisation, role models and mentors (Lamb, 1979) is underestimated. Fathers, it is argued, have a 'special' role in their children's lives, contributing valuable qualities to parenting. While these arguments have been contested (Dunne, 1999) several fathers' accounts drew on the notion of 'difference' between maternal and paternal care to validate their experience.

In the context of the contemporary discourse which stresses father involvement, lack of, or low level involvement with their children could be validated by claims of maternal deviance. Deviant maternal behaviour included the deliberate withholding of information about the children, and exclusion by mothers from decisions around the

children and their day to day care. For lone fathers in the study, relationships with their children became more closely linked with their identities because it placed many men in a position where, (often for the first time), external agencies were evaluating men's situations with their children.

Agency involvement was important, because it became part of the discourse around 'bad' mothering for several fathers. Thus, the involvement of social services, for example, might vindicate men in their perception of the non-resident mother as a 'bad mother', who had been judged 'unfit' by agencies who were seen as having specific expertise as far as raising children was concerned.

Nevertheless, several fathers said that they had also been excluded from the decision making process prior to becoming primary carers by the professionals involved in their case. This varied from a lack of information, to poor communication, or a perceived failure to take the fathers' wishes into account. One father had removed his son from the mother's home because of his ex-partner's mental health problems, and felt that health professionals had not given him enough information during his partner's illness.

I was never ever made fully aware of the, uh, those problems that's what was it wasn't until it was out of control is the way to describe it ..and it tended to get out of control before, I could see from that, now it's too late, she's sorted but its too late (David Bates)

Nevertheless, this father said that he had always been very involved in his child's care from the time of his birth, which is somewhat at odds with his assertion that he was not fully aware of events in the family home. He became a lone parent because of these difficulties, and as the primary carer for his child, now needed to reconcile his previous position with his caring responsibilities, and hence a caring identity.

Indeed, several fathers said that it was 'too late' for their ex-partners to resume maternal responsibilities (despite changes in the circumstances of some mothers), which might suggest a determination by some men to maintain their current situations in the face of opposition, a point that will be returned to in the following sections.

However, a minority of fathers were open about their use of the construction of mothers as 'unfit' to maintain quite a high degree of control over their ex-partners contact with the children. Strategies employed by this group included limiting the amount of contact that women had with their children, or insisting on physically remaining with the child during contact visits.

A sub group of fathers had court mandated residence orders for their children (n.11) which were often linked with a dispute about residence. In cases where Court Welfare Officers (CWO's) were involved, fathers typically experienced this intervention as supporting mothers rather than fathers, sometimes despite direct evidence to the contrary.

> *I felt the CWO went out of her way, went deliberately out of her way to make a case for the children to go to their mother.. in the face of everything, even though theoretically I was told by my solicitor I had as much chance of getting residence of the children, I found that quite simply to be not the case. There was a less than a 5% chance..no matter what the mother does, whether she's a drug addict or a prostitute or whatever. The only thing they.. the courts may pick up on and take them off their mother is if she was beating them or she was physically violent to them, something like that, which I don't think is really right with times like now.*
> *(Graham Dodds)*

Some fathers experienced the intervention of CWO's as unnecessarily intrusive. This appears to be linked in men's accounts with feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty about their new situation, and may have been experienced as a challenge to their parenting competence.

> *You know (he) wanted to dig everything up about me but it was a case of he wasn't willing to, you know, if I'd ask him, he'd sort of like ask me a question, er I don't know something daft like "Do you love your children?" you know, and I'd bounce it back at him and say "Well have you got kids?" "Well yeah I've got kids," "Well do you love your children?" and he'd go "Well we're not talking about me, we're talking about you," But no, there was something about him that I didn't like*

er I really did, looking back at it now I really did make it hard for him. (Dave Bishop)

While, with the benefit of hindsight, this father reflected on his own part in the dynamics of the relationship with professionals, he nevertheless experienced questions about his relationship with his children as a personal challenge. The CWO involved in his case had also visited the mother's home, both when the children were present and when she was alone. Nevertheless, the fact that he was included in the investigation evoked feelings of hostility and resentment for this father, (with whom the children were mainly resident), in that his ability to care for his children appeared to be open to question. This was despite the fact that the CWO had offered him informal reassurance about the eventual outcome of the enquiry.

Yes and I think it took about 10 or 11 month of going through court. I mean at the end of it or virtually towards the end of it the Court Welfare Officer said to me "You've got nothing to worry about". (Dave Bishop)

Thus the formal framework in which decisions were made about the care of children was perceived as a challenge to men's existing relationships with their children, and appears to be instrumental in a more generalised perception that fathers are unfairly treated during the process of separation or divorce.

Most parenting takes place in the private arena of 'home' and 'family', and many parents would experience detailed scrutiny of their day to day care and motivation as intrusive. Fathers, however, appeared to be likely to interpret any evaluation of their capacity to care as evidence of social bias against fathers as carers. This applied to all fathers, not only those raising girls, (as discussed in the accounts above).

Nevertheless, fathers of girls who were subject to professional evaluations tended to see this as closely linked with the sex of their children.

I always find that the biggest thing for me being a lone father is being the... just the social acceptance of it. I can remember going through a period of having to appear to be whiter than white in the way that I dealt with things, the Court

168

Welfare thing, that had a big effect on me that took a lot of it over, but having discussed it with other people I realised that it wasn't just concerning me being a father with two young girls and that people would look at me. I just realised that you've got to be so careful, and not give anybody any reason where they could have doubts or suspicions that there was something untoward going on, that sort of thing, and I think a lot of that for me was the Court Welfare system. I was made to feel that it wasn't right, it wasn't acceptable for me to bring up the children (Howard Johnson)

Perceptions about how others might see them were thus very influential in terms of how comfortable fathers felt in their relationships with their children, linking with the discourse around 'unsafe' fathers. (Cameron et.al., 1999; Lloyd, 1995) A sub-group of fathers also had other children who were not living with them. (n.8) While it might be expected that older daughters would be more likely to be living with their mothers, this was true in only two cases in this sample. Nevertheless, these fathers also felt that they were open to scrutiny.

I always feel that when I say my two boys live with me but my daughter lives with her mother, I have to explain, in detail, the reasons why that is, because my automatic thought is 'oh, gosh, they might think I'm an abuser or something', and I'm not allowed to have my daughter with me, and that frightens, that really frightens me, I'd hate to be seen in that light, and so I always say 'oh yeah, my daughter came to live with me for a couple of weeks and she didn't like it very much, she didn't get on at school, missed her friends, you know, its more free at her mums, so she chose to live with her mum'....and so we go through this whole amount of information (laughter) just so people don't think that. (Ian Miller)

Men's relationships with their children are thus challenged by becoming a primary carer. For fathers who may have had relationships that were limited by both their paid work and the availability of someone else (the mother) to care, becoming a solo parent meant what was, for some men, a profound change from quite 'traditional' fatherhood

to engaged parenting. The fathers in this group had to consider not only their practical responsibilities, but also the *meaning* of fatherhood.

Practical resolutions: developing new relationships

The practical implication of the responsibility that fathers acquired for children who had primarily been cared for by others (usually their mother) was that the security of the arrangements in place for the children's care was very important to this group of fathers. As discussed in previous sections, the whole process of acquiring formal responsibility for their children was one which many fathers experienced as a threat to their own claim to parenting. While this perception appears to have been shared by at least some of the sources of support and advice that fathers accessed, analysis of men's accounts suggests that there may also have been other reasons for advice that they were given.

Research into the legal status of unmarried fathers suggests that many fathers have not acquired formal parental responsibility when cohabiting relationships break down. (Pickford, 1999) Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, there are many routes into lone fatherhood. These routes vary, and may be formalised after a lengthy legal process, involve social services only, or be purely informal arrangements between ex-partners, or indeed, a combination of arrangements. Peter Norman had acquired primary responsibility for his children because of Social Service intervention in their mother's care of them.

> *Well I've been to see a solicitor about going for sort of like getting legal custody of the children but the solicitor advised me don't stir up any waves and leave it as it is until if she does something then do it. (Peter Norman, unmarried father of two, no formal Parental Responsibility)*

While superficially at least, the advice to refrain from 'making waves' suggests that his solicitor regarded his lone fatherhood as potentially problematic if the case did ever come to Court, analysis of Peter's account suggests that there were other reasons for this advice, and that other formal agencies were supportive.

Yeah because I've been told, the Social Services said if it came to it, if it did go to court there's no way she'd get the kids back, because the police have been involved, the Social Services have been involved and they'd basically be on my side, so don't make any waves unless she does.

Nevertheless, this father (in common with several other respondents) produced anecdotal evidence that formal systems do, in fact, discriminate against men becoming primary carers for their children. Substantive evidence for a factual basis for this belief is lacking at present, and indeed, may reflect a more generalised perception based on arguments propounded by politicised men's rights groups.

The legal situation regarding unmarried fathers who had primary care of their children was that many of them did, in fact, have Parental Responsibility. Under the terms of the 1989 Children Act s.10 (4) unmarried fathers (or any other person) who has a residence order for a child, also has parental responsibility, (Cretney, 1997:192-3) and one father had formally acquired parental responsibility during his cohabitation with the child's mother. However, the impact of perceptions that fathers are discriminated against on the lived experience of men raising children alone should not be underestimated, as evidenced by the frequency with which fathers expressed this view.

Even when fathers had obtained a legal mandate for their fathering, this did not necessarily mean that they felt secure in their situation as solo carers. This meant that they were parenting in what felt, for them, a climate of uncertainty about their future with their children. Adrian Wright, for example, had been married to his former partner, and obtained a residence order for his daughter when the relationship broke down, because of significant difficulties that his ex-partner had with the child. Adrian expressed the view that they had 'never bonded', although a younger child had remained with the mother, who had returned to live with her own parents. Nevertheless, he expressed uncertainty about the future.

If it goes to the Court, and then the Court would say...see when me and Paula were divorced..well she's always been unsettled, but now she's settled down and that, I think that the courts would, well just go with her and that would be it.

(Interviewer) Is that what you solicitor says?

No but I'm just so afraid that would happen but since she's (daughter) been here everything's improved and she says she wants to stay here, but she's very..adaptable..it's difficult to know but I wouldn't say I'd risk it, so I got it legal and official like. I want her to stay with me, but I'd like to know it's the best thing for her in the long run, I don't know I'm in a bit of a situation I don't know at all (Adrian Wright)

The issue of maternal mediation and control over the post separation experience thus remained an important issue for many fathers. The complex structure of several new lone father families meant that even when there was little or no contact with the non-resident parent, fathers still experienced the impact of their existence.

As I say she wouldn't let me adopt him which we talked about while we were together you know it was a case of "No he's my son, always will be my son, but you can bring him up and look after him," yeah so when she initially left, as I say if he'd had an accident I couldn't legally sign for him. You know I knew at one point she were down in (a city in the Midlands) but I didn't know where in ( ), so we had to go through, initially go through a court and get what is classed as a Residency Order (Dave Bishop)

Nevertheless, a combination of circumstances and events meant that most of the fathers in the study had moved through a process in which the practical demands of their new situations became connected with a shift in attitude towards their new situation. This seems to be embedded in a developing relationship with their children, and an emergent sense of responsibility for the children's wellbeing.

This is not to suggest that fathers lacked a sense of responsibility for their children prior to the end of the relationship with the mother, rather, I would suggest, that the 'classical' maternal role of nurturing, protection of and care for the child became incorporated into men's sense of what it means to be a father. Indeed, several fathers described a 'turning point' in their experience of parenting, during which they began to

take on a sense of fatherhood as a protective function (often but not always) from the lack of responsibility shown by the other parent.

I've had experience of this and the kind of route she would take and I think it's to do with..I can't just disrupt the children's lives and just do what the hell I want. That covered my reactions at the time, I was determined that she wasn't going to disrupt their lives any more, that was my reactions. (Graham Dodds)

Thus, as many fathers had negotiated a shift from caring *about* their children, which was a pre separation or divorce mode, to caring *for* their children, relationships with children could be developed and sustained in new ways. This did not necessarily mean that the practical tasks associated with primary responsibility for children became less demanding, although routines could be established once fathers knew that they would be the children's primary carer for the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, for some fathers, the practical organisational challenge remained an issue as children grew up, and new practical solutions were sought. Ian Miller, for example, was raising teenaged boys, and said that he experienced constant tension between his desire to encourage autonomous behaviour in his sons, and his own sense of responsibility for meeting the practical needs of the family. An attempt to encourage teamwork in day to day practical tasks had met with only limited success:

Over the last six months or so, I've been so fed up with reminding them.... I've just let the pots pile up.... until people start complaining that they can't find a knife or a teaspoon, or whatever...and then we start emptying pots out of bedrooms...and, you know, washing the pile in the sink and stuff...and Daniel says, 'why do I have to do all this?'...(Ian Miller, lone father of 2)

However, the domestic environment was for many fathers, as discussed in previous sections, the site of the development of closer relationships with their children, through shared activities and the development of a mutual understanding. Fathers often characterised their relationships with their children as one based on trust and friendship, although for some men, this was balanced by a more traditional orientation to

fatherhood, that is, one in which their job was to instil discipline into their children, a point that will be returned to.

Yeah.. I try, that's the idea, she does, she helps, she tries her best, she does her best but 'cos she helps me do here, she's got the idea that I help her.. it works like that (Daniel Bates, father of 7 year old)

The accounts of men in the study thus expressed some notion of what it meant (to this group of fathers at least) to be 'good' fathers. Primary responsibility for children might thus be seen as introducing new dynamics into the parent child relationship. Where fathers' interactions with their children had previously been constrained by a commitment to paid work, and the availability of maternal care, there was indeed no need for fathers to question their relationships with their children.

'Traditional' fatherhood?

Recent shifts in perceptions around fathers and fathering may mean that men are no longer expected to be the overt disciplinarians of the historical model of fatherhood. Although men's potential as a source of discipline in families, (particularly with regard to teenaged boys) has been touched on by both theorists and policy makers, the contemporary (and socially accepted) model of the 'good' father in two parent families could be defined as that of breadwinner and playmate. The lone fathers in this study appear to have broadened their conception of what fatherhood actually meant to them, because of their responsibility for their children.

As discussed in Chapter 5, paid work became less of a priority for the majority of fathers in this group, and relationships with children achieved a new depth and importance. While the rather vague notion of 'discipline' remained for many fathers a taken-for –granted function of fatherhood, men were equally likely to express a degree of uncertainty around what this should actually involve, (see, for example, Paul Jones' account in the previous section). These fathers were more likely to characterise their relationships with their children as based on close friendship, in families in which teamwork was an essential element of success.

Nevertheless, new relationships also meant that father and children's lives became more intertwined, which could create new dilemmas. Dave Bishop, for example, was highly involved in a local voluntary group prior to the end of the relationship with his partner, and had to make a decision about whether that involvement could continue.

His solution was to take the children with him to events, which required adjustment on both sides. Dave worked full time, and may not have been as enthusiastic about shared social activities had he spent the day with his children; nevertheless, he saw shared activities as instrumental in the development of a more companionable relationship.

> *I wanted to still go out and do things, you know but they were tired and basically wanted to go to bed so we had to have a compromise. Initially I started going out you know taking them out with me wherever I went, but coming back like at half past eight or eight o clock and then gradually I introduced them to later bed times, that were hard..and come nine o clock, ten o clock I'll either still be out with mine or they'll be sat here watching telly with me as a you know like an evening company type of thing. (Dave Bishop)*

Indeed, many fathers in this group linked the initial practical challenge and their engagement with the day to day responsibilities of household and childcare activities with the development of close relationships with their children. As discussed above, pressure on time meant that there was often less time available for men's 'fun' engagement with their offspring. However, one clear consequence of primary responsibility for children was, for the fathers in this study at least, that they characterised their relationships with their children as close, confiding and warm.

> *I gave myself two months.. I didn't think I could cope after that.. and its now four years and we're just best friends, more than father and son. (George White)*

This is not to say, however, that notions of a more 'traditional' model of fatherhood were abandoned in favour of a friendship model. Analysis of fathers' accounts reveals that for most fathers, a caring relationship (both in the practical and emotional sense) meant that they believed that they also had a responsibility to socialise their children

175

into respectful relationships with others. This was important in terms of both the rewards that fathers experienced in their relationships with their children, and their ability to parent effectively.

This was typically characterised as 'respect' in the parent – child relationship, although this was not something that could be 'taken for granted'. Many fathers expressed the view that respect from children for a parent should be earned, rather than regarded as a right.

> *I think that perhaps the most I important thing is the fact that I'm not just their father, I'd like them to think that I'm not just their father and I think they do think that. I don't want, I don't want them to grow up thinking that ... we've got a relationship where I just am here and I'm feeding them, cook for them and wash for them.. and I want to be their friend as well, but try and keep their respect, it's very difficult but I feel as though I need to try and do that. And I think I need to try and do that perhaps as a lone parent because there isn't anybody else here.*
> *(Richard Prince)*

The balance between 'friendship' and 'respect' in the parent – child relationship is clearly not exclusively the domain of lone fathers. However, men's understandings of the nature of their relationship with their children appeared to be contingent on primary responsibility for parenting, a point that I will return to in the final section of this chapter.

Moreover, the practical impact of lone fatherhood on men's relationships with their children meant that the wants and needs of the dependent child required fathers to engage reflexively with their children. This represented a departure from their previous parenting style for many (if not most) of the fathers in the sample, which in turn meant that there were rewards from interactions with the child that fathers may not have experienced in two parent families.

> *I spose the only thing is if you're tired and you don't want to do this but he does.. you can say 'no I'm not doing it', or do it even if you don't enjoy it so you're not*

making the most of it.. uh it's best when you're both into something. (Daniel Bates)

Identity resolutions: being a 'good' father

The preceding chapters have explored the way in which social and cultural constructions of men and women as parents combine with structural factors to impact on men's experience of solo parenting. I have argued that men who become primary carers for children experience shifts in both their identities and perceptions, and that these changes are linked with primary responsibility for children. Thus, analysis of the accounts of men in the study has suggested that the nature of the way in which these men relate to their children has undergone a process of change. As primary carers, fathers' practical situations mean that they engage with their children differently.

This is not to suggest that fathers in the study did not engage with their children before the end of the parental relationships, but that situational factors meant that father's involvement was almost certainly less in the two parent family. Being an adequate father in a two-parent family may have an element of voluntarism, and require very different skills and interactions with children from those needed by a lone father.

As I have argued in the previous sections, lone fatherhood presents men with a series of challenges to their identity as both fathers and workers. Analysis of lone father's accounts suggests that one of the most profound experiences those men encounter is in shifting relationships with their children.

Prior to becoming lone parents, most of the fathers in this group had been in 'traditional' relationships in which their ex-partners took most responsibility for childcare, and indeed, some men had experienced a period of living apart from their children. The practical change of becoming a solo parent means that there is no longer another adult who may safely be assumed to take the necessary responsibility for children when the father is absent (during working hours, for example). There is thus no longer an element of voluntarism to childcare – even with good support networks, fathers' interactions with, and sense of responsibility for, their children increase.

177

Physical responsibility for children thus presents challenges in men's relationships with their children. While contemporary fatherhood may be undergoing a process of change, challenging the traditional model of fathers as disciplinarians and breadwinners, the experience of change may be intensified for men who are solo parents. The following section explores how lone fathers conceptualise 'good' fathering, and the way in which fathers in this study resolved the challenge to identity presented by their relationships with their children.

Emotions and identity

Fathers in this study often located their own feelings about being a father in their relationships with their own fathers. I have touched on this in previous chapters, but in the specific context of men's relationships with their children, a sense of a lack of emotional closeness in their own relationships appears very influential in terms of how contemporary lone fathers conceptualise 'good' fathering. Most fathers thus identified areas of their own parenting where they felt that they were compensating for the lack of warmth and closeness that they had experienced with their own fathers.

> *I'd say we were close ...um I think it stems from me dad because me dad was so unemotional I'm not gonna be like that with my children, um, I tell them I love them every day, you know, and when they go to sleep, I want them to feel safe, you know, not that I never did but I never felt I could talk to me dad emotionally about anything, (Steven Hill)*

Implicit in these accounts was the notion that contemporary fatherhood is qualitatively 'different' from fatherhood in the mid twentieth century, and that fathers in this study perceived themselves as more attuned to their children's emotional needs than their own fathers had been. There was a perception that expectations around fatherhood are changing in some sense. While research evidence suggests that fathers generally are less clear about the precise nature of this change (see, for example, Warin et. al, 1999)

178

almost all of the fathers in the study said that their parenting was qualitatively different from that of their own fathers.

Becoming the primary carer for their children may, of course, create a focus for fathers' reflections on fatherhood in ways that are different from fathers in two parent families; lone fatherhood has created a situation where men need to consider the implications and meaning of their situation. Moreover, a process of reflection on their own childhood experiences meant that many fathers felt a significant degree of satisfaction in having rejected the 'traditional' model of fatherhood. This group of men were therefore able to identify emotional warmth and closeness as a key feature of good fatherhood, which in turn supported their identities as caring parents.

The fact of how different I've been with my children compared to how I was treated as a child, I've been a lot more involved, the permission I was given from my wife was I was allowed to be emotional...I've never had, uh, being an only child, learning to form attachments because all my mother's emotions were directed towards my father, but it hasn't meant that the wheel has gone full circle and I've brought my children up the same, I became very close and very involved with them. (Howard Johnson)

As discussed in previous sections, being a good father was often contrasted in men's accounts with maternal failings (or being a 'bad' mother). Perceptions of maternal lack of responsibility could thus be utilised as a way of coming to terms with a caring identity. Perceptions of a lack of maternal responsibility may suggest a partial solution to some of the tensions around fathers and a caring identity for this group, offering as it does a sense of both moral and practical superiority. Thus, mothers who abdicate their position as carers for their children (and, to a lesser extent, contemporary fathers who fail to meet their responsibilities to their children) not only vindicate men's position as lone parents, but also consolidates their practical situation.

So now if she ever did want him back, which, not in that situation ever will, she'd find, you know, she'd find it were impossible, Yeah, well they just wouldn't let it

happen, as I say it's known to everybody, everybody knows about the thing that
she did (Daniel Bates)

Responsibility in relationships with children

Notions of 'responsible' parenthood thus support men's relationships with their children in lone father families. While this has been touched on in previous sections, in terms of the emergent relationships between fathers and their children, *feeling* responsible for care, as discussed in the previous section, strengthens men's identity as a caring parent.

The issue of contact with the non-resident parent is a contentious issue for many lone mothers, and the same may be said to be true of lone father families. This concept emerged in men's accounts as underpinning their understanding of their children's needs for emotional stability, (although again, this concept was multi-layered and sometimes bound up with themes of anger and loss.) Fathers often said that, were they in the situation of the non-resident parent, contact arrangements would be adhered to for the sake of the child.

I think it should be a regular thing, like I always did, I made a point of doing that
for his sake, I think it's got to be all or nothing so the kids know where they stand
they've got that bit of stability, they know they're gonna have contact and when.
(Philip Brown)

Some fathers expressed their role as protective, by mediating not only between the child and the non-resident parent, but also between their children and the world outside the family home. Situations in which the non-resident parent was seen to make excessive emotional demands on children, or as creating situations in which children were unhappy, often provoked a protective response from fathers.

Graham Dodds, for example, said that his ex-wife's telephone calls to the children often caused them distress, because these calls frequently followed a crisis in her own life, which his sons found difficult to deal with.

180

I believe that um a parents a parent for the children to lean on and not the other way around she should be big enough to know that and cope with these things herself, the boys aren't old enough to have this put on them really it's making them, I think children grow up far too quickly as it is and life, this is very bad.. for gods sake they don't really want it, there's plenty of time for them to grow up and become an adult, you know, in two or three years time (Graham Dodds)

The protective response that fathers experienced in response to emotional upsets in their children's lives might be seen not only as a response to the perceived needs of children, but also indicative of the way in which fathers constructed childhood. Protecting children from emotional harm requires sensitivity to their responses to situations; (Ruddick, 1990) moreover, this protection also consolidated the lone father family as a family unit, in which men's identities as a caring parent were further strengthened. Thus, responsibility combined with practical care can create a strong sense of satisfaction with their caring role for lone fathers.

I think once you've accepted you're her father, the responsibility, uh, it's a satisfying thing ..well, I look at her, I look at her photograph when she's not there, and it's easy, any time, I can go right back to when she was born, I can go right back to when she was in her mum's tummy, and yeah, I just love that person, um, and I don't, I think about the dream that I had for her then, and I look at her asleep. (Jason Coombes)

Children's responses

The satisfaction that fathers derived from their relationships with their children was also, as might be expected, linked with the response that they received from their children. This was not a one way response, and would be best conceptualised as a process which was negotiated between children and parents. (Brannen and O'Brien, 1996) Almost all the fathers in the sample perceived themselves as 'doing well' in their relationships with their children, and this could also validate men's identities as caring parents.

181

I mean the first thing she'll do when I pick her up from school is give me a good cuddle in front of everyone and a lot of kids won't do that, will they? And she always gives me a kiss when she's going (Adrian Wright)

While warmth and closeness in relationships with children was a source of great satisfaction for fathers, the response of people outside the immediate family was also important, and positive encouragement could also validate men's sense of satisfaction with their caring activities.

I spose one of the best things is when they come and say 'Thanks, dad', or 'You're the best dad in the world' or just shows me, hugs me out the blue, he can do that you know, it's uh, probably when we're sitting on settee at night, you know me arm round him, you know, and that's me, that's me satisfied for the night um also people tell you what a good lad he is umm and say, 'yeah, you're doing ok'. (Andrew Nash)

Many fathers accounts also mention the importance of their role in socialising their children, which again could provide both positive feed back from others, and a significant source of satisfaction for them as parents. The following account is illustrative of this process:

I don't know... if I ask them not to do something they don't do it, if I ask them to do something they do it, that they're nice with people, you know that they're well behaved. You know I'm well into the when they're at school they you know learn things and when Amber comes home she does her homework..er if they ask me anything I'll tell them what it is.. when we go out I mean I take them to the pub, I mean it's like some people say kids spoil your lives, ruin your lives, it's a load of rubbish. (Peter Norman)

I've just got the attitude that you must bring the child up in a decent way, you know, respecting people, and I feel I'm a respectable parent because I've treated them right (Steven Hill)

Being a father, for this group of men at least, appears to mean that a sense of identity and self worth has developed through closer relationships with children, which are in turn contingent on men's responsibility for their day to day care. Fathers could thus, whatever their practical situations, feel that they were doing a 'good' job', and experience the rewards that this brought. Although fathers practical situations varied, (and some were undoubtedly less than ideal) primary responsibility for children meant that some men were able to conceptualise their parenting role in new ways. To this extent, lone fathers might be seen as beginning to reconstruct their fatherhood.

Most important to me as a father, that's being her father, it's out of my hands, being her father, having my hopes and aspirations for her, I'm glad to have her, yeah, there's no downside, the only downside is my lack of being able to do as much as I want for her.. that's because of the situation that I'm in now, but I'm trying to work it out, I'm trying to change it. Yeah, having an input, having an input in her life, that's it. (Jason Coombes)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how analysis of lone fathers' accounts suggests that the practical experience of *doing* care enables men to experience solo parenting as positive. Although being in paid work may be seen as supporting men's identities, being primary carers undoubtedly challenges a polarised, 'breadwinning' identity. Lone fathers are, however, able to validate their caring experience by drawing on social and cultural beliefs about women's propensity to care, and on the notion of self-sufficiency, which is supported by conceptions of political fatherhood. Men's identities are thus challenged by the experience of being primary carers for children, but doing care means that men develop new relationships with their children, which transcend the significance of external factors.

I now want to consider how, and to what extent, being a 'good' father depends upon a propensity to care, which, as discussed, is seen as an essentially 'feminine' trait. In the following, and concluding Chapter, I draw together the themes that have been explored in the preceding chapters. As I have discussed, men's propensity to care is seen as

being limited by psychology (or 'deficit' perspectives of fatherhood) as evidenced by the work of early psychological theorists, and enduring notions of 'difference' between mothers' and fathers' care. (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997)

However, as Morgan (1996) suggests, gendered identities may be constructed in terms of 'difference', but are best conceptualised as a 'process, rather than a thing'. (Morgan, 1996:72) In considering the accounts of lone fathers in this study, it is possible to discern a clear process in which gendered identities were challenged by practical circumstances, and ways in which this led to a process of change in how men saw their responsibility to and for their children.

In the following Chapter, I consider the notion that men's shift from 'caring about' their children to 'caring for' [2]meant that their relationships with their children became based on principles of care, as a response to the perceived needs of the child, and how this might be seen as constituting 'maternal work'. (Ruddick, 1990; 1994)

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[2] See, Ungerson, 1987, and Finch and Mason 1993 for analyses of gender and caring; also Smart 1991, for a discussion of what this means in relation to fatherhood.

Chapter 7

Lone fatherhood: Transitions in changing contexts

This study explored the experiences of a small sample of men raising children alone in the context of post divorce and separation parenting, and considered the impact of this experience on fathers across a range of contexts and situations.

The thesis began by describing some of the debates around men's participation in and experience of parenting. Much of the academic and political discourse around fatherhood has suggested that there are barriers to men's participation in parenting, and that men's paid work and normative expectations around mother's care are particularly important in this context.

Further, the psychological theory that inheres in and underpins many contemporary notions of 'good' fathering suggests that there may be some limitations on how men do fathering, although there is also evidence that, in the right circumstances, men can, and indeed do, nurture and care for their children. However, these theoretical positions are somewhat in tension with enduring notions of motherhood, which are underpinned by essentialist notions of maternal care as a 'natural' expression of femininity, and one in which women's preparedness to care is assumed almost without question.

The accounts of men raising children alone suggest that, prior to separation or divorce, there were some constraints on their parenting. Caring for children is both demanding and tiring work, and this was more so for fathers balancing primary responsibility for care with paid employment. Nevertheless, this is work that mothers routinely take responsibility for after divorce or separation.

Sole responsibility for children involves a wide range of tasks, including practical childcare and maintaining the domestic environment. Prior to divorce or separation,

fathers may have had limited engagement in both childcare and domestic labour, and shifting responsibility presented new challenges for fathers.

Nevertheless, men's accounts showed how it was possible for fathers to overcome these. Men not only become engaged with their children in a primary caring role, but also derived great satisfaction from primary care-giving. Meeting the practical challenge often involved the acquisition of new skills, and the mobilisation of support from workplaces, kin and social networks. This was easier for some men than for others, and was highly contingent on social and structural factors.

We do not know how many fathers would like to have primary care of their children after divorce or separation, and are deterred by the belief that their claims would be viewed unfavourably by the courts. Despite some cases reported in the media, the evidence for significant numbers of fathers being willing to make the life changes associated with primary responsibility for children is largely anecdotal, and somewhat sketchy. (Harne and Radford, 1994)

Moreover, there has not been a history of fathers asking for this level of care, (Maidment, 1981) or indeed, historically having to ask, since equality of rights between (married) mothers and fathers was only achieved in 1973. (Maclean and Eekelaar, 1997)

The 1989 Children Act's re-working of the concept of custody to 'parental responsibility', was intended to convey a message about men's continuing responsibility to children and the importance of children's needs. In practice it meant much the same to mothers who usually continue to care for children. (Harne and Radford, 1994)

Another area of uncertainty relates to the number of fathers who are deterred by normative expectations around post divorce and separation parenting arrangements from seeking to care for their children. The evidence that does exist for men's post separation parenting shows, above all, that in the majority of cases, women remain the primary carers of children. (Kiernan. Land and Lewis, 1998; Bradshaw et. al., 1998) Mothers continue to not only undertake the 'double shift' of work and home, but are

also highly likely to be materially disadvantaged by divorce or separation. (Perry et.al., 2000)

In this concluding chapter, the main themes that emerged from the research are summarised and discussed, and I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings for both parenting and future policy development.

Becoming a lone father: choice or constraint?

As I showed in Chapter 3, fathers who became primary carers had lone parenthood thrust upon them, and although several men had been actively engaged in ensuring that their children remained in their care, the impetus behind this process occurred primarily because of a breakdown of maternal care.

In the context of men raising children alone, there were some differences in the way in which fathers had become lone parents. As discussed in Chapter 3, almost a third of the fathers in the study had originally left the family home when their relationship with the children's mother broke down. The evidence from accounts of this sub-sample suggests that, although fathers believed that they had some 'rights' regarding their children, they had not considered that they had a responsibility for day to day care.

Although most wanted regular contact, they accepted that mothers would continue to care, and that they would have some form of contact with their children. In practice, the level and frequency of contact that this sub group of fathers actually had with their children during the period that they were non-resident fathers was highly variable.

The majority of fathers in the sample, though, became lone fathers because the mother left the family home. The only factor that all fathers had in common with regard to their 'routes' into lone fatherhood was that their relationship with the child(rens) mother had broken down. I do not intend to over-simplify the way in which men became primary carers. Fathers' accounts indicated periods of significant trauma and uncertainty, and the processes involved were often far from straightforward.

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that had the mothers in question continued to care, or continued to be able to care, for their children, it is unlikely that fathers would have become primary carers. So for the men in this study, *gaining* primary responsibility for children always occurred in the context of a mother's inability, or unwillingness, to continue to care.

However, one interesting finding that emerged from lone father's accounts was how, once they had become their children's primary carer, they were highly resistant to the notion that the mother should 'have the child(ren) back'. Three mothers had attempted to regain the care of their children, and at the time of interview, all three fathers had been successful in achieving Residence Orders for the children in question.

It seemed that once the mother had relinquished responsibility for the child(ren), even informally, fathers were in a very strong position to retain their children's care. Formal agencies such as Social Services and the Courts appeared to take the view that the child should continue to live with the parent who currently had primary care. This seems to be consistent with earlier findings that prior to the 1989 Children Act, when Courts awarded custody, decisions were likely to be made that 'maintained the status quo.' (Harne and Radford, 1994:72)

Fathers sometimes expressed anxiety about what might happen if the non-resident mother decided that she wanted the children to live with her. However, what seems to have happened in practice, at least for this sample, was that non-resident mother's claims were likely to be unsuccessful.

Although fathers may not have initially had their agreement that the child(ren) should live with them formalised by a Court, the point at which a non-resident mother expressed a 'claim' to the children was the point at which fathers were likely to seek legal advice, had they not already done so, which usually set procedures in motion which formalised the existing arrangements for the children.

Subsequently, fathers could, and sometimes did, appear to exert significant control over both the amount and quality of contact that mothers subsequently had with the children.

This might, for example, mean that a father took the child to the mother's home, and remained physically present during visits, or adopted strategies that minimised the amount of time that the mother spent with the children.

Changing fatherhood

As discussed in the preceding chapters, it is frequently argued that mothers impede father's relationships with their children, both in two parent families and particularly after separation or divorce. According to this perspective, maternal competence has 'deskilled' fathers. (Burgess and Ruxton, 1996)

In two parent families, women's emotional labour may facilitate relationships between family members, and between children and the outside world. Moreover, after separation or divorce, mothers may continue to do this, by, for example, mediating and facilitating non-resident father's relationships with their children. (Smart, 1991; 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999a) For men who may not have felt responsible for 'tuning in' to children's needs on a day to day basis, this sometimes created difficulties for fathers in terms of 'knowing' how to approach a primary caring role.[1]

Although most fathers in the study expressed support for the notion of 'involved ' fatherhood, this often contrasted with men's understanding of their own pre-separation childcare activities as essentially 'babysitting' (while the mother worked, or if the mother was ill, for example). Fathers' experience of caring for children was often in a temporary capacity until the mother was able to resume her primary role. So men's caring for children was located within their relationship with the children's mother, and intertwined with notions of maternal responsibilities.

Although it would be incorrect to suggest that while fathers were in two parent families they did not engage directly with their children, the presence of mothers meant that men did not have to 'own' the responsibility for childcare and housework. (Coltrane, 1996)

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[1] The importance of women's emotional labour in facilitating post divorce relationships between fathers and children suggests that non-resident mothers may have quite different experiences than fathers, although there is very little research in this area.

However, discourses around the nature of 'good' mothering provided some lone fathers with a powerful framework on which to base their positions as primary carers. As the more 'moral' parent, (who had not 'deserted' the family) they could lay claim to being 'good' parents, in contrast to 'bad' mothers. Most of the fathers in this study drew on this framework, as part of a process of making a moral claim about their own positions as primary carers.

Men's lone parenting, then, originated in a combination of factors. Maternal absence acted as a 'push' factor, and this was balanced against normative constructions of mothering to support men's parenting. Again, I do not wish to suggest that fathers were not concerned for the wellbeing of their children, rather that for several fathers, this concern was detached from 'owning' a caring identity, suggesting a split between 'fatherhood' and 'manhood'. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997)

Nevertheless, for the fathers in this study, practical change, that is, becoming a primary carer, meant that the balance of their parenting began to shift towards the perceived needs of children as a primary factor in their parenting. Responsibility for children thus brought about changes in how men felt about their parenting because their position required direct engagement in, and responses to, their perception of children's needs, which entailed a practical and emotional shift. As lone fathers, men's active engagement with their children's care was no longer an activity about which they exerted a degree of choice- all of their daily activities were influenced by their primary responsibility for children.

This meant that men had to begin to accommodate activities which were defined by most of the fathers in this study as 'women's work', or 'things that a mother would normally do'. It is important to note in this context that, by defining both childcare and domestic work in this way, fathers did not necessarily mean that these were tasks that women (as opposed to men) *should* do. Rather that the norm, in their experience, and related to wider social structures, was that this was 'women's work', which typically remained unquestioned so long as it was being done. (Graham, 1993; 1983)

Nevertheless, if men accepted that their role as lone parents was the same as women's, they were accepting a marginalised, low status and undervalued position. Work outside the home has historically been accorded higher status than domestic labour, and for fathers, the ability to manage both paid and unpaid work may be a matter of pride, reinforced by both the support of others and the perception that lone fathers are 'doing well'. (Barker, 1995; Greif, 1985)

Some of the constraints that fathers experienced were related to economic and social structures, for example, access to housing, and labour market position. For the subgroup of men who were already living apart from their partners when they became lone parents, there were other practical issues to resolve. These men had to adapt from an essentially 'single' lifestyle, in which self care was central, to one where children had to be taken into account as an organising principle in their lives.

For fathers who were used to being independent, and having the freedom to pursue social interests, the assumption of primary responsibility for their children meant that significant adjustments had to be made in their day to day lives.

It is often suggested that social isolation is a significant problem for lone fathers. (NCOPF, 2002: Gingerbread, 2001; Barker, 1994; Greif, 1985) Lone parenthood meant that some fathers could no longer continue with the social and recreational activities that they had prior to their lone fatherhood. While there were some differences between fathers who had spent some time as non-resident fathers, and men whose partners had left the family home, they were not as great as might be expected.

Most fathers said that they missed the intimacy of relationships with ex-partners, but not the conflict that had occurred, (although not all relationships had been experienced as conflictual.) However, fathers who had been non-resident parents were accustomed to few childcare responsibilities, and more opportunities for social life.

Once fathers became lone parents, many found ways to adapt and continue with social and leisure activities, albeit in somewhat different ways, while some found that social life became very difficult. Practical restrictions were particularly acute when children

were very young. (Particularly in view of the fact that almost all of the children were aged 10 years or younger when their fathers became their primary carers.)

Lone parenthood thus drew fathers into direct engagement with their children's needs. Fathers also had to negotiate the practical, domestic context, (which for some men was relatively unfamiliar) and their position in the labour market. These processes were not discrete, however, but were interwoven in the fabric of men's everyday lives.

For many men in the sample, newly acquired responsibilities were accompanied by feelings of anger and loss over the relationship with their children's mother, and for a further sub group, the loss of a child who had remained resident with the mother. Issues around the relationship that the lone father family had with the non-resident parent thus had a continuing impact on men's lives, and all of these factors affected the way that fathers experienced their lone parenthood.

Fathers, paid work and responsibility for children

Most of the fathers in the sample were in paid work when their relationship with the mother ended, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, a 'breadwinning' identity was taken for granted in their everyday lives. Nevertheless, becoming a primary carer for a child or children could mean that fathers' perspectives shifted to accommodate both caring and breadwinning, as evidenced by men's developing relationships with their children, and the feelings that they had about this. (Chapter 6).

When fathers were in paid employment, working arrangements continued to be negotiated and re-negotiated to meet the changing needs of the family. Of at least equal importance, however, was the assimilation of a primary carer role, and all that this implies, into men's internal models of what 'being a father' meant. For the majority of the men in this study, this had not been a primary or 'core' identity prior to the end of their relationship with the mother, despite claims of high levels of involvement in childcare.

As fathers in two parent families, men had not needed to consider how to negotiate around paid work and childcare. Fathers in paid work thus had to negotiate with employers when they became primary carers, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, becoming a lone father impacted on men's work experiences in a number of ways. Although there was an increase in unemployment among fathers in the study after they became lone parents, this was not a simple process of 'cause and effect'.

Becoming a primary carer for child(ren) could mean that fathers were less available for overtime, for example, or needed to re-arrange the hours that they worked to accommodate their caring responsibilities. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 5, one father was reluctant to allow anyone else to take or collect his son from school, and was able to re-organise his paid work to allow him to do this himself. However, the greatest impact that primary responsibility for children appeared to have was the way in which fathers re-evaluated the significance of paid work in their lives.

Almost all the employed fathers described paid work as 'less important' than it had been prior to the their separation or divorce, and one father had opted for voluntary redundancy so that he could spend time with his eight year old son. Moreover, several unemployed fathers, far from seeing themselves as 'failed breadwinners', (Lewis and Warin, 2001; Warin et.al., 1999) were able to draw on discourses of 'good' parenting and 'father involvement' to support their unemployed status. So for these men, being a 'good' father meant being available to their children in ways in which 'good' mothering has historically been constructed.

For fathers in paid work, employers' responses were crucial. As I also discussed in Chapter 5, the most flexible working environment appeared to be relatively small firms where fathers had worked for some time. Workplace support continued for several fathers for some time after their initial 'crisis' period, and often meant that fathers could remain in paid work. While none of the employed fathers had undertaken part-time working, some had opted for lower pay, and described in-work benefits as crucial to being able to maintain their employment.

In two parent families, mothers are more likely to be responsible for making alternative childcare arrangements. (Daniel and Taylor, 2001) While accessing appropriate childcare did present some difficulties for fathers who worked shifts, for example, fathers relied on a range of sources of childcare, in arrangements in which the support of their own parents was often crucial.

Generally, men preferred grandparents as sources of childcare, as people whom they could trust. Grandparents also offered the most flexible source of childcare, by having children for overnight stays, or, on occasions, 'sleeping in' at the lone father's home. The most significant difficulty that fathers had in terms of accessing childcare was in arranging for (non-family) care in their own homes. However, fathers who asked for help did not appear to have too much difficulty accessing childminders and nursery places.

The difficulties that fathers said that they had accessing childcare seems incompatible with evidence that suggests that lone fathers have more 'community support' than lone mothers do. (Greif, 1985; DeMaris and Greif, 1997) However, I want to suggest that this relates not only to issues of identity in which fathers felt unsupported because of their situation, but because fathers themselves were generally quite protective of their children.

There is some evidence to suggest that lone fathers may be particularly protective of their children, and generally more reluctant to consider either using childcare, or to leave older children to care for themselves. (Lewis et. al., 2000:21) There were examples of fathers in my sample who were, indeed, reluctant to leave their children in the care of someone else (for example, the father cited above).

I would suggest that there are several reasons for this. Firstly, fathers often expressed a determination to 'prove' that they were 'good' fathers. If (as it often appeared) this meant that their fathering was measured against (idealised) discourses of 'good' mothering, fathers were likely to believe that mothers should prioritise children's needs above their own needs and desires. Fathers who were primary carers thus 'proved' that

194

they were as good as, or better than, non-resident mothers who were seen by fathers as abdicating their responsibilities towards their children.

For many lone fathers, then, 'being a good father' was not only linked with providing, (I return to this point in the following sections) but also 'doing a better job' than mothers. This was not only part of a moral discourse around 'bad' or 'neglectful' mothers, but also part of a process of men's consolidation of a 'primary carer' identity. Moreover, some men were, as discussed, reluctant to relinquish control of their situation. Paying for childcare may have threatened men's emergent caring identities in a way that family care, as a reciprocal arrangement, may not.

Fathers, domestic labour and childcare

Fathers may be constrained in their parenting because of differing social, cultural and personal expectations. These include both adherence to a breadwinning identity, and a lack of 'ownership' of childcare. Further, normative expectations of mothering may feed in to notions of 'difference' between fathers and mothers, by placing undue emphasis on the supposedly 'instinctive' nature of maternal care.

Nevertheless, although women mainly do childcare (and caring more generally), men also care for children, spouses and partners across a range of contexts and situations. (Hakim, 1996; Ungerson, 1987; Finch and Groves, 1983) However, the meaning attached to men doing childcare (and the support that they receive in doing so) varies in both kind and amount. (Morgan, 1996:102)

How, then, did fathers in this study define prior 'involvement' with their children? As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of the sample had been present at the birth. All fathers reported participation in some practical care of their children during infancy, and none, for example, said that they had never changed a nappy. Indeed, changing nappies was the most commonly cited example of early involvement in childcare, and for many fathers appeared to symbolise more than a necessary practical task; rather, being prepared to carry out this basic task suggested, (albeit retrospectively) their willingness and preparedness to be involved fathers.

As children grew older, most fathers reported that the demands of both children and partners changed over time, and with the increasing ability of the child for self care, day to day practical care became a less significant aspect of the father-child relationship in two parent families. Nevertheless, early practical involvement was linked in fathers' accounts with the notion that they had 'bonded' with their children, (a notion that was drawn on subsequently as an explanatory device for their solo parenting.)

The explicit recognition by some fathers that practical care for a child is instrumental in the subsequent development of parent-child relationships suggests that some fathers experienced a dichotomy very early in their parenting, which was, in their retrospective accounts, important in their subsequent experience. As breadwinning fathers in two parent families, their caring was an additional activity, separated from the public sphere of paid employment, and, as we have seen, in common with most British fathers, (Ferri and Smith, 1996) they were likely to increase the hours that they worked.

The apparent contradiction between fathers' accounts in which they maintained that they had 'done as much', or more than, their ex-partners prior to the end of the relationship were, as discussed in previous chapters, in tension with men's accounts of their paid work commitments. Nevertheless, some fathers were responsible for childcare during the evenings and weekends, while their partners worked.

In families where children had reached school age, and mothers worked part-time, some fathers could legitimately claim that they were physically responsible for their children for significant amounts of their waking time spent at home, during term time. However, the dual income families had also utilised support from a range of sources, including, as discussed in previous chapters, grandparents, friends and formal childcare.

What was characteristic about fathers' accounts of involvement with their children prior to separation or divorce was that being an involved father meant spending time with their children, or the act of physically 'being there'. It did not mean time spent on domestic chores, but rather activities directly associated with the child; thus, while

helping a child with homework constituted involvement, preparing clothing for school might not.[2]

It might be expected that men who reported high levels of involvement with their children prior to the end of their relationships with the mother might have experienced their subsequent transition to solo fatherhood as a continuum of care. It would, however, be incorrect to suggest that this process was always easy to accomplish, or that it is easy for fathers to combine paid work with the demands of childcare.

What was of greater significance, I would suggest, is the number of fathers who believed that women found childcare easier than a man would, because of both biology (motherhood) and structural factors which many fathers saw as privileging motherhood. Fathers in partnerships generally saw their role in two parent families as 'supporting' mothers, and men may not have recognised the demands made on women of combining paid work, childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Thus, women's paid work was often 'played down' by descriptions of 'little jobs', for example. This can also be seen as related to men's expressions of breadwinning identities. Acknowledgement that their ex-partners work had been a positive contribution to the household undermines notions of 'good' fatherhood, if good fatherhood is construed as being a 'good provider', and this was another tension that was often evident in lone fathers' accounts.

Gendered identities are historically and culturally specific, and there is some evidence that couples are re-negotiating both their intimate relationships (Jamieson, 1998; Beck and Beck- Gernsheim, 1995) and their parenting relationships and practices. (Gerson, 1993; Lewis et.al., 2001)

However, while many fathers may have been willing to accommodate their partner's paid work, they were reluctant if they believed that this would be to the detriment of

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[2] For an analysis of men's attitudes to, and use of domestic technology, see Speakman and Marchington, (1999)

their own economic activity. In other words, their partner's labour market participation often had to be seen to fit around their own labour market participation.

Debates around women's labour force participation were characterised throughout much of the 20ᵗʰ Century by assertions (highly dependent on labour market requirements) that paid employment was inimical to 'good' mothering. It is also true that mothers not only experience the greatest disparities in earned income; (Duncan and Smith, 2002; Bethoud and Gershuny, 2000; Dex, 1999) but also carry out most unpaid work, both domestic and caring.

Despite the contemporary emphasis on fatherhood, the debate falls rather short of suggesting that 'good' fatherhood might mean privileging men's parenting over, or even equalising fathering with, their economic activity. So while both the extent and the nature of mothers' labour force participation is profoundly influenced by responsibility for children (Bradshaw et.al. 1991; Duncan and Edwards, 1999) it is perhaps unsurprising that many fathers adhered to a breadwinning 'core' identity while they were in two parent families.

Nevertheless, as lone fathers, they were in a position where they had been forced to overcome, (or at least to come to terms with), the constraints imposed by labour market participation on their engagement in domestic labour and childcare.

The majority of lone fathers taking part in the study had experienced life prior to separation or divorce in families where there was a 'traditional' division of labour, although, as also discussed, this did not mean that they were not 'involved' in household tasks and childcare. Nevertheless, paid employment meant that fathers were absent from the family home for (sometimes extended) periods of time, time in which childcare was primarily the responsibility of ex-wives and partners.

In other words, men's involvement in childcare and maintaining the domestic environment prior to the end of the marriage or cohabitation was largely contingent upon their availability. Moreover, the availability of time to spend at home, and the way in which that time was utilised, were not necessarily congruent with the

responsibilities and demands experienced by partners, particularly where that partner was also in paid work.

Father's prior experience and beliefs therefore tended to support men's assumptions that 'a father's role' is primarily as provider for his family. Men in the study had been able to assume the right of 'breadwinning' fathers to have their paid work supported both in 'the family' and the wider social world. These assumptions almost certainly militated against fathers feeling responsible for the day to day care of their children, and the maintenance of the environment in which this takes place.

The fathers who took part in this study were thus unlike the majority of British fathers, in that both caring and providing for their children was their primary responsibility, all of the time. These fathers were, as discussed in previous chapters, negotiating fatherhood in the context of practical constraints, competing discourses around parenting and paid work, and the perceived importance of mothers and fathers in their children's lives.

For men whose 'core identity' depended upon being in paid work, taking time off to accommodate childcare responsibilities or a reduction in pay, or hours worked, may not appear to be a realistic option. Nevertheless, some fathers were able to negotiate this, and among the lone fathers in this sample, only two might be described as highly career-oriented both before and after becoming a lone parent. It appeared that a willingness to compromise was very important for successful negotiation of employment and lone fatherhood, albeit in a situation that was not of men's choosing.

Although all the fathers in the sample saw their role as needing to provide for their families as very important, this was balanced in their thinking by a need to meet their children's needs. Indeed, as discussed above, a lack of paid work did not mean that unemployed fathers could not feel as though they were providers; resources may have been limited, but this was balanced by other things that they could do for their children in terms of care, and their own availability to their children.

Fathers and their children

As discussed in Chapter 1, men's relationship with their children remains one of the most contested areas in the contemporary discourse around fatherhood. Fathers may no longer be seen as 'distant' authoritarian figures, but some psychological discourses continue to problematise men's perceived lack of intimacy with their children. (See, for example, Frosh, 1997) However, the accounts that fathers in this study gave prioritised close, confiding relationships with their children. Almost all the fathers said that their love for their children was the most important element not only of their fathering, but most important to them *per se*.

There is evidence that both fathers and mothers tend to conceptualise their responsibilities in their relationships with their children somewhat differently. Moreover, in two parent families, these differences may rarely be challenged. (Warin et.al., 1999) However, for several fathers in the study, their relationships with their children represented an area where beliefs and assumptions about the nature of mothers' and fathers' roles were contested.

Nevertheless, several men in the study saw themselves in the 'traditional' role as agents of their children's socialisation. Thus, for example, fathers might describe themselves as 'old fashioned', emphasising the importance of children's 'good' behaviour as evidence of 'good' parenting practices.

However, day to day care for children meant that they were equally likely to describe themselves as 'both mother and father'. While some men saw this as doing mothers' emotional work in addition to the practical domestic work that they had undertaken, for several fathers, there was a sense in which they experienced a transition from 'doing' this work to 'being', and caring for children became inherent in their fathering identities.

Men in the study were raising almost equal numbers of girls and boys. While it might be expected that this would present some difficulties to men raising children alone,

particularly in the context of men's perceived danger to children in some situations, (see Chapter 1) very few fathers expressed concerns around raising girls.

Most of the female children were pre-adolescent, but fathers of adolescent daughters appeared to have negotiated, or were negotiating, issues around children's gender with relative ease. Only one father in the sample thought that raising girls was a 'problem', and this father was unusual in the sample in that he was reluctant to have physical contact with his daughters.[3]

Relationships with sons were also described as warm, affectionate and 'close'. With very few exceptions, fathers described physical as well as emotional closeness, often contrasting these with their relationships with their own fathers. Several lone fathers appeared to be actively constructing relationships with their own children that were consciously 'different' from the relationships that they had experienced as children with their own fathers. Moreover, men who had experienced difficult or distant relationships with their own fathers were often engaged in reconstructing these relationships, or on occasion, constructing them for the first time.

Many fathers talked about their enjoyment of expressing their love for their children, and their feelings that, as primary care givers, this was much easier to do because they were fulfilling the role of both parents. Thus, interactions with their children that they might previously have regarded as essentially feminine, (or 'soft', as fathers often expressed this) became seen as legitimate elements of their day to day parenting.

So men's relationships with their children were also the site of change in men's perceptions of what it meant to do fathering. Previous lone father research has suggested that men who were 'involved' in childcare in two parent families find the transition to lone fatherhood easier than men who were not. (Greif, 1985; DeMaris and Greif, 1997) However, as discussed in previous sections, father's experience of fathering in two parent families did not necessarily appear to equip men for a primary caring role.

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[3] This father was also extremely depressed, and appeared to feel very negative about many aspects of his life.

The experience of the lone fathers in this study suggest that notions of previous paternal involvement in childcare may have some limitations as a basis for satisfaction with, and preparedness for, lone fatherhood. Although there were variations in men's experiences, many of the fathers who described themselves as 'highly involved' prior to divorce or separation had nevertheless parented with a partner who appears to have taken most responsibility for meeting children's practical and emotional needs. Moreover, some fathers had been non-resident fathers for up to two years prior to their lone parenthood.

Where fathers had experienced a period of non-resident fatherhood, they were unlikely to intervene in the children's care, and as discussed in Chapter 6, most of these fathers became primary carers because events in the mother's life had reached crisis point. Indeed, one father's children had been taken into care without his knowledge. There are, then, clearly other factors at work in men's satisfaction with primary care-giving.

I want to suggest that, although prior 'involvement' in children's care and the domestic arena may be helpful to fathers who are negotiating the practical and emotional challenges of lone fatherhood for the first time, it is not absolutely necessary in order for men to succeed as primary care-givers.

As many of the fathers in this sample acknowledged, practical skills may be learned, and fathers in this sample were able to negotiate the unfamiliar terrain of primary responsibility for children once they were positioned as primary carers. Thus, although the perception that childcare is 'easier for women' may initially impact on fathers' willingness to care for their children, once men became their children's primary carer, they were able to assimilate a 'caring' identity.

Towards a 'new' fatherhood? The impact of caring on men's identities

We cannot assume that men's experience of parenthood is the same as that experienced by women. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapters, the lone fathers in this study

described their experience as fathers in two parent families as not only qualitatively different from their experience as lone fathers, but also as different from the way in which they conceptualised mothers' experiences. Nevertheless, both lone father studies and studies of men in two parent families have suggested that in some circumstances, men can and do 'mother'. (Greif, 1985; Barker, 1994; DeMaris and Greif, 1997)

Moreover, although the demands of paid employment and the responsibility to 'provide' for a family provides a pragmatic reason for limitations to men's involvement in childcare in two parent families, this is only a partial explanation for men's lack of engagement in care giving.

Smart and Neale (1999) suggest that some fathers apparently 'switch' identity at divorce, and further that these fathers very quickly assume a strong commitment to a caring identity. The authors point to a strong relationship between men's labour market situation and the assumption of caring identities:

> Tentatively we would suggest that men's willingness to assume an identity as a caring parent is much more likely to be related to their position in the labour market than it is for women. Women may work full or part time, be students or be outside the paid labour market, but if they are mothers, then motherhood in the form of caring parenthood is a core identity. Fathers seem to assume this identity only if they leave the labour market (or are ejected from it) or if they have some degree of flexibility or control over their hours at work. (Smart and Neale, 1999:54)

The rapid transformation into 'new' fathers that the authors identify was indeed recognisable in the experiences of some fathers in my own sample. However, the accounts of lone fathers in this sample also suggest that this relationship between breadwinning and caring identities is complicated.

As discussed in Chapter 5, many of the fathers in this sample were in full time employment which often appeared to be quite inflexible in terms of the hours that men worked, for example. These fathers appear, as discussed in previous chapters, to have

initially adopted a caring identity as an additional identity, rather than one that replaced, or took priority over, a breadwinning identity. Paid work, or 'breadwinning' was not necessarily seen as an onerous task for fathers; indeed, several men talked about their enjoyment of their work, and the satisfaction that they derived from it.

Thus, although it was possible to discern the assumption of a strong caring identity among working fathers in the sample, there was also evidence of a process of change. Of the small number (only three in this sample) of fathers who were unemployed at the point of separation or divorce, (and therefore theoretically available for childcare) only one adopted a caring role. The remaining two unemployed fathers had very limited ongoing contact with their children. For these fathers, gaining physical responsibility for their children appears to have acted as a catalyst for change.

Moreover, for fathers who had experienced a period of time as non-resident parents, continuing contact with children sometimes had an element of voluntarism on the part of fathers, for example in the timing and duration of contact. Fathers who experienced ongoing difficulties in their relationship with their ex-partner could also find that there were difficulties with contact with their children.

Contact was also related to practical factors, for example, accommodation in which lack of space made visits from children difficult. In cases where the father had returned to live with their own parents, continuing contact with their children was often encouraged and facilitated by grandparents.

As discussed in previous chapters, grandparents (both grandmothers and grandfathers) were very important, and fathers in the study frequently mentioned their role in maintaining relationships with the grandchildren. Indeed, as discussed above, lone fathers were often engaged in constructing 'new' relationships with their own fathers, who were sometimes highly involved in supporting their sons in lone father families.

Although men cared 'about' their children prior to separation or divorce, this differed from the identity that fathers adopted as a result of becoming primary carers. The fathers who had initially lived apart from their children had accepted that this was a

social norm for separated and divorced fathers. Fathers may also have had limited contact with their children, although evidence suggests that non-resident fathers' continued contact with their children is contingent on a number of factors. (Bradshaw et. al., 1999)

A distinction needs to be made here between 'caring for' and caring about'. Smart (1991) argues that while 'caring about' can indicate a degree of passivity, 'caring for' is the active work of caring. It is 'caring for' that effects change: through doing care, fathers can be 'metaphorically born again'. (Smart, 1991:492) Drawing on Tronto's (1994) arguments, Smart further argues that 'caring for' is a moral practice, which gives rise to a moral ordering in households which men and women recognise most of the time.

If this 'moral order' remains undisturbed, post divorce and separation childcare should not be problematic, because where parents have been 'caring for', the commitment continues beyond the end of the parental relationship. However, the 'rights' discourse (which is almost exclusively applied by and to fathers) makes moral claims appear to resemble 'the unacceptable and 'old-fashioned' appeal to biological motherhood which is now renounced in favour of a policy of equality'. (Smart, 1991:494) This is part of what Smart refers to as the 'discursive reconstruction of fatherhood'.

As the subjects of this 'discursive reconstruction', some fathers drew on the moral claim that inheres in 'caring for' to claim a position of both moral and structural superiority to lone mothers, as workers and carers. Not all fathers expressed this, and men who had reasonably good relationships with ex-partners acknowledged that mothers had a moral claim to their children because of the caring work that they had done, (even though fathers might now perceive their care as deficient). Nevertheless, whether or not fathers claimed a structural and moral superiority, almost all believed that non-resident mothers had abdicated their responsibility to their children.

The positioning of mothers 'gatekeepers' of their children's physical and emotional wellbeing, irrespective of father involvement, (Warin et.al. 1999) underpinned fathers' claims that maternal absence was morally reprehensible. Indeed, this claim was

205

sometimes extended to all mothers who do not care for their children, (regardless of the circumstances), who were almost always characterised as 'bad' or 'unnatural' mothers.

The unavailability of mothers' accounts means that it is not possible to evaluate non-resident mother's situations at the point where fathers became primary carers. However, men's accounts of the process of becoming lone fathers suggest that, where formal agencies were involved, the evaluation of women as 'unfit mothers' was important in men's subsequent transitions to primary carer, and sometimes consolidated men's beliefs.

Moreover, men could feel both empowered and vindicated by maternal absence, because as providers and care givers, they were demonstrably succeeding in ways that non-resident mothers were seen to have 'failed'.

The majority of non-resident mothers were reported by fathers to be either partially or wholly dependent on state benefits. However, fathers' own unemployment, and subsequent benefit dependence, (or, indeed, in-work benefits) was typically constructed by fathers as the result of external forces, and thus outside their own control. The result, as discussed in Chapter 5, was that this also supported the notion of moral superiority of fathers relative to mothers not in paid work.

Notions of 'good' and 'bad' mothering thus remained as powerful reference points for lone fathers, underpinning men's sense of being 'different', not only from their peers in two parent families, but also from lone mother headed households. The lack of a cultural template for solo fathering meant that some lone fathers in this sample developed a strong sense of self as being 'outside' the parameters of conventional male parenting.

However, although fathers described their lives as encompassing both fathers' and mothers' roles, [4]and how practical tasks included 'mothers' work', men taking part in the study did not necessarily see themselves as quasi- mothers. Rather, their accounts

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[4] Lone mothers might also make this claim

described a 'new' identity as male primary caregiver, suggesting that adherence to an essentially masculine identity may be difficult to relinquish.

Conclusion

Most fathers in this group had not regarded equality in both paid and unpaid work as a goal for their own (two parent) families. Indeed, many fathers expressed the belief that contemporary women have already gained equality with men. Moreover, fathers appeared equally likely to believe that men are systematically discriminated against in disputes around residence and contact after relationship breakdown, and in childcare settings.

Although constructions of motherhood in contemporary society bind women to privileging the perceived needs of their children over and above their own needs and desires, (Ruddick, 1989; 1994) we cannot assume that mothers do, in fact, 'instinctively know' how to mother. Further, women's confidence in their ability to mother may be easily undermined in some contexts, indeed, some fathers' accounts suggested that several non-resident mothers believed themselves to be 'bad' mothers.

The assumption that women are 'natural' carers represents a fundamental challenge to solo fathering and, I would suggest, for men doing fathering in two parent families. Analysis of the accounts of men raising children alone suggests that mothers' assumed propensity to care, and men's lack of engagement in not only care giving but also the maintenance of the domestic environment in which this takes place, may represent significant barriers to engaging more men in care work in families.

The issue of paid work and men's adherence to a 'breadwinning' identity has become fairly entrenched in the perception of policy makers as one of the primary barriers to 'working parents' (but mainly men's) full participation in 'family life'. However, women's increased labour force participation has not been matched by similar increases in men's participation in domestic labour and childcare. Although there have been some increases in men's unpaid domestic labour, a disproportionate amount is still carried out by women. (Hantrais and Letablier, 1996)

Evidence from the BHPS shows that as a percentage of domestic labour, men's contribution increases when women move into full-time work. However, this apparent 'gain' needs to be measured against evidence that women spend less time engaged in domestic labour when they enter full time paid work, and this accounts for most of the proportionate increase in husband's domestic work. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000; Gershuny et. al., 1997)

Nevertheless, there is some evidence of what some commentators have referred to as a 'ratchet effect'. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000) This suggests that there are small changes in the division of domestic labour as women and men move in and out of paid work. Thus, for example, a woman moving into full time employment may initially reduce her proportion of domestic labour, reduce this further while in employment, and if she leaves employment, returns to a 'slightly less egalitarian division of domestic work'. Similar effects have been noted in terms of husband's paid employment. (Laurie and Gershuny, 2000:55) Nevertheless, this process is slow, as the authors note, and has only led to a small reduction in gender inequality.

There is, then, some evidence for change, albeit small, and these changes seem to have consequences for gender inequality in the long term. One contemporary consequence of social change, including women's increased labour force participation, is that the expectations of girls and women have been raised (both inside and outside the home). (Sharpe, 1995)

Analysis of lone fathers' accounts gave some indication of women's changing expectations: fathers sometimes suggested, for example, that their ex-partners may have been generally dissatisfied with their situations, and in some respects, their departure from the family was linked with wanting something 'different'.

What was striking in some of these accounts, however, was men's apparent bewilderment about this. If, for example, a woman had left because she had met another man, this could be construed as understandable (if unforgivable) to a certain extent. Women who had not re-partnered, though, presented something of a dilemma in

terms of explaining subsequent events, and fathers sometimes fell back onto the discourse of 'bad mothers' as an explanatory device.

Some fathers, then, appeared to be experiencing what has been identified as a 'cultural lag'. This hypothesis suggests that, although women's expectations have changed men and boy's expectations appear to have remained relatively intact. O'Donnell and Sharpe suggest that 'male cultural lag' occurs because changes in 'traditional' attitudes and behaviours may appear to benefit girls and women more than boys and men, who may thus be somewhat resistant to change. (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000:91)

Again, there was some evidence of resistance to change in lone fathers' accounts, although as fathers' accounts indicate, once men became primary carers, this had a profound impact on men's core identities, and this meant that many fathers re-evaluated the importance of paid work and their relationships with their children. Moreover, while no father said that he 'enjoyed housework', several expressed some satisfaction in doing work that needed to be done to maintain the domestic environment.

One major loss for fathers might be seen as the loss of free time. Time to pursue interests or relax became very limited for men in full time paid work. Several had responded to this by adjusting the hours that they worked, not only to care for their children, but because working very long hours was balanced against other requirements for self and family. One father (mentioned in Chapter 5) characterised this experience as 'running supersonic', and this appears to be a fairly accurate summary of the experiences of many fathers who were primary carers, and in full time paid work.

This would also, of course, be a familiar feeling for many working mothers, (Garey, 1999) and if we understand free time as a form of capital, it is capital that is generally more available to men than women. (Whitehead, 2002:141) Moreover, the evidence suggests that, certainly in the UK context, there are clear conflicts between the needs of children and women's own needs as autonomous beings. (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Skold, 1988)

Social and cultural beliefs around notions of the 'good' mother assume that mothers have 'knowledge and skills which it is taken for granted that a woman will learn as she grows up and then continue to learn on the job.' (Campion, 1995:222) Campion suggests that women thus have access to information and advice that is congruent with social expectations, whereas men do not. (This argument is one that is often used by fathers and groups that work with fathers to support that notion that fathers are in some ways a 'special case.')

The implication for fathers in this study is that although fathers may feel[5] excluded from caring tasks in two parent families, this seems likely to be related to the struggles of partners to overcome practical and emotional issues around their own identities and skills, and, moreover, women's lived experiences. These issues may, then, be directly related with social and cultural constructions of 'good' mothering, or as Lupton and Barclay argue, 'women's own desires and anxieties about their role as mothers, the meanings of which are inflected through dominant discourses on the 'good' mother'. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997:147)

I want to argue that constructions of 'good' mothering leave little space for women to either acknowledge or express mothering experiences which are less than positive, and that the actions of some non-resident mothers may have reflected this. Further, men's perceptions of maternal inadequacies are not only supported by wider social mores around maternal roles and responsibilities, but could sometimes be used to support men's own caring identity, providing an element of 'proof' that they were the more caring and responsible parent.

I do not, as I have said, wish to suggest that these fathers were not caring and competent parents, rather to highlight one of the ways in which men were able to utilise notions of a 'failure' of mothering to support a caring identity.

Moreover, it might be suggested that maternal mediation flows from not only women's primary care- giving across many contexts, but also from men's perceptions around what constitutes 'good' mothering.

As discussed in previous sections, some writers have suggested that in some circumstances, men can, and do, 'mother'. (DeMaris and Greif, 1997; Barker, 1994; Greif, 1985) Although fathers did not necessarily conceptualise their caring as this, I want to suggest that this is what many of the men in this study sample were in fact doing. By this, I do not mean that responsibility for domestic chores constitutes 'mothering', but that if 'mothering' is understood as a constitutive activity, some fathers were responding to their children's needs as mothers would.

I return here to Ruddick's account of mothering. She argues that mothering is 'maternal work', which, although it has similarities with other forms of care, is not the same. Maternal work requires the recognition that biological vulnerability is socially significant, and demands care. (Ruddick, 1989:18)

Ruddick's account has been criticised because of its apparent tendency to universalise accounts of women's experience. (Arendell, 2000) However, Ruddick does not claim to be able to speak for all mothers, acknowledging that women's experiences of motherhood are socially, culturally and historically specific; moreover, other maternal stories are told in other contexts, in which mothers speak 'for themselves'. (Ruddick, 1989:54)

Fatherhood, in Ruddick's account, is determined by cultural demands rather than children's needs. Thus, for example, 'shared parenting' can mean that men can override women's (already limited) authority. This argument chimes with Smart's account of the 'discursive reconstruction of fatherhood' in which (fathers') 'caring about' children 'seems increasingly to occupy a sentimental and sacred place in the dominant moral and legal order'. (Smart, 1991:494)

The shift in identity experienced by some fathers who were raising children alone was also, as discussed, a shift from 'caring about' to 'caring for', and in this sense can be seen to be 'maternal work'. In Ruddick's account, maternal work can, and indeed should, transcend gender. One reason for this is that the 'social and economic policies that tend to restrict mothering to women also… restrict mothers to limited lives'.

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[5] Although fathers also say that they 'feel' excluded outside the domestic environment

211

(Ruddick, 1989:45) By undertaking maternal work, men challenge 'the ideology of masculinity', which may not always be a comfortable experience for men (or women).

The question may then be, not can men mother, but rather do men want to do maternal work, and what are the implications? The evidence from the accounts of men in this study suggests that while lone parenthood was not of men's choosing, men could, and often did, derive great satisfaction from caring for their children, even though this meant that they also needed to undertake associated, sometimes unfamiliar, household tasks.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the political 'new fatherhood' might be conceptualised as having four elements. These elements include notions of fathers as providers of masculine identity; fathers as enforcers of patriarchal power; fathers as carriers of rights, and fathers as sharers of responsibilities. (Smart and Neale, 1999b:123) The fourth 'ideal type', that is, fatherhood as a genuinely involved and equitable project, sharing both care and 'masculine privileges' is one that is not underpinned by policy.

Nevertheless, fathers raising children alone, although in talking about fatherhood they sometimes used the language of both 'rights' and 'power', were in a position which might be seen as undermining both these discourses. When men became primary caregivers for their children, many previously taken-for-granted 'masculine privileges' (for example, relative freedom from responsibility for domestic labour and responsibility for childcare) had disappeared, certainly from their domestic environment. The exploration of men's experiences suggests that this was an important factor in their subsequent shift in identity. The evidence from this study, then, suggests that regardless of social change, including changes brought about by changes in women's labour force participation, fathers tend to be privileged in two parent families. Moreover, when mothers cease to 'do mothering', they may be characterised as having 'failed' in what is still seen as an essentially 'feminine' task.

Changing patterns of family formation and changes in women's labour force participation have been well documented. The proportion of women with a partner and a child aged less that 5 who also were in paid work more than doubled between 1973

and 1996. Conversely, there were substantial falls in women's employment rates amongst single women, particularly women heading lone parent families. The picture for women's employment is therefore complicated. Similarly, there has been a fall in the number of men in paid work, primarily affecting men at the beginning and end of their potential careers. (Berthoud, 2000)

Relationships between parents, children, and changing family structure seem likely to continue to change. The 'traditional' role of fathers as breadwinners is under pressure from many directions, and there is evidence for both political and ideological change in the way that fatherhood is constructed. Questions remain about the impact that this may have on men's engagement in caring for children and domestic labour.

Dunne (1999) argues that while 'gender' is social in origin, there is a need to recognise and celebrate women's traditional areas of work as being of value. Moreover, Dunne argues that not only should men become engaged in this context but that men should also 'facilitate and insist upon' change in the lives of other men. If men became more like women to the same degree that women have become more like men, this would challenge both patriarchy and capitalism. If, for example:

> 'fathers experienced parenting and domestic life in similar ways to women, they would find the time demands of employers as unrealistic as mothers usually do. This would have serious implications for the organisation of paid work and would undermine men's monopoly of economic advantage'. (Dunne, 1999:81)

As the previous chapters illustrate, men raising children alone do experience both parenting and domestic life that in many ways are similar to mothers. Fathers found that they needed to find new ways of negotiating both paid work and the domestic context, and some were able to combine care-giving and providing work, and gain satisfaction from both. For some fathers, care giving became proportionately more important, while the importance of paid work decreased.

The experience of men raising children alone suggests some of the possibilities for gender equality in parenting. While lone fathers' accounts often reflected social and

political ideologies around mothering and motherhood, some fathers also expressed an awareness of a climate of change around the gendered nature of parenting and paid work. Nevertheless, fathers were not raising children in a family situation of their own choosing, and they did not always feel comfortable with notions of 'change'.

As men's 'core identities' are often constructed as being centred on breadwinning, so women's have been constructed as centred on mothering. (Silva, 1996) Yet as Silva points out, this construction appears not to have benefited women in other spheres of life. However, women are active agents in shaping their mothering, and motherhood itself is subject to re-definition.

Nevertheless, women's 'reluctance' to accede their maternal role (see, for example, Warin et.al, 1999) has been cited as an important factor in men's apparent reluctance to be 'involved' in childcare and the domestic setting. Yet mothers who do not 'mother' are socially constructed as having 'failed', by offending the unwritten law of femininity, central to which is the notion that mothering is 'natural' for women.

Further, caring for children is work that has been done almost exclusively by women, and women who have raised children in environments that may sometimes seem inimical to childrearing, and sometimes dangerous to children, may not agree with the assertion that 'men can mother'. However, some fathers are 'caring for', as an 'actual activity', rather than a 'projected capacity' (Smart, 1991:494) and would seem to have some claim to be doing 'mothering', or 'maternal work' in the sense that Ruddick suggests, in which this work is based on the perception of the needs of the child.

I would suggest that rights-based claims (which have been, as discussed in Chapter 1, highly influential in the implementation of policy) reflect 'new' fatherhood in ways that are, as Smart and Neal claim, 'regressive and backward looking'. Smart and Neale, 1999b:123) Men can, and sometimes do, 'care for' their children. Looked at from this perspective, arguments about 'differentiated' parenting, or whether men have 'something extra' to offer their children that mothers cannot become less important.

Fatherhood is now well established on the political agenda, and the key question may now be how this will move forward. Almost all studies of lone fatherhood claim that in the future, the number of men raising children alone will increase.

These predictions are based on the assumption that social and economic change is linked with change in gendered relationships. While this may be true, as discussed above, in real terms the effect is not very great, and change is very slow to occur.

Lone fathers' experiences may have limited use in attempts to predict the future of fatherhood. Nevertheless, lone fathers are engaged in actively parenting in a context in which they are, [6]although not the same, is in some respects similar to mothers' positions.

Lone father families may reflect more accurately how men can become engaged in parenting than many studies of men in two-parent families which rely on reports from both parents, and often reflect differences in parents' perceptions of what the other parent actually does. (Berthoud and Gershuny, 2000; Dienhart, 1999)

Lessons from elsewhere in Europe suggest that encouraging men to take parental leave may have somewhat mixed results, and tend not to affect either the division of labour within the family or gendered inequalities in the labour market. (Bergman and Hobson, 2002)

Nevertheless, when the discourse around non-resident or 'absent' fathers is framed in structural terms, such as uncertainties around employment and unemployment, policies tend to emphasise incentives rather than penalties, and a greater emphasis on care rather than economic obligations. (Hobson and Morgan, 2002)

A political emphasis on 'care' may be a highly progressive step for men's engagement in care giving. Satisfaction in lone fathering seems to be based on care first and foremost; fathers' accounts suggest that for lone fatherhood to succeed, and for men to

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[6] See Chapter 3

enjoy their caring, compromise was necessary and that everything else needed to 'fit' around care as a primary requirement.

Nevertheless, it is important that policies address areas that are real issues in fathers' lives. Fathers, particularly the less well off, are unlikely to take unpaid parental leave. (Moss and Deven, 1999/2000) Even when parental leave is paid, men do not always take advantage of their full entitlement. (Department for Trade and Industry, 1996)

British fathers work the longest hours of any fathers in Europe, (Burghes et.al., 1997) and a reduction in working hours would give fathers more time to care. Other positive incentives for men's engagement in care, for example the Swedish model in which the 'daddy month' (parental leave specifically for fathers) appears to be the most progressive policy to date. (Bergman and Hobson, 2002)

The evidence also suggests that a change in culture is required, and in the Swedish case, becoming a father has become a crucial part of men's identities. (Bergman and Hobson, 2002:112) In the UK, organisations such as Fathers Direct, NEWPIN and Working With Men all aim to raise awareness of fathers' issues and promote father involvement. This is also a progressive step, but most likely to achieve success if they accompanied by positive policy incentives.

The challenge is not to engage women in paid work, because women are already in the labour market. The challenge is to engage men in caring, to the extent that women are engaged in paid work. The evidence from this study suggests that not only can men 'mother' their children, but that this activity has the potential to transform fatherhood.

Appendix 1

THE SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 30 men who were raising at least one child alone. Respondents were drawn from a wide area of the Midlands, Yorkshire, the NorthWest and SouthWest England. The time that fathers in the sample had spent as lone parents ranged between six months and eight years, and while the ages of the fathers ranged between 25 and 63, the majority of the sample was aged between 30 and 50 years. (Table 1)

Father's age at interview	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64
	n.2	n.8	n.6	n.5	n.5	n.2	n.1	n.1

Table 1

Children were defined for the purposes of the study as aged 16 or less; while most of the children were men's biological children, three fathers were raising step children (boys aged 9 and 3 respectively, and girls aged 10 and 13 years). All the stepchildren were the biological children of the non-resident mother. Eight fathers in the sample also had other children who did not live with them. Most of the children of the sample (n.58) were aged between 1 and 10 years when fathers first gained primary responsibility for them; almost all the children were aged 10 or younger when their fathers became their primary carers. (n.50) (Table 2) Nearly one third of the children (n.17) were aged 5 or younger when their father became their primary carer, and youngest children were divided almost equally into girls and boys (n. 8 and 9 respectively).

Age of children when father became lone parent	< 1 year	1-4 years	5-10 years	11-13 years	14-16 years	16 years +
Girls	—	n.9	n.16	n.3	n.1	n.1
Boys	n.1	n.8	n.16	n.2	n.1	—

Table 2

Marital status of fathers	Divorced	Married, separated	Cohabited, separated
	n. 15	n. 3	n.12

Table 3: Fathers by marital status

Marital status	Arrangements for children	
Divorced	Statement of Arrangements	n.8
	Court, Residence Order made	n. 7
Married, separated	Informal, unresolved	n. 3
Cohabiting, separated	Social Services intervention	n. 5
	Court, Residence Order made	n. 4
	Informal, Private arrangement	n. 3

Table 4 : Arrangements for children

218

At the time of interview, half of the sample worked for an employer. (Table 5)

Table 5: Employment status at interview

☑ Unemployed (n:10)
▣ Self-employed (n:3)
▨ Employee (n:15)
⊟ FTE (n:1)
■ Retired (n:1)
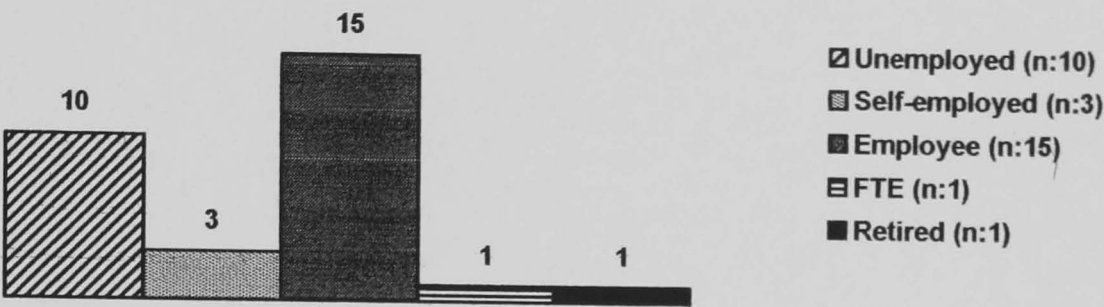
Table 6: Father's occupations
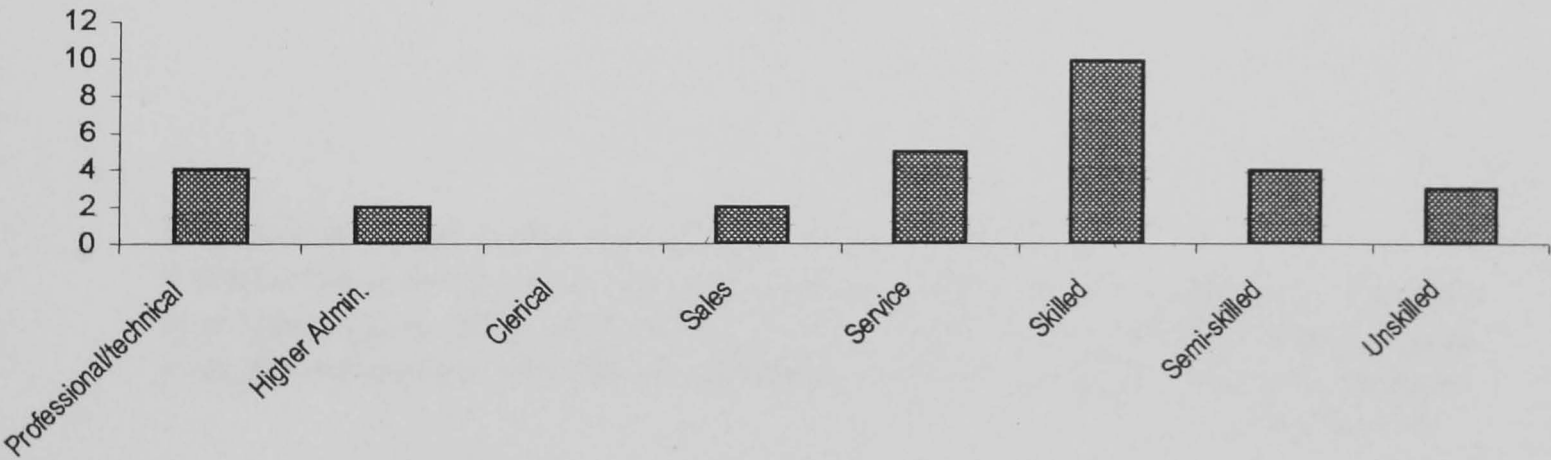
(Main job of those in employment; Last job of unemployed fathers)

Genogram

Key:

◯ Female
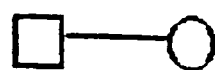
□——◯ Married couple

□ Male
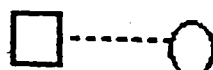
□------◯ Divorced/separated

Example:
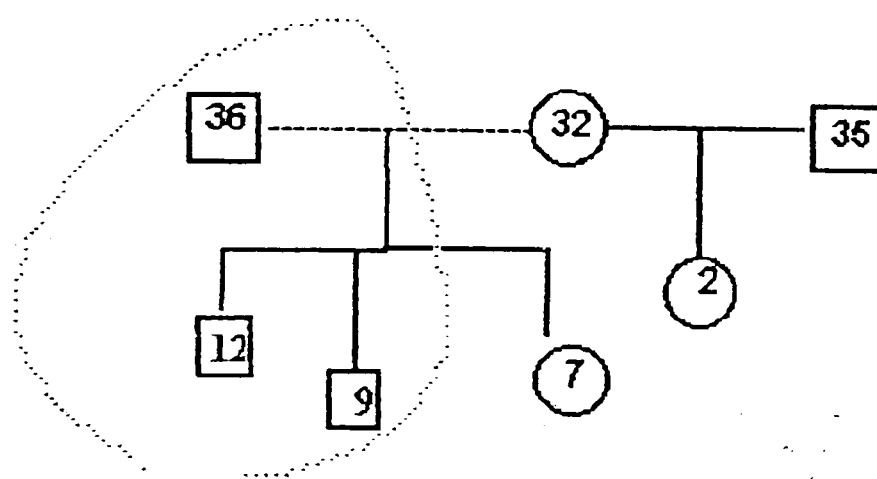
This example shows a male headed lone parent household.
A dotted line is drawn around members of the household, which in this case comprises a lone father and two boys, aged 12 and 9 years. The 7 year old daughter of the marriage lives with her mother, who has re - partnered, and has a 2 year old daughter in the new relationship.

Adapted from Finding families: An Ecological Approach to Family Assessment in Adoption, Hartman, A., 1979, London, Sage

Eco-map

Work

School

Extended
Family

Family or
Household

Friends

Recreation

Church

Health
care

Social
services
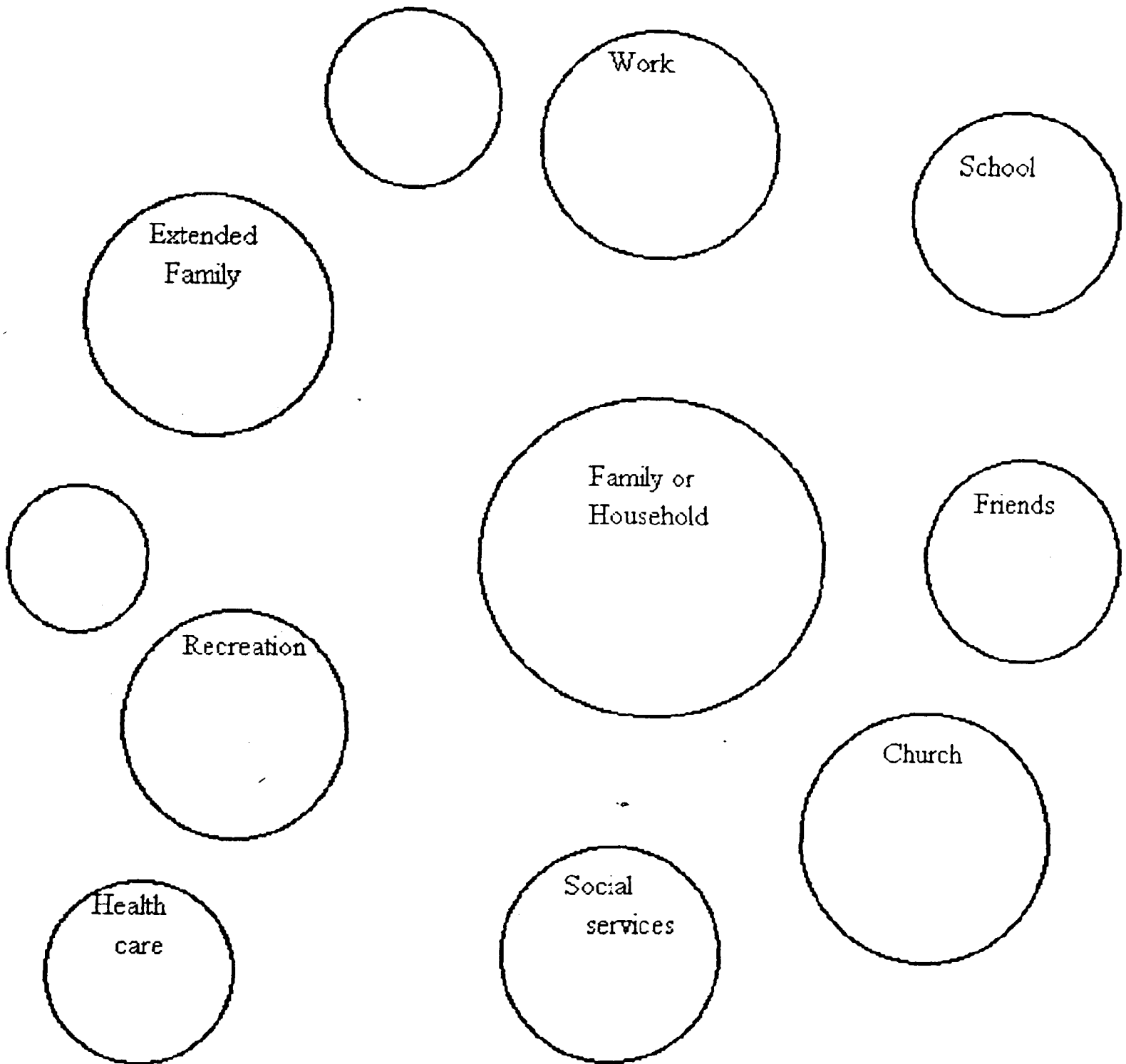
Fill in connections where they exist.

Indicate nature of connections with a descriptive word or by drawing different kinds of lines;

_____ for strong; _ _ _ _ _ _ for tenuous; _/_/_/_/_/_/_ for stressful.

Identify significant people and fill in empty circles as needed.

Adapted from Finding families: An Ecological Approach to Family Assessment in

Adoption, Hartman, A., 1979, London, Sage

Appendix 4

Interview Guide

1. Looking back to before your (divorce/separation), who mainly looked after the child/ren?

2. Now that you are the child/ren's main carer, what difference has it made to what you do with them?

3. How do you organise practical work around the home?

4. How do you organise the practical side of caring for the child? (Food/clothing/bedtimes/child's activities/caring for child when ill)

5. How would you describe your relationship with your children?

6. Thinking about your relationship with your children, what is most important to you as their father?

7. How do you express your feelings for the child/ren? (love/affection/worry/concern)

8. How do you feel about being a father?

9. Who made the decision that you would have the child/ren living with you? How did you feel about the decision?

10. How was it decided that the children would live with you? (What happened?)

11. Why was it decided that the child/ren would live with you?

12. Generally, how do you feel about being the child/ren's main carer?

13. Since you became a lone parent, have you had any help with caring for your children?

14. Do you ever ask for help or advice in caring for your children?

15. Who would you ask for practical help if you needed it?

16. Who would you ask for advice if you needed it?

17. Have you ever felt that you needed practical help or advice, but were unable to get it?

18. When you became the main carer for your child/ren, did you make any changes in other areas of your life? (e.g. change of job, house move, social life)

19. Were these changes made from choice, or did you have to make them?

20. What factors influenced your decisions?

21. Has being a lone parent had an impact on your paid work?

22. Have you ever taken time off work to care for your child/ren?

23. Are the family in contact with the children's mother?

24. How much contact do you have with the child/rens mother?

25. How much contact do the child/ren have with their mother?

26. If contact, where does this take place?

27. How do you feel about this?

28. Does the children's mother support her children financially?

Lone Fatherhood Project

I am writing to ask if you would consider taking part in a research project that I am carrying out which looks at men's experiences of raising children alone.

I am interested in how lone fathers see themselves as the main carers for their children, and in the way that fathers care for their children. I also want to look at how much support lone fathers get with bringing up their children, whether from relatives and friends, or professionals that they come into contact with (for example, their child's school, health visitor, or social services). I am also interested in how people make decisions about who will be the children's main carer when the parents separate, and how it is decided that the father should be the one to look after the children.

What lone fathers themselves say about their situation will form the central part of the research. For fathers who take part in the research, this will involve being interviewed twice. Interviews usually last about 1 ½ hours. The interviews will be tape recorded, (provided that the person being interviewed agrees). Participants will also be asked to complete a simple questionnaire.

Because of the sensitive nature of the research, I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary

- You will be free to refuse to answer any question

- You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time

The interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Tape recordings and written records of the interviews will be kept in a locked drawer, to which only I will have access, and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. While interviews will form part of the

research for my PhD Thesis, which is a public document, and I may quote exerpts from your interviews in my final report, under *no* circumstances will your name or *any identifying characteristics* be included in the report.

I hope that I have explained my research clearly, and that you will consider taking part in the study. If you have any further questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Liz Fox

School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Nottingham
NG7 2RD
e-mail lqx8ef@gwmail.nottingham.ac.uk
Telephone: 0115 9178916 (Confidential line) or 0115 9515097 (Research office, University of Nottingham)

<u>**Appendix 6**</u>

<u>Lone Fatherhood Project</u>

Statement of Confidentiality and Consent

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project.

I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary

- You are free to refuse to answer any question

- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time

The interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Tape recordings and written records of

the interviews will be kept in a locked drawer, to which only I will have access.

I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity. Your interviews will form part of my

PhD research, which is a public document. I may quote exerpts from your interviews in

my final report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying

characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that I have discussed the contents with you

-------------------------------------(signed)

-------------------------------------(printed)

Liz Fox   ----------------------------(researcher)
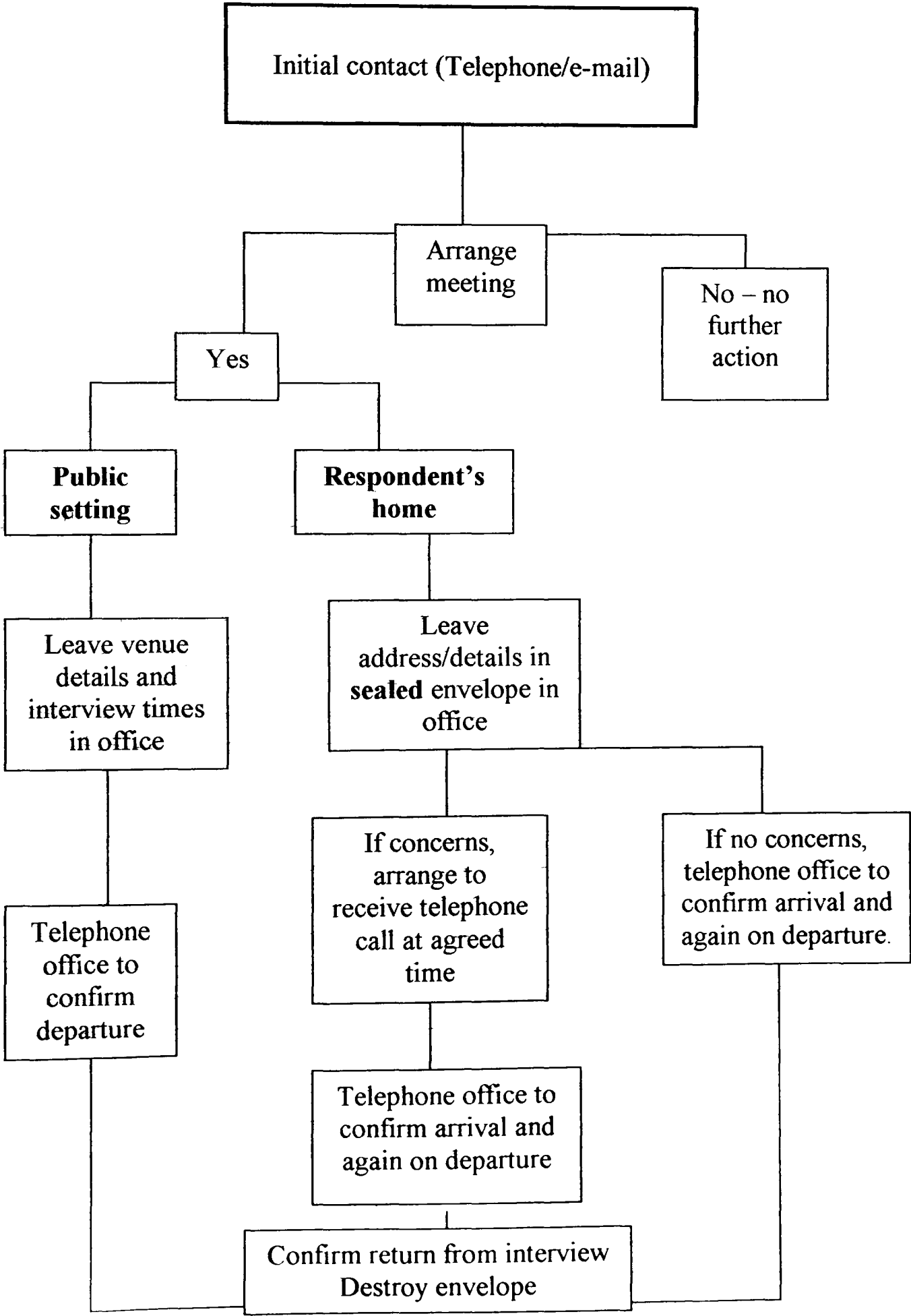
School of Sociology and Social Policy

University of Nottingham

NG7 2RD

(Adapted from Robson, *Real World Research*, 1993)

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                    │  Initial contact (Telephone/e-mail) │
                    │                             │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                  │
                        ┌─────────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                        │     Arrange     │        │  No – no     │
                        │     meeting     │        │  further     │
                        └─────────────────┘        │  action      │
                                                   └──────────────┘
                    ┌─────────┐
                    │   Yes   │
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           ┌────────────────┐        ┌────────────────┐
           │   **Public**   │        │ **Respondent's**│
           │   **setting**  │        │    **home**     │
           └────────────────┘        └────────────────┘

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         │ Leave venue    │      │      Leave           │
         │ details and    │      │ address/details in   │
         │ interview times│      │ **sealed** envelope in│
         │ in office      │      │      office          │
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                         │ If concerns,     │    │ If no concerns,  │
                         │ arrange to       │    │ telephone office to│
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                         │ call at agreed   │    │ again on departure.│
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         │ Telephone      │   ┌──────────────────┐
         │ office to      │   │ Telephone office to│
         │ confirm        │   │ confirm arrival and│
         │ departure      │   │ again on departure │
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              ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
              │ Confirm return from interview   │
              │      Destroy envelope           │
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