

The University of Hull

Married to the State - Mothering on Welfare
Survival Strategies of Single Mothers in a UK Public Housing Estate

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

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September, 1994

This work is dedicated to the memory of Edna Chesters (1912 - 1989)

in return for that *“little something”*.

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Acknowledgements

So many people have helped me in different ways in the course of this study that it is impossible to acknowledge them all properly. I would like to thank my colleagues at both Hull and Humberside Universities for offering stimulation, critical appraisal and much needed moral support and encouragement. I would especially like to express my appreciation to the following; Subrata Mitra whose confidence in me shored me up on occasions when my spirits failed me; Warwick Blenkinsop, who was repeatedly coerced into service as proof-reader and, more importantly, in the long-suffering role of critical 'sounding board' as ideas were formulated, developed or rejected; Dave Crimmens who offered help and advice in the latter stages. My sincere thanks to Sandra Wallman, my supervisor, who gave me encouragement, constructive criticism, advice and much more.

I doubt this work would ever have been finished without the help of my sister, Judith Preston, who took over my parental responsibilities at crucial times, and if my sons, Chris and Lucas, had not been so co-operative throughout and so magnanimous during the last few months.

This project would not have been possible without the assistance of the women of Green Fields. To them, many of whom are now my friends, I offer my appreciation for allowing me to delve into the most intimate and sensitive areas of their lives; my admiration for their strength, courage and fortitude in the face of so many hardships and my sincere apologies for having benefited from their trust and friendship without being able to offer anything in return.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, this thesis is entirely my own work and I accept full responsibility for its contents.

ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an ethnographic account of the lives of single mothers subsisting on Department of Social Security (DSS) benefits in a large public housing estate where unemployment rates are very high and traditional nuclear families are the exception rather than the rule. The aims and objectives of the thesis are to explain and interpret the survival strategies of working-class women whose lives are characterised by physical and emotional hardships, multiple deprivation and violence. Two issues in particular are addressed. The first is the construction of gender role norms and to significance in the way women interpret their own actions and those of others and the second is the importance of resources derived from informal female social networks for the survival of individual women.

The thesis relies largely on data gathered during two and a half years of participant observation within the estate, combining interviews with a total of 96 single mothers and cases studies in the form of life histories of eight women. These methods are described in chapter 1.

Chapter 2 focuses on the impact of economic change, patterns of male and female employment and their impact on family structures, gender roles and gender identity. It begins with a discussion of women and social change, firstly from an historical perspective and then in the light of recent changes in the western economy and women's changing position relative to men. It argues that the extent to which women are able to bring about social and economic change has been underestimated. To portray women universally as the victims of oppression by men, individually or collectively, denies the role of women as agents of social change in their own right. The influence of women in the 'domestic sphere' can have widespread and far-reaching

consequences for society as a whole. The chapter argues that for many women, single-motherhood is a strategy for survival, just as marriage itself can be a strategy for survival. Where marriage offers the best or only option for women and their children, they will tolerate inequality, exploitation and even abuse in return for financial support from men. Where such material support is not available or is not the best option, women reject marriage in favour of single parenthood. They have evaluated the potential advantages and disadvantages - a cost-benefit analysis often based on real experience - and opted to remain single.

Chapter 3 offers a brief discussion of some American case material. There are many similarities between the responses of individuals and families to economic disadvantage and marginalisation in the black ghettos of the USA and those in the Green Fields estate. The American studies demonstrate the fragility of the nuclear family in areas of widespread poverty.

Chapter 4 describes the setting of the study.

Chapter 5 presents case studies in the form of life-histories of eight single mothers in Green Fields. The cases illustrate the capacity of the majority of women to manipulate and manage their lives with varying degrees of success.

Chapter 6 examines the incidence and experience of male violence within sexual relationships in Green Fields. From the accounts of the women's experiences we discover why they tolerate violence in relationships and why, if at all, they eventually leave the relationships. It argues that within the cultural framework of the Green Fields setting violence in sexual relationships is, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted as normal by both men and women. Where men are denied legitimate means to express their masculinity through work and wages, the need to express their masculinity manifests itself in

alternative and less conventional forms of behaviour. Their economic 'powerlessness' in the broader society is compensated for by displays of conspicuous and exaggerated 'machismo', often in the form of aggression.

Chapter 7 discusses women and crime in the light of social change. It explores issues concerning the unequal propensity for men to engage in crime compared to women, and questions whether theories used to explain and predict male criminality actually stand up to scrutiny if they are applied to women. The chapter goes on to argue that the linkage between the single-motherhood and rising crime rates since 1955 is at best inconclusive and ignores other social changes which have occurred during the same period.

Chapter 8, investigates patterns of illicit activities within Green Fields, and focuses on the implications of such activities in terms of gender, resources and individual survival. The chapter shows that the women of the estate, if they break the law, do so in order to provide adequately for their children, and even then their illicit activities are on a very small scale. In Green Fields women's primary identity is tied up with the role of 'motherhood'. Women define, justify and legitimise their own actions and those of other women in terms of their perceived qualities as mothers, and utilise whatever opportunities, illicit or otherwise, that are available in order to provide for their children. The role of traditional working class motherhood, in which women have always had primary responsibility for child care, has been extended to include making financial provision for their children in the absence of support from fathers. It is from this that they derive their self-esteem and self-respect.

Chapter 9, in conclusion, explains the implications of the previous chapters, and in particular the social networks, in terms of individual survival and identity. Despite their impoverished circumstances, the majority of women are able to maintain traditional bonds of parenthood, female friendship networks and their social identity. The minority who are not able to do so

are disabled not by men, but by other women who exclude them from the female social networks from which important material and other support is derived.

The chapter also discusses how the men of Green Fields have become peripheral to domestic and family life, and that this has led to a crisis of identity for men. The traditional construction of working-class gender roles in which men provided for and dominated their partners and children has changed to one in which poor women, through the welfare system, are financially better placed than men and often better off without them. Nonetheless, men can and do bring resources (through crime) into the estate and these resources, directly and indirectly, benefit some women and children.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Preamble- Images of single mothers, politics and the media

The research for this thesis was started in 1990, more than two years before the political rhetoric surrounding the issue of single mothers became headline news. By 1993 lone mothers had become the 'folk-devils' of the nineties, and a new moral panic took the media by storm. Young women, the country was told, were deliberately "getting themselves pregnant" in order to jump the council housing queues. Women were having *even* more babies in order to move into *even* bigger and better houses and get *even* more state benefits. Secretary of State for Wales, John Redwood, in a speech made on July 2nd, 1993, described single mothers as "one of the biggest social problems of our day".

In November 1993 a BBC Panorama programme, *Babies on Benefit*, portrayed single-mothers in a Cardiff housing estate as calculating, avaricious and amoral. The programme focused on young never-married mothers and attacked them for "relying on taxpayers to provide" for them and their children. The mothers were derided for not preventing their pregnancies, and portrayed as irresponsible. Although the majority of one-parent families in the UK are headed by women who are divorced or separated, and then not always by choice, rather than by teenage mothers seeking advantages in the housing market, the Panorama image was pervasive.

The programme was much quoted in parliament, in newspapers and elsewhere despite its obvious bias and the many inaccuracies contained in it. A complaint to the Broadcasting Standards authority was lodged by Sue

Slipman on behalf of the National Council for One-Parent Families. The complaint was upheld but the Panorama producers have refused to apologise.

The progressive decline in the popularity of marriage and the rise in single-motherhood have led to fears among certain social groups that not only is the nuclear family under threat, but the very fabric of society itself. 'Traditional family values' became the lynchpin of the Tory government's '*Back to Basics*' campaign. Simultaneously, new underclass theories following the American model emerged and have been widely reported. The Sunday Times newspaper ran lengthy articles on two consecutive weeks in July 1993 expounding the theories of American sociologist, Charles Murray, who directly linked illegitimacy with lawlessness. "Only marriage and the principle of legitimacy will preserve a liberal society", claimed Murray; "The middle classes are rediscovering the traditional virtues of marriage, but the underclass is following the American pattern of family breakdown, welfare dependency, crime and drug abuse".

Single-mothers were blamed for juvenile delinquency, for the rise in drug addiction, for rising crime rates and other social ills and, according to Murray and others, the reason for their growth in numbers is the over-generosity of the Welfare State. Junior health minister, Tom Sackville, (in a speech in Liverpool, July, 7.7.94; quoted in the Sunday Times, 11.7.1994) stated that "the existence of very comprehensive benefits and a free housing system has further reinforced the idea that anyone can have a baby at any time, regardless of their means or circumstances". Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security, had already labelled single mothers as "offenders" when he said in his speech to the Tory Party conference in October 1992, "I've got a little list, of *benefit offenders* who I'll soon be rooting out ... Young ladies

who get pregnant to jump the housing list...". Single mothers were vilified and blamed for their disadvantaged situation.

The Hidden Agenda

Cynics argued that the hidden agenda underlying the government's criticism of single mothers was the growing cost to the Treasury of supporting families without a male breadwinner (reported in the Sunday Times, 11.7.94 to be in excess of £6 billion per year) at a time when payments of unemployment benefits reached an all time high and when increasing life-expectancy has stretched the capacity of government pension funds to meet the needs of an aging population.

Although criticised by the Labour opposition for hypocrisy (in the light of a series of sex scandals involving Tory politicians which followed soon afterwards), the attitude of the government was later tacitly endorsed by the new Labour leader, Tony Blair, when he declared in 1994 that his party was sympathetic to the needs of single-mothers, but that "*normal, stable families*" were the best environment for children to grow up in.

Criticism levelled at single mothers was disproportionate in that little or no attention was paid to the absent fathers. This gave weight to the belief that the government's '*Back to Basics*' campaign was a barely concealed attack upon women in general, and independent women in particular.

For every lone mother there is at least one absent father and yet, until the implementation of the 1993 Child Support Act, these men were ignored. The Child Support Agency (CSA) was set up in an attempt to reduce expenditure in Income Support by extracting financial support from absent fathers where the mother is wholly or partially dependent upon DSS benefits. However,

despite the declared intentions of the Act, there was to be no material advantage to single mothers or their children. The real beneficiary of the revenue derived from the Child Support Act is the Treasury.

Confidential information leaked to the media showed that the CSA was deliberately concentrating their attention on men in stable employment, many of whom already paid maintenance to their children through court orders, because they were seen as a lucrative and easy target. The so-called 'feckless' fathers who made no contribution were being ignored.

The collective protests of middle-class men who were forced to make increased payments to their former families were perceived to represent a serious political threat to the government at a time when its popularity was at an all-time low. Questions were raised in Parliament and MPs on both sides of the House reported that they had received more aggrieved correspondence from constituents on this single issue than about any previous legislation. The pressure from a minority of men who were adversely affected by the Act had its effect. After just a few months the men's demands met with a positive, albeit limited, response from government. The legislation is to be amended. The potential interests of the many thousands of single mothers, surviving with their children in conditions of great hardship on the very margins of extreme poverty, were superseded by the priorities of political expediency.

The Green Fields study

This study aims to give an ethnographic account of the lives and experiences of single mothers subsisting on DSS benefits in an outer-city housing estate. Ethnography is “an approach which avoids the pre-definition of what is to be considered relevant and aims at discovering the insider’s view of [her] social world” (Spradley, 1980, p24), and is, therefore “particularly suitable for feminist research” since it has “as its aim the uncovering of women’s own perspectives of their lives as resources for analysis” (Taylor, 1993, p9).

The research is based upon more than two years participant observation with women in the Green Fields estate in a north eastern city, interviews with a total of 96 women and case studies in the form of life-histories of eight women. Following the tradition of urban sociology, the study attempts to understand the lives and experiences of individual women by considering the meanings associated with their actions through the eyes of the women themselves.

Participant observation “involves either close or superficial rapport with a variety of individuals with the result that the process, interaction emergent material are affected by the age, gender and personal history of the fieldworker” (Okely and Callaway, 1992, preface). My interest in this research was in part a response to my own circumstances. When I started the study I was in my late thirties and the divorced mother of two small children. I had spent a period of one and half years subsisting on DSS

Supplementary Benefit (now Income Support) when my younger son was a baby. Because of my own experiences I felt able both to identify with and to empathise with the respondents in this study, firstly as a woman, and secondly, as a single mother and as a person who has experienced the practical problems of attempting to live at DSS Income Support level. Apart from the difficulties involved in living on a very low income, I have had first-hand experience of the patronising and obstructive manner in which claimants are treated by some (though not all) members of staff at the DSS. I was also sensitive to the stigma associated with single-motherhood in general.

Apart from the question of reflexivity, my background is relevant because it helped to overcome the problem of "the researcher's presentation of self to the interviewees" and of "establishing rapport between the ... interviewers and ... women giving an account of motherhood" (Roberts, 1981, p4). Roberts (p16) points out that "...reflexive sociology in which the sociologist takes her own experiences seriously and incorporates them into her work" risks the challenge of "lack of objectivity". However, she notes that "a step which is frequently omitted from descriptions of the research is that of providing a background to the framework within which a piece of research is conceived and developed" (p17). Without my own experience it is doubtful whether I could have created the necessary rapport with the women of Green Fields to undertake this research in the first place, and in the second place, whether it would have been possible to make sense of their world if I had not had at least some shared experiences.

I was familiar with the Green Fields area before I decided to undertake this research. Between 1987 and 1990, when I was a mature undergraduate student I was employed by the local newspaper as a door-to-door sales canvasser, and had at some time or another interviewed every householder on the Green Fields estate at least once. Most of the doorstep interviews were with women, and it was apparent to me even then that the preponderance of female 'heads-of-household' with children was greater than in other areas of the city in which I had canvassed.

I was intrigued by the contrast between the standard and quality of life which was self-evident in the case of some women subsisting on DSS benefits and so obviously lacking for others, and what reasons might lay behind these differences. Some women keep neat and comfortable homes and their children are clearly well-cared for. Others live in squalor; their houses stink and their children are dirty, unkempt and are often to be seen hanging around the house still in their night clothes during school hours. I expected female support networks would explain the vital differences.

The theory which I initially set out to test was based on my own life experience. During the short period when I lived on DSS benefits, my experience and material circumstances were greatly enhanced because I was able to exchange resources with other women in informal mutual support networks. I enjoyed (and still do) the support of a number of other mothers with whom I could exchange various resources; for example, baby-sitting,

outgrown children's clothing, the loan of money or domestic equipment (lawn-mower, sewing machine etc.) as well as the less tangible benefits of moral and emotional support, information and companionship. Without this informal support, with two children and a weekly income of £33.60p per week, survival would have been difficult if not impossible.

Most of the women in my own social networks at the time were relatively well-off compared to me. Some owned cars and could share transport. Some carried credit cards with which purchases could be made on my behalf without actual cost to them since the money would be repaid before the monthly statement arrived. This was a major advantage because it enabled me to buy supermarket items such as washing powder and toilet paper in larger and more economical pack sizes than my meagre weekly income would have allowed.

I collected other children from school with my own for friends who were working in return for gifts of all kinds - clothing, plants for the garden, toys and outings for the children, or perhaps the occasional night out for me. The material value of this informal support brought about a significant increase in our standard of living without the need to declare any actual *cash* income and lose a commensurate sum from my DSS benefits. I was not breaking the law because I was not earning *money*. All benefits were 'in kind'. For example, each week in my own kitchen I cooked and froze all meals for a family of four with working parents. I spent all of the cash they gave me to buy the ingredients, but the quantities I prepared were sufficient

to feed me and my children as well. Our food bills were minimal and we enjoyed a quality of diet way beyond anything I could otherwise have afforded. In these and other ways I was able to exchange my time and skills for a variety of non-cash benefits which greatly enhanced our standard of living. A further advantage was that I did not have to arrange child-minding for my own children because all of my activities were home-centred. I expected to find the same sorts of exchanges occurring within the Green Fields setting.

The problem I found in the Green Fields setting was that the single mothers there, with one notable exception, do not have social networks where there are surplus resources, and it goes without saying that where material resources do not exist they cannot be exchanged. Expensive items of domestic equipment, an electric sewing machine or power drill, for example, cannot be loaned to friends and neighbours because nobody can afford to buy them in the first place. There are few working parents who can pay for stand-in child care and even if there were, young children in Green Fields are more often than not left in the care of older siblings or older children of neighbours. Adults baby-sitters are the exception rather than the rule. Few women have sufficient money for their own needs, and certainly not enough to be able to make loans to others of any great substance. They do not have access to cars or credit cards. Even practical skills and/or knowledge are few and far between. Only a small minority of women have any substantial knowledge of cookery, knitting or dressmaking or other kinds of

domestic skills which can facilitate living on a small budget or which can be exchanged.

After a few weeks in the field I recognised that I had approached this research with no small degree of naivety. It was apparent that social networks were important because the women who freely associated with others enjoyed a visibly better standard of living than those who did not. The majority, the 'sociable' women, appeared to be happier, smarter and more energetic than the 'isolated' minority of women, who were obviously depressed and unhappy. This was understandable. Companionship and emotional support are important in generating feelings of well-being in most of us. But this in itself did not explain why there was a marked difference between the material conditions of the different women. Female social networks were clearly significant, and yet at that stage I could not determine how the women derived material benefits from them. Only after more than a year in the field, when I had gained the trust and confidence of the women, was I able to identify the sources of the material advantages enjoyed by some women but not others. In the early stages these were carefully concealed from me. I later found that the survival strategies of working-class women living in an impoverished community are very different from those of single mothers in the middle class community of which I had been a part.

Gaining Access

At the beginning of the study I briefly toyed with the idea of moving onto the estate myself, but this was not possible for family reasons. Taylor (1994,

p21) points out that “the issue of the effect one’s research has on one’s family is virtually ignored in the literature”. As a single mother I did not have a husband or partner with whom I could leave my own two sons, and to have taken them to live there with me was out of the question. My younger son, then aged 6, gregarious and confident would probably have been perfectly happy but for his 11 year old brother the experience would have been nightmarish and almost certainly dangerous. Without question he would have been mercilessly bullied travelling in uniform to and from his fee-paying school which is situated in a different part of the city. I would not interrupt the continuity of the education of either child by changing their schools for a relatively short period of time, and then solely for my own purposes. If I had decided to live in the estate, the fact that my children attended schools elsewhere would have immediately marked us as different from other single-parent families in the estate, and this would most probably have created an impediment to doing this research. In any case, there was never any possibility of carrying out the research covertly since sooner or later somebody was bound to recognise me from my job with the newspaper. In the end I travelled in and out of the estate on a daily basis, although I did sometimes take my younger son with me.

I wanted to mix freely with the respondents but I was aware that they would never accept me as ‘one of them’. Adapting my style of dress was easy enough. I acquired a small wardrobe of suitably cheap and garish frocks (“*glad rags*”) which served their purpose when I went out with the women in the evenings. Jeans and jumpers were fine during the day and for less formal

occasions. Language and accent were a more obvious barrier. I tried to avoid using 'big' words which I thought might intimidate them or which they would not understand. My accent, as it turned out, proved to be an asset. The words "fuck" and "fucking" are an integral part of everyday speech in Green Fields. Sentences are dotted with them much in the manner of punctuation. Occasionally using the word "fuck" as they did, rather than making me sound less 'posh' in their eyes had the opposite effect. Because of my accent it did not sound the same when I said it, and they found this extremely amusing. Sometimes they would make me repeat it several times for their entertainment, but nonetheless, it was a great ice-breaker, and I was the butt of many good-humoured jokes. Unfortunately, I found myself dropping the words 'fuck' and 'fucking' into everyday speech outside of the estate, sometimes with embarrassing consequences!

I started by devising a questionnaire (see appendix 1). It was never my intention to use the questionnaire other than as a means of making contact with women who at the beginning were complete strangers. Through my job with the local newspaper I was accustomed to walking around the estate with a clip-board, and I supposed that I was not an unfamiliar sight in the role of interviewer. I started in a local pub adjacent to the Post Office on a Monday lunchtime. I knew that Child- and Lone-parent benefits are paid out on Mondays and I correctly guessed that a few women would meet and treat themselves to a drink on their 'pay-day'. I waited in the bar until I was approached, as I knew I would be, by a group of six women, who were curious about me and what I was doing there. (This technique in the past

had earned me plenty of commission from the local paper). I told them that I was from the Anthropology department at the University.

I was careful not to use the word 'social' or 'sociology', since I was afraid they would connect me either with the DSS, always referred to in Green Fields as "*the Social*" or Social Services. I was aware (from my canvassing) of the widespread fear and loathing of social workers in the estate. I told them that I had been very lucky and had won a small grant to write a book. I did not say that I wanted to 'study' them, as I felt that this might make them self-conscious. Instead, I told them that I was a single-mother myself, that I had lived on DSS benefits, and that I wanted to tell the world just how hard it really is. Would they please help me? They were immediately enthusiastic, and offered lots of suggestions and introductions to other single mothers. In the first few weeks I interviewed around 50 women and began to make friends. Only one woman, approached through a friend, declined to be interviewed.

The questionnaire was deliberately innocuous. I had to overcome various degrees of suspicion that I was working for the police or the DSS, and I did not want to compromise my position by being too intrusive at this stage. As it turned out, the only really interesting information derived from the questionnaire itself was the high proportion of women who reported they had been the victims of domestic violence.

On occasions when women were open and friendly towards me, I arranged social meetings where possible. In the early stages, these meetings always took place away from their homes, more often than not in local pubs. I promised the women that they would be completely anonymous and that anything they told me would be treated in confidence. I never asked anybody's surname, and even now know some of the women only by their first names.

Gaining the trust of the women was a slow process in the beginning, but after about six weeks in the field I gained the sponsorship of a few 'key' women who were liked and trusted by the others. In the early stages, I suspect that my visits were a welcome diversion from the tedium of daily life, and on a more practical note, I normally took with me cigarettes and the wherewithal to buy a round or two of drinks. Only after I had gained the trust of the women I had befriended did I visit them at home, and then only if they invited me. After several months I was going out and about with 'the girls' at weekends, and was accepted as part of their social scene. Each Friday evening, with two other women, I was part of a pub Karioke act, the '*Android Sisters*'. We gave incredibly poor performances of 60s and 70s hits to the delight of the pub audience, most of whom were (fortunately!) drunk. I was invited to birthday parties and other special occasions, and was able to 'pop round' to visit a number of women on a casual basis. I sometimes took the children of my women friends on the estate on trips to the cinema, picnics and other outings with my own children. On a number of occasions I had children from the estate to stay with me at home to give the mothers a break.

On one occasion I was invited to join a small group of women and their children for a week's holiday in a rented chalet at Withernsea. I was unable to go for the week but, with my younger son, I joined them for the weekend. The weekend proved to be somewhat stressful. The fourteen year old son of one of the women broke into the house of a local resident, so the police were called out to us. The women themselves had run out of money by the time I arrived, and before I left I had to extend a loan for their food and transport home. Needless to say, it was never repaid, although I didn't really expect it to be.

There was only one major set-back during my field work. By pure chance I dropped in for a coffee at a small local hotel near the school of my older son. It happened that one of my key respondents was 'moonlighting' there as a cleaner and saw me from an upstairs window. Afraid that I was snooping on her, she tested my reason for being there when I met her later the same week, but nonetheless, she was still suspicious. For a while she gave me the 'cold shoulder' and, although eventually she accepted my explanation and we continued meeting, there was never the same warmth in our relationship after that. She pointed out to me that she could not afford to take any risks which might jeopardise her position.

After about eight months I became concerned that I was not meeting any of the women who were isolated from the rest. I anticipated having difficulty in making contact with these women, but in fact this turned out not to be the

case. I was able to identify women who were ostracised by the others from the comments of their neighbours - "*we don't have nothing to do with her, she's a dirty cow*" - "*don't go to her house, all her kids have got dicks (head-lice)*". In the end, I knocked on the doors of the women who were 'excluded' and asked if I could ask them a few questions. Without exception they were grateful for some female company and the opportunity of a break from their lonely existence and obviously flattered by the attention they received. Further visits were welcomed, especially as I normally took cigarettes, sweets for the children and a bottle of wine or a couple of cans of beer with me.

Risks

I recognised from the beginning that there were some risks associated with the research I had set out to do. The estate has a well founded reputation for crime and violence, and when I worked for the newspaper I had always made a point of leaving the estate before dark. I had been into all of the pubs before, sometimes to shelter from the rain or catch up on paperwork, but only during the day. The pubs in the area are not the most salubrious in the city. I witnessed many incidences of pub violence during the course of my fieldwork. On a typical Friday or Saturday night there is normally at least one violent incident in any of the bars, and these sometimes result in very serious injuries. There were several occasions when I was standing or sitting close by when alcohol-fuelled tensions erupted into fights in which glasses and bottles were smashed and used as weapons. The chaos surrounding these brawls inevitably meant that even as an innocent bystander I ran the

risk of injury because of the possibility of being involuntarily 'caught up in the action'. These incidents were sometimes extremely frightening.

Because I had been roughly accosted a couple of times by drunken men when I was waiting at the bus stop, after the first few occasions I always arranged a mini-cab to take me home at nights. I avoided socialising with men wherever possible, except where they were close friends or relatives of the mothers who were my friends, and only ever in the presence of the women themselves. Even then, it was necessary to be extremely cautious. Sexual relationships in the Green Fields setting can be very complex, and I was wary of appearing too friendly with any of the men in case I was intruding on 'someone else's patch'. My fears were well-founded, though not for the reasons I had anticipated. On one occasion, when I was out with a group of women, I accepted a drink from a male acquaintance of one of my female companions because to refuse would have been inappropriate at the time. The drink was 'spiked', almost certainly with Acid (LSD). Fortunately I was safely home before it took effect. After that, I carefully avoided drinking anything I had not carried from the bar for myself.

I was also present on a number of occasions when women were threatened by men with violence in their own homes. Few women have telephones to call for police assistance. Fortunately, on each such occasion the man left after discovering that his intended victim was not alone, but was accompanied by a ('posh' speaking) stranger. Probably the most frightening incident I experienced was an occasion when an irate neighbour smashed

every window in a house I was visiting. I crouched on the floor to protect myself and two of the three small children who were present from flying glass. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. As Taylor (1994, p18) points out, "doing participant observation is stressful".

Further risks were later incurred because I was mixing with women who were actively engaged in various illicit activities. Taylor (1994; p17) cites Polsky (1969; p138) who says "if one is to effectively study adult criminals in their natural settings he must make the moral decision that in some way he will break the law himself. He need not be a participant observer and commit the criminal act under study, yet he has to witness such acts or be taken into confidence about them and not blow the whistle". There was always the fear that, as an outsider, I would be blamed if individuals were apprehended by the police, especially at one stage when I was circulating in the estate with drug dealers going about their business. In the case of a police 'bust', unknown to me and occurring in my absence, I would have been at serious risk of physical violence if I was suspected of being an informer. In the case of a police 'bust' in my presence, I might well have been arrested as an accomplice.

I also spent several evenings with women working as prostitutes in the 'Red Light' area of Hull's city centre. I felt quite safe in the protection of the women, but was concerned that I could be arrested for soliciting when I was left alone while the women 'did the business'. It was during the short periods when I was waiting alone that I gained a real insight into the working

life of a prostitute. Their potential clients, or at least those who propositioned me in their absence, represent a true cross-section of (male) society. I found that just as there is no stereotypical female prostitute, there is also no stereotypical client.

Leaving the Field

Doing fieldwork in 'your own backyard' creates difficulties which are not encountered if the 'field' is geographically distant. Ethnographic studies conducted at a distance inevitably reach their conclusion when the ethnographer packs up her field notes and boards the 'plane home. For me, leaving the field was not so straightforward. After more than two years in Green Fields I had made many friends and had regular on-going contact with them. Only one of the women really knew understood the problems with what I was doing.

At the beginning of the study I had freely given women my telephone number, partly in an attempt to demonstrate my sincerity and partly in order to overcome their suspicions about my identity. By allowing women to phone me at home I also allowed them to check up on me which, in the circumstances, seemed perfectly reasonable. However, as my field work drew to a close I began to regret that I had done so. After I had stopped visiting the estate for two or three weeks, the women started to telephone me to find out what had happened to me, to find out if I was ill, to update me about their problems or, in some cases, just to talk. I was the only female 'friend' some of the women had, and they had come to depend on me for

company and outings. I found it very difficult to sever the relationships which I had worked so hard to establish at the beginning.

I did not want the women to feel resentful - that I had exploited them and then dumped when they were of no further use to me. I felt very guilty that I had deliberately built up trusting relationships with women for whom I had been able to do little or nothing. This guilt is discussed by Moore (1994, p9) who says that she too "questions the purpose of [her] work ... for the people [she] works with because I do not find it easy to know of what immediate use it could be to them". Taylor (1993, p25) also refers to the problems of leaving the field at the end of her study of a female drug-injecting community in Scotland. Like me, she had made a number of friends and she did not "want them to be left with a feeling of having been exploited". I was particularly sensitive about the possible effects of my disappearing from the lives of some of the children, especially those whose short lives I knew to have been characterised by adult abuse and betrayal and who are disturbed and insecure as a consequence.

As it happened, I took new a full-time job which gave me a reason for being unable to spend time in the estate, but even so, I still felt contrite, especially when children called on me at home or telephoned to ask if they could come and stay and I was almost always obliged to refuse. The children still telephone occasionally but the calls have become less frequent.

Another problem for me was that as long as I was in regular contact with the women, I was tempted to update the case-studies as the circumstances of the women changed, in which case this research could have gone on forever as individuals processed through their lives. Davis (in Oakley and Callaway, 1992, p210) refers to case-studies as “illustrative incident” which “are the photographs of ethnography”. Inasmuch as a photograph can only capture a moment in time, the case studies in the Green Fields research had to be limited to the past and present experience of women at the time of the field work.

Profile of the women - the Case Studies

This study does not set out to portray the women of Green Fields as passive, down-trodden ‘victims’, firstly, and most importantly, because this is not how they see themselves and secondly, to do so would be to depreciate the extent to which the majority of the mothers organise their extremely limited resources with both ingenuity and alacrity, as evidenced by the case studies in chapter 5. The case studies demonstrate that the majority of women are not pathetic and inadequate, nor are they amoral and greedy as portrayed by politicians and the media. On the contrary, they are individually and collectively able to manipulate and manage their lives with varying degrees of success.

The life history of each of the women whose case is included in this study is unique, and for this reason the case studies vary in length and style. They

were chosen because there is a particular aspect of each which is common to the experience of a significant number of women in Green Fields as a whole. Critics of the case study approach to social research point out, because the researcher uses case material selectively, firstly that there is the danger of distortion and secondly, that generalisation is not usually possible on the basis of a single case (Bell, 1987; Moser and Kalton, 1971). Clyde-Mitchell (1983), however, points out that nearly the whole of the respectable body of theory has resulted from the extensive use of case studies in sociological and anthropological research. It is from the large number of separate case studies that it has been possible to “draw inferences and to formulate propositions about the nature of social and cultural phenomena in general” (p189). He says that “there is absolutely no advantage in going to a great deal of trouble to find a ‘typical’ case” (p204). In any case participant observation is not intended to produce a representative sample (Taylor, 1994). The life histories of individual women contained in this study are not ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ of the women of Green Fields as a whole, but their circumstances and experiences are.

The names of all women described here have been changed. In chapter 8, where illicit activities are described in some detail, women whose cases are contained in chapter 5 have been given a different pseudonym where there is the possibility that their domestic or other circumstances might identify them.

A problem I anticipated at the beginning of the research was how to define ‘single-mothers’. I expected that during the course of the study some of the

women would enter new sexual relationships and would perhaps change their single-parent status. Would I continue to define a mother as 'single' if she started co-habiting with a man who did not provide material support, for example, or if she was married to but not living with the father of the children? Would I exclude women who took up paid work? The fact that this eventually proved not to be a problem could be of interest. The life histories of the women, and this is especially true of the older mothers, show that they have had a series of monogamous relationships, but none to my knowledge has entered into a new cohabiting relationship during the last three years. The sexual partners of the women, where they exist, live separately. All of the women live with their children in houses (ie. not flats) in Green Fields, and all are dependent on DSS benefits. None has taken up full-time work. It is impossible to know whether this indicates a general trend towards long-term singlehood, a change in individual lifestyle, perhaps as a result of the women themselves getting older or if it is no more than coincidence.

Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 2 contains a discussion of women and social change. Chapter 3 briefly introduces some American case material which is included because of the similarities between the social organisation in Green Fields to that in the black ghettos of the USA. In particular, the work of Carolyn Junior Bryant (1994) shows how Afro-American single mothers construct their social relations around exclusively female networks and their identities around their perceptions of motherhood. Chapter 4 describes the setting, and chapter 5 presents the case studies. Because of the high proportion of women in Green Fields who have been the victims of domestic violence, chapter 6

focuses on this issue. Chapter 7 introduces a discussion of social change, women and crime, and chapter 8 describes the significance of illicit activities in the lives of the women of Green Fields. The final chapter draws together and explores the implications of the Green Fields research. There is a partial review of the relevant literature contained within the chapters.

In an attempt to portray the sincerity and intensity of the women's emotions, wherever possible the words of the women themselves have been used to illustrate their attitudes and experiences.

Chapter 2. WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of marriage and household structures in England from an historical perspective in order to demonstrate that the current political rhetoric and moral panic about rising illegitimacy and family breakdown is not a new phenomenon. Economic change in the late sixteenth century and again during the nineteenth century were accompanied by rapid social change which led to fears of a breakdown in social order.

Marxist and Marxist Feminist theories make the assumption that the nuclear family emerged in western society as a response to industrialisation, urbanisation and the rise of capitalist relations of production, and that as countries in the developing world undergo economic change, similar changes in social relations will occur. This view has been challenged by both anthropologists and historians. Henrietta Moore, for example, (1988, p116) criticises the functionalism of this approach, and argues that the issues are not so clear cut. She accepts that capitalism has transformed social relations, but says, "The processes of transformation have been equally determined by the existing forms of production, reproduction and consumption; in other words, by the existing forms of kinship and gender relations". Historian Peter Laslett (1971), amongst others, argues that the nuclear family form pre-existed both industrial capitalism and urbanisation, and therefore the assumption of a causal link between the growth of capitalism in the nineteenth century and the emergence of nuclear families is fallacious.

The chapter then explores changes in family structures in the UK and elsewhere since the 1960s, and argues that economic, legal and technological change in the post-war period has seen an expansion of the

number of women who are economically active and this has inevitably brought about change in women's expectations and gender relations in general. More recently, political and economic changes have led to a huge rise in male unemployment and a lowering of wages for the poorly-skilled, and this has undermined the ability for many working-class men to support their families. The growing number of single (unmarried and divorced) mothers reflects a situation where rejection or avoidance of marriage may for some women be a strategy for survival.

The chapter then discusses how family structures are economically determined in part, but that they are also influenced by other factors including the cultural framework in which they exist. In western culture, the status of men is determined by their occupation. For women, motherhood offers a socially sanctioned alternative to paid work. This is especially the case for working class women who have minimal career aspirations and can derive a more secure income from welfare benefits than from low-paid unskilled work. Women may not have rejected the 'ideal' of traditional marriage, but for many poor working-class women the practical constraints of their economic situation renders marriage dysfunctional. That is not to say that women are avoiding sexual relationships with men but that they may prefer motherhood without marriage.

Improved access to welfare benefits for women have widened their options. Welfare provision, although far from generous, is often a more reliable option than dependency on men. The chapter outlines how poverty creates stresses which are detrimental to family life and how the benefit system itself gravitates against marriage.

It is also argued that the extent to which women can and do influence social, economic and political change has been underestimated. Through their influence in the domestic sphere, women collectively are able to bring about change.

Household structures, families and work in the UK since the sixteenth century An historical perspective

The sixteenth century.

Peter Laslett points out that, contrary to popular myth, it was not the coming of industry which brought economic exploitation, oppression and the gender division of labour - they were there already (Laslett, 1971). Laslett argues that the economic framework of Tudor society determined the structure of the family and social relations within it. The patriarchal master was not only the head of the household; he was also the employer, the entrepreneur and the manager of both the domestic and economic functioning of the household. There was no clear distinction between these functions. Apprentices, many of whom were young children at the beginning of their indentures, were usually unpaid members of a household who worked for their food and accommodation. They were forbidden to marry until after the age of twenty one. Social structures were rigidly linked to economic, and thus, domestic organisation. With the exception of certain occupations, such as seamen or mining parties, adults did not go outside of the domestic sphere to work. Individuals who were unable to maintain their place within a household had few opportunities to find paid work.

Laslett demonstrates that multi-generational families living in the same household were not characteristic of society in pre-industrial times. Parish records from Ealing in 1599 show that only one household in twenty had a generation depth of more than two. Life expectancy was short. Few lived to see their grandchildren, and for those who did survive beyond their productive years, conditions were bleak. Many old people were left to die alone, either in their tiny cottages or in almshouses. Large households were the prerogative

of the wealthy and powerful, and were not typical. Only the nobleman was likely to have a household of twenty or more members.

Upon marriage, a manservant would have to set up a modest home of his own, and become a wage labourer. Subject to the vagaries in the labour market and, without the guarantee of at least subsistence within the master's household, survival for many was very insecure. The arrival of children often precipitated decline into serious poverty for such independent households. The families were inevitably small, since each child would be apprenticed out to another household at the earliest opportunity, and many died in infancy or early childhood.

Average household size was modest; mean household size in Coventry in 1563 was 3.82, in Ealing in 1599 it was 4.75. Palliser (1985, p38) argues "the normal household was modest in size because it was a simple nuclear family". Citing parish records, Palliser negates the view that the extended family was the norm. He says that the implications of this are that with all its consequences for attitudes and childhood influences as well as for demographic structure, the normality of the nuclear family cannot be denied. The mean household size remained fairly constant at 4.75 persons from the late sixteenth until the early twentieth century (Palliser, 1985). Laslett (1971) explains that when the son of a family married, he left and started a household of his own. He could only marry if he was in position to do this. Otherwise, he simply could not get married.

The nuclear family was firstly the basic social unit and secondly, the basic unit of production in both urban and rural communities. It is important to note that nuclear families were not 'static'. Approximately a quarter of all marriages were remarriages. Early death meant widows and widowers frequently

remarried because the survival of the family as an economic unit depended upon it.

Late marriage in the latter half of the sixteenth century was a response to economic conditions, since each new marriage created a new economic unit which could only survive by competing with the rest of the community. Social and economic pressures and the need to await a vacant plot of land effectively prevented early marriage in agricultural communities. Within the larger towns, informal social pressures were weaker, and the restraints against earlier marriage were not so great. Blaming 'over-hasty marriages and over-setting up of households by the youth' for increasing poverty, the Council of London in 1556 prevented early marriages by ordering that no-one be granted the freedom of the city under the age of twenty four. (Palliser, 1985) This bar to early marriage was made general in 1563 by the Statute of Arbiters, which set the minimum age for completion of apprenticeships at twenty four in the towns and twenty one in the countryside. The average age of first marriage rose to 26.65 for men and 23.58 for women. (Laslett, 1971)

Rapid changes in the economy in England in the latter part of sixteenth century led to a marked increase in unemployment and poverty. There is a plethora of possible explanations - population growth, famine, plagues, inflation, wars, industrialisation, the rise of wage labour, the reformation, the dissolution of the monasteries - the list is formidable, but there is consensus amongst historians that rapid and far-reaching social changes occurred as a consequence. Palliser (1985) explains that where the facts of economic life and technology required a working group different in size and constitution from the working family, there was discontinuity. Changes in the economy as a whole inevitably created stress within the household, since it was

essentially an economic entity. When the economic infrastructure, within which the household was the basic unit, was threatened and became unstable, then the household itself became unstable; economic instability led to family breakdown. Illegitimacy rates soared, especially amongst the lower classes (Laslett 1972 and 1980). At the same time, the population outgrew resources, exacerbating problems of unemployment and homelessness, which in their turn produced social disorder and a rise in crime rates (Palliser, 1984).

There are no extant statistics which measure the extent of poverty on a national scale in terms of either numbers or degree. However, records which have survived from censuses carried out in 1570 in Norwich show that there were 504 men, 831 women and 1,007 children in need of relief. Records from London, Worcester, Warwick and Sheffield show similar conditions. Large numbers of women and their children were abandoned as men left to seek a living. The journeyman who travelled around in search of wage labour was a common sight; their wives and children were often left to survive on the produce, if any, from the small patch of land around the cottage in which they lived and/or the paid labour of the woman where work was available to them (Palliser, 1985).

The growing number of 'able-bodied' people who were willing but unable to find work led to the introduction of legislation; firstly in an attempt to maintain social order and stability and secondly, to attempt to bring about relief for those in poverty 'through no fault of their own'. Torn between the Christian teachings on charity and fear of anarchy and disorder, the Elizabethan government introduced legislation in an attempt to reduce the numbers and relieve the poverty of the 'impotent poor', that is, those who were unable to work because of age or infirmity. Simultaneously, draconian measures were

taken to punish the vagabonds - able-bodied but idle "masterless" men. It was widely acknowledged that unemployment and poverty were the root causes of the massive crime wave which swept through the country in the 1590's. Rioting broke out and food was seized in 1596 and 1597 (Palliser, 1983).

Almsgiving, which, until their dissolution under Henry VIII, had been the responsibility of the monastic institutions, was organised at parish and municipal level through the imposition of a local tax. The introduction of the Elizabethan poor laws at the end of the sixteenth century established the principal of corporate responsibility for the relief of poverty for the first time in English history. The measures introduced in 1576 and revised in 1601 were so effective that they remained in force until 1834, when they were replaced by the Benthamite Poor Law Act.

The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century

Similar demographic changes occurred in the eighteenth century; the population expanded rapidly, and agricultural communities could not sustain their growing population. Internal migration to the growing industrial towns, mining areas and ports led to an increase in urban populations, where the rates of marriage rose and the average age of marriage fell. The average age of marriage at the beginning of the century was 27 in the agricultural areas, compared to 20 in the urban areas of textile manufacturing and mining. (Mathias, 1969) By 1800, in industrial areas of Lancashire 40% of people in the age group 17-30 were married, compared to 19% in rural Lancashire.

Expanding employment opportunities in the industrial towns had removed the former restraints on early marriage which were characteristic of the rural communities. Delaying or avoiding marriage was no longer necessary where work was plentiful and whole families, including children, could be gainfully employed in factories. Unmarried adults became the minority in the growing towns and cities.

There was a substantial growth in the population of the urban areas, which according to Mathias (1969), was a direct response to the rising demand for wage-labour as the economy became increasingly industrialised. The nuclear family remained the basic unit of labour as the rural population shifted from the countryside to the industrial towns and cities. Wages were low and it was necessary for entire families to work together to produce a living wage. The work of children as young as four and five years old was essential to the survival of the poorest families, and in any case, with both

parents at work, there was no other means of supervising small children other than by taking them along (Best, 1971).

The eventual reduction in the employment rates of children in the 1860s, and later, those of women was a result of technical changes in manufacturing techniques and a commensurate reduction in the demand for labour rather than an expression of compassion or humanity towards children. Best (1971; p135) argues, "Prosaic factors of technical progress [made] the regiments of cheap infant and female workers increasingly uneconomical and avoidable", Consequently, during the sixties and seventies the child workers of Britain "began to be protected against the consequences of their parents necessitousness or cupidity". (Ibid; p136)

A combination of demographic change and fluctuations in the economy from the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 led to large numbers of workers falling into unemployment. The relief available to the poor at parish level was insufficient for the growing numbers of indigent workers and those unable to find work, and poverty was widespread. The Benthamite Poor Law was introduced in 1834 as a response to the perceived need for greater control over the poorest workers and the growing numbers of unemployed. (Mathias, 1969).

The unemployed poor were, on the whole blamed for their situation. Best (1971) says, "It was a constant complaint of the social policy makers [of the time] ... that life was indeed harder for those of the poor who tried to keep going independently than for those who, having less shame or a weaker moral fibre, settled for 'sponging' on society." Consequently, conditions within the workhouses were deliberately punitive. Mathias (1969) explains that it was thought that if conditions inside the workhouses were worse than

those prevailing outside, then the able bodied poor would make the rational decision to stay out of the workhouses and work. Despite evidence of severe deprivation amongst the poor - deprivation so extreme that for many even the intentionally austere quality of life in the workhouses was actually preferable to that outside - the policy makers pronounced 'moral weakness' as the main cause of unemployment and poverty.

There are no recorded statistics for unemployment on a national scale, but it is known that no fewer than 2,883,000 people emigrated overseas (mainly to America and Australia) between 1853 and 1880. This emigration was one of the factors which led to the assumption that work could be found by those who genuinely sought it. Best (1971; p147-148) states that "The prevalence and force of these assumptions about unemployment made the bulk of the propertied oligarchy incurious about its causes and character. It held them to the supposition that in normal times.....anyone who could not for more than a short, perhaps transitional period live by his own labour was lazy or incapable".

Unemployment and/or under-employment, estimated by some commentators (Ashworth, 1960) to have been as high as 20% in the larger towns and cities, led to a number of social problems. Firstly, there was an increase in 'lawlessness', and crime was endemic. The chronically unemployed and many others who were under-employed, drifting in and out of low paid casual work formed what Best (1971) refers to as a 'residuum' at the bottom of society. They represented a real and significant threat to law and order. The 'propertied classes' feared anarchy and social breakdown as a result of the perceived lack of morality amongst the underclass.

Changing patterns of employment and rising unemployment and poverty inevitably had their effects upon family structure - as unemployment rose there was a simultaneous decline in family stability. Consensual unions, rather than formal marriage, were common amongst working class women, who sometimes gave up co-habitation from fear of unwanted pregnancy, or simply moved on to another man when their partners fell out of work. The enforced removal of women and children from the industrial workplace meant entire families became dependent upon a male breadwinner (Lewis, 1984). Lewis, (1984; p9, citing Ellen Ross from Fall 1982), points out that romance played little part in the marriages of working class Victorian women. "Romantic love or verbal and sexual intimacy were considered less desirable than financial obligations, services and activities which were gender specific". Husbands were expected to provide financial support for their families, and in order to gain this support, and women, out of sheer necessity, had no option but to accept a subordinate role to men within marriage.

According to research conducted by Booth and Rowntree at the end of the nineteenth century amongst the working class population of London and York, economic constraints meant that women were primarily concerned with providing food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their children (ibid). Working-class wives were willing to tolerate heavy drinking bouts and physical abuse from their husbands in order to maintain financial support without which they and their children could not otherwise survive (Lewis, 1984; Taylor, 1983). "Working class marriages may perhaps be best considered as economic and emotional support systems. Wives were not unaware of the pressures experienced by men at the workplace and on the whole tended to accept the burden of domestic responsibilities that fell to their lot, and which, if left undone or mismanaged, might provoke some kind of outburst from their husbands" (Lewis, 1984; p10).

The Bastardy laws were strict. An unmarried mother, unless her family were willing and able to support her and the child/ren, had no other recourse but the workhouse. The harshness of these laws was an "expression of the state's desire to reaffirm moral values, particularly as they governed female sexual behaviour, as well as a determination to curtail the burden of expenditure this particular group imposed upon the community" (Lewis, 1984; p11). Working class families were thus expected to accept certain moral standards and codes of behaviour, those of the middle-classes. Husbands were required to fulfil their obligations and provide financial support for their dependent wives and children. It was widely argued that the "stable family" must have a male breadwinner, since this was the only way to ensure that one generation would exert itself in the interests of the next (Lewis, 1984; p).

Philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury was one of an enlightened few who questioned both the desire and the ability for working class men to be able to perform this function. He believed that working class women were "much superior to [working-class men] in judgement and economy", and he noted "instances every day of the homes of such industrious women being swept away by the rapacity of their husbands" (House of Lords, Debates, 1870, CC11, col. 613). Although Shaftesbury recognised the hardships and restraints suffered by poor working-class women, the state still attempted to impose the responsibilities of domestic duty and middle-class family values.

As a result of the nineteenth century Factories Acts which limited the employment of women, large numbers of women had no alternative but to enter 'domestic service'. By 1881 in England and Wales 1,269,000 women were employed in domestic service, which represented 15.7% of the population as a whole (Best, 1971; p123). Wages and conditions were poor,

and many middle-class employers, despite their attitudes with regard to marital responsibility etc., imposed rigorous standards of segregation between men and women, and between family members. For many young women, however, there was no alternative to domestic work. Domestic service remained a major source of work for 'respectable' working class women into the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Early Twentieth Century

Conditions for poor working-class families had changed little by the beginning of the twentieth century. Evidence produced for the 1912 Royal Commission on Divorce cited a case in which a whole family were taken into the workhouse because the father was "hopelessly out of work". When the mother was allowed out in order to "build a new home" for the family, she began cohabiting with another man. The woman's justification was that the new 'husband' was able to provide for her, where her legitimate husband was not (Lewis, 1984). Informal, or 'irregular' marriages amongst the lower classes were common, and this, once again led to concern amongst the middle and upper classes about the apparent lack of 'morality', meaning middle-class ideals of morality and respectability which dominated society regardless of their relevance to working class women.

Victorian morality and attitudes prevailed. Although the 1914 -18 war brought about some limited improvements in the position of women, it should be noted that these limited improvements were mainly of benefit to the middle-classes. The position of working class women remained largely unchanged. Domestic service continued to be the most popular occupation for women. 33% of working women were 'in service' in 1901, compared to 30% who were employed in textile manufacturing. Middle class women, married or single, were unlikely to be employed at all, and few women of any class were in a position to be financially self-sufficient (ibid).

The lack of economic and social independence experienced by women is well illustrated by Vera Brittain in the autobiography of her early life, *Testament of Youth*. Describing her parental home in Buxton, Brittain says that her family, which at that time consisted of herself and her parents (her brother was up at

university) employed no less than three housemaids and a garden boy. The difference between working-class and middle-class women is graphically illustrated when she complains that, when using a spare room to prepare for an examination, she was "not allowed a fire out of consideration for the maids" (1978, p69). She did not consider lighting it herself. Despite the fact that Brittain was unconventional for a woman of her age, passionate about injustice and an early exponent of feminism, in this and her subsequent writings she fails to address the issue of social class inequality which differentiated her own position from those of her working class counterparts.

In the 1930s a decline in the birth-rate caused some alarm, and women were exhorted to produce children - four each was considered ideal (Phillips, 1987; Riley, 1983). For men to work in the factories, and for women to stay at home and produce babies was considered their 'duty' to the nation. The ideology of marriage and motherhood were reinforced through legislation which prevented certain professional women from continuing their work after marriage.

Despite the enormous contribution made to both industry and agriculture by women during the 1939-45 war, from the end of the war and for the next two decades it was considered natural and desirable for women to return to domestic life and be once again dependent upon men. In Britain and the USA the ideological superiority of the role of women as housewives and mothers was strengthened, and the expectation of men as sole breadwinners in their families was crucial to their being considered 'good' husbands and fathers. The popularity of the nuclear family peaked in the 1950s.

Women and Social Change since 1955.

Since the 1960's marriages have become less stable and less permanent, with diverse family arrangements and patterns of parenting emerging in all classes of society throughout the western world. Households are becoming smaller in size as the birth rate declines. More people cohabit as a prelude to or substitute for formal marriage, and people are marrying later (Social Trends 23, 1993). There are more divorces and separations, more illegitimacy and an increasing number of young women who choose to raise children outside of marriage. The moral overtones which surround the current political debate tend to focus upon the undesirability of one versus two parent families, rather than upon the more fundamental issue of the decreasing relevance of the traditional two-parent family in late-industrial society; this despite evidence which shows that increasing numbers of women in Europe and America are rejecting marriage and nuclear family life in favour of single-parenthood, and that men are fathering children without necessarily having any intention of playing an active role in their lives. As their numbers grow, variations in family structures have become socially accepted. This is reflected in the number of young women for whom the traditional two-parent family is perceived as an alternative rather than as a superior form of family and who are choosing to set up home and have children without marriage. Unmarried mothers are no longer stigmatised as they once were, and are less likely to be coerced by social pressure or economic necessity into giving up their babies for adoption as they did during the 1950s and 1960s (Pascall, 1986; Haskey, in Harvey and Crow, 1991).¹ Simultaneously, there is a growing proportion of women who choose not to remarry following divorce or widowhood.

¹There were 22,000 adoptions in 1974, compared to only 6,000 in 1990 (Social Trends 23, 1993; Office of Population Censuses and Surveys).

In the UK between 1971 and 1991 the number of lone parent families, more than 90% of which are headed by the mother, increased from 570,000 to 1,300,000 (Clarke, Craig and Glendenning, 1993). There is also a growing trend in Britain to have babies outside of marriage. In 1992, 32.3% of births were registered outside of marriage, although it should be noted that a proportion of these name the father on the birth certificate as living at the same address, so it should not be assumed that illegitimacy automatically implies single-parenthood. The rate of marriage, taking into account the declining population, is at an all-time low. In the 12 months to the end of September, 1991, 158,000 divorces were made absolute, representing 51.5% of the number of marriages for the same year. The rate for remarriages has also fallen. It is now only a quarter of its 1971 level. (Population Trends 72, OPCS 1992). The average age of marriage has risen to 27.4 years. This figure compares almost exactly with the average age in the latter part of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were also times of economic stress. Many couples are choosing cohabitation, either as an alternative or as a prelude to formal marriage.

Whatever the polemics, it is clear that the nuclear family can no longer be regarded, at least statistically, as the 'normal' family in modern Britain and elsewhere, but rather that it represents only one of a number of alternative family structures. Attitudes are also changing. Research shows that only 17% of men and women born in the UK between 1950 and 1970 believe that a couple should marry without living together first. In Germany in the same age group this drops to 7%. People from the younger age groups are less enthusiastic about marriage than older people. Corresponding figures for the over sixties are 63% in the UK and 40% in West Germany. 35% of women and 25% of men in the UK believe that a lone mother can bring up a child as

well as a married couple. Rates for West Germany are 45% and 37% respectively. Only 2% of women in the UK accept that it is better to have a bad marriage than no marriage at all (Scott, 1993). The decline in the popularity of marriage is more marked for women than it is for men. It is perhaps not surprising that men are more likely than women to perceive the need for a resident father as important - the benefits and rewards of traditional marriage are greater for men than for women.

Hernes (1987) argues that the decline in the popularity of traditional marriage resulted from the growth in opportunities for women in the labour market, and thus, to be economically independent of men. In Denmark, for example, the number of women in the work-force has steadily increased since the end of the 1960's, and simultaneously, the number of divorces have risen and the number of formal marriages have declined. This pattern has been repeated in the UK and elsewhere. (It should be noted that childcare provision for working women in Denmark is greatly superior to that in the UK, making it much easier for Danish women to take up paid work than their British counterparts).

There are still significant differences between the average income potential of working men over working women (Walby 1986 and 1990; Siltanen and Stanworth, 1984), but this differential is not so great where unskilled and casual work offers men very low rates of pay and little job security (Walker, 1993). In areas of high male unemployment, access to welfare benefits has left women on the whole better placed than men (Pascall, 1986). The welfare state from its inception assumed women with children, with the notable exception of widows, to be dependant upon men. Pascall (1986, p27) argues that the "context within which the welfare state articulates productivity with reproductivity is fundamentally patriarchal; but that does not mean that social policies always work against women's' interests". She goes on to point out that "women are not merely passive victims of social policies". Women are using the benefit system to further their own ends; they recognise that the welfare state is often a better and more reliable provider, albeit a poor one, than a husband can be.

Data from around the world shows that women can and do adapt their survival strategies, sometimes on a day-to-day basis, sometimes in response to specific challenges and certainly over their lifetime. Women are not passive victims of circumstance - powerless creatures who are docile, submissive, helpless, ignorant or even stupid. Such a portrayal of women underestimates their power as creators of circumstance and their ability to manipulate resources in order to facilitate their own and their children's survival. This includes the facility, where necessary, to adapt social and household relations. If a particular form of marriage or household structure brings advantages (material, prestige or other) to women and their children, then they will adapt accordingly. Furthermore, if economic or other changes occur which render a particular family form dysfunctional to the needs of women and their children, then women will respond by changing social relations within it, or abandoning it altogether.

Women can achieve their goals, where appropriate, through their ability to manipulate their menfolk, to ignore their menfolk, to organise their menfolk or ultimately to reject their menfolk. It is widely recognised that women can and do bring about social and political change through their influence in the private domestic sphere (Lamphere, 1974; Hirschon, 1993). However, the division between the public arena in which men are dominant and the domestic where women hold sway is an obstacle to women rather than a clearly defined 'boundary'. Research in western society (including the present Green Fields study) shows that women from disadvantaged social groups are able to cross from the 'public' to the 'private' and back again with remarkably more ease and with greater success than men (Lamphere, 1974; Stack, 1974 and others). Their survival often depends upon it.

Patterns of social relations are infinitely varied, as are individual women, and it is a mistake to generalise about 'women' as though they were a uniform category (unlike men who are normally regarded as individuals!). The received impression of women from other social and cultural settings is inevitably influenced by the cultural and political preferences of the observer, and there is a tendency to overlook or undervalue the position of women who appear powerless and subordinate simply because the observer is judging them by different cultural standards. Intellectual middle-class women, including many feminists, have tended to equate the powerlessness created by poverty and incumbent social deprivation with powerlessness in the lives of poor women in general, and this leads to misconceptions as to the nature of gender relations in working-class families. Delphy and Leonard (in Crompton and Mann, Edt, 1986; p60ff), for example, argue that because married women rarely receive an equal proportion of family resources, they are doubly disadvantaged, firstly because of their class position and secondly because of gender relations within the family, in which power rests in the hands of men as breadwinners. They say (p65) "In poor families, even food and other essentials (medical care, leisure, pocket money) are distributed differentially". Even where husbands are regarded by Delphy and Leonard as generous, they are described (p64) as "very benevolent despots" in as much as they may choose to forego many privileges, but "they can have them again at any time". Delphy and Leonard analysis is problematic for several reasons. They say (P65) "because the family has been taken to be 'the major unit of reward and class fate' by sociologists and 'of consumption' by economists, very few people have bothered to look at distribution *within it*". but in making this assertion they fall into another common trap, that of making the assumption that 'families' are inevitably traditional nuclear families with the man as the main breadwinner. This, of course, is no longer always the case. They also state (p64) that "the household head budgets for their

income and stipulates what it can be used for". Within working class families this is not always the case. It was not unusual for working men to hand over their weekly wage packets unopened to their wives, although it should be noted that this was the exception rather than the rule. Fishermen at sea and military personnel stationed abroad for example, had their wages paid directly to their wives. As Jahoda (1982; p20) points out "in the micro-world of family budgeting, rationality does not dominate, not with the rich and certainly not with the poor". The powerless associated with extreme poverty is shared and experienced, albeit differently, by both men and women. Loss of status for men, for example, can be just as debilitating as a low food and clothing budget is for women.

The survival of many working-class communities is a direct result of the resilience and skills of their womenfolk (Campbell, 1993; Junior-Bryant, 1994). Networks of women in poor communities undertake the entire responsibility for supporting children, elderly relatives and adult male kin (Stack, 1976; Junior-Bryant, 1994). In the Green Fields setting and elsewhere men, unable or unwilling to offer any support, represent a drain on women's limited resources rather than an asset, and as a consequence, women are rejecting 'traditional' gender roles, including marriage and nuclear family life as a necessary strategy for their own and their children's survival.

The nuclear family in western society is not 'natural', inevitable, nor especially desirable; rather it exists as a product of both its social and economic environment. Where economic and other conditions for its existence are unfavourable, as is frequently the case in areas of high unemployment and/or very low wages, alternative family structures, including single-parent families, will inevitably evolve. That is not to argue that the organisation of family, household and human reproduction is determined by

economic factors alone. Changes can take place within a cultural framework in which a particular family form is idealised even by those who are not part of it. Nevertheless, the economic circumstances and social class position of individuals do have a major influence on how they organise their reproductive strategies and manage their lives; changes in social relationships cannot be adequately explained in isolation from the economic framework in which they occur. The structure of households and their internal dynamics depend both upon their environmental (physical, economic and political) and cultural (custom and convention) settings.

There is no universal 'family' which is common to all societies, nor even within a single society. In the UK, regional, ethnic, and economic and social class differences produce many variations in the organisation of 'family' life. Patterns of parenting also vary. What is regarded as 'good mothering' in one social setting may be roundly condemned in another. The absent working mother of the 'latch-key' child is condemned for neglect by the very class in society which sends its children away to boarding school from the age of eight. Okely, describing her own experience of a girls' boarding school in the 1950s, a time which witnessed the popularity of Bowlby's theories of maternal deprivation, points out the irony of such criticism (Okely, in Ardener, 1993). According to Bowlby (1953), young children separated from or denied regular contact with their mothers are liable to become unstable or disturbed adults. This widely-held view helped to underpin the ideological dominance of the 'traditional' nuclear family, with the father as breadwinner and the mother engaged in full-time child-care. Parsons (1955), making the assumption that men are automatically in a position to generate a family wage, regarded the nuclear family as the basic social unit in the industrialised world.

It must be emphasised that the term 'norm' is ambiguous. Statistical analysis measures in numeric terms the propensity of a particular type of behaviour from which an 'average' or 'greatest frequency' norm is derived. On the other hand, 'cultural norm' may refer to particular ideals, rather than to actuality. The statistically 'average' family may not in any way resemble the ideal family, the 'cultural norm' (Robertson, 1991). Moore (1988, p117) insists that in any analysis of changing 'family' forms a clear distinction must be maintained between "the 'ideology' of the family and the structure and organisation of the household". She says, "Reflecting on the circumstances of the majority ... it is clear why it is necessary to maintain a distinction between 'family' ideology and the actual structure and economic circumstances of the household".

By and large, it is the lifestyle of the wealthy white middle-class family which in western society is regarded as the ideal or 'normal' family, and the middle-class wife and mother within it who is put forward as the paradigm of motherly virtue. The situation of women from outside of this relatively small and privileged group is frequently disregarded. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994; pp 2-3) points out that this particular definition of mothering "has so dominated popular media representations, academic discourse, and political beliefs and practices that the existence of alternative beliefs and practices among racial, ethnic, and sexual minority communities as well as non-middle-class segments of society has gone unnoticed".

A variety of factors have altered the economic power relations within families in Western society. The late twentieth century has witnessed a period of rapid economic and demographic change. Changes in the economy in the UK and elsewhere since the early 1970s have seen a shift away from heavy industry and manufacturing towards a more service-based economy.

Recession and de-industrialisation together caused a particularly sharp increase in male unemployment. At the same time, new production techniques and the demand for a cheap, flexible labour force have brought about an increase in the numbers of women who are economically active outside of the home. In the UK in 1951 26.9% of women over the age of 16 were in paid employment. By 1977 this figure had risen to 33.4%. In 1985 women constituted 41% of the workforce (Central Statistics Office, 1985). By 1993 52.5% of women were active in the workforce. This change is especially notable amongst women with children - 75% of women in the age range 35-44 are economically active, and mothers with school age children are likely to fall in to this age category (Social Trends 23, 1993). 1991 figures show that 66% of married mothers and 49% of lone mothers are in paid work (Guardian, 2.3.93, citing the National Council for One-Parent Families). The number of women with children actively engaged in paid work is a growing trend throughout Europe. For example, by 1978 in Denmark 81% of women with one or more children were in paid work (Hernes, 1987).

Four points are of special relevance here. Although women throughout Europe tend to be over-represented amongst the low paid and part-time workforce,² their economic position and more importantly, their economic expectations have changed significantly since the 1950s. Secondly, political pressure and the impact of the women's movement have led to improvements in the legal position of women with respect to home ownership, tenancy rights and in particular, entitlement to benefits from the welfare state. Thirdly, the advent of the contraceptive pill and abortion rights have given women greater control over their fertility. Finally, changes in the divorce laws have resulted

² Average female full-time wages in the UK are only 71.2% of the wages their male counterparts (Social Trends 23, 1993)

in women usually, though not inevitably, gaining custody of children following marital breakdown.

These combined factors have contributed to a serious erosion of the economic and legal advantages of men over women, especially amongst the working class where men's earnings are lower, and as a consequence there have been changes in the internal dynamics of family life and gender relations within it. The image of the nuclear family as portrayed by the media remains, but for many it is no more than an ideal, attainable only by the relatively wealthy middle-classes, and even then, in many cases only as a result of the wife's earnings providing a second family income. For poorer families, it remains a dream. When it comes to long term planning - and traditional marriage, marriage for life, is the ultimate long-term commitment - economic reality limits the options. As Robertson (1991; p71) points out, "Poverty reduces choices to the short term; long range planning is a privilege of the wealthy and powerful". For the poor, survival on a day-to-day basis overrides any attempt at planning for the long-term. However much individuals from other social groups value the ideal of the nuclear family, they can only operate within the parameters of their own experience. Practical constraints can outweigh cultural preferences (Hannerz, 1969; Stack, 1970 and 1974; Moore, 1988). The middle-class view of the nuclear family as morally superior and 'natural' is powerful and pervasive, "but there was - and still is - an enormous gap between the pervasiveness and power of the ideology, and the actual household structure and economic circumstances of the majority of the population" (Moore, 1988, p118). Robertson (1991, p24) agrees. He says "some moral standards may be so widely unattainable that poorer people pay little heed to them, and make do with a sort of second-order morality of their own: they do not regard themselves as particularly

stigmatised by bastardy, or premature household fission or dependency on others" (Ibid; p24).

Structural changes in society do not occur without changes in the behavioural patterns of individuals, including patterns of sexual relationships and human reproduction. Cultural ideal and economic action are "locked in continuous strategic interplay" as people adapt their established values and beliefs - their cultural norms - to the changing environment in which they live; "when times change and fewer people have a chance of fulfilling the ideals, the ideals themselves will have to yield" (Robertson, 1991; p25). Individuals spend a far greater amount of their time engaged in organising the means for their subsistence than in organising their reproductive strategies. Robertson, however, argues that "It would be a mistake to conclude that economic choices and actions are necessarily more important than reproductive strategies, or that the latter are merely a by-product of economic decisions" (Ibid; P25).

As previously mentioned economic considerations alone do not dictate individual choices, especially those relating to sexual and reproductive behaviour. If that were the case few people in the western world would have children at all. In societies where children are economically active, where the parent generation depends upon their children to provide for them in their old age and/or where a high proportion of children do not survive, having a large number of children may be a vital strategy for personal survival; they represent an economic asset (Walby, 1990; Best, 1971). On the other hand, in modern western societies, children are likely to be dependent upon their parents for a minimum of sixteen and in some cases, as long as twenty five years. This massive investment in the next generation is rarely rewarded in direct financial terms. Long-term security, if any, is more likely to be

provided through pensions, investments and/or the welfare state (Walby, 1990; Robertson, 1991). Raising dependent children is a major drain on the resources of parents, and individuals clearly do not make decisions as to whether or not to have children based upon a rational evaluation of the economic advantages and disadvantages to themselves.

In this area above all the analysis of social behaviour would be inadequate if it ignored the importance to the individual of bonds of intimacy, affection, kinship and the emotional pleasures derived from parenthood itself.

Human reproduction for the majority requires that men and women engage in heterosexual relationships. But the survival of an infant from the instant of its conception is dependent upon the survival and well-being of its mother: after conception the presence or otherwise of the father is, at least biologically, superfluous. Without wishing to state the obvious, it is women who become pregnant, who give birth and who are left, both literally and metaphorically, 'holding the baby'. The biological reality of pregnancy, childbirth and lactation are universal to all human societies. Definitions of 'motherhood', on the other hand, are divergent. The bio-determinist views of motherhood suggest that women are genetically predisposed to maternity, that mothering is instinctive and a product of hormone differences between men and women (Bronowski; 1973).

The radical feminist position, on the other hand, regards both 'family' and 'motherhood' as social constructs. The appropriation of women and of their sexuality and reproduction are essential ingredients both in the subordination of women and for maintaining patriarchy in social relations (Brownmiller, 1976; Rich, 1980). Firestone (1974) argued that sexual reproduction is in itself the basis of the domination of women by men. This "tyranny of

reproductive biology" she regards as a problem which can be solved when technology creates technological advances which may create alternatives. Millett (1977), Rich (1980) and others argue that heterosexuality is itself a social construct, and that within heterosexual relations women service men emotionally, materially and sexually, and men derive an unequal advantage from these relationships. According to Rich (1980), rape and violence, or even the fear of rape and violence, are utilised by men to maintain their dominance over women, and the broader culture of society as a whole reflects this. Most crimes of violence are committed by men, and fear of violent crime is common to women of all social classes (Walby, 1990). Susan Brownmiller (1975) argues that violence, including sexual violence against women, is a pervasive part of male/female relations and that it is culturally condoned. The social constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' objectify women, and are reinforced by violence and pornography which are, in their turn, condoned by patriarchy and misogyny in society as a whole (Dworkin, 1981; Brownmiller, 1975). Other writers (Rich, 1980; Millett, 1977; MacKinnon, 1979) also argue that men, through sexual practices from harassment to pornography, reduce women to the level of objects.

Radical feminist writers, therefore, see men as the only beneficiaries of gender inequality. Central to their position is the belief that the unequal nature of the institution of heterosexual relationships, and especially marriage and the nuclear family, lead to female oppression, and, in particular, to violence against women. The family is a patriarchal unit, a microcosm, which exists within the patriarchal macrocosm of society as a whole (Millett, 1970). Only when women are freed from the bonds of heterosexual reproduction will equity with men be possible.

This position does not adequately explain the growing number of women who are economically independent and autonomous, but who nonetheless willingly, and often enthusiastically, engage in heterosexual relationships with men - with or without marriage - and who actively choose to have babies. There are also women, some of them lesbians, who do not want relationships, sexual or otherwise, with men, and who are vehement in their criticism of traditional family life, but who go to great lengths to become pregnant. Marriage and 'the family' may be socially constructed, but the argument that heterosexuality and/or the 'maternal bond' are entirely social constructs is rather more problematic.

Margaret Mead (1950) believed that the maternal bond itself was derived from biology, but that specific forms of behaviour associated with motherhood and the value placed upon them varied according to different social conditions. "The mother's nurturing tie to her child is so deeply rooted in the actual biological conditions of conception and gestation, birth and suckling, that only fairly complicated social arrangements can break it down entirely" (p191). Rich (1977) considers motherhood to be a powerfully emotional experience which puts women in touch with their bodies; a potential source of great happiness for women. She distinguishes between the 'experience' of motherhood, which includes the positive aspects of the relationship between a mother and her child/ren, and the 'institution' of motherhood, which she argues keeps the processes of female reproduction and child-care under male control. Barrett and McIntosh (1991; p141), discuss the benefits of collective child-rearing, but they concede that "communes have ... done nothing to break down the mother-child bond".

Not all mothers enjoy the experience, however. Firestone (1970) considered pregnancy and childbirth profoundly unpleasant experiences - she described

giving birth as "like shitting a pumpkin"! Oakley (1974) describes her own experience as the mother of young children as excruciatingly frustrating, boring and unsatisfying. For her, there seems to have been no "joy in motherhood" and she says she took tranquillisers on a daily basis.

The close bond between mother and infant can clearly vary according to the individual mother and the cultural setting, but it is to be found in every society. In many cultures to be childless is regarded as deviant. Childlessness can be regarded as a curse, an illness or even a sin (Hirschon, 1993). Barrett and McIntosh (1990) point out that there is no word in English for not having children - 'non-parenthood' and 'childlessness' are a negative expressions which imply a lack or omission.

The extent to which human behaviour is shaped by 'biological forces' has not enjoyed the same degree of interest as the extent to which the 'biological' is influenced by the social and cultural. Sharon Macdonald (in Ardener, 1993) discusses the manner in which cultural and biological definitions of 'femaleness' have become polarised and entrenched, and concludes (p202) that the semantic and material are ultimately inseparable. She says (p188) "The relationship between biology and culture, particularly in the domain of sex and gender, is still a matter for active negotiation and research". Some writers (Vance 1984; Rubin 1984) argue that it is not actually possible to analyse from a feminist perspective the social organisation of sexuality in the same way that it has analysed gender. Rubin (1984, p308) maintains "it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence."

To attempt to separate one from the other may well be a futile exercise, and real understanding of the organisation of sexual and reproductive behaviour

might be better achieved if there was a shift from the debate between 'nature *or* nurture' to a discussion of 'nature *and* nurture', and the influence of each over the other.

Caplan (1987, p10) states that "sexuality, like gender, is socially constructed", citing Malinowski's (1929) study of the Trobriand Islanders and Herdt's (1982) work in Papua New Guinea as just two examples of the wide variety of sexual practices 'discovered' in the course of anthropological field work. She points out (Ibid, p20) how "sexuality is an integral part of identity on both a personal and a social level; it is part of being male or female, as well as adult." In addition, she argues that the extent to which children are *unequivocally* welcomed (or not, as the case may be) is a major key to the understanding of sexuality. Where high fertility is regarded as a good thing, sexuality will be regarded likewise, whereas in Western societies, where contraception is widely practised and "sex has become widely divorced from fertility" (ibid, p23), control of female fertility is "inextricably linked" to control of sexual behaviour. She concludes (Ibid, p25) that "sexual practices cannot exist in a vacuum. What people want, and what they do, in any society is to a large extent what they are made to want, and allowed to do. Sexuality cannot escape its cultural connection"

There is no doubt that many women experience intense emotional attachment to their children, and this bond extends beyond parturition and lactation into later childhood. Whether socially constructed or bio-determined, it is a commonly recurring phenomenon that mothers protect and succour their young, and the survival of an infant is more often than not dependent upon this. Whatever the biological imperative it is clear that broader social relations, including household organisation and gender roles, are products of culture - that is, learned forms of behaviour, communally accepted and

adopted. It is also clear that the degree to which cultural norms are accepted varies with the experiences of social groups and the status of individual men and women as they progress through life. Practical experience everywhere brings with it the understanding and wisdom of age, although in the modern western world the status accorded to the elderly is apparently lower than in other societies. Marriage and parenthood can confer status upon women as well as men, and in many societies they represent the passage to adulthood (Robertson, 1991; Hirschon, 1993), for example, by giving a young woman a new sphere of influence in which she may assert her dominance and in which the dependency of her man is acknowledged (Ridd, in Ardener, 1993b, p190).

There is a tendency, even amongst feminist writers, for women to be regarded as "passive recipients of change, and as victims of forces they do not generate or control" (Rowbotham and Mitter, 1994; p4). As previously stated, this tendency ignores or at least underestimates the extent to which women can and do act as agents of social change. The choices made by individual women in overcoming constraints and adopting strategies to ensure their own and their children's survival and well-being, can bring about changes in the structure and the culture of society as a whole. It is the process of change itself which creates problems as individuals adapt their cultural beliefs to the empirical reality of the world in which they live. Rejection of marriage and/or the nuclear family in the modern western world may represent a practical strategy for women's survival, but it also creates gender role problems, especially for men who have fewer opportunities to adapt to socially acceptable alternatives outside of that of the 'provider' role (Robertson, 1991; Hannerz, 1980; Walby, 1990). The political rhetoric surrounding the UK government's "Back to Basics" campaign demonstrates the inability of many men, and notably, politicians (White middle- and upper middle-class men) to come to terms with the changing roles of women in

society. Many feel threatened by a perceived decline in their status. In this respect, their verbal attacks on single mothers can be seen as an attack on women in general, and the feminist movement in particular.

Marriage, at least in western society, is no longer the prerequisite for sexual relationships or for leaving the parental home. That is not to argue that women, or men for that matter, have necessarily rejected the ideals of romance and conventional marriage, nor that they have abandoned heterosexual relationships, but rather that in increasing numbers they are restructuring the way in which they organise their domestic lives as a response to the macro-economic processes of the world in which they live. Although there are some notable social class and ethnic differences, it is rare for young adults to live in the same household as their parents. The majority of young adults set up home independently on a permanent basis by the time they reach the age of 24 (Finch, 1993).

Women who have alternative means to support themselves are less likely to enter a dependent relationship with a man. This theory, according to Walby is supported by the fact that the higher the woman's social class the less likely she is to marry, whereas the opposite applies to men - the lowest social classes are least likely to marry (1990, p84-85). The less a man has to offer, the less attractive he is as a husband and the more it is in the woman's interest to avoid or leave him. The divorce rate is highest where the husband is unemployed, and lowest where he has a professional occupation with a commensurate salary. For women in the poorest families, state welfare can provide better levels of benefit and more importantly, greater security, than individual men (Walby, 1990; Pascall, 1986).

Lamphere (1974) believes that traditional 'male-centred' sociological analysis of family structures under-emphasises the extent to which women are political actors who employ strategies to achieve their own ends. Women's strategies, she argues, reflect the structures of power and authority within the 'domestic group'. Where authority rests with male hierarchies in both the domestic and public arena, women can manipulate the political opinions and actions of their menfolk, typically by withholding food or sexual services. In societies where the two spheres are integrated, such as the Navajo, Eskimo and Bushman, decision making and authority is shared. Lamphere (ibid; p112) argues that in western society where there is a clear division between the (female) domestic sphere and the (male) public sphere, the influence and autonomy of working and lower-class women tend to be limited to the domestic arena. She discusses the extent to which Black low-income households in the USA are influenced by external political and economic factors, and believes that the formation of women-centred domestic groups represents the strength of individual adaptations to poverty and serves to demonstrate the resilience of both Black men and women. "The effects of economic racism on Black males, access to welfare, and even poorly paid unskilled work on the part of Black females and the instability of housing contribute to the fact that households are constantly forming and breaking up, usually around women who can provide needed child care" (ibid, p110).

Unemployment, low wages and poverty in the western world are no longer confined to the poor Black neighbourhoods of the USA and elsewhere. It should especially be noted that arguments (Herscovits, 1958; Smith, 1962) maintaining that differences between black and white household organisation are based upon ethnic, historical or cultural factors do not stand up to scrutiny in the light of changes taking place in contemporary society. When white communities are faced with the economic problems of unemployment

and poverty which have been associated with the Black minorities similar patterns emerge.

Lamphere concludes that the behaviour of individual or groups of women "cannot be understood without reference to domestic power structure, to woman's place within it, and to the factors that shape the relationship between the family and larger society" (Ibid, p112). In reaching this conclusion she fails to address the extent to which women, because of their influence in the domestic sphere, can bring about structural change in society as a whole. Individual women in western and other societies may have relatively little power in the public spheres of politics and economics, but their individual responses to circumstances have collectively brought about a dramatic shift in the structure of modern society. That men, who until now have held political and economic power in industrial society, are perplexed by this change is a measure of the extent to which the social organisation of reproduction and production has outgrown the boundaries of the household, taking women's interests with it (Robertson, 1991; p41).

Changes in the lives of women - of their attitudes, actions and strategies for survival - are taking place without a commensurate change in the cultural frameworks which influence the attitudes of both women and men. The social and cultural construction of 'femaleness' and 'motherhood' - the ideals - have not yet adapted to the actuality of the real world, but the manner in which women are organising their lives has. The result for many working-class men has been devastating. Conventional notions of 'masculinity' offer few opportunities to men who for reasons beyond their control are unable to conform, and as yet, are unable to adapt.

"The question of human agency is of particular significance in a period when teleological theories of historical and progressive evolution have been confuted both analytically and by actual events" (Rowbotham and Mitter, 1994, p5).

Margaret Mead (1950) believed that 'fatherhood', in the sense of a man providing for his children and their mother, is essentially 'unnatural'. Such behaviour on the part of men is a 'social invention'. "Men have to learn to want to provide for others, and this behaviour, being learned, is fragile and can disappear rather easily under social conditions that no longer teach it effectively" (p192). Where the social pressures on individual men are weakened, for example, by family breakdown as in the industrialised world, then the responsibility is carried collectively. "The hard-working, well-employed members of society become the providing fathers of thousands of children who are public charges" (p191).

Malinowski (1930) believed that legitimacy of children was a vital determining factor in defining the structure of a family. Legitimate birth, according to Malinowski, regulates a child's rights to care, instruction and inheritance. He went on to propound that a family can only exist if some person performs the role of the father, although he says that the social father need not necessarily be the biological father, nor even that it need be a male. According to Malinowski, the functions performed by the 'pater' are, firstly to determine the status, rights and obligations of the child, and secondly, to take a responsibility for the behaviour of the child. There are countless women who successfully perform these functions without reference to either a male or another responsible adult, and other societies where these tasks are performed collectively. The Israeli Kibbutzim, where education and socialisation were performed collectively, have been cited as an example.

The concept of 'legitimacy' itself may also be questionable. In Haiti and parts of the Caribbean, 'illegitimate' births represent more than 80% of the total of births registered, although it is argued (Goode, 1960; Zelditch, 1964) that the high rate of births outside of marriage may not be a rejection of legitimacy norms, but rather a response to a breakdown in the organisation of lower class families without any corresponding growth of regulative structures. Many informal unions are eventually legitimised through marriage, and it is of particular significance that informal unions are the exception amongst middle and upper class families. Middle and upper class families are in possession of wealth which the lower classes do not have, and it therefore makes sense that legitimate marriage should be more important to families in the higher social groups in order to safeguard the inheritance rights of the children.

There would seem to be a clear relationship between the economic position of the father on the one hand and marital and family stability on the other. The assumption that men are the only or the major source of economic support for their families is, according to Heidi Hartmann, (1976) the key to the sexual division of labour in family life. It may also be the vital ingredient for marital stability, or indeed, for the need for marriage to exist at all. In the first place, if the father does not (or can not) pass on personal wealth to his children, then his need to formally recognise them is not so vital, and conversely, a mother does not need to enter into a formal union to protect her income, status or inheritance rights or those of her children. Additionally, if the authority of a man within his family is determined by and a reflection of his economic status outside, then if he has little or nothing to contribute to his family in economic or status terms, then his position within it becomes redundant. If patriarchy in capitalist society is derived from men having better access than women to its material resources and authority structures,

(Oakley, 1974, Walby, 1986, Phillips, 1987) then where no such advantage for men exists, the need to formalise sexual relationships between men and women is seriously eroded or does not exist.

Wright, citing Harris, (1984) says, "It is important to conceive of the household as a *social rather than natural entity* with a particular structure and organisation which must be understood in terms of history, ideology, and relations and forces of production. Shifts in economic relations radically affect the structures of households, the power relations within them and the ability of individuals to control the products of their own labour" (Wright, 1993; p 59. added italics).

Engels (1884) argued that the nuclear family evolved with the emergence of private wealth, controlled by men. He argues that monogamy and marriage arose from the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of men and from the men's desire to bequeath this wealth to their own children and to no one else's. Engels believed that economic dependency upon the man, exploitation within the family, and therefore, subordination and control of women through marriage, were the necessary means to ensure the legitimacy of their offspring. The essential function of marriage is to ensure undisputed paternity, through exclusive sexual access, in order to ensure that the wealth of an individual man passes to his biological children.

In this respect Engels pre-empted the feminist movement by a number of years. Marxist Feminists argue that marriage and the family, and especially, in the Western world, the nuclear family, are the basis for female oppression in capitalist society. It is within marriage that men can claim both unpaid domestic service and sexual exclusivity. Juliet Mitchell, citing Engels, argues that the appropriation of individual private property necessitates a form of

social organisation within which production takes place collectively, but private ownership continues within the family. She says, "Engels traced the origin of the oppression of women to the demand for individual private property: women had to be 'owned', faithful to marriage to produce an heir for the inheritance of individual private property". (Mitchell, 1971; p153) Hence, the emergence of the nuclear family in modern society was determined by the economic infrastructure of industrial capitalism.

Marxist feminists, like Radical feminists, regard the nuclear family as a socially constructed institution in which gender division of labour and the exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labour benefit men, but unlike Radical feminists, they see the capitalist system as the real beneficiary. The family is a small-scale political economy with its own division of labour; an econometric model which serves the interests of the capitalist superstructure (Humphries, 1982, p138). Capitalism, with the family as its basic unit depends upon women to service the needs of the male workforce and to reproduce and socialise children in order to continuously replace it. Women can also act as a 'reserve workforce' which can be brought into the labour market when and if the system needs them. Thus, the domination and oppression of women by men results from capital's dominion over labour, and capital benefits from the unequal gender division of labour within the home. Alison Scott, (in Crompton and Mann, 1986; p163) argues that "the effect of the rise of capitalism has been to restructure and deepen the differential between male and female labour", and "the kinship system played a crucial role in this development. Its main features were an emphasis on monogamy, the indissolubility of marriage, patrilineal property and inheritance rights, and a nuclear household structure".

Patriarchy in the work-place prevents women achieving positions with high status and commensurate wages and thus to achieve parity with men, which in its turn limits their access to positions of political influence and authority. Jobs traditionally undertaken by women are treated as an extension of their domestic role, and hold low status and pay (Walby, 1986). According to Walby, patriarchy, through men's unequal access to the resources and rewards of authority structures outside of the home, gives power to men and this power is maintained through the subordination and oppression of women. Male dominance within the family, she argues, is a reflection of society as a whole. Walby's view of gender relations, however, is rapidly being undermined by changes in the economy and in the workplace. The needs of modern technology are such that an increasing proportion of new jobs are jobs for women, while the traditional area of male employment, mining, manufacturing industry and shipbuilding for example have all but disappeared. Walby argues that early socialisation discourages girls from aspiring to work more usually seen as men's work, and the idealisation of the role of 'motherhood' as indistinct from 'femaleness' ensures that women's position in the work-place is regarded as secondary to her primary role as a housekeeper and mother. This, too, is becoming outdated, as the number of young women having children is in decline, and there is strong evidence emerging that the aspirations of girls and young women are changing. However, options available to educated middle class girls and young women are not necessarily shared by their working class counterparts.

Marxist feminism centres around the premise that patriarchy and male dominance are the product of men's unequal and advantaged access to material resources. Therefore, if the material advantage of men over women does not exist, as in the case of the urban working-class, then the dominant role of men must also diminish. This led to a marked shift in

gender relations within families, and the rising divorce and illegitimacy rates in western society evidence this. Women are no longer willing to tolerate an unfair and unequal position in the family when they derive no material benefit for themselves or their children by doing so.

The Welfare State, which assumed that all women are, or at least should be, financially dependent upon men, has been blamed as an important agency in maintaining gender inequality, and yet it has actually been instrumental in the liberation of many lower class women from subordination to individual men and, albeit in a limited sense, has brought about their relative empowerment. That is not to argue that working-class women have gained any real political power in society as a whole. They remain impoverished and still have relatively little control over many important aspects of their lives. It is rather that their position has changed from being dependent upon individual men within the patriarchal working class nuclear family to relative autonomy, albeit under the patriarchy of the state. Perhaps even more interesting is the evidence which shows that despite a reduction in the 'family' income, the women themselves regard themselves as better-off (Pahl, 1989; Adams, 1976).

In any case, the actual amount of money coming into a household does not necessarily benefit the women and children. On the contrary, evidence from Africa (Moore, 1994) shows that although the household income of two-parent families is usually greater than that of single mothers, the children of the latter group are less likely to suffer malnutrition and more likely to be attending school, a reflection of the fact that single mothers spend a higher proportion of their resources on their children. Where men are the main wage-earners, a sizeable proportion of their money is spent on luxury 'status' goods and beer and gambling which inevitably causes marital conflict.

Wright (1993) found similar patterns in Lesotho. Male migrant workers who have become unemployed as a result of recession in South Africa represent a serious drain on family resources; the women who are in paid work, and who are often the sole providers for their families, are expected to provide their menfolk not just with the means for subsistence, but also with money for drinking and so on. Domestic violence is common, and the divorce rate and single-parenthood have increased.

Evidence from anthropological case-studies in Africa (Evans-Pritchard 1951; Schneider and Gough, 1961) shows that there is greater marital stability amongst societies which have patrilineal descent systems than in those which have matrilineal systems. In a patrilineal descent system, where wealth passes through the male line, it is of the utmost importance that a husband is sure that he is also the biological father of any children of his marriage, and additionally, in societies where children are an economic asset, such 'ownership' is vital to a man's economic status. In a matrilineal system wealth passes through the female line so the need to ensure that the husband is the genitor is not nearly so vital. (Schneider and Gough, 1961). Furthermore, the position of women in a matrilineal system of descent and inheritance is enhanced by the degree of access to and control over economic resources, including those derived from children, and thus, they hold greater domestic authority. The divorce rate is high, and this may be an indication that women use divorce as a strategy for achieving financial autonomy. Women are able to gain wealth and achieve economic independence, and thus, to be head of household in their own right (Lamphere, 1974; p108 -109).

As a result of economic change brought about by exposure to western industrial methods of production, and in particular, wage labour, matrilineal

social systems in Africa have tended to disintegrate and have been replaced by the 'elementary family' as the key kinship group. (Gough, 1961). This would seem to bear out Engels' theory. Within the traditional framework of matrilineal society it is less important who the genitor actually is. With the growth of new forms of production and the accumulation of surplus wealth through cash crop farming and/or wage labour, the authority of the father over his children has increased, and there is a growing tendency for inheritance to pass directly from a father to his children. Simultaneously, the new found economic independence of the wage labourer has eroded the authority of the lineage head, and the traditional kinship systems have been replaced by elementary families as the basic social and economic grouping with respect to residence, economic co-operation, legal responsibility and socialisation. (Ibid). More recent studies in Africa, (Moore, 1994; Lamphere, 1974; Wright, 1993) illustrate how male unemployment and/or inadequate wages have led to a decline in the rates of marriage and an increase in divorce, reflecting the manner in which African women, like their western counterparts, have rejected traditional marriage patterns in order to ensure their own and their children's survival.

In this situation women's knowledge and resources can be of greater value than those of the men. There is a great deal of data (Stack, 1974; James, 1993; Wright, 1993; Ridd, 1973; Hirschon, 1993 and others) which demonstrates that women are often better positioned than men to utilise support from kinship networks, and especially from their own families. In the urban setting this can be useful in gaining information and dealing with 'authorities'. This is very apparent in the American studies of Black neighbourhoods, where it is the women who negotiate for welfare and other resources. Women organise the means to survival, including maintaining

and utilising kinship and other networks (Hannerz, 1969; Stack, 1970; Scott, 1984).

The Green Fields study shows similar patterns. It is the women more often than not who manage life for the men, within marriage as well as outside of it in their broader family relationships. Beatrix Campbell (1993, p178), describing life on a northern England housing estate, vividly portrays the position of men in these households :-

"These men live in a twilight world. They're lying around on sofas in their boxer shorts, watching videos; they have their tea when it's put in front of them. When the men get into trouble, or when they want them out, it is their wives and mothers who make the arrangements. The men won't go to their solicitors, they won't liaise with the housing department, they won't liaise with their kids' schools. It's the women who make the appointments, it's the women who call to cancel the men's appointments, it's the women who make the apologies What is absolutely astonishing about these tough men is that they have to have their slippers under some woman's bed. The men cannot make out on their own. The reality is that children in this community do not grow up seeing men do any of the coping, caring or standing on their own two feet".

Single mothers - A Social problem?

Despite the erosion in the stigma once associated with single-parenthood and illegitimacy in Britain and elsewhere, single-mothers are nonetheless regarded by many as a 'social problem'. They are blamed for the rising crime rates, for causing distress and ill-health to children and for poor performance in education (Dennis and Erdos, 1992).

Robert Chester (1977) recognised the growing trend towards single-parenthood in the UK, and predicted that as deviations in family structures became more common they would be regarded as variations, and that there would be a commensurate reduction in the social stigma associated with single-parenthood. From 1976 to 1986 the number of lone-parent families increased by 35% and by 1993 they represented 19% of all families with children. (Clarke, Craig and Glendenning, 1993) An estimated 70% of these families are wholly or partly dependent upon the welfare state (Social Trends 23, 1993; OPCS). It is largely as a consequence of their perceived cost to the state that single mothers have come to be regarded as a problem.

The problems which are attributed to single-motherhood result not from their single-parent status *per se*, but rather from the ambivalent status of women in general and mothers in particular in a rapidly changing world. This is not to underestimate the difficulties encountered by lone-mothers and their children. On the contrary, it cannot be overstated that in a society with legal, political and fiscal structures which assume the presence of two parents, single-motherhood brings with it a host of problems which do not affect two-parent families. However, the assumption should not be made that families with only one resident parent are automatically less stable than families with two. The Green Fields study demonstrates that few of the women enjoyed stable

'family life' during marriage, and on the whole their lives are more stable and they regard themselves as happier since leaving it.

The terminology employed to describe lone-parenthood is in itself problematic. It implies images of negativity - *unmarried mothers*, *broken families*, *unsupported mothers*, *fatherless families* - all labels which define what the single parent family *is not*, rather than what it is (Hardey and Crow, 1991; p4). By implication, such terminology implies families which lack something. Even the term "lone-parent" implies deviation, which Oakley (1974, p70) believes is because that single-mothers represent a threat to accepted gender role playing, and thus, to social order. She says, "The family as an institution is a prescription for gender role normalcy ... single-parent families represent a social situation full of ambiguities and thus are stigmatised".

Hardey and Crow, (1991, p2) point out that families with problems are not the same thing as 'problem families', and that parents who are poor are not necessarily 'poor parents'. The greatest problem for most lone-parent families is lack of income, or more specifically, "lack of a male wage" (Pascall, 1986; p4). That is not to imply that the only problems which affect lone-parents are financial. Loneliness, isolation and lack of companionship are frequently cited as negative aspects of lone-parenthood (Shaw, 1991; Hart, 1976), but financial hardship may be the underlying cause of these problems. Lack of money can prevent women from going out and about and meeting others, especially if they have to pay a baby-sitter.

Dennis argues that extensive research has shown that "children in lone-parent families suffer disabilities as compared with the average child in the *stable two-parent family*" (Dennis and Erdos, 1992, p.xix; added italics).

Such comparisons, frequently cited by politicians, should be treated with caution. In the first place Dennis makes the assumption that all two-parent families are stable, which of course, is not always the case, and by inference, that single-parent families are not. More importantly, they do not take into account social class, poverty and other factors which have been shown to influence levels of disadvantage, delinquency and so on.

Single mothers are an easy target for politicians and other critics. They have no collective voice; they are spread throughout the population, and they are over-represented amongst the lowest social classes (Popay, Rimmer and Rossiter, 1983, p12-13; Chester, 1977, p159). It is for this reason that organisations such as Gingerbread and the National Council for One Parent Families (formerly, the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child) have been unable to bring about improvement in the collective position of single-parents because of "the continuing diversity of lone-parents' experiences, and the resultant limitation of their collective strength" (Hardey and Crow, 1991 p7). Even those who are sympathetic to the needs of single mothers have a tendency to automatically regard single-parent families as disadvantaged compared to families with two parents. It is true that single mothers are over-represented amongst the poorest families in Britain but generally speaking this is a consequence of their disadvantaged position in the labour market rather than of their single-parent status.

The DSS benefit system makes it very difficult for claimants to take up paid work outside of the home even if they should want to because paid employment prevents them from claiming other benefits such as housing benefit and free school dinners. This can leave them worse off than before, notwithstanding that child care is usually very expensive. Many of these problems are faced by mothers of young children, married or not, and in

any case, there are single mothers who currently depend upon welfare benefits who would still be dependent upon benefits if they stayed with the father of their children where he is unemployed or in a low-paid job. Children of these families would be raised in poverty regardless of whether the claim was made by the father or by the mother herself, and in many cases, the family would be even poorer if the father stayed with the family, since limited resources would need to be stretched to provide for him as well. Both fathers and mothers may recognise this and respond accordingly. A father who deserts his wife and children may not be as "feckless and irresponsible" as he is portrayed. On the contrary, he may realistically see his actions as the best thing he can do for them, given his limited choices. Likewise, the single mother who declines to marry (or to stay married to) the father of her children may be deciding quite rationally upon the most advantageous financial alternative. They are each responding in the best way they can to the circumstances within which they are placed.

Unmarried mothers under the age of twenty, who are the smallest but fastest growing group of single parents, (Social Trends, 21; 1990 and 23, 1993; HMSO) may be similarly evaluating their options. Unemployment has reduced the opportunities for them to find paid work between school and marriage and/or first childbirth. They have no entitlement to DSS benefits between the age of 16 and 18, and training schemes are not available for all school-leavers. For a working-class girl leaving school without vocational or other qualifications whose ambition is to have a home of her own and children, there becomes little point in deferring pregnancy. For her, motherhood may be an acceptable and desirable role - her passage to the status of womanhood. Marriage holds few attractions when her male peer group is likely to be unemployed or hold a job with low pay and is thus unable to provide financial security even for himself. Between 1961 and 1989 the

ratio of births within and outside of marriage to women under twenty changed from 53:13 to 13:48 (Dennis and Erdos, 1992; p125). Britain has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe. In the UK 69 per thousand girls between the age of 16 and 19 years become pregnant, (compared to only nine per thousand in Holland, which has the lowest rate). Approximately one third of these terminate their pregnancies, but there are still 42 births per thousand. It should however, be noted that, despite the political rhetoric surrounding them, unmarried teenage mothers are in the minority, representing only 23.76% of all births outside of marriage, and that unmarried (i.e. never married) mothers of all ages represent slightly fewer than one third of single parents as a whole (Hardey and Crow, 1991).

Poverty and Family Breakdown in the UK

The relationship between poverty and family breakdown is borne out by research in the UK which shows that single parent families in Britain come disproportionately from the lowest social classes (Bell, 1971; Popay, Rimmer and Rossiter, 1983). Poverty exacerbates the likelihood of family breakdown (Pascall, 1986; Fryer and Ullah, 1987).

In British society, as in the US, a man's ability to maintain his position within the household is directly related to his ability or inability to act as breadwinner. His status within the family is dependent upon his position in the outside world. With neither occupational status nor income he has nothing to offer his family; he has no role to play either within the family or in the world outside and he becomes marginal to family life. Where there is a breakdown in the man's breadwinning role, then the patriarchal nature of his position within the family is undermined, and the traditional family becomes dysfunctional.

Unemployment and low income can be both a cause and a product of family breakdown. Male unemployment can be a major contributory factor in creating family stress (Fryer and Ullah, 1987; Jackson and Walsh, 1987; Fagin and Little, 1984). The cultural meanings attached to work play an important role in shaping masculinity - a man defines himself and his relationship to others in terms of what he does. Work provides him with identity, income and status (Box, 1987; Fagin and Little, 1984; Jahoda, 1979 and 1982). His role in the family is a reflection of his status in the world outside, and his traditional position as breadwinner in the family is dependent upon the wages he earns. An unemployed man's self-esteem may be further eroded if his wife works because her income emphasises his loss of status as

the main breadwinner, and at the same time it challenges the traditional gender division of labour. In any case, the benefits paid to an unemployed man are reduced *pro rata* if his wife is working, so he may discourage her from taking or continuing in paid employment where there is no financial advantage to the family.

Conversely, family breakdown can lead to unemployment, especially for women. Women in the UK with young children are handicapped by the scarcity and cost of child-care provision, which, combined with other expenses incurred such as clothing, fares and so on, can make it uneconomical to take part-time or low-paid jobs. ((Hardey and Glover, 1991; Pascall, 1986)

The system currently used to calculate entitlement to benefit in the UK, like the American welfare system, treats women preferentially if they are not cohabiting with a man. Perhaps more importantly, a single mother receives the benefit payable for her and her children directly, rather than through the father, which gives her greater personal control over her finances (See Appendix 1).

It has been argued (Oakley, 1974, Mitchell, 1971, Young and Wilmott, 1975 and others) that a woman's dual role in having paid work as well as unpaid domestic responsibilities has led to a deterioration in her position. It is still assumed that a woman's place is primarily in the domestic sphere, and thus, she is expected to undertake a considerable expansion of her working life whilst simultaneously being discriminated against in the world of work because of her additional domestic responsibilities. However, for the single mother whose only official source of income is welfare benefits, this argument is spurious. She is already fulfilling her 'traditional' gender role in being

homemaker and mother. The unequal nature of her earnings potential in the field of work outside of the home is not relevant to her because she does not necessarily want paid work, at least officially, if she derives no financial benefit. Taking formal employment, unless it is highly paid, means that she will end up worse off even before other expenses such as fares to work or child care costs have been taken into consideration.

Graham Allen (1985) argues that the attractions of marriage, or at least of a long-term stable union are evident, especially for females. He suggests that marriage eases domestic and childcare difficulties, and provides greater financial security, and that being in a partnership leads to greater integration into social life. Allen, like many other writers, makes the presumption, firstly, that a husband is employed and secondly, that he can earn an adequate wage. In the case of a man on poor and/or irregular wages, or where he has none, his presence does not ease financial burdens. On the contrary, as previously stated, he may be a drain on limited resources, especially if he keeps a disproportionate amount of the 'family income' for himself, and his departure may well be a welcome relief to the mother. This is particularly so where he is liable to drunkenness and/or violence. Allen also assumes that men are likely to undertake their share of childcare and household chores. Research (Oakley, 1974; Household Trends, 1985) shows that men rarely undertake even a small proportion of household chores or childcare; furthermore, the proportion is considerably lower in working class families. Therefore, a woman is likely not only to be better off financially if she becomes or remains single, but also the amount of unpaid work she is required to perform within the home is less since she does not have to wash, iron, cook and shop for the man.

A single mother may suffer the oppression of poverty, but she does not have to tolerate either the kind of subordination to men or domestic violence which is a common characteristic of working class marriage. A woman is able to be both homemaker and breadwinner, albeit in difficult circumstances, without reference to a man. Her status as a mother is sufficient in itself to provide her with both a home and an income, as well as an occupation within which her self esteem is maintained, if not actually enhanced because she is managing it single-handed.

If, as Juliet Mitchell (1971, p 118) argues, a woman's capacity for maternity is a definition of womanhood, then she may be happy to be so defined. Her status is determined by her reproductive role, and for many women this status is sufficient. They do not see their role as an substitute for "action and creativity", but as an attractive and acceptable alternative. Many working class women do not want to compete with men for jobs which, even if they exist at all, are likely to be tedious, repetitive and badly paid, and in any event, unlikely to leave them financially better off than they would be on welfare benefits. What the women do seek is enhanced status and better financial rewards for the job they are already doing, that of mothering their children. They do not see their mothering role as an "instrument of oppression" (Mitchell, 1971; p119), but rather as a vocation, if not of choice, then of necessity.

The presence of a man within the household, it is argued, provides a 'role model' for the male children (Dennis and Erdos, 1992). However, precisely what that role is evades definition when the man has no job, makes little or no contribution to the running of the house and is liable to outbursts of violent behaviour towards his family, including his children. If there has been stress within the family, a non-resident father may make a better role model for the

children if his departure from the family home leads to him becoming more stable and less volatile. A research project undertaken for several children's charities prior to the implementation of the 1993 Child Support Act, '*Children Come First?*' showed that more than half of the single mothers interviewed gave violence as the reason for the breakdown of relationships with the fathers of their children (Clarke, Craig and Glendenning, 1993).

There are many variables which must be taken into account in any attempt to fully analyse the incidence and causes of domestic violence. Research, however, does indicate that there is a direct causal link between male violence in the home and unemployment (Fagan et al, 1983; Walker, 1979; Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Whilst many other factors, such as educational levels, social class and personality disorders have to be taken into account, it should be noted that these other factors are in any case directly related to unemployment levels. Nonetheless, as violence within the family is frequently cited as the reason for marital breakdown, the connection between domestic violence and unemployment should not be ignored. Women who are or who have been subjected to male violence, and especially those for whom marriage or cohabitation provides little or no financial advantage, have little or nothing to gain from remaining in such a relationship. Furthermore, they are less likely to want to remarry following separation or divorce.

Women who were formerly married to unemployed or low paid men regard their poverty as a consequence of the low levels of benefits rather than as the result of their single parent status (Pascall, 1986; Shaw, in Hardey and Crow, 1991). They are accustomed to financial insecurity and hardship which they have experienced during their marriages. A lot of women have had considerable experience in managing on a tight budget during marriage (Shaw, 1991; Pahl, 1989). Many women say that they would still prefer to

be single even if their financial position could be improved through remarriage (Walby, 1990; Adams, 1976). They enjoy the "independence, pride and self-esteem, confidence, and a feeling of doing a hard job, that is, parenting, well" (Shaw, 1991). Welfare benefits may not be generous but they are a regular and reliable source of income which women can collect in their own right and dispose of as they see fit without reference to men. Financial autonomy is not something which they are willing to give up lightly (Adams, 1976; Clarke, Craig and Glendenning, 1993; Hardey and Crow, 1991). Shaw describes this autonomy as representing something more fundamental, "the achievement of being in control" (in Harvey and Crow, 1991; p148).

In both Europe and the US, black men are more likely to be in low-paid work or to be unemployed than their white counterparts. In the US in 1983 the unemployment rate for blacks was two and a half times that of whites (US Department of Labour, 1983). In 1984 in the UK 29% of West Indians were unemployed compared to 11% of whites (Labour Force Survey, 1984, Employment Gazette, both taken from Box, 1987). Unemployment has since risen, and increasing numbers from all ethnic groups are now affected by unemployment. However, the differentials between black and white remain. In 1992 in the UK 24% of blacks were unemployed compared to 11.5% of whites (Labour Force Survey, Social Trends 23, 1993). The highest numbers of unemployed males in all ethnic groups are the under twenties, closely followed by the age range 20 - 29 (Ibid).

CHAPTER 3. THE AMERICAN CASE

This chapter reviews some of the American literature on the ways in which black ghetto communities cope with poverty, unemployment and gender identity. There are marked similarities between the survival strategies observed within the Green Fields setting and poor black communities of America. The American welfare system, and in particular the AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children), gravitates against marriage and/or stable cohabiting relationships in much the same way as the British system. Constrained by unemployment and poverty, often as a result of racism, the black American male suffers serious disadvantages when attempting to support a family financially. Black American women adjust their reproductive strategies to survive with their children in the best way they can and for the majority this means rejection of traditional American nuclear family life. The situational constraints of ghetto life lead to high rates of marital instability and welfare dependency, compounded by racism and the stigmatisation of unwed mothers. What the Green Fields study demonstrates is that black ghetto life in America results not from a 'sub-culture' based on ethnic differences, but from responses to the economic conditions which prevail for the poor black American.

The American Case

In parts of the Caribbean, Central America and amongst the poor black communities in parts of the USA, matrifocal families represent a significant proportion of the total. In 1971 in the USA 29% of black households were female-headed, and matrifocal families represented around 50% of black Caribbean families (Gonzalez, 1970). 51.1% of all black children under the age of 18 in the United States live with a single mother (US Bureau of the Census, 1991, quoted in Bryant, 1994).

It is argued that the economic position of blacks in the New World is responsible for the high incidence of matrifocal families rather than a separate culture based upon ethnic or historical features (Liebow, 1967; Hannerz, 1969; Stack, 1970). Bowman, writing on post-industrial displacement amongst black workers in the US, refers to provider role strains within the family unit. Tracing the correlation between unemployment and family instability, he says that increasing numbers of black males, as they drop out of the labour force and lose personal income, find it difficult to meet expectations as primary providers for their families. This in turn leads to "growing feminisation" among black families, with many black single working mothers who are the sole economic providers for their families. Bowman shows a clear link between unemployment and family estrangement. Black males are hardest hit by growing 'post-industrial displacement', increasing unemployment levels, labour force attrition, and economic obsolescence, and this increasing marginality strains their ability to operate as primary providers for their families. Consequently, large numbers of black mothers become the main breadwinners for their children - 47% of all black families with children under 18 years old do not have man acting as breadwinner. (Bowman, Date?)

Elliot Liebow, in *Tally's Corner* (1967), a study of black "street corner men" in a poor area of Washington DC, argues that it is 'situational constraints' which are responsible for the high incidence of female-headed families, rather than a subculture which rejects 'mainstream values'.

Liebow maintains that it is the sheer hopelessness of their situation - unemployment, poverty and so on - which makes the men reluctant to even attempt to perform the traditional role as breadwinner and head of household. Marital relationships fail as a result of men having insufficient income to support a wife and family, rather than rejection of family values *per se*. Legal marriage entails rights and responsibilities which are respected by participants as well as by the community outside. Both men and women perceive the primary obligation of husbands as that of supporting their wives and children, whilst tied up with this is the symbolic value associated with providing that support. Liebow argues that for the man, self-respect, status, self-esteem, etc., are ultimately bound up with the ability to support his family. Furthermore, he says that, although the fact of supporting his family defines the principle obligation of a husband to his family, it is the expressive value carried by the providing of this support which elevates the husband to manliness.

Chronic shortage of money precludes most of Liebow's study group from fulfilling their 'manly role', and they frequently resort to heavy drinking, crime and 'womanising' in order to preserve an alternative and acceptable image of manliness. What may be regarded as a subculture of irresponsible behaviour and the need for instant gratification is, Liebow argues, an acceptance of the limited circumstances in which they live, combined with their inability to bring about any material change to their situation. Lacking the necessary skills, qualifications, experience or contacts with which to gain access to jobs with

either status or adequate pay, they have no incentive to invest in their own future, much less take upon themselves the responsibility for supporting a family. In fact, such an attempt only confronts them with their own failure. Liebow explains that for a man to stay married is to live with his failure. He is confronted by it day in and day out. The standards of manliness are out of his reach in the world in which he lives.

Although the women in Liebow's study also believe that a husband's main responsibility is to provide financial support for his family, they express a need for more than just this. They also want the man to be an active and enthusiastic participant in everyday domestic life, especially where the children are concerned. The wife requires public expression of his loyalty, but she also wants him to be head of the family, to make decisions, to take responsibility and to be reliable. The men are unable to perform the prescribed role, and when the women express their dissatisfaction with their men, sometimes in an attempt to make the men assert themselves, they are likely to provoke the men into acts of physical violence and aggression towards them.

Acts of violence by husbands towards their wives are considered normal and to some extent acceptable by both men and women in the community. Inevitably, in the face of such obstacles the marriages break down. The women may follow the breakdown of their marriages with a succession of sexual partners, but these relationships invariably break down for the same reasons as the first. Serial monogamy, with or without the legal tie of marriage, may be the consequence, but, Liebow argues, this does not imply a rejection of mainstream values, nor a distinctive 'sub-culture'. He says that the succession of partners which characterises marriage among the lower class does not constitute a distinctive cultural pattern, but rather that it is an

adaptation to the cultural model of the broader society as seen through the experience of repeated failure.

Liebow's conclusions are supported by Ulf Hannerz (1969) whose research amongst low-income blacks in a Washington ghetto district led him to conclude that situational constraints are the major factor in directing the behaviour of individuals. Hannerz does not entirely rule out cultural factors, which he believes would constitute a hindrance to change even if the situational constraints were removed. He makes the point that the ghetto dwellers are exposed to the 'cultural apparatus' of mainstream American values through the education and welfare system, television, newspapers and radio, as well as everyday personal contact with white families. (This latter applies rather more to the women than to the men.) The 'mainstream model' of family life is one in which the man's occupational status reflects upon his family; he brings home the resources for family consumption, mediates between it and the outside world and interprets that world to his family through his greater knowledge of it. He thus, holds the dominant and authoritative position in the family.

The proportion of working women within the ghetto community is much greater than in American society as a whole, and that it is the women who generally deal with welfare and other agencies when necessary, as well as taking care of bills, paying the rent and so on. In most instances the men are unable to derive status through employment, for any work which is available is likely to be insecure, unskilled and low paid, and does not carry any particular status. Like the men in Liebow's study, gender relations in the Washington ghetto are influenced not just by what the men cannot do but also by what they do instead. Masculinity in the ghetto is demonstrated by toughness, hard-drinking and free-roaming sexuality, component

characteristics which Hannerz points out are not in total contrast with mainstream American culture's expression of masculinity. Hannerz, like Liebow, found that conflict with wives and female partners was largely caused by the men's failure to live up to the expectations of women. He says that the women also take the mainstream model for their reference point. They nag about the men's inability to provide adequately for their families. Conflict regularly arises when the man spends money on such things as liquor and gambling in order to socialise within his male peer group, and consequently does not participate in family life in the way the woman expects. Furthermore, when he is home, he is frequently drunk. Hannerz says that the husband's inability to perform his role as breadwinner and his lack of participation in family life lead to conflict because the rights and obligations prescribed in mainstream American society, when applied in a situation where there is limited access to resources, create ambiguity and deviation in the definition of the conjugal relationship. Hannerz believes that the 'ghetto specific' male culture role, which may be seen as a compensation for household marginality, in itself contributes to further alienation from family life, as perceived within the mainstream model. The marriages break down, and the children usually remain with the mother. Although the children may have some contact with their fathers, this contact tends to become gradually less frequent until it is lost altogether.

Material conditions change very little for the family after the departure of the father, and many women feel better off alone after what may well have been a volatile relationship. The behaviour and attitudes of both men and women in the ghetto are an expression of a ghetto specific culture which is a by-product of situational constraints, namely unemployment and poverty. However, Hannerz argues that if those constraints were removed, then

mainstream values would, after a certain (unspecified) time-lag, erode the cultural attitudes of the ghetto.

A further study of how people survive in an impoverished black ghetto in the USA, *All Our Kin*, was carried out by Carol Stack, who lived with her baby son within the black community (Stack, 1970). Stack explored relations between men and women but, unlike Liebow and Hannerz, she writes from the perspective of the women in her study. Her findings are not very different from the conclusions drawn by Liebow and Hannerz. She agrees that unemployment emasculates individual men and undermines their role in the family. Stack also noted the high incidence, and the apparent acceptability, of domestic violence amongst her study group, and says that the most important single factor which affects interpersonal relationships between men and women in *The Flats* is unemployment. Losing a job or being unemployed month after month debilitates men's self-esteem and sense of independence and necessitates that they relinquish their role in the economic support of their families. They then become unable to assume a masculine role as defined by American society. Stack demonstrates, through case studies, that the welfare system actually works against marriage or formal cohabitation, since marriage and/or a resident male in the household normally prevents women and their children being eligible for state handouts. She argues that the women realise that welfare benefits and ties with kin networks provide greater security for them and their children than a male partner can.

Stack describes how the social network system provides mutual support for its members through the sharing of financial, domestic and child care resources. She notes a pattern of co-operation and mutual aid among kin, and she makes the hypothesis that domestic functions are carried out by clusters of kin who do not necessarily live together. The basis of these units

described by Stack is the domestic co-operation of close female members and the exchange of goods and services between male and female kin.

This support is vital to the survival of the individual, especially for the women and their children, but Stack goes on to explain how the support networks themselves create a barrier to marriage and/or cohabitation, since the resources which are monopolised by a marital or sexual union are removed from the kinship networks of an individual. Consequently, pressure is often applied to either or both parties to end a relationship in order that the group may maintain its customary demands upon the individual. The women themselves recognise this, and realise that the only way for a marriage to succeed is for the couple to distance themselves physically from their family and friends. However, if the partnership subsequently comes under pressure, the women and their children return, since the support of the network gives them more security than being dependent upon an individual man.

Recent research (Bryant, 1994) in another area of southern America also demonstrates the importance of female support networks to single mothers. Bryant (p28) defines support networks as "those who individuals rely on for support and those who rely on her support". Individual informal support networks include "concrete assistance, emotional support and information/guidance" (p66). Concrete assistance can take the form of babysitting, goods and other services; emotional assistance may be non-judgemental listening to feelings, thoughts and providing comfort in times of emotional turmoil. "Girlfriends" also offer mothers the opportunity for relaxation and fun. Bryant notes that "the majority of mothers' sources of social support are woman centred" (p70), whereas "male friends were identified as peripheral sources of concrete support - intimacy was not found in mother-male friend relationships" (p93). She says "mothers ... have

abandoned their efforts to achieve intimacy in heterosexual relations" (p94). As in the case of single mothers in the Green Fields study, Bryant found that "low-income African-American women value their role as mother which serves as a source of identity, meaning, self-worth and dignity" (P17), and, like the women of Green Fields, they "viewed welfare as a stable way to enable them to provide food and shelter for their families" (p87). She says that "the women's self-images derive from how they viewed themselves in relation to parenting and managing their households and their perceptions of themselves "in doing all that they can for their children". Their self images were found to be positive; "All of the mothers expressed self-liking and self-approval since they viewed themselves as good mothers and heads of households" (p89). They regard "their capacity to acquire resources to meet fully their families' needs as "the true test of their character" and thus, the "determinant of self-image was their ability to provide for their children" (p94). Bryant also found high rates of male violence, particularly in the form of vandalism and damage to property caused when (debarred) men tried to gain access to the women.

The research amongst poor black communities in the USA reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that constraints of unemployment and poverty lead to instability in heterosexual and marital family relationships, resulting in a disproportionately high number of matrifocal families amongst poor black communities compared to American society as a whole. Women increasingly rely on other women rather than men for support. Male violence is a common characteristic observed in all of these studies.

CHAPTER 4. THE SETTING

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Post-war Housing Policy in England and the neglect of the 'Outer-City' Estates.

The problems of urban poverty and deprivation have been given increasing attention over the last two decades. Inner city areas, in particular, have been the focus of many studies, (Short, 1982, Malpass and Murie, 1987, Malpass, 1986, and others). Many inner-city areas have been designated by government as areas of special need but there has been increasing awareness that outer city estates, especially those built in the fifties and sixties to house the overspill population and to replace housing stock lost in post-war slum clearance programmes, experience deprivation on a scale just as great, if not greater, than that of the inner-cities.

According to a recent report prepared by Duncan Maclennan of Glasgow University for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, poverty and deprivation are more widespread in the post-war outer-city estates than in the 'inner cities'. Maclennan says that government policy in emphasising and targeting aid primarily to the inner cities, perceived as centres of decline, is outdated and misleading. In a study of 10,000 households in six cities in the UK, he found that 73% of council tenants derived their main income from state benefits, and that they had little or no savings.

The CES interim report of the National Project on Outer Estates, published in 1984, shows that living standards on the outer estates have dropped more markedly in comparison to the national average, and that unemployment is higher in the outer estates than in the inner cities. But until very recently, outer-city estates were excluded from special help from central government sources.

Outer-city estates are characterised by the following problems; they are situated away from city centres, and this makes transport a problem for non car-owner. They are very large, and are predominantly local authority rented housing. They exhibit high levels of poverty, unemployment and dependency upon the welfare state. They are socially unbalanced in having low levels of non-manual and professional workers. The population of the estates is usually very young, with a high proportion of children and a disproportionate number of single parent families and finally, they tend to be overcrowded, especially for families with young children.

A characteristic feature of post-war council housing is the proliferation of high-rise blocks of flats. The proportion of residential properties with three or more stories had risen from 25% in 1953 to almost 50% by the 1960s and 70s (Burnett, 1978, Short, 1982). Increasing land costs led to high rise building being regarded as a way to reduce costs, and government subsidies were given as incentives to local authorities to encourage the new industrialised construction systems. The high-rise block was seen as a way of providing high density housing within the constraints brought about by shortage of land.

Following the building of high rise blocks by London County Council at Roehampton, (begun in 1951) which was regarded at the time as a great success, cities throughout Britain cleared away the slums and built in their places towering blocks of flats. For example, in London's East End, Newham Council embarked upon a massive slum clearance project to replace decaying housing stock. Between 1963 and 1968 implemented a programme to build 2200 new dwellings, which involved building nine 24 story high-rise blocks. Because of the massive scale of this commitment, they contracted

the work to a large national building contractor, Taylor Woodrow³, who used an industrial system of building. (Blowers et al, 1982) Industrialised building systems were popular with local authorities and with their large contractors, because they were labour efficient, and were not so dependant upon the weather as traditional building methods and, thus, profits were increased. The high-rise block became a conspicuous symbol of municipal achievement. (Short , 1982)

The popularity of high-rise building declined rapidly towards the end of the 1960s. Government subsidies for buildings of more than six stories were reduced following the 1967 Housing Subsidies Act. Further cutbacks in the Local Authorities house building programmes were brought about by devaluation in the same year, reducing the financial resources available to local councils. Finally, there was growing concern and criticism of high-rise blocks. The Inquiry into the *Ronan Point*⁴ disaster in May, 1967, drew attention to a number defects in the design and construction of high-rise building systems. Construction methods used had been largely cheap and shoddy. Poor ventilation, causing damp and condensation, lack of noise insulation and a generally poor overall finish led to increasing dissatisfaction with flat dwelling. Short states, "Flats were increasingly seen to be unpopular, expensive and ugly. The high-rise saga is an important tale in post-war council housing. The use of tower blocks affected the cost, location, design and, in fact, the whole character of council housing in the post-war period. The shiny towers, initially the sign of achievement, became the sign of failure and incompetence." (Short, 1982).

³Taylor Woodrow is one of several large construction companies in the UK which make large contributions to Tory party funds.

⁴On May 16th, 1967 a small gas explosion in one of the flats in a 22 story high-rise block, Ronan Point, built by Taylor Woodrow in Newham, London caused a substantial part of the structure to collapse 'like a pack of cards'. Four people were killed and seventeen were injured

The tower blocks had offered a solution to the design of high density, low cost housing needs, but in social terms they were regarded as a disaster. Vandalism was, and still is, widespread, largely due to the lack of 'defensible space'. For families with children, lack of available safe play areas which can be easily supervised, and the difficulties in creating or maintaining any sense of community ties show the extent to which the planners and designers had ignored the real needs of the tenants, most of whom, in any case, wanted a traditional house with its own entrance and preferably a small garden.

In 1987 the Department of the Environment decided that, although it was prepared in principle to offer limited funds to the outer-city areas, approval for individual schemes would have to await a review of inner-city priority areas. The Inner City Programme Committee, in September, 1987, deferred decisions on individual cases, pending the availability of clearer information on social needs and national policy guidelines. Limited funding from central government did not become available until 1988. In the meantime, local initiatives to set up improvement schemes within the communities themselves are frequently hampered by the apathy which is characteristic in communities of people facing social and economic deprivation. The people most in need are least likely to benefit from these schemes. Having little control over many aspects of their own lives, they lack the initiative and organisational resources necessary to bring about major changes.

The outer city estates were built, mostly during the fifties and sixties, on the outer periphery of major cities to re-house communities who were affected by the post-war slum clearance programmes. However, the very location of many of these estates created problems for residents from the very beginning. The local authorities in the post-war era were primarily concerned with the building of houses, i.e. dwellings, and there was a marked lack of

interest in the provision of community facilities, such as health and social centres, or with adequate shopping facilities. Furthermore, as John Short points out, "Planning controls on industry, commerce, shopping and large entertainment facilities have operated differently from controls on residential development. Houses have suburbanised, the rest have not. The net result is that much of the post-war housing built on the edges of British cities is far from the essential services." (J. R. Short, 1982)

The planning authorities worked on the assumption that families had access to car transport, which is often not the case, especially in low income households. Even in households where a car is available, it may not be available to the remainder of the household if the wage-earner uses it to get to and from work. The effect of the move to the outer-city estates was to isolate many people, and especially women at home with young children, from their families and former friends as well as from many of the facilities which they needed.

Green Fields

More than 22 per cent of the population of Northeaston live in four deprived outer city estates which together house a population of 64,367. There is a general housing shortage in the city, which has a council house waiting list in excess of 18,000. The average wait is two and half years for houses, two years for flats. The shortest wait is for accommodation for single old aged pensioners who are generally housed within six months. Moving the elderly into suitable housing is given some priority because it frequently releases larger dwellings for younger families.

Green Fields estate is situated three and a half miles to the North West of the city, between the city centre and open farmland to the north. The estate is relatively small by national standards with only 3,500 dwellings, of which 98.6 per cent are council owned. The estate was constructed during the 1960's according to the "Radburn" estate design (after Radburn, New Jersey, US), which segregates the houses and pedestrians from roads and vehicles. 65 per cent of dwellings are houses, the rest are blocks of flats, a mixture of low and 28 high rise. The estate was originally built in four distinct stages, although the buildings are all of the same type - system built Wimpey 'no-fines' concrete slab houses. ('no-fines' refers to the type of cement used in their construction). These houses are grim in appearance, and have no distinguishing features to relieve the monotony of their facades. The houses are mainly built in "front to back" rows of between four and eight houses, divided by narrow (12 feet wide or less) walkways, which accumulate litter and attract packs of stray dogs. Dog excrement adds to the mess. Although many houses were originally built without front gardens, the City Council in 1989/90 erected fences along most of the walkways, giving each house its own small area of enclosed (and 'defensible') space. This has

brought some small improvement to some parts of the estate by reducing the accumulation of wind-blown litter.

Unlike other outer city estates, such as Easterhouse in Glasgow, Green Fields is not significantly overcrowded. Only 5.9 per cent of households on Green Fields have a ratio of 1 or 1.5 persons per room, compared to Easterhouse's 24.9 percent, and although this figure is not high for an outer estate, it is still nearly twice the national average. All houses were built with inside toilet facilities, and many were built with electric under floor heating systems, which proved to be inefficient and expensive to run, and from the beginning were rarely used. In many instances, these have subsequently been removed. As a consequence, dampness, condensation, water penetration and cracks in the structure of the houses are common complaints. There is a backlog of repair orders, with long delays, six months on average, before repairs are carried out, which adds to the high level of dissatisfaction amongst the tenants.

From the very beginning, Green Fields proved to be a 'problem estate', and it has deteriorated since. It is generally unpopular, with high levels of crime and vandalism and a very high turnover of tenancies compared to other estates in the city. The annual turnover in tenancies is over 9 per cent, although some areas of the estate are relatively settled and many tenants move within the estate itself.

There are eight high rise (12 -20 floors) blocks of flats, each with six flats on each level, and there are several medium rise blocks. All are built of concrete, some with small balconies. Vandalism has been a major problem in the flats and efforts have been made to provide better security, for example, by means of video-operated '*ansaphones*' with closed-circuit TV and

automatic doors. The automatic doors and the security systems themselves create two new problems, notwithstanding that are regularly out of order due to vandalism. The video camera which is placed to show who is entering and leaving the block is accessible to all tenants, which means that they can check the comings and goings of their neighbours. This in its turn allows thieves to break into their neighbours' flats, comfortable in the knowledge that the tenant is out of the way. If the tenant returns unexpectedly, they are forewarned by the closed-circuit TV and can quickly get out! The lifts, most of which smell heavily of urine and sometimes worse because they are often used as toilets, are also often vandalised, which can mean elderly and other residents are unable to leave their homes if they are unable to negotiate the many flights of stairs. The occupants of the flats, many of whom are elderly and living alone, feel constantly threatened, fear violence and theft and are nervous of opening their doors. Their fears are actually justified as the incidence of crime within the tower blocks is very high. The public walkways and stairways, which are regularly covered with graffiti, are used by disaffected young people for whom the landings and stairs are meeting places out of the weather for the distribution and use of drugs. Discarded needles are often lying around the stairways.

Although there are grassed over open spaces between some blocks of housing and around the high rise blocks, these are normally covered with litter and dog dirt and are unsuitable for small children to play on. There is inadequate provision of safe play areas for young children. Groups of children, teenagers and unemployed youths characteristically roam around the estate, throwing stones at dogs and breaking anything which they chance upon. Gang warfare is not uncommon. There are no purpose-built recreational facilities other than three pubs.

Shopping facilities are poor, although there have been some improvements made in the last three years. However, for mothers with small children, a visit to the shops involves either a lengthy walk or a bus journey. Fewer than thirty per cent of households have a car. In many cases women with small children have to rely on visits from the "Happy Van", which is a mobile shop selling cigarettes, sweets, crisps and basic provisions such as bread and baked beans. Facilities for buying fresh meat and fruit and vegetables are sparse, and consequently it is difficult for some families to provide an adequate diet. For mothers with small children, especially those who are living at subsistence level the lack of resources for shopping exacerbate the problems of living at poverty level. New business initiatives are discouraged because the tenants lack sufficient disposable income to make them viable. The few small shops run by individual traders have their windows protected by metal shutters to prevent theft and breakage, and the traders complain that their profits are seriously eroded by shoplifting. Lack of competition keeps prices high and choices limited.

Many families use mail order catalogues, which offer free weekly credit but non-competitive prices and expensive weekly credit systems are the only means of providing clothing and toys for themselves and their children. The alternative is "*shopacheques*"⁵, and this leads to many women incurring debts which are difficult to repay from their meagre incomes.

Fuel disconnection for non-payment is commonplace, and when this occurs the debtor usually has to make arrangements for the arrears to be repaid direct from the DSS on a weekly basis. This is then deducted from their weekly benefit, reducing weekly income still further. Since this inevitably

⁵ Shopacheques are purchased on credit from an agent. they can be spent at their face value at a limited number of local shops. The debt is repaid in weekly instalments at a high rate of interest.

leads to the debtor being unable to pay the next bill, families are trapped in a cycle of inescapable debt. As a last resort, gas and electricity suppliers will install a token slot meter. The price paid for the unit or therm via these meters is calibrated to recover arrears, and is likely to be much higher than the standard price. The "pay-as-you-use" slot meter is actually quite popular for many people on a small income because it prevents them running up more bills that they are unable to pay and thus provides a sense of security. The electricity board has reduced theft of fuel by placing paper stickers on electricity meter which tear if the meter has been tampered with, and also by giving a reward of £50 to meter readers for each detection of theft.

More than 70% of households on Green Fields are in receipt of housing benefit. Many tenants have their rent paid directly to the housing department. This serves to increase their feelings of dependency, and reduces both their disposable and their personal control over their finances. Amongst the rest there is a high rate of rent arrears as people struggle to provide the essentials of life from very small incomes.

The unemployment rate in 1981 was around 30 per cent, three times the national average, and has been rising since. Some parts of the estate by 1988 had up to 80% unemployment. (Inner City Programme; Review of priority areas. Report of the City Planning Officer and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive, Inner City Programme Committee, 1988) Unemployment statistics only measure the number of people signing for work. Single-parents, the disabled, the over 55s and the retired do not have to sign on, and for this reason unemployment statistics are not a reliable measure of numbers of people who are welfare dependants. More than eighty per cent of children are claiming free school meals, which places Green Fields ahead

of the poorest of the other outer city estates, which have rates of 57 and 35 per cent respectively. This means that more than eighty per cent of children in the area are from families whose only source of income is DSS Income Support. (Families receiving other kinds of DSS benefit, such as Unemployment or Sickness Benefit receive an allowance to cover the cost of school dinners rather than free meals.)

The houses

The interior of the houses in Green Fields are all very similar (See Figure 1). On the ground floor there is an entrance lobby leading into a living room. In most cases it is necessary to pass through the living room to enter the kitchen, which is usually at the front of the house overlooking the path. The hall and stairway is accessed from the kitchen. Upstairs there is a lavatory, bathroom and two or three bedrooms. The walls are very thin and there is little chance of privacy. If the TV set is switched off (a rare occurrence except at night) conversation can be overheard from adjacent houses. A small number of houses have four bedrooms and are a little larger downstairs. These houses are typically at the end of a terrace, and are more prone to damp than those in the middle.

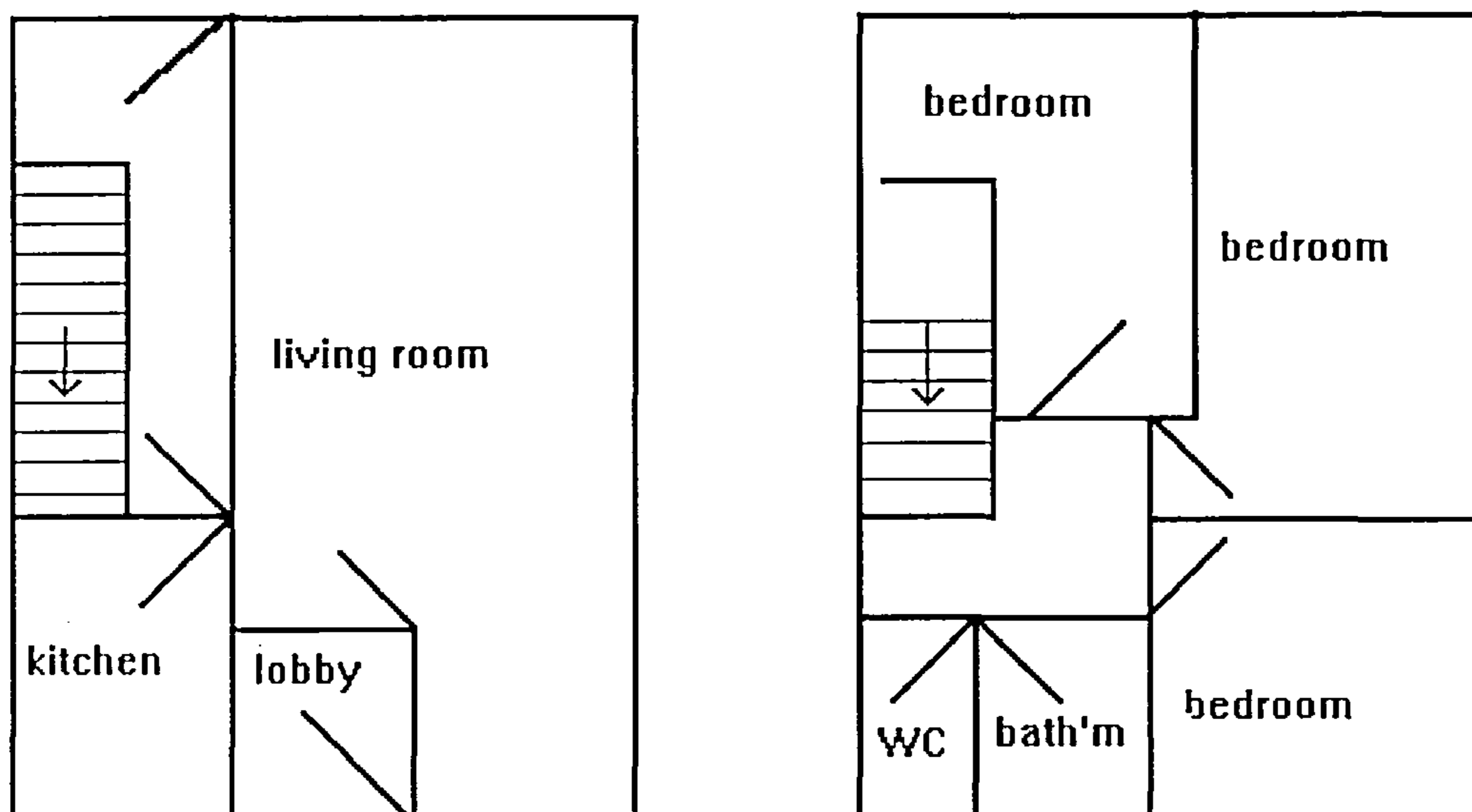


Figure 1.

The outsides of the houses are maintained by the city council, and tend to be in a fairly good state of overall repair as long as they are occupied. Empty houses are boarded up in an attempt to prevent vandalism, although this rarely deters determined efforts on the part of youths who inevitably break in.

Tenants take a greater interest in the internal furnishings than the condition of the house itself or its decor. Few of the 96 women interviewed for this study own domestic items of any great value other than a TV set and possibly a video recorder. About a third have hi-fi equipment, always placed in the living room. Of the houses visited, about a quarter have little or no furniture (other than beds) in any room apart from the living room. The living room is the only room normally entered by guests, and for that reason the condition of the living room furniture is important. A new or fairly new three-piece suite indicates respectability and carries status. Women almost always comment on each others suite. The suite itself, if not an indicator of prosperity, at least demonstrates that the household is not absolutely poverty stricken. Women

will put themselves into serious debt, often through catalogues or *shopacheques*, to replace a worn out sofa.

One of the reasons given by her female neighbours for ostracising Glenys was that "*her settee stinks*". It does. She has neither carpets nor curtains and the little furniture Glenys possesses has been donated by charity, and is in extremely poor condition. Her house smells of urine, dogs and stale milk (her brother keeps a large aggressive dog in her kitchen). Although several other houses visited were similarly squalid, they are not typical.

Few homes have a 'dining' table. Meals are normally eaten in the lounge in front of the television set; the children eat from plates on the floor and the adults from their laps. Because of lack of space families rarely eat together at the same time. The television is always the focal point of the room, with the suite arranged around it. There is occasionally a coffee table and usually a variety of 'ornaments' arranged in prominent positions. Ornaments, typically pottery dogs and cats, souvenir ash trays, glass vases (but rarely with flowers in them) and fussily dressed dolls, are sometimes placed in the window, facing outwards for the benefit of passers-by rather than for the people inside the room. Otherwise they are placed symmetrically on the mantelpiece. Such ornaments are typically received as gifts for birthdays etc. from family members or other women.

With a few notable exceptions, in most cases the living room is immaculately clean. A woman is judged by her neighbours and friends according to the condition of her living room. Its contents and condition are a source of either great pride or great embarrassment to her, and no matter how clean and tidy, they almost always apologise for it anyway. Even where there are no sheets

on the children's beds and no floor-coverings anywhere else, the lounge will be furnished in as ostentatious a manner as money will allow.

Chapter 5. The Case Studies

VICKY

Vicky is twenty one years old, and is the mother of a baby boy, Jay, aged twenty four months. She has lived in her present house since shortly after her divorce one year ago. She previously lived in a council house on an estate in east with her ex-husband, Gerry, and their baby son. Gerry moved out as a result of a court injunction following his extreme physical violence towards her, and soon after she was re-housed on Green Fields to escape further threats of violence from him.

She has two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and a lounge and kitchen below. There is a small rear garden. She has few friends on the estate and sees her neighbours only occasionally. Her family do not live in the city. Her telephone is disconnected for non-payment of an outstanding bill, which she is now paying off in instalments. Without a telephone she has difficulty in maintaining contact with her family and the few other friends she has.

Vicky is very attractive and dresses smartly. Her son is also always beautifully turned out. Her appearance is not typical of the women of Green Fields; she tends to cover her arms and legs which gives her an appearance of prim and demure respectability, but in fact she does so to hide unsightly tattoos with which her ex-husband 'adorned her'. Her appearance, being rather different from the other women around her, may partly explain her relative isolation. She has lived in the city for five years, although she came originally from south of the Humber, where her mother, now remarried, sister and brother still live. Her father, who has also remarried has a house in

Nottingham, but works in the Middle-East. Her family background is different from the majority of Green Fields women, and the other case studies.

Vicky's father, David, is a qualified engineer who was employed by an Aberdeen based oil company. He commands an excellent salary, and her childhood family home was a large detached house in a suburb of a north Lincolnshire town where the families of both of her parents lived. She was the third and youngest child in the family, having an older sister and brother. Vicky's mother, Mavis, is a well-dressed, smart and attractive woman, and David is an educated man, and is charming and handsome. Both are now in their late forties. Vicky's childhood was, until she was thirteen, relatively stable, affluent and comfortable, in contrast to that of most of the women of Green Fields.

David's regular absences from the marital home in the early eighties because of his job (he maintained a small flat in Aberdeen which he used Monday to Friday) led to increasing tensions in the marriage, and ultimately to its breakdown following scenes of violence. Vicky says that the violence was frequently initiated by her mother, who she describes as a very jealous woman, but that they were escalated by her father, especially if he had been drinking. A particularly violent fight, witnessed by Vicky at the age of twelve, led to David walking out, and he never returned permanently to live with them. Following the divorce and the sale of the matrimonial home, Mavis moved with the three children to a modern semi-detached house in their home town, whilst David moved permanently into his Aberdeen flat. Mavis found it difficult to adapt to her reduced circumstances and income, despite the wages she had from her clerical job and generous provision which her ex-husband had made for her and the children by way of maintenance payments, and she became very bitter towards him. Mavis was a reluctant

party to the divorce, as she had hoped to get her husband to return and make a fresh start with her. Only when she discovered that David was having an affair with an old friend of the family did she finally accept that he was not going to come back. Vicky's sister, (then aged nineteen) was working as a make-up and beauty consultant at a local department store, and her brother (then aged eighteen) was serving an engineering apprenticeship with day-release at the local Polytechnic.

Vicky reacted very badly to the emotional events surrounding the family, and became increasingly disturbed. At the age of thirteen she was arrested for shoplifting, and at around the same time contracted genital warts, which her mother describes as the "last straw". Mavis did not want to have to accompany her daughter for treatment at the local urogenital clinic as she was afraid that she might be seen by somebody who recognised her and that her own reputation would suffer. She was unable to cope with her daughter's behaviour, which she felt was out of control, so she eventually placed Vicky into the care of the Social Services. The social services placed Vicky with a local foster mother, Pat, who had two younger children. The foster placement was successful, and she and Pat, her former foster mother remain friends. Shortly before Vicky reached her sixteenth birthday she left Pat's care since social services take no responsibility for children once they reach the age of sixteen if they have left full time education.

Determined to be independent, she moved into a bedsit. Soon afterwards, she became involved with a group of youths who were part of a gang led by a notorious local crook, then aged twenty two, with whom Vicky became infatuated. She and the gang leader had a sexual affair in which he dominated her completely, and treated her with contempt and much violence. When he and his friends broke into an empty hostel one night, she was

waiting nearby and was arrested with him and the others. The man was remanded in custody pending trial at the crown court, and Vicky was released on bail.

A further attempt to live with her mother failed - Mavis could not accept Vicky's need to go out and mix with friends of her own age for fear that she would engage in promiscuous behaviour or get into "more trouble", so she locked her in the house while she went to work. Depressed and angry through isolation, whilst attempting to telephone Pat Vicky broke the lock which her mother had placed on the telephone. The result was a heated row in which Vicky lost her temper, threatened Mavis and was arrested and charged with criminal damage (the telephone) and threats to kill.

Barely sixteen, she spent the night in a police cell, and appeared in court the next morning. She was rescued from custody by Pat, who arrived at the request of the duty solicitor, who coincidentally happened to be one of Pat's personal friends. Pat once again offered Vicky a home.

Shortly after her seventeenth birthday, Vicky appeared in the Crown Court, charged with aiding and abetting the break-in at the hostel. She was sentenced to four months youth custody which she served at a women's prison near Wakefield. The trial was attended by her father who had only then been told (by Pat) of his daughter's plight, and Pat, both of whom were shocked by the severity of the sentence, especially because of Vicky's age and circumstances at the time of the crime. An appeal was lodged, but she had served her sentence before it could be heard. Vicky was very much influenced by her prison experiences. She was exposed for the first time to drugs and was taught how to perpetrate credit card and cheque book fraud amongst other things. Although she hated the experience of prison, she does

she speak fondly of the friendships she made with the other women inmates, and the camaraderie that she enjoyed. In fact she says she has not, before or since, enjoyed the friendship of women in that way. However, she has not maintained contact with any of the women she met in prison, apart from a brief visit to one of them soon after she was released from prison. She was visited in prison by David and Pat, to whom she wrote regularly.

Pat once again offered Vicky a home with her and her family after her release from prison, this time at their new house in another city, which Vicky accepted. Vicky saw this as an opportunity to make a fresh start in a new town, where she did not have to live up to her reputation or face the emotional trauma of seeing her mother. She moved to the new city and lived for the next year with Pat and her family. She had no contact with her mother, sister or brother in the meantime. Her father phoned occasionally.

After almost a year living with her foster family, Vicky applied for a flat from the council, and as her ex-prison and probation status gave her priority on the waiting list, she was almost immediately offered an attractive flat in a converted house near the city centre. She was then aged eighteen.⁶ Following the move into the flat, she made contact with her natural mother and sister and brother, and occasional visits took place between them.

A series of brief sexual relationships with various men followed her move. These relationships were, without exception, of a violent nature, and she was frequently beaten up. Her self-esteem was very low, and she says that she actively sought out men with criminal background, since with them she did not

⁶Contrary to statements recently made by certain government ministers, priority on council housing waiting lists for young single women is rarely given in cases of teenage pregnancy. However, priority is given to teenage girls who are leaving council care or imprisonment, as they may not have a 'family' to return to.

have to hide or justify her own criminal convictions and prison term, as she felt she had to with "decent men". She says that she felt at the time that she belonged in the company of criminals, and that the violence she experienced was "what she deserved". The few brief relationships she had with non-violent, non-criminal men were ended by her, as she could not bring herself to describe her past. She eventually became involved with Gerry, whom she married when she was five months pregnant with baby Jay. Gerry, was in his late twenties and divorced. He came from an estate in the city, and had numerous of convictions for burglary, theft and grievous bodily harm. His former wife had divorced him because of extreme domestic violence.

Gerry regularly subjected Vicky to violent attacks, especially when he was drunk. She says he was "paranoid about her talking to other men", and often accused her of "screwing around". On several occasions he 'head-butted' her in pubs for no apparent reason other than to "show off to his mates". She became so afraid of his violent outbursts that she avoided talking to other men, whether he was there or not. Gerry's attacks continued during her pregnancy, and afterwards, when he would even hit her whilst she had the baby in her arms. She was hospitalised for the third time when baby Jay was just a few weeks old. She describes how a nurse warned her that if she stayed with Gerry he would "end up killing her". She replied that "if she left him he would kill her anyway, so what choice did she have?" She lived in constant dread of his violent rages, especially when he was drunk, but was afraid to leave for fear that he would find her and kill her, and anyway she had no means of support for her baby. She became very depressed. She felt unable to cope on her own, and was totally dependant upon Gerry and, to a lesser extent, his extended family. Ashamed of the way she was living, she

once again lost contact with her natural family, and by this time, her foster mother as well.

Gerry's last attack on her left her with her arm seriously injured, caused when he pushed her through a pane of glass. She says he was still hitting her and throwing her about while she waited for the ambulance, and that her house was covered in blood. She spent ten days in hospital, and is left with an unsightly scar and partial loss of feeling in her left hand.⁷

Soon after she left hospital Vicky started divorce proceedings against Gerry. She says it was not because of the violence - she had "got used to that" - it was because she no longer loved him and because he did not "turn her on any more". After a delay of seven months, a court injunction eventually banned her husband from the house, and she has not seen him since he collected his things under police escort. He was never charged for any of his violent attacks on her, despite the severity of her injuries. He has had no further contact either with her or his son, and she believes that he has returned to his former wife, whom, she has heard, he is beating as often as before.

In the meantime, Vicky has started a relationship with Len, a man in his forties, who is obviously very fond of her and who gives her emotional, practical and financial support. Len is married although he has never lived with his wife, who is terminally ill. They married three years ago when her illness was diagnosed in order that he would have legal rights to their illegitimate daughter after her death.

⁷Vicky was not offered counselling whilst she was in hospital. A hospital spokesperson advised me that whilst it is their policy to allocate a nurse on a personal "one to one basis" to each patient, and that the nurse may suggest that a patient speaks to a counsellor. Because of patient confidentiality they are not allowed to inform counsellors or social workers unless the patient agrees.

Vicky has been seeing Len for nearly nine months, although they do not cohabit. His daughter lives with him at his parents house. He and Vicky have discussed setting up home together after the death of his wife which is likely to be in the near future, but both feel it is inappropriate to do so whilst his wife's life hangs in the balance.

Vicky has her rent paid direct by the Housing Benefit Department at the City Council and receives £53 each week in Income Support. Len gives her a little money most weeks, and he has provided her with household equipment, carpets and so on. He has also helped her to repay some of the debts (fuel, telephone and HP arrears) outstanding from when she was married to Gerry.

She dresses herself and her son mainly through shoplifting. She has now been convicted three times for shoplifting offences and is paying off fines at the rate of two pounds per week. A further two pounds a week has to be paid to the court for a fine for not having a TV licence imposed more than a year ago. She has been warned by her probation officer that if she persists in her habit of shoplifting she may not be so fortunate in escaping a custodial sentence in the future. Her attitude towards this, as with many other aspects of her life, is fatalistic - she does not feel that it is within her control. She sometimes avoids the city centre for several weeks at a time, but then, when depression "gets on top of her", she goes on a "shoplifting spree". She tends to steal luxury goods rather than basics, most often clothes for baby Jay and occasionally for herself.

She does now have some contact with her family. She sees her father every four to six months when he is in the UK and her mother every eight to ten weeks. She always goes to her mother, rather than allowing her mother

to visit her at home. She says she would be ashamed if Mavis saw the estate and the house she lives in, and with some humour, that her postal address, 'Green Fields' "*sounds nice to someone who has never been to the city and seen it!*" Since her mother's recent remarriage relations between her and Vicky have improved.

She sees Pat once or twice each month, and goes to her when she needs help, advice or a shoulder to cry on or when she finds she cannot cope with baby Jay. Occasionally they go out for a drink together but more typically they have Jay with them so they spend the time at Pat's house or go for a coffee or shopping together. Vicky says that she likes to be with Pat because she can talk to her and that Pat does not judge her or make her feel bad. She welcomes Pat's advice and help with Jay. She says she would not tell her natural mother if she was in trouble as it would just cause more rows. She does not mix much with the women in her neighbourhood as she says that they think she is "*stuck up*", and she does not want them to know about her past. Len and Pat are her main sources of support.

Len has recently refitted and redecorated her kitchen for her and dug over and turfed her small garden. Although she sees him on most days, he stays overnight only occasionally. In addition to his other activities, Len works four evenings each week as the singer with a band.

Vicky spends much of her time alone with Jay. She takes him to a day nursery three mornings each week, an arrangement made for her by social services who were contacted by the probation department. She had told her probation officer that she was finding him difficult to cope with. She is not allowed to leave him there because he is too young to be covered by their insurance policy, so she has to remain with him on each occasion. She has

not made friends with the other mothers there because they drop off and collect their children later. She says they are *"not very friendly"* towards her.

Jay is a very demanding child and she looks forward to the time when he can go to nursery without her so that she can *"get a break from him"*. She does not want to have any more children, at least in the foreseeable future, and does not envisage remarriage, although she hopes that she and Len will eventually live together. She does not like living in her present house but does not see any realistic prospect of ever being able to move away unless Len finds a new house for her. Although she says that she does not want to be dependent upon him indefinitely, she recognises that her choices are very limited.

Vicky is aware that her criminal record will make it impossible for her ever to get a job, and her only work experience was burying dead pigs while she was in prison. She is resigned to living on benefits indefinitely, although she says she would like to *"do better for the sake of the baby"*.

She blames her relative isolation on the estate and lack of adult company for regular fits of depression, and she says that she sometimes contemplates suicide, especially when Jay is *"playing her up"*. She has a lot of difficulty controlling her son and says she wishes she could *"manage him better"*, especially at night, when he often refuses to sleep. She smacks him several times most days, but with very little effect. At times he deliberately provokes her, particularly when he cannot get her attention. He is very strong for his age and has an extremely loud voice. He enjoys slamming doors, sometimes for half an hour at a time, which Vicky says *"gets on her nerves"*. He does this partly from boredom and partly to gain attention. Vicky tends to shout at him, and ultimately to hit him, (rather than to distract him and divert his

attention to something else). He takes little notice of her, even when she does hit him. She fears, particularly when he throws tantrums, that he will *"turn out like his father"*, and at times seems to be afraid of him.

She is now in fairly good health, although her diet and that of her son is limited and not very nutritious. She regularly skips meals, and buys a bag of chips from the chip shop for her and Jay's lunch. This is rarely because she is short of money, as Len gives her enough, but usually because she *"can't be bothered"*. Len tries to make sure that her fridge is well-stocked, but Vicky only cooks a *"proper"* meal when Len is there to share it with her.

She drinks a few beers and some wine at home most nights and smokes about fifteen cigarettes a day, always bought in packets of ten. She also smokes cannabis *"when she can get it"*, usually with Len. She says that *"drink and dope help [her] to sleep"*.

She does have some contact with social services because of her probation order but she hates and fears them. She is afraid that if she does not keep up appearances that they will put her baby in care. At present this seems unlikely. The child is physically well cared for, but there is the risk that her persistent shoplifting may ultimately end with a prison sentence. In this case there would be a strong possibility that she would lose the child.

Vicky's fatalistic attitude is a reflection of the lack of control she feels she has over any area of her life. Things happen to her - she does not make them happen. Even the way she struggles to manage her obstreperous child is symptomatic of her attitude of being unable to control her life. He does things, and she responds. She does not attempt to control his behaviour, rather she reacts to it. Unfortunately, she tends to pay attention to him when

he is misbehaving or being destructive, rather than when he is being co-operative. Since he is generally seeking her attention this serves to encourage the negative aspects of his behaviour rather than the positive.

She has no concept of being able to predict or determine her future. Her future with Len is ultimately tied up with the death of his child's mother. She tends to avoid discussing her future, probably because she is aware that it is to be determined by another's personal tragedy. This situation emphasises the fatalistic nature of Vicky's life. She lives from day to day⁸.

⁸ Len's wife died in May 1993. Vicky's situation remains unchanged.

VERA

Vera is forty year old. She is the mother of five boys, aged 19, 18, 16, 13 and 5 years. She lives with her children in a house with three bedrooms, living room, kitchen and bathroom and a small 'garden'. She has always lived in the Green Fields area. She grew up on an estate which borders Green Fields, and where her mother still lives. She sees her mother several times a week. Vera has seven brothers, five older than her and two younger. All but one of them have moved away to other parts of the city. She sees the brother who remained nearby on a day to day basis but has less frequent contact with the others. Vera's father deserted her mother when she was six years old and she has not seen him since. Vera says he was a violent man who subjected his wife to regular beatings, especially if he had been drinking. Vera cannot remember much else about him, other than the fact that she and her brothers were always afraid of him. They tried to keep out of his way.

"We didn't see much of him really. He used to be in the boozers a lot. Mind you, when he was there we used to play out. He used to beat the living daylights out of me brothers. Not for any real reason - just cos he was like that."

So far as Vera knows her mother divorced her father several years later. Vera admires her mother, who managed to raise eight children on her own in circumstances of great hardship.

"I don't know how me Mam managed really, what with all us kids. But she did. We always had something to eat, no matter how skint she was. Mind you she was old before her time. She always looked old and tired to me. She looks better now really. She used to do some cleaning at a factory early

mornings, and then offices at night. She did that for years, till she got too old to carry on. She was always a good woman, though, me Mam. She'd do anything for anyone, even though she had nowt herself. And she always made sure that none of us got into trouble. Not that she hit us or anything like that. I suppose we was just scared of letting her down. "

Vera left school when she was fifteen without any formal qualifications. She took a job at Zerny's dry cleaners as a spotter (Spot remover) where she remained for nearly five years.

Shortly before her twentieth birthday she became pregnant to the boyfriend she had been seeing for three years. She married him just before the baby was born. Her husband was a van driver's assistant. Another baby followed a year later.

They began to quarrel all the time after he lost his job and Vera left him soon after. Vera says that they argued about money and because he was *"under her feet all the time"*.

Six months later she moved in with another man, with whom she had her third baby. She lived with him for three years. This relationship broke down for the same reason as the first - he became unemployed, and lack of money and the tensions of having him around her day and night just *"got on her nerves"*. This time it was the man who left, leaving Vera in her house on Green Fields with the three children. She lived with just her children for the next year, after which she met and moved in with a man who worked at the Croda oil refinery. She had her fourth child about a year later.

This relationship lasted for two years. His work at the oil refinery was on a casual basis and his wages were very low and irregular. However, Vera says that the biggest problem with him was that he was very possessive and *"cramped her style too much"*.

Vera is an extremely gregarious person, and enjoys the company of other women. The man resented her going out and about with her friends, and hated it if she had *"a night out with the girls"*. This led to Vera becoming increasingly frustrated arguments followed. After two years she left him, and moved in with another man, her fourth partner.

This fourth partnership lasted five years. The man worked at a local pickles factory and although his wages were *"not brilliant"* they were regular. She says he was a *"decent sort of bloke"* who always treated her well, and was good to her kids. They had a baby together, Vera's fifth son, who is now aged five. However, Vera says he was prone to being moody and was not always easy to live with. She left him after five years because she says she *"got bored with him"*.

Vera lived on Green Fields with each of her former partners. All of the men are still living on the estate and she sees each of them *"from time to time"*. She says she is on good terms with all of them. None of them is working at the present time.

Although Vera's relationships with her ex-partners are good, only one of the men, the father of the sixteen year old, has any contact with their children. This son visits his father occasionally, and he sometimes *"gets him a pair of shoes or something when he can"*. The other children know who their fathers are, but do not have any direct contact. Vera says that she

sometimes points out the men to the children if they "*see them around*", but "*nothing more than that.*"

None of the fathers pay any maintenance for the children. Her former husband, the father of the two oldest boys used to pay a small amount through the courts but this stopped when each of them left school. Vera did not gain any advantage from these payments, however, because the same amount was deducted from her DSS benefits. Vera has never made attempt to get maintenance for the other children, since none of the men was in a position to pay anything. In any case, there would have been no reason for her to do so since any money paid would have reduced her benefits by a commensurate amount.

Vera receives only £68.64p each week to support her family. The rent for her house is paid through the Housing Benefit scheme, and she receives free school meals for her three children who are still at school. All benefits, including child benefits for her two older sons stopped when they left school at the age of 16, despite the fact that they are unable to claim benefit in their own right before the age of 18. Neither has been able to obtain a place on the government's YTS scheme. There are insufficient no places available. Consequently, Vera is required to support herself, three adult sons and two children from the £68.64p which is officially intended for herself and the three schoolboys. She supplements her income by working as a cleaner at a small local hotel, where she is paid an hourly rate of £1.50p.

Vera is actually very well organised with her small income. She makes repayments of £12 each week for a private loan, and £2 for life insurance. From her remaining income she has to cover electricity and gas bills, food, clothes and other expenses for her family. She does not have a telephone.

She goes out with her women friends on Friday nights, usually to a local pub, where she usually buys three or four small lagers. She does not smoke or use any other social drugs.

Vera still enjoys a close relationship with her mother, who has also always been *"good with the kids"*. Her mother looked after the younger children when Vera was able to get part time work. She still helps during the school holidays.

Vera is a very popular woman. She has many friends of both sexes, although when she is out and about she tends to stick with other women. She rarely goes out with men, despite the fact that she is obviously well liked by those who know her. Vera says that she has an active sex life, but does not want to get involved with any man on a *'one to one'* basis. She describes her sex life as *"casual and social"* - if she meets someone who is willing, then *"that's fine"* by her, but she does not want to *"get into a relationship"*

She is happy to go out and about with her friends, to take an active part in whatever is going on socially in the area as an individual. She does not see any need to be *"paired off"* with anyone, as this would *"cramp her style"*. She does not foresee herself cohabiting in the future because it *"has not worked out in the past"*, and she *"has too much to lose"*. Like most of the women interviewed, she likes her independence, and prefers to remain single.

She says that her desire to remain single is because of *"bad past experiences"* but she is actually one of the minority of women on Green Fields who have never been the victim of domestic violence. She says that she has never been attracted to the *"sort of bloke who knocks you about"*.

"After what happened to me Mam, and then seeing her managing everything on her own all those years, there's no way I was going to have some bloke pushing me around. Why should I? What I want from a bloke I can get without putting up with that sort of shit!"

Vera has a low opinion of women who remain in relationships where they are the victims of male violence. She has been instrumental in helping several of her friends leave violent partners, giving them safe refuge and helping them to be re-housed. She is widely respected by both men and women.

Vera says she does not have any serious problem with any of her children. The 16 year old has been *"in a bit of bother over nicking motor bikes and that"*. She says it is something that *"he'll grow out of"* - that he's a bit *"wild"*, but otherwise normal for his age. He is the only one of her sons to have maintained regular contact with his father, and Vera claims that he has a problem compared to the other boys because he has two authority figures.

Vera is a person who displays a positive and confident attitude to life. She does not complain about her financial situation, being used to hardship in the past. She does not foresee any dramatic changes in her future lifestyle, and says she is quite contented with her life as it is, except that she finds it difficult to manage on her income. She does not want to get a *"proper job"* because she would be worse off if she did, and anyway, she likes the people that she works with at the moment. Although she recognises that she is underpaid, she says that she doesn't mind because the boss knows that she claims benefit, and pays her *"off the books"* so she does not have to declare it.

SALLY

Sally is twenty three years old. She has two infant sons, aged eighteen and twenty nine months. At the time of writing (May 1993) she is eleven weeks pregnant with a third baby. She has lived in her present house on Green Fields for almost two years, since the breakdown of her marriage. Her former husband, the father of the two boys, is a Lance Corporal presently serving with the armed forces in Germany. Prior to moving into her present home, a house with three bedrooms, she lived in Germany with him. Sally is remarkably articulate compared to many of the women of Green Fields. Although her education was limited and foreshortened she is clearly an intelligent woman.

Sally was born and lived on an estate to the east of the city until she was fourteen. She was the younger of two children of her father's first marriage. When she was five years old her mother died, and her father remarried soon after. His second wife had three older children, all boys, from her previous marriage. The couple had a natural son and later adopted a daughter.

Her father's second marriage has since broken down, and her father, now aged forty six, has taken a new partner with whom he has four more children, aged from a few months to five years old. He and his new partner now live on an estate to the east of the city). Sally has not seen her father since she was taken into care at the age of fourteen, but she has maintained contact with her former stepmother whom she sees monthly. She also sees her stepbrothers and her adopted sister monthly.

Sally had a violent and disturbed childhood. Both her father and her stepmother beat her and her siblings frequently; her father often used a

buckled belt. Her stepmother on one occasion pushed her through a window, causing serious cuts which required forty stitches. She says that her stepbrothers and sister were favoured by both her father and stepmother, although she admits that they too were regularly beaten.

Sally was sexually abused by her father from the age of seven or eight. These incidents occurred several times each week, always in her bedroom, whilst her stepmother was out working.

Sally remembers the first time it happened. Her father told her that *"all little girls do this with their daddies - it makes their daddies love them"*. She was forbidden to talk about it because he told her *"It's our special secret"*.

Some time later her adult stepbrother began to do the same thing, except that he threatened her with violence if she resisted or told anybody about it.

When Sally was asked whether either her father and brother knew that it was happening with the other she replied, *"I don't know.....Me brother used to come into me bedroom and so did me dad. I didn't think of that."*

Q) What happened?

"Penetrative sex - actually having intercourse with me. Oral sex and things like that. It happened first with me dad. He told me that I was the apple of his eye, his little princess. I shouldn't never tell nobody - that all little girls did this and it was normal. To love. To keep it a secret."

Q) And your brother?

"Not long after me dad started it, and he used to tell me he'd hurt me. That he'd hurt me if I didn't do it with him."

Q) What did he threaten you with?

"The sex was painful, like, but he used to tell me he'd batter me. But he often did hit me anyway."

This abuse continued until she was nearly thirteen, when she went to live with her aunt. *"Me dad had a girlfriend what was three years older than me. She tried to be me mother but I didn't get on with her. I was thirteen then. When they got a house on their own they kicked me out to me aunty's".*

Soon afterwards she was raped by her uncle, as a result of which she became pregnant at the age of thirteen. She was taken into care just after her fourteenth birthday.

"Then I was with me aunty and uncle. My dad told my uncle and my uncle did the self same thing to me. But then I was pregnant, and it all came out in court."

Sally had confided in a school friend. The school friend told a teacher and the police became involved.

"I told a school friend when I was fourteen and then the police came and took me to the police station, and then I was moved out of the city."

Sally was placed at a children's home at Hornsea. Her baby, a boy, was given up for adoption immediately after the birth, since she was considered unable to look after him herself. Sally says she was not consulted about the adoption - as a minor, her feelings were not taken into account, and care workers felt that adoption was best for both mother and baby. Sally now deeply regrets the adoption, although she accepts that she does not know what she would have done otherwise. Throughout the period she spent in care she wanted to return to her family, but she says that this was not

allowed. She says that losing both her family and her new baby left her feeling abandoned, unloved and extremely lonely.

Several foster placements for Sally were attempted, the longest lasting almost six months, but they all broke down. Sally says that she hated living with these other families, whom she felt looked down on her, and, despite the sexual abuse, still wanted to return to her own family in the city. In fact, she spent the most of her teens in children's' homes.

Miserable and depressed, she twice attempted suicide during this period. She says that during visits her family "pressurised" her into the suicide attempts in an effort to coerce social workers into letting her return home.

"I was brainwashed into taking two overdoses. One overdose was when I was fourteen. A hundred paracetamol and sixty aspirin. A care worker found me. I had a stomach pump."

Did you receive any counselling?

"No. They pumped out me stomach and sent me back"

Back to the children's home? *"Yes."*

Sally was still living in a children's' home in Drifffield, near Bridlington, Yorkshire when, at the age of sixteen, she met the man who was to become her husband. Originally from Scotland, he was (and still is) serving in the army. She had an affair with him for two years before again becoming pregnant. They married and she moved with him to Germany where the first child of the marriage, a boy, was born.

Sally was frequently beaten by her husband during their short-lived marriage. She says that the violence regularly occurred during and after quarrels about his accusations of infidelity. Sally told me that she was not "*unfaithful to him*", but in fact she was occasionally working as a prostitute! When he "*kept her short of money*" she says that she would "*sell her body for a bit of cash*". Sally, who now works as a prostitute in the city centre, makes a clear differentiation between sex within a relationship and sex for money. For her, working as a prostitute is not the same thing as having a '*sexual affair*'. (See pages following.)

When she was pregnant with her second child, Sally fled Germany and returned to the city. Because of her homeless status, pregnant and with a year old baby, she was quickly placed in her present home in Green Fields by the council. Her second son was born three months later. She has had little contact with her ex-husband since. He has seen the older child only twice since the separation and has had no contact with any of them for more than a year. At the time of writing he has never seen the younger baby.⁹

Sally is in reasonably good health, although she had "*a nervous breakdown*" two years ago following post-natal depression and says she still suffers with "*her nerves*". She was treated with tranquillisers. She now smokes about thirty cigarettes each day, uses cannabis on a regular basis and occasionally takes 'speed' (amphetamines) when she can get it. She has reduced her

⁹In June 1993 her former husband arrived at Sally's house late one evening with his sister and another man. He took away Sally's older son, leaving the younger one with her. She has not seen either since. Sally believes that he has taken the child and returned to Scotland. She has been advised that there is nothing she can do about this as the jurisdiction of the English court does not apply to Scotland. She is still, albeit, half-heartedly, seeking advice.

alcohol consumption since she has been pregnant, but says she used to drink '*excessively*' at times.

She says that her children are healthy apart from the older child suffering from mild asthma. There is evidence of some neglect. The younger child has on occasions had small scars on his legs which look suspiciously like healed or healing burns, possibly from cigarettes. She says they are birth marks. Janet, a near neighbour of Sally's, has observed marks and bruises on the child which do not "*match up*" to Sally's explanations for them. She says that Sally may say he has fallen down the stairs, but the marks on him look more like finger pressure marks or bruises from being hit by an adult. None of the injuries appeared dangerous or life threatening. Sally says that she often ends up hitting the children because they "*get on her nerves*". She shows almost total disregard for her younger son, who spends most of his time either in his cot or strapped in his baby buggy. Probably as a result of being almost permanently confined, he is not yet walking although he is now eighteen month old. It is very apparent that she prefers the older child, and she rarely mentions the younger child in conversation.

Sally's rent is paid by Housing Benefit and she receives milk tokens for both infants. Her ex-husband pays £40 per week for the two children, by order of the courts. The payments are automatically deducted from his wages. She does not benefit from the money he pays, however, as it is counted as income and taken off her Income Support.

Her weekly income from Income Support, including the maintenance is £74 per week, which includes her child benefit. From this she has £31.70 deducted at source to repay debts. Her cooker was recently condemned as unsafe and disconnected by the Gas Board, so she took a loan of £100 from

the Social Fund to buy a second hand replacement. This is being repaid at £9.45p per week. A further £15 each week is taken to pay arrears of electricity following disconnection of the supply, and arrears of £4.50p each week goes to arrears of water charges. £2.75p is taken from her for Poll Tax arrears, so she is left with a disposable income of only £42.30p. From this she is supposed to pay gas, electricity, food, clothes and other day to day expenses. Disposable nappies for the two infants cost her fourteen pounds each week. She does not have a washing machine.

Sally supplements her income by working as a prostitute in the city centre. Depending on the number of hours she works she says that she can earn anything from £100 to £300 per week. There is, however, little evidence of such an income and her neighbours say that these figures are greatly exaggerated and that £90 or £100 is nearer the truth and then only when she actually goes out working.

Her clothes are shabby and often dirty. Her house is neglected, smelling of sour milk and urine, and it contains nothing of any real value. Her living room contains a three piece suite, a television set and an old table. She has no refrigerator, iron or washing machine. She hand washes her own and the children's clothing in the bath, which explains their generally shabby appearance. The children have few toys or clothes. It is difficult to see where the money she earns on the streets is spent. There is no evidence in her lifestyle of an income over and above benefit levels.

She leaves her babies with neighbours whilst she works, as she sometimes brings clients to her home. The younger boy sleeps in his pushchair whilst the older child generally falls asleep on an armchair in the neighbours' living room. She seems to go out to work only when she has urgent and pressing

need for immediate cash, and then will stay out only for as long as it takes to earn the required amount. For example, if she needs seventy pounds the next day she will go out and stay out for as long as it takes her to earn just that, and then come home. This may be one hour or it can be five depending on how many 'punters' are around. There are times when she can hang around the streets until well into the early hours of the morning to make a few pounds. She never plans more than a few hours ahead, and is fortunate that she can rely on her neighbours to baby-sit, even at extremely short notice.

The neighbours, also single mothers, are normally paid ten pounds for having the children. They are grateful for the extra cash, and therefore encourage her to go out to work as much as possible. It is unusual for any of the mothers interviewed for this study to be in a position to pay for child care. More usually an older child is brought into a house to sit in front of the TV with younger children and they will fetch an adult from the neighbours if the need arises. The neighbours do not usually have enough space or bedding for the children to sleep at the neighbours' houses. In the case of Sally's children, they are both still very tiny.

Sally says that being abused as a child has made it easy for her to detach herself mentally and emotionally when she is with her clients. She says that it *"is only my body that they are buying, not me"*.

Sally explains that learning to assume this attitude was the only way that she could cope with the experience of her childhood abuse. She says that it was her way of *"fighting back"*. Whatever they did to her, they did not really *"get inside her They never really knew me - nobody knows me, not by just touching me"*.

She says it was the only way she can keep some of herself *'private'*. It was this which she says is what made it possible for her to survive her situation as a child, and she adopts the same attitude when she is working now.

Sally works in the Waterhouse Lane area of the city, which is just behind the new Princes Quay shopping centre. She charges £10 for 'hand relief', £15 for oral sex and £20 for sexual intercourse. If they have a car, she goes with them in the car. Otherwise, when the weather is bad, she takes her clients into the lavatories of the Earl De Grey public house, and if it is fine she goes behind an old warehouse or on a nearby building site. If the client is a visitor to the city she sometimes goes to his hotel room, and occasionally she brings her clients home. For this she charges extra. Clients who come to her house are charged *"Thirty pounds before they even walk in the door"*. She says this is because of the extra risk that she is taking; that it is more dangerous to take a man home. Nonetheless she emphasises that she actually feels safer in her own home - that she is "in control" there. Sally says that when the men go into her house they are very nervous and she can easily humiliate them, which she enjoys. A client who wants to go home with her normally wants her to remove her clothes, which she will not do outside. For this she also charges extra.

When asked whether she felt she was being exploited by the men who pay for her services, she found the question extremely funny, demanding an explanation as to how they could be exploiting her when she was *"relieving them of all that money for a two minute 'jobby' "*. This conversation took

place in the living room of a neighbour's house, with two other women present.¹⁰

Sally does not feel in any way exploited. She says she is proud of her work, and regards it as just a way of earning a living. From Sally's viewpoint, it is the men who are being exploited, since they are *"daft enough to pay for it - and some of them with a wife at home anyway."* Sally said she can tell a man's occupation by looking at the interior of their car. *"if he is a solicitor or a bank manager or summat like that then he'll have a photograph of his wife and kids on the dashboard - always the man standing and his wife seated with the kids in front - real nice like. Makes me sad really. Like if he's got a nice wife and kids and all that stuff, why does he want to go with a whore like me? I often wonder what they tell the wife. They always say that she's not interested in sex. I don't believe them - they're real bastards anyway. Mind you, I wouldn't go with some of them if they didn't pay me either!"*

Sally says that she always uses a condom. She will not, *"at any price"*, offer her services without. *"I always use one. I take them out with me. Even if they pay double or treble. If they want to go without I tell them to get stuffed!"*

Well informed about the risk of AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease, she says, simply, *"I don't want to die!"* She says that she goes every six weeks to the local STD clinic for a check up, and that she has never contracted any sexually transmitted disease.

It is doubtful whether she does in fact attend the STD clinic, as she later said that she hates gynaecological examinations and treatment.

¹⁰ They wanted to know how much I was getting for an hour's work, and whether I was in the wrong job!

Sally insisted that she always removes the condom herself because she is afraid of the risk of unwanted pregnancy if the condom should break.

"I like coloureds but I don't like Pakis. So I won't take a Paki - I will not go down on a Paki's dick even if he has got a johnny on. They smell. I'll even shut doors on Pakis and Chinks..... I won't take no Chinks, but I did take one the other week. It's hard to keep the Durex on though. Chinks have got no dicks and they've got no arses, why do you think they walk so light? The nightmare of it is, what if the durex split and your bairn's a Chink or a Paki, so I won't take them just in case. I don't mind black men but I would if I got pregnant to one."

A broken condom and an unwanted pregnancy for Sally would be another "bairn". She would not consider an abortion because she does not *"believe in it"*, and anyway, she does not like being *"messed about with down there"*.¹¹

Sally recently became personally involved with one of her clients. He *"got chatting"* with her and *"took her for a few drinks"*. They started *"an affair"*, and she is now eleven weeks pregnant as a result of this relationship. She says that she does not use a condom in a personal relationship because to do so would be treating a man like a 'customer' and not like a 'real friend'. She says that it has to do with 'trust'. She intends to keep the baby.

¹¹At first I was intrigued by this apparent paradox. However, as Sally talked more of her childhood experiences and her work I realised that for Sally, visiting a gynaecologist means handing over 'control' to a man. This, for her, is synonymous with the abuse she experienced in her childhood. She emphasises that when she is with her clients she is always in control of the situation. She can, and sometimes does, refuse any client, and she can 'terminate the deal' whenever she wants to.

The man, whom she presumes is embarrassed by having an affair with a known prostitute, has abandoned her. She is trying to get the council to give her a house in Bransholme just a stone's throw from where he lives with his parents in order to coerce him into resuming the relationship, or at least to ensure that he cannot ignore her condition. She is gleefully aware of how shocked his mother will be to know that her son *"has been having it off with a whore, and a grand-bairn to show for it!"*

The likelihood is that she will get the house she wants, and will move away from Green Fields. The links that she has with her family are tenuous. Her only friends are the women who live around her on Green Fields. She has only very casual friendships with her colleagues at Waterhouse Lane. She has never visited any of them at home, nor developed any kind of friendship other than chatting whilst waiting around for clients. If she does move she will lose the support that she presently has from her female neighbours and this will restrict her ability to work out at nights. However, as she points out, she is pregnant so she will have to stop for a few months anyway.¹² It remains to be seen what will become of her children, who at present are looked after by her neighbours for at least some part of every day.

¹²Sally has since miscarried. She has been advised not to become pregnant again for at least three years for medical reasons.

MANDY

Mandy is thirty one years old and has a son aged eleven years. She has lived on Green Fields in a two bedroomed house with a little garden since she left the father of her son eight years ago. She was brought up in the old Docklands area, and then on an estate to the east of the city. Her parents divorced when she was ten years old, after which Mandy lived with her mother.

She sees her mother, who still lives on Bransholme about three times a year, but has lost touch with her father and does not know his whereabouts. Her son sometimes stays with Mandy's mother in the school holidays. She has four brothers and two sisters, all of whom live on Bransholme; she has contact with them only rarely. *"Not for the last year or two."*

After Mandy left school at the age of sixteen she attended a thirteen weeks course at the Northern Business School where she learned clerical and typing skills. She is unusual in being one of a small proportion of the women on Green Fields with vocational skills and training. After she finished training she was subsequently employed in a clerical job at the local Infirmary.

She met the father of her son, a self-employed shoe shopkeeper, when she was fifteen. He was divorced when they met, and they started cohabiting in a flat in the central area of the city after she became pregnant at the age of nineteen. The relationship broke down because of his violence. He also has a criminal record for burglary and has spent some time in prison. He has since remarried his original wife with whom he has two further children.

Mandy's son visits his father and his wife roughly once a fortnight, and on his birthdays and at Christmas. His father pays maintenance into the court for the boy, but this is deducted from Mandy's DSS benefit. He also gives his son a little pocket money. Mandy says he used to treat her occasionally, but this stopped after he remarried.

Mandy's son was born with a hole in his heart, for which he receives treatment annually, although this was more frequent when he was younger. His eyesight is very poor, which means he has to wear special glasses, without which he is virtually blind. His sight is deteriorating.

Mandy says she is in good health, although she does not look well. She appears seriously under-weight, her skin is sallow and her hair lank and greasy, and her hands constantly tremble. She says that she does not use any drugs, prescribed or otherwise, but she drinks not less than four pints of lager daily, and often very much more. She is frequently drunk.

Mandy has a weekly income of £54.85p from Income Support and child benefit. After repaying £15 each week for a private loan and £3 to a catalogue agent she has a disposable income of £36.85p. From this she has to find £2.10p school bus fares for her son, water rates and poll tax¹³. Her rent is paid direct to the Council from housing benefit. Her son receives free school dinners.

Mandy has an ongoing sexual relationship with a boyfriend who lives alone in the nearby high rise block of flats. He has been in prison in the past for burglary and for unpaid fines. He is unemployed, although he occasionally

¹³No longer applicable.

gets casual informal work "*here and there*". She says she prefers it when he is not working because when he has money he gets drunk, and when he is drunk he becomes violent to her more often than not. When he has only his fortnightly 'dole' giro, his drinking is restricted to a "*fortnightly binge*."

Mandy says that when he turns up at her house late and drunk, he will "*kick the door down*" if she refuses to let him in. She says the police will not protect her, but in any case she has no telephone to call them from her house. Despite the regular violence, Mandy says she would consider setting up home with him when her son is sixteen, but not now as he does not like the boy, and she says "*he takes from me but doesn't help*". He sees Mandy at the beginning of the week when she has a little cash, but "*disappears*" when her money runs out.

The first interview with Mandy took place in a public House on Green Fields on a Monday afternoon in October, 1990. Mandy has since been barred from that pub, following a drunken brawl with her current boyfriend. At the time of the interview she had a badly bruised face, both eyes blackened and other ugly bruises on her cheeks and chin. She had clearly received a severe beating.

However, her physical appearance was the subject of much humour amongst her women friends at the pub. Comments such as "*I think you should change your make up, Mandy, it's not the right colour for you*", and "*Why don't you get a frock to match your eyes?*" caused great hilarity amongst the women present.

There were two men in the group, Tony, a man in his early sixties and another man, (around forty?) who was the boyfriend of her closest girlfriend. Both of the men expressed real and serious concern about her condition, and

about the frequency with which she was beaten by her boyfriend. Ironically, it was the two men in the group who expressed concern, whilst the women apparently found it amusing. When asked by the other women present why she tolerated the regular beatings Mandy was clearly irritated. She claimed they were making fun of it, and although she took it in good humour, she made a point of changing the subject. She said that she had her own way of dealing with her problems, and that she resented interference from her friends. The two men said that they didn't think that there was anything wrong with a man "*showing a woman who's boss, but this guy [goes] too far.*"

Mandy spends most of her days in one pub or another. Her son, Wayne, has to seek her out in whatever pub he can find her when he comes home from school. He often has to wait outside for her for anything up to an hour and a half.

She claims very emphatically that Wayne is the centre of her life, and that everything else in her life comes "*second to him*". However, her companions had a very cynical view of her. They told me, when she briefly left the group, that she neglects the boy badly because she drinks too much.

Mandy does not seem at all happy, although she seems reconciled to her situation, and faces life with a stoical resignation. Alcohol consumption is her way of anaesthetising herself, but unfortunately, it only adds to her problems, both financial and social. Her house is unkempt and sparsely furnished, and she lacks warm clothing in the winter. Most of her money is spent on drink, and she relies to a great extent on the goodwill of others for food and other essentials. She has very little control over her circumstances, and lives from day to day. Any suggestion of change in her future is always deferred "*till Wayne is sixteen and no longer needs me*", and then she "*might consider it*". Mandy has one female friend, Sue, who lives nearby. Sue treats her to a

beer occasionally if Mandy has no money, and she regularly "treats" Wayne. Sue gives Wayne money for discos and pocket money, and procures clothes for him. Sue is obviously concerned about the boy's welfare, and does what she can to help. Apart from Sue, Mandy's other women friends are 'pub friends', that is, people who she drinks with, but with whom she has an ambivalent relationship. This is partly because of her frequent drunkenness, but mainly because they say she is a "*bad mother*". She has three or four men friends in the pubs and there is also Tony.

Tony is a man in his sixties of whom she says, "*does everything for me*". It is Tony who takes care of the repairs, gardening and other practical jobs around the house, as well as helping with a bit of cash and "*taking me out for a beer when he's got it*". Tony is retired. He lives alone on a state pension and some savings in a nearby maisonette. He has known Mandy for four years, although neither of them can recall how they met ("*probably in the pub*"). He is a gentle quiet man with a very down to earth manner. He is obviously very fond of Mandy in a paternal sort of way, and wishes she would get rid of her boyfriend. Mandy, who has lost touch with her father, sees Tony as a sort of substitute father figure. There is a very deep and genuine affection between them, and Tony seems to be the only really stable thing in Mandy's life. Mandy's friendship with Tony is one of the things which causes violent arguments between Mandy and her boyfriend, who she says is intensely jealous when he is drunk and "*doesn't give a shit the rest of the time*".

Although Mandy is known to Vera and her many friends, she is not included in the group of women who socialise together. She is seen by them as a "*complete head-case*", and is not respected because of the "*way she treats the boy*". Unlike Vera and her friends, Mandy does fraternise with the men in the pub, and has a reputation amongst the women as an "*easy lay*", although

there is little evidence to suggest that Mandy has sexual relations with any of them. Rather, she mixes with them in order to have a few drinks paid for her.

Her daily life consists of "*doing the house*"¹⁴, going to the pubs around midday, where she stays until the early evening and watching TV until the middle of the evening when she goes to bed. She goes out drinking at night two or three nights, sometimes alone and occasionally with her boyfriend. She rarely leaves Green Fields. She has not been into the city centre for "*about five years*" since she hasn't got any money, so she "*can't see the point*".

Mandy does not even want to consider her future. She has little control over the present. She has not considered going back to work, despite her qualifications, because she entirely lacks self-confidence. She is, on the whole, ostracised by most of the women who live around her. Her neglect of her son is unacceptable to most of the women who know her. She lives an isolated existence, made tolerable to her only by her alcohol consumption, which then adds to her inability to cope with the practical problems of her day to day life. She has not considered seeking treatment for her alcohol problem because she is afraid that if she draws attention to it "*they will take Wayne away and put him in a home*". If 'they' did, she says, she would kill herself.

¹⁴Housework, although there is little evidence of this.

GLENYS

Glenys is nineteen years old. She has one son aged 18 months, and has recently miscarried a second baby. She has a house with three bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom and living room, where she has lived for fifteen months. The house has no curtains, carpets and very little in the way of furniture. She has a second hand electric cooker, but no refrigerator, washing machine or other kitchen equipment. In her living room there is a rotting sofa, a formica topped table, a plastic chair and a portable black and white television which was loaned to her by her brother. She sleeps on a mattress in one of the bedrooms. Her baby has a cot in another. The house is very dirty and smells of stale milk and dog excrement. Until recently her 20 year old brother stayed in the house with her, but he has now started co-habiting with his girlfriend.

Glenys grew up in the 'Quadrant' which is a particularly deprived small estate of pre-war council houses which has a bad reputation for levels of crime and violence. Her father left her mother when Glenys was less than one year old. She has never seen him since. Her mother remarried and had four more children, two boys and two girls. Glenys left home at the age of sixteen after of being sexually abused by her step-father. This abuse took the form of *'heavy petting'* from when she was aged 10, and eventually full sexual intercourse several times each week from when she was fifteen until she left home at sixteen. Her step-father threatened to beat her if she told her mother, who still does not know about it. She eventually told her YTS supervisor about the abuse and contacted 'Childline'. Her stepfather denied the abuse, and it continued until her older brother confronted him and threatened him with violence. Glenys left home soon afterwards to stay with friends in the same area. Her mother and step-father now live on Green

Fields. She sees them only at Christmas and Easter. She sees her brother daily.

Glenys left school at the same time as she left home. She started a YTS scheme when she was sixteen, and gained a City and Guilds Certificate in Caring. She then worked as a care- assistant at a home for the elderly and mentally-ill. She became engaged to a landscape gardener who was then aged 22. He was her second sexual partner after her step-father. When she became pregnant just after her seventeenth birthday, although they were "engaged" he "walked out on" her. She has not had any contact with him since. He has never seen his child, and provides no financial support for him. She has since had a relationship with a 19 year old trainee Marine Engineer from Green Fields, with whom she became pregnant for the second time. She has since miscarried, and the relationship has ended.

Glenys receives a total of £66.56p in DSS benefits for herself and her son, including Child Benefit. In addition her rent is paid by housing benefit. She has a private loan for £100 (used to buy a pram) which she is repaying at £5 per week, and pays £13 each month to a mail order shopping catalogue for the baby's cot and baby clothes. Glenys herself has few clothes and those she has are extremely worn and usually dirty. After loan repayments and disposable nappies, which cost approximately £10 each week, she has a disposable income of £48. From this she has to pay for food and clothing and all other expenses. She is repaying a debt for unpaid electricity by means of a token-meter. This means that she has to buy electricity tokens which are used to operate a prepayment meter either from the electricity showroom or the local post office. The minimum value of the tokens available is £5. The meter has been calibrated at twice the normal rate and will remain so until she has cleared the arrears. As a consequence, she pays not less

than £15 per week for electricity. If she has no token she has no means of heating, lighting or cooking. She and her baby often spends weekends without electricity. There is an immersion heater installed for hot water, but she rarely uses it because of the cost.

Glenys leads an isolated life. She has little contact with the women who live around her. Her neighbours say that they "*despise her*" because "*she is dirty and does not care for baby*", and that they expect this "*because she comes from the Quadrant.*" Her neighbours expect the child to be taken into care "*any day*", and that "*it is no more than she deserves*". Glenys spends her days watching television when the electricity is on, and walking the baby out when it is not. The house is often very cold, which exacerbates her health problems. She has asthma and a hacking cough which has been diagnosed as chronic bronchitis. She says she smokes five cigarettes each day because she cannot afford more. She rarely goes out in the evenings as she has nobody to go with, and rarely drinks. Occasionally she goes to a Bingo hall. She says she has only one friend, Ann, who sometimes takes the baby out when "*she is poorly*". She has only ever been as far as Withernsea (12 miles from the city on the east coast,) where she once went on a school trip.

The child is poorly dressed and looks unhealthy. When he is awake he whines almost constantly.

GILLY

Gilly has lived for seven years on Green Fields. Her house is larger than most having four bedrooms and two reception rooms, as well as a kitchen, bathroom and a separate downstairs toilet. She has a garden at the back and a small paved area at the front, which leads from a communal pathway serving six houses in a row. Her house is neat, clean and bright and well cared for, despite the fact that she was living on benefits for a number of years. Gilly now receives a student maintenance grant.

Gilly is forty years old, divorced, with five children from two former marriages. Her eldest son, aged twenty is living away from home and attending an undergraduate course at university. Her daughter, aged seventeen is still at school preparing for A levels and the three younger children, boys aged ten, eight and six live with her and attend the local Green Fields primary school.

When Gilly was first interviewed in 1991, she was about to embark on her full-time degree course at a local university, but at the time was living upon DSS benefits. She has since completed her degree. Although she receives a full grant, she was told that she would not be eligible for other benefits such as free school dinners, prescriptions, dentistry etc., and this, combined with the loss of housing benefit (she is ineligible as a student) left her marginally less well-off than when she was dependent entirely upon DSS benefits. She was, however, able to take casual part-time work without losing out, as she did when she was on Income Support. Gilly was recently refused Income Support during her 1993 summer vacation from university. Unhappy with the decision, she challenged the ruling. With the assistance of a local solicitor, she appeared before an DSS Appeal Tribunal. The outcome was that, because she is working more than 16 hours each week as a cleaner, she is entitled to Family Credit of £91 per week. She should have been receiving Family Credit for the last two years. The payments cannot be backdated.

Gilly comes from a large family originally from the local area. Her grandparents moved from Cleethorpes, south of the Humber, to Welton in the 1920's, when Gilly's mother was three years old. Both grandparents were "in service", he as gardener and she as a housemaid. Gilly's mother also went (into service) as a kitchen maid with a local family. She left service after the 1939 - 45 war, when she met and married Gilly's father, an Irishman who was stationed nearby during the war. Her parents set up home in Welton in a council house and had seven children there, five daughters and two sons.

Gilly is the fourth child of the family. During Gilly's childhood Welton was still a rural village, with about one third of its inhabitants dependent upon agriculture, and the other two thirds employed by one of three local industries, Hawker Siddley, (now part of British Aerospace), the Capper Pass lead smelting factory and Blue Circle Cement (both now closed). Gilly says that there was not even a bus service to the village when she was a child. All of the children attended the local village school. Her parents lived in Welton until her father was made redundant by Blue Circle Cement in the early 1980's. With his redundancy money they bought a house in Hessle, a large village about four miles from the city.

In 1991 her parents were still married and living in Hessle. Her mother has since died. She sees her father about once a month. Of her four sisters and two brothers, only two remain in the area, but she maintains contact with all of them on a regular basis, although there is more contact with the two who have remained in the area because of the proximity.

Gilly left school at the age of sixteen with four 'O' levels and five 'CSE' passes, and took a job as a clerical assistant. Her first marriage took place

at the age of twenty when she became pregnant with her first child at the age of twenty. She had been "going out" with the father of the baby for about two years, and was still living at home with her parents in Welton.

Following their marriage, she and her husband moved into a flat in Brough. He was a ship's rigger at the fish docks at that time. They later moved to a house in Melton, a village close to Welton, where her second child, a daughter, was born. The marriage broke down when the children were seven and five years old respectively, following repeated scenes of domestic violence. Her husband often assaulted her, but usually took care to hit her only where it would not show. She says that her back, chest and legs were frequently covered with bruises after he had beaten her to the ground and then repeatedly kicked her. A final incident led to her seeking help from a neighbour after he attempted to strangle her. She decided to end the relationship then because of the "devastating effect it had upon the children".

Gilly left her husband to stay with friends for a week or so, but moved back into the matrimonial home after he agreed to move out. She took part-time work in a canteen and as a school cleaner. Gilly lived with the two children in the former matrimonial home in Melton for around seven months following the separation, and then moved to Cambridge to set up home with a man she had known since childhood. She married this man a year later.

Gilly's second husband was a clerical officer with British Rail. They had three children, all boys. After three years in Cambridge they moved to North Wales, where they lived for the next two years. During her second marriage Gilly had a variety of part-time jobs, including school caretaking, bar work and

cleaning. The family moved back to the city under the National Mobility Scheme¹⁵ and into the house on Green Fields where Gilly now lives.

Gilly's second marriage broke down two years later because her husband was "messaging around with other women". He had two "affairs" which she found out about, but the "final straw" came when he was convicted of fraud and theft from his employers, British Rail, and she subsequently divorced him. She says that she saw nothing of the money that he had stolen and that he had been spending it on the other women.

Her first husband has always paid maintenance for the two older children and, in addition, he has given each of them thirty pounds per month for 'pocket money'. (He now gives the eldest boy who is a college student £120 per month.) He sees his children approximately once a month, and he and Gilly have a "reasonably friendly" relationship now. Gilly says that he is quite generous natured, and always remembers to bring something for her three younger boys at Christmas and Easter, even though they are not his. Now she receives £50 per month from him to maintain the three younger children. After the breakdown of her second marriage, Gilly became dependent upon DSS benefits. Her maintenance income for her children, £7 per week each for the first two and £50 per month for the three younger boys was deducted from her benefits.

¹⁵This scheme allows tenants to move from one local authority housing area to another without having to start at the bottom of the council housing waiting list in the new housing area.

Gilly did not want to live on Green Fields, but they had no choice. Council tenants who live locally are normally offered a suitable house when it becomes available, but they may decline the first and second offer without losing their position on the housing waiting list if they hope to get a better or more convenient offer. Only after three rejections do they lose their place on the waiting list. This choice is not available to tenants moving under the National Mobility Scheme - they must take the first house which is offered - and in any case, there are not many council houses with four bedrooms available in other parts of Hull.

Gilly's second husband is currently a publican in Peterborough, and she believes that he intends to remarry in August 1993. His children visit him alternate weekends, although their ten year old son is becoming increasingly reluctant to go.

Gilly is keen to gain qualifications so that she can get away from Green Fields, where she says she hates living. Her eldest son, aged 20, is now a college student, and it was through what she describes as "his interference" that she became interested in education for herself. Once she had followed her son's A level courses in order to help him, he insisted that she could do it for herself if she wanted. He made enquiries on her behalf about college courses, and, as a birthday present, enrolled her into an 'Access Course' at the local college. Initially unsure of herself, she found that she thoroughly enjoyed the course, which led to her starting a degree course in Humanities at Humberside University.

Gilly is a smart and brightly dressed person with a very positive approach to life. She has a lively and sardonic sense of humour, especially at her own expense, and is popular with her many friends. Her social network is both wide and varied. She now mixes with her fellow students as well as the many friends she had before. She also keeps in regular contact with her family, and still sees friends she has had since childhood.

She gained the friendship and support of the headmistress at the primary school attended by her younger children. She is involved with the school PTA and helps the teachers as a classroom volunteer. The headmistress at the school gave Gilly a lot of encouragement when she decided to return to education, and continues to be supportive.

When Gilly was first interviewed she said that she had two close and about ten other women friends, and the same number of platonic men friends, but she emphasised that none of them are from Green Fields. She said that she prefers not to mix socially with her neighbours, with whom she has little in common. In fact she has many more friends than she first estimated, and she does mix with her neighbours on Green Fields, although she tends not to "go out with them socially".

Gilly described how, when she first moved onto the estate with her small children, there was no play group. She approached the local church for the use of the church hall, which was granted free of charge. She then put up notices in the area and put slips of paper through doors to draw attention to the new Mother and Toddler Play group which she had organised. There was little response to her efforts, and only a handful of women turned up. She had to abandon the scheme after just a few weeks when she discovered that some of the women were stealing from the kitchen at the church hall. She confronted one of the women who was about to take a large container of detergent, but could not convince the woman that it was a betrayal of trust, nor would the woman return it to the cupboard. The other women present took the part of the one who was stealing, and Gilly, in despair, felt she had to end the group's meetings at the church hall.

Her present social networks provide her with many forms of support, moral, practical and emotional. Gilly says that the women in her life are more supportive than the men, and although she accepts practical help from the men (repairs etc.) if she needs to, she will borrow money only from the women. The reality is that it tends to be Gilly who does the lending, rather than the borrowing. She is a very capable manager of her small income.

She says that she does not have a great deal in common with her female neighbours, and that they think that she is a bit "strange". Although she does not go out and about with her neighbours, she knows all of them by name, and does occasionally invite them in for a coffee. Gilly is the only person in her immediate vicinity with a telephone still connected and the women nearby sometimes call to use the phone. She occasionally gets involved in mediating on their behalf with the DSS, water, electricity and gas boards, since she is generally better informed, and she will make telephone calls and write letters for them if she is asked. In many ways she performs the role of an unpaid social worker on behalf of her neighbours, and although this is done in a very informal way, there is recognition on both sides of the differences between Gilly and her neighbours. They treat her with respect, which Gilly acknowledges, although she says that she feels that they do not like her very much. This is not the impression that her neighbours gave. They speak of her with great affection, and they rely on her for practical and moral support.

When Gilly's mother died early in 1992 she described the practical help (taking children to school, shopping etc.) she had been given by one of her neighbours in the immediate aftermath. Further enquiries revealed that Gilly had helped the same woman three years before following the 'cot death' of the neighbour's baby, and that the neighbour had never been given any opportunity to return the friendship until the death of Gilly's mother. Although Gilly says that she keeps "very much to herself" when she is at home, her diary reveals that she has quite regular contacts with both present and former neighbours on a day to day basis.

Gilly says she will take work "*if she can fit it in*". This, too, is understatement typical of Gilly. In fact she takes any kind of work that is offered to her, and

somehow always manages to find the time, despite having four children living at home with her. She says that she is lucky having her teenage daughter still living at home, and that things will be more difficult if her daughter goes away to college, which she expects will happen soon.

Gilly also receives some indirect help, for example, gifts and pocket money given direct to the children by their fathers. She pays about ten pounds each week for a loan and '*Shopacheques*',¹⁶ and must also pay rent, poll tax, water rates, gas, electricity, telephone, insurance, school dinners and bus fares.

Gilly had a relationship with her most recent sexual partner for four and a half years, but did not foresee any prospect of setting up home with him. She also had a casual sexual relationship (every six weeks or so) with a married "*male friend*". This relationship has been ongoing for five and a half years. Her regular boyfriend did not know about it. She says that she values her independence too much to consider remarriage or cohabitation, and anyway, her boyfriend was "*selfish and inconsiderate*", and still "*attached to his mother*". She was quite happy for him to provide an outlet for her sexual needs, so long as he was fun to be with and did not attempt to encroach too

¹⁶Shopacheque is the trade name of a credit company. Shopacheques, which are of fixed value supplied in denominations of multiples of £10, are bought from the company on a credit arrangement. They are accepted in many retail outlets in payment for a wide variety of goods. The user repays the value of the cheque, plus interest, to the Shopacheque company, usually over a period of 25 or 40 weeks. The money is collected by an agent of the company who calls to the house for the cash. The agent receives a commission for the money collected and also for selling more cheques. Interest rates are high. The current amount of interest on £100 borrowed over a period of 25 weeks is £25, and over 40 weeks is £36, representing an APR of 152.3 and 127.5 respectively. Many women on Green Fields use either Shopacheques or mail order catalogues to purchase household items, Christmas presents for the children and school uniforms. The main advantage to the women in using either method of shopping on credit is that the money is collected in cash weekly. However, both methods of obtaining goods on credit are expensive. In the case of catalogues, goods ordered can be paid for over a period of 26 or 52 weeks, but are normally charged at the full Manufacturers Recommended Price, which can be considerably higher than the competitive rates offered in local shops. The women know this, but do not have the resources to pay for a relatively expensive item in a single instalment from their weekly income.

much on her life or that of her children. When she discovered that he had been "*two timing*" her with another woman she ended the relationship. He still keeps in touch with her, and makes it very clear that he would like to resume the relationship if Gilly would let him. She states emphatically that she does not want "*financial dependency on any man*". She has recently started meeting men through a dating agency, although she makes it clear that she is seeking a 'boyfriend' for outings and possibly sex, rather than for marriage or cohabitation. Nonetheless, she has not entirely ruled out the possibility of a serious romantic attachment if "*the right man should come along*", although she feels that the prospects of this happening are unlikely.

When asked Gilly if she had any health problems she replied that she had not, other than mild anaemia, and yet later, during another conversation she described a chronic gynaecological condition which is very debilitating and which will probably require surgical treatment at some time in the future. This is almost certainly the cause of her anaemia. When asked why she had not mentioned this before she replied that she hadn't thought about it at the time. She obviously does not see the condition as something which compromises her lifestyle, and it was therefore not worthy of mention. This is just one example of the way in which Gilly ignores or overlooks the handicaps which she has had to overcome in her life, and it demonstrates an important aspect of her very positive outlook.

Gilly feels that contact with their respective fathers has been of benefit to the children, but more recently her second husband has become belligerent towards her as a consequence of demands being made by the Child Support Agency. On the morning she was to begin her final exams, she received a letter from his solicitors saying that he intended to apply for custody of the

three youngest boys. Although such an application is unlikely to succeed, it was very distressing for Gilly.

In the future she hopes to develop her career, possibly in social work, but definitely away from Green Fields. She is hardworking, determined and enthusiastic. She displays an unusual degree of initiative in overcoming problems, and is a sociable person who is popular with the many people she meets. She has clear and realistic objectives which she is likely to achieve.

Gilly's Diary

Gilly was asked to keep a diary for one week and note everybody she "socialised with" during the week - including telephone calls. The week she kept the diary was "fairly typical". She told me that nothing especially unusual occurred. The individual people she met and/or chatted with that particular week were not necessarily the same as any other week, but their numbers were fairly routine.

Key

Dad (Age 71, now widowed)

Angela 49 - sister

Rosalyn 47 - sister

Kevin 44 - brother

(Gilly 41)

Lorraine 39 - sister

Sean 36 - brother

Rachel 29 - sister

Keith first ex-husband, father of two older children

Geoff second ex-husband, father of three younger children

Dave ex-boyfriend 44

Ian boyfriend (non-sexual) 40

Tommy old friend 33

Joanne former neighbour 29

Linda friend since early childhood 41

Denissa friend for 25 years 41

Karen neighbour 36

Glynis new friend 40

Denise neighbour 36

Gwenda friend for 25 years 41

Hazel friend for 6 years 33

Anne-Marie student friend 27

Trish student friend 38

Anne student friend 20

Josette student friend 39

Carol student friend 36

Sheila ex-neighbour/friend from Wales 33

Trudie neighbour - 4 doors up 33

TUESDAY

- 8am Rang Linda to remind her to pick up my children at 3.30pm.
I don't get home until 4.45pm.
- 9.15am Denise called round to use my phone - asked if I wanted a job cleaning at a secondary school. Said yes please.
- 9.30am Joanne rang to ask if she could call round for a coffee.
- 10.10am Joanne came. Asked me to be with her when her baby is born
Said yes - love to.
- 12.30pm Lunch Anne's flat, then study with her until 3.15 lecture.
Gave me her washing to do.
- 4.30pm Linda came to my house for tea. Daughter came home from college with her boyfriend. He stayed for tea as well.
- 6.30pm Dave rang. He will drop off amplifier and microphone tonight for my sister's quiz night at the pub.
- 7pm I rang Glynis to confirm night out on Thursday.
- 7.30 Dave called round with amplifier and microphone, had 'cuppa' and chatted.
- 8.00pm Rachel arrived to spend evening with me - wanted a chat. Joined by her husband at 10.30.
- 9.00pm Anne rang. Asked me to record film 'Hope and Glory' from the television for her. Said I would.
- 9.30pm My son phoned from Manchester for general chat
- 1.00am Angela rang. She had been involved in a car accident earlier in the day, and wanted to talk.

WEDNESDAY

- 8.30am Denise called around. She wanted advice about her water bill. The Water Board was threatening to cut off her supply. I asked her to call back after lunch and I would ring the water board as I was going out at 9.00am on student placement.
- Spent rest of the morning in a Primary school, helping with a class of ten year old children. I started this as part of a student placement/tutoring scheme, but enjoyed it so much I now do it as a volunteer.
- 12.15pm Joanne called for a quick coffee
Denise called. I rang water board for her. They accepted reduced payments.
- 2.00pm Met Anne for tea before meeting. Took her washing to her
She gave me lecture notes taken when I was absent when child ill and off school. Fair exchange!!
- 3.30pm Linda picked up children from school. Had 'cuppa' with me
- 4.00pm Karen asked if I would write a letter for her to her pen pal
- 6.30pm Lorraine rang - wanted result of my blood test.
- 7.00pm Karen called for 10 minutes advice about blind dating.
- 7.30pm Rachel picked me up to go to the quiz and mark papers with her husband. Good night out with friends at pub.

THURSDAY

Unplugged phone Thursday morning as studying - very rude of me!

- 5.00pm Joanne rang. Said she will cut the boys' hair at the weekend and also give me the £100 she borrowed off me. (Gilly loaned the money to Joanne, a single parent, in January to pay for Joanne's son to have a holiday with his grandparents. Joanne saved her child benefit to repay the loan. Gilly offered the loan, since she knew she could trust Joanne to repay it.)
- 5.30 Glynis rang to confirm meeting for drinks. (Glynis is a new friend. Another friend of Gilly's who is using a dating agency had a call from Glynis who is doing likewise in the hope that they could meet and 'exchange notes' and advice. The other friend was reluctant, but Gilly offered to meet her instead.)
- Dave rang to ask if the quiz was a success, and if the amplifier was okay
- 5.45pm I rang Ian for a general chat. This call was prearranged.
- 6.00pm I rang Rachel to discuss the meeting she has tonight with the bereavement counsellor. Asked her to ring me afterwards.
- 9.00pm Rachel rang - said she felt better after talking. She is beginning to understand her feelings etc. (Gilly's mother died last year. Her sister is having problems accepting the death. Rachel is

also having matrimonial problems. Her husband is violent towards her, and she would like to leave.)

FRIDAY

- 12.00 noon Anne phoned to see if everything okay as I wasn't in college. Son (aged 7) ill.
- 4.30pm Linda rang to see if I wanted to go out with her and hubby. Said no, as I was studying.
- 6pm I rang Rachel to see how she was. (Whiplash injury after car accident.)
- She had been to see a solicitor regarding separation from violent husband.
- 6.45pm Ian rang for a chat.
- 7.00pm Karen called to see if I wanted a cleaning job (at Kwiksave supermarket, where Karen works) starting on Monday morning. Said yes.
- 7.30pm Tommy rang. Asked if he could call round for a chat. Sounded upset.
- Came round ten minutes later. Girlfriend, eight months pregnant had just thrown him out. Asked what he could do.
- Just wanted someone to talk to.
- 8.30pm Sheila rang from Wales for a chat. Talked for an hour! (Sheila was Gilly's neighbour when she lived in Wales. They take turns to call each other fortnightly.)

SATURDAY

Spent the morning in Pearson Park with the boys. Met two students from my course and stopped to chat. Went to Joanne's to get the boys' hair cut. Stayed for a chat and coffee.

Tea time: Rachel rang to ask if I wanted to go out with her. Refused as I'd planned to go to Linda and Pete's. I always go out on Saturday nights as daughter has boyfriend round and likes the privacy. Convenient all round!

SUNDAY

10.30am Karen came round to ask me to call the police. her ex-boyfriend was threatening her. She stayed till the police arrived fifteen minutes later

12.00noon Trudie came round. Bleeding from arm, mouth and ear. Her boyfriend had beaten her up. Would I ring for police. The same policeman turned up (after one and a half hours). Asked if I was running a "safe-house!".
Meanwhile Trudie had gone back because she said her bloke would be smashing the place up if she didn't.

1.00pm Ian rang to arrange to meet tonight

4.40pm Linda rang for a chat.

5pm Dave rang. Did I want the new *Stephen King* video. Just an excuse to phone.

5.15pm Gwenda rang from Germany. Asked me to pass on a message to her son who lives on Green Fields.

6.00pm Anne rang to see how my studying was going. (She motivates, encourages and nags me!)

Spent the evening in the pub with Ian

MONDAY

- 6.45am Went to work at Kwiksave with Karen.
- 8.45am I rang Anne. Not going to college today - very sick during the night She said she is not going on Friday. She'll get notes for me today and I'll get them for her on Friday.
 Asked if she could sleep over at the weekend as all the other girls in her flat are going away and she does not like to be alone there. This happens around once a month.
- 3.30pm Linda called after school
- 3.45pm Denise called to use the phone (coin box broken)
- 5pm Ian phoned - thanks for night out.
- 6pm Glynis rang to ask if I was going out Wednesday night.
 Said no, but gave her Linda's number as she is going out.
- 7pm Hazel called round. Told me arrangements for her wedding in April.
- 8.30pm I rang Geoff (ex-husband number two). Robert (son aged 11) wants to take friend with him when he visits at the weekend. No problem.
 Linda picked up boys from school. I came home at 4.30pm
- 7.30pm Went to Robert's friends house to give the parent address and telephone number of his dad in Peterborough.
- 8.30pm Dave rang - did I want any more paint and brushes?
 Another excuse!
- 9pm Rang Keith (ex-husband number one). Arrangements for Steven at Easter and allowance for Louise.

TUESDAY

- 6.45am Went to work with Karen.
- 9.45am Met Anne in library
- 10.15am Seminar
- 11.15am Went to Dad's at Hessle. His 71st birthday. Ros and Rachel there. Caught bus back to college with June, Dad's new lady friend. She asked me if I approved of her relationship with Dad. I said I was glad Dad was happy. Linda picked up boys from school. I came home at 4.30pm
- 7.30 Went to Robert's friend's house to give the present address and telephone number of Robert's Dad in Peterborough.
- 8.30pm Dave rang - did I want nay more paintbrushes? Another excuse! 9pm Rang Keith (ex-husband number 1) Arrangements for Steven at Easter and allowance for Louise.
- 9.15pm Rang Anne-Marie re Urban History project
- 9.25pm Rang Trish re Urban History project. We need to meet about our joint project but we agreed to wait until assignment work is out of the way. Told me of another student friend who is out of hospital and wants me to call. I phoned her. She said she will not be back until after Easter and would I collect lecture notes for her. (Yes, of course).
- 9.45pm Went out for a drink with Ian.

WEDNESDAY

6.45am Went to work with Karen.
9.00am Spent morning in Primary School
12.30pm Lunch with Linda
2pm Anne came round to study
6pm Phoned Sean general chat
6.15pm Phoned Kevin general chat
7.30pm Carol phoned. Would I pass message to tutor.
9.15 Josette phoned. Did I know that Karen was ill?

This diary demonstrates that Gilly's social networks are wide and varied. The telephone clearly is very important to her. It allows her to keep in touch with her family as well as new and old friends. It represents a lifeline, not just for Gilly, but for her neighbours as well. It is also the main reason, at least ostensibly, for her neighbours calling. Gilly is the only one the eight women included in these case studies with a telephone connected. The others have all been disconnected for debt.¹⁷

¹⁷Vicky has since had her telephone reconnected after Lenny paid her outstanding bill. Sally owes Kingston Communications in excess of £800. She had been making lengthy calls to Germany. Vera asked to have her telephone removed because she could no longer manage to pay even the rental for incoming calls after her second son left school without a job. Mandy has not had a phone connected for the last six years. Brenda and June hope to be able to have their's reconnected at some time in the future, but at present cannot afford to pay off their outstanding bill.

Brenda and June

Brenda and June live together as a lesbian couple. They have a house with four rooms, kitchen and bathroom. They each have three children from their respective marriages. Brenda is 42 years old. Her first child, Sharon, aged 22, lives in another outer-city estate and is herself the single mother of three small children. Brenda's son aged 19 is currently in prison. His offences were committed in order to get money to buy heroin. Brenda's third child, Steven, aged 13, lives with Brenda and June at weekends and during school holidays. He has a police record for persistent offending, and attends a special residential school from Monday to Fridays. Brenda left her husband after sixteen years of what she describes as "*a normal, happy marriage*" because of his violence towards her. She says that the violence started only after he was made redundant from his sea-faring job. Prior to that Brenda says he was a "*good enough bloke*" with whom she enjoyed '*family life*'. When he was '*laid off*' he started drinking heavily, and subjecting Brenda to regular '*braying*' (beatings) until she could take no more. She left him, taking the children with her to a women's refuge.

Brenda describes her life up until then as "*pretty ordinary*". She says she grew up in an "*ordinary family*", had an "*ordinary marriage*" and is "*not a very interesting person at all!*" She says that she never thought of herself (and still does not) as 'lesbian'. She sometimes fancies "*men in the street*" but does not want to have "*nothing to do with them no more*". She says she "*can't cope with no more brayings*". She says she is happier now with June than she has "*ever been with no man*". She says that with June she knows where she is, that she can trust June and that she feels safe with her.

June is 34. She also has two sons, aged 14 and 8 and a daughter aged 9. Her marriage broke down when she discovered that her former husband was sexually abusing the three children. He is currently 'on the run' from the police. He has had no contact with her or the children since he left. June believes he is living in South Humberside. June has lived on the Green Fields estate for 27 years. She was the adopted child of her parents; her adoptive father died when she was eight years old and her mother when she was 29. Her real mother, whom she knew as 'auntie' lived next door to her adoptive parents, although she did not know this until after the death of her father. She has an older sister, now aged 36, who lives in the city with her natural mother and a brother aged 35 who lives in another estate in the city. She sees each of them at intervals of approximately one month.

June was living at home with her adoptive mother when she became pregnant with her first child. She married the father, a fisherman, shortly before the child's birth, and moved to Green Fields soon afterwards. She had two more children with her husband. She says that she "*went off sex with him*" after the birth of the third child, and for the last two years of the marriage they lived "*together but apart*". He was a shift worker, so they used the same bed but at different times. She says she has not had heterosexual sex for more than five years, initially preferring "*one night stands*" with women she met around the city centre. She has been with Brenda for three years now. June was also the victim of violence in marriage, but in her case, she says that after her husband hit her in the face, causing serious facial injuries, she "*laid him out*".

June has a history of violent behaviour. She was expelled from school at the age of fourteen because she attacked another girl, fracturing her skull. She has three previous convictions for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) and two for

Actual Bodily Harm (ABH). The three convictions for GBH resulted from attacks in pubs, two upon women and one upon a man. The two ABH convictions were "*domestics*", involving her female cousin on both occasions. She has never been sentenced to prison, but did spend 48 hours in a police cell following the second GBH charge.

June says she has difficulties controlling her children. All three children exhibit signs of being seriously disturbed. June believes that these problems result from "*attention seeking*" following their sexual abuse. The older boy, Wayne, regularly misses school, and both younger children suffer from enuresis. Wayne throws violent temper tantrums when his wishes are thwarted, banging doors and attacking the younger children. He appears to be retarded. June says he has "*the mental age of an 8 year old*". He is unable to sit still for more than a few minutes and, unless he is distracted, he characteristically sits in a chair rocking and masturbating. During the course of this study he was taken into care for his own protection after he sexually abused the child of a neighbour.

June's younger son and her daughter sleep together in a single bed in a room without floor-coverings or curtains. The room is cold and draughty, and the paper is peeling from the walls. They are unable to bath because the water heater is broken. Wayne shares another bedroom with Steven when they are both at home. Both teenagers are regularly in trouble with the police, typically for breaking into houses, criminal damage and stealing cars and bikes. June believes that Steven leads Wayne into trouble. Brenda attributes Steven's anti-social behaviour to his drink problem. He is often drunk, more often than not on super-strength lager which he gets older youths to buy for him from the off-licence. He obtains the money for the beer by breaking into houses and stealing either money or valuables.

Brenda is generally in good health, other than "*suffering with nerves*". She rarely drinks alcohol and does not smoke. June suffers from severe asthma, which requires regular use of a Ventolin inhaler. She is seriously overweight, smokes an average of twenty cigarettes and says she smokes eight cannabis joints each day. She says she goes out, usually to city centre pubs, "*about once a month to get pissed*". In fact, she is drunk rather more often when she can get the money.

Within the relationship, each plays out a specific and clearly defined 'gender' role. Brenda says she is "*the more stable*" of the two, and that she exerts a "*steadying influence*" on "*the wild side of June's nature.*" Brenda is evidently less volatile and extrovert than her partner. She dominates in the domestic arena of their shared life, whilst June is the one who "*brings home the dosh*". June is very practical, and is expert at fixing and mending things, whereas Brenda is much quieter. June takes care of negotiating with 'authority' figures because Brenda is illiterate and very self-conscious about it. June tries to protect Brenda, and becomes very angry when Brenda's children cause her worry. On one occasion June became involved in a physical fight with Brenda's daughter's boyfriend after he arrived looking for Sharon following a violent scene between them. June lost several teeth.

The two women seem to have settled into a domestic routine punctuated by crises caused by the behaviour of their children. The police and probation service are regular visitors to the house at such times. Neither of the women seems able to exercise any control over their respective children, despite frequent beatings from June. Brenda's son, Steven, goes to his grandmother whenever June beats him, and his grandmother almost always calls the police to Brenda and June's house. The police show little interest

in the assaults, and appear to make the calls only as a matter of routine. They seem to regard it as inevitable that the two young teenage boys will follow the older brother into prison in the course of time. The police visits further exacerbate relationships between the two women and the youths. The younger children show no discomfort or fear when the police call. They are accustomed to it.

Chapter 6. SEX AND VIOLENCE.

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Chapter 6. Sex and Violence.

"I love him 'cause there's no man can beat me like he do"

Bessie Smith.

Introduction

There are six houses in the terrace where Gilly lives. Her five female neighbours are all either occasionally or regularly beaten by their male partners. On one occasion one of these women was twice run over by her partner in his car, resulting in very serious injuries which required major surgery and skin grafts. This woman refused to press charges against him, and is still living with him, despite that incident and two subsequent serious beatings.

In four of the cases contained in this study, those of Vicky, Gilly, Brenda and Sally, violence was the reason given for the breakdown of a previous relationship. Mandy is regularly beaten by her current boyfriend. June left her husband after he violently and sexually abused her two older children. She recently had most of her front teeth knocked out in a confrontation with Brenda's daughter's boyfriend. Only Vera says she has never been violently treated by a man.

Of the cases included in this study, in terms of the severity of physical injury, Vicky's case is the most extreme. Vicky's injuries resulted in permanent damage. The other women report serious facial bruising, (Mandy, Sally and Brenda) a broken nose (Mandy) and a broken arm (Brenda) and wrists (Sally and Brenda). Gilly was frequently attacked by her first husband, receiving

blows to her body and kicks to her legs, although he avoided hitting her "where it would show". Sally, who was beaten and raped by three adult males in her family from the age of eight, left her husband after repeated attacks. Glenys was beaten and sexually abused by her step-father.

The occurrence of male violence in Green Fields is so commonplace that it is accepted by the women as part of the reality of their everyday lives. Gilly's diary records a Sunday morning on which two of her five neighbours went to her for assistance after incidents of real and threatened violence. Gilly says that this is not unusual. The women concerned do not discuss the rights and wrongs of violence, rather they compare the results of it. Even those women who have suffered serious injury at the hands of men seem to accept it as a routine part of marital and/or sexual relationships, and neither they nor other women seem at all shocked by its occurrence.

Neighbours turn a blind eye even to very serious abuse, and in some cases will joke about it amongst themselves. They are unwilling to become involved on behalf of their female neighbours, whether or not they are friends, and even less likely to contact the police in case they are accused of interfering in a private row, or actually blamed for it.

A recent research project carried out on behalf of a group of children's charities to assess the likely effects of the *1993 Child Support Act* reports that ten out of seventeen formerly married women gave violence as the reason for family breakdown. (Clarke, Craig and Glendenning, 1993) Of the ninety single mothers from Green Fields interviewed during fieldwork for this study, seventy six report having been the victims of violence in sexual relationships with men, and of these, violence was given as the reason for family breakdown in sixty three cases. However, further enquiries reveal that

although violence may have been an *official* and/or *public* explanation for the breakdown in a relationship, in fact it is not always the most significant or the only reason. Perceptions of 'domestic violence' vary. Violence in some instances may be an acceptable component of sexual relationships, and aggressive behaviour a desirable and socially sanctioned aspect of working class perceptions of 'masculinity'. (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Stearns, 1990)

Alcohol

Alcohol abuse has often been associated with domestic violence. (Norwood, 1988; Young, 1991; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; O'Neill, 1973, 1982) This association is questioned by Richard Berk, who argues that the "causal role sometimes attributed to drinking is probably spurious". Berk points out that unhappy men may be more likely to become problem drinkers. He concedes that "men who have a history of problem drinking are more likely to inflict serious injuries", but that "drinking is not an immediate and direct cause of those injuries". (Berk et al, 1983)

The research on Green Fields indicates that alcohol is a factor in some incidents, but not all. The women interviewed report that although violence is more likely to occur when the man is drunk, it also occurs on occasions when he is completely sober. In Mandy's case drunkenness, including her own, is almost always a contributory factor, whereas with Vicky and her ex-husband it made little or no difference - he was liable to violent outbursts of temper at any time, sometimes, but not always, without any warning signs. Brenda says her seaman ex-husband had always been a heavy drinker during the periods when he was on home leave throughout the fifteen years of their marriage, but was never been violent towards her, drunk or sober, until after he was made redundant. For the next two years, and until Brenda left him, he beat her two or three times every week.

Mandy, Vicky and several other women said that on some occasions they deliberately provoked the man into losing his temper, especially if they themselves had been drinking. They say that their own drinking may actually be more relevant than the man's. Both admit that they are sometimes

verbally aggressive and even openly scornful of the man when they have had too much to drink.

Sally, Vicky and Gilly felt that in the relationships in which they were being abused they had sometimes "brought it upon themselves", and/or that they had "deserved" it. Vicky, Mandy and others explained that in a potentially volatile situation with a violent man, their own sobriety or drunkenness may have been the vital difference between them being able to contain or exacerbate the situation. These women say that when they are sober they can recognise the early warning signs of a potential fight developing and are able to calm down or humour the men, but if they have had a few drinks themselves they are more likely to provoke further aggression by, for example, arguing with or criticising the man in a way which leads to an escalation of his temper. In these cases the women will sometimes see their own culpability as a contributory factor - if they hadn't been drinking then it wouldn't have happened.

Sally and Gilly said that outbursts of violence occurred with similar regularity whether their partners were drunk or sober. June admits that when they had been drinking she was probably more violent than her ex-husband "once they got started". He once hit her in the face causing injury, but she responded in kind and "laid him out". June finally parted from her ex-husband because he was sexually abusing two of her three children, not because of his violence towards her.

Reported domestic violence and the police

Violence towards women is categorised by the police into three types in accordance with the Offences Against the Persons Act of 1861. The categories broadly equate to the crimes of Common Assault, (minor or slight injuries which require no medical treatment), Actual Bodily Harm (minor injuries which require medical treatment) and Grievous Bodily Harm (serious injuries). The first category, Section 47, applies in cases of domestic violence in which the woman has been subjected to violence which may include injuries such as black eyes, bruising and shock.

Violence of a more extreme nature is dealt with under sections 18 and 20 of the Offences against the Person Act of 1861, which the police acknowledge is out of date and in need of revision and clarification (Young, 1991; Sheptycki, 1993). These sections deal with offences which include open cuts which require stitching or other hospital treatment, bone fractures and other forms of grievous bodily harm. In these cases the man would normally be arrested and kept in police custody overnight, and charges may be brought against him. However, these will only proceed to prosecution in the court if the victim is willing to give evidence, and quite often the woman refuses, either through fear of reprisals in the form of further violence, or because a reconciliation has occurred between the victim and her attacker.

Section 47 cases, where there is no evidence of serious injury, are generally dealt with by giving "advice" to each of the two parties separately. This will take the form of a verbal warning to the man, and the suggestion to the woman that she should visit a solicitor and possibly, if the couple are married, start proceedings against the husband via the Family Division of the Courts.

One of the difficulties with this approach in a setting such as Green Fields is the design of the houses and flats, most of which have only one living room and thin, poorly insulated internal walls. As a result, it is difficult to facilitate privacy for either of the partners whilst this "advice" is given. In the meantime the male aggressor, who may well be drunk and by now even further aggrieved, bides his time until the police leave the scene, after which the situation can escalate dramatically.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most incidents of domestic violence on Green Fields go unreported. The women are afraid and suspicious of the consequences of contact with the police as well as social workers, health visitors and other official authority figures. Women say that reporting violence is a waste of time because the police do nothing anyway, and they recognise that it can make the man more aggressive than ever once the police have left.

Women report that they are reluctant to go to hospital unless they absolutely have to because they do not like answering questions about their injuries. Some say they fear that if they report the ongoing violence then social workers may become involved and their children placed on the 'At Risk' register, and ultimately taken from them. This widely held fear is frequently offered by women as an explanation for doing nothing about their own vulnerability at the hands of violent men. Some women report that when they have threatened to call the police, their men have warned them that they risk losing their children if they do so. In any case, antipathy towards the police is virtually universal on Green Fields, and abused women are no exception. They do not want the police prying into their lives or homes because the women themselves are frequently involved in illegal or quasi-legal activities.

For the police, entering the estate at night when much of the violent abuse occurs is potentially dangerous. The physical layout of the estate itself means that they invariably have to walk some distance from their cars, either along the walkways to houses or into the tower blocks via lifts, to reach the scene of the crime. Even there they are vulnerable to assault.

Anthropologist Malcolm Young describes how, when he was a serving policeman in the Gateshead area, it was common practice for the police to attempt to resolve many domestic disputes, at least temporarily, by driving the man to the other side of the town and leaving him to walk home. Young concedes that this practice of "dumping" the male invariably failed to resolve the underlying social problem of 'domestics', which was "inevitably too complicated for the police to solve". Furthermore, it had the effect of 'manoeuvring' the statistical record and "no doubt hid many aspects of the true nature of domestic violence". He explains that in many cases such men were eventually arrested and charged with drunkenness, which "swelled the drunkenness statistics" and "presented another limited police version of reality". (Young, 1991)

The police tend to regard domestic violence cases as a waste of their time. The unlikelihood of a successful prosecution and the fear that their interference at scenes of domestic violence may actually aggravate matters and/or cause the fighting couple to turn on the policeman or woman makes them reluctant to become involved. Young points out that 'domestics' hold low status in any hierarchy of 'real work', even though 'domestics' are a major factor in the statistics of murder and manslaughter. (Young, 1991).

The overall reluctance of the police to interfere in scenes of domestic violence on Green Fields is not really surprising, considering the low chance of a

successful prosecution and the difficulties involved in policing an area where they are treated with almost universal hostility even by the victims of crime. Informal enquiries made with the local Police reveal that in the three month period between October 1992 and January 1993 only seven per cent of recorded calls to scenes of 'domestic' violence in the city led to an arrest being made.

Male police officers are no less likely to display sexist attitudes than any other group of men in society, and, according to Young, the conservative and hierarchical nature of the police service itself engenders a greater degree of sexism than that which is found amongst the population as a whole. The report of the Metropolitan Police Forces Working Party on Domestic violence states that, "the response of the police, predominantly male, to cases of domestic violence, where the victims are predominantly female, is further confounded by the fact that a proportion of policemen themselves abuse their wives" (LSPU; 1986, p2-3). Young says "any plea for a revised system of policing with a more equitable human face requires enormous structural and conceptual alterations in cultural and ideological attitudes" (Young, 1991). Informal enquiries of five local policemen demonstrate attitudes ranging from *laissez faire* to callous indifference - that they have "more important things to do than attend at 'domestics' ". This may be a reflection of the attitudes of policemen towards women both within the ranks of the police and within society in general, which predispose individual policemen to give low status and low priority to the position of women as victims of domestic violence. (Young, 1991; Sheptycki, 1993)

The view that "*women are their own worst enemy*" is often repeated by policemen, referring to the fact that even where the circumstances are serious enough to warrant prosecution, significant numbers of women will

refuse to press charges or to appear as witnesses for the prosecution. Of the seventy six women on Green Fields who reported being the victims of male violence, none had pressed charges against their partners, despite some very serious injuries. Without exception, they expressed reluctance to *"get involved with the courts"*

Efforts have been made by the police at both national and local levels to present a sympathetic face to women who are victims of abuse. Women are encouraged to report abuse to the police, but these initiatives have had only limited success. In this city there is an extra problem. The purpose built suite which was opened to deal with domestic abuse in the area has been inundated with cases of child abuse (which is a particularly acute problem in the city), and the new centre has been unable to meet the needs of women.

Increasing awareness of the issue of domestic violence within society as a whole is illustrated by the fact that individual policemen acknowledge the need for a change in procedures, although none was able to offer any positive suggestion as to how such change may be brought about. Gillian Pascall argues that only when "violence becomes murder - as it not infrequently does - then is it likely to become a public concern." (Pascall, 1986: p52) The police also recognise that today's 'domestic' may be tomorrow's murder, but they do not feel that there is much more that they can do in the present circumstances.

Women's Aid and Women's Refuges.

The spread of the Women's Aid networks throughout the country since the early 1970's has helped to raise awareness of the problem of "battered women." The Women's Aid refuge in the city has hostel accommodation for thirteen women and their children. A spokesperson at the hostel says that the demand outweighs the number of places available, and they often have to refer women on to other hostels. She emphasises, however, that they operate an 'open-door' policy, which means that they will never turn away any woman who fears she is in danger.

The city is not unusual in this respect. Places of safety and refuges for women in most other towns and cities are oversubscribed - there are simply not enough of them to provide for the needs of women at risk from male violence. The first refuge for women, Chiswick Women's Aid in London, became so overcrowded that within a year of its opening there were over thirty women and children in residence in a tiny 'two-up, two-down' terraced house. When the refuge was transferred to a Victorian mansion with ten rooms, there were fifty four women and children resident from the first day. (Pizzey, 1974). In Glasgow the demand for safe refuge for women led to overcrowding at the Women's Aid refuge from the day it opened, and the places available are still insufficient for the demand. This situation is repeated at Women's Aid hostels throughout the towns and cities of Britain. (Dobash and Dobash, 1992).

Erin Pizzey and the Chiswick refuge drew the attention of the media to the problem of domestic violence in the early seventies. Public pressure led to political debate and a Parliamentary Select Committee was created in 1975 to examine the evidence and to make recommendations. Criticism of the work

of the 1975 Parliamentary Committee is outlined by Dobash and Dobash in their book, *Women, Violence and Social Change*. They explain that the Chiswick refuge was the focus of the hearings, although the Chiswick refuge run by Erin Pizzey had by then split with nearly all of the other refuge groups who had set up the National Women's Aid Federation. Of the Committee's first four sessions three concentrated on evidence given by representatives of the Chiswick group.

Critics point out that the Chiswick experience was not representative of the Women's Aid movement as a whole. The committee heard evidence which reinforced the popular stereotypes of both 'battered' and 'batterer' - female victims were described as inadequate, of low intelligence and with damaged personalities in need of "protection from their own stimulus seeking activities", and who "have the ability to seek violent men or by their behaviour to provoke attack from the opposite sex". They merely needed protection while they underwent rehabilitation to reform their own behaviour! (Dobash and Dobash 1992). The men were presented as alcoholic or psychopathic, in need of institutionalised psychiatric care, and a causal connection was made with early childhood experience of violence in the home (Ibid).

The limited evidence heard by the committee led them to the conclusion that the problem of violence was confined to a small minority who fitted the popular stereotype of the 'battered wife' and her 'batterer'. These stereotypes, which apply to only a very small minority of men and women who are in abusive relationships, detract from the difficulties experienced by many other women who were not included in the narrow framework of the discussion.

Although poor working class women are over-represented at the Women's Aid hostels, this is largely because they are more likely to have nowhere else to go. The women who seek advice from the Women's Aid groups are drawn from across the social spectrum, and Women's Aid groups argue that the incidence of violence in interpersonal relationships is spread throughout society.

Women's Aid groups argue that women who are physically abused by men are no more likely to have 'inadequate' personalities, low intelligence or low self esteem than any other group of women, nor are their male abusers predominantly psychopathic or drunks. This view is supported by Richard Gelles, who states, "After ten years of continued research and administration of countless psychological tests, the summary evaluation of the psychopathological approach to domestic violence is that the proportion of individuals who batter their family members and suffer from psychological disorders is no greater than the proportion of the population in general with psychological disorders. (Gelles, in Finkelhor, Edt; 1983)

Nor are the female victims usually 'passive agents'. Research from Britain and the USA shows that women who are in violent relationships "engage in constant struggles to comprehend the violence and their predicament, and engage in endless activities attempting to mitigate the violence and change or end the relationship" This normally includes looking at their own actions in an attempt to explain the violence, and often includes seeking help through a number of channels. (Dobash and Dobash, 1992)

Attitudes to violence in Green Fields and elsewhere

It is important to note that there is a wide and significant variation in what individual women perceive as 'domestic violence'. For some women, threatening behaviour in the form of aggressive posturing is unacceptable, whereas others do not regard anything which does not result in an actual injury as 'violence'. The women of Green Fields tend to fall into the latter category, whilst middle class professional women are more likely to regard any display of aggression as unacceptable, and will refer to it as 'violence'. In between there is a wide range of views. The definition of 'violence' and its acceptability varies according to the social context in which it occurs. Middle class women may be reluctant to define their own experience of violence as such because they are unwilling to see themselves as 'victims' of what they see as a working class problem. (See below)

In order to discover whether the high incidence of domestic violence is peculiar to Green Fields, or whether the Green Fields women accept violence in relationships as normal and are therefore more likely to talk about it than women in general, a 'straw poll' was conducted amongst women from outside of the estate. Enquiries were made of sixty six women, and although the sample used was not in any way representative, the results were startling. The women from outside of Green Fields were in the age range of twenty to sixty-eight years old, and were drawn from across the social spectrum. Each woman was asked whether they have ever been the victim of 'violence' within marriage or other sexual relationship. Violence was defined as having been struck or physically pushed around by a man.

More than three quarters of the sample outside of Green Fields answered that they had been the victims of violence, and all but two reported incidents

of threats and/or intimidation which stopped short of actual physical assault. Even when the violence had been severe none had reported it at the time and, as often as not, they did not even discuss it with friends because they say they were too embarrassed. For some of these women the first time they admitted to the violence was when they started legal proceedings for divorce and the violence was used as evidence of unreasonable behaviour on the part of their husbands.

Sometimes efforts to conceal what is happening become quite elaborate. One professional woman in her late thirties actually reported to the police a fictitious attack and mugging on the street in order to provide herself with a public explanation for the severe facial injuries she suffered after a particularly vicious attack from her partner. This woman, who has three young children, is still living with the man. She says his attacks, which at one stage occurred as often as twice a month, now occur much less frequently. He has attacked her only "*two or three times in the last year or so*". She says that he is more secure in the relationship now, and "*less paranoid*" than he used to be. She also says that she herself does not drink so much as she used to because when she did have "*a few too many*" she was likely to provoke his temper. She explained that she can be "*verbally quite nasty*" when she drinks too much.

Another highly-qualified professional woman, in her early forties, said that on a number of occasions her (now ex-) husband attacked her repeatedly with his fists, "*but what else could he do, poor thing? - when he was unable to argue verbally because he could not express his feelings he became totally inarticulate and would completely lose his temper*".

An attempt to discuss the issue of 'domestic violence' in the context of the Green Fields research with each of these women provoked a hostile response in every case. They emphatically disassociated themselves from 'wife beating' and 'battered women'. The woman who had invented the 'mugging' insisted that it was "*just a phase in [her] relationship when other things had not been going too well - a reaction to stress*" - she did not feel that her experience of male violence was in any way related to that of other women, with whom she had "*little or nothing in common*", whilst another woman responded, indignantly, "*Don't put me in the same category as those sort of women....*".

Both believe that they are so different from the inadequate, ignorant and helpless stereotype of 'the battered woman', that their own experiences cannot be compared or equated to that of other victims of domestic violence.

The very young women (under twenty two) and women over fifty reported less violence than the sample as a whole. In the case of the former group the response was fairly predictable. Younger women were less likely to have cohabited for any length of time, although many in this age range described the experiences of friends who had. In the case of older women there is widespread reluctance to admit to family disharmony in general, and violence in particular. Only two women over the age of fifty admitted to having been the victim of violence from their husbands, and in each case it was given as the reason for marital breakdown. One 69 year old, when asked if she knew of any victims of domestic violence amongst her peer group, replied that "*No, but then we've never mixed with those kind of people!*" Another woman in her late sixties, the wife of a retired manual worker and a council tenant, (though not of Green Fields) gave an almost identical response. She replied

"The people we meet don't go in for that sort of thing, although we did know of someone who lived nearby - but that could have been a rumour."

There seems to be a greater feeling of shame and stigma associated with domestic violence for women over fifty, even in the Green Fields setting, where older women tend to deny that it occurred either to them or to their peer group despite the fact that their daughters describe scenes from their childhood of violence within the parental home.

Gilly described how, when she was a child, her father regularly beat her late mother. Gilly says that her father's violent assaults upon her mother continued throughout her childhood until one of her older brothers confronted her father with the threat of retaliation, after which, so far as Gilly knows, the beatings stopped. Even when her mother was seriously hurt, she forbade the children to mention it outside of the house, and there was a tacit understanding within the house that it was not to be discussed. It is apparent that violent behaviour has occurred in the domestic lives of the older age group just as much as the rest, but the older women refuse to talk about it. When interviewed separately, men in the older age group admit to having treated their wives violently in the past, but their wives deny it. Gillian Pascall points out that domestic violence in the 1950s and 1960s was ignored by everyone "from friends and neighbours to police, courts, and academic writers" (Pascall, 1986: p 52) Pascall says that, in the first place, the occurrence of violence contradicted the images of "happy families" which were especially ideologically dominant in the 1950s and 1960s and, secondly, that family violence took place within the private sphere of the home, and that family privacy was considered almost sacrosanct.

Violence in the home is clearly not confined to places such as Green Fields, nor is it a working class phenomenon. What is significant about the Green Fields experience is, firstly, the severity of many cases of assault there compared to the others, and secondly, the social acceptability of violence, which shames and embarrasses neither the perpetrators nor their victims. It is openly discussed as a natural part of everyday life. Consequently, on Green Fields, domestic violence is not always confined to the private world of the home. Vicky's ex-husband on several occasions hit, or 'head-butted' her in public - usually in the pub - whilst Brenda's ex-husband frequently beat her in the walkway outside their house and then locked her out. Scenes of violent confrontation on Green Fields often spill out onto the streets and walkways, with the neighbours as an audience. The neighbours rarely interfere lest they become either directly involved or get the blame when the fight is over and the protagonists are reconciled.

The social constraints which affect the residents of Green Fields are different from those which influence individuals from other social settings. It is significant that Green Fields women tend to regard displays of aggressive behaviour as a sign of strength or of manliness, whereas the women from outside of Green Fields regarded outbursts of violence as evidence of weakness on the part of the man - as "*losing control*", or "*immature behaviour*". This is reflected in the reluctance of the latter group to discuss it, since it is regarded by them as embarrassing and socially unacceptable, in stark contrast to the Green Fields women, who openly discuss violence as an everyday part of sexual relationships. For them there is little stigma associated with being a victim of male violence.

Clearly, there is a marked difference in what is considered 'normal' or even desirable behaviour from men. 'Masculine' behaviour is regarded differently

according to the social setting. Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1990) argues that 'masculinity' is an acquired set of behaviours and attitudes that are maintained by a complex system of punishments and rewards. He says that no single set of behaviours, attitudes and conditions characterises all men even within a single culture.

Norman O'Neill (1973; 1982) conducted a study of the attitudes of working class men in the city in 1973 in an attempt to directly demonstrate the effect of environment. He compared the attitudes of Dockland workers still housed in the Dockland slums (located around the areas of the old docks) and others who had moved to the improved environment of the new council housing estate to the east of the city.

O'Neill describes the changes in the attitudes of the men in his study, from 'authoritarianism' which dominated in the old environment towards a more liberal and humanitarian attitude after they moved from their old slum houses to the new estate. He was especially interested in their attitudes towards their wives and children as one indicator of attitudes to authority as a whole.

He found that the men he interviewed in Dockland had extremely unequivocal ideas of gender roles. He quotes one respondent, "*A woman's job is to look after the home and the bairns. [children] A man's is to bring home the money*". Another told him that he was the provider, she was the domestic - "*A wife must always obey her husband*" - he "*ordered*" and she "*obeyed*". Men who helped their wives at home were not men at all, since housework is women's work, and therefore a man who undertakes domestic chores cannot be 'a man'. Feminist anthropologist, Gayle Rubin says, "The division of labour by sex can be seen as a taboo against the sameness of men and women which divides the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories and

thereby *creates* gender" (Rubin, 1978). Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg (1990) agree; "this taboo against similarity, and the dread of the collapse of gender difference operates silently and powerfully in all relations between men and women". They argue that the patriarchal structure of society, which accords power and privilege to men leads to them experiencing humiliation when gender divisions blur, and that women who attempt to take over male prerogatives place themselves in a vulnerable position. (Goldner, Penn et al, 1990)

O'Neill (1973) gives a number of examples of men in the Dockland area whose attitudes reflect Rubin's hypothesis. When questioned about their opinions of male and female roles, the responses given are described by O'Neill as "cyclical". Things are right because they are 'natural', (i.e. conventional) and because they are natural they must be 'right'. For example, they will describe unconventional (at that time) behaviour, such as boys having long hair, as "unnatural". Girls have long hair - therefore, a man with long hair is acting like a girl. Male displays of aggression are "natural" and therefore acceptable. A man who is not aggressive is therefore not behaving naturally; he is not really a 'man'.

Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg, who from 1986 to 1990 conducted a four year study of battered women and their attackers at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy in New York argue that "battering" is "a man's attempt to reassert gender difference and gender dominance - when his terror of not being different enough from 'his' woman threatens to overtake him". (Family Process, Vol. 29, 1990) They argue that such extreme fears in men are, according to theories of gender-identity formation, "normatively central to the development of masculinity" (Ibid.)

O'Neill (1983) quotes a respondent in his study thus, *"When I was a bairn me dad used to treat me mam something awful.."*, and another, *"To be recognised as a man you had to appear physically strong, be aggressive, seem sexually potent and to be seen to dominate your wife and children"*.

These were the dominant attitudes of the men who remained in the old slums environment, whereas O'Neill found that the men who had moved to the new estate were less aggressive, less authoritarian and spent more time in shared activities with their families.

O'Neill attributes the changes to a number of related factors. The old slum areas were typically rows of front to back houses with poor sanitation, shared toilets and washing facilities and lacking in insulation for either heat or noise. There was little privacy. Extended families lived very close to each other, whilst neighbouring menfolk worked at the same places and drank together in the local pubs and clubs. Peer group pressure made it very difficult for anyone who did not conform to accepted standards of behaviour to escape the notice and the scorn of their friends, neighbours, family and work mates. A man who did not dominate his wife was considered less than a man by other men and would be the object of ridicule and scorn.

O'Neill goes on to demonstrate how the men who moved away from the Docklands gradually changed their attitudes. The most intimate aspects of their lives were no longer closely scrutinised by their peers. They were also some considerable distance from their old drinking haunts, so they went out less frequently and were drunk less often. He also notes that the material changes brought about by their move had a beneficial effect. Because they no longer had to spend a substantial proportion of their income merely to effect essential repairs protecting their houses from the elements they were

able to afford more luxury commodities such as television and refrigerators, and so developed an interest in their homes and material possessions which had been impossible whilst they remained in the slums. O'Neill (1993) says, "Strengthening this process is the much elaborated move towards 'home-centredness', and the acquisition of commodities".

Their attitudes also changed with their new environment and the improvement in material conditions, a change which O'Neill describes as from 'authoritarian' to 'humanitarian'. This change was particularly evident in their attitudes towards their wives. He refers to a "more participatory attitude towards marriage, especially in relation to conjugal roles". Many of the men now helped around the house, took an interest in their children and socialised with their wives in a way which would have been impossible had they stayed in the Dockland area because of social pressure from the people around them. They felt that they had more control and influence over their lives, and therefore did not need to be constantly and publicly proving their 'manhood'.

Many of the Green Fields residents originally came from the same slum areas as the respondents in O'Neill's study, and inevitably reflect similar attitudes. Three of the eight cases in this study are of women who spent their childhood years in the heart of the old Dockland areas, and whose families were moved to Green Fields as a result of slum clearance.

O'Neill's respondents were, by definition, working men. Their removal to the outer estate left them in a much better financial position than before. A larger proportion of their total income was left after housing costs had been taken into account, and as a result they gained a greater sense of control over their lives. This positive change in their economic status and the associated feeling of self-worth may have been a more significant factor in changing their

attitudes towards relations within their families than the simple change of environment and/or the removal of peer group pressures. Economic security relieves stress and provides a sense of well-being and optimism. (Jahoda, 1982; Warr and Payne, 1983)

Between 1973, when O'Neill carried out his study and the 1990s changes in the economy as a whole and particularly in the labour market have had a profound effect upon working class families. The decline in the traditional industries of the city and its environs and rising unemployment on a national scale have left many men in the 1990s with no earning capacity. The financial advantages of working class men over women have been eroded. Female employment has risen generally, whilst male employment has fallen. Women in the 1990s are in a better position relative to men than their counterparts of the 1970s. Changes in the welfare benefits system have also placed women claimants in a better position than men, and simultaneously, high rates of male unemployment have eroded the opportunities for men to undertake the traditional role of breadwinner and head of household.

David Schulz (1982) argues that "Male dominance has been incorporated into our traditional definitions of the roles of husbands and wives". Women on the whole have adapted to changes which have generally improved their position relative to men, whilst men have not benefited. The roles available to women have expanded, and conversely, the scope available to men has been eroded. The transposition in gender relations brought about by rapid economic and social change outside of the control of individuals who are affected by it challenges the traditional and normative construction of masculinity, and this inevitably produces stress in gender relations. Stearns (1990) refers to the "difficulty experienced by men in making adjustments to

the changing role of women". Clatterbaugh (1990) also argues that "Men's options have not changed along with the changes that have occurred for women; men are stuck in the same traditional gender roles as providers, protectors, and competitors for women's attention". Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg (1990) point out that the ability to transcend the rigid categories of gender difference is difficult enough in "ordinary troubled relationships" but that it "puts a special burden on the man who is violent and the woman he abuses".

In the setting of the working class estates such as Green Fields, where unemployment is widespread, men have few ways in which to express their male identity. They are unable to perform their traditional male role in the family. The family has become dysfunctional, and as Schulz (1992) points out "dysfunctional stress may be conceived of as generating conflict and aggression".

O'Neill also recognises the problems for men who are unable to adapt their attitudes to accommodate rapid social change. Displays of physical aggression have always been a traditional facet of the behaviour of working class men. O'Neill (1993) says, "Traditional working class communities place much emphasis on masculinity, physical aggression and a sex-based division of labour".

The distinctive normative framework of traditional working class life and gender identity within it are threatened by the juxtaposition of the roles of men and women. There are negative effects on some men, "where failure to adjust could induce a man to physically assault his wife". O'Neill (1993) argues that for "those who experience a rigid sex-based division of labour, domination over their wives is one of the few forms of authority they

exercise" The changing roles of women threaten their own perceptions of what it is "to be a man".

Peter Stearns, amongst others, also says that "wife-beating was ... usually accepted in working class culture". Stearns attributes this, in part, to the frustrations of working in an environment where the men have little or no power". (Stearns, 1990).

Finkelhor (1983) argues that domestic violence is part of the broader theoretical framework - the "dynamics of power". He says that in the case of spouse abuse the "strongest are shown to victimise the weakest". However, he goes on, "although they are acts of the strong against the weak, they seem to be acts carried out by abusers to compensate for their perceived lack of or loss of power", and that "this attempt to compensate is often bound up in a sense of powerlessness, particularly with regard to masculine ideals in our society". Finkelhor points out that abuse is often "a response to perceived power deficit", and notes that it frequently occurs when men become unemployed and/or suffer financial difficulties. Goldner, Penn and Sheiner (1990) also recognise the importance of power relations within families. They state, "Gendered premises about masculinity are rigidly adhered to in the families of the men who are violent". Feelings of fear, inadequacy and dependence must be denied because they are "feminised". The denial of these emotions are "in direct conflict with psychological reality", and this, they argue, is why "intimacy can be so dangerous". Violence is a means of "reasserting gender difference and male power". (Ibid)

Women who are victims of Violence.

Rigid attitudes to gender roles amongst both men and women are traditional to working class family life. Unemployment erodes a man's identity and self-esteem - he is powerless to fulfil any other 'masculine' role in the home other than that which derives from his physical strength over his family. This, paradoxically, also seems to be accepted by the very women who are the victims of male violence. They want their men to be 'men', and yet they recognise the inability of the men in their lives to perform their 'social function' as providers. This phenomenon was observed by Liebow (1967) and Hannerz (1969) in their respective studies of life in the black ghettos of American cities where male unemployment was (and still is) very high.

Bitter experience has taught the women in this study that, from a financial and practical position, they are able to manage better without a man. The DSS benefits system itself reinforces this situation. (See Appendix 1) However, although the women jealously guard their financial independence, this does not mean, in most cases, that they do not have relationships with men, and these relationships often involve a certain amount of violence. Because violence for many women on Green Fields is an everyday part of sexual relationships this is perfectly normal and acceptable to them, and is therefore taken for granted. How else can the men in their lives be men?

"Would you want to be with a bloke who couldn't stand up for himself? You know - hen-pecked, like. Not me, I'd rather he knocked me about a bit than that." (Linda, Neighbour of Gilly's , aged 27)

"Well even Sean Connery says he does it, and I wouldn't mind being knocked about by him if he's free next Tuesday night!" (Sharon, aged 37)

To the women of Green Fields, aggressive responses from men are often acceptable responses.

Numerous theories have been offered to explain the phenomenon of the so called "battered woman". One view is that all women are the victims of systematic male repression within society as a whole, and especially within the family. According to Shainess, if women could escape their predicament [within the family] and establish lives of their own then they would free themselves from the violence and its consequences (Shainess, in Dobash and Dobash, 1992) Another perspective identifies women experiencing persistent violence as having unique personality disorders, leading to the creation of a distinct socio-psychological category, "the battered woman syndrome". This syndrome is characterised by the 'masochism' resulting from the problems encountered by all women living in a patriarchal society. "The presence of a masochistic syndrome makes certain women especially vulnerable to exploitation and violence". (Norwood, 1988). Norwood argues that women who stay in relationships with violent men do so because they are addicted to the excitement. They "choose dangerous men and dangerous situations" and are "highly attracted to drama, chaos and excitement". (in Dobash and Dobash, 1992) This approach implies that women who are battered are in some way different from women who are not.

Donna Moore (1979) holds a different view. She says that the profile of the battered woman is not very different from that of her batterer - all ages, all ethnicities and from all socio-economic groups. She goes on to add that battered women have very traditional notions of male and female behaviour.

Many of the women interviewed on Green Fields have an extremely romantic and idealistic view of men and marriage, at least in the abstract. Their

romantic notions are inextricably linked with their perception of masculine and feminine gender roles. Men, they say, *should* be dominant in sexual relations, they *should* subdue 'their' woman, even if the powerless economic status of the men in their lives means that they are unable to in any way other than that which derives from their superior physical strength. Unemployment, lack of status and lack of money causes men to be 'failures' in their own eyes, and they 'fail' in the eyes of the women too, for they are unable to live up to the expectations of the women. Their position as head of household/breadwinner has been undermined by their position in relation to the labour market. In this respect, the research on Green Fields mirrors the findings of Liebow, (1967) and Hannerz (1969) in their respective studies of US ghetto life.

Moore (1979) states that violence victims frequently demonstrate a lack of self-esteem. In the sense of having a low self-opinion, lack of self-esteem is not evident in the majority of the women in the Green Fields case studies. Lack of self-esteem is very apparent in the stories of Vicky, Glenys and Mandy, but it is certainly not true of Gilly, Brenda, June or Vera, who each have a very positive self-image - nor is it a particular characteristic of the women who responded to the 'straw poll' outside of Green Fields. Many of the latter have highly successful, well-paid careers and excellent social skills. Even Sally, who was raped and abused by adult males in her life from the age of eight, who spent her teenage years in care and currently works as a prostitute, has a very dynamic attitude to life and an extremely positive view of herself.

This is endorsed by Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg, (1990) who found that women who are battered "were not timid, self-deprecating, fragile victims. They were women of substance who had strong opinions and conveyed a

sense of personal power". They argue that "women form a sense of self, of self-worth, and of feminine identity through their ability to build and maintain relationships".

It should be noted, however, that because most of the women interviewed in the aforementioned study are undergoing therapy, and those on Green Fields are no longer in the violent relationships, both samples are able to evaluate their former situation and their present lives with the benefit of hindsight. Those women who have left relationships in which violence was a feature may have derived kudos and self-respect, firstly, from the act of leaving, and secondly, by surviving independently afterwards.

In any case, the concept of self-esteem, mentioned by Moore and others, is as variable as any other facet of individual personality. Sally, for example, does not feel any stigma about her work as a prostitute. She tells people what she does as a matter of fact, without any apparent embarrassment or shame. It is simply her way of providing for her children, and she is quite proud to talk about it.

Factors which undermine the self-esteem of one person may be entirely different from those which affect another, especially when placed in their social context. An analogy might be the case of a devout Catholic wife, for whom divorce is out of the question for religious reasons, and who might suffer years of abuse and maltreatment within marriage, and yet will gain more self esteem from enduring it than from leaving. The more she has to tolerate, the more she feels she is suffering because of her religious beliefs, and in this way her self esteem may well be enhanced. To the Catholic woman, the alternative of divorce and/or the public shame and stigma of separation may be infinitely worse than the private humiliation suffered within

her marriage, and she may derive self-respect through her 'martyrdom' in the name of keeping her family together for religious reasons.

For the women of Green Fields there is, in any case, little or no stigma attached to being treated with violence. On occasions Gilly's female neighbours have gathered to discuss their injuries, and compared bruises almost competitively. Injuries are discussed in much the same way that many women exchange childbirth stories, each out to 'better' the next woman with tales of endurance.

On several occasions group discussions took place, on one occasion at Gilly's house, another at June and Brenda's house with Brenda, June and Sally, and on numerous other occasions in the local pub. What was most striking about the group discussions was the extent to which the women involved were prepared to reveal the most intimate and private aspects of their experiences in violent relationships and the manner in which they were able, by comparing their own experiences with those of other women, to rationalise the violence. Within the solidarity of the group they were more likely to express mutual indignation at their treatment, whereas when interviewed individually they are more inclined to attribute the blame for the violence to some act or lack of control on their own part. These meetings appear to have a twofold function - they create a sense of solidarity between the women and at the same time they allow the individual woman to 'normalise' her own experience.

Victims of domestic violence are not invariably isolated individuals who nurse their injuries in private, and hide them from the outside world. This may be true of many of the sample outside of the estate, but it is certainly not true on Green Fields, where the attitude of the women is quite pragmatic. They tend

not to discuss the rights and wrongs of their treatment, but rather to compare the results. In the immediate aftermath of an attack a woman may declare her hatred of the man and her intention of ending the relationship immediately, but, in fact, she rarely does so. More often Green Fields women will stay with their aggressor through repeated attacks.

Why do women stay in relationships with violent men?

The answers given by women who are still in violent relationships and those who have left to the question, "Why did/do you stay?" are as individual as the respondents. One explanation, frequently offered by feminist writers, is that battered women are financially dependent upon the men who batter them, and that they have nowhere to go. Without an income of their own and without accommodation women lack the material resources to escape male brutality (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Beechey and Whitelegg, 1986; Pizzey, 1974; Pascall, 1986 and others). Male power and male dominance are derived from their financial status as family breadwinner over women as their dependants. Wilson (1983, p95) says that "Far from being abnormal behaviour, the violence of men towards women they live with should rather be seen as an extreme form of normality, an exaggeration of how society expects men to behave - as the authority figure in the family". Wilson goes on to argue that women's lack of power within the framework of the family reflects their lack of economic status outside of it.

This is not borne out by the research on Green Fields. Financial dependency may apply to a family with a male breadwinner, but it is not an adequate explanation in the case of the women interviewed in this study, since virtually all of them are, or were, financially independent of men and are householders (tenants) in their own right. They are surrounded by other women who are single mothers, so would not be stigmatised for separating from their partners, and would almost certainly be better off financially without them.

Even where financial dependency is a constraint, it does not seem to be the major factor. Green Fields women are used to financial hardship. The

amount of money each receives from her partner is unlikely to be more than the amount she would get from DSS benefit, even where the man has a job. If he is unemployed it is likely to be less. If they cannot force the man to leave voluntarily, finding alternative housing for themselves and the children can prove to be more of a problem. Getting a court injunction involves solicitors, is time consuming, and is likely to involve lengthy delays during which the woman has to live with a potentially volatile and violent man in circumstances which are aggravated by the acrimony involved in the process. In addition, as is clear in other situations as well, both women and men dislike contact with the 'authorities', and are often intimidated by the legal procedures.

It turned out to be more revealing to ask those women who had left why they had done so than to ask women who remain in the relationships why they stay. It also seems to be an easier question for women to answer - the active decision-making (and planning) involved in getting out of a relationship is easier for them to explain than the more complex questions surrounding why they stay. The increase in self-respect a woman gains from confronting and tackling a difficult and often dangerous situation after what may have been years of intimidation can be enormous, and they are usually very pleased to talk about it. Describing the process to another person appeared to re-affirm their confidence and self-worth. Breaking up an abusive relationship takes a great deal of courage and enterprise for a lot of women, especially since the process may even involve a serious escalation of violence. They also have to overcome their reluctance to tackle 'authority' figures, such as solicitors, the DSS and housing authorities.

In Vicky's case financial dependency was a factor in her remaining so long with Gerry, but not the only reason. He was unemployed and not a good

provider anyway, and in that respect she is much better off now. Her explanation for being reluctant to leave her husband for so long is more concerned with her own romantic expectations of marriage. She really believed in the 'idealised family', and wanted the marriage to work out. She loved him. It was the eventual realisation that her ideals were never going to be realised with Gerry that led to her ending the relationship. Vicky did not leave her ex-husband because of his violence. She left him because "*he was pathetic*" and she did not respect him. She had "*stopped loving him*".

Gilly, on the other hand, endured several severe beatings from her first husband before leaving him. Gilly's injuries were always to her body, where "*they would not show*". She would be kicked and punched, but was never struck in the face. She never discussed her predicament with anyone outside of the house, and took pains to hide her bruises. (Gilly did not live on Green Fields at the time of her marriage). Besides, in between bouts of violence her husband was a "*good husband*", and she "*loved him*". The final straw came on one occasion when her enraged husband attempted to strangle her, and in terror she sent her son, then aged five, to get help from a neighbour. The child was so upset and frightened by the incident that Gilly decided to leave. It was concern for her child, rather than for herself, which led to her leaving the marriage. Her love for her children was stronger than her love for their father.

Brenda left her husband after seventeen years of marriage when his drunken attacks had become more frequent and she realised that he was not, as he kept promising, going to stop. She says that until her ex-husband lost his job he was a loving father and "*good fun to be with*", and she "*loved him dearly*".

Sally was not financially entirely dependent upon her soldier husband. She could always depend on her own earnings as a prostitute if she needed to, and unknown to him, did so from time to time during her marriage. After the relationship broke down he attacked her with even greater ferocity, and for many months after she left him she lived in terror of his turning up on her doorstep. She says that she realises that she should have made the break much sooner than she did - she now can see him as he is - but at the time she genuinely believed that he would change. Sally is very aware of the "macho image" expected of men in the armed forces, and she feels that his aggressive behaviour was as much a response to his army training as his personality. She says she made allowance for his bad behaviour towards her for that reason.

Mandy says she cannot lock out her violent boyfriend because he will break the door down anyway, and then he is liable to be even more vicious to her. She does not consider his violence to her as especially important - she has "*got used to it*". The reason why she will not cohabit with him is not because he is violent towards her, but because he does not get on with her son. She says that, despite her boyfriend's nasty temper, she loves him.

Vicky, Gilly, Brenda and Sally ended their former relationships, therefore, not only because of the violence which they suffered, but because they had lost the romantic attachment - the love that they had felt for their men. They were not constrained by financial considerations. In any case, as previously noted, the financial position of the women was not adversely affected by the break-up of marital or cohabiting relationships.

The reasons why they tolerate so much violence are more deep-seated than merely financial and/or practical support. Donna Moore (1979) explains "a

very important reason why [they] stay is a combination of love and hope". She points out that the bonds in a marital or cohabiting relationship are very strong, and every woman hopes, because she loves the man, that each violent occasion will be the last. This is especially true where there are children of the relationship.

Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg (1990) noted that women undertaking therapy "were looking for a *deus ex machina*, and they found it in extravagant illusions of romantic love". They regard a woman's inability to give up an abusive relationship as 'addictive'.

Almost all of the women interviewed on Green Fields have a very romantic and idealised view of love, marriage and family life. They really want the relationships to work out. Some believe that in time things will improve - that he will "*settle down*". Of the cases contained in this study, apart from June and Brenda who are involved in a lesbian relationship, only Vera, who has never been treated violently by a man, realistically appraises the advantages and disadvantages of being "*involved with someone*", and her attitude is both pragmatic and cynical. She says that so long as she can "*get her leg over*", why should she want to "*wash a bloke's socks and put up with all that shit?*" She says this with great bravado, but she is genuinely and fiercely defensive of her independence. Vera is very capable of asserting and of looking after herself, and she was also greatly influenced by her mother who brought her children up alone after getting rid of her own violent husband when Vera was a child. Vera is happy to indulge in sexual relations with men, but does not want any further commitment. Brenda, on the other hand, has lost all interest in men, and has only negative feelings towards them, preferring to live in a lesbian relationship with June.

Gilly is consciously restructuring her life to enhance her career prospects, and she manages her house and children very successfully alone; she has a varied and active social life, and yet she has been using a dating agency in the vague hope of finding "*the right man*". Although she says she is only looking for a man with whom she can have friendship and perhaps sex, she is not currently celibate so she does not need to find a sexual partner. She hangs on to the remote hope that she will find a man with whom she can have marriage and "*traditional family life*" - the "*man of her dreams*" with whom she can "*share her old age*". This 'dream' of romantic love and family life was what kept Vicky with Gerry, Brenda with Joe and Sally with Pete. It is what keeps Mandy locked in the violent relationship she has, except that she recognises the conflict between 'family' life, where it includes her son, and 'love' life between her and her boyfriend, and it is for this reason that she says she will wait until her son leaves home before she will consider remarriage or cohabitation.

The women love television soap operas such as *Neighbours* and *Brookside*. They read romantic magazines, often of the photo-strip variety such as "My Guy", or *Woman's Realm* with romantic short stories. Their dreams of romantic love feature in their conversations all the time. They are not over ambitious. They do not expect wealth and status. The ideal man for almost all of the women interviewed in the Green Fields study is someone who loves them sincerely, is good with the children - a man who can give them financial security and life's basic comforts and who looks like Elvis Presley or Robert Redford! The emphasis on good looks is very common. The man of each woman's dreams has to look the part - to make her the envy of her friends when she goes out with him. Not one of the women talked about sharing life's hardships. They all want a man with whom there are no hardships. A handsome and generous breadwinner.

And what if he hit them from time to time? Responses to that question were variations of the same theme:-

"It's nice to be with a man who lets you know who's in charge - makes you feel safe"

(Jean aged 23)

"Shows he really cares about you, like, if he doesn't get jealous and all that stuff you wouldn't know whether he's bothered or not".

(Vera's son's girlfriend, aged 19).

They are often quite proud of "sticking by" the man who hurts them, even to the extent of boasting to each other about the amount they are obliged to put up with. One of the most popular songs on Green Fields, especially in the pub Juke-boxes, is Tammy Wynette's song, *"Stand by Your Man"*. Most of the women of Green Fields seem to know it by heart.

*"Sometimes it's hard to be a woman,
Giving all your love to just one man.
you'll have the bad times and he'll have the good times,
doing things that you don't understand
But if you love him you'll forgive him,
even though he's hard to understand
and if you love him, oh, be proud of him
'cos after all, he's just a man."*

For the women of Green Fields, violence in a relationship is not the most important issue. In this setting, for the women as well as for the men,

aggressive behaviour is a symbol of 'manhood', of masculinity. In the words of the women themselves:-

"I would want him to [hit me] if I went too far." (Vicky)

"Who'd want a man that couldn't give you what for if you asked for it" (Gilly's neighbour, mid-thirties)

They have no respect or admiration for men that cannot assert themselves, and they accept that aggressive behaviour is simply one way for a 'proper man' to do just that. If he cannot stand up for himself within the confines of his own home, then how is he going to do it in the public sphere where it really matters?

"It separates the men from the wankers!" (Edna's daughter, 22)

"So what. A man should wear the trousers" (Mandy)

There is also another side to the story. All but two of the women interviewed on Green Fields, and many of those outside of the estate, reported that, in their view, they had sometimes provoked the violence towards them. They recognised that there were occasions when they drove the man beyond what they already knew was his temper threshold, either by nagging or by ridicule, until the men lost control and attacked them. Sometimes it was a way of getting attention, but often it was a way to dispel the tension in the relationship.

This cycle of events is described and explained by psychologist, Lenore E. Walker. Her research with four hundred victims of male violence in the Rocky

Mountain area of America showed that violence occurs in cycles involving three distinct stages. The first stage which she describes as the 'tension building phase'; the second is the 'explosion', or 'acute battering incident' phase; and the third is the 'calm, loving respite' phase. (Lenore Walker, in *Battered Women*, Edt. Donna Moore, 1979)

During the first phase the man becomes increasingly edgy, and is liable to minor outbursts of temper and violence. The woman recognises the tension, and will attempt to dispel his aggression by humouring him in whichever way, based on her previous experience, is likely to be most effective. She may be compliant or nurturing, or simply keep out of his way. The period during which the tension builds up varies in duration from one man to another, and for an individual man, may vary at different stages of life. The causes of the tension may have nothing whatsoever to do with the woman or the relationship - he may have financial pressure, or an unhappy working life. He might have been insulted by someone in a pub, and had an altercation with a workmate. However, as the tension increases, the woman gradually loses control over the situation, until the man's temper finally 'explodes' in an outburst of violence.

For some women, however, the build up of tension and the knowledge that sooner or later, the outburst is inevitable leads them to provoke it. In this way they at least have some control - it may be while the children are out at school or in bed, or simply that they wish to 'get it over with' at a time when they feel that they are able to deal with it. It is in this situation that a woman's own drinking can also be a contributory factor. If she has had too much to drink then her inhibitions are affected and her judgement may be impaired. It becomes more difficult for a woman to suppress her anger towards the man who has subjected her to a period of extreme tension with his displays of

aggressive behaviour and so on, and inevitably, any expression of resentment or anger on her part is sufficient to unleash the violence which she has been trying to circumvent whilst sober. This scenario is described by many of the women interviewed on Green Fields and elsewhere. The woman at this stage is likely to blame herself, for she feels that if she had successfully controlled the situation then he would not have lost control.

The second phase described by Walker is one in which the man completely loses control. Unlike the first phase, during which he is able to contain his temper and the violent incidents are relatively minor, when he enters the second phase his rage is totally out of his control, both physically and emotionally. Walker describes it as "blind rage" - he does not know what he is doing. She says that 'batterers' are rarely able to remember what happens during this phase, and do not even recall what caused them to stop. Again, alcohol may play a part in this, but not always. It is certainly true, however, that he is not only more likely to lose control if he is drunk, but he is also likely to underestimate his own strength.

The third phase, according to Walker, is characterised by loving, caring, considerate and contrite behaviour on the part of the man, which is welcomed by both parties. He may shower the woman with gifts and flowers. He may take her out and about, and be unusually helpful around the house. He may alter his behaviour, cut out drinking or whatever he thinks will please her. He is likely to be attentive and passionate, expressing his great love for her, and also his need for her presence. Afraid that she may leave him, he promises never to do it again, and because she loves the man, and because it is during these times that he actually lives up to the romantic image of the man of her dreams, she believes him. Her anger is displaced by a reconfirmation of everything she loves about him. She is convinced by his genuine remorse,

and enjoys the attention she is receiving. She forgives him - after all "*he's just a man*".

Goldner, Penn and Sheinberg (1990) explain that in the bid for forgiveness that follows a violent episode, the man engages in a dramatic act of reparation in order to recapture the woman's loyalty.

Unfortunately, this third phase is generally short-lived. Once the man has been reassured that she does indeed still love him and that she is not going to leave, at least for the time being, then the whole cycle starts all over again, and the tension again builds up towards the next violent incident.

The women appear to be victims of their own romantic illusions. The brief periods of reconciliation are likely to be the best times they enjoy with the men in their lives. Furthermore, in some cases these are also the times that they exercise the greatest degree of control over the men. Sally, as well as a number of other women, says that she sometimes actually encouraged the violent outbursts because she knew that afterwards she would will enjoy a period of renewed amorousness from her husband; and because she knew that she "*could get away with murder*" for a while afterwards because he would be so anxious to please her. Although they are a minority, Sally and some others in Green Fields and elsewhere actually exploited the men's tendency to violence to their own advantage. It gave them, albeit briefly, power over the men.

Another important factor for many Green Fields women is that the romantic interlude which follows a violent outburst is a high spot in the routine of their lives, which are otherwise devoid of excitement and colour. It is also a confirmation of the importance of their position in the lives of the men. Without the tension and the violence they would not enjoy the passion and

the romance which they crave in order to reassure themselves of their place in the man's affections. The former is the price they pay for the latter.

In their own words:-

"Shows that he really cares about you" (Sharon, aged 35)

"makes you feel like a woman - real feminine like" (Edna, aged 40)

"anyway, just think about the making up - Wow!" (Vera's friend, aged 42)

For some women, therefore, violence is a normal part of sexual foreplay, and for many others it is part of a process by which they can manipulate the men in their lives into treating them, at least for a while, in the manner of their romantic aspirations. It is not surprising that there are times when these incidents get out of control, resulting in quite serious injuries.

In conclusion, it may not be violence in itself which causes the break-up of sexual and marital relationships, but it is frequently given as the reason, especially in divorce proceedings. Violence is part of life with the men of Green Fields - part of what makes men men. The relationships break down when the romantic periods which follow are no longer welcome to the woman. Recognising that they no longer want the man in their lives, violent or otherwise, they give up the illusion that the violence will stop. The man, sensing this, becomes more insecure and *'paranoid'*, (the word most frequently used by the women to describe the men's behaviour). He becomes increasingly jealous of what he now realises he has lost and "he may not want her to go anywhere, to speak with anyone. This restriction of access reflects his assumed right to her as interactive and exclusive sexual property and his fears of her disloyalty" (Tifft, 1993). The violent outbursts

become more frequent, and are often accompanied, as in the case of Vicky, Brenda and others, by accusations of infidelity which are totally fictitious. The woman then brings an end to the relationship, using the violence as an official reason to obtain a divorce or exclude him from her house. With that man, at least, the dream is over.

Chapter 7. WOMEN AND CRIME

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Chapter 7. Women and Crime.

Introduction

The next two chapters will attempt to explain the circumstances in which crime occurs in Green Fields and its importance in terms of social networks, identity, gender and individual strategies for survival. The case studies in chapter 5 show that a high proportion (five out of eight) of the women rely to a greater or lesser extent on income from 'non-legal' sources. Crime has a significant impact on the women's lives, both as victims and as perpetrators, and this has to be understood in the context of other aspects of their lives including the social and economic framework in which it occurs.

For the purposes of these chapters the words "crime", "lawbreaking", "offending" and "illicit activity" are variously used to refer to infraction of actual and current legal norms, meaning indictable offences, however trivial.

Beginning with a brief review of the feminist critique of traditional male-dominated criminology, this chapter examines the various theories which have been used to explain crime in general, as well as the reasons for the differentials between rates of male and female crime and the relationship, if any, between social change and general patterns of male and female offending. Chapter 8 goes on to discuss actual lawbreaking in Green Fields, its significance in that setting and the meanings attached to specific behaviour by the people concerned.

Women, crime and criminology - a case of under-achievement?

Both crime and criminology have been dominated by men and there is relatively little research into female lawbreaking. Feminist criminologists (Smart, 1976; Heidensohn, 1985) complain that there is a dearth of ethnographic material on female crime at 'grass-roots' level. The need for further research is emphasised by Heidensohn (1985, p11) who believes that "sex differences are so sustained and so marked as to be, perhaps, the most significant feature in recorded crime". She says that the reason these differentials have not attracted the interest they deserve in "traditional androcentric criminology" is that women's crimes are regarded by men as too mundane and low-key to be of any real interest, but that "since age and sex remain the best predictors for crime and delinquency - better than class, race or employment" (Ibid, p143), it follows that real understanding of crime is inadequate if it ignores or underestimates the importance of the low incidence of female crime and the significance of women's lawbreaking where it does occur.

Some Statistics

Extensive research in Europe, Britain and the USA shows that women commit many fewer crimes than men (Smart, 1976; Heidensohn, 1985; Heidensohn and Farrell, 1991; Box, 1983 and 1989; Carlen, 1988 and many others). It is arguably for this very reason that female criminality has, until recently, attracted so little attention.

It is difficult to make accurate comparisons based on official data because crime statistics are not collated in the same way from place to place and from time to time, and this gives rise to inconsistencies. As Heidensohn (1985, p3)

cautions, "scepticism about both the validity and the reliability of criminal statistics is now more or less universal". British (and other) crime statistics are based upon those crimes which are 'known to the police'. The British Crime Survey as a result of research undertaken on behalf of the Home Office between 1983 and 1988, concluded that as few as 37% of all crimes are reported to the police, and many sociologists believe that recorded crime rates should not be used as a reliable indicator of the true extent of crime (Carson and Wiles, 1971). However, despite scepticism about the accuracy of crime statistics and the methods used to collate them, women are clearly under-represented. According to Box (1983, p169) the official statistics may even exaggerate women's involvement in crime since "women play virtually no part at all in corporate crime, governmental and social agency crimes, or organised crime".

In 1985 only 59,000 females were convicted of indictable offences in England and Wales, compared to 385,200 men (Carlen, 1988) and since 1987 women have represented only 3% of the prison population (Central Statistics Office). In England and Wales in 1987, women were only 17% of convicted or cautioned offenders; the remaining 83% were men. Very similar comparative rates emerge from studies in France, with 18.73% of crimes committed by females, Italy, with 19% of the total, and Germany with 20.5% (Heidensohn, 1991). The differentials are even more marked in Holland and Scandinavia. Dutch crime statistics show that only 10% of crime suspects in 1988 were women, and the figures for Norway and Finland are 10.7% and 8% respectively (Heidensohn and Farrell, 1991). Female crime rates have risen slightly since the 1950s, but as a proportion of the whole, the male/female ratio has not altered significantly (Box and Hale, 1983, cited in Heidensohn, 1991).

When crime statistics are further broken down in order to evaluate type of crime by gender (See Table 1 below), it is still clear that, as Heidensohn (1991, p55) succinctly puts it, "*Crime is certainly a field of endeavour in which women could be said to have under-achieved!*"

Table 1 **Numbers of female per 1000 male convictions for selected crimes, England and Wales, 1989**

shoplifting	802
fraud and forgery	221
handling stolen goods	157
murder, manslaughter/attempted, etc.	125
thefts (excluding shoplifting/handling)	112
woundings and serious assaults	86
criminal damage	70
robbery	57
burglary	39
sex offences (rape / assaults etc.)	11
All indictable offences	178

Source: Central Criminal Statistics for England and Wales.

From 1982 to 1992 the conviction figures show the same patterns. Offenders found guilty at all courts of all offences in England and Wales in 1992 numbered 12,607,000 men and only 259,000 women, and there are marked differences when type of crime is considered. 39,800 men compared to only 3,800 women were convicted of crimes of violence against the person; 43,000 male convictions for burglary compared to only 1,200 female (Social Trends 24, 1992).

Although there has been a very slight increase in crimes of violence involving women (mainly from the younger age groups) their numbers overall remain very small compared to those of men (Heidensohn, 1991; Box, 1983).

Property crime is the highest category for both men and women. But it is worth noting that over half of recorded "serious crimes" referred to in UK

statistics are theft and handling of stolen goods, of which up to half are trivial offences in which property or money stolen is worth £25 or less, or, put another way, "two fifths of *all* serious recorded crime refers to offences involving less than £25" (Box, 1987; p117).

Theft involving women is most commonly in the form of small scale shoplifting, and more men than women are convicted even there. Fraud and forgery are the next most common categories of crime involving women, but it should be stressed that this represents numerical frequency for women and not the share of offences - the female *share* of such offences remains modest (Box 1983; Carlen 1988; Heidensohn and Farrell 1991).

A review of official statistics and numerous criminological studies to date shows not only that women commit fewer crimes than men (Box, 1983; Heidensohn and Farrell, 1991; Carlen 1988) but also that "very many fewer of them are professional criminals" (Heidensohn, 1991, p61). The rates of recidivism for women are very low (Carlen 1988; Box 1983). In 1992 44% of adult males were re-convicted within one year compared to only 2% of girls and women (Social Trends 24).

Feminism, criminology and female Crime

Feminist critics of traditional criminology (Leonard, 1982; Heidensohn, 1985 and others) argue that sociological theories which attempt to explain human behaviour are actually no more than discussions of *male* behaviour, and nowhere is this more apparent than in theories of crime and deviance.

This has been attributed to a number of related factors discussed briefly here.

1. Size and Scale.

Because female crime is not perceived as a threat to social order, being less frequent, small in scale and regarded as insignificant in comparison to the more 'serious crimes' of men it does not attract the same amount of government and/or other funding for research. "Female crime has had therefore a low public profile, it has not seemed to be an acute social problem, needing solution, for which research funds might be forthcoming and upon which careers might be built" (Heidensohn, 1985; p142). Many 'typical female crimes' are crimes without a victim and are therefore less likely to be reported and to be measured in statistical terms. There is also the possibility that lack of research in itself may lead to under-estimation of female crime. In other words, a social phenomenon can be overlooked if nobody is interested in observing it. Box (1983), however, argues that the evidence suggests otherwise, and that the statistics almost certainly reflect the true rates of women's involvement in crime.

2. Androcentricity in the Social Sciences

Before the emergence of the feminist movement, criminology, like mainstream sociology, was dominated by men who were "limited by interest and experience from observing female behaviour" (Heidensohn, 1985). It is argued that male ethnographers have difficulty carrying out valid research on

women, and according to some feminist sociologists, they should not even attempt to do (Back, 1993, p223). Warren (1988), Oakley, (1981) and others also question the implicit power relations between the male researcher and female respondents in androcentric social science (Back, 1993). Back agrees that "gendered power relations may be at work within the research experience. It is not simply that men cannot study women; rather, the issue is the degree to which power relations between men and women mediate the research process" (Ibid, p224). Bell (Bell et al, 1993, p1 - 2) discussing the importance of gender in research argues that "the issue of gender arises because we (ethnographers) do the fieldwork by establishing relationships, and by learning to see, think and be in another culture, and we do this as persons of a particular age, sexual orientation, belief, educational background, ethnic identity and class. In particular we also do it as women and men".

Criminological research has, until recently, been carried out by men about men, and this has resulted in limited understanding of female behaviour.

3) 'Machismo'

Lack of glamour associated with 'typical' female crime, according to Millman (1982), Smart (1976) and Heidensohn (1985), makes the study of women's crimes uninteresting to male writers. Heidensohn (1985, p141) asserts that there is a "machismo tradition" in criminology; the interactionist / phenomenological approach to the sociology of deviance of the 1960s and early 70s was inherently sexist - it celebrated the behaviour of young male delinquents but women were rendered invisible or only mentioned in passing and even then only to illustrate the attitudes of male respondents towards women in general. This is most apparent in studies of urban delinquent groups such as those of the Chicago school and other studies of deviant sub-culture, for example, Whyte (1955) and Cohen (1980), though Cohen (pxxi)

does accept that "the absence of girls from the subcultural literature is striking and demands explanation".

Many of the ethnographic studies of this period show obvious admiration on the part of the (male) researcher towards the (male) researched, and it is this which Heidensohn attributes to the machismo tradition which, she says, has "treated working-class delinquency as heroic and romantic" (1985, p141).

Cohen, for example, in his study of Mods and Rockers, *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* (1980) refers to "spectacular sub-cultures" which are the object of "obvious fascination" (introduction, Page xix), demonstrating the glamour attributed by white middle-class men to the 'delinquent' lifestyle of working-class youths. Becker, who was working as a jazz musician whilst undertaking his now famous study, *Outsiders* (1963), gives an appreciative and empathetic view of the racketeers and hoodlums who were his fellow musicians (Heidensohn, 1985).

4) Pathological and biological explanations

Female crime was for many years regarded as pathological and, as a consequence, medical rather than social causes were considered more appropriate for research. What was commonly regarded as female 'deviance' was often behaviour considered inappropriate to their sex, or actual 'sexual misbehaviour' such as prostitution and abortion. Women's fertility and sexuality had to be controlled, and those women who resisted the social controls (imposed directly and indirectly by men) were considered unfeminine and unnatural. "Implicit assumptions were made about physiological and psychological nature of women" (Heidensohn, 1985, citing Klein, 1973, p8), and women who did not or could not conform were regarded as mentally-ill rather than simply 'bad'.

What is regarded as acceptable sexual behaviour changes over time and place, and western women now have greater individual control over their sexual and reproductive behaviour than ever before. Social, medical and legal changes have made statistical analysis of these types of female 'crime' even more problematic because crime rates can and do record only offences known to have been committed against the legal norms which apply at the time.

Some 'crimes' are by definition gender specific - female prostitution, self-induced abortion and infanticide¹⁸ being obvious examples (Smart, 1976; Heidensohn, 1985; Heidensohn and Farrell, 1991), and these offences, because of their very nature, take place in private and would be difficult to record and probably impossible to study.

Various changes in the laws governing the availability of legal abortion in the UK and elsewhere have inevitably reduced the numbers of female 'criminals'. Women can now legally procure early termination of pregnancy without recourse to the illegal 'back-street' practitioner. There are no reliable statistics available for the number of women who successfully underwent illegal abortions in the past - it usually became apparent to the authorities only when the procedure went wrong, sometimes tragically, and the woman concerned had to seek urgent medical attention.

Biologically determined theories of female crime dominated sociological thinking from the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1960s when criminologists such as Pollak (1961) and Dalton (1961) blamed psychological,

¹⁸Only mothers can be charged with infanticide.

menstrual or menopausal problems for female deviancy, rather than the economic and/or social reasons attributed to men (Smart, 1976).

The belief that women are 'unable to help themselves' still exists. Pre-menstrual tension, menopausal hysteria and depression are not infrequently offered in court as mitigation for women who have been charged with offences ranging from shoplifting to murder. Store detectives interviewed informally in the course of this study complained that they are hindered in doing their jobs because it is the (un-publicised) policy of a number of large companies (including Texas Homecare, Aldi and Tesco) not to prosecute female shoplifters if they mention any of these factors when arrested at the scene of the crime. Neither the potential costs of unsuccessful prosecution nor the possibility of negative publicity arising bring benefit to the companies concerned.

Box (1983, p170) argues that women are "not generally believed to be really criminal and hence an occasional, even serious criminal act is more likely to be viewed as an irrational or emotional response to a passing situation". Malcolm Young (1994; p55) also refers to women's "supposedly inherent irrationality and emotionalism", which he says is a view of female criminality widely held amongst the police and judiciary despite the lack of evidence to support it.

Jock Young (Rex, 1974, p169) highlights the way in which differing interpretations are placed upon certain actions according to who the actor happens to be. The typical opiate addict in the US at the turn of the century was female, white, middle-aged and middle-class (as personified by the character of *Mary* in Eugene O'Neill's autobiographical play, *Long Day's Journey into Night*) and her addiction was seen as an illness, involuntarily

contracted and a cause for sympathy rather than censure - "little blame or stigmatisation was applied to her". More recently, Young says, the addict is more typically "male, lower-class, Negro and young", and as a result what is actually a physiological addiction has "become overlaid with *moral* and irrelevant overtones. A tautology has been established suggesting that the addict is psychologically immature, the major evidence for this is that he is lower-class, criminal and, above all, addicted" (p 169; italics in the original).

The way in which certain behaviour is categorised is influenced by the perceptions of the observed as well as of the observer. The self-concept of an individual is largely derived from the attitudes and responses of others towards them. If the actions of an individual are regarded in a negative light then the actors themselves are likely to adapt their self-perceptions accordingly. (For a detailed exposition of labelling theory see Becker, 1963).

The linkage made between supposedly masculine 'traits' of aggressiveness, competition and criminal behaviour, compared to the 'passivity and dependence' of females, is also disputed (Oakley, 1972, Box, 1983). Numerous American studies show that women who engage in crime are no more likely to be 'more masculine' or 'less feminine' than others, and there is no reliable evidence to show that female offenders are more or less socialised into notions of conventional 'female values' (Carlen, 1988; Box, 1983). Box, after reviewing the research to date, concluded that "what evidence there is - and it is not consistently sound - is that there is no unambiguous support for the view that female offenders come from the small minority of women who do not identify with traditional female values" (p177).

In conclusion, there seems to be very little evidence to support the view that women are inclined to crime for pathological or biological reasons. Extensive

research attempting to prove such causal factors has diverted interest and resources away from more conventional criminological research which has attempted to explain male offending.

Women and crime - a special case?

Leonard (1982) believes that existing theories of criminology fall short of the task of explaining female crime patterns because they are constructed by men about men and can therefore only explain men's behaviour. Leonard points out (1982, p57) that "Merton made no attempt to apply his typology to women". Merton argued that deviance may occur as a result of *anomie* experienced by individuals who, because of their social class position, are denied access to legitimate means by which to attain their goals. "It is only when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain common success goals for the population at large while the social structure rigorously restricts or completely closes access to approved routes of reaching these goals for a considerable part of the same population, that deviant behaviour ensues on a large scale" (Merton, 1957, p146). Albert Cohen (1955) hardly mentions women in his work on delinquent boys. Although Cloward and Ohlin (1960), who combine and develop the theories of Merton and Cohen, actually state in their introduction that their work focuses on males, they do not offer any explanation of why men's situation should differ from that of women. None make any attempt to explain middle-class crime and/or deviance, but concentrate on the delinquent behaviour of lower-working class males.

Despite the fact that feminist criminologists (Leonard, 1982; Smart, 1976 and others) criticise male-dominated criminology for ignoring women, they nonetheless argue that female crime cannot be explained by the same criteria that apply to men. Others (Carlen, 1988, Heidensohn and Farrell, 1991) argue that female lawbreaking can only be understood in the broader context of sex-role socialisation where women are subject to constraints of

male dominance in both their private and public lives, and the weaker position of women in general. A brief discussion of the more prominent theories follows. (For a more comprehensive review of these arguments see Box, 1983.)

Social control and family integration

Social controls, according to Kornhauser (1978, p24) are "actual or potential rewards and punishments that accrue from conformity to or deviance from norms. Controls may be internal, invoked by the self, or external, enforced by others" (cited in Carlen 1988. For a more detailed exposition see Hirschi, 1969). Closer parental supervision, reduced peer pressure and women's greater integration in family life have been variously cited as factors in inhibiting the likelihood of adolescent girls from becoming 'delinquent'. It has been suggested (Carlen, 1988) that parents "are more alarmed at the teenage deviance of daughters than sons and that social workers are more concerned with the behaviour of mothers than of fathers" (p131). Carlen's study of female prisoners found that the women she interviewed "thought that these general concerns with the greater need to regulate and control women were carried over into the courtroom" and that there was "a greater social stigma attached to being a female than to being a male criminal" (ibid). Heidensohn (1985, p180) argues that marriage, domesticity (and childbearing) provide powerful mechanisms of control over women, the more so because they can be imposed with "the willing, even eager, acquiescence of women themselves". Box (1983, p180) accepts that social control influences the likelihood for individuals to engage in or abstain from deviant or criminal behaviour. He says "*Of course*, an individual's social bonding and friendship network creates constraints which diminish the opportunity to commit delinquency" (added italics).

But on the other hand, social networks can and do bring opportunities for lawbreaking. The Green Fields and other studies indicate that social networks are a primary factor influencing the likelihood for women to engage in certain types of crime (Carlen, 1988; Taylor, 1993). Carlen (1988) refers to the rewards of friendship which can be derived from involvement in crime and Taylor's study of female drug users in a Scottish city shows that social networks are central to the distribution, use and abuse of illegal drugs by women. The Green Fields study shows that in that setting the women who do not take part in the illicit activities of their female neighbours are the minority of women who are socially isolated rather than those who are integrated. This point is elaborated and illustrated in the following chapter.

Chivalry

It has been argued (see Young, 1994 and Box, 1983) that misplaced chivalry on the part of the police, courts and other officials engenders the belief that women are not really criminal, and they are thus less likely to be the subject of police investigations in the first place. According to Young (1994), when women are involved in crimes with men they are perceived by male police officers to be passive accomplices, and are thus less likely to be charged and/or convicted. This contributes to official underestimating of women's involvement in serious crimes. Young observed that on some occasions the bargaining processes adopted by policemen during their enquiries result in women's involvement being overlooked in exchange for a confession from men. This, he says, occurs because "women are still largely excluded from the [police] profession or are marginal in the basic dramas of 'cops and robbers' on which much police work is set out and arranged. Here the idea of 'crime' has a huge symbolic load and structures many aspects of police culture, yet it is largely related in practice to a narrow range of anti-social

behaviour concerning certain acts of misappropriation of property and some acts of violence"(Ibid, p56).

Young also believes that sexism in the male-dominated court system leads to an attitude that women need to be protected and are less likely to be convicted and more likely to be treated more leniently when they are. The local stipendiary Magistrate is described by a local Senior Probation Officer interviewed for this study as "paternalistic, quixotic and even patronising to women", and "very sympathetic to female offenders" almost always regarding them as "passive victims of unfortunate circumstances, or manipulated by men", with the result that women are likely to receive lighter sentences than men.

The argument (expressed by some feminists in the 1970s) that women accused of crime are treated as 'doubly deviant', firstly for the criminal act itself and secondly for being 'unfeminine' in having offended at all, and are treated more harshly is not supported by extensive research in the USA (see Box, 1983, p170), although there is evidence that this does sometimes happen in the case of crimes which are regarded as 'unnatural' for women, such as child abuse. Overall, the research does not show any significant gender imbalance in sentencing (ibid)

Women, crime and social change.

It has been argued (Simon, 1975) that if the same causal factors which have been offered as explanations for male crime were applied to women, it would be reasonable to expect similar patterns of behaviour, and therefore, that women's emancipation should produce a rise in female crime.

Box (1983), however, advises caution when considering the linkage between female emancipation and rising female crime, not least because "rhetoric and anecdote often substitute for rigorous analysis of relevant data" (p191). He says that most commentators erroneously rely on crude manipulation of official data in order to prove or disprove causal connections, and that theories based on nothing more than the coincidental overlap of historical events may be "fatally flawed" (P192). He does, however, conclude that research based on the most rigorous analyses available to date and adjusted to contain the maximum number of variables, does not demonstrate any major changes in the ratio of female to male crime, and cites Steffensmeier (1980) who says that the "new female criminal is more a social invention than an empirical reality". Subsequent further studies using different methods of analysis produce less conclusive results. The debate continues.

Opportunity.

Smart (1976) Simon (1975) and others argued that women have fewer opportunities than men to commit crimes of theft and fraud because employment gives men greater access to money, equipment and so on. Men are more likely to be in positions of authority and will therefore be more likely to handle financial budgets, expense accounts and manipulate funds, making employee theft easier. Smart, writing in 1976 (p15) predicted that "most occupations give some opportunities for dishonesty and it is likely that as

women become a larger part of the workforce more of them will be involved in offences of this nature". Simon (1975) also anticipated that as women's occupational opportunities increased there would be a commensurate increase in occupation-related property offences as a consequence of women experiencing the tensions, temptations and motivations which corrupt men.

In 1994 women make up almost 50% of the UK work force and have thus gained opportunities to engage in employee-related crime. A large proportion of women are exposed to the "temptations, motivations and corrupting influences" which have been used to explain male occupation-related property crime, and similar patterns of female crime should therefore have emerged. The evidence indicates otherwise. There have been no significant changes in the official female rates for major fraud, robbery, theft or car crime. Men outnumber women in all of these areas.

Working women are, in any case, under-represented in positions of power and authority (Walby, 1986; Siltanen and Stanworth, 1984 and many others) where there are greater opportunities for autonomous action. Working women, because they hold subordinate positions, are also likely to be more closely supervised and are thus in a less 'advantageous' position when it comes to theft, fraud or embezzlement from their employers/clients than their male counterparts.

Although certain official crime rates for women have increased, the increases have been in the area of shoplifting and cheque book/welfare fraud, none of which are related to paid work (Box, 1983). This would indicate that female crime has risen fastest amongst those groups of women who have gained or

stand to gain little or nothing from women's generally improved position in the work place, rather than amongst those who have.

The economic marginalisation of women during the last two decades has had a greater influence on women's propensity to engage in property crime (Crites 1976; Carlen; 1988). Crites writing in 1976 predicted that poor women would suffer as a result of the advantages gained by women in general, and white middle-class women in particular, in the move towards greater equality between the sexes, and this would lead to the further marginalisation of working-class and non-white women. She states, "employment benefits derived from the feminist push for equal employment opportunities accrue predominantly to white middle-class females. The women's rights movement has largely swept over the subpopulation group of poor, minority females into which the female offender falls. These women, rather than being the recipients of expanded rights and opportunities gained by the women's movement, are instead, witnessing declining survival options" (Crites, 1976, p36-37, cited in Box, 1983). Literature on the 'feminisation of poverty' (Scott, 1984; Rodgers, 1986; Morris, 1994; Stallard, Ehrenreich and Sklar, 1985) discusses the ways in which single-mother households have become the largest category to experience social and economic marginalisation and chronic poverty.

Carlen (1988, p11) believes that women who are marginalised by a combination of class position, gender and the concomitant problems of poverty and multiple deprivation - ill-health, bereavement and isolation - have neither the material nor the ideological incentive to be law-abiding.

'Provider role strain'

Theories of 'provider-role strain' offered an alternative explanation for the greater criminal involvement of men than women - men are under greater pressure than women because they are expected to be able to support their dependent families.

During the last two decades a growing number of women have become 'heads of household' with sole responsibility for making financial provision for their families and these women at least are subject to the same 'provider role strains' which were said to afflict only men. Changes in family structures should, therefore, have led to a rise in female crime and a commensurate decline in the male rates as a consequence of men being relieved of the burden of supporting their families.

This has not happened. It is true that there has been a slight increase in the numbers of women convicted of property crimes but there has been an even bigger growth in the rates for men.

As a causal explanation for gender differentials in crime, provider role strain clearly is not adequate in itself. Box (1987), however, believes that strain is even more apparent in differing responses to unemployment. He says (p137) that "unemployed males are more likely to be perceived as problematic because, in western culture, work is not only believed to be the typical way in which males are disciplined but it is also their major source of identity and the process by which they build up a stake in conformity. Consequently when males are removed from or denied access to work, it is widely believed that they will have variously anarchic responses among which criminal behaviour is likely to figure quite strongly". He goes on "In contrast, and again because of institutionalised sexism, unemployed females can, and for the most part do, slip back into or take up the wife/mother social role and hence

become subject to all the informal social controls of *being* in the family, thus making criminalisation ... unlikely" (italics in the original). Hence, their motivation to use illegitimate means to acquire money, possessions and status is lower than that of men (Ibid, p180).

This view assumes that all women regard careers and/or paid work as secondary to and less attractive than child-rearing, home-making and (until recently) marriage. It may be the case that some women are better insulated from the effects of loss of identity, purposelessness and depression which typically affect unemployed men (Jackson and Walsh, 1987; Jahoda, 1982; Box, 1983 and 1987; Morris, 1994 and others) if they consider their socially sanctioned maternal role as their primary identity, but this is not necessarily the case for all women. There are women from the professional and managerial classes, who until very recently enjoyed greater job security than working class women, and who are now affected by redundancy and unemployment. Women who were formerly in highly-paid work during the boom of the 1980s can be affected by unemployment in much the same way as men. They do not necessarily see their work, or lack of it, as secondary to childrearing and/or marriage and they too may suffer material deprivation and thwarted ambitions. They may not be stigmatised in the same way that men are, but that does not mean they do not lose status and esteem both in their own eyes and that of their peers. And if women are sole providers for their families, then according to strain theory, rates of crime amongst them should have increased. The evidence indicates otherwise.

Women's emancipation and crimes of violence

Simon, writing in 1975, predicted that there would actually be a decrease in female crimes of violence because, she argued, increasing emancipation of

women would relieve them of the frustrations created from the sense of subservience and dependency upon men associated with the traditional female role; their anger, and thus their motivation to kill, would be reduced - "when women can no longer contain their frustration and their anger, they express themselves by *doing away with the cause of their condition, most often a man*" (1975, p2; italics added).

If Simon's thesis had been correct, then there should have been a reduction in violent crime amongst the minority of women who have gained from improvements in women's position in the work place, the white middle-classes, and a rise in violence (including murders) amongst the poorest women who have gained little or nothing from women's emancipation. The incidence of female violence has, in fact, hardly changed at all. Studies show that women are still many times more likely to be the victims of violence from men than the other way round and when there is a change in the position of women relative to their men they are actually more likely to suffer abuse from men than before (Stanko, 1985; Dobash and Dobash, 1992 and many others, see previous chapter).

In any case, even those women who have gained nothing or who have actually been disadvantaged by the improved position of women in general more commonly use the legal processes of divorce and separation, rather than murder, to '*do away*' with men. It could therefore be argued, at least if Simon's theory was correct, that social and legal changes making divorce easier for all women may have prevented a massacre!

Crime and family breakdown

Underclass theorist, Charles Murray (1990) asserts that expansion of welfare provision has encouraged the breakdown of traditional two-parent family households and led to the growth of a counter-culture which devalues work and encourages dependency and/or crime. Crime, he argues, is symptomatic of a growing subculture which does not accept the values and norms of mainstream society - illegitimate births are the leading indicator (p17) of a section of society in which the "habitual criminal is the classic member" - an "underclass" which "lives off mainstream society without participating in it" (p13).

Murray attributes to the unemployed the facility for making choices which in reality they may not be in a position to make. High rates of unemployment caused by economic recession in both the UK and the USA have left whole communities without the possibility of work, but the evidence overwhelmingly shows that the vast majority of the unemployed would prefer to be in work provided that it paid sufficient wages (Fryer and Ullah, 1987; Engbersen, Schuyt, Timmer and Van Waarden 1993 and others).

Murray singles out lone-motherhood rather than unemployment and poverty as the primary cause of "social breakdown" and rising crime. He asks (p12 - 13) "is there any difference in child-raising between a neighbourhood composed mostly of married couples and a neighbourhood composed of single mothers?" and continues "the difference is large and palpable. The key to an underclass is not the individual instance but a situation in which a very large proportion of an entire community *lacks fathers*, and this is far more common in poor communities than rich ones" (italics added).

Working-class women in general and single mothers in particular are vastly over-represented in Murray's 'underclass'. They are the group most likely to be long-term dependants on welfare benefits and least likely to be actively engaged in the formal labour market. According to Murray's hypothesis therefore, single mothers ought to be more active in crime than any other group. But it is young men from the lower social classes who even according to Murray himself, are "indifferent to work opportunities" and are the "habitual criminals". Murray's theory offers no explanation as to why it should be lower class men rather than women who fall into this category if the causal factors are welfare dependency and lack of 'work ethic'.

A further inadequacy of Murray's underclass theory is that it offers no explanation for white-collar or corporate crime, typically the preserve of the powerful - white middle- and upper-class men - and crime which must by definition occur where the participant is fully engaged in the labour market. These 'crimes of the powerful' are estimated (see Box, 1983 and 1987) to be far more costly to society in real terms than those of the poor and marginal. "Corporate crime is the more serious more people are killed, maimed and robbed, and the last of these aggregated far exceeds the value of 'conventional' theft" (Box, 1983, p17).

Like Murray, Norman Dennis (1993; and with Erdos, 1992) also blames single motherhood for rising crime rates. He argues that rising crime in the UK is a direct result of what he refers to as the "dismembered family" - single mothers raising children in the absence of "fatherhood". Dennis believes that fathers are essential to act as role models in socialising children and in the absence of such role models children are liable to become delinquent.

Murray and Dennis seem to have accepted the popular myth articulated by certain conservative politicians that working-class women and girls "*get themselves pregnant*" (John Redwood, Secretary of State for Wales; Cardiff, July, 1993) apparently without any part being played by working-class men. Men may not be living in traditional nuclear family households but that does not necessarily mean that they are not part of the communities in which children grow up.

But what is problematic about Dennis and Murray's position is the assertion that men *should* act as 'role models' given their disproportionate propensity to engage in crime, and their belief that children are more likely to become delinquent if they are brought up by women, who on the whole are law-abiding, than in the presence of men who demonstrably are not.

This is especially the case where children have regularly witnessed and/or experienced intrafamilial violence at the hands of men. The Green Fields and other studies show that domestic violence is a striking characteristic of working-class (and other) family life (Archer, 1994; Clarke, Craig and Gledening, 1993 and others. See previous chapter). Crimes of violence are almost always the prerogative of men and there is ample evidence to show that men who are violent have themselves been the victims of male violence in their own childhood, and have exaggerated ideas of gender role norms (Archer, 1994; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Stanko, 1985 and others; see previous chapter).

Dennis's argument pivots around the premise that the ideal family, that of the 1950s, was stable and law-abiding and that the sharp increase in crime rates from 1955 to the present correlates with a decline in the popularity of conventional marriage and a rise in illegitimate births. This, he believes,

demonstrates a lack of morality, an attack on the notion of citizenship and social responsibility. He says that children, and boys in particular, who grow up in "families without fatherhood" are denied the stabilising influences typified by the traditional 1950s family life, with working father and full-time, stay-at-home mother. The kind of political rhetoric encouraged by these highly publicised underclass theories, by placing the blame for juvenile crime squarely on the shoulders of single mothers, adds stigma to the other disadvantages they face bringing up children alone.

In any case, a brief glance at current statistics shows that Dennis's argument is weak. Figures released in 1993 show that one third of men born in the early 1950s had a criminal conviction by the age of 31 and one in fourteen had been convicted of a crime of violence. 7% of men had more than six convictions (Social Trends 23, 1993). These presumably are the same men who spent their childhood in the 'stable' two-parent families of the 1950s which Dennis appears to believe was a "golden age" of paternal responsibility, neighbourliness and sociability. In addition, the most recent statistics published by the government Central Statistics Office show that the number of known juvenile offenders (under 16s) fell by almost 35% between 1981 and 1992 (Social Focus on Children, quoted in the Guardian, 24.8.1994).

Morris (1994, p116) sums up the conflicting pressures faced by single mothers. They are expected to fulfil their traditional gender role as "agent of morality and socialisation", but at the same time they are exhorted to join the labour force and experience the stigma associated with being dependent on welfare benefits. These women have not rejected either the 'work ethic' or traditional 'family values'. They are simply not able to do both, and find it difficult adequately to do either in the face of the obstacles placed in their

way. Many come from situations of chronic poverty "that offer opportunities for neither men nor women" (Morris, 1994, p116 citing Bane, 1988, p385).

The tendency for politicians to scapegoat single mothers conveniently diverts attention from other changes which have occurred since the 1950s and which have also had an impact on modern western society.

Unemployment

The period which has witnessed the sharpest decline in the popularity of marriage has been accompanied by a huge rise in male unemployment. The unemployment rate in 1965 was only 1.4% of the workforce and job vacancies at the time matched the number of registered unemployed (Box, 1987). Long-term unemployment (more than six months) was experienced by fewer than a third of the total. Unemployment has risen to what Box (ibid, p4) refers to as "grotesque" proportions. By the end of 1985 a quarter of men and a fifth of women in the 18 - 24 age group were unemployed. Unemployment has disproportionately affected the ethnic minorities, unskilled males and city dwellers.

Inequality

At the same time income inequalities have widened. Changes in real income between 1979 and 1994 show that the poorest 10 per cent of the UK population have seen their real income fall by 17% whilst the richest 10 per cent are 62% better off (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, quoted in the Guardian, 2.9.94). The poorest in society, those dependent on welfare benefits, have experienced a cut in the real value of their benefits and have lost their entitlement to emergency payments for urgent need. Benefit cuts during Mrs Thatcher's first term in office amounted to £1,600 million (Mack and Lansley, 1985) and the situation for benefit claimants has deteriorated

since. A children's charity, NCH Action For Children, claims that present benefit levels for children would not be sufficient to provide "a subsistence diet of gruel, bread and meat three times a week given to children in Victorian workhouses" (quoted in the Guardian, 2.9.94)

What is particularly significant here is that the rate of benefit payable to single adult claimants over 25 years of age is £44 per week, and even this is widely regarded as inadequate. For the age group aged 18 to 24 the rate is between £26.45p and £34.80p, and for the under 18s living at home there is no benefit paid at all. The basic needs of a person under 25 are not very different from those of a person of 25 or over. So, just at the very age when it is known that young men are most likely to offend, 18 - 24, they are denied an income which the government itself regards as the minimum level for subsistence.

The impact of television

Commercial television which arrived in Britain in 1955 is also an important factor. By 1981 99% of British households had one or more TV sets (Cashmore, 1994). Television has had a huge impact on people's everyday lives. The working-classes, according to research by Gerbner (1980, cited in Cashmore, 1994), watch much more television than "higher earners" and are presumably more likely to be affected by it. For those who, because of the constraints of unemployment and poverty, do not have the resources to stray far from home, television provides a window to the outside world.

In every house in Green Fields visited during this study the television set was invariably switched on. It is normally turned on in the morning by the first

person up and remains on throughout the day until the last person retires to bed at a time dictated by the closure of the TV channels. This habit was also noted by Wight (1987, p233) in his study of unemployed families in a Scottish community. He says that in Cauldmoss "a living room without any television would be considered very bare, and the occupants either absolutely poverty stricken or most peculiar". In the Green Fields setting, when conversation makes it difficult to hear the TV, for example when the children are about, the volume is turned up. Individuals then raise their voice to be heard above the TV so it is then necessary to turn it up even higher. By early evening the TV volume is set at its maximum level and noise levels are extremely high.

The commercial stations are the most popular, and soap operas and crime programmes (such as *The Bill* and *Crimewatch*) are particular favourites. Cashmore (1994, p155) says "Crime drama regularly take up 20 per cent of programme time and commands high ratings, not to mention viewer loyalty". Viewers on Green Fields show their enjoyment of crime programmes, as conversation stops for the duration of their favourites. At other times nobody appears to be actually giving their full attention to the TV at all - it is simply there in the background as a distraction, with individuals showing a spasmodic interest as programmes they like are shown.

TV and Violence

Research to date shows that although there is no scientifically proven link between screen violence and violent crime, there is consensus that regular viewing of screen violence de-sensitises the viewer (Cashmore, 1994). Between 8.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m. British TV shows on average five acts of violence every hour, and this, argues Cashmore (p65), gives out the message that such acts are usual and normal - "television violence has become quotidian. We accept it as part of our everyday viewing; so much so

that we barely bat an eyelid at the sight of physical force, injury or death". Cashmore believes that this has led to a situation in which society begins to recreate the world as depicted by television. Television images, he says (ibid, p67) reinforce the view that "violence is...a socially acceptable way to solve problems". This does not mean that TV violence automatically translates into actual violence, "but it can facilitate and encourage it by providing scripts to be encoded, worked up and decoded at later stages when the situation seems appropriate." In their real lives most people are not regularly involved in life-threatening situations, major disasters and so on, but they can experience the fear, thrills and excitement of those situations through watching them on TV. Gerbner's (1970) pioneering research into violence on television led him to postulate that it represents "cultural indicators" of the world; viewers accept the images depicted by TV as images of the real world and begin to re-create the world accordingly. Ideals and norms of behaviour are adapted and absorbed into the viewer's own lives (Cashmore, 1994).

TV and Stereotyping

Television can and does create, endorse and/or reinforce racial, gender and other stereotypes and this in turn can generate and/or reinforce prejudices against disadvantaged groups in society. Cashmore argues that even when television is used to deliberately manipulate positive attitudes towards minority or disadvantaged groups, the results can still be damaging. To illustrate this he gives the example of the American comedy show, *the Cosby Show*, which depicts an attractive black American upper-middle class patriarchal family, the *Huxtables*, rather than the more usual 'marginalised or victimised image of black Americans. This fictional image of a prosperous black family has brought about a changed perception of black families in American society in general. The white majority, Cashmore maintains (p99),

are able to justify their indifference to the disadvantages suffered by black people in general by pointing out that the Huxtable family are obviously "prosperous" and "seemingly unaffected by racism", and therefore, "If blacks can be like the Huxtables, why does the country agonise over their so-called problems?"

Gender roles are also stereotyped. Male heroes are more often than not adventurous and aggressive and females attractive and gentle, although Cashmore (1994) notes that programme producers are increasingly widening the scope of roles played by females. He says (p115)

"since researchers first identified the quintessential consumer as female and between the ages of 18 and 35, television has pandered to women, promoting the vision of the good life in which they play a key part and feeding an obsession with youth, affluence, beauty and glamour. Yet in another way, the position of women has similarities with that of other minority groups. Historically, women on both sides of the Atlantic and, indeed, in most parts of the world, have been regarded as bearers and rearers of children, oriented to domestic work and having no significant role to play in society's major institutions. The family has been seen as the woman's domain: here she is in her element, nurturing, caring, comforting".

Cashmore believes that this is changing, with scripts being rewritten to incorporate women into roles which were formerly the preserve of men and he believes this reflects recognition by advertisers that women have greater control than men over disposable income, and that if they want to attract a female audience they must portray women in a more flattering light.

TV and Advertising

Arguably, the most profound effect of television is brought about through advertising. Advertisements go beyond the function of introducing potential buyers to a range of goods and services. They act as a vehicle for manipulating values and attitudes through which "people can organise their thoughts and experiences and come to make sense of the world they live in" (Dyer, 1982, p2). Dyer suggests that advertising offers a magical solution to the problems of real life - a modern day alternative to religion or art in that it provides a framework for the interpretation of experience and the elimination or rationalisation of the unpleasantness of life. Life will be transformed with the acquisition of this or that commodity. Advertisements "collapse aspirations and fantasies into items" (Cashmore, 1994, p97) that can be acquired from the shelf of a supermarket or mail order catalogue. Cashmore (ibid) maintains that "television is advertising" and therefore "it follows that television is more than an integral part of our culture, it is a defining agent of culture".

Advertising sells not only products but also images of the lifestyles with which they are associated. "Cars are the exemplar here: several dozen models may be very similar, but some marques maintain a status which can be transferred to the owner" (Cashmore, 1994, p86). The marketing of expensive sport shoes and clothing, usually endorsed by famous sport personalities and primarily aimed at young men, has resulted in the 'right brand' training shoe becoming a status symbol for many young men. Cashmore (p93) points out that the target age for television advertisers is 22, which is believed by advertisers to be the age group "willing to shift product loyalties", and which, he says, "is why much of the fare of prime time television is about the joys and challenges of youth".

Advertisements and the TV programmes surrounding them inundate the viewer with a myriad of attractive and desirable material things and associated lifestyles. But for the poor and unemployed, both the products and associated lifestyles are beyond their means.

The desire for material possessions goes beyond their actual worth or practical use value. Wight (1987, p221) argues "the practical value of objects is determined by cultural ends to which they are put: they have no value in themselves, only in relation to culturally defined objectives" and that "frequently, these cultural aims are not even recognised by the consumers". Wight (ibid, citing Sahlins, 1976), says that the vast range of manufactured goods amount to nothing more than an elaborate "bourgeois totemism" by means of which culturally significant aspects of a person are communicated. Wight's study of the Scottish community led him to conclude that "the cultural criteria by which commodities are valued (as opposed to supposed 'functional' criteria) are demonstrated by the unemployed's perspectives towards consumption. Because the unemployed ... do not see themselves as a distinct group, the cultural values ascribed to goods change little" (p7).

The symbolic values associated with different material objects varies according to the setting. Men want and need to possess the material possessions which symbolise working-class 'manhood', whether they are able to afford them or not. In Green Fields, what is culturally significant to the men is possession of things, by whatever means, which have symbolic value as indicators firstly, of financial success as defined by the media but more essentially of their masculinity. Women, on the other hand, want their children to look like the angelic, cute, well-dressed children portrayed in TV advertising. What is most significant to the women is motherhood and

making adequate provision for their children. The children must be seen to be well-cared for.

This fundamental difference forms the basis of the next chapter. To place the illicit activities of the women of Green Fields in context, their behaviour must be viewed in the light of the pressing need, over and above any other social and/or legal pressure, to maintain their identities as mothers.

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Chapter 8. Crime and Illicit Activities in Green Fields.

Introduction

Crime discussed in this chapter includes DSS fraud, shoplifting and other theft, handling stolen goods, drug dealing, vandalism, and car and bike theft. Child sexual abuse (said by local health and social workers to be a serious and widespread problem in the county and in the city in particular) is also briefly discussed because it is prominent in the lives of some of the women in this study. This study found no evidence of women sexually abusing children, but three were abused by adult men in their own childhood, and abuse of her own children was the reason given for the breakdown of one woman's marriage. It must be emphasised that it is not possible to ascertain precisely how typical the cases described here are, nor to attempt any kind of quantitative analysis of crime in Green Fields as a whole, but anecdotal evidence from the women themselves and incidents observed in the course of the study suggest that the patterns of illicit activity described are likely to be repeated throughout the estate.

The Green Fields research relies to a great extent on 'self-reporting' and, because of the sensitive nature of the subject, it has not been possible to substantiate incidents of crime described here except where they were physically observed in the course of this study. As a measurement technique, self-reporting has its critics, but it is generally regarded by criminologists as at least as reliable as other techniques (Heidensohn, 1985; Box, 1983). Box (1983, p168), citing numerous studies says "it is safe to argue that the majority of respondents are *honest* when they ... reply to interview questions concerning their own criminal behaviour" (italics in the

original). The comparative results of crime-rate studies using other methods do not differ greatly from those based on self-reporting (Ibid, p169).

Nonetheless, there are certain limitations to the self-reporting method. The willingness of individual respondents to admit to certain kinds of lawbreaking can and does reflect the ascribed stigma or status attached to a particular activity, and that in itself may be specific to its particular cultural setting, physical location and the age and gender of the respondent. Early research using the self-reporting method tended to focus on delinquency in adolescents (not least because groups of adolescents were easily accessible to the researcher), the age when offending rates are highest. The results of these studies show considerably higher rates of delinquency for boys than for girls. However, it must be noted that for cultural reasons boys are more likely to boast about 'deviant' activities which girls might prefer to conceal (Smart, 1975; Heidensohn, 1885). This is particularly so where promiscuous and/or premature sexual behaviour is reported. Sexual promiscuity gives kudos to the adolescent male, but may cause shame and embarrassment to the girl (Ibid).

In the Green Fields setting the specific meaning attached to women's engagement in one type of illicit activity compared to another has less to do with conventional notions of morality than with a logical and reasonable evaluation of the potential benefits, the risk of detection and the consequences thereof. For example, it is argued in this chapter that the very low incidence of DSS fraud compared to other crimes amongst women in Green Fields results from a combination of the relatively small rewards, the potential consequences of detection and the lack of respect to be gained from others. However, it cannot be ignored that these combined factors (and especially the immediate and very serious consequences of detection) lead to

understandable caution in admitting DSS fraud compared to other crimes. This was especially the case in the early stages of this study, when replies to the enquiries of a (then unknown) interviewer about DSS fraud were definitely unreliable. Women were hardly likely to admit to having informal paid work to someone who might well have been a 'snooper' for the DSS fraud squad! The same reluctance almost certainly applies to child sex-abuse, but for rather different reasons. Where child abuse occurs it is unlikely to be revealed through self-reporting given the associated taboos which apply both in Green Fields and elsewhere.

Behaviour such as vandalism, regarded as deviant or delinquent in other places, in Green Fields is seen as little more than juvenile high spirits, and even where it results in serious criminal damage it does not provoke the sort of outrage it would cause elsewhere. Cohen (1980, p12) questions whether 'deviance' can be defined at all. He says that the term 'deviance' invites the response, 'deviant to whom?' or 'deviant from what?', just as the term 'social problem' invites the question 'problematic to whom?' What is socially acceptable or otherwise varies, just as the labelling of criminal behaviour is itself essentially a social process (Becker, 1963; Box, 1983; Cohen, 1980).

The actual or presumed behaviour of an individual may be of less importance than their "personal attributes, real or imagined", and "this interplay between the symbolic meanings attributed to personal characteristics and the presumed relevance of abstract meanings typically associated with particular behaviour is evident whenever an individual classifies her own actions or has them classified by others" (Box, 1983, p169). Thus, the meanings attributed to and the interpretation of behaviour, criminal or otherwise, reflect the attitudes and characteristics of the observer, including the self as observed.

In Green Fields, the primary factor considered by the women in classifying their own and other women's behaviour is essentially related to the perceived risks to their children. To be 'a bad mother' is infinitely worse than to break the law, especially if illicit behaviour can be justified because it is in the interests of the children. The consequences of detection can be damaging to the children, so to be caught is regarded by the women as a greater 'crime' than the actual lawbreaking.

This is central to understanding the women's view of themselves and other women. The most hated and feared 'officials' in Green Fields are social workers. Social workers can take away the children, and in doing so they deprive the mother not just of her children with all the concomitant emotional repercussions, but they also strip a woman of her social status, her identity and her primary activity. A mother is publicly labelled as bad and/or inadequate, and is subsequently ostracised by other women, who do not want to be associated with her. Neither Mandy nor Glenys are welcome to mix with their neighbours or other women because they are both regarded as bad mothers - their children are 'at risk' and likely to be removed. Little sympathy is shown for them. In Mandy's case they blame it on her drinking which they say is "*her own fault*". This actually exacerbates her drink problem. Unable to mix with women, she spends much of her time in the pubs with men who treat her to drinks. In the case of Glenys, her neighbours say that she "*lives like an animal and her bairn should be taken off of her while it's got a chance*". Neither of these women has access to the social networks which can offer the opportunity to gain a little extra money to supplement their DSS benefit. Neither is offered the cheap foodstuffs, household equipment or children's clothing which may either be stolen or simply passed on by another mother when her own children no longer need it. Because they are unable to benefit from the resources (some but not all of which are derived from illicit

activities) which are enjoyed by other women, these women are further deprived. Trapped in a situation from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting conditions, their position rapidly deteriorates. They cannot supplement their income because they are denied access to the networks which for the women of Green Fields are often the only available means to economic survival. They live in squalor, and because their living conditions are squalid and their children inadequately cared-for and badly dressed, they are perceived as dirty and 'bad' mothers, and are thus ostracised by other women. The ultimate irony is that, in terms of conventional morality, these women are actually the law-abiding respectable few, but they are nevertheless subject to condemnation for neglecting their children, and liable to be punished accordingly when their children are removed. Women who break the law, on the other hand, can plead in mitigation that they did so for the sake of their children, and being a 'good mother' is a strong reason offered by defence solicitors for not sending female offenders into custody.

Social networks give women access to cheap goods, and food in particular, but they also allow the women to normalise their activities by sharing experiences with others. They exchange friendship, companionship and information. For example, the women of Green Fields are fully aware of the attitudes of magistrates, policemen and court officers and, through information available within the female networks, they are able to accurately predict the tariffs imposed upon female offenders before they even get to court. They are both rational and calculating, not only in their participation in lawbreaking, but also in their evaluation of the likely consequences of detection and conviction. Their evaluation of their own actions and those of other women is determined by a combination of circumstance and logic - what potentially can be gained against what is at risk. If there is the chance

of losing or damaging their children through either imprisonment or severe loss of income, then the risk is likely to be too high. Any mother who knowingly takes such a risk is regarded by others as a 'bad mother'.

Most offences committed by the women of Green Fields are 'crimes of survival', small in scale, but vital in providing a little extra money or other resources to supplement their inadequate incomes. Where theft is concerned, the amounts involved rarely exceed £100, and are more usually in the order of £5 to £10. As a general rule, stolen foodstuffs, clothes and other household items are sold for around a half of their value, and larger items, especially those resulting from burglary, for about one tenth of their true value. Items of portable electrical equipment, such as video recorders and microwave ovens, are sold for between £20 and £30 and sometimes even less, depending on their condition and how 'hot' they are.

As in other areas of social life in Green Fields, the involvement of men and women in different types of crime, reflect the cultural construction of gender in the community as a whole.

Male youths are mostly, but not always, responsible for criminal damage in the form of vandalism. Young women and girls are rarely active participants although they are sometimes present as observers. Women are hardly ever directly involved in car crime, and then only as passengers in cars known to be stolen.

Women handle stolen goods, but this study did not find any women who were actually involved in large scale theft, burglary or 'breaking and entering'. Those crimes are committed by men. Women when they steal do so by shoplifting.

This study found an interesting gender division in the sale of drugs; within Green Fields it is now mostly women who sell cannabis, albeit in small quantities, but rarely hard drugs. Like car crime, dealing in hard drugs is the prerogative of the men. A progressive shift in cannabis selling away from men to women took place within the estate during the period of this study.

The more serious crimes of theft committed by mature men tend to occur in the 'public arena', and outside of the estate. Burglaries within the estate, which are often not reported to the police, are offences typically committed by male teenagers and young men under 25. Sometimes the victims know who has burgled them, and goods can be restored without the need for complaints to the police. On several occasions during the period of this study the mothers of teenage boys were observed restoring property stolen by their sons to its 'rightful' owner in an open manner and without any evidence of embarrassment, although disputes arising from neighbourhood theft do occasionally lead to physical violence.

Women's illicit activities tend to be 'home-centred', with the notable exception of shoplifting, and even that could be regarded as an extension of their domestic lives. Shoplifting is an arena of crime where women have the same, if not greater opportunities as men, since shopping is a legitimate and necessary public activity for women (Heidensohn, 1985, p7).

This male/female and public/private dichotomy is discussed by Young (in MacDonald 1994, p59), who argues that the structural predominance given to male police officers pursuing male offenders who operate in the public domain reveals a "world of symbolic boundaries". Young argues that the male-dominated police force, as a response to heavy male-orientation within,

has a tendency to overlook or underestimate female criminality. This might, he says, "be a world where women are placed firmly in the invisible world of hearth and home; for in this arena, the 'dangerous classes' follow a similar private/public gender orientation in their practices".

There is also a political dimension. Serious crimes, particularly of theft, committed by men predominantly occur outside of the estate where victims of robbery, burglary, car and other theft report their losses to the police if only in order to validate insurance claims. This creates political pressure to improve 'standards of law and order', and the police must be seen to respond. The police also have to answer criticisms of incompetence and impotence, and will therefore be under greater pressure to detect and prosecute those crimes which attract the attention of both the media and the public in general. Women's crimes, being in small scale and trivial by comparison do not receive the same sort of police attention as those of men firstly because there is often no obvious victim and secondly because they rarely involve violence or injury to the person.

Crime statistics record only reported and/or prosecuted crimes. Within Green Fields a high proportion of crimes go unreported to the police, in the first place, because residents are unlikely to be insured against theft, and in the second, because victims of crime and/or members of their families may themselves be involved in illegal activities and do not want any contact with the police. It should also be noted that residents of Green Fields may be both engaged in crime and at the same time victims of it. Stolen items, bought and sold within the estate, are often stolen again, sometimes even by neighbours, but the victim of the later theft is unable to report the theft since the goods in question, if recovered, could be identified by the police and restored to their original owners. This kind of theft was observed several

times in the course of this study. Valuable items appear and are proudly displayed in a house one day; a few days later they have gone again without much comment or even expression of disappointment, only to be replaced a few days later. The same, highly distinctive video recorder was identified in no less than three different houses in less than five weeks.

The crimes which involve the women of Green Fields are, by and large, the crimes of the poorest and most marginal groups in society (See Carlen, 1988; Box 1983; Heidensohn and Farrell 1991). Some women regard the extra income derived from their illicit activities as vital to their survival. For others, the pecuniary rewards of illegal activities may actually be less important to the women involved than the social networks in which they take place. For example, small-scale buying and selling of cannabis brings not only financial rewards to the women who deal, but also gives them status and brings them into contact with others with whom they might otherwise not mix.

In this respect, the Green Fields case gives evidence to the assertion made by Carlen (1988, p11) that economic factors alone are not the only determinants of how women calculate the rewards from either law-breaking or conformity. She says that a "drift into crime, accompanied by the concomitant rewards of friendship, financial gain and excitement, can engender the alternative 'controls' that gradually commit the woman law-breaker to a way of life more satisfying than that offered by the meagre (and often uncertain) welfare payments of the [DSS]."

In Green Fields the pecuniary rewards of women's lawbreaking are not great enough in most cases to radically alter their impoverished lifestyles but, although the amounts derived are very small, as a proportion of their income they can be critical to their subsistence, and the social networks in which

these activities takes place give the women access to other vital resources. Finally, the excitement generated by some acts of lawbreaking observed and described in this study can offer relief from the tedium and aimlessness apparent in lives otherwise devoid of variety and stimulation because of the constraints of poverty. The women of Green Fields demonstrate an extraordinary ability to express themselves through humour, and nowhere is this more apparent than in jokes about their own and other women's law-breaking. Group meetings which took place during this study, sometimes in the local pub and at other times in the homes of the women, provided a forum in which women shared humorous stories about their experiences of crime both as perpetrators and as victims. They gave the women the opportunity to evaluate and compare their actions, boast of their successes and methods and also to compare themselves and their actions favourably with those of men.

DSS fraud - 'milking the system'.

Fraud and abuse of the DSS system have been highlighted by post-war governments, largely in response to criticism from the media but, from 1980 the Thatcher government itself took the lead in instigating anti-claimant feelings (Walker, 1993; Carlen; 1988). Government ministers claimed that the poor were not poor at all; they were unwilling rather than unable to work and that some categories of claimant should in any case be supported by their own families rather than by the rest of society via the welfare state. Proactive Regional Benefit Investigation Teams were created in 1983 to support existing local fraud staff in seeking out benefit 'cheats and scroungers', and claims were made of huge savings and recoveries of over-payments.

The government particularly targeted the unemployed and lone-mothers as likely 'fraudsters', and changes were made in administrative procedures to tighten up the benefit system, especially for the unemployed (Walker, 1993). Simultaneously, fresh criticisms were made of other claimants. For example, benefits to the disabled have fallen in real terms and are more difficult to obtain than before (Walker, 1993; Finch 1989), but despite this Prime Minister John Major recently referred to Invalidity Benefit claimants who "*jogged*" to and from the DSS offices. The terms 'dependency culture' and 'underclass' emerged or were revived and were rapidly adopted by right-wing politicians. Secretary of State for Social Security, Peter Lilley was roundly applauded by the 1993 Conservative Party Conference when he gave his now famous speech outlining his "little list" of benefit cheats and other undeserving claimants, and in particular the lone-mothers, that he intended to "root out". John Redwood, Secretary of State for Wales, speaking in July 1993 in Cardiff said, "*One of the biggest **social problems** of our day is the*

surge in single-parent families what is worrying is the trend in some places for young women to have babies with no apparent intention of even trying a marriage or stable relationship with the father of the child" (quoted in the Independent Newspaper, 20.11.931, emphasis added).

These highly publicised attacks on single mothers as undeserving, irresponsible and promiscuous benefit 'cheats' was taken up by the popular press, reinforcing existing popular negative stereotypes about the unemployed, the poor in general and single mothers in particular. Walker (1993, p151) contends that this "inevitably has an impact on how claimants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. It leads to a sense of inferiority among claimants and a sense of suspicion both by staff who administer the scheme and by the general public".

Claimants who are already surviving on a day to day basis live in fear of having their benefits reduced or taken away.

"Over a million women head one-parent families and the majority of them live not only in poverty but also in fear - that due to official inefficiency the [DSS] benefit cheque won't arrive; that the benefit will be withdrawn while their circumstances are reviewed; that they will be accused of any of a number of fraudulent practices relating to the claiming of benefit; that they are under constant surveillance, from both neighbours and officials watching to catch them out if they appear to be sharing household expenses with anyone else; that their children will be taken into residential care" (Pat Carlen, 1988, p2).

The DSS benefits paid to single mothers (and other claimants) are very low (See appendix 1). Research undertaken in 1993 for the Child Poverty Action

Group at the Family Budget Unit at York University found that a single parent with two children would need £23 per week more than is currently paid in DSS benefits in order to provide for even the basic costs of housing, food, fuel and clothing. A recently published report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the effects of the 1986 Social Security Act shows that it left the unemployed, half of all lone-parent families and a third of couples with children unequivocally worse off compared to other disadvantaged groups. Proposed cuts in housing benefits will add to their financial problems (reported in the Guardian 24.8.1994). Even so, DSS benefits represent survival for many single mothers, and they are loath to put this income at risk.

Despite media hype at both local and national levels to the contrary, the Green Fields study found that DSS fraud in the form of informal and undeclared earnings is actually very rare amongst the women of the estate. Opportunities to find paid work are scarce; unskilled work, especially casual work, is poorly paid and there are the logistics of child-care costs and other associated problems. Even where there are opportunities for taking paid work, the DSS system acts as an impediment. If they declare earnings over £15 they lose a commensurate sum in benefits which leaves them worse off if they have to pay fares and/or baby-sitting costs. If they do not declare their earnings, they run the risk of being found out and losing all benefits. The potential rewards are considered too small to make it worthwhile for women to risk the very serious consequences of detection.

Similar DSS rules apply to alleged cohabitation. Cohabitation is more difficult to prove and if the man is also unemployed, exhaustive enquiries and/or prosecution do not produce great savings to the DSS. (This is especially so if the relationship was in any case short-lived and the man has since moved on.) Although there are women in Green Fields whose sexual partners sleep

overnight, this study found, without any exception, that the men have another address where they 'hang up their clothes'. Both men and women know the DSS rules and co-operate to maximise their respective and mutual benefit position. The women need to protect their own income, and will resist any attempt to have a man's name added to their rent book

This study found only three women who defrauded the benefit system by taking paid work undeclared to the DSS. Lucy for the last seven years has worked for £1.50p per hour as a part-time cleaner at the premises of a small local business. The extra money allows her to support her five children, which she says would be otherwise impossible since her two oldest boys left school and she no longer receives benefit with which to support them. (They are not eligible for benefits in their own right until they are eighteen.) The second woman, Ginnette, had been employed as a piece-worker packing seasonal soft fruit, and was 'caught in the act' by DSS officials. The work she had been doing was available for only a few days. At the time Ginnette was interviewed for this study she was waiting to find out if she was to be "*taken to court for it.*" In the meantime, all benefits from the DSS, including her Child Benefit, had been suspended pending enquiries. The third woman, single and without children, had been caught working in a factory. At the time she was interviewed she had lost the job and had been without benefit for seven months. When she is unable to get help from her mother (also a DSS claimant) she works as a prostitute.

Apart from Lucy, all of the women interviewed for this study consider that to jeopardise their basic income would be stupid and irresponsible. "*You've got to think of the kids*" was the response of the majority. In group discussions they were quite vociferous about this. Ginnette's story was recounted on several occasions by women who had never met her, but who

knew the precise details of her case. Although sympathetic to her in principle, they nonetheless regarded her behaviour as *"daft"*. *"She should have known better"* and *"you've got to think about the bairns."*

In spite of this virtually unanimous view that 'milking the system' is *'daft'* and *'too dangerous'*, Lucy's friends, paradoxically, express admiration for her, firstly for *"having the guts to do it"* - *"I don't know how she does it. My nerves couldn't stand it"*, but more notably, that she is *"being a good mother"*. They, on the other hand, are *"too scared to take the risk"*. Their admiration for Lucy is a reflection of the risks she is taking and the gravity of the consequences if she gets caught. There is also the fact that she, unlike some others, has never been caught. Lucy herself feels justified in doing what she does, although she emphasises that the little she earns is barely enough to support her two teenager sons, and it is this, rather than her job which she regards as the real crime. Her friends agree with her.

The women of Green Fields on the whole know the rules. The DSS assumes that detected and undeclared income has been present for up to (but not more than) a year, and unless the claimant can prove otherwise, benefits are suspended until the alleged overpayment has been fully recovered. Since it is difficult to prove something which may not in any case have existed, this can result in lengthy delays while enquiries are made and benefits restored, if at all. Suspension of benefits is immediate and absolute, and in the meantime, the woman in question can be left without income and with no legal means of support for herself and her children.

By comparison, if they are caught and prosecuted for shoplifting, they are likely to be fined and/or subject to a probation order. Fines can be met by small weekly payments, and a probation order involves visiting a probation

officer at weekly or fortnightly intervals for up to a year, not such an ordeal as probation officers tend to be sympathetic to women who shoplift out of need. Clearly the consequences of being caught shoplifting or even small-scale drug-dealing are far less serious for women than for DSS fraud, no matter how trivial the alleged fraud may have been.

The women do not question the morality of women 'milking the DSS', but a significant number of women take a different view when they are discussing men who they believe are "*making out doing guvvy jobs*" - "*the fellas can always get work on the side*". To some extent this reflects the view that men, already relieved of responsibility for their children, are "*doing better than we are*", but it also demonstrates the way in which the women are themselves influenced by the hype which they receive from TV and other media. They argue that it is the men "*cheating the system*" and getting "*more than they deserve*" which keeps the levels of their own benefits down. However, despite the women's strong opinions on the subject, not one knew of any man from their own acquaintance who was in regular or decently-paid employment and signing for unemployment benefit as well. They appeared confused when asked to cite examples of this kind of fraud, not because they were reluctant to answer, but because they could not think of any, and yet they genuinely believed in the rhetoric and media hype. It had to be true because they had "*seen it on the telly*". They finally concluded that it was happening, but in places other than Green Fields. The women's view of the world outside of the estate is largely dependent on what they have seen on television. They rarely question what they see even when it is in direct conflict with the reality of their own experience. Their sympathies can be changed and changed again on the basis of TV programmes. For example, when they had seen a TV documentary about the Cardiff housing estate visited by John Redwood they were openly critical of the 'absent fathers'

portrayed in the programme. A few weeks later, they were expressing sympathy with absent fathers who were affected by the (then) new Child Support Act, apparently unaware of the contradiction.

Pledging

The illegal practice of 'pledging' child-benefit books in exchange for an immediate cash loan (normally half of the face value of the vouchers) is reported by the women to be widespread. Seventeen respondents said they had at some time or another resorted to a lender for a 'CB loan' when they had been desperate for cash. Child benefit vouchers are signed over to the money-lender as collecting agent for the official book-holder, and subsequently encashed by the lender on the due date at the Post Office.

This costs the borrower 100% in interest for loans which are sometimes for only a few days, but women say there are times when they have no alternative. *"When the electric's been shut off and you haven't even got candles for the kids' bedroom, never mind no heat or nothing, you don't really have much choice. You can't even make a cup of tea to warm your hands up. They've got you, haven't they?"* Moira (33, divorced, four children under 12)

'Dolly' operates an organised fraud by means of child-benefit books. The books are either stolen from, or reported as stolen but actually sold by, their legitimate holders and subsequently replaced by the DSS. In reality, the books are tampered with to change the payment details and later encashed at post offices. Thirteen such books were observed in Dolly's possession during this study. The tampering was indiscernible.

Both of these kinds of child benefit fraud could be easily prevented if proposed changes are introduced to improve security. Suggested proposals include photo cards, magnetic strips and pin-numbers allocated to the legitimate book-holders to accompany the payment vouchers. Although this would cut off what is for some a 'life-line' when they are *in extremis*, it would prevent the serious exploitation of women already living in extreme poverty and desperate for a short-term cash loan (and at the same time prevent the loss of public money through organised fraud of the type described here).

In conclusion, the Green Fields study found some evidence of DSS fraud, but less than anticipated and far less than other crimes observed and/or reported by the women. Official statistics give weight to the evidence contained in this study. There are approximately 26,000 DSS claimants in the west of the city area. In the first quarter of 1994 there were only 50 people (of whom 33 were women) prosecuted for DSS fraud, representing less than 0.2 of the total number of claimants. Their number, at approximately 200 per year, is very small compared to the 1993 detection rates for theft and handling stolen goods (10,776), criminal damage including arson (2,440) or burglary (3587) in the same area (Humberside Police 1993 Annual Report)¹⁹.

¹⁹It should be noted these figures are for the whole of West Hull, of which Green Fields is only a part. Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain figures for Green Fields in isolation.

Car Crime

The car has long been recognised as a symbol of male power, success and potency (Bayley, 1986; Wight, 1987). The advertising of the last three decades has deliberately and successfully exploited the image of man 'in control' of the powerful machine which brings freedom, independence and adult status. The classic American 'Road Movie' epitomises the freedom associated with car driving, and many Hollywood films would be incomplete without the ubiquitous car chase. In western society not only the simple fact of possession of a car, but also the type of car a man drives, can indicate his social and occupational status. The advertising of different models of car projects different images, which in their turn, reflect upon the driver. Expensive but reliable models of car, such as the Volvo, indicate financial security and a sense of responsibility for family safety; the advertising of certain kinds of small car, such as the Fiat Panda, is aimed at the female market, and its image is then associated with the 'feminine' driver.

Wight (1987) discussing the relationship between cars and the construction of masculinity in a Scottish working class community observes that, "control over powerful machinery ... has masculine meaning, the classic example being cars" and that "this power is demonstrated through fast drivingThe power of the car is enjoyed as an extension of one's body capacities" (p275). The sexual connotation associated with cars and driving is expressed by both men and women on Green Fields. In the words of one young man in his early 20s, *"A man without a car is a man without a cock. Not really a man at all."* Cars in are given female pronouns by their male drivers; for example, *"She went like a dream";* and *"I fucked the guts out of her"* (burned out the engine). This tendency is noted by Robertson (1991, p65) who says "we find that in conversation men ascribe a personality *and the*

female gender to certain valuable commodities, mainly mechanical objects like ships or cars over which they seek to exercise pleasurable *control*" (italics in the original).

Car crime is gender specific. Men drive cars; women are passengers in cars driven by men. Men and youths steal cars; women do not. None of the women interviewed for this study has ever owned a car, and only one has passed a driving test. One of the women at one stage 'acquired' a motorcycle which she rode without licence, tax or insurance, but Gilly alone expresses the ambition to own and drive a car. Car-driving is neither important nor apparently desirable to the women of Green Fields and for this reason they are rarely actively involved in car crime and even then only as passengers in cars known to be stolen.

However, although they are rarely directly involved in stealing of cars, the car as a symbol is very important to women as well as to men. Their initial evaluation of potential male partners is associated with the cars men drive. And the first question she is asked by other women is "*what kind of car does he drive?*" In Green Fields the value associated with possession of a car goes beyond its material or convenience worth - the car is a visible, tangible and mobile symbol of masculinity and of sexual potency and driving a car is one of a number of factors denoting a boy's transition from youth to manhood - an unmistakable and public indicator of adult status. Possession of a car indicates a man's (apparent) financial standing, and the type of car he drives indicates his 'virility'. Kudos for women is derived from being seen with a man who drives a certain type of car.

In Green Fields, it is the 'macho' car, the model with the powerful engine, regardless of its age or condition, which carries the greatest status. Fast

driving is equated with fast living; powerful cars with powerful men, and by implication, with being virile and 'sexy'. The more sporty models carry greater status than the family saloon type of car. The driver of a Robin Reliant is the archetypal 'wimp', and (along with train-spotters and anorak wearers) the subject of many jokes. Only a 'poof' or 'wooftah' would be seen in one. This attitude also applies to adult men on pedal cycles. Women and children ride bicycles; young men ride motor bikes and 'real' men drive cars.

Boys ride stolen motor bikes from the age of 12/13 (and sometimes even younger) and 'progress' to cars at 14, 15 or 16. According to the local police, motor-bike theft is usually the "first step on the road to car theft". The mothers of some teenage boys accept "*nicking*" (cars and bikes), like 'premature' sex, as a normal, if somewhat undesirable, phase in their sons' "*growing up*". Something they would "*grow out of*". Teenage sons of three of the women whose cases are included in this research have each been arrested for taking both cars and motorbikes but none of the mothers regarded the thefts as a particular problem. The mothers were more concerned about the possibility of their sons being injured than in the fact or consequences of the theft itself.

The estate has a well-founded reputation for 'joy-riding' and of 'stripping' stolen vehicles. An informal estimate from the police Car Crime Unit suggests that as many as 80% of the 12,000 cars stolen each year in the city and its environs either end up in the outer estates or are taken by the residents thereof and dumped, fired or 'stripped' elsewhere. Amongst some of the younger residents there is a certain pride in this fact. Local jokes evidence this; for example, "*Nigel Mansell started winning races after he changed his pit team. When asked by rivals who his brilliant new men were,*

he replied that they were from Green Fields, since no other team can strip a car faster!"

In the Green Fields setting it is having control of the machine - possession - as much as (and sometimes more than) ownership, which gives prestige to the male driver. Of necessity, car ownership carries certain obligations and responsibilities; a drivers licence, tax and insurance. Notwithstanding that these obligations are expensive and beyond the means of all but the fortunate few, possession of these documents does not in itself enhance the macho image of the driver. On the contrary, driving a car illegally is regarded as even more daring than simply owning it. The risks involved in Taking (a car) Without the Owners Consent (TWOCing)²⁰ add to the dangers, perceived as well as real, of driving a powerful car. In the Green Fields setting TWOCing, as much as driving is perceived as a sign of masculinity. It offers an opportunity for men not only to express but also to display male bravado to others. TWOCing a car adds not only to the thrill of driving it, but there is always (hopefully!) the possibility of a chase. TWOCing allows a car to be driven recklessly; there is no concern for the car because when the petrol runs out, as often as not, the car is either abandoned or 'stripped' anyway.

Car theft is perpetrated exclusively by men because it is men to whom possession of a car confers status; status for a woman is derived from being attached to the man who drives the car. As Wight (1987) emphasises, the

²⁰ There is a legal distinction between 'borrowing' a car (TWOC) and theft. For the latter offence to be proven, the intention to permanently deprive the car's rightful owner must be established. 'Taking Without Owners Consent', was introduced in the 1930 Road Traffic Act. At that time it applied to cars which were recovered within 48 hours. The act was amended in 1968 to extend this period to one month. In 1993 a new law, Aggravated Taking of a motor Vehicle, was passed specifically to deal with the growing problem of "joy riding", and applies where there is an accident, crash or police chase. Because of the legal difficulties in proving 'intent' (to permanently deprive), more often than not car thieves are charged with either TWOC or, more recently, ATV. ATV normally applies where injury or serious damage has been caused.

cultural values ascribed to commodities do not change when the circumstances of the individual are affected by unemployment and poverty, so that if "standing, in terms of age, genderis to be established and affirmed, the same commodities must be used as currency" (p399).

Opportunities to display adult male status within a legal framework come through employment, earnings and spending power, and this includes the potential to maintain a family. When these are denied, then the more visible accoutrements of masculinity become even more crucial if the man is to maintain any social status. In a setting where so much symbolic value is placed (by both men and women) upon men possessing a car, and where men, constrained by poverty and unemployment, are unable to do so through legitimate means, it is not really surprising that car theft is so common.

Child Abuse

Two of the eight women whose cases are described in this study reported having been sexually abused in their childhood. Sally was sexually assaulted and repeatedly raped by three adult male family members from the age of six and Glenys by her step-father from the age of 10. June separated from her husband when she found that he was abusing two of her three children. Her 13 year old son was recently taken into care "for his own protection" after he sexually 'assaulted' a younger female child in a tent on the grassed area near their house. The little girl's father, a neighbour, smashed every window in their house and the boy himself was threatened with violence and/or death.

The rates of child sexual abuse in Green Fields are regarded as very high by local health and social work professionals. Of the 96 women who responded to the early questionnaire, 9 admitted that they had been sexually abused as children, all by men and all but 2 by members of their own family. It is likely that further and more persistent enquiries of the women would have led to a greater number of admissions. It is well-documented (Stanko, 1985; Hooper, 1992; Browne, 1994; Wynne, 1987; Priest, Mockridge and Clear, 1993) that women are extremely reticent in admitting experience of sexual abuse in their childhood, not only at the time of the abuse but for a long time after, and it is assumed by many professionals that some probably never admit it.

Child abuse is an emotive subject, and definition is problematic. In the first place *childhood* is itself a social construct. In modern western society childhood extends beyond puberty and into young adulthood. In other societies, girls can be married as soon as they reach puberty, and have children soon afterwards, a practice which would be both illegal and unacceptable in the western world in modern times.

The practice of adults having sexual relations with children has been known since recorded history began (Renviose, 1993; Archer, 1994). Child prostitution, for example, is known to have been common in Roman times (Archer, 1994) and incestuous marriage was the norm for the ruling class in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt (Renviose, 1993). A variety of sexual practices involving prepubescent children have been observed by anthropologists in different parts of the world, without any apparent harm being caused to the children either at the time or in their adult lives.

In England the age at which sexual intercourse is legally allowed has varied. In the sixteenth century it was set at 12 for girls; it was raised from 13 to the present age of legal consent of 16 in 1885 to prevent the poor selling their young daughters into prostitution (Renviose, 1993). The age of consent varies from one European country to another, and even within the UK the legal age of consent is different for homosexuals and heterosexuals. Therefore, what are regarded as acceptable sexual practices, including those which involve pre-pubescent children, vary from culture to culture and over time and place. What constitutes '*sexual abuse*' is therefore culturally constructed and is thus open to differing interpretations.

This is also true of violence towards children in general. Parton (1985, p161) cites Straus et al (1974) who argues that child abuse is far from abnormal or pathological, but rather that it is a reflection of the cultural acceptance of violence in families in general. Straus starts from the premise that "the family is the most physically violent institution that most individuals will encounter" and that "it is in the family that most people learn to be violent. The distribution of violence results from the cultural norms and values concerning violence in different groups and classes. Physical punishment is

seen and experienced by most family members as normal so that the family provides the primary arena where children observe and receive an explicit training in violence". Beyond the family itself, society not only condones but actually encourages adult family members to use violent means to enforce discipline and socialise children. Far from being considered maltreatment of children, corporal punishment is regarded by many as a duty of the parent and as somehow intrinsically good for the child.

For the purposes of this chapter, the following definition of sexual abuse is useful; "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles" (Browne, 1994, p210).

Depending on the age of the child and the degree of physical violence, if any, the evidence suggests that in western society the psychological harm noted in children and adults who have been sexually active since childhood is more probably caused by the breaking of social taboos and the associated guilt and shame than by the sexual act in itself (ibid). This is compounded by the fact that sexual abuse is more often than not part of overall patterns of violence in the home (Browne,1994).

The reasons for the high rates of abuse in the Green Fields area are not yet fully understood, but certain factors might be relevant.

Research shows an inverse relationship between the income of the parents and violence, with the highest earners having the lowest rates of violence and the poorest having the highest (Parton,1985). Unemployment has also been found to be a significant factor. Research in the US shows that where

the male 'breadwinner' is unemployed, rates of physical violence are 62% greater than where he is employed, and that stress increases the likelihood of child abuse (ibid). Surveys show that "the incidence of social stressors, such as poverty and unemployment, are associated with a high rate of reported acts of violence to children (Browne, in Archer, 1994, p210).

Sexual abuse of children occurs most often where there are high rates of family violence (Parton, 1985; Bagley and King, 1990). Finkelhor (1983, p18) argues that child abuse is directly related to power relations in families. He says, "the most common patterns in family abuse are not merely for the more powerful to abuse the less powerful, but for the most powerful to abuse the least...Abuse tends to gravitate towards the relationship of *greatest power differential*." (italics in the original). There are close links between wife-abuse and the sexual abuse of children (Browne in Archer, 1994). Domestic violence in the form of men beating women and children is widespread in the Green Fields setting (see chapter 7), which lends support to the theoretical relationship between the two phenomena observed in other studies (Parton, 1985; Bagley and King, 1990).

The abuse of young children is rarely a 'one-off' incident but part of a broader pattern of an addictive form of behaviour, and there is evidence to indicate that abusers are often adults who were abused in their own childhood (Finkelhor, 1984).

Priest, Lockridge and Clear(1983) work in Green Fields with families who have experienced abuse. Group sessions with the mothers of children who have been abused by men eventually revealed that 90% of the mothers had themselves been abused in childhood. One grandmother had discovered that her husband of many years had abused not only their daughter in her

childhood, but his grand-daughter as well. Clear believes that women who have spent their childhood in 'unorthodox' family relationships are less able to judge what kind of contact between adults and children is within the boundaries of what is "normal and acceptable" and are less sensitive to signs of disturbed behaviour in their own children. They may themselves be subject to physical abuse by men in the family and even if they suspect abuse is occurring, they may feel powerless to intervene.

Most abuse of children arises within the family. 98% of children know their abuser, and one third of abused children are under the age of five (Wynne, 1987). There are cases of severe and permanent physical damage to very young children who have been victims of rape and buggery by adult men (ibid). Clear believes that the under-threes are "the ideal age for abusers" because "they are unable to talk" and cannot therefore reveal the abuse. The most common perpetrators are the children's natural fathers, although 25% of abusers are teenage boys, and 75% of all known perpetrators started abusing as teenagers (Wynne, 1987). Wynne believes that emotionally deprived children are easy prey for abusers because they will go wherever they can get attention. There is also a link between child sexual abuse and a "drift into prostitution" (ibid, p19)

Research shows that common characteristics of child sexual abuse are firstly, the insistence on the silence of the victim by the (almost always male) perpetrator, and secondly, the victim is very often subject to threats of or actual physical violence (Finkelhor, 1985; Renvoize, 1993). Renvoize (p38 - 39) points out that there is "an enormous overlap of all four forms of child abuse - emotional, physical, neglect and sexual". Self-blame, shame and guilt on the part of the victim are typically reinforced by humiliation, intimidation and emotional blackmail from the abuser in order to create the

secrecy necessary for the abuse to continue (Stanko, 1985; Finkelhor, 1979; Browne in Archer, 1994). The shame and guilt can lead to serious psychological problems, with disastrous results for the victim in adult life (Ibid). Some women "develop various forms of 'sexual dysfunction'" and difficulties in personal and family relationships (Stanko, 1985, p30), others attempt self-harm and even suicidal behaviour, many suffer severe depression and other psychological disorders (Browne, 1994; Stanko, 1985).

In this study June was the only mother who reported the sexual abuse of her own children, but statistical evidence suggests that others were either less honest or unaware. Just as they have difficulty in accepting and coming to terms with the knowledge of abuse in their own childhood, denial of abuse of their own children is common. "The disclosure of sexual abuse when the perpetrator is someone with whom the woman has had a close, trusting relationship is the most devastating event in a woman's life the impact of the disclosure renders women unable to make decisions and leaves them with an overwhelming sense of guilt and self-blame" (Priest, Lockridge and Clear, 1993, p1). Clear, in an interview, described one mother who became aware of her husband abusing his five year old daughter only after she arrived home unexpectedly and found her daughter without her knickers and the bedsheets (her own) in the washing machine. Her husband could not explain why the child was not wearing her pants until she emptied the washing machine and the child's knickers were wrapped up in the bedsheets.

Professional help is vital at this stage, but difficult to obtain. Priest et al, (1993), in a report prepared for the National Children's Homes and Humberside County Council on their work with child abuse families in Green Fields, indicate that many women initially approached their family doctor with

their suspicions but the mothers were not believed. They give examples of GPs not following guidelines or reporting the matter to the Social Services Department as they are recommended to do. One mother was told to take her child to the accident centre at the local hospital. In another example (Ibid, p9), where the mother told her GP that she suspected her husband was abusing her young daughter the doctor is quoted as saying that "*he was sure that it was not possible as her husband seemed such a nice man*". They say that the most common response of doctors to mothers experiencing health problems following disclosure of abuse was to prescribe tranquillisers (ibid).

Vandalism

Vandalism, in the form of graffiti and damage to public property, does not seem to be regarded as a serious problem by the majority of the residents of Green Fields. Graffiti, litter and damage to public property are evident throughout the estate, although some areas are worse affected than others. The lifts, stairways and entrance halls in the high-rise flats are a particular target for youths who spray paint, smash light fittings and damage doors and windows. The lifts are often used as toilets, and human excrement is a hazard for the elderly and poorly sighted. It is rare to find a pay-phone in working order outside of the public houses.

Vandalism is part of a pattern of destructive behaviour. The estate is littered with discarded prams, bikes, TV sets and toys. Young boys have been observed systematically destroying expensive toys apparently for the fun of it. They also tip rubbish out of dustbins and spread it around. They are not corrected by their parents or other adults

Even where vandalism causes damage to their own houses the residents are unlikely to be especially upset by it. When June and Brenda had all of their windows "potted" [deliberately broken] by an irate neighbour, the council sent workman on the same day to replace the glass. The workmen even cleared up the mess. The breakage resulted in a brief visit from the police, (who had been notified by the council), but no further action was taken. June and Brenda, as victims of the crime, did not want to reveal to the police the cause of the dispute with their neighbour. Like public buildings and amenities such as schools, shops, and offices, they regard their houses as the property of "the Rent" (council). It is the council's responsibility to perform essential repairs and maintenance. Damage is reported to the local rent office on the

estate, who authorise repairs to be carried out. Residents will call out "the Rent" to effect even the most trivial of repairs, for example, a loose hinge on a garden gate or a blocked piece of guttering over a porch. They have no proprietary interest in their homes and no apparent motivation to maintain the structures. Damage caused to their own houses by vandals does not seem to bother them unduly as it does not cause them any personal expense or undue inconvenience. This is even more so in the case of damage to public property,

The condition of the outside of the house does not in any way reflect upon the householder; houses are painted and repaired by the council regardless of the circumstances of the tenants. A house in a state of external disrepair is of little significance to the people of Green Fields since it does not indicate any failing on the part of the tenant.

A few elderly tenants on the outer periphery of the estate make an attempt to make their gardens attractive, but they are quite often thwarted by teenage vandals and/or children from neighbouring houses who trample on their flower beds and destroy the plants. It is only the elderly who complain about vandalism. The older residents of the high rise blocks have to use the dirty lifts and staircases, and many express fear of leaving their flats after dark. This problem is not peculiar to Green Fields. Herbert and Thomas (1990, p260) note that "features which seemed to heighten vulnerability included the upper storeys of high-rise buildings, corridors and stairways which were not well observed, and open spaces which served only to separate buildings". It was for this reason that recent improvements on Green Fields set about creating 'defensible spaces' in an attempt to reduce damage by caused by vandalism as well as crime in general.

The doors and windows, upstairs and down, of unoccupied houses are boarded up by the council to prevent looting and damage. When vandals do break in they leave little intact. Toilets are smashed and doors removed, sometimes to make a fire within the property itself. Empty houses are a target for drug users who congregate in them for shelter from the weather. They leave behind them the evidence of used syringes which are a hazard to small children who later enter the houses to play.

The apparent vulnerability of some urban environments to vandalism has stimulated research into the extent to which physical design of the urban environment influences behaviour in general and crime levels in particular. The results are inconclusive, although there is a widely held view that the quality of a built environment can only be improved if attention is also given to the social and economic circumstances of the residents (Herbert and Thomas, 1990). Attempts to engineer 'community life' by means of the physical design of housing layout (as in the form of the 'Radburn' system used in Green Fields) have largely failed because they cannot on their own solve the problems of poverty, unemployment and lack of social integration (ibid). The physical layout of the estate is such that many areas are not overlooked by residential buildings, a characteristic which is said to make estates vulnerable to damage ((Herbert and Thomas, 1990) but this would make little or no difference to levels of damage in Green Fields because in the first place residents are unlikely to have a telephone with which to call for police assistance, and in the second, they are reluctant to have contact with the authorities anyway. They are even less likely to confront young vandals for fear of assault.

The damage caused by vandals in the estate adds to the general air of degeneration and squalor which makes Green Fields a depressing physical environment.

Handling stolen Goods

The handling of stolen goods offers some promising insights into social relations in the Green Fields setting. Visits made to the homes of the women in the course of this study elicited many (highly tempting) opportunities for purchase of "*bargains*", the term used by the women of Green Fields to refer to stolen goods. There is a thriving informal trade in household commodities of many kinds.

The commodities observed during this study being traded by women include cleaning materials, shampoo, foodstuffs of many kinds, alcoholic drinks and clothing. Stolen goods are traded through the female networks, and favours are exchanged by giving priority to certain people in the form of 'first refusal' for cheap luxury goods when they are available. Few of the women can afford to stockpile, so the actual deals tend to be very small (rarely amounting to more than £5 or £10).

Items are offered for sale in the pubs, in women's houses and even in the walkways between rows of houses. The openness with which these goods are traded belies the illicit nature of their origins. The word soon gets around when goods are available, and women call at each others' houses to take advantage of 'bargains' when they are available.

There is no enquiry on the part of the prospective buyer as to their source, but on the other hand there is no apparent attempt to disguise the fact that the 'bargains' being traded are stolen. In any case, it is rare for the seller to have actual knowledge of the precise source of the goods. They acquire them, almost always from men, and sell them cheaply among their friends. A case of port and a carton of Lacoste T-shirts might be on offer in one

house; packs of washing powder, toothpaste and boxes of chocolates in another. There is a certain amount of exchange which does not involve money, but more usually the goods are sold for around half of their true value. Children's clothing is very commonly offered for sale, and this is of vital importance to mothers who could not otherwise dress their children in a manner which is acceptable on the estate. Most children on Green Fields have far better clothing than footwear because 'bargain' clothing is almost always available through the networks, whereas shoes more usually have to be bought in shops at the full retail price. For this reason, women whose children are badly dressed are condemned as poor mothers. The women say there is no reason for children to be dressed in worn or shabby clothing because cheap replacements are normally available. Women such as Glenys and Mandy are excluded from the female networks and are thus unable to benefit from the 'bargains' which are available to the majority. Consequently, their material position is inferior to those who are able to take advantage of the illicit trade in food and clothing and their living conditions reflect this. It is the women who are outside of the women's social networks who are left to survive on DSS benefit alone and this, for most, is impossible if the mother is to adequately provide for herself and her children.

Selling stolen goods, albeit for much less than their real value, can offer a small but significant increase in income for women. Stolen property observed being sold in the course of this study had all been brought into the estate by men, who had passed it to their female friends and relatives to distribute. The proceeds of sale are divided equally between the supplier and the distributor.

The women do not seem to be conscious of taking a particular risk when either buying or selling the goods. They say that if they should be

challenged, they quite genuinely do not know where the things originally came from, so they "*can't grass anyone up*". They are all aware that to inform on anybody involved could result in the supply of cheap goods being cut off or curtailed. They must also maintain social relationships with others in the networks, as neglecting reciprocal favours could lead to rejection in the future.

More expensive items, those which are typically the product of burglaries, change hands for a fraction of their true worth. This is an indicator of the risks involved. A stolen video or television set is a longer-term acquisition, and is more easily identified than food or cleaning materials which will soon be consumed leaving no evidence behind. The potential risks of detection are therefore considerably greater. Apart from that, few women have enough available money to pay anything like the realistic price for expensive items, and 'market forces' therefore drive the price down. An item can only be sold for what someone is willing or able to pay, and hence, the going rate is normally about one tenth of the normal purchase price.

Shoplifting and Theft

After receiving stolen goods, the most common crime amongst the women of Green Fields is theft by shoplifting. Loss through shoplifting was the reason given for the closure of the few small shops which used to be on the estate. A general groceries store formerly run by an Asian family closed after less than two years trading because they were systematically robbed by groups of teenagers. One would create a distraction while the others helped themselves to goods from the shelves. The closure of small shops has had the effect of reducing competition which in its turn keeps prices high.

For some mothers shoplifting is a simple matter of survival. When money runs out it is the only means they have to feed their children. A woman will enter a store to buy one or two items which are paid for, perhaps milk and corn flakes, and at the same time will steal several more items. If she has no money at all she cannot enter the shop to make a legitimate purchase in order to facilitate the theft, so she will borrow the cash to pay for some items from a friend or neighbour. She will sometimes steal something, either by request or as a present for the neighbour, as favour in return for the loan.

Shoplifting carries no stigma amongst the women of Green Fields. It is described as a "*means to an end*", and is the subject of much humour amongst the women, who vie with each other in their tales of cheek and daring. This is illustrated by the following exchange which occurred at a women's night out in the local pub:-

"I saw you yesterday in [supermarket]'s.

"Yeah, so what?"

"You were looking at the beans (in a mocking tone) checking out the prices and the quality and all that"

"So fucking what?"

"You were nicking them, you daft cow, that's what!!"

Bursts of laughter followed, and the whole group joined in to tell their own "funny" shoplifting stories - Jessy was caught *"doing a packet of beef burgers"*. She escaped with a police caution, which took place in her house when she had *"half a bleedin' cow out the back!"* This was followed by the explanation, *"The kids won't eat proper meat, you see."*

Another woman told of a friend who had mistakenly taken an item which she later found to be not the type she liked. *"Bold as brass, she walked back in two hours later and got the manger to change it for the other one!"*

They talk about shoplifting as *"a bit of a lark"*, but underlying the humour there is real desperation. While they are in groups they laugh and joke about many aspects of the hardships they endure, but when interviewed on a one-to-one basis there is a sadder side to it.

"What'd you do if your giro hadn't come and you'd nowt to feed the bairns with. You can't tell them on Thursday that they've got to wait till Monday can you? You've got to do something. Anyway, them shops get enough when we've got money don't they? They don't miss a few bits and bobs. They just add it to the price." (Jean, mother of three).

"I got done by the police for some milk and Ready Brek. They were real nice to me really, 'cos they knew it was only for the bairns and they let me off that

time, but they said next time I'd be up in court" (Irene, 26, two children under five).

Another woman reported that she hated shoplifting because she *"nearly had a heart attack every time"*, but like many others, there are occasions when she feels she has no choice. Her friends and neighbours have as little money as she has and are often unable to offer her even a small a loan. Her family are also on benefits, so they too are unable to offer short-term help and anyway, she says she hates to ask *"because then they'd feel they were letting me down and they can't help it can they?"*

Apart from shoplifting for food, which is typically small scale and a response to urgent need, there are women who, like Vicky, go into the city centre for shoplifting sprees. For Vicky, a shoplifting trip to the city centre could be regarded as a form of entertainment. She does it for the excitement. Her boyfriend is able to make up the shortfall in her income and provide the essentials for her and her child, so she is not in urgent need. Much of the time she steals for thrills. The adrenalin and excitement liven up the boredom of her otherwise uneventful life. This is evidenced by the fact she rarely wears the clothes she steals. The cupboards in her house contain many garments which she has stolen but never worn, pushed out of sight with the store price labels still attached. Some of the clothes are not even her size. She has been charged and convicted for shoplifting in the city centre three times. On each occasion she has perhaps been fortunate in that she was caught taking baby clothes. The courts dealt with her leniently presumably because of sympathy for her circumstances and her self-evident desire to provide for her son. It is impossible to determine what the outcome might have been had the police searched her house and discovered the hoard of

stolen goods contained in it. She says she never sells any of the things she steals.

Another woman recommended Marks and Spencer's and Littlewoods as good targets for shoplifting, "*cos then you can get your money back, see*". When asked if they would want a receipt she replied scornfully, "*not if you put it into one of their bags and say it was a present*".

In some cases theft is simply opportunist. Something left unattended (such as an item of post sticking out from a letter box or tools left on the ground next to a car being repaired) is taken in a casual manner by a person passing by.

The Green Fields study identifies three different types of shoplifting. The first, where the woman steals food and clothing for her child/ren, is typically a response to urgent need. The second kind is shoplifting for excitement; to relieve the boredom of everyday life. Shoplifting is, by its very nature, a cheap form of entertainment. The third type is the more organised racket of shoplifting to order. June operates the latter. She steals only small but valuable items such as computer games, pre-recorded video tapes and expensive cosmetics, often requested by women in the run up to Christmas. She is extremely clever in the way she goes about this. She waits by the counter until another customer is being served. While that customer is taking the attention of the shop assistant and June casually picks up and walks away with whatever she wants. She prefers department stores. She takes the 'tester' bottles of perfume and after-shave which are on display at the specialist cosmetics counters whenever she has the chance. She points out, with impeccable logic, that this is not really stealing because the perfume is being given away free in the first place. A full bottle of good perfume can

fetch a few pounds. Favourites are *Opium* and Estee Lauder's *White Linen*, each of which retail at around forty pounds.

June also procures bicycles to order. Usually assisted by one of the teenage boys, she dismantles stolen bikes and then puts the component parts together in order to prevent a stolen cycle being identified. The teenagers actually take the bikes, mostly from the University area of the city (where many first year undergraduates arrive with a new and expensive bicycle and a careless attitude to security) or from around the city centre. Where locks are used, they can easily be cut through with an appropriate tool. Tina sells them for ludicrously low prices. As little as £15 or £20 can secure a mountain bike worth several hundred pounds. (The Police figures for bicycle thefts in the city for the years 1992 and 1993 are 9,519 and 8,345).

Drugs

The dealing of cannabis in Green Fields is now carried out almost exclusively by women. This was not entirely the case at the beginning of this study and was not at all the case before it started.

The street price for cannabis is £15 for an eighth of an ounce, £25 for a quarter and £45 for a half. In other parts of the city and elsewhere the minimum 'deal' is usually an eighth but in Green Fields cannabis is more typically sold in 'deals' of one quarter of an eighth for £5. This is enough for three or four 'joints', depending on the strength. Five years ago women would 'score a deal' from a man, who stood to make a very large profit from dealing in such small amounts. Realising this, the women got together and bought their cannabis in half ounce lots and then sold it amongst their own social networks. By slightly undercutting the price charged by men they gradually took over this lucrative market.

Because women now deal cannabis more than men it has come to be regarded as a female activity and men have become reluctant to be seen handling it. The men who were previously dealing in it dropped cannabis and concentrated on the sale of hard drugs. Cannabis in bulk is brought into the estate by a small number of male drug dealers, but after that it is broken down into smaller deals and distributed by women. Even men now go to women for cannabis.

The sale of 'hard' drugs' such as heroin and cocaine remains exclusively the domain of the men. This study did not discover any woman who deals in hard drugs, nor any who knew of any other who did.

In a sense this phenomenon is not very surprising. As in other kinds of crime, the involvement of men and women is largely determined by the risk of conviction and the likely penalties. Detection of cannabis dealing is (unofficially) a low priority for the police, who are more concerned with breaking up hard drug rings. It is widely known that the police are unlikely to prosecute in the case of possession of a small amount (less than an eighth) of cannabis, and few women can afford to buy even that much. Men are seven times more likely than women to be searched in the street (Young, in MacDonald, 1994) and in any case, the dealing goes on within the women's own houses where the risk of detection, in most cases, is minimal.

One woman, Shelley, had been caught, but was still dealing despite the fact that she is awaiting trial for a drugs offence committed just a few months previously. She confidently expects to get probation (again) as she has four young children and relies on the reluctance of the magistrates, who she believes "*don't like sending women with young children to prison*". Shelley has been operating her 'cannabis ring' for almost five years, and had been apprehended twice. She has been fortunate in that on each occasion she has not been in possession of more than a quarter of an ounce. She occasionally buys an ounce at a time.

The gender division emerging in the sale of drugs on Green Fields typifies the propensity for men and women to engage in different kinds of crime. A man on the estate is liable to be ridiculed for dealing cannabis, a *soft* drug, because it has come to be associated with women. There is little or no kudos for men from being involved. *Hard* drugs, on the other hand, such as heroin and cocaine in their various forms ('acid', 'crack', 'ice' 'smack') carry

a more 'macho' image, and there is a definite association between hard drugs and masculinity.

In the first place they are dangerous; there is a physical risk incurred in their use, especially where needles are involved. Pearson, (In Herbert and Smith, 1989; p317) describes heroin use as the "ultimate test of manhood in mortal combat with the 'demon drug'". Taylor (1994; p6) points out that the stereotype of the male drug user has shifted from that of a "pathetic and weak" individual to that of a "purposeful, resourceful person" whose "circumstances were shaped by the lack of legitimate career opportunities". She says "the lifestyle associated with drug use allowed these young men to develop an alternative career which provided them with meaning, motivation and status".

Young (1994, p62) discusses the symbolic nature of the language surrounding the use of drugs. He says the street culture of addiction is "heavy with a symbolism of gender" (p64), and that its gender denomination can indicate its "social value, potency and status" (p62). Cannabis, he argues, is associated with the female attributes of "love, peace and communal caring" (p65). The language of hard drugs, and this is especially the case where needles are involved, is aggressive and "warlike"; blasting, getting a hit, shooting it up and so on.

Secondly, to obtain these drugs brings the buyer into contact with some very dangerous men, both inside and outside of the estate. The suppliers of hard drugs are regarded as 'professionals', and have the reputation of being "killers". Gilbert (in Archer, 1994) cites Salazar (1992, p12) referring to the massive scale of violence in a Colombian city, says that for men "drug trafficking has become the major means of social and economic

advancement ... it is the only way to achieve wealth and status. In the hope of eventually breaking up the cartels, boys form contract killing gangs. Almost invariably they end up dead themselves". Dealing in hard drugs is big and dangerous business, which carries a macho image. The big dealers are also the original suppliers of the larger quantities of cannabis, but the women do not deal with them directly. A man from the estate acts as an intermediary. They argue that they would not deal with women because women are *"not tough enough and might squeal"*.

Thirdly, the risk of imprisonment for anybody caught dealing hard drugs is high, so a dealer *"needs to have a lot of bottle"*. As in other areas of crime, women are reluctant to run the risk of imprisonment. Shelley herself said *"you've got to be hard to deal the serious stuff"*.

And finally, there is a lot of money involved in the sale of hard drugs, and here again, as in the case of other kinds of crime, the 'big stuff' is the preserve of men. The women, even collectively, would find it difficult if not impossible to raise sufficient funds to buy hard drugs. Investment in and profits from cannabis are small. Breaking up a quarter of cannabis into £5 deals would net a profit of £15 assuming the dealer did not keep some for herself. Clearly even the most enterprising woman would need to lay out a considerable sum to make a living from it. But even a small amount of extra money is useful.

The only women to make a substantial income from cannabis are Mary and Jane, both mothers in their late twenties. Mary and Jane smuggle cannabis into Local and other prisons. The dope is wrapped in cling film and placed in the mouth when they visit male friends in the prison. At some stage during the visit they 'kiss' it across to the man who immediately swallows it for later

retrieval. For this service the women are very well paid because both risks and penalties are very high. The women collect the money from family or friends of the prisoners on the outside. They are always paid in advance for '*delivering*' just in case they are arrested, and they are able to demand a high price. The price for delivery of a quarter of cannabis is £125, which leaves the women with a '*delivery fee*' of one hundred pounds.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the significant factors concerning the various forms of illicit activities in Green Fields are as follows:-

There is a clear gender division in the likelihood for men and women to engage in different types of crime. The patterns of crime within the estate reflect patterns of crime as evidenced by official statistics in the UK as a whole. Drug dealing seems to be the exception, although it is impossible to know whether this phenomena is peculiar to Green Fields. (It may be that the propensity for the police to target certain groups, and blacks in particular, for drug searches leads to a distortion in the conviction rates). Men engage in violent crime, large scale drug dealing, robbery and burglary both in and outside of the estate. Women shoplift, traffic stolen goods and cannabis, all on a small scale. In the Green Fields environment, where opportunities for legitimate expression of gender role norms are limited, status can be maintained through engagement in gender specific illicit activities.

The illicit activities of the women of Green Fields are almost always crimes of the poverty stricken - crimes of survival. The rewards of their activities are extremely small, but can be vital in enabling mothers to feed and clothe their children, and thus maintain their self-esteem as well as social status.

Illicit activities can offer some women a relief from the tedium of their otherwise uneventful lives. The excitement generated by acts of law-breaking can offer a cheap form of entertainment.

Although women distribute stolen goods and cannabis, these commodities are introduced into the estate by men. It could be argued that in this way men are contributing to the economic survival of women and children.

Shared activities, such as cannabis dealing and handling stolen goods, give women opportunities to normalise their lives within friendship networks. These social networks are crucial to the well-being, both practical and emotional, of the women who are part of them.

Women who are excluded from the female social networks are also excluded from having access to valuable resources. Law-abiding by conventional rules of morality, in the setting of Green Fields these women are stigmatised and labelled; and further, because of material deprivation they run a very high risk of having their children taken into care for neglect. This adds to their low status on the estate, where being regarded as a good mother is vital.

Conclusion

Because of economic, legal and social constraints the majority of women in western societies until recently had no option but to marry in order to subsist. Marriage provided status and legitimised inheritance rights as well as giving women and their children a livelihood. Raising children without financial support from a man was a practical impossibility for most women, and their legal rights over their children were very limited. Women had little choice other than to tolerate subordination to, and in some cases serious abuse from their husbands because for most women, and especially those with children, marriage offered the only strategy for survival. The position of working-class wives is summarised by Carlen who says "the domestic life of ... working-class women has traditionally been haunted by the two spectres of slum housing and violent men ... they have also traditionally shouldered the main domestic responsibilities including paying the bills ... Their domestic position has been one of responsibility without authority or privilege" (1983, p30). Even for those women who were wealthy in their own right, status depended on that of their husbands, and thus, "marriage, for all that it subordinated women to their husbands, was of extreme importance to them" (Scott, 1991).

Whether the nuclear family is regarded as functional, exploitative or simply the most 'desirable' family unit, its existence and continuing prevalence as the basic unit of modern society depends upon the economic and other conditions being favourable. Women's position relative to men has improved in both economic and legal terms, especially with regard to property and child custody rights. Women in increasing numbers are opting for single-parenthood because it offers them greater security and better

material conditions in which to raise a family than marriage. This is especially the case for working-class and poor women who have children with men who are low-paid or unemployed. This trend is evident in other parts of the world where men are unable to financially support a family (Bryant, 1994; Wright, 1993). Wright's (1993) research in a Lesotho community where there are high levels of male unemployment demonstrates that many women are single by choice. She refers to this as a "strategy of singlehood". The Green Fields research shows that the women there have evaluated their options and are choosing to raise children outside of marriage because they perceive themselves as considerably better off. The DSS benefit system gravitates against marriage in that single mothers are better placed with regard to benefits than married women. Both women and men recognise this and adapt their domestic arrangements and reproductive strategies accordingly. The current trend towards single motherhood can therefore be regarded as a strategy for survival.

Work defines the social status of men in western society (Jahoda, 1982; Fryer and Ullah, 1987; Fagin and Little, 1984 and others). Where men are unemployed, they lose not only their occupational status, but also their primary focus of activity, the bonds of male companionship and friendship, their spending power and thus, the ability to undertake a supportive role in the family (Ibid). Unable to act as breadwinners, unemployed or badly paid men are unable to fulfil the traditional working class role within the family and in many instances are more of a liability than an asset to it. Thus, the lack of economic status of the men of Green Fields renders them redundant to family life, and marital instability and the extremely high proportion of single-mothers reflect this. The men of Green Fields have become peripheral to domestic and family life.

In Green Fields men have few legitimate opportunities to express their masculinity. Gender identity is "bound up with the experience of power" (Moore, 1994, p68). Where the individual's gender identity is threatened, as "reflected in the behaviour of others to whom the individual is closely connected", then this may "be perceived as a threat to power, position, control and even assets". In the Green Fields setting, where families are dependent on DSS benefits and where women have become better positioned than men in terms of access to them, the traditional role of working class men has been undermined and masculinity is threatened. "Violence is the consequence of a crisis in representation, both individual and social. The inability to maintain the fantasy of power triggers a crisis in the fantasy of identity, and violence is a means of resolving this crisis because it acts to reconfirm the nature of masculinity otherwise denied" (Ibid, p69).

Violence adds to existing stresses in families and increases the likelihood of family breakdown (Archer, 1994; Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Finkelhor 1984; Fagin and Little, 1984 and others). A significant number of women in the Green Fields study gave violence as the reason for the breakdown of relationships, but further enquiries indicate that the real reasons are rather more complex. Violence in sexual relationships is, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted as normal by both women and men in Green Fields. Both men and women need to maintain their gender identity, and displays of aggressive behaviour are regarded as normal, even desirable, for men. It is only when the women's romantic illusions are shattered that they end violent relationships, using the violence as an official and/or public explanation in order to facilitate re-housing and/or divorce.

The central focus of identity for women in Green Fields is inextricably linked to the role of motherhood. Few women have ambitions beyond having a

home and bringing up their children. The role of motherhood in Green Fields has been extended to being able to provide adequately for children as well as being able to care for them, and for a woman in Green Fields to maintain her status this must be apparent to others.

Illicit activities form an important part of the survival strategies of the women of Green Fields. The illicit activities of the women are generally trivial in terms of financial rewards, are best described as “crimes of survival” (Carlen, 1988) and on the whole they are unlikely to feature in or have any great impact on crime statistics. It is overwhelmingly men, rather than women who engage in serious crime.

Within Green Fields the construction of gender determines the likelihood of men and women to engage in different kinds of lawbreaking. Patterns of lawbreaking in Green Fields reflect the ratios of male to female crime indicated by the overall national statistics. Nonetheless, the importance of these activities for women, firstly in terms of day to day survival but more importantly, for the female social networks is crucial to understanding social relations within the estate. In Green Fields notions of being a ‘good mother’ are of paramount importance. It is within the female networks that cheap (stolen) food and other household items are circulated. The minority of women who are perceived by others to be ‘bad mothers’ are excluded from the female social networks, and are thus denied access to valuable material and other resources which are vital to their financial survival. As a consequence, the situation of poverty for the minority is worsened, their children are likely to be undernourished, dirty and poorly dressed. Socially isolated, these women are also more likely to suffer from depression and other stress related illnesses, and ultimately run a high risk of having their children taken into local authority care. This then serves to publicly

confirm the 'bad mother' label. Ironically, it is the minority of women who are 'law-abiding' and honest by conventional standards of morality who are likely to be stigmatised and 'punished' by having their children removed.

The Green Fields study indicates that there is in the estate a generally negative attitude towards all 'outside' authority, including the forces of law and order. This would appear to be a direct consequence of the inability for individuals to survive on DSS benefits without resorting to illicit activities. If survival depends on illicit means then the influences of authority are inevitably weakened. Since 1955 there has been a marked increase in rates of reported crimes in Green Fields as well as nationally. The linkage between single-motherhood and crime is inconclusive and ignores other social changes which have occurred during the same period, but the Green Fields study does indicate a link between male unemployment, poverty, family breakdown and crime.

It is in the area of lawbreaking that the relative position of men and women is most clearly delineated. Stripped of their 'male status' in the family by a combination of unemployment, powerlessness and economic disadvantage, the men of Green Fields are able to display their masculinity and enhance their financial position through various involvement in criminal activity outside of the estate. This has benefits for the women and children. Despite the fact that few men in Green Fields are able to bring resources to their individual families, collectively the men of the estate, through various forms of illegal activity, do bring resources into the estate which directly and indirectly benefit the women and children.

Appendix 1. The questionnaire

1) Family/household structure

Christian name

Age.

How many children do you have?

What are their ages?

Boys and/or girls?

Do they all have the same father?

If not, how many father's altogether?

What was your age when your first child was born?

What, if any, was your occupation before then?

How old were you when you left school?

Did you have any educational/vocational qualifications or experience?

What work experience do you have since leaving school?

2) Residence

How long have you lived on Green Fields?

Since living on GREEN FIELDS, have you always lived in your present home?

If not, how many times have you moved?

House or flat? Garden?

How many rooms?

Where did you live before GREEN FIELDS?

Where did you live as a child?

Extended family

Where do your parents, if alive, live now ?

If alive, are they still married?

If not, what was your age when they separated?

How often do you see them?

Do you have any other family?

Where are they now?

How often do you see them now?

Fathers

What was your relationship with the father of your first child?

How long had you known him?

Where were you living when you met?

First child's father's occupation at the time?

(Questions repeated if more than one father)

Health

Are you in good health?

What health problems, if any, do you have now?

What health problems have you had in the past?

Have you ever been treated by your doctor for depression?

What treatment did you receive?

Are you taking tranquillisers now?

Do you use any social drugs on a regular basis?

(Details only if willing)

Alcohol consumption?

Children's' health

Do your children have any problems with their health?

Financial details

What is your weekly income?

Actual income (from all sources)

Are you repaying any debts or loans out of that?

(Catalogues, shopacheques, private loans)

How much do you have left after that?

(Amount of disposable income)

What commitments do you have to find out of that?

Do your children get free school dinners?

Any other benefits?

Social Life

Do you have many friends?

How many women?

How many men (Platonic)?

In what ways, if any, do these friends help you to cope?

(Baby-sitting, finance, repairs, companionship, advice, having fun, etc.)

Sexual activities

Do you have an active sex life?

(Details, if willing)

Would you consider remarriage/cohabitation?

Reasons for and against?

Family violence

Have you or your children ever been the victim of "domestic violence"?

Have you or your children ever been the victims of sexual abuse?

Crime, if any, in family.

Does the father/s of your children have a criminal record?

Has he/have they ever been in prison?

How long, and how long ago?

Do you have a criminal record?

For what?

Have you ever been in prison?

How long, and how long ago?

Social services

Do you have any contact with the Social Services?

Health visitors, midwives etc.

Please give comments.

Children's schools

Do you have much contact with the school/s which your children attend?

Please give comments

Problems with children

Do you have any problems with your children?

(Discipline, bedwetting etc.)

Contact with and support from absent fathers

Do your children have any contact with their father/s?

How often?

Does he offer you any financial support for the children, either formally or informally?

Please give details.

APPENDIX 2 - DSS benefit rates at APRIL, 1994

Single person (aged over 25)	£45.70p
Lone parent premium	£ 5.10p
Family premium	£10.05p
Dependent child in age range 0 - 11	£15.75
in age range 11 - 15	£23.00p
in age range 16 - 17	£27.50p (if in full-time education)
aged 18	£36.15p (if in full-time education)

These benefits are *reduced, pound for pound*, for any other income the family has *including child benefit and child maintenance* received through either court order, or more recently, collected by the Child Support Agency.

Families in receipt of Income Support are also entitled to Housing Benefit, free school dinners and free prescriptions.

Single man 16 - 18	NIL
18 - 25	£36.15p
over 25	£45.70p

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