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# **Connecting experiences: Young people's family life as a unifying entity**

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## Abstract

Most previous research investigating the role of family in youth to adult transitions has been conducted via quantitative studies. Although their results tend to suggest the best "outcomes" are within those from intact households, and from families characterised by authoritative and supportive parenting, the area is beset with complications and inconsistencies. More general research on young people (or "adolescence" in the developmental literature) portrays it as a period characterised by growing autonomy, and so focuses on spheres of influence outside the home and family, such as the school and peer group, where young people's independence is enacted.

Against a background of recent changes in the shape and trends of family formation and the nature of youth to adult transitions, this qualitative study investigates the ways in which experiences of families equip young people to navigate the transition to adulthood and its attendant risks to health, well-being and status. In doing so it links internal family processes with the external facts of continued inequality in outcome for young people in terms of health, risk-taking behaviour, educational attainment and labour market position.

Twenty-two families (both dual and single resident parent) with young people (aged 13-17) were recruited and interviewed by the author. All families resided in the west of Scotland in or near Glasgow. Young family members and their parent(s) were interviewed together and apart (a total of sixty-six interviews) about their experience, enactment and understanding of family life and its role in the transition to adulthood.

Results suggested that a focus on the *practices* of family life (such as the organisation of mealtimes and discipline) and the beliefs implicit within them, illustrates both how families are understood in the abstract, and further, how family activities are developed within the wider social context. *Parenting* (rather than household) not only emerged as key to contemporary understandings of families, but the strategies and beliefs which form the basis of parenting were revealed as one way through which the internal processes of families can be linked to the world beyond the home. The study therefore offers a contribution to explanations for the reproduction of life chances, interpreting parenting strategies as attempts to create *value consistency* between the internal, privatised sphere of a family and home and the external, public sphere of young people's independence.



## **The structure and form of the thesis**

The structure of this thesis reflects the evolution of the research project itself. Conceived of as an exploratory study looking at how key family processes were linked to their statistically recorded outcomes, it set out with intentions to record the experiences of young people and their parents equally. Reflecting these intentions, the literature review contextualises the study by drawing critically upon both developmental psychology and the sociologies of youth and the family.

During the analysis of data I came to focus more closely on parental understandings of discipline strategies and consequently this is the major focus of the final two data chapters as well as a major strand in the other three. Where I was able to analyse young people's data in respect of discipline and understandings I did so, however the children's data was not as strong, for analytical purposes, as that given the parents.

Reasons for this are multiple and not least among them my lack of experience at the time of data collection. Steps were taken in the design of data collection materials to capture children's views in the adult setting of a data collection session (such as doing the interviews in the children's homes). However, I found that the data from interviews with parents was more consistent and amenable to analysis. In particular, parents were shown to be more accomplished at "taking a step back" from the everyday practices they enacted and exploring why they would do things in a given way over other possible ways of doing things. Younger respondents, (but by no means all of them) would often not be as adept in this ability. Such difficulties inevitably filtered into the analysis, influencing the themes that were emergent as the analysis progressed. Capturing young people's voices requires different skills than those needed with adults, and I have however used a sizeable amount of young people's data in this analysis, but add this caveat for transparency.

Subsequently, as the reader progresses through the thesis young people's voices subside while representations of parental views increase. One might therefore ask why the title of the thesis references young people and not their parents. The reason for this is because the main findings of

the thesis still pertain to the lives of young people, showing how parents harness and rein in available resources such as time, emotion and finances in a manner which creates family environments shaped around their understandings of what is vital for the success of the young people involved. Quite often these family environments cut across traditional divisions of household and see influences of both non-resident kin and other people who may not be related. The point of their involvement is that for both young people and their parents the contributions of these others are consistent with the world-view underpinning the family lives of the family members.

The data presented in this thesis represent a snapshot in the lives of these families; the dynamic nature of family processes over time could not be captured using the methods described. The snapshot is of families at the stage of late childhood. If I was to return to the families now, their day-to-day practices and strategies may well have developed and evolved in light of the increased independence of the young people and perhaps family change. Similarly, the pathways of the parents themselves may have undergone change; some parents categorised as in low income groups in this study may have progressed to better paid employment (especially in the case of younger mothers who were at the start of careers or completing higher education). However despite such changes in the material well being and the capabilities of the young people in some of the families, I would suggest that the understandings which underpin strategies would persist even if new forms of expression in practice were developed.

### **A note on terminology**

This issue also brings me to spell out here the terminology used throughout this thesis, since it is not without consequences. I refer to respondents here as *young people* and not *children*, *teenagers* or *adolescents* because the etymology of some of these terms is problematic. I use young people as it is the term that best captures young people as agents. The concept of a child is broad and often unwieldy. It can range from the dependent infant to the grown up children of adults, who no matter what their age and stage will always be somebody's child. When the parent and adult child interact

with one another, there will always be elements of that interaction which reflect the special nature of the relationship between them. When I use the word child or children then, it is from the perspective of the adult who defines them as such; parents don't refer to their *young person*, they refer to their *child*.

The concept of *adolescent* constructs children from a different perspective, that of scientific Developmentalism, which suggests that individuals pass through physical and capability defined *stages* from the dependence of infancy to the independence of adulthood. More recent sociological data have led to a questioning of when independence in an economic and emotional sense is achieved, given the changed nature of the transition to adulthood (discussed in Chapter 1). The concept of *teenager* also borrows from the Developmental perspective by attributing behavioural characteristics to a fixed point in the life-course, the broad and varied years between 13 and 20. Not only should we be wary of lumping together the behaviour of a 13 year old with that of a 19 year old, but in addition, the concept of teenager is in many ways both a commercialised and demonised variant of inflexible Developmentalism, and as such has rather unhelpful connotations.

In a similar vein, the use of the term "the family" has been avoided or used with caution. Except when referring to a particular instance of a family I have avoided using it and opted instead for "families". The pluralizing of the term is a solution that attempts to capture the diversity of family forms rather than an overarching normative standard. As Smart and Neale (1999) have pointed out, as did feminist authors such as Barrett and McIntosh (1982) prior to them, the naïve use of the term family can imply that there is "*a naturalistic grouping which always, everywhere, is the family with its fixed gender roles. It distorts differences of class, race, region and so on.*" (Smart and Neale, 1999, page 20). The use of terminology in this thesis is influenced by Morgan's (1996) understanding of "families", which acknowledges that use of the term "the family" is naïve and loaded but also has real meaning for the actors involved. In this light the substitution of the word "family" for a new word altogether (so-called "concept abandonment" – Scanzoni 1983), would lose sight of something important in what "family" means to people. Added caution comes

from a focus on "family practices", another term coming from Morgan (1996) which recognises that families do not do the same things for all people and that those characteristics which families may share across the board, such as emotional support or care, are not achieved by the same strategies and means.

### **The limitations of this thesis**

As well as the point made above of this thesis representing a "snapshot" of family life at a given moment in the life-course of the families studied, there are other limitations which need to be addressed. The emergent choice of focussing on how parents help young people to construct a consistent set of values and beliefs about the world, underpinning practices and reinforced by wider connections, led to the exclusion of other areas of investigation.

The first of these refers to the influence of ethnicity. With the exception of a Jewish family (and their religious beliefs had a profound influence on their enactment of family interactions, duly discussed), the sample gained for this project was ethnically homogenous; white and predominantly Christian or secular with a Christian up-bringing latterly rejected by parents. During the course of fieldwork, religious beliefs did not emerge as a key theme across the data-set as a whole in respect of respondent's professed beliefs about the nature of their family lives. For this reason, exploring this area of belief did not become a major part of the analysis. This could be entirely a consequence of the recruitment process that did not use organised religiously orientated avenues as a sampling strategy. If I had recruited through Mosques, Churches, Synagogues or denominational schools, the data collected may well have led a greater focus on religious belief in the formation of family identities and parenting strategies.

Another limitation is the analysis of gender. Although in many ways inseparable from the study of families, and an important theme throughout, the analysis of gender is not given the central role it could have received. Smart and Neal (1999) comment that parent's understandings of their children are shaped by their (parental) gender (p. 107). I have thus tried to capture the differences

in expectation of role between mothers and fathers as it appeared in the data in sections in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. Different constructions of role, of how both young people and parents viewed the differences between mothers and fathers (or their alternatives) are investigated here. However, the gender of the young people themselves can also shape parenting practices:- these again are touched upon in the thesis but to a lesser extent. The main antecedent focussed on in this analysis is that of socio-economically influenced contexts of belief and behaviour. This proved a substantial and fruitful area, in its own sake worthy of in-depth study and thus forms the mainstay of this analysis.

The aim of this section has been to help the reader navigate the thesis and explain some of the key decisions and processes that have influenced its shape and form. More of these decisions and processes are discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to methodological considerations. The thesis itself represents a process of focussing, - from a broad literature review section to a specific emphasis on parental understandings of discipline strategies in the later chapters. The connecting principle between all the data shown is that of value and identity maintenance within the socio-economic contexts the parents find themselves within. It is in respect of these themes that the final section of the thesis is drawn together.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and Review of Literature**

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## 1.1 Introduction

The research presented here investigates, taking the early teenage years as the point of reference, the role of families in the transition from childhood to adulthood. It does so with an interest in the reproduction of life chances that accompany this stage of the life-course. This literature review sets the backdrop by assessing the contributions made by the fields of Sociology and Psychology in understanding the influence of families on young people's outcomes. To do this I take examples from the literature itself such as health, well-being and educational attainment; measures that are traditionally used as markers of successful or unsuccessful transitions to adulthood. There are also separate literature reviews at the beginning of the results chapters to introduce the substantive areas that are addressed within those chapters. The background literature discussed below is that which influenced the choice of method, research design and research questions. Even though much of the research literature here is taken from the quantitative tradition, the changes I document in both the nature and study of the family and transition to adulthood show why a qualitative methodology is applicable at this time.

Given that the families, young people and transitions to adulthood have been widely studied through the lenses of not only different disciplines, but also by different perspectives within disciplines, the literature caused its fair share of problems and did not offer itself easily to précis. In recent years it has become more appropriate, in terms of both empirical evidence of societal changes and theoretical developments, to reunite young people with their families in research. In this literature review, I will investigate how the two separate spheres of Sociology and Psychology, and separate spheres within Sociology, have conjoined with respect to the study of young people and families. I suggest that this

opportunity has emerged as a consequence of the emerging sociological interest in individualisation. I begin by describing the literature examining young people from a structural Sociological perspective and follow with a description of the literature of the same tradition that looked at the family. I conclude this section by looking at how recent theoretical developments have led to both the possibility and necessity of uniting the separate areas. Attention then turns to processes within families, and the influence of Psychology in its attempt to understand the relationships between internal family dynamics and young people's outcomes. The concluding section looks at how contemporary work attempts to unify the understanding of external and internal, structure and process, to account for differential outcomes.

## **1.2 The socio-economic explanation of youth to adult transitions**

The outcome variable of young people's health is illustrative of how the application of a materialist (socio-economic) model of transition has become beset with problems in recent decades. This is not least complicated by the fact that in the first place young people's health as an outcome is problematic by its very nature. Although the commonly held view that young people are by and large a healthy group questionable (Rutter and Smith; 1995), there is evidence of socio-economic equalisation in measures of health statuses during youth (West 1997; West and Sweeting 1996). However by the time young people become young adults, noticeable and significant socio-economic differences in health begin to emerge. The task of explaining how socio-economic differences in health emerge in young adulthood would contribute to an understanding of how all manner of life-course outcomes are produced. A significant contribution to understanding the class based patterning of adult health and illness has come from those proposing the "materialist" explanation



offered by the authors of the Black report (Townsend and Davidson; 1982, Whitehead; 1988). However it seems that despite the continued influence of socio-economic background on life-chances, for young people there exists not only seeming equality but there has additionally been a transformation in experiences of both youth and early adulthood that calls into question accounts that assume an inter-generational transmission of health inequalities. The idea that young people follow a clear and predictable class-based transition from youth to adulthood and in doing so, reproduce the socio-economic locations of their parents anew (Furlong and Cartmel; 1996) has recently been questioned. Uppermost, in the 20 years since the Black report, the nature of the transition from childhood to adulthood has changed considerably along with the economic relations that underpinned the materialist explanation. These recent developments now require explanations of continued health inequality that combine an understanding of the role played by structural conditions with that of individualistic negotiations of the life-course in reproducing the differences.

This task has not been assisted by the nominal separation of the areas of knowledge involved in compiling accounts of the role played by structural influences and individual differences; represented structural Sociology and Psychology. Gillies (2000) has commented that a consequence of this separation has been the creation of discrete theoretical discourses within sociology and psychology that prohibit the one from informing the research of the other. Moreover, both disciplines can be held to account for subsequent absences. The structural Sociologists have failed to unite the experience of youth with families. Whereas Psychologists, with their emphasis on the origins of individual differences within families, have failed to account for the contextual factors that which have led to the creation of new and changing experiences of both youth and family.

Further separation can be found at the intra-disciplinary level in Sociology where family and youth studies have also developed separately. Sociologists have tended to investigate structurally the concepts of childhood and families which has led to families being studied as a unit in relation to the wider societal superstructure. Within the sociological study of young people, there has been until recently a tendency to apply the same analytic strategy (through the study of socio-economic trajectories) but to study them within the public spheres where they act out their fledgling independence (schools, the peer group etc.).

### **1.3 From common trajectories to individualised transitions: the sociology of young people from structuralism to individualisation**

The European Group for Integrated Social Research make a helpful distinction between two inter-weaving concepts that have run through the sociological study of youth, those of *trajectories* and *transitions*. *Trajectories* they describe as "the structural pathways foreseen by societies, the conditions of labour market entrance, education and training facilities, supply of affordable housing for young people, legal age-based criteria defining rights and responsibilities ...etc." (EGRIS 2001). In short, a trajectory is the formal path of growing up. This definition can additionally be seen as embodying ideologies of childhood and adulthood in a series of social, economic and legal milestones to adult status that the majority will pass through. *Transitions* on the other hand are "the integral parts of the life-course that are loaded with subjective meaning...(the study of which will) recognise that young people are actively trying to shape their present and future lives, albeit constrained within the economic, social and cultural conditions they find themselves within." (2001, pp102-03). The history of the sociological attempt to understand youth can be seen as the move from an attempt to understand trajectories to understanding transitions.

Recent decades have witnessed a "sea-change" (Harvey, 1989) in the nature of society that has, in turn, changed the way sociologists view their subject matter. The new form of social organisation has variously been described as post-modern, high modern or late modern, and has involved structural changes that have permeated all areas of social life which theorists such as Lyotard (1984) have suggested have made structural analysis no longer appropriate. Subsequently theorists and researchers have debated the significance of the changes and the contribution social science can make to understanding social life in these apparently new times. The early proponents of the postmodernisation thesis used cultural evidence to support their views (Featherstone, 1991), whilst those concerned with more materialistic concerns such as employment, education and health have stressed a continued influence of socio-economic circumstances in determining social life (Furlong and Cartmel, 1996; and in relation to health, West and Sweeting, 1996; West, 1997). Additionally, regarding the study of young people, theoretical developments have had to account for the fact there no longer exists a steady, predictable progression from the economic dependence of childhood to the independence of young adulthood. In response to this, the emphasis of much research has been upon questions of identity and lifestyle (Miles, 1996) and the role of socio-economic backgrounds in shaping such lifestyles.

The boundaries of youth and adulthood have themselves become flexible, reflected by a change of approach at the broader theoretical level with theorists such as Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) who described an apparent fragmentation of the structures that had characterised the previous analyses of society (most notably the concept of social class). Both these theorists have identified a process of *individualisation* of social life in which the

old shared experiences of groups of people no longer seem to have a commonality that leads to group identification at the subjective level.

In Giddens' analysis, life has become a '*reflexive project*' in which the individual has to create anew their own biography within these changed structural conditions. For Beck, the emphasis is on how the individual has to make use of the resources at their disposal to navigate their way through the increasing risks that inhabit the world that the modern epoch created. It is not that either theorist thinks individualisation means a levelling of experience or a more egalitarian society; structural factors still determine the level of opportunity or constraint an individual faces. However, these opportunities and constraints will not be experienced collectively to create the previous feeling of solidarity. Nor will the experiences of individuals be reflected empirically as trajectories shared between individuals within certain structural groups (classes).

#### **1.4 Young peoples' passivity in the sociological study of "the" family**

The exclusion of young people from the sociological study of the family until relatively recently was a consequence of an overly structuralist view of the relationship between "the" family (largely taken for granted in its structural form) and society. Morgan began his 1975 treatment of the sociology of the family, one that itself became a key text in the field, with the claim "the family we discuss in lectures and tutorials - the family with its functions, its roles, its kinship and networks - often appears to be remote from the family we experience outside the lecture room." (Morgan 1975, p 1). This work, starting as it did, with a call to reflect the lived experience of families proceeded to address the "varieties of functionalism", psychiatry and feminism that were coming to characterise the study of "the" family. This was because sociological studies of family had not at that point been

concerned with lived realities, but instead with the explanation of how and why social relations and structures came to be reproduced. However Morgan's work too, characteristic as it was of the times, failed to make reference to how young people related to adults in the modern family. Young people were viewed as passive socialisees and could only be talked about as dependents when in relation to family. By the time they had developed sufficient autonomy to become individuals capable of enacting social life in their own right, they had become part of another section of knowledge where the focus became the relationship between themselves and their peers, often with an "index of ills" emphasis that saw young people as a social problem (Jones and Wallace 1992), or responding to it, explaining away deviance as in the works of Patrick (1973) Cohen (1972) or Young (1971). Young people's relations with teachers were also studied (Hargreaves, 1967; Hargreaves, 1972; Willis, 1977) as school became seen as an important secondary socialising influence, where trajectories became embodied in such processes as streaming in the classroom, entrance to grammar school or secondary modern, going into higher education or a technical college. The young person's experience of the trajectory might have been studied in relation to their peer group affiliations and adopted subcultural styles, values and attitudes, but only to support a structuralist approach that saw them as a class in waiting. Rarely though, did this analysis locate young people as actors within families.

The trajectory tradition owes much to the functionalist analysis of family life and the socialisation process. In particular, early work looking at the family by Parsons, attempted to show that family was structured, in its modern form, so as to provide the optimal "*primary socialising*" agency for society (Parsons 1956), reproducing adults who had absorbed and embodied societal cultural norms, passed on via family and other socialising agencies (church, school, etc). It was believed that for this to happen successfully, children

needed to be dependent upon their parents in order to learn from them via the process of role modelling. An assumption of childhood dependence is implicit in the continued silence of young people in the family during this time. After family, other institutions such as the school, became selection agencies which reproduced social class locations through an apparently meritocratic procedure of sifting and sorting pupils and conferring on them the educational qualifications which became the key to their future social and economic positions. Today, the faith in educational qualifications ensuring an enhanced labour market entrance is perhaps more questionable for those in lower socio-economic positions (Allatt and Yeandle 1992; Furlong and Cartmel 1996) as is discussed later.

This view of young people moving from a state of dependence in their family situations to independence in the public sphere, via the school, set the trend for studying young people in public but not in private. One of the few occasions the experiences of young people were situated within their family situations was in Musgrove's (1966) *"The Family, Education and Society"*. However, even here, the work was a study of the reproduction of class positions, concluding that educational success was more likely to be achieved when the values of home and school coincided. Consequently, the school and family were seen as the agents of change, with very little scope for young people as actors. In essence this is a trajectory orientated conclusion; either an indictment of feckless working class households and a meritocratic school system or perhaps a Marxist critique of an educational value system designed to reward and reproduce privilege, as later theorists such as Bourdieu (1976) would claim. What is clear is the extent to which the possibility of young people's efficacy is excluded.

Gillies (2000) identifies Leonard's (1980) work *Sex and Generation* as a notable exception to the trend of separating young people from their families in research. Leonard's study reflects the theoretical priority of increasing independence and autonomy, and documents the experience seen as a key stage in the process of gaining independence in the lives of the young people featured, that of getting married and breaking away from the parental home. A constant theme in the work is of young adults still having to live by the rules and expectations of their parents for as long as they reside under their roof. However, successive life events such as finishing education and finding a job that paid enough to leave home, get married, and set up home, show a close fit between trajectory at the structural level and transition at the biographical. It therefore represents an interesting comparison with transitions to adulthood research carried out in the 1980s and 1990s after very different economic conditions transformed young people's experiences of the transition in a relatively short period of time.

Gillies' (2000) suggestion that family research within sociology has tended to look at either relations with young children, wider kin or the conjugal relationship is however correct. In Young and Willmott's (1957) *Family and kinship in East London* which some have argued has become one of "the most widely read books in British social science" (Wilson, 1985, page 33) the relationship between young people and their parents was not substantially addressed, nor in subsequent studies in the series, and no young people were interviewed. In the first study, significant emphasis was given to relationships between parents and their own parents, as indicative of the gradual erosion of the extended family that faced the families moving out to the suburbs. Their emphasis was on the relationship between community and family, as a study which emerged out of changing population trends and the desire to re-house working class communities in new, cleaner, spacious

accommodation that reflected visions of a brighter future. The impetus of the research was fear of losing a vision of family life, the extended families of east-end London, under threat from planned housing.

### **1.5 Returning young people to their families; the changed transition from youth to adulthood**

In the twenty years since the publication of Leonard's study there has been a transformation in the very structural conditions that were implicated in the determination of both youth trajectories and the structuring of family. This has led to families and youth becoming bound together. The EGRIS report referenced earlier, suggests that institutionalised trajectories and individualised transitions for European youth have become "*de-coupled*" (2001: p110), as "the transition has lost its clear and attainable destination of a completely integrated adult" (2001, p103). This produces a situation whereby more young people "yo-yo" between dependence and independence, meaning that to focus solely on the school, peer group or youth job market will not reflect the experience of transition adequately. For example, it is now more likely that young people will stay on at school for longer thus prolonging financial dependence on parents (Schneider 2000). For those leaving school at minimum age in the UK, the 1980s saw the removal of their benefits and since the 1990s young people have not been entitled to full benefits until the age of 25 (Jones, 1995). This in turn has combined with a contraction of the youth labour market and economic restructuring which has placed more emphasis on flexible employment. This has been experienced by young people as a shrinking of opportunities within steady, full time employment, especially in sectors such as manufacturing or primary production, combined with a growth in flexible (part-time, short term) service sector employment.



The government response to rising youth unemployment when the trend first became visible, was the introduction of youth training schemes. The school to work transition, for those who do not stay on in education, has involved an extended period on a government training scheme as the common experience (Furlong and Cartmel, 1996; page 34). The fact that employment prospects are not good after the completion of youth training has further added to the fragmented experience of the school to work transition for those who leave school at the minimum age. For those on a further and higher education trajectory, the removal of grants for many of those staying on in further and higher education, and the introduction of tuition fees in England and Wales has been one of the government responses to ever increasing student numbers. The consequence has been an ever more lengthy transition to financial independence from parents. For those leaving school to look for work, low wages have always characterised the low level positions at the beginning of career structures. However today it is rare that this will be experienced as a traditional apprenticeship with the relative job security this offered. The move towards flexible working practices that characterised the labour market during the 1990s affected the experience of youth employment severely. Furlong and Cartmel (1996) report the work of labour market researchers (such as Ashton et al and Atkinson) who describe the trend for employers to reduce work-forces to a core staff with a pool of peripheral workers available for employment only at times of high demand for services, as the needs of the market dictate. The ranks of these peripheral workers are made up by those in lower tiers of employment, the positions usually filled by young people. Krahn and Lowe (1993, in Furlong and Cartmel, 1995) report how burger companies have perfected this art of "just in time" production by having employees clock off when the restaurants are not busy. More usually however, young employees will experience seasonal variations in employment or intermittent periods of employment increasingly characterised by part-time

or short term contracts which can be renewed or let lapse as a response to trends in the market. Consequently, both university leavers and those finishing youth training schemes will continue to experience an unsteady school to work transition lasting well into their twenties. This experience may also be accompanied by a lowering of expectations as expected trajectories fail to be matched by labour market opportunities.

As the experiences of trajectory and transition diversify, the earlier structural analyses now look inadequate. Consequently, calls for a more biographical approach which reflect the *structural individualisation* of youth transitions have been made with, in addition, the call for researchers to integrate the study of youth and families (Raffo and Reeves 2000). The new approaches, which have been described as biographical, continue to see youth as a stage of transition and continue to look at those areas in which young people are acting out their independence. However, an awareness of the variations within the experiences of young people starting out in similar socio-economic locations in combination with the contemporary theoretical interests in individualisation thesis or structuration theory (Beck, 1992, Giddens, 1991) has resulted in analyses that take account of how young people negotiate the transition and utilise the resources at their disposal. This approach also allows an explanation of why some young people from deprived socio-economic starting points can buck the trend of the statistically anticipated trajectory and improve their life chances. It locates the adolescent experience within family situations, since this represents the resource backdrop from which they will mount their transition to adult status by making use of the various concepts of capital available to them. The combination of financial, cultural and social capital represents the variety of resources that young people use to negotiate their way through the various arenas of their transitions to adulthood. The notions of social and cultural capital also fit well within the contemporary understandings

of agency and structure which have emerged as a response to the challenge of the individualisation thesis. Cultural capital refers to the various linguistic and cultural competences rewarded by the education system and the labour market (Bourdieu, 1973) and has been conceptualised as something which young people can use and accumulate actively, though the ability to accumulate and access this resource is prescribed within the conditions they find themselves (Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Allatt, 1993). Social capital refers to the sense of belonging, trust and reciprocity that exist between individuals in communities (Putnam, 1993) that can assist in providing labour market opportunities for young people. The various forms of capital also represent entities which bring families into the analysis, and a number of researchers have produced accounts, (discussed below) of how social capital especially, as well as cultural and financial capital, is garnered within families and passed on to young people who can then transfer it into relative labour market advantage. For families on the margins, an absence of social capital can compound the absence of financial capital.

With regard to such experiences, Allatt and Yeandle (1992) undertook a qualitative account of the transitions from school to work as experienced by young people in the North-east of England. Their work showed how the various forms of familial capital combined within a labour market suffering the effects of recession, to assist in the production of different transitions for young people. For some of the families interviewed, the economic restructuring or transition to a service based economy from one based on manufacture had eroded their stocks of both financial and social capital. The often simultaneous unemployment of multiple family members would inevitably lead to periods of economic hardship. However, the process of economic restructuring itself had led to a devaluing of the social capital possessed by parents, which in turn impinged upon their

ability to assist in finding work for their sons and daughters. In addition, when discussing the relationship between the various forms of capital and the transition from school to work Allatt and Yeandle show how cultural capital possessed by families can produce advantage. They write that educational qualifications;

*"... are an outcome not only of individual effort, intelligence and institutional provision but are also shaped by the social and cultural capital of parental knowledge, advice encouragement and the social networks which enhance educational opportunities." (page 31)*

They found that faith in qualifications leading to employment began to wane in times of recession when family ties became more important in gaining jobs in the youth labour market. The "de-coupling" of trajectory and transition increased the importance of family connections through affiliates "speaking for" family members at their own place of work. However, those who worked in the traditional manufacturing industries of the north-east found that their work based connections could no longer be seen as viable social capital since such industries were in contraction and often not taking young people on. Family members' knowledge of the new industries was generally scant, with understanding of their recruitment procedures being no better than that of the young people themselves. A further study by Allatt (1993) concentrating on the role of family in middle class homes showed how resources and "emotional capital" (parental time, effort and care) were reigned into making educational success and qualifications a family project. Additional advantage came from the fact that young people internalised their parents' aspirations and, as these parents had already successfully negotiated transitions to professional occupations, their self-confidence. Social capital advantage came for the children of relatively privileged backgrounds through associated access to their parent's social networks which

"nourished" interpersonal skills. Access to such groups, who could pass on knowledge of the world outside families, additionally fostered an understanding of how to interact and adopt group standards. Membership of such groups often ensured access to inside information about jobs or work related issues (Allatt 1993). Morrow and Richards (1995) in a review of literature looking at the school to work transition from the perspective of family involvement, assessed evidence from a variety of sources that suggest kinship links are vital in gaining access to first job. They report the work of Lee and Wrench (1981) who claim to have found evidence of employers cutting down on recruitment costs by using family links to find apprentices (so isolating groups outside of the traditional recruitment networks.). Additionally they cite unpublished work by Gill Jones whose analysis of National Child Development Study data (1995) demonstrated that families displayed a degree of "generational attachment" to certain industries in certain areas such that *"occupational choice will be affected by the breadth of the frame of reference of school leavers and their parents."* (Jones in Morrow and Richards, 1995)

A more measurable concept of social capital has emerged as a significant development within the American research literature too, and its origins and nurture within families is a strong theme. J.S. Coleman (1988) in his landmark paper on the subject connected the ability to foster and garner social capital within families to a definite family structure; nuclear with only one parent working outside the home and a low number of siblings. This paper launched a myriad of research projects linking family social capital to transitional outcomes for young people (Furstenberg 1995; Parcel and Dufur 2001; Runyan, Hunter and Socolar 1998; Teachman, Pasch and Carver 1996; Zimiles and Lee 1991). Many of the findings of these research topics are reported and discussed in this thesis (in Chapter 4), but it is important to note here that Coleman's definition re-conceptualised elements of family

resources and interactions as social capital in a way which gave them a measurable nature. Hypotheses could then be formulated, particularly in relation to family structure, as well as by wider socio-economic structural circumstances, to highlight the effects of the variable on a variety of young people's life-course outcomes.

## **1.6 From standardisation to diversity; recent changes in the shape and theories of family**

Just as the study of young people has been transformed by a fundamental shift in the understanding of society and the relationship between individuals and the structures of social life, so too has the study of families been touched by the post/ late-modernity debate. Sociological studies of families have shifted from modernist, structural based understandings to an emphasis on a diversity of structures and an individualisation of familial and personal narratives. This is not without significance for other areas of sociological endeavour; *"studies and research on the family carried out in the last decade may be interpreted as the answer - in the area of knowledge - to the transformations that have occurred in the structure of society"* (Sgritta, 1989, in Cheal, 1999)

However the response to increasing diversity was not the first challenge to modernist, structuralist orientated family studies. Similar seismic shocks hit the field in the 1970s after feminist critiques of modern social science highlighted glaring holes in its analysis. Today the study of family life and feminism cannot be separated, and to understand the impact of feminism we need to understand the stasis that standard sociological theory was in regarding "the family" up until the early 1970s. Family sociology had been influenced up until this time, like the study of young people, by the structural functionalist tradition, positing the theory that the nuclear family represented a rationalised institution that most

efficiently and effectively filled the needs of both individuals and society. Parsons (1956) claimed that the main functions of "the" family were the socialisation of children and the personality management of adults, and that the nuclear family was thus particularly well suited to modern western societies. The division of labour within it ensured both instrumental provision through a father working outside the home and emotional needs satisfied through a domestic orientated marriage partner. It was believed that as the project of modernity progressed (as modernity could only do), the nuclear family would eventually be adopted by all, on account of its inherent rationality. Thus for example, Murdock (1949) on the basis of an analysis of two-hundred and fifty societies claimed that the nuclear family had *already* been established universally. This claim becomes slightly less incredulous when he informs us that many of these were variants of the western conception of the nuclear family (characterised by shared residence of the conjugal pair and their offspring); *the polygamous family* in which the male plays partner to numerous nuclear families simultaneously, and *the extended family*, in which an extension of a parent-child relationship unites two nuclear families. Murdock suggested that the universal nuclear family fulfilled functions in the spheres of sexuality, economics, reproduction and education. In terms of sexuality, the spouse pair represents a solution to the need across all societies to restrain sexual activity without reducing reproduction to a capacity that would fail to reproduce the population. Economically, Murdock found that in his two hundred and fifty societies, an efficient sexual division of labour existed that roughly mirrored the gender mores of the late 1940s United States! The reproductive and educational functions fulfilled by the universal nuclear family need little explanation and Murdock adds helpfully that although some of these functions are taken over by outside agencies, the family will always share in them to such an extent that it will never be supplanted.

However, Cheal (1991) warns that it is easy to overstate the consensus which characterised Sociology in the United States during this period. He prefers the term convergence, by which he means that researchers had as a guiding principle a scientific directive towards clarity and understanding around the concept of family. This was achieved through the comparing of propositions, testing of hypotheses and compilation of inventories relating to what was known about the family for use in the task of theory building. The problem with this was two-fold, firstly the models being constructed by theory convergence had become cumbersome and could not study forms of living that were outside the standard theory of "the" family. Secondly, the idea that only the nuclear family could fulfil certain functional prerequisites was becoming unsustainable in the face of evidence from anthropology, historical and comparative studies that a variety of institutional forms could meet these functional prerequisites, families or not (Gittins 1985).

Feminism also began to criticise the orthodox sociological view of "the" family as "agent" or "unified interest group" when it actually served the needs of individual family members in different ways. The feminist critique became most well known for introducing an analysis of conflict and exploitation into family studies, however this recognition also changed the way in which families came to be understood as an entity. Barratt and McIntosh (1978) for example, pushed for a deconstruction of the concept of family on the basis of evidence that there are multiple forms of the experience and that normal discourse surrounding the notion of "the" family serves to reproduce a patriarchal form of intimate relations by giving it the illusion of inevitability and naturalness. The problem with studies of the family within the structural functionalist perspective was represented by their failure to question the idea that they might be contributing to a cultural construction of the family that was as ideological as it was real. This perspective led to criticism of any attempt to



uncritically apply positivist methods to the study of the family through fear of reproducing the family in an exploitative form. The classic example of science doing this was when Bernard (reported in Cheal, 1991) noticed men and women reporting the same events differently, in a manner distorted by their cultural understandings of what the events meant, influenced by their perception of gender roles. Thus she found men over-reported their power in marriage situations and women under-reported. Such concerns heralded a period of post-positivism in which there was a realisation that scientific models of the family were grounded in folk understandings, with the result that the propositions to be tested scientifically reflected cultural understandings of how the family operated. To ensure that the circle of reproduction was not continued, unstructured and open ended research methods have been encouraged, at least until there can be consensus as to the dimensions and attributes of familial experience.

Renewed responses throughout the 1990s to the diversification of family forms have meant the debate about the relationship between inquiry into families and the subject matter of that inquiry has not had a chance to settle down. The fact of *increasing* diversity in family forms (the issue is no longer that there was *never* diversity) represents a challenge to the certainty of a modernist structural analysis of families in society; that rationality and progress will lead to an ever standardised experience. This dimension of modernism, which was also evident in the structuralist approach to youth, is in addition displayed, according to Cheal (1999) in the modernism of Young and Willmott (1973) and their model of the "Symmetrical Family", whereby power relations in families would equalise between spouses. Their vision of modern progress had the benefit of witnessing the beginnings of the feminist movement, and they rightly conjectured that the feminist critique of society and families' role in reproducing gender roles and their resultant

inequalities, meant that the family would never be the same again. They believed a redistribution of household labour would result as women began to give more time and attention to their work outside the home. This was coupled with the trend they witnessed in their earlier study of families moving from high density inner city areas to lower density suburbs and an increased emphasis on a privatised family experience with a higher premium given to consumerism over collectivism and contact with extended kin (Young and Willmott 1957). The manner in which they felt this would cut across class boundaries through a process of *stratified diffusion*, "the tendency of lower status groups to emulate those above them," is similar to the structural functionalist belief in the process of standardisation in family forms accompanying the process of modernisation.

However, families have not standardised around the middle class model of family formation. In the years following the publication of "The Symmetrical Family", the prediction that more women would place emphasis on employment outside the home over domestic, unpaid labour has been born out. By the end of the 1980s, about two-thirds of women worked outside the home. However, this does not convincingly suggest a commitment to the sphere of paid work akin to that traditionally displayed by men, given that that few women have a continuous labour market experience and most of the increase can be accounted for by part-time work (Marsh and Arber 1992). As has been discussed in relation to youth transitions, economic restructuring has led to an increase in part-time work across the board which has shaped the labour market experiences of both women and men. Additional trends, such as the decline in marriage rates accompanied by a rise in the age of marriage, have further prevented the standardisation of families to the symmetrical model. Fertility rates are similarly declining alongside marriage (although the two rates are not necessarily connected), with birth rates in Britain hovering just around replacement

level after sharp rises in the post war years, followed by a decline bottoming out in the late 1970s (Marsh and Arber, 1992).

However, the trend in family formation that has attracted most in the way of public debate and ensuing research has been in respect of parental circumstances of childbirth. By 1996, the Office of National Statistics reported the percentage of solely registered births (births with one parent's name on the birth certificate) had gone up from about five percent in the 1970s to eight percent (Newman and Smith 1997). The figure for those jointly registering births but doing so out of wedlock had gone up from nine to thirty - five percent over the same time period. These figures are not illuminating on their own however. The increase in jointly registered births outside wedlock can be interpreted as a secularisation of family life with cohabitation replacing marriage as the institution in which people raise children. This trend, which has been described as the "Swedish model", is characterised by high rates of cohabitation at child-birth but low rates of teenage pregnancy. This has been opposed to the so-called "American model" which shows similar numbers of births outside marriage but with much higher rates of teenage pregnancy accounting for them. Another thing the figures on their own do not tell us is the trajectories of family formation that childbearing in a cohabiting or single state indicate. Traditional understandings of the trajectories of family formation would suggest that a single state would proceed to a married state and that recent times may have seen the insertion of a cohabiting phase.

Fitting such statistics into a longitudinal picture is difficult given that the categories of relationship status tell us little about trajectory. For example, evidence suggests that less than half the births outside marriage registered to two parents were parents living at the same address (Marsh and Arber, 1992), which adds a different complexion to the original

figures. Another problem with the data is that they lose their real meaning unless they are combined with other socio-demographic information, the analysis of which, could for example, reveal whether Britain was following the Swedish or American models of family formation. Thus Hess (1995) tells us that in terms of the demographic variable of age, the situation in Northern Europe and Britain is that the rate of teenage pregnancies appears to have peaked and is displaying a decline. Latest figures in Scotland (Registrar General, Scotland, 2001) show that the birth-rate for those under the age of twenty has stayed steady over the last ten years and that the number of jointly registered births has gone up from sixty-two to seventy-three percent of all births in this age group. However, the figures also show that the later people have their first birth, the increased likelihood of their co-registering it is (87% at thirty five and over compared with an average of 83.5%). This would suggest a trend towards a trajectory of partnership formation followed by child bearing.

However, showing the pregnancy rate by socio-economic status displays a different picture, of *differentiated* trajectories of family formation along socio-economic lines. Collins (1992) for example showed a very high association between areas with high rates of birth outside marriage and those with high unemployment and high crime rates. Such a finding was also reported by Murray (1990) who claimed the distribution of children born outside marriage and solely registered was both higher among lower socio-economic groups and indicative of an American model of "underclass" formation. In his ideology of the underclass, causality is reversed; thus the cause for the socio-economic problems of the areas is seen as the high proliferation of fatherless families.

Whatever the implications of the new family arrangements, either for communities or the individuals involved, mainstream sociological theory has had to respond to the new circumstances or be left with models of family that simply do not reflect lived experience. The family life-course perspective has grown out of the view that a normative sequence of family events does not take place anymore. Marsh and Arber highlight that this is the case by pointing out that the categories of relationship status used in quantitative research "single, married, cohabiting, separated, divorced, widowed ... do not imply a unidirectional scale" (1992, page 8). The sociological study of families has therefore been forced to go through its own individualisation process, and in doing so has answered some of its critics. By concentrating on the individual's experience of family, and viewing families as interrelating individuals following their own life-course trajectories which coincide at the point "family", theorists have overcome the criticism that they have petrified family relations and made the family unit the entity with the agency, rather than the individuals who compose it.

In Britain, Bernardes has been at the forefront of calls for this type of analysis of family life and he urges a moratorium against any attempt to develop a scientific model of "the" family. Instead, he suggests that the term should only be used in reference to its everyday lay usage and that notions of family life-courses or standardised experiences of it should be rejected when seeking to understand individual experiences of family as the starting point for any analysis (Bernardes 1988). His thinking about the life-course has strong echoes of the treatment of youth given by the theorists influenced by Beck and Giddens, dealing with the duality of structural and individual influences on the life-course in a similar manner; *"life-courses are conceived here not merely as occurring over time but also as negotiations of social structures, the nature of such negotiations being influenced by situational and*

*developmental factors*" (Bernardes, 1988, page 599). From looking at how individuals negotiate the structures of the life-course, we can look at why they choose to form groups with one another and call these alliances *family*, and why at certain moments they cease to use the term or change its meaning. Rather than viewing the transition to adulthood as a structured trajectory, he suggests there are multiple launch points from the family, and it is through the experience of these launchings that young people begin to develop a new interpretation of their relationships with family members. These launch points are influenced by structural factors and the options available to those individuals, but they are not *structured*. For example, two same sex siblings could choose different launch points (e.g. leaving home via university or getting married). By seeing families as a set of *"interlocking trajectories"* (Elder, in Cheal, 1999) we can see how the decisions and events that affect individuals also affect other family members, such as when a child returns to a family home after a relationship breakdown or during a period of unemployment, just as the studies of youth transitions by Jones, Allatt and Yeandle discussed above.

Perhaps there is one lingering doubt I have with the life-course perspective, and that is that it is a triumph of pragmatism rather than it being an approach to family that truly reflects our understanding of it. For all its emphasis on actors' understandings, its accompanying emphasis on flux and individualism and the apparently fickle attitude of family members towards when and where relationships are considered *family*, seems to contradict the sense of what family means to individuals. That "blood is thicker than water" is a cliché, however one which shows that within the lay understanding of family relationships, these ties are assumed to have, and are invested with, a metaphysical quality that makes them qualitatively different from other relationships. Hence, their absence can be felt as strongly as their presence. There is no room in the life-course model to incorporate the

perception of familiar ties which a son may have with a father he has never met, or a mother with a great grandmother she too has never met but whose daughter "has her eyes". In much the same way, two siblings might leave home and not associate with each other for years, sharing several stages of the life-course with other associates. However, one would help the other at a moment's notice in a way they might not feel obliged to a best friend, who at any rate will have "their own family" to assist them. It can be argued that such emotional investments are the product of living in a society which places value on such bonds and as such teaches us to value them over others. However, as a widely held and often reinforced belief, it can be seen to persist within the diversification of family forms we have today. A result of increasing diversity is that people expect different things from their family configurations, and conversely, functions that were filled by family relationships can now be filled by other arrangements. However, in a situation where a combination of other institutions and arrangements have fulfilled the functions of a family, to the extent that the individuals within these other arrangements are termed "family" in the absence of genetic commonality, the use of the term will remain a metaphorical description of these relationships, based on an understanding of what a family is. The difficulty arises when in talking to people about their understanding of family, the only available means of talking about the metaphysical superiority of family is through appealing to notions of familiarity.

## **1.7 Variables and Outcomes; the influence of psychology in explanations of young people, their families and life-chances**

In the absence of studies that combined youth trajectories and families in the structural tradition of sociology, it was generally left to researchers allied to the psychological tradition to take up the mantle of investigating the relationship between what happens in families and how a young person is likely to experience adulthood. Given the different emphasis of psychology, its concern in accounting for individual differences and the relative ease with which it sits in a natural scientific paradigm, the nature and mechanisms of explanation have obviously differed greatly from those of structural sociological investigations, often giving the impression that the two disciplines are studying entirely different subject matter. Like the structural sociological tradition, the psychological tradition has constructed the subject matter within its own parameters and as a consequence has not been without criticism either; at least one reviewer has suggested the process has led to the '*medicalisation*' of the experience of young people in relation to their families (Gillies, 2000). The terminology that different research interests employ often reveal their colours. The term 'adolescent' replaces the 'young person' of more recent sociology, the psychological synonym suggesting a more developmental and biologically determined bridging period between childhood and a stable adult identity. Research interests also construct the problems which they then set about investigating. For structural sociology, the idea of a successful transition to adulthood was influenced by a view of adults in economic terms; as being employable. In the psychological tradition, the emphasis has been through the identification of variables that contribute to the shaping of adult personalities. This project sets out with the aim of identifying an inventory of conditions and influences that are optimal (or sub-optimal) in the creation of well-rounded adolescents, who in turn become well-rounded adults. Outcome variables consist of



measurable entities such as self-esteem, well-being, levels of psychological distress or age of first sexual experience. Such studies have also looked at outcomes which share the economic focus of the structuralists such as educational attainment, rather than labour market position.

The psychological paradigm has influenced an empirical tradition that has emerged in the last thirty or so years from the United States that has looked at the individual, rather than the societal or theoretical consequences of the diversification of family forms. Belonging to a more positivistic, quasi-scientific tradition which has been influenced by the experimental method, a key contribution in this field has been that of Amato and Keith (1991) whose meta-analysis investigated the effects of family diversification on young people. They looked at thirty-seven studies that had previously tested the influence of family structure (whether people lived in single, both birth -parent or reconstituted family) against a psychological dependent variable, the well-being of the young person so brought up. The results of the meta-analysis suggested that children of parents who experienced divorce exhibited lower self esteem as adults than those who had not. Researchers working in Britain found a similar association between childhood parental divorce and adult psychological distress (Rodgers, Power and Hope 1997), parental divorce being associated with a range of "sequelae" (note the medical/disease connotations) including poor academic achievement, low self esteem, psychological distress, delinquency, substance use, and "sexual precocity" (Rodgers, 1996). Ganong and Coleman (1993) in another meta-analysis (twenty-four studies) found associations between children living in single parent or stepparent families and lowered self-esteem while Garnefski and Diekstra (1997) found that young people from one parent or stepparent families reported lower self esteem and more suicidal thoughts and attempts than those from intact families.

The case for negative outcomes in non-traditionally structured households has become, thanks to such works, statistically beyond dispute. What has not been adequately settled however, is what causes the outcomes. Is it satisfactory to "blame" family structure or should researchers investigate the variety of possible mediating factors that may be responsible for the outcomes? Research seeking evidence for likely explanations has not tended to single out one definite source of the lowered psychosocial outcomes, rather the evidence points to a combination of factors. For example, the finding of Rodgers, Power and Hope (1997) that there was no increased risk of long-term psychological distress after the *death* of a parent points to the possibility that it is not the absence of a parent that produces the negative outcomes but something within the process of marital separation, be it the associated conflict or subsequent societal reactions to the event. This raises the question of whether divorce produces less severe outcomes now it has become more common. Ely, Richards, Wadsworth and Elliott (1999) suggest not, at least from evidence of the consistent association between family structure and educational attainment at three time points in the post war years.

Studies that look at influences other than family structure *per se* include those that have looked at how living in a non-traditional household might affect the distribution and access to resources from which a young person can draw. In this latter category, Weiss (1984) showed that finances dropped after marital separation and stayed low afterward. Research has also suggested that adolescent well-being suffers from an increase in hassles experienced by young people in single parent households (Bodmer and Grob 1996), an explanation which not only points to lack of resources, producing the hassles, but also to a deterioration in the processes for dealing with problems. Despite plenty of evidence to

suggest that poverty is associated with family disruption (Cockett and Tripp 1995), there is still some debate over the direction of this relationship, with studies indicating that it is more often poorer families that experience separation and divorce (Booth and Amato 2001; Rodgers and Pryor 1998).

Given findings that suggest there are poorer outcomes for young people (be they psychological, educational etc) associated with households which have suffered disruption, many studies have sought to look at how at the processes of divorce and separation may contribute to these. This approach involves viewing families not as static units that produces outcomes but as a series of processes which establish certain experiences for young people, that lead to the outcomes. It was in this spirit that the findings of a Family Policy Studies Centre review of research showed outcomes for children of family disruption were detrimental, but with the qualification that *"The nature of the family disruption may be more important than either the disruption itself or the type of family structure that results"*. (Burghes 1994, pp 1114-15)

Such thinking led to the formation of the hypothesis that it was not the fact that individuals were in a single parent or reconstituted household *per se* that causes troubled transitions to adulthood, but the associated conflict of divorce or separation. This approach has been present from one of the earliest British studies to look at the relationship between experiences of parental separation and adult outcomes, Illsley and Thompson's (1961) study of child-birth. They found that extra-marital conception in the 1950s was more common amongst women from "broken homes", as they were termed at the time, and they concluded that it was not the broken homes but the unstable and traumatic relationships with parents that produced such outcomes, given that conception rates were higher in cases

where separation was preceded by a prolonged estrangement or temporary separation. In a similar vein, Elliott and Richards (1991), using the National Child Development Study data found that measures of "disruptive behaviour", levels of being "unhappy and worried" and scholastic achievement *before* and *after* divorce, were not only worse for children whose parents divorced. Most importantly, they were worse before the separation as well. This led subsequent researchers to explore the idea that conflict was the key, proposing a mechanism that parental conflict eroded the parent-child relationship. Garber (1992), for example, found conflict to have a greater negative effect than parental separation. Shagle and Barber (1993) hypothesised that adolescents who experienced family conflict would be more likely to have higher levels of self-derogatory feelings, which in turn would encourage self-destructive thinking (suicide ideation). Having shown that family conflict was linked to self-derogation, mediating the association with suicidal ideation they proposed that young people come to believe they are the source of family problems, leading to an internalisation of the conflict, transferring to guilt and feelings of rejection and being unloved. Raschke and Raschke (1979) hypothesised that family structure would make no significant difference in children's self concept, but perceptions of conflict would. They found both these hypotheses to be supported. Amato, Spencer Loomis and Booth (1995) have contributed further to the understanding of the relationship between conflict and adult well being, suggesting that the level of conflict prior to separation is critical. They found that in high conflict families, children grow up to have higher levels of well being if their parents divorce than stay together. However in low conflict families, children have higher levels of well being if their parents stay together.

Such research has led to an acceptance that family processes may not only lead to and precede parental separation or divorce, but can also have a major impact on the health and

life-chances of younger family members. In this respect, Furstenberg and Hughes found the consequences of divorce to be mediated by "a complex blend of selection and socialisation... children who grow up with both biological parents end up better off in part because they are advantaged to begin with *and* because their parents remain together" (Furstenberg 1995, p 446 and pp 545-456, my italics). The recognition that divorce or separation are not variables that have an equal effect on all, but that there are pre and post divorce narratives which involve other important variables displays similarities to the life-course approach discussed in the previous section. It shows that a separated family, a single parent family, or a dual parent family are the culmination of a complex interaction of individual choices bonded by structural circumstances. This has led to an attempt to understand the relationship between families and young people's outcomes not in terms of a simple and direct cause and effect relationship, but one of processes shaped by context.

American research literature has also attempted to look at the underlying processes which shape outcomes and although taking place in a different context their insights may add to the picture in the UK. Their descriptive data such as the parental structure of households have come to be seen as "status addresses" (Dornbusch 1989). Status addresses are not viewed as determinants of behaviour but the locale within which key processes (which *are* assigned causality) are acted out. Thus, a single parent household or dual parent household becomes not the causal feature but the context in which causal features may lie.

Researchers have been urged to go on and identify aspects of behaviour that take place within those contexts. Dornbusch believes that status addresses alone are particularly poor in explaining outcomes as they do not account for those who do better than expected, devoid as they are of an appreciation of processes that take place within these status addresses.

Family processes, in particular parenting style, have been found to be related to children's academic achievement across all status groups. Dornbusch (1989) in his own research found a correlation between parenting styles characterised by what he described as "mixed" or "inconsistent" and lowered educational achievement. A hypothesised mediating factor was that inconsistency in parenting style produced inconsistency in the home environment which created anxiety within young people, and this would translate into lowered performance in school. Analyses at the so-called level of the "mesosystem" (or the linkages between the home environment and the experiences of the school) are proposed by Dornbusch (1989) as the corrective to an overemphasis on the "microsystem" (the relations between family and the individual's personality) and the "exosystem" (the influence of social structure on individual's lives) that has been characteristic of much research reported so far. This can be translated as a call for researchers from the structural sociological tradition and those influenced by psychology to incorporate each other's insights into their analyses.

Dornbusch has also looked at how family decision making might be influenced by family type, claiming that part of the explanation of less advantageous outcomes for young people from single parent households was another process, the earlier handing over of choice in respect of decisions such as what time to be in, or how to spend their money (Dornbusch and Carlsmith 1985). This earlier move to autonomy in single parent households has been linked to "deviant" acts (such as drug or substance misuse), which in turn are associated with lowered school grades. Joint decision making, on the other hand, is consistently associated with higher grades at school, and lower grades are more likely in families, of any structure, where parents dominate the decision making process (Dornbusch, 1989). The

influence of parenting style and social learning processes in the production of negative outcomes is also highlighted by Dadds and Barrett (1996) who show anxiety to be associated with over-controlling parents, a possible explanation of these associations being the failure of such parenting styles to produce a sense of mastery or self-efficacy in young people. Dornbush (1989) suggests that parenting styles that fail to produce internal motivation are less effective (Dadds and Barrett 1996). Elder and Russell (cited in Simons 1996) also see the associated negative effects of single parent households as being mediated through parenting style, suggesting that the quality of the mother's care deteriorates as a result of emotional depression and social isolation.

Amato (1993) developed the understanding of the relationship between family structure, process and outcomes further. He suggested that to satisfactorily account for the effect that separation and divorce has upon young people's transitions to adult identities, research should take account of the *multiple* dimensions of the transition; for example how the divorce or separation affects access to parental resources such as emotional support, practical help, guidance and supervision and availability of role models. The proposed mechanism is that the availability of such resources assists in helping children develop social and cognitive competence, as do economic resources. Amato believes the configuration of such resources together with the experience of conflict need to be understood in order to assess prospects for children. This approach was further developed when Booth and Amato (2001) found that the dissolution of low conflict marriages caused problems as parents of low conflict marriages were less integrated into the local community, perhaps gaining requisite social support through family connections. Low conflict marriages were also positively associated with the quality of children's intimate relationships, social support from friends and relatives and general psychological well

being. The incorporation of these factors into the configuration of negative influences preceding divorce perhaps reflects the increasing influence of the social capital debate within American sociology.

The analysis of within-family dynamics has a history of many decades and it still remains particularly influential in the United States, although its impact is also evident in recent British research. Two theoretical contributions that are critical to understanding contemporary studies of family dynamics are those made by Baumrind and by the family systems approach to family studies, influenced by those such as Minuchin and Olson, and Sprenkle and Russell (Baumrind 1978; Baumrind and Black 1967; Minuchin 1974; Olson, Russell and Sprenkle 1983). Baumrind's contribution has been in respect of the impact of parental discipline style upon young people's academic outcomes. She identified a style of discipline termed "authoritative" as the most appropriate in contemporary societies as it helps develop the form of competence which they require. Looking at the family processes which produce such a parenting style she identified two dimensions; parental *demandingness* and parental *responsiveness* (Maccoby and Martin 1983). Parenting which involved high expectations of children and enforced rules and standards but also saw parent-child relationships as reciprocal and therefore used open communication and recognised the rights of children, was characterised as "*authoritative*". In the most significant operationalisation of this model, Baumrind (1967) demonstrated that such parenting styles were positively associated with school performance. Similar associations were also found by Dornbusch, Leiderman, Ritter et al (1987) who looked at parenting style in relation to adolescent scholastic achievement.



Similar relationships have been demonstrated in respect of well-being. For example, Coopersmith (1967) found parents who set high standards for obedience coupled with a democratic style of decision making tended to have children with higher levels of self-esteem. In Britain, and more up to date, are the findings of Shucksmith, Hendry and Glendinning (1995) who characterised an authoritative parenting style as being high on the dimensions of *acceptance* and *control*. They too found that this was the most effective style, showing positive associations with measures of school integration and well-being. Glendinning, Shucksmith and Hendry (1997) found associations between young people's perceptions of parental *support* and *control* and levels of adolescent smoking, with an increased likelihood of smoking in *unsupportive* home environments. Similar findings from McFarlane, Bellissimo and Norman (1995) show that a parental style (high on *protection* and *care*) affected adolescent well being positively.

In a meta-analysis of thirty research studies, Foxcroft and Lowe (1991) found that a parental style that was characterised as low in support and lax in control was associated with adolescent drinking. Their own research found similar relationships between adolescents' perceptions of parenting style and substance use, but only for males (Foxcroft and Lowe 1995). Baumrind's (1978) proposed explanatory mechanism for the success of the authoritative style is its apparent adaptation to developing "instrumental competence" and Aunola, Stattin and Nurmi (2000) have found it still seems to be the parenting style most suited to developing effective achievement strategies in young people as it associated positively with "low levels of failure expectation, task irrelevant behaviour and passivity and the use of self-enhancing attributions" (p 205).

Another dimension of family functioning that has been identified as crucial in determining successful transitions to adulthood has been that of family *cohesion*. This term comes from family systems theory, in particular Minuchin (1974), who identified the dimension of *family cohesiveness* later described by Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxem and Wilson (1983) as "the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another" (page 70). Olson with Russell and Sprenkle (1983) also added the dimension of *adaptability* to create the "circumplex model of family functioning". The two dimensions were conceptualised as curvilinear, with activity at either extreme of the dimension seen as dysfunctional (*enmeshed* and *disengaged* are the extremes in respect of *cohesion*, and *rigid* and *chaotic* in rigid of *adaptability*). Successful "*balanced*" family functioning was described as operating in the middle ranges. Researchers who have looked at levels of cohesion within families include Barber and Eccles (1992) who found that measures of cohesion, democratic decision making style, permissiveness and conflict could be used to predict levels of self rated depression. Farrell and Barnes (1993) also found that cohesion as a dimension had a positive effect on both psychological (well being and self-esteem) and behavioural (deviance) outcomes. They found cohesion not to be curvilinear however, describing it as linear with a wholly positive association with adolescent and parental outcomes. Foxcroft and Lowe (1991) in a meta-analysis of other studies using the dimensions, found that the *cohesiveness* of a family system could influence outcomes such as adolescent drinking. This echoed earlier work by Burt, Cohen and Bjorck (1988) which showed that young people who perceived their families to be *cohesive*, *organised* and *expressive* tended to have greater psychological well-being, whereas those who rated their families as *conflict-ridden* and *controlling* tended to have poorer well-being. The direction of causality however was not questioned.

The dimension of *adaptability* has been criticised (Beavers and Voeller, 1983) as it blurs the distinction between individual autonomy and family cohesion. These authors propose that it is possible to have high individual autonomy and high family cohesion. Consequently, Noack and colleagues (Noack, Kerr and Olah, 1999; Noack and Puschner 1999) have analysed family functioning using dimensions of *connectedness* and *individuality*. Their finding that for families higher on *individuality* than *connectedness*, outcomes included higher levels of aggressiveness and depressive mood, go to support the argument that sound family relationships are vital for successful autonomy development.

It is quite difficult to see where exactly the positivistic studies described here have taken us. They have produced many different dimensions measuring seemingly similar qualities of family life but giving them different labels; cohesiveness, support, connectedness etc. It is also difficult to see how they contribute to the study of diversification in family forms as they seem to ignore the fact that changes have taken place in the family structures within which these process occur. The approach has also been criticised for constructing and medicalising a particular form of adolescence and of parenting. The continued trend of seeking associations between forms of parenting and young people's psycho-social outcomes constructs notions of "pathological" parenting in respect of its impact on transitions to adulthood, as well as pathologised young people. Moreover, by solely concentrating on *within-family* processes the context of families is lost, the "status addresses" described earlier of Dornbush which maintained the possibility of appreciating the social context of family dynamics is no longer present. This criticism is highlighted by Gillies (2000) in her discussion of psychologically informed, quasi-experimental studies such as the ones presented here. She levels the following criticism against psychological explanations linking youth offending to patterns of parenting;

*"[P]sychological studies rely on simple linear models of causality, ignoring the multifaceted, connectedness of elements that place particular actions in a context of determination. The incidence of crime could be linked to any number of life variables, including gender, race, neighbourhood, unemployment etc. However, the primary focus placed on family relationships reflects a predetermined 'commonsense' view that deviancy is rooted in upbringing."* (Gillies, 2000, page 216).

This represents a criticism that could apply to any explanation of a youth transitional outcome that fails to pay suitable attention to external context factors. Another criticism of seeing family processes as reducible to dependent and independent variables is that the paucity of contextual understanding it produces downplays the agency of young people themselves in the processes. They are reduced to outcomes shaped by environmental and adult centred influences.

### **1.8 Towards a unified account of transitional experiences**

Studies carried out on this side of the Atlantic have tended not to lose sight of social structural contexts of family dynamics and relationships. To this end, research by Glendinning, Hendry and Shucksmith (1995) not only sought to find if there were any associations between parenting style and adolescent functioning but also attempted to locate parenting style within the socio-economic context of families. In respect of associations between socio- economic position and parent- child relations they found "problem relationships were to some extent linked to socio-economic disadvantage...however, the most common type of parent-adolescent relationship, reflecting a permissive approach to parenting, was found to be largely unrelated to social

class of home background." (p 264). In other research they incorporated a trajectory approach and configured young people's family backgrounds with peer group and school factors, beginning to paint a picture of how outcomes (in this case, health and well-being) related to these separate but related spheres of adolescent experience. Unlike either the overtly structural sociological or the positivistic family studies, health outcomes were not constructed as outcomes *determined* by other factors, but are seen as a consequence of *indirect* health selection. As they state, health outcomes are influenced by "the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage throughout childhood and adolescence, where this then impacts on social position in young adulthood." (p 235) Their approach therefore has much in common with the transitions perspective discussed earlier. However, they also incorporated measures of family dynamics to show how these cluster with other areas of young peoples' experiences to produce individual experiences of transition.

They found they were able to differentiate young people into three broad groups according to integration into the family, school and peer group along with attitudes to adult authority. The three groups were "*conventional, family and school orientated*," "*peer orientated*" and "*disaffected, peer orientated*" youth. The family dynamics that characterised the conventional group were high levels of family support, warm-directive behaviour and control. A decline in these dimensions towards rejection of adult authority and stronger emphasis on peer association characterised membership to the other groups. Young people from the conventional group were found to be less likely to come from single parent or step-parent households. What was interesting in terms of indirect health selection was that those from the *disaffected* group were more likely to occupy lower labour market positions in early adulthood and have less healthy behaviour and beliefs.

Sweeting and West (1995) included family structure, material factors and measures of family functioning in their analysis of associations with health outcomes (self-esteem and well-being). They suggested that family functioning might have a more direct effect on health outcomes than material factors, partly explained by the social mobility which positive parenting can instil. Sweeting, West and Richards (1998) also found an association between a family dynamic variable and improved outcomes, one that was stronger than family structure, that of family time. They suggest that this could be a proxy for a number of parenting variables or dimensions of dynamics such as *cohesion*, *support*, or *warm directive* parenting all of which have been associated with positive outcomes. They also point out another way in which it can feed into the transitions perspective in the formation of indirect health selection; through the garnering of the parental social and cultural capital it produces.

## **1.9 Locating the present study**

Given the differing positions and strategies for understanding the role of family in young peoples' transitions to adulthood, this literature review represents an attempt to locate my own research strategy within the broader context of previous research. Two issues were key in the formulation of the research strategy that produced the results discussed in the remainder of this thesis, shaped by issues emergent in the literature. First, was the aim to maintain an understanding of family that did not take for granted its form or structure. The second was to maintain a contextual understanding of processes within families. That is, rather than seeing families as atomised units, to view them, and the processes which constitute them, as shaped by both wider contexts of beliefs about family and its role, and also by the socio-economic backdrop that structures choices available about how to enact family lives.

These distinctions recognise both cultural and socio-economic components of family life which are difficult to disentangle. By employing qualitative methods and analysis I sought to investigate the ways through which both the cultural and socio-economic contexts of family merged to shape experiences of youth to adult transitions. Early on in the research process, I identified two potentially helpful theoretical perspectives to guide the research questions which are discussed in the next chapter. The first of these was the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and his notions of cultural capital and habitus (1978). The notion of cultural capital is a way of conceiving how the material and non-material advantages provided within families can be passed on to young people so assisting the reproduction of inequality. Bourdieu's notion of habitus refers to the "structuring structures" that reflect understandings of the world possessed by individuals and based in their economic circumstances. Thus conceived, habitus could both incorporate and inform parenting and health beliefs as well as the strategies operated by parents designed to improve or reproduce the life-chances of younger family members. Conceiving parenting (as a key family process) within such a framework maintained the contextual appreciation of family processes.

This would still leave the question of how the constituents of habitus could be explored through qualitative research. To this end, the second perspective, that of Morgan (1996), is the recommendation that we concentrate on family *practices* as a means of understanding family, proved instructive. This is because the challenge has been to understand how changing notions of family, youth to adult transitions, and parenting beliefs and strategies contribute to life-course outcomes. Family practices can embody understandings of all of these. By concentrating upon family practices and the underlying beliefs that inform them,

we are also gaining insights into the way that the habitus is constructed for actors. Therefore, in this thesis I investigate four discrete areas of family life adopting a practice/habitus perspective: Understandings of family itself as an entity, the family as social capital, mealtimes and discipline style.

By looking at the first area (understandings of family) the notion of family remains problematised and not taken for granted and thus not missing important understandings through having an overtly rigid model of family. It was also hoped that in elucidating understandings of what family does for the actors involved in its production and daily reproduction, I could arrive at a loose flexible understanding that could underpin the rest of the analysis. Importantly, it was a strategy that would recognise the changing, individualised understanding of the institution.

In Chapter 4 I investigate the notion of social capital to develop the understanding of how advantage is garnered and passed on (or not) through family activities and understandings. The idea of looking at these interactions and exchanges that affect family life and parenting was not conceived at the beginning of the research but was an idea developed inductively as it became clearer that family processes took place within a context wider than the household. The fact that there was available research literature to draw upon was reassuring and I decided to re-conceptualise parenting in terms of social capital to see how it fed into the wider aims of the thesis.

I looked at mealtimes (Chapter 5) as a standard practice which has become synonymous with lay understandings of family life. As a practice which constitutes family life, and one which has recently been the subject of much research and analysis it not only seemed



appropriate to the method but also reflected an early desire to locate the origins of health inequalities. In addition, the fact that feeding practices have a strong cultural dimension means that it presented itself as a likely starting point for unpicking the cultural/material antecedents of family practices.

The choice to look at discipline styles (Chapters 6 and 7) emerged before the data collection because it represented a key parenting strategy and one on which there was a wide body of available research, therefore I was conscious that social scientific knowledge has constructed it as part of the explanation of youth to adult transitions (problematised in Chapter 6), I also felt it was an area of belief with direct relevance to “the feel for the game” that is habitus as underpinning it are assumptions about the way the world operates (explored in Chapter 7). From a pragmatic standpoint, I also felt it was advantageous if respondents could easily talk about this aspect of family life/ parenting.

Through such a method of investigating families, an analysis was produced which could allow us to see how the processes of family might contribute to the life-chances of young people living in families. The process and execution of the methodological approach are detailed in substantially more depth in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Data Generation and its Lessons**

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## 2.1 Background to the Study

This study developed from an analysis of a wider, longitudinal survey called the *West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study* (Macintyre, Annandale, Ecob et al, 1989) that tracked young people from age 15, their last year of statutory schooling to age 18 by which time they were in tertiary education, working, on a training scheme or non-employed. Primarily concerned with health outcomes, the study asked a range of questions about young people's lifestyles and experiences as well as gaining information about family background from young people and parents. An early finding from the *Twenty-07 Study* was that despite there being differences in the material standards of living between intact, separated and reconstituted families, there was little relationship between measures of physical and psychological well-being and family structure *per se* (Sweeting and West 1995). It was also found that there was a relationship between reports of family time spent together and not only certain health related behaviours such as smoking, but also immediate post-school employment status. The findings suggested that a higher amount of family time in some way produced more positive health related and transitional outcomes (Sweeting, West and Richards 1998).

These findings were of particular interest in that they confounded an existing body of research which had identified non traditional family structures, chiefly those stemming from marital disruption as a key variable detrimental to a range of developmental aspects of young people, notably self esteem and well being (Simons et al 1996, Amato and Keith 1991, Dornbusch and Carlsmith 1985). In addition to these psychological outcomes, certain behavioural outcomes have also been linked with family structure, such as earlier sexual experimentation, smoking and delinquency (Elder and Russell 1996, Whitbeck

1996, Simons et al 1996). The original article (Sweeting and West 1995) had reclaimed a "a role for culture in the health inequalities debate" at the same time that the idea of "family time" was becoming a prominent cultural feature. So much so that by the time I had finished the analysis stage of this project, the British Sociological Association had held a meeting of its Family Studies Group around the theme of the work/ family life balance in November 2000. The holding of a conference around this theme suggests that it was one which was considered important for researchers as well as to the popular imagination.

However, the idea of family time is itself problematic. In a non professional understanding of it, it appears as an interpretation of developmental psychology, often received through popular forms such as television and magazines, mixed with notions of cultural capital but played out within a structural situation where parents have begun to feel the pressures of paid work outside the home diminishing the amount of so called "quality time" they have to "invest" in other areas of their life, including their children and families. Sociologists however, have attempted to "make strange" taken-for-granted ideas of quality time. Christensen (2000) further problematised the notion by asking who quality time benefits most in families, the children or the parents, and whether both were interpreting the same time as equally valuable and beneficial. The key influence of paid work in the genesis of the dilemma of course makes it possible that ideas of "quality family time" are in fact a particularly middle class experience of those, who, in contemporary parlance, are work rich but time poor (those who have jobs which pay well enough to support a family but with the pay-off that they are unable to enjoy time with their families as a result). In poorer households, time may be the one resource that can be lavished on young people by parents, begging the question of whether it can compensate for material disadvantage and if so, the further question of why social class locations are reproduced so consistently.

## **2.2 Why a Qualitative Study?**

A qualitative methodology was particularly appropriate for this study. Firstly, the larger quantitative Twenty-07 study had produced a finding that raised as many questions as it answered vis-à-vis the relationship between family life and young people's lifestyle/ life-chances. Outcomes had been identified, but the understanding of the underlying process had not been made apparent by the statistical data. The openness of qualitative methods to unexpected turns, emergent themes and for gaining insights into the understandings of social functioning made it particularly appropriate at this stage of the research process.

There were additional factors relating to the nature of the subject matter, the lived context of families, which also called for an interpretative method. Dowell, Huby and Smith give as one of three reasons for undertaking a qualitative investigation the appropriateness of the method to understanding "people's behaviours, opinions and interactions in their normal context" (1995, p9). However, in the case of families, a qualitative method is given an additional salience on account of the fact that the nature of this "normal context" are families or the household, which was undergone large scale change. Daly et al (1992) suggest that qualitative research is particularly appropriate for studying the ways in which families create and sustain the relationships that underpin and make real the idea of "family". Given the evermore diverse structural characteristics that contemporary family forms take, a qualitative methodology that has as its focus the individual and shared meanings that keep these shifting and changing networks of relations one of "family" is therefore more appropriate than a method designed to measure and quantify pre-determined and taken for granted fragments of the overall family experience. The most recent figures at the time of initiation of the study pointed toward the growing trend for

lone parenthood, childbirth outside of marriage, delaying the birth of the first child and smaller family size (Newman and Smith, 1997). Despite our latent familiarity with the terms "household" and "family", the lived reality has become one characterised by diversity and change. Therefore, a qualitative study could contribute to formal theory building through the process Layder (1994) describes as concept clarification. By looking at substantive areas surrounding families, such as parenting, discipline and collective activity, an interpretative study could help develop a clarified formal understanding of family and household processes which would inform the next stage of investigation. As discussed in the literature review, formal understandings of "the family" emerge from multiple disciplines and there is a considerable degree of overlap blurred by a specification of concepts using the terminology and perspectives of discrete subject areas, such as developmental psychology, systems theory, family therapy and various strands of sociology. This is further complicated by a lived reality of families in which these formalised processes are understood as simple common-sense, the second-nature of our individual family lives.

### **2.3 Analysing the data**

Given the statistical changes in the structure and form of families over recent decades, a study of families and its processes that was grounded in actors' understandings was an additional priority. Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) sees the application of qualitative methods as particularly suited to this as they attempt to "uniquely capture the unfolding nature of meanings, interpretations and processes" (Layder, 1994, p 42) of the subject matter at hand. A Grounded Analysis of the data was therefore appropriate (building from actor's understandings) and data generated from interviews was amenable to a process in which there existed a reciprocal relationship between data collection, analysis and theory. Additionally the analysis produced would aim to both *fit* the

substantive area from which it evolved and additionally be as close as possible to the everyday *understanding* of the actors involved, making sense to both the persons studied and those who practice in the area (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p237).

With respect to the first of these, before further questions could be asked about the role of family lives in the reproduction of life chances, the family parameters and understood reality needed to be ascertained in a manner that had a strong degree of *fit* with the understanding of actors who everyday construct and reconstruct the concept in their life. If this could also encompass the scientific terminology surrounding family, it might feed into future studies that sought to investigate the effects of these changes.

With respect to the understanding of the actors involved, qualitative research is the most appropriate research methodology for capturing so-called "multiple realities" (Dowell, Huby and Smith 1995), be it between different operations of "family" between households or between individuals within households. An emphasis on capturing "multiple realities" has emerged alongside the postmodern critique of the application of scientific methods to social life which claim the high ground of neutral, objective understanding. Contrary to the Modernist perspective in family studies, Ribbens McCarthy, Holland and Gillies (2000) have suggested that an advantage in attempting to capture the "view from nowhere" is the emergence of a theoretical understanding of family lives that does not prioritise the existing power relations that form the cultural backdrop to family research. A notable outcome of this is the recognition of young people's perspectives in the construction and investigation of subject matter (James and Prout; 1990; Qvortrup et al., 1994).

Despite the obvious desirability of the multiple perspective approach, practical considerations associated with variance between accounts also needs to be recognised. This problem was identified by Pahl (1989) when she found different accounts given between spouses in relation to the organisation of family finances. As is reported in the main review of literature, Jessie Bernard also noted discrepancies in accounts, leading to questions of how folk models of family can shape accounts of it (Cheal, 1991). Whereas disagreement or discrepancies over processes are not unexpected, Sweeting (1999) found inter-subjective confusion over something as apparently self evident as a father's residence or non residence in a household. However, the validity of children's accounts should not be under-estimated given that the same study showed a high level of validity between children's and parents' accounts of parental occupation (West, Sweeting and Speed, 2001).

To aid the practical task of analysing the data, the NUDIST software package was chosen. This allows researchers to fragment data into key themes as they emerge from the interview process. All except the results presented in Chapter 7 (for reasons given there) were assisted by using NUDIST. However, certain limitations to the use of Grounded Theory should be commented on for purposes of transparency. Analysis can only be based upon respondent's priorities to a limited extent. For there to be a research project at all, researchers must have a sense of priorities as to what needs to be investigated. Decisions have to be made as to what possible data is considered salient and relevant. Where Grounded Theory can aid the researcher is in warning the researcher to be open to differing understandings from their own preconceived ideas and for research methods to facilitate access to new or competing understandings as much as possible. An example of this could be in the researcher having too rigid a concept of the family unit and focussing only on those interactions between the child and the biological parents. In the reality as



experienced by this rhetorical family, key parenting tasks could be carried out by a non-family member or extended family member, the exclusion of data about which fails to capture the true lived reality of the situation. For example, a favoured Aunt or Uncle may have an important mentoring role to the young person. So as much as this study attempts to be based around emergent themes, it is within the bounds of being a research project that has certain areas that are considered key and important. Often these priorities reflected the priorities of the respondents themselves, this however is not justification in itself. For the remainder of this chapter I describe the process by which the project evolved so the reader can see the evolution of priorities in as an emergent a way as I could realistically manage.

## **2.4 Early Fieldwork**

The data from which this thesis emerged were collected between September 1997 and February 1999. All told, thirteen separate strategies were adopted to yield 22 families for study.

The research went through two ethics committees; the University's ethics committee and then later (when it transpired that recruitment would continue through GPs), the NHS local research ethics committee. Ethical concerns which were considered and addressed included the necessity of involving children in the research, the likely consequences of participation for young people taking part, and how to insure informed consent for participants, both adults and young people. The participation of children was justified by the inherent value in gaining young people's perspectives. The likely consequences of participation addressed the fact that young people may well tell the researcher information that contradicted their parents perceptions of them; this issue would be covered by standard protocol for confidentiality (involving the use of pseudonym for reporting quotes and none of the data being used for other purposes or being seen by others). Plans for the safe-

keeping of data were also discussed. Research participants were to be advised of their right to confidentiality except in circumstances of data pointing to a child being at risk of abuse, when this right would not be adhered to. Gaining consent involved a written information sheet which was talked through prior to participation in research. Efforts were made by the researcher to insure that young people themselves had no objections about choosing to enter into the research, and not following parental wishes against their own. This involved talking through with young people their participation in the research in a private setting prior to the individual interview.

Fieldwork started with a visit to a single parents' support centre called "One Plus" based in the city centre of Glasgow. The aim of this visit was to undertake what I was describing at the time as "pre-pilot" research. Assisted by a key staff member, I was able to organise a group with 7 women including 5 parents, one accompanied by her adult daughter, and another woman who was a social worker. The group interview lasted just over an hour and was recorded, transcribed and analysed by myself, although the identification of emergent themes was not a priority or the aim of this stage of fieldwork. Rather than data collection proper, the visit to "One Plus" was intended to give me experience of talking with people about families and to help me anticipate potential problems in the data collection process that was to follow.

Looking back over the transcript and accompanying field-notes, I am reminded of how I attempted to shrink into the background in this group session, and the transcript reads more as someone eavesdropping a free flowing group conversation rather than a moderated discussion. My prompts were few and far between and the conversation was initiated not by myself but by the social worker who read out a letter that I had written to my contact at

the group when requesting a visit. My field-notes also serve to remind that this strategy was a consequence of not only my novice status but also being conscious of hi-jacking an important time in these women's week.

Some interesting and focused discussion did however emerge from the group. Family was something the women seemed interested in talking about. Some of the themes that emerged in the transcript did in fact become threads in this thesis; for example, the importance of family "time" in building a sense of family. Given that all the parents present were separated from their children's fathers, much of the discussion also focussed around issues of contact time between children and fathers and the generally unsatisfactory nature of this in the experiences of these women. Some also commented on pressures they felt through their children to conform to a "normal" family type, with one woman telling me how a picture from her wedding day still adorned her mantelpiece in order to pre-empt questions from her son's friends about whether he had a dad. This was offset by another parent telling the group that she and her partner decided to go their separate ways as soon as she found out she was pregnant, preferring the path of lone parenthood to a partnership where they "didn't have anything there". This underlined a strong feeling that there were a whole variety of experiences of lone parenthood (and by extension, families), and not all of them were necessarily detrimental to mothers or children. However, one characteristic of all the respondents which became an overarching theme of the discussion was the economic hardships forced upon them by lone parenthood. For these women, their relative poverty was intertwined with, and formative in, their experience and understanding of family. For example, the first utterance that appears on the transcript, simply as a response to being asked to talk about family life was;

*"To me family life is, seeing what you've got left of your benefit, after paying your credit card and sitting looking at each other, and the few hours you're allowed to use electricity".*

Allison, single parent.

The reason I include this account of my pre-pilot group is because at the time it was revealing to hear of the so-called "lived reality" of my preliminary reading, for example the experience of financial strain effecting family life (Burghes, 1994; Demo and Acock, 1996; Kail and Eccles, 1998). Later on in the same group, issues of maintaining a family identity in changed circumstances emerged. I entered the situation not really sure of what I intended to get from the fieldwork encounter; indeed I could not even be sure it was fieldwork itself, hence it being "pre-pilot". However, in my field notes I could see that analysis was combining with thoughts on recruitment and possible emergent research questions as I was beginning to get a clearer idea of what was knowable from interviewees' accounts, and to develop ideas about what lines of questioning would produce analysable data.

Another pre-pilot avenue was talking to an enterprising worker in the voluntary sector who had established an advice centre aimed at helping step families. Step Families in Scotland is a telephone based service following the model of Childline which could be used by parents as well as children. What I was told by the project founder reverberated with ideas about the way families are constructed by theorists such as Broderick (1995), writing from a symbolic interactionist perspective. From this perspective, the most important aspects of family life are those which are not directly observable to the researcher; the realm of meaning through which notions of family and togetherness become salient to the

individuals within the group. Some of the problems with which Step Families in Scotland dealt showed how the maintenance of shared meaning was key to family formation. For example, I was told that a common problem with young people in step families was that the reconstitution of family structures led to certain aspects of family history no longer being discussed. The anxiety it produced in the young people who phoned in showed that the discontinuity of a family structure created a discontinuity in their own life story and that a family was more than the sum of adult and juvenile members. A family is on an important level experienced as a story that has to be told and retold. The retelling is in order not only to create the reality of the facts in the story but to ensure that all members in families share elements of the story, that it is shared experience and not just individual.

This thought became more engaging as I saw the salience of qualitative methods to the subject matter at hand. However, I also began to see the fragility of the family as a mental construct when its taken-for-granted nature is questioned. Some callers had phoned not knowing whether the service was for them because it used the term "step family" which my contact confessed she felt was quite "middle class" in that it might exclude single parents with cohabiting partners or those with serial partners who did not equate their individual domestic situations with the label of step family. Thus early on, before even having formulated any formal research questions, I saw cause for excitement as well as caution; families as a system of meanings could be studied, especially through the entrance point of problems, but individual understandings of family could be distorted if the researcher offered excessively rigid models of the family to research participants.

## **2.5 The initial research questions**

Having had some introductory experience of talking to people about families and having explored a large amount of the background literature, I set about developing some research

questions based on what I thought was possible through qualitative methods. At this stage I wanted to explore the link between family experiences and health or health related outcomes. Although health did not become a focus of the research in the long run, at this stage I was perceiving health as the respondents themselves chose to view it. I was therefore open to the possibility that health might mean different things to different respondents, such as issues surrounding of physical and mental illness or disease, or a more positive conception involving ideas of well-being and the enjoyment of health. This would include the accounts of young people as well as parents as this is a key stage in the life-course where the processes that lead to adult social class positions begin to take shape. The early research questions were, in retrospect, perhaps over-ambitious in terms of their number. However, rather than seeing them all as formal research questions, they might be viewed as representing themes and issues that had emerged from my reading of the literature. Whatever the status of these questions, they were as follows;

- How, if at all, do different types of family structure affect family members' (adults and young people) abilities to maintain health related strategies?
- How, if at all, do different levels of income, as a potential consequence of family structure, affect family members' abilities to maintain health related strategies?
- How are health maintenance strategies related to family processes and/or and the socio-economic background of the home?
- How is the concept of family maintained through family disruption or reconstitution?
- Do health strategies undergo change during family or financial change?
- How does a family's or individual's socio-economic trajectory shape health behaviour?
- How does family time spent together affect attitudes and behaviours towards health?

- What do different families do together and what are the constraints on families spending time together?
- Do health beliefs differ between family members, for example, between young people and parents?
- How do the school and the peer group fit into the scheme of health maintenance?

These early research questions underwent some fundamental revision as time went on.

This change was connected to a number of problems, both practical and methodological.

One of the key practical issues was the failure to recruit a sample that would allow me to investigate certain questions and these difficulties are documented in a section below.

During the early stages of the research I believed it would be possible to view health as an outcome that was identifiable through the data. For this reason, many of the initial research questions had health as an outcome, related to a family feature in a way which suggested a possible causal mechanism could be identified. As is also discussed below, I eventually had to abandon this way of proceeding because of the problem of gaining accounts about an issue that is as morally loaded as health and health related behaviour. It was additionally methodologically problematic in that I was looking for outcomes (health) that are normally measured. In contrast, my fieldwork methods would yield data that would not be of the measurable type, but rather could more properly be used to analyse *understandings* of health which might lead to the measured outcomes. Without overstating my naïveté, I was of course aware that qualitative methods generated findings inductively and were not best served to proving pre-established hypotheses, but even seeing health as an individual strategy to be explored proved difficult when respondents knew the "right answers" to questions. As the project moved through its successive stages I found it more constructive to think of health as an outcome that was developing within the lifestyles of

the young people who were participating in the project. As such, "outcome measures" would not be available until patterns of adult health or morbidity had become established.

To see health as an outcome that could be made separate from the other experiences at this stage of the life-course also seemed an indelicate use of qualitative methods. Prout (1995) has written of how class and health can usefully be seen as "inbricated cultural performances" rather than "causally linked variables". Other work which has adopted such an approach includes Calnan and Williams (1991). This study found connections between style of life and health beliefs and behaviours that went further than the material. For example, social position could shape attitudes towards exercise and foster different perceptions of how exercise was perceived as beneficial, with those from middle class backgrounds referring to it as enhancing well-being. However the same respondents would complain of being constrained by work and family commitments when finding the time to exercise, whilst those in more physical, often manual occupations would count their day's work as providing exercise. This led Calnan and Williams to conclude that the issue of resource distribution between households contributed something to explaining differences in health behaviour, but not all. Cultural factors such as family members' understandings of what constituted "proper food" (as part of a conception of a balanced diet), or a "square meal" for example, could also explain some difference. Being part of wider "style" of family life or conception of "health", understandings of what is proper food may differ from that considered such by nutritionists or health educators.

As my own fieldwork continued and inductive research questions emerged, I adopted the idea of family as a cultural performance, shaped within certain material constraints. This revealed a methodological problem similar to that which Calnan and Williams found



applied to health beliefs which equally applies to families; that these "unspoken stocks of knowledge" (p.526), for example, in respect of family life are only reflected upon when they are questioned in some way. Thus Calnan and Williams found that accounts of health related behaviour and the understandings which underpin them would not emerge spontaneously, but only when prompted and problematised in interview. As is discussed later in this chapter, discussing family presents a similar problem to the researcher.

Seeing family and health as an intertwined cultural performance led to an emphasis in the data collection and analysis on the practices that constituted this performance. Some of these, such as the understandings of mealtimes were directly salient to health. However other areas of family experience, such as discipline style, are perhaps not directly related to health, but were salient to understanding the experience of families and parenting. From early on in the research, when asking for family members to think about outcomes for young people, the issue of parenting and discipline strategies was an area about which family members would talk at length. This suggests that the idea of parenting and discipline was key to the understanding of what families "do" in the minds of people in them, including young people. There possibly also exists of it being related to health in an immediately obvious way, such as making young people adopt certain behaviours, but also in a long term, less obvious way through the associated life-course outcomes which relate to parenting style.

Another example was that of mealtimes, where the parenting emphasis on feeding and providing combined with the "making real" of family through creating shared experience. One can see in the example of mealtimes that there would be in the accounts given, data

which obviously pertained to health and health strategies as well as to ideas of family. In the case of discipline, the health implications would not be so obvious.

It also became clear that these tasks of family did not operate in a vacuum confined to the physical structure of the household. The family performance could extend beyond the household and the enactment of family could change as individuals crossed boundaries.

During the recruitment and fieldwork stages therefore, the research questions changed (discussed below), not only as a consequence of recruitment constraints, but also as part of the inductive process of discovery.

## **2.6 The research questions that are addressed in this thesis**

The research questions which are addressed in this thesis are as follows:

- Given the widely reported diversity of structural forms, how do family members construct their understandings of family following change in terms of the individual and societal experience of family?
- What are families expected “to do” by those who live in and enact them? Or, what set of tasks does the contemporary family enact to create the “cultural performance” that is the contemporary family?”
- Is there evidence that a family’s parental structure shapes the enactment of family, and if so what is the nature of these differences?
- Is there evidence that a family’s socio-economic status shapes the enactment of family life?
- What knowledge underpins parenting strategies?

- Do the values that are implicit within the construction and performance of family, shape the life-chances of the young people involved?

## **2.7 Sampling and Recruitment**

In an attempt to answer the initial set of research questions (see 2.4), I planned to establish a purposive sample of 24 families based upon the structure, the smoking behaviour of young people within the family, and a measure of socio-economic status (see Table 2.1 later in this chapter). Each of these theoretical sample categories was chosen on account of there being evidence that they were indicative of life-course and health related outcomes. For family structure, Burghes (1994) highlighted findings produced by the Family Policy Studies Centre which showed several "health warnings" for children in families which had suffered disruption. This is despite the evidence I opened this chapter with, that there was still a debate around whether coming from a single parent or disrupted family was likely to impact negatively on life chances and adult health related outcomes. Signally, many from disrupted families failed to reach key developmental milestones as quickly as their peers from intact families. Those children reported as "illegitimate" were shown to have higher rates of psychological maladjustment and were less academically successful. This single research finding supports the many additional studies discussed in Chapter 1 (pp 28- 40) that support sampling with a measure of family structure. Additionally findings for negative outcomes were supported by later work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1998) which showed an increased chance of detrimental outcomes for children in separated families in the areas of poverty, poor housing, income levels after the transition to adulthood and academic attainment. Similarly, findings from the Economic and Research Council 5-16 research program (2000) claimed that the social and economic

disadvantage of living in a family where the father is not present accounted for developmental deficits, such as slower cognitive development and poorer behavioural adjustment. Even by accepting the findings of Sweeting and West (1995), a purposive sample including families selected on family structure was still valuable as it is undeniably a background feature which shapes the level of resources at a family's disposal and becomes the backdrop on which families act out their understanding of family. As health was shown to be shaped both by constraining and cultural factors in the above literature (Calnan and Williams, 1991), similarly constraining factors upon family should also rightly be included.

A measure of smoking behaviour was also sought on account of research that has shown adolescent smoking, like family structure of origin, to be predictive of social class trajectories. Glendinning, Shucksmith and Hendry (1994) report an "emergent pattern of class based differences in adolescent smoking behaviour, as young people make the transition towards adulthood" (p.1449) which is significant in terms of social class trajectory in that smoking was found to be more highly associated with static class positions below the middle class positions and downward mobility from the middle class. Similarly West and Sweeting (1997) identify the association of smoking with the adoption of a "street orientated" youth leisure style involving a rejection of school which leads to earlier leaving, greatly affecting life-chances. Corresponding findings are reported by Hagquist (2000), in relation to Swedish youth; he identifies smoking as being associated with the trajectory related variable of choosing non- theoretical programmes in upper secondary school.

A measure of socio-economic status was also sought as there are consistent reports of a strong relationship between health outcomes and measures of socio-economic status such as social class or deprivation of origin (Townsend, 1982) although at the stage of adolescence these appear to be less apparent than at other stages of the life-course (West, 1997). To this end, I had hoped to use Carstairs- Morris (1991) postcode sector level deprivation as an indication of socio-economic status in the initial sampling strategy. Based on census data, this calculates levels of relative deprivation from features such as household density and overcrowding, unemployment and car ownership on a 7 point scale at the geographical unit of postcode sector. It was thought that this measure of socio-economic status would overcome problems with existing measures such as the Registrar General's scale of social class which can marginalise women's experiences because of its basis on the occupation of the head of household (Arber, 1997). Several single parents in my sample would describe themselves as heads of households but would nonetheless be dependent upon an estranged, former partner for income.

Ultimately two major problems prevented me from controlling the socio-economic distribution of my sample however. The first were the difficulties in recruiting my sample systematically and the subsequent need to recruit through a variety of strategies. The second was that I found this measure of socio-economic status to be too crude when applied to individual families within a postcode sector. Applying this single measure to the recruited families meant that it categorised households which clearly differed, as belonging to the same group. This was because it failed to take account of household variation and crucial cultural differences that could influence life chances, such as aspirations for children and how disposable incomes and leisure time were spent. When using such scales I believe we should whole-heartedly take Blaxter's (1991) advice and see

them not as precise measures of "differences in income, education, environment, power over resources and behaviour...(but) as simply a starting point for the investigation of social circumstances and health." (p.61). It is for this reason, therefore, that I additionally used my own subjective interpretation of socio-economic situation informed by the key theme of social class trajectory, such as occupation of parent(s), size of house relative to others in the sample, access to, and number of cars, and cultural indicators I picked up in interviews such as values, aspirations, attitudes and hopes for the future and for their children.

At the design stage of the project, the projected sample necessary to answer the preliminary set of research questions was as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

**Idealised sample necessary to address initial research questions**

	<b>Two birth Parent household</b>	<b>One birth Parent household</b>	<b>Reconstituted household</b>
<b>Smoking young person</b>	Low deprivation 2	Low deprivation 2	Low deprivation 2
	High deprivation 2	High deprivation 2	High deprivation 2
<b>Non Smoking young person</b>	Low deprivation 2	Low deprivation 2	Low deprivation 2
	High deprivation 2	High deprivation 2	High deprivation 2

To sample 24 families on the basis of the original purposive sample, it was necessary to have information about young people prior to recruitment, and it was decided that the best way to identify potential respondents would be via sub-sampling from an existing MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit questionnaire-based study, the "*West of Scotland 11- 16 Study*" (West and Sweeting, 1996).

This school-based study had been used to yield information about the health, lifestyles and life circumstances of a cohort of young people in and around Glasgow. It was thought this study would afford my project access to young people from which to recruit families on the basis of self-reported measures of family structure and smoking behaviour, as these had been asked about in the questionnaires. Area based deprivation levels could be inferred from respondents' postcodes (Carstairs and Morris, 1991) which had been provided by 90% of the participants at age 13 (Sweeting and West; 1996). What became problematic in this approach was that the study had generated no home addresses. The 11- 16 database included names only, having successfully recruited and retained a sample via schools; all letters to parents had also been issued via schools. Doing it this way had been considered the most ethical as I only had the information the young people themselves had volunteered to give, but therefore not home addresses. Doing it this way meant that I would only have home addresses given to me by parents who chose to do so, therefore not contravening issues of privacy and data protection.

Having identified a source of potential respondents, I began to recruit for a pilot stage. The first sampling strategy involved contacting pupils in an 11- 16 school where 12 families were identified using information on family structure, smoking and deprivation category

(DEPCAT) given by young people in the study. The pupils were aged 13/14 years. The details of the twelve pupils are shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2      Characteristics of pupils contacted at the pilot stage**

**Family Structure**

Both Birth Parents	7
Reconstituted	1
Single Parent	4

**Deprivation Category (DEPCAT)**

3	1
6	7
7 (lowest on 7 point scale)	1

**Smoking status of young person**

Never smoked	8
Tried smoking	3
Current smoker	1

Personalised parental letters were given to the young people via the teacher, with a reminder being sent three weeks later along the same route. The letters were accompanied by an information sheet about the study and an opt-in parental consent form which needed to be signed by the parent on behalf of themselves and the young person. The ethical issue of the young person themselves consenting would be handled later on, at the interview when consent was requested from the young people themselves after a chance to discuss the research with myself, prior to the interviews.

The covering letter and information sheet carried a description and explanation of the fieldwork. It explained that the study would be collecting accounts of family life from young people and their parents. This strategy yielded, rather disappointingly, only two families (an investigation of why this might have been the case is in the "Lessons of fieldwork" section at the end of this chapter).



The disappointing response rate from the first mail-out raised a serious question about my ability to control the characteristics of sample. If I could only recoup 2 families from 12 families contacted, I felt it would be a better strategy to begin contacting as many families as possible, with the aim of forming a pool who had provided consent and a willingness to take part and following that, to select a sample from those who had given consent. To this end, the second strategy involved contacting two further schools that had been involved in the *11-16 Study* and had been particularly "friendly" to the research process. The two schools were very different from one another, one located in a middle class area in the West End of the city taking in a mixture of pupils from the nearby residential areas, the other in the East End of the city, which has since closed down due to falling rolls, reflecting the fortunes of the post-industrial area of town in which it was located. I believed that the selection of these two schools would go some way to representing socio-economic diversity in the sample families that would be recruited from them. In these schools, I began by using groups similar to those used with adults in an attempt to interest young people in the subject matter and make the research a little less of an unknown quantity. Visits by myself and my supervisor to deputy heads in the respective schools had ensured the co-operation of staff and I was granted time in three personal and social education sessions of the middle class school, and four in the school in the deprived area. After the groups I introduced my study and handed out recruitment packs for pupils to take home to their parent(s) or guardian(s). This strategy, which enabled contact with around about one hundred young people (the PSE sessions were smaller than standard classes), yielded not one positive response.

Around about the same time, a third family was opportunistically grasped after an informal discussion about my project whilst tutoring undergraduate students. As much by accident as design, my first three families represented some degree of diversity. I now had enough families to embark on what I was at the time describing as a pilot. However, due to continued difficulties in recruitment, the data collected subsequently became part of the main project. The three families represented three different forms of family structure; both birth parents, a one parent household and a reconstituted household. In terms of levels of affluence or deprivation, two came from the same postcode area (scored as deprived on the Carstairs Morris scale) whilst one came from a more affluent background. Despite two of them living in an area with the same formal level of deprivation, other evidence, such as car ownership and number of adults in work, suggested that one family was relatively better off than the other.

Despite a successful series of three interviews in the "pilot" stage, it was clear that response rates had been too low to repeat the same methods of recruitment. Some of the reasons for this are analysed later on, but it is perhaps worth saying at this point that it was a particularly unsatisfactory way of recruiting due to the lack of control that the researcher had. Letters via pupils to parents in over 100 homes had only yielded two families. Schools are, with good reason, particularly reluctant to give out pupil information, in particular addresses or phone numbers which could compromise individual safety. To some extent this was overcome at the first school because using the *11-16 Study* database meant that teachers could be recruited to hand out information to the 12 *named* pupils. This school contact could also ensure the delivery of reminder letters. This was not possible at the two schools where pupils were given letters following groups, as I did not know even the names of the participants. Sending letters to parents via schools therefore proved

fraught with difficulties, one practical issue being that the letter has to arrive home in one piece. Teachers told me that many pupils did not carry bags and might therefore ask a friend to carry the letter for them, inevitably forgetting to ask for it back. Even if they did have bags, there was no guarantee the recruitment materials would return home in a respectable state, or be retrieved from the bag and given to parents. The major issue though was not practical, but related to the separation of home and school environments in the lived experiences of pupils. I will explore this in more detail later, but it was also a feature which hampered my recruitment through the "Youth Bus" project.

The Youth Bus was a lottery funded project for young people located on a large peripheral housing scheme to the west of the city. The bus drove round the scheme's main circular thoroughfare ensuring equal access for young people dispersed over the scheme. On board, young people, mainly aged early to mid teens, could talk to friends, listen to music, play computer games and access the health education materials that were on the bus. The youth leader would also organise occasional outings to activities off the bus, such as musicals in town. I made contact with the youth leader on this project after another researcher had told me of successful focus groups she had held with young people on the bus around the issue of sexual health. After contacting the youth leader and telling her about my project she was keen to help and invited me along to one of the mid-week bus runs around the scheme. I actually made two visits to the Youth Bus, on both occasions conducting groups with small groups of teenage girls. As with the single parents' group, someone who knew the regulars better than I did (the youth leader) acted as moderator to begin with and I introduced topics of family once they got warmed up. At the end of the group, I handed out recruitment materials and introduced my study. The youth leader encouraged the girls to take part, but as with the groups in PSE classes, a good discussion

was not followed by an enthusiastic opting-in to the study. None of the families of these young people responded to the invitation to take part. However, the Youth Bus did lead to two families coming into my study. Perhaps feeling sorry for me, the Youth leader said I could interview her and her teenage son. She also volunteered a friend who was interviewed, although later family issues led to her withdrawal.

In the end, greater success was achieved through contacting parents directly rather than going via young people. This is illustrated in the strategy of recruiting through General Practitioners. This involved enlisting the help of three research friendly GPs, members of an established research network, to send out my information sheets, covering letters, and consent forms to families. The GPs identified families on the basis that they had young people in the right age group and they represented a diversity of family experiences. The positive response rate, of 7 from 47 letters sent out, was low by any other standards, but for this project it gave a sense at last of progress being made. However, time was fast running out. The negotiations over access with both schools and the GP research network had taken precious time. The groups with young people had been among (and remain) my first, a fact which might have contributed to the negative response rate. Most depressing of all, it was summer in the second year of a three year studentship, and my sample was still to come together.

During that same summer, I was also contacting single parent groups such as Gingerbread, both as general background research and to recruit families. Once more, none came forward via this avenue. Once the recruitment from General Practice had finished, I turned to another questionnaire based study as the source of possible families, allowing me to contact parents themselves rather than go through young people. Twenty one families

were identified as potentially suitable from the *West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study* (MacIntyre, Annandale, Ecob et al, 1989), a large scale, longitudinal study of health and lifestyles conducted by the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit. This study contained three cohorts, aged 15, 35 and 55 at baseline 1987/8. The middle cohort had reached 45 by 1998 and it was also possible to sample from this group on the basis of age of children, family structure and socio-economic status (based on deprivation categories). Once again, recruitment packs were sent out and it was hoped that the respondents' continued involvement in and loyalty to the interview based *Twenty- 07 Study* would make them more amenable to taking part. From the 21 packs sent, there came six positive responses. One of the responses came from the mother of a young person with a severe learning difficulty. After discussion with the parents about the nature of the research and the kind of areas I was interested in, they suggested that the young person's experiences of the processes of independence forming that I was interested in, would be quite distinct from the sample as a whole. I was ultimately interested in issues rooted in socio-economic factors of the families studied, the experiences of a young person with learning difficulties would offer fascinating insight into issues of dependence and independence and youth to adult transitions. However, to include just one respondent would not do these issues justice. Another issue was that the young person in question would be unable to do the interview on her own, and would need a parent present to assist. Myself and the parents therefore agreed that it would not be appropriate for her take part in this particular study. The overall total was up by a further five families.

A parallel strategy involved presenting the research project to a first year sociology class of approximately two hundred students, in the hope that they might see a benefit in their family taking part in a research project. I suggested that older students who were parents

of teenage children, or students who had younger brothers or sisters might want to take away a recruitment pack. This approach produced one more family. I also took my research to another lone parents' group in the East End of Glasgow and after introducing and discussing the project, recruited two further participants. My final formal strategy involved contacting a local family mediation service. My contact there got in touch with four families on my behalf, all of whom agreed to take part. Only one of these families was included as, with those already recruited and two additionally contacted through informal contacts (the family of a friend's father and the friend of a member of my research committee), I at last felt I had sufficient diversity in my sample and an analysable volume of data. Most pressingly, time was running out.

Table 2.3 summarises the 22 families in the study (note that their names have been changed), including their parental structure, my subjective interpretation of their socio-economic status (based on cultural/ material indicators) and their source of recruitment. Given the difficulties in establishing teenage smoking behaviour (discussed later), the reader will notice its absence by this stage.

**Table 2.3      Characteristics of the study families**

Name	Structure	Age of Child	Socio-economic status*	Recruited how?
Townsend	One parent	13	Low	<i>11- 16 Study</i>
Anderson	One parent	15	Low	Informal
Harris	One parent	13 & 17	Low	East End single parent group
White	One parent	13	Low	WestNet GPs
Kilbride	One parent	14 & 16	Low	<i>Twenty - 07 Study</i>
Moss	One parent	14	Low	<i>Twenty - 07 Study</i>
Small	One parent	16	Low	<i>Twenty - 07 Study</i>

McKinnon	One parent	16	Low	Sociology class
Ferdinand	Two parent	13	Low	Informal
Leighton	Two Parent	13	Low	WestNet GPs
Shandwick	Two parent (recon)	13 & 17	Medium	<i>11- 16 Study</i>
Rose	Two parent	13	Medium	WestNet GPs
Johnstone	Two parent	15	Medium	WestNet GPs
McMaster	One parent	13 & 16	Medium	<i>Twenty- 07 Study</i>
Giffnock	Two parent	13	High	Informal (sociology tutorial)
Paisley	Two parent	13	High	WestNet GPs
Craig	Two parent	13 & 15	High	WestNet GPs
O'Connor	Two parent	13 & 15	High	WestNet GPs
Pollock	One Parent	15	High	Informal (friend of work based contact)
Prestwick	Two Parent	13	High	<i>Twenty -07 Study</i>
Lanark	One Parent	16	High	Family mediation service
Corkhill	Two Parent	13	High	Informal contact (friend's relative)

\* Based upon my own subjective interpretation

Table 2.4 shows the family structure and socio-economic status of the 22 families in the sample. It can be contrasted with these in the ideal sample shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.4      Family structure and socio economic status of the 22 study families**

<b>Socio-economic status</b>	<b>One Parent household</b>	<b>Two parent household (including reconstituted)</b>
Lower	8	2
Medium	0	3
Higher	3	6

## 2.8 The Interviews

In the families studied I intended to interview the parents and a young person both together and separately, in an attempt to yield multiple perspectives. I was able to do this in all but a few cases. Although the numbers were small, it is interesting that if a family member refused to take part it was most often the (step) father. This happened in three households with two adults present, but in a further reconstituted household the mother refused to participate. In a few instances, I interviewed extra siblings when they expressed an interest in becoming involved. This happened in three of the households. In one family I was only able to get information from the mother as the family underwent a period of difficulty and decided they wished to withdraw at that point. In all, sixty-six family interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed for this project.

Mothers were in all but one case the prime mover in helping me accomplish the interviews, doing work such as making sure people were home on the night and arranging dates and times for my visit. Most of the interviews took place on weeknight evenings, and it would take between two and three visits to complete the series. The order of interviews was usually a joint interview between parent(s) and young family member, followed by the individual interviews on a separate visit. The joint interviews were often the longest and most tiring which was why I would not usually continue with separate interviews after this event. Another reason for conducting joint interviews first was to allow younger family members to become comfortable with the idea of an interview before asking them to take part without their parents.

For all the interviews, I used three separate research instruments; an interview schedule, newspaper articles that depicted negative outcomes for young people, and flashcards which



listed "influences" on young people's health and lives. Sometimes it would seem easy enough to go straight into the interview schedule, sometimes I felt respondents might need warming up using the flashcards or newspaper articles. Other strategies were considered for data collection, such as a plan to give young people diaries in which to write their experiences of family lives, but were discarded very early on since I felt that such a strategy might not have been welcomed because of its similarity to extra school work. I also felt, as recruitment difficulties became clear, that I did not want to put people off by asking them to commit to what might appear a great deal of work.

The newspaper articles and flashcards were designed to produce data relating to family members' understandings of the place and role of family and parenting in determining outcomes for young people. By introducing a range of outcomes and a range of potential influences, I was hoping that respondents (both parents and young people) would be able to talk about the range of influences they invoked to explain why young people turn out the way they do. The newspaper articles were from *The Guardian*, *The Daily Record*, and the *Scottish Daily Mail*. *The Guardian* article reported a story in which a bullied 13 year-old girl killed herself. The story had appeared on the front page of the paper and I considered it a standard enough news story to warrant using it, however it was still used with caution given the potential for distress. *The Daily Record* story was one in which the results of a World Health Organisation study reported that "Our youngsters are among the most depressed on Earth". The *Daily Mail* story reported on what it perceived to be a growing trend for so-called girl gangs indulging in behaviours such as drinking, violence and drug taking.

The use of the newspaper articles allowed me to follow up respondents' initial reactions by encouraging them to talk about the causes of such behaviour. Often, this would result in parents or young people telling me that they simply did not know nor understand why young people would do such things, especially in response to the teenage suicide story which some parents (more so than the young people) found particularly upsetting. At this point the flashcards could be useful in helping respondents think through which influences they felt to be particularly salient. The influences listed on the cards were "Family Finances", "Family Habits", "Friends", "Who Makes up the Household (e.g. number of parents)", "Rules and Parental Strictness", "School", "T.V., Magazines, etc" and finally, "Individual Differences". So as not to force respondents into including influences they would not usually consider relevant, I would tell them that the words on the cards referred to influences some people thought were important, and that none of them were necessarily right or wrong. I would also ask respondents to remove any of the influences that they themselves did not rank as important. Such an activity served as an effective tool for respondents, especially younger ones who often had difficulties thinking beyond their own experiences.

The interview schedule evolved over the period of fieldwork. At all times I put high priority on responding to themes and issues that interviewees saw as important, in accordance with my understanding of grounded analysis. As the first draft of the interview schedule had been developed after very little interview experience, it was inevitably based more around existing literature and research than it was in the lived experience of the respondents, and I had aimed to be responsive to their interests at all times. The same interview schedule was used for parents, children and group interviews, with my wording changing to suit the circumstances.

The final interview schedule broke down into 9 key areas. The first was a general introduction given by myself situating the study within work already being carried out at the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit. During this introduction, with all participants present, I tried to ascertain how much experience respondents had of being involved in qualitative interviews. I would then explain the processes in a manner I felt was appropriate to the knowledge they already had. Most had been involved in some kind of questionnaire research before, but few in qualitative interviews. I stressed as much as I could that it was a methodology that attempted to take very little for granted and sometimes I would ask questions that might sound a bit stupid. I told them that the reason for this was that there would be no misunderstandings on the taped record. Parents especially seemed to respond positively to the idea that this was their opportunity to tell the researchers how things really were, rather than researchers assuming what was important and unimportant.

The second section of the questionnaire focussed around general health and began with concrete questions about health behaviours ("When was the last time you visited the dentist/ doctor", "Does anybody in the house smoke/ has anybody ever smoked"), and moved on to questions which attempted to stimulate reflection on conceptions of health and illness ("Do you consider yourself to be in good health?" and "What is a healthy diet?"). The former more concrete questions generated quite mundane and shallow data compared to the more evaluative and reflective responses to the later questions. In later interviews, I dropped the former line of questioning unless it was proving difficult to stimulate discussion. These (more concrete) questions seemed to set an inappropriate tone for the rest of the interview, relying as they did on reporting of specific instances of health

behaviour. At best, they provided inroads into the more reflective responses about health behaviour and its place within a wider system of beliefs. The issue of health was returned to in the sixth section of the schedule but from the perspective of health beliefs rather than explicit, concrete examples. More evaluative questions were asked here such as "What do you think it means to be a healthy person?" and "Is it easier or harder to stay healthy today?"

The questions about health did not in the end become the focus of the findings in quite the central way I had initially anticipated in the first set of research questions. The other health questions (section 6 of the interview), were considerably more useful in generating answers that discussed strategies and beliefs about health and illness and its causes.

The third section asked about concepts of family and adolescence. This included how respondents believed things to have changed for both families and young people, whether they saw themselves as a typical family, and "What makes a family?" I found that respondents, especially young ones, found these questions particularly difficult to answer, as the notion of family was pretty much given as a self evident reality. In the first results chapter in this thesis (Chapter 3) I look at concepts of family, but the data that produced this analysis were taken from answers to questions in the other sections just as much to those in section 3 of the schedule. For the respondents, it seemed that "family is what family does" and rather than asking seemingly oblique or abstract questions about the concept of family, I could generate better responses by asking about the concrete practices and experiences that make up the lives of families.

The fourth section about family time emerged from the ongoing interest in "family time", "quality time" or managing the "work-life balance" which has been a priority in discussions about families (Caproni, 1997). This was a key section of the interview because it also involved questions about the practices that constitute family experience. As I was also interested in changing family experiences over time, I included the question "Is this different from when you were younger?" in regard to family time, to be applied both to young people and parents. In the first instance, I hoped answers would give a sense of how family experiences change during the transition from childhood to teenage years, and in the second, of what might be new about the contemporary experience of family life compared to previous generations.

The fifth section focussed on the specific family process of parenting and parenting beliefs by asking about discipline and rules. Here I was interested in finding out not only why families had certain rules but also how these rules became rules, how they were decided, and what happened when there was conflict over rules (processes). In an important way, this was a key methodological crux in the research. If researchers are to be interested in the lived reality of family processes and family experience, then with a specific area such as discipline and parenting we should properly be concerned with both the content and expression of parenting style within the household. Previous research has tended to look at these aspects of discipline from an either/or perspective; I hoped to see how the two may have been related within family experiences. In this section, I also introduced the issue of family structure in relation to discipline styles (an issue which I also tried to tackle with the flash cards).

The remaining three sections dealt with the influence of school and peers, autonomy and individuality, and finally, emotional well being. The section on school and peers was an attempt to see how people believed the home and the school to interact to produce outcomes, while that on autonomy and individualism aimed to see how, if at all, these key aspects of development were promoted by parents through their parenting. However, I soon felt this section to be somewhat of an add-on, as the data could easily be gathered elsewhere in the interview and it remained on the schedule only as an aide memoir. A final item pertaining to the concept of emotional well being held the same status. I used the same interview schedule with the younger family members, changing the emphasis to fit their perspective during the interview and again using the sections as aide memoir.

## **2.9 The Families**

Below I give brief descriptions of the 22 families.

### The Townsend family.

This family consisted of a mother and her three teenage children living with their grandmother in the grandmother's house. The mother worked as a typist in a legal centre and had in split up with her former partner and father to her children a few years previous to our contact. Her relationship with her eldest son caused her much concern and he had been in trouble with the police in recent months. However, she considered her relationship with the son who featured in these interviews (aged thirteen) to be very good. He had not been in any trouble and was progressing well at school. I conducted three interviews in this household with the mother and young person together and separately.

### The Anderson family.

This consisted of a mother and her two children, one of whom was in his mid teens (fifteen), the other at primary school (seven). Both children had different fathers and

contact was kept with both, though on more favourable terms with the later relationship. Mother worked as a youth leader and relied upon her own parents for childminding. Three interviews were conducted in this household, with the mother and fifteen year old together, and with each separately.

#### The Harris family.

This family consisted of a mother and three children, one a toddler, the index respondent aged thirteen and an older son aged seventeen. Her current partner shared the household with them but he had no desire to be included in the study. The family was recruited through a single parent group and the mother presented herself as a single parent. The mother looked after her children full time. Four interviews were conducted in this household with the mother and thirteen year old together, and both separately and, in addition, with the seventeen year old separately.

#### The White family.

Family consisting of a mother, a teenage son aged thirteen and recently born baby girl. The children had different fathers and, although mother was still with the father of her baby, they had no plans to live together. Mother had recently completed a postgraduate diploma in social work and was planning to go back to a new career in this field. Her son had very little contact with his own father but his relationship with the mother's current partner was good. Her own mother lived across the road and the two had a difficult relationship at the time of our contact. Three interviews were conducted in this household (mother and young person together, and each separately).

#### The Kilbride family.

A mother and her teenage son (fourteen) and daughter (sixteen). Mother worked as a hospital cleaner as did her daughter outwith school hours. An elder daughter had recently moved out of the home and there was very little contact with the father who was out of the country. Mother found her relationship with her daughter difficult as she felt unable to discipline her. Four interviews were conducted in this household with the mother and fourteen year old together, and the mother, fourteen year old and sixteen year old separately.

The Moss family.

Mother and fourteen year old son. Mother worked as a medical secretary in the local hospital. Young person had good regular contact with his father who lived in a nearby part of the city. Three interviews conducted in this household.

The MacLeish family.

Mother and two daughters, one of whom was a baby, the other a sixteen year old. The teenage daughter's father lived locally and contact was regular. Mother was at University studying social sciences. Three interviews conducted in this household.

The Small family.

This household consisted of a mother and her two children aged fourteen and six. Mother was reliant upon her estranged husband for maintenance payments. I was only able to carry out one interview with this family, an interview with the mother as she subsequently chose to withdraw from the study.

The Leighton family.



There were three people in this family, two parents and a thirteen year old daughter. The father, who worked as a taxi driver, wished to be left out of the study. The mother worked in the local library. I conducted three interviews with the two members of this family who wished to be included.

#### The Ferdinand family.

This family consisted of four people, the parents, a teenage daughter (fourteen) and a younger son. I only completed one interview with this family (with the mother) before the parents' relationship entered a period of stress and they withdrew from the study.

#### The Shandwick family.

Although this family was more properly a reconstituted family they presented themselves to me as a dual parent household in which the mother did not wish to take part. Father and two daughters were interviewed. Only one of the daughters was a teenager, the other was a few years younger. Another young person lived in the house, a slightly older boy (seventeen) who was the son of the mother but had a different father. This was a two income household with the father employed as a builder and the mother an administrator. Three interviews were conducted in this household with the father and his two children together, and the eldest daughter and father on their own.

#### The Rose family.

This household consisted of two parents, a teenage daughter aged thirteen at the time of the study and a younger daughter not involved in the study. Mother was employed as a secondary school teacher and father was at the time unemployed. Three interviews were

conducted in this family, parents and young person together, the parents as a unit, and the daughter separately.

#### The Johnstone family.

This household consisted of two parents, a teenage daughter (fifteen) and a younger son. The daughter was the focus of the study and the father claimed he was unable to take part due to work commitments; he worked in a managerial role, and the mother was a university student. Three interviews were conducted with this family.

#### The McMaster family.

This was a middle class, single parent household consisting of a mother, three teenage girls and a young boy who had just started primary school. No contact was maintained with their father. I conducted four interviews in this household with the mother and two of her daughters aged thirteen and sixteen, separately and as a group. Mother was a manager at a call centre.

#### The Giffnock family.

A two parent household with two teenage daughters. The eldest daughter was seventeen and the focus of the study was on the younger daughter aged thirteen. The relationship between the father and his daughters could be quite stormy, much of this tension centring around his strongly held Jewish religious beliefs that the daughters had begun to question. He worked as a business executive and was away from home a lot. Mother had stayed at home but was venturing back to paid work. Four interviews were conducted in this household, parents and thirteen year old together and each of these three on their own.

#### The Paisley family.

This family consisted of two parents and a thirteen year old daughter. The father was an engineer and the mother worked for a travel agent. The father was also a volunteer within the Scouts' movement and the mother within the Guides. Three interviews were conducted in this household, with the parents and daughter together, the parents as a couple and the daughter.

#### The Craig family.

In this family there were two parents and two teenage sons aged fifteen and thirteen. Both featured in the interviews. An elder daughter had left home and had recently given birth to a baby. The parents regretted the fact their relationship with the elder daughter had deteriorated prior to her having the baby, although they described things as having recently begun to improve. The father ran a building business and the mother stayed at home full time. Three interviews were conducted here with the whole family together, the parents as couple, and the two teenage children together.

#### The O'Connor family.

This household consisted of two parents, a teenage son (thirteen) and a teenage daughter (fifteen). Father, who asked to be left out of the study due to work commitments, worked as the manager of a betting office, mother worked as a part time school secretary. I conducted three interviews, with the mother and son, separately and together.

#### The Pollock family.

This was a middle class single parent household with three teenage children aged between thirteen and eighteen. I conducted three interviews focussing on the mother and middle male sibling aged fifteen.

#### The Prestwick family.

This family was presented to me as a two birth parent household although I later discovered it to be a reconstituted household with two of the four children present being from the mother's first and two from her current marriage. The children were aged six, eight, thirteen and seventeen, and an older brother had left home. With the aim of maintaining respondents' interpretations as paramount over researchers' categorisations, the family is presented not as reconstituted but as two birth parent in accordance with their image of it. I conducted three interviews in this household with the parents and the thirteen year old daughter together, the parents as a unit and the daughter separately.

#### The Lanark family.

This middle class single parent household consisted of a mother and her daughter who was aged sixteen. The young person's parents had recently separated and had been to family mediation. Her elder brother had also recently left for University. She still maintained good contact with her father, spending occasional weekends and holidays with him.

#### The Corkhill Family.

This family was the second family of a father who had been previously married. With his new partner, they had a thirteen year old son. Three interviews were conducted in this household with the family together, the two parents together and the young person by himself.

## 2.10 The Lessons of Fieldwork

As has been discussed, the design and research questions of the study changed considerably over the course of recruitment. Looking at the process of recruitment itself is a particularly illustrative way to demonstrate this process of change and discovery. The sample in its finality looked very different from the idealised one I had started out with. However, the long and drawn out process through which I recruited my families became as much a part of the analytical process as an attempt to generate data. My difficulty in recruitment became analysable data in itself, being illuminated by key strands of sociological thinking about families and transitions to adulthood, such as the quest for autonomy that characterises the teenage years, and also the received understanding of the family unit within the privatised realm of contemporary experience.

The main differences between the final sample and that devised at the outset were that, indications of smoking behaviour were absent, I lost the sharp distinction between single parent, reconstituted and dual parent households; and I used a less defined indicator of socio-economic status/level of deprivation. Part of this was due to practicalities. Initially, I believed I would be able to ascertain family structure, area level deprivation and the target young people's smoking status through questionnaire data available from the *11-16 study*. However, as has been comprehensively documented above, I had to adopt a less structured approach, losing control over prior information on smoking behaviour, family structure and socio-economic status in the process. I realised recruitment would have to take place with a lean towards sampling through multiple recruitment sources as a formal purposive sample through one recruitment source proved impossible.

However, the reasons that the sampling rationale changed so significantly could represent something of a result in themselves. The words of Dowell, Huby and Smith are reassuring in this respect;

*"Qualitative research often deals with topics where the parameters and characteristics are not known at the outset and therefore cannot always be established until some way into the study. Selection decisions therefore cannot always be made once and for all, prior to the onset of data collection."*

(1995, p25)

It is therefore worth investigating the process of selection, and viewing the encountered difficulties as having significance. In particular, they highlighted methodological issues, and what had happened over the course of my recruitment revealed a strength of qualitative research in its fit and appropriateness to the subject matter at hand. The sampling frame as presented prior to entering the field was the result of borrowing inappropriately from the hypothetico-deductive model of scientific inquiry, and implicit within it were a number of assumptions. Among these was the epistemological assumption that by choosing a sample that represented discrete categories of experience (single parent household/dual parent household, smoker/non smoker, low deprivation/high deprivation) a possible causal relationship existed between some of these categories and "outcomes" such as behaviours or trajectories. For the subject matter at hand, it transpired that qualitative methods could not be used in such a positivistic manner. In fact it became clear as recruitment went on that my experiences were contributing to an understanding of family that was more appropriate to my method. My recruitment experiences raised important issues about the subjective understanding of the central concepts which were forcing themselves to the surface.

## **Lesson 1: Policing the boundary - young people's identities**

The belief that I could identify a young person and then track back to their household for the purposes of a family interview proved to be an erroneous assumption. Under this misconception, I attempted to contact over one hundred young people through schools. It became clear that strategies that involved targeting the young person first in order to seek contact with their family were unsuccessful. With hindsight I can see that young people were not the appropriate family members to target and that my strategy should have been to target parents who had young family members. A process of young people beginning to establish, and more importantly protect, their independent identities was strongly evident in those early fieldwork experiences. Gaining consent for and conducting the initial groups was not a problem and the data from the group were good despite my novice status. However after I had completed the groups and asked about the possibility of interviewing their parents, it seemed all rapport was lost. It was clearly a step the young people did not want to take. All that had been discussed, it seemed, was on the understanding that they were in a space away from home, and their home based identities.

What my initial approach had failed to recognise was that the young people I contacted in schools and peer based activities were actively constructing views of themselves in their interactions in these settings that would contradict constructions of self in the family setting. For this reason, I found young respondents felt comfortable talking about all manner of subjects that might come under the heading "sensitive topics". Thus relations with the opposite sex, underage drinking and smoking and experimental drug use all seemed acceptable topics, which they brought up amongst themselves, with their friends. Indeed, for some topics, the presence of a teacher did not seem to hinder their disclosure. It seemed that reticence only emerged when topics such as home and family arose. One

reason for this appeared to be that these subjects were simply not as much fun to talk about. Within this context, the mundane and commonplace was not only exactly this but there lay the possibility that it eroded the young people's construction of their identity in that context. Thus, a further reason for reticence in respect of discussion about family appeared to be that the young people wished to be protective or secretive of their domestic backgrounds in a way that was tied up in the connected processes of establishing an extra familial identity and maintaining their sense of individual autonomy outside the family realm. Recent findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Langford, Lewis, Solomon and Warin 2001) would support this interpretation that young people often find ways of withholding information from parents for fear of being controlled, even in democratic families. To take these discussions "back home with them" represented a threat to this carefully created autonomy.

## **Lesson 2: Policing the boundary - families and privacy**

A quote made forty years prior to my fieldwork seems as relevant as ever when applied to my experience.

*"The reasons for the lack of intensive field studies of families are not hard to find. Family life goes on inside homes, not in the street or in universities, schools clinics, churches, factories or any of the other institutions to which research workers may have access. Unless one is invited inside a home one cannot learn much about the family as a working group. But ordinary families are not likely to ask a research worker into their homes since they have no particular motivation to come to a research team. They are unlikely to know that research is going on, or to take part if they do know about it. It is difficult to interest people in a study that probes into their private affairs, especially if the interviews continue for a long period of time.*



*Contacting families by knocking on doors is inappropriate when one is asking for extensive co-operation in the exploration of matters that are felt to be private."*

(Bott, 1957 p6)

As I discovered, young people had too much at stake to want a researcher coming home with them and crossing the boundary they worked so hard to create and maintain. It became clear that, if I was to access families, I would have to make and utilise contacts with adult family members. However, this approach would not be without its problems either. As the above quote from the sociologist Bott, despite being from 40 years ago, so clearly points out, families in their modern form are essentially private. This is a consequence of the location of economic activity outside the home, in the public realm, during the modern period, which has in turn led to the opposite and equal demand for privacy in the domestic sphere. As a consequence, our contemporary understandings of privacy, home and family have become almost synonymous. Despite the recent decline in the popularity of the modern nuclear family, and the increasing trend towards family forms Shorter (1975) has described as "postmodern", it is an un-contestable fact that the contemporary family, whatever its form, still values the essential bedrock described by Aries (1962) of intimacy, romance and the sentimentalisation of childhood. It seems no matter what happens or has happened to families in two intervening decades, the institution described by Lasch (1979) as "the haven in the heartless world" of capitalism will remain. As long as the outside is characterised by competition and individualism, the inside of families will be its corrective mirror, an idealised site of affectionate expression and the fulfilment of human needs. Intrusion into this realm of privacy by wider society is done so at either a perceived cost or benefit to the families involved.

Many of the studies that have investigated families have underlined this cost/benefit model in the fact that their subjects are so-called "pathological" families. In such circumstances the studied families have opened themselves up to medical or social institutions in the hope of "cure" or remedy. An example of this is work such as that featured in Left and Vaughn (1985) who report case studies carried out in families containing at least one member who displayed symptoms of schizophrenia. The purpose being to investigate links between schizophrenic symptoms and the family process of Expressed Emotion. Here, the pay off for conceding privacy would have been considered worthwhile; through the hope that family lives would have been "normalised" by the treatment family members underwent. The fact that research interviews can be tiring, lengthy and an intrusion into a time and space set aside for recreation and reconstitution (making the research interview a form of work in a non-work sphere) would have offset this medical consideration. However, by the same token, research can also therefore present a challenge to a non-pathologised family's sense of normality. Donzelot (1980) followed in the footsteps of the Foucauldian project by documenting the role played by social science and public institutions in the creation of surveillance apparatus for families who operated in a manner outside the bourgeois norm. This fear was expressed when talking about my study and my need to recruit families. Friends would often volunteer their families as examples of "dysfunctional" families, and there was an underlying assumption that I would not be interested in "functional" families. Lasch tells us why he feels families have had good reason to be wary of workers bearing the epithets "medical" or "social";

*"At the same time that they exalted the family as the last refuge of privacy in a forbidding society, the guardians of public health and morality insisted that the family could not provide for its own without expert intervention. Some of them indeed had so little confidence in the family that they proposed to transfer its*

*socialising functions to other agencies; others wanted merely to improve the quality of life through ambitious programs of 'parent education', marriage counselling and psychiatric social work."* (Lasch, 1979, pp12-13).

So families have long been implicated in the evils and perceived failings of wider society. Today there are new family demons being created by researchers; both family structure and processes have been identified as potential threats in recent decades. As there came a shift away from the nuclear family as the ideal to which people aspired, a particular section of policy planners became alarmed that new family forms seemed ill adapted to the Beveragian welfare model of "the" family described by Roll (1991) as "married couples, not just as a family unit, but one in which men are the breadwinners and women the housewives and child-rearers...financially dependent upon their husbands". Rodger (1996) tells us that a particular section of these planners "identified a 'moral malaise' underlying the change in family structure" (p.123) which, along with media coverage problematised a family form. Families were a key way through which poverty was addressed and individualised by the New Right in the 1980s. Consequent calls for welfare reforms to promote market relations combined with a moral discourse that supported families in a "traditional" (post war) form have followed. More recently, questions have arisen about the effects of working mothers upon child development. Recent findings (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001) point to decreased school performance for those whose mothers worked full time during their early years. Amongst the identified effects of full time maternal employment were an increased probability of becoming economically inactive and an increased probability of psychological stress in adulthood. Research findings, valid as they are in the own right and with an important contribution to make shaping welfare policies that might disadvantage children whose mothers are subjected to

welfare to work schemes, can become distorted in the blame culture that has developed around the sensitive issue of family life.

The implications of this for accessing families are plain. As Hesse and Handel (1992) observed, family is one of the most closed and private of all social groups and the lines between those who are inside and outside are more deeply evident than with any other group. Like the so-called exotic areas of research such as drug-use or prostitution, there are morally charged issues which surround family as a social phenomenon. However unlike these areas of investigation, it is not an engagement within a certain activity within a certain context that defines one as outsider or insider. Legal definitions aside (as this study is not about the objective family, but its subjective experience), there are a host of understandings and relationships that transcend participation in the activities of families that are necessary to make one "family". I could share a family meal in a household and not be "family". To be family means an exclusive relationship with those other people in the group and to lessen this exclusivity comes at the cost of the concept of family itself.

For this reason not only is *participant* observation of families impossible by definition, but the gaining of access to the type of accounts that define belonging to a family group is made difficult as it is these very accounts that are part of the secret knowledge that constitutes family membership. Gubrium and Holstein (1990) remind us that families are areas of privileged access, a back region that are constituted on the sharing of secret knowledge about that family between its members. So again, the simple requesting of information about the activities and beliefs that make up our understandings of family is at the expense of the very ideas that construct it. Central to families in contemporary British culture are the concepts of privacy, exclusivity and intimacy. Thus to attempt to investigate

the privatised realm of family has within it the potential of breaking an unspoken contract that is axiomatic to our essential understanding of ourselves and our relations with others, namely the distinction between the public and private knowledge which is at the heart of our understanding of family.

I experienced difficulties in accessing families because I chose the wrong starting point- schools and other sites inhabited by young people. Other studies of which I am aware that have studied young people through schools, have done so *in* schools, thus gaining data more easily. The MRC's *11-16 Study* and *SHARE* study are examples of this. Both used questionnaires given out in formal school settings, thus by-passing the need to negotiate access to private settings.

### **Lesson 3: Bridging the boundary - women and families**

The latter and more successful half of the recruitment process occurred through contacting parents rather than younger family members. However, I also made some use of "professional" gatekeepers to families such as GPs and a therapist. The recruitment through GPs involved my contacting a small number of research friendly GPs who contacted families on my behalf. From this strategy a relatively high response rate for this study was achieved of seven families from forty-seven recruitment packs sent out. It seemed that by using a GP, a professional generally seen to have a close relationship with families, I had increased the likelihood of the recruitment practice reaching the targeted households and decision makers. However, of all the consent slips returned from the GP strategy, the vast majority were signed by female adults in the family. Twenty-four forms were returned in all. Twenty- one of these came from adult female family members, one from an adult male family member (positive), and two from respondents to whom I could not ascribe a gender (a "Ronnie" and a "T").

In Leonard's study entitled "*Sex and Generation*" (1980), in which she interviewed fifty couples before and after their weddings in an attempt to understand family through the rite of marriage, she remarks that her gender helped her gain access to brides-to-be. She too it seemed experienced a "haphazard" (p. 29) recruitment process and she, like me, had to do away with her original plans for a representative sample. Historically the realm of home and family and subjects associated with the "inside" of the inside/outside dichotomy have been the culturally determined role of women, and therefore gaining access has involved gaining the trust and rapport of adult female family members. Gaining the trust of an adult female family member is therefore more likely to result in gaining access to the entire family. Contacting families through their GPs could assist this process as one of the mother's roles is often as guardian of family health as well as gatekeeper to the household. As Day (2000) has identified, the so-called "ethic of care" is bound up with constructions of feminine, maternal identity and the consequent priority placed upon women as mothers to care (and to be seen to care) about their family's and children's health. Thus letters coming from the GP addressed "to the parents of" invariably end up in mothers' hands. This idea is also articulated by Cunningham-Burley and Macleod (1991) who write "*it is mothers, primarily, who attend to their children's health needs: who make daily decisions regarding their well-being; recognise the early stages of their illness; and nurse them when sick*" (page 29). It is therefore not surprising that doctors from GPs were not ignored by mothers who received them. The additional GP-lay power differential makes a request from a GP a difficult one to refuse and the strategy may have proved to be a successful way of bridging the public/private split in that it exploited an element of the maternal discourse which constrains women from appearing not to care about their family's health. Additionally, the position of a General Practitioner is probably closer to "family" than any professionally involved person can be. Often they are present at the events and

experiences, joyful, tragic and trying, that construct a family's biography. To the envy of family researchers, they are seen as outsiders privileged with insider knowledge. The same could also be said of the other medical gatekeeper I used to recruit my last family; the therapist from the family mediation service. As with the GP, it seemed a recommendation from someone who had been present and integral to key events in a family history was a privilege that ultimately gained me access.

#### **Lesson 4: Talking about health is easy- we know the right answers**

Just as the way in which families are constructed creates issues of accessing accounts for the researcher, once co-operation is assured, so can the same issues affect the collection of data. Using the open ended interview as a method of generating data brings with it no guarantees that respondents will not give accounts they feel acceptable for public consumption. The issue of public accounts has relevance in regard to the issues of both families *and* health, as both areas have become imbued with something of a moral discourse. In regard to health, education programmes have told us what is "right" and "wrong". In everyday language, health education messages have been translated into "sins" as exemplified by a cursory reading of the health sections of any lifestyle magazine (especially, although not exclusively, women's). Negative health behaviours such as smoking, drinking to various levels of excess, eating fatty foods and being inactive are all generally frowned upon, and their exponents often labelled in negative ways. With healthy behaviours we all know what is good or bad and adjust our accounts of ourselves accordingly.

With young people in particular, I found that the accounts collected of their health behaviour deviated little from health education advice. It seemed that this behaviour

extended often to friends as well, as if young people could be stigmatised by association. There is every possibility that the lifestyles of young people I spoke to were not as healthy as they themselves painted due to the desire to maintain separate identities discussed earlier. Youniss and Smollar (1985) suggest "parents appear to have consistent rights of approval and disapproval and children adapt their revelation and disclosure accordingly" (pp15-16). Just as young people control the information they give to their parents, so the interview situation can be controlled by young people to give desirable accounts. The claims of independence made by the researcher will not necessarily make young people any more forthcoming, the important fact is that the researcher was ultimately invited into the house by the parents. This undermines an alleged advantage of interviewing parents and children separately; that we can access the so-called multiple realities discussed earlier. In my interviews, parental and young people's accounts had a high degree of similarity. This could have much to do with the fact that for sake of establishing rapport and familiarity with the interview process, I interviewed parents and children together on the first occasion, which also enabled young people to become privy to what they considered the "correct" answers to give in the subsequent interviews which covered similar areas. One way in which this affected the generation of data was that it meant I was unable to get a reliable measure of smoking activity, once I had lost recourse to the descriptive data which anyhow, was not necessarily of unquestionable veracity on account of it being collected in different conditions.

If there is the possibility of public accounts in relation to health, then for the reasons stated above in relation to accessing families, the same must be said of the accounts given about family life. This raises the thorny question of the status of the data collected in this study, specifically of its validity as a tool for possible generalisation about families. Both a



strength and weakness of qualitative data is in the fact that it offers insights into the constructions and understandings which shape action. It does not provide a window on a reality assumed to be objective, "out there", measurable and verifiable but instead sees actors understandings of a situation as having some causal relationship with action. For the purposes of this study, I see the application of the method as owing something to the standard social constructionist text of Berger and Luckmann (1967) in that at its heart is a belief that society is constructed by subjects and that inter-subjectivity and agreement over the way of the world is key in creating the seemingly objective character of the subject matter at hand, in this case families. What is interesting at this moment in the history of families is that, not for the first time, this intersubjectivity is under question, hence the anxiety over family forms and processes that undermine the established consensus. Therefore, even if the interviewees were giving this researcher socially desirable, public accounts of their family lives which deviated from what they actually did in some respect, the data generated could still say something about how respondents expected families to be and what they expected families to do. This helps the data avoid the long-standing criticism of qualitative research that it slips into subjectivity, or worse solipsism, as interview accounts are at the most micro, a constructed account negotiated between researcher and research participant which has little applicability beyond the interview setting. However, accounts are not only subjective, they are *intersubjective* too, as the interviewee expects the researcher to understand the reality they are presenting, regardless of whether or not it corresponds to the everyday lived experience. As such, the collected accounts of family have a practical application; differences in expectations can be the source of conflict between individuals within households and a lag between understandings of family that inform policy and the lived understanding can hinder individuals in families on the economic margins. Furthermore, understandings of family represent the magic dust

that transforms a collection of blood or non-blood related individuals that make up the household into the most profoundly experienced of relationships.

## **2.11 Summary**

In this chapter I have documented the interrelationships between recruitment and methodology and study design to make clear how the data collection was far from unproblematic both practically and methodologically. It shows that from the first instance, the ways and means through which I sought to collect data challenged my understandings of the subject matters as much as the data collected itself. It has therefore sought to make transparent how the data were more properly *generated* rather than collected, and to display my reflexive stance towards the data.

The next chapter, the first of the results sections proper, continues the theme of reflexivity toward the subject matter at hand and the problems of method. It takes one of the central concepts of the research project, the notion of family itself, and problematises the sociological construction of the concept to build towards a notion of family grounded in the understandings of those who enact and reproduce the institution.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Making sense of Diversity: What is family? The accounts of family members**

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### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present data that address how changes in family forms are experienced by individual family members. These data arose from discussions of what respondents believed their families did to make them "family". As such it represents an attempt to maintain a practice-orientated and grounded approach to data generation. As family members talked of the perceived tasks of "family", two key issues emerged in their talk; those of expressivity and discipline. As it became clear that these contributed to the foundations of actors' understandings of the concept of family, I turned the analysis to how these understandings are maintained within the changing structural form of families.

The expressive functions of families appeared to go both ways, serving both the emotional and spiritual needs of adults as well as children, a characteristic of contemporary families which has been discussed elsewhere (Langford, Lewis, Solomon and Warin, 2001).

Crucially, respondents displayed how the expressive characteristics desired of family were maintained over, and even at the expense of, structural factors such as the number of resident parents. Exploration of the data also revealed that the expressive functions of family facilitated another defining characteristic of family, that of parenting, and in particular, disciplining, through the heightened ability of familial relationships to withstand arguments and turbulence. As with the expressive functions of family, disciplining functions can also transcend issues of family structure. As the data show, disciplining relationships between birth-parents have the propensity to succeed and fail in both traditional and non-traditional family structures with the key issue being the quality of the relationship between discipliners. This finding accords with a major theme that emerged throughout the data; the importance of accordance in values as central to processes which take place within families and parenting relationships. This accordance in values appeared

more important than the residence or non-residence of a particular parent, and necessary to the success of discipline relationships between parents and their children. In this chapter, I contrast these findings against a standard model of family pathology invoked to explain the disadvantage associated with non-traditional family structures (the "deficit" model) to highlight the value of looking at relational over structural issues.

Plenty has been written about the changing nature of families. Predictions and pronouncements of "the" family's death are not new. Gelles (1995) reports that those researching families have sporadically engaged in "doomsaying" regarding its future throughout the twentieth century. Increases in the divorce rate were considered indicative of the impending death of families as early as 1937, when Sorokin commented that families were no more than a nightly parking lot for spouses. The early hysteria prophesying their death quietened has down as the century progressed with a gradual recognition that families and their forms could change.

Contemporary Western families are of course characterised by a diversity of available structures and forms rather than an overarching statistical or normative standard. This section starts with a brief discussion of current sociological thinking regarding the composition of families in the face of widespread changes in its surface characteristics. The main aim of this section, however, is to look at respondents' understandings of what families are, in light of widespread changes in family structure and living arrangements. In asking people "*what is family?*", one might expect that the familiarity which we have with the concept and related expressions or phrases would impede useful reflective thinking about. It was indeed sometimes the case that "the family" was simply too obvious a reality for actors to talk about usefully. However, it became apparent that notions of family were

best elucidated when actors were talking about what they expected *family* to do. As an example of this, this section will investigate how one particular family process, the disciplining of young people is re-negotiated under the changed circumstances of contemporary families.

The findings gained from respondents' understandings of family shown in this chapter reflect a core motif that is found throughout the findings of this project as a whole; that to understand families in their contemporary formulation we need to break free of a conflation of "family" with "household", the latter simply being the container of some of the relationships that constitute families. On this issue, Van Every (1999) criticises the methodology of many sociological research studies that have used the category "household" as a proxy for "family". While such a method may be a convenient means of gathering data via a postal questionnaire sent to individual households, the problem it produces is that through this form of scientific practice, researchers are reproducing an understanding of family that is based around residence. In the words of Gilgun, Daly and Handel (1992), "*Household is something used to specify the location of what we believe to be authentic domestic activities, whether or not we have been on its premises*" (page26). It could be added that in fact household is something used to specify the location of what we believe are authentic *family* activities.

In reality, family activities take place over a variety of spaces. This point is not without methodological significance. By focusing purely on households, researchers can miss important relationships, such as that between the child and a non-resident parent, that may contribute to the overall quality of parenting, either positively or negatively. The term "single parent family" has not only a descriptive, but also an emotive, significance in

everyday usage and public understanding. This has been, perhaps unwittingly, supported by research investigating developmental outcomes that have identified negative outcomes in statistical terms for young people growing up in such single parent households. At the risk of sounding pedantic, the phrase single parent family should have no meaning. Just as biologically speaking, there is no such thing as a single parent, so socially and developmentally, the notion of single parent families is also problematic. Many of those who are described as coming from a single parent family in my study, did in fact maintain some degree of contact with a non resident parent. It is likely that it is not the residence or non- residence of a parent in a household that produces the outcomes which researchers have gathered evidence, but the way in which this residence or non residence establishes a particular matrix of relations that structures the availability and access to the material and emotional resources that the parent offers. Ideas of single parenthood suggest an absence of a relationship and contribution of resources from the non-resident parent. From the findings presented here the assumption of no relationship with a non-resident partner will need to change if the processes taking place within the diversity of contemporary family formations are to be understood.

A second finding relates to actors' understandings of the notion of family from the standpoint of its perceived functions. In respect of this, I argue that the data reflect an understanding which brings parenting to the fore in understandings of families. While this may be a consequence of sampling bias (all the families which took part have dependent children), it serves against a discourse that has characterised much sociological thinking about families that has instead given primacy to the conjugal bond. This conceptualisation emerging from actors' accounts undoubtedly mirrors the wider secular change that has seen the diminishing role for the conjugal bond as the basis of primary relationships.

The final significant finding takes the form of a theme which emerged from the data pertaining to the processes that take place after the redistribution of parental resources in families containing a non-resident parents. Theories accounting for difficulties experienced in single parent households have pin-pointed lack of resources as a possible explanation, be these human resources or material ones. However, the data suggest that it is not necessarily the absence of resources (especially human resources) per se that produces problems, but the ways in which the relationships allocate the resources across households. This finding therefore makes it feasible that it is not family structure itself which can produce negative outcomes, but the way the relations within the triad of resident parent – child – non-resident parent are enacted.

### **3.2 The Modernist family**

Before presenting the findings it is necessary to introduce some of the ideas that have shaped the contemporary sociological understanding of families. Scientific understandings of families are perhaps most readily associated with the Parsonian concept of the isolated, conjugal family (Parsons, 1956). Morgan (1975) describes him as *the* modern theorist of the family (p.25). The Parsonian view holds up the American family circa the 1950s as the ideal means of organising primary relationships for the benefit of industrial society. Cheal (1991, p.59) summarises the Parsonian position in identifying six characteristics of the model as follows 1) marriage between adult partners; 2) superiority of the conjugal bond over other social commitments; 3) raising of legitimate children; 4) shared residence; 5) the employment of one or more adult members outside the home; and 6) the unrestricted sharing of incomes between adult members.



In a similarly modernist, if more progressive vein is the work of Young and Willmott for whom the symmetrical family is seen as the theoretically ideal model (Young, 1973). "Ideal" in a similar sense to Parsons' model in that it is the family formation best suited to the needs of the age, economy and society from which it came. The "Symmetrical Family", however, is characterised by increasingly equalised power relations and earning capacities between conjugal partners, if you like the nuclear family after feminism. However, thirty years on, contemporary family formations would suggest that Young and Willmott's model has been surpassed as quickly as the model it replaced both through increased divorce rates and increasing numbers of mothers opting to have children outside marriage and shared residence with the other parent.

Additionally, more recent work of Volger and Pahl suggests that women's increased earning capacities have not necessarily reduced inequalities within households. The central conjugal bond, where it still exists, contrives to be characterised by patriarchal priorities with regard to finance in some families (Volger and Pahl, 1999). The Rapoports have suggested additionally that reorganisation of domestic roles was simply "lip-service" adjustments in dual earner families (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1976). Another interesting development which questions the progressive imperative of the Symmetrical Family is that, contrary to Young and Willmott's "trickle down" interpretation of family change (with the working class mimicking middle class styles), the family formations that have increased their representation in the last few decades have been those formed outside a marital or domestic relationship. Historically, these family formations have been associated with deviance and implicated in the "underclass debate" of the early 1990s (Rodger, 1996) and its previous incarnations.

Despite the obvious deviation from the modernist ideal in the contemporary organisations of domestic, childcare and emotional relationships, the word "family" still carries with it a very meaningful and lived reality. Later theorists have tried to come to terms with this diversity by providing alternative models that take account of the decreasing importance of the conjugal bond. For instance, Scanlon (1983) has suggested that research that has best attempted to deal with the widespread changes in family composition, working patterns, birth rates, increasing divorce, choosing not to marry, etc. has started from the perspective of processes and preferences and worked up to an understanding of structure from these points. In summarising what he describes as "Conservative Responses" he describes those who hold on to a Modernist conception of family. Implicit within the views of those who hold a conservative view of family are barriers that make this enactment of family life difficult for large sections of the population. One such notion which is overlooked by conservatives is that the traditional nuclear family requires a certain level of financial resources to enact this model of family, relying heavily upon the male being a highly motivated achiever, freeing his conjugal partner from the need to work outside the home. Implicit within this is the notion that husbands have access to educational and occupational opportunities, which in the American context (and elsewhere) excludes sections of the population with a lower socio-economic status. It also carried an implicit assumption that illness and impairment will be dealt with using family resources with minimal reliance on external agencies fulfilling family functions, such as the welfare state. Rather than seeing these constraints as undermining the validity or practicality of the model, it was assumed by adherents to the conservative position (such as social policy planners) that, whilst there will be exceptions, a widespread adherence to moral standards would enable families to survive.

The position which Scanzoni identifies as the "Progressive Response" describes the traditional, nuclear model of family as one of a different age hence its disjuncture with contemporary societal experience. For Progressives, the institution of family adapts to enable the interests of both spouses, rather than their enacting respective ascribed duties. Scanzoni's interpretation has latterly been described as "concept abandonment" by Cheal (1991), in that he has suggested that the alternatives to the family are now too widespread and common place to be described as "alternatives". However, an additional problem is that his suggested alternative term, "primary relationships" reflects precisely the same historical progression (valuing privatised relationships over public, and assigning certain functions and activities to each sphere) which led to Modernist understandings of the family (Cheal, 1991). An issue I have with Scanzoni's analysis of the contemporary families is that it is premised almost entirely around the conjugal bond, to the detriment of the analysis of the parent-child relationship. In data displayed here is at least equally, if not more so, the defining surface characteristic of the contemporary family, and given the trend for increasing numbers of children to be reared outside any formal conjugal bond. Still, I believe there is something to be gained from his method, if not his application. Examining processes and understandings as the means to arriving at an understanding of structure seems a useful way of dealing with the diversity of contemporary living and emotional arrangements. For Scanzoni, the processes present in the adult primary relationship are there to ensure that each partner can find fulfilment in work and love; the Freudian definition of happiness in life and negotiation seems to be the most cherished process through which this can be achieved. However, since many parents have abandoned the adult primary relationship as the axiom of family life, the emphasis will need to be adjusted. This movement towards the micro-social interpretation of family as providing the building blocks for larger scale interpretations is reflected in Morgan's

(1996) belief that we should look at family as a collection of practices. By understanding the organisation and underlying beliefs about these family forming practices, we become better able to understand family on the more general level. Meanwhile Bernardes has warned that the term "family" is a politically and morally charged one which obscures the lived diversity of a majority of family situations. Its only future, claims Bernardes, is in terms of the usage and meanings ascribed to it by actors (Cheal, 1991).

### **3.3 The respondents' understandings of "family"**

From the data collected, actors' understandings of family produced four interconnected and overlapping categories of thinking about family from which a contemporary notion of family could begin to be formulated. One of these was the notion of *time*. By this actors meant that family was a concept defined by time spent together through which ideas of family were being enacted. It is important to add at this point that it was not just a specific quantity of time or time defined by certain activities. The time also had to have a specific quality about it that could allow the enactment of another category by which notions of family were understood, that of *expression*. As a set of relationships, family relationships were defined partly by their expressive nature. By being reminded of the expressive functions of family, the functionalist analysis of Parsons is again invoked. His belief in the expressive nature of the family unit being fulfilled by particular gender roles is shown in the data here to have some validity in the minds of respondents, even in light of family re-organisation. Another category I will look at corresponds to the notion of *parenting*, that is in the current understanding of family, there is a notion of parental obligations to younger members whilst they are dependants. This finding is partly determined by the sample; a conjugal relationship that did not include children, for example, might not include this aspect. The final category through which family members look at family is in terms of

*structure*, in that family corresponds to diverse ideas about numbers and categories of persons present in a household to make it a family.

Within the interviews that made up the main body of the fieldwork, elucidating respondents' understandings of family was arrived at through two means. Firstly by a direct line of questioning which simply asked what family meant. This approach met with limited success. The immediacy of the concept which leaves it an often unquestioned "background feature" (Gubrium, 1988) in the minds of actors meant that respondents could often not give very full answers. That notions of family pervade our thinking so completely did not mean, however, that understandings of the concept could not be discovered. Often more circumspect responses were accomplished through asking respondents what they thought the implications of living in different types of family structures were or the reasons why some families break-down. Implicit in these responses were ideas of what were considered the most important features of family, or what was considered important and essential to family life.

### **3.4 Time and expression**

For respondents to talk of family in terms of the time that constituted family life was not uncommon. This was particularly important in distinguishing the nature of family relationships from other forms of relationship. Although the notion of spending time in itself did not reveal the most significant elucidation of what family meant, it was obviously the starting point in respondents thinking through the question.

PS     *"So what makes it a family?"*

PC     *"The time that they spend together. Like if they go somewhere like to the pictures or the park, or shopping. I wouldn't say we were a model family, but we always find time to spend with each other."*

Paul OConnell, 15 Dual Parent Household

*"Family is a group of people who do things together - willingly (laughs)"*

Sandra Townsend, single parent household.

Above, a young person identifies time as an essential quality in his understanding of family life. Often this idea of *time* could be connected to family occasions, and this theme will be further explored in the section on family mealtimes later on. An example of this belief was present in the words of a single mother who claimed that at Christmas she went overboard "to compensate" for the deficit of living in a single parent household. However, to say that family as a concept is defined by time does not on its own produce too many insights. But by looking at the underlying reasons why this time is constitutive of the experience of family, we begin to enter into actors' understandings more significantly.

One of these features which gives time spent together a particularly familial quality is its expressive nature. In early classroom based exercises, not intended to form part of the main fieldwork, young people would often introduce the notion of "commitment" to conceptions of family. Often they would be imprecise in spelling out exactly who this commitment encompassed; the parents as a couple or the parents to their children. One group came up with a definition of family as "a commitment that involves more than one person", with one young person adding "two people that are committed to each other". It is of interest that the notion of commitment was so readily introduced, and importantly, remained uncontested between the young people as it refers to the specific quality, rather than the mere existence of a relationship between people. Another group did come up with

a definition that referred to the surface characteristics of a family, and more precisely, child rearing; "where two people come together and decide to have a child". This definition shows how for young people, the necessary existence of children in a family can be a consequence of them having difficulty thinking beyond their own experience. As became clear throughout my analysis of these responses, notions of family could be tied people's subjective experience of it, especially at a younger age. Only one young person indicated marriage as constitutive of family.

The expressive functions of family given by younger family members were bi-directional between children and parents. Below, we hear a young person speak of the type of family he would not like to belong to (an example of a negative reflection on the nature of family) and this idea of spending time is central; *"Some people's parents don't care about them and they just go away and leave them on their own"*

(Paul O'Connell, 15 dual parent household).

This was also suggested in the concerns of one young person who believed his friend had a poor relationship with his father because he preferred the pub to the company of his child in the evenings. Clearly, spending time together is seen as synonymous with caring.

However, the benefits of shared family time can go both ways, from child to parent too;

*"Well, I think a mum should spend time with you because they are going to regret it when they get older if they don't, they are going to wish they spent more time with you."*

Paul O'Connell, 15 dual parent household.

The young person is suggesting that the parents have a lot to gain in spending time with their children. If today's family is to be seen as much in terms of the expressive benefits it affords, then these benefits are not just received by the children. The socialisation model

of family, as an environment in which children are nurtured by parental resources until old enough to stand on their own, fails to recognise the contribution children make to parents. Where these contributions are often not financial (although as will be discussed in a later section on family social capital they can be economic in a broader sense, through contributing to the task of parenting), children can have a supportive function for parents in households. This was especially the case in single parent households, where often older siblings of the same sex as the mother became "adult company" to talk about topics such as work. Children seem to fill another type of expressive function, giving parents a sense of emotional and spiritual fulfilment which I believe the last young person was suggesting.

The expressive nature of family life and family time also enables families to fulfil their parenting function effectively. The best description of the relationship between the expressive nature of families and their parenting functions was made by this mother;

*"In a family you have a little bit more elasticity, you can push it a little bit further and know they are still going to be your family. To a large extent the family is a proving ground, you get a chance to find limits because you'll know they'll stick around for you more. They may shout about it but they are still family no matter how much you call them."*

Maureen Shaws. One parent household.

This identification of family as a "proving ground" is an interesting return to the idea of family as the primary socialising agency and provides an insight into why time and expression have combined in a particular way to produce the contemporary understanding of family. It is not just that families teach expression through providing a loving, caring environment as an example. It is this very environment that facilitates the parenting function of.



In the remainder of the chapter, I will concentrate primarily on the expressive and parenting functions of families as they are key understandings that respondents have given in defining family (as, through more examples, will become apparent). In looking at these functions, I will also take into account two key features that emerged from the Modernist account of family given in the background literature: the ideas that family involves firstly, two conjugally related adults; and secondly, that these cornerstone family members share a single residence. An example of how the families in this study enacted and developed beliefs about the expressive and parenting functions of family from their own standpoints of varied and diverse family and household organisations, can therefore contribute to a contemporary understanding of families.

### **3.5 Structure: A need for a mother and father?**

Young people and parents alike were very aware of diversity in family structures, "*there are so many different families these days*" a teenage girl in a one parent household told me. So far I have argued that it was the expressive functions of family that would be brought to the fore, over and above the idea of structure or whether those in your household were your parents or not; "*its people you live with who care for you and love you and stuff, you don't necessarily have to be related to be family*" (Joanna Lanark, 16, one parent household). However, such progressive views of the nature of familiar relationships were not shared across the board, and even when diversity was recognised, it could be difficult for young people to imagine anything other than their own experience of family providing the support and security associated with its expressive functions. For example, a young person from a dual parent family remarked "*I think you feel better if you have mum and dad because then you feel more like a family, more together.*"

In terms of family's expressive functions, views were often held that suggested no contradiction between the ability of a family to fulfil its expressive functions and the absence of a particular family member, such as a father. Below, we hear a young person continue that a family's expressive functions are fulfilled quite adequately by diversity of parental structures; in fact, to put a traditional model of family life first would often result in a reduction in a family's ability to provide a safe, caring, supportive environment;

*"I'd rather they be apart and happy than together and miserable, especially if they are making other people's lives miserable as well!"*

Joanna Lanark, 16, single parent household.

This view could also be held by young people from two parent households, as exemplified by the view that one loving parent is better than two warring ones;

*"You could have two parents in maybe an unsuccessful relationship or whatever and obviously the child is not going to benefit from having those parents. Whereas if there's one loving parent, the child knows it is loved."*

Chrissy Johnstone, 14, dual parent household.

And similarly, a parent from a conventionally structured household echoes this view;

*"You're far better having one parent and being happy with that one. It would be nice to have two, a nice balance, male and female, but at the end of the day it really depends upon their relationship, how happy the children would be."*

Mary O'Connell, dual parent household.

The view of the last mother and daughter are those of people from households with traditional parental structures. They are therefore to a large extent hypothesised views about an alternative reality of which they do not have first hand experience. As it

transpired, these hypothesised views of those in households with traditional household structures did accord quite accurately with the thought processes of parents who had decided to live apart from their children's father. It seems that in giving reasons why families break up, the preservation of a family's expressive functions takes priority over the preservation of a traditional family formation;

*"It was unhealthy in every way really. They weren't hit or anything, it was more like they were shunned and like they couldn't be around their dad, like he had no time for them. It was 'keep them quiet' you know. It wasn't healthy to have wee ones shut up in their rooms, there was no family life."*

Sandra Townsend, single parent household.

This quotation sums up succinctly the absence of a necessity for certain structural criteria to be matched to constitute the idea of family. This mother not only points to the failure of her previous living arrangements in meeting the expressive functions of family, providing an environment where children are given time, love and attention. She believes that this sort of environment, despite having two conjugally related adults present, is not only a poor enactment of family, but in the absence of expressive functions being fulfilled, is *not* family; *"there was no family life."*

Similarly, a mother tells me of her experiences after a break up, echoing the above observation;

*"It does have its pluses, you don't have the negative side of family life, the fighting, the arguing. We didn't split up for nothing you know."*

Karen White, one parent household.

Although the majority of respondents did not have rigid conceptions of family which adhered to the traditional nuclear conception, there were residues of this model within their

thinking. In its most extreme formulation, an account is given of the inseparable link between the definition of family and the presence of two conjugally related adults;

*"A mother, a good mother is the core of the family, she is the nucleus of the family, she is the one to feed, clothe, take care of you, look after and listen to you. More than the father, because the father tends not to be there, its not that he doesn't want to be, it's just the roles that people play"*

Martin Giffnock, dual parent household.

In this father's view, structure is essential to his definition of family and to his understanding of the enactment of expressive functions. It must be stressed however that he is the only respondent who introduced the notion of paid work influencing the composition of families. His understanding seems flawed given that "the roles people play" in contemporary society do not necessitate men going out to work over women, given the trend for the feminisation of many new forms of work. Interestingly, his partner's views on the nature of family also begin from the position of the conjugal relationship. However, in her understanding, this is not for the benefit of the children but for the adults themselves;

*"A loving caring partner. Good health and a good partner and a bit of luck and you'll do OK...you don't necessarily need to have kids to have a good family."*

Eleanor Giffnock, dual parent household.

This mother's view again was an exception in that she reiterates the centrality of a conjugal bond to the notion of family, as was expressed in the literature earlier on.

However, this belief that children were not necessarily essential to families was not expressed often, partly, I'm sure, because of the fact that all the families in the study did have children. If I had been interviewing people in living arrangements that did not include children I might have got more responses like this. On some occasions, parents did

offer accounts that suggested that family structure was essential to fulfilling the expressive and parenting functions of family. One such belief was the idea that children need complementary gender inputs in their child rearing. This was expressed by parents from non-traditional family structures who were, for the most part, content with their current household organisation. Young people also often thought about whether there was a need for a mother and a father;

*"I think it is important to have a mother and a father. Different role models. You see how they are different, you see how your mother acts and you see how your father acts, and I imagine you would follow what your mum and dad do."*

Chrissie Johnstone, 14, dual parent household.

It is interesting that this young person, who earlier offered views supporting the claim that two resident parents were not necessary to fulfilling a family's expressive functions, sees a need for two parents in fulfilling a family's wider function of socialising and bringing up young adults. The idea that mothers and fathers offer different and separate parental influences could be described as the *"one of each type"* notion (Paul Prestwick, father, dual parent household). This belief could be premised on the understanding that men and women still have "essential" differences, despite formal equality in the performance of roles in society such as in the workplace. Although not exclusively a role fulfilled by men (in fact far from it, with all but one of the mothers interviewed working outside the home for pay), men's roles were still predominantly seen as centring around the outside world of work and providing and instrumental input. Not having a father around could be seen as a deficit in this respect. Here, we see a young teenage male discuss this perceived deficit in instrumental terms;

*"When there is a man around you feel a bit safer because there's someone to protect you. But with my mum, because she's a woman, she can't do things, she'll try and play football but she can't."*

David Anderson, 14, one parent household.

However, it seems that the instrumental role was not the only perceived role for fathers. There was evidence of an expressive role for fathers although different from the one outlined for mothers.

*"I can talk to my mum about more personal things than I can my dad, but I can talk to my dad, if I am not getting on with my mum I can go and talk to him about that."*

Stephen Moss, 14, one parent household.

The expressive function of the father therefore, is seen as a support, a back up for when the primary expressive carer, the mother, is unable to fulfil this role. Additionally, fathers can also provide support in discreetly different areas of expertise than those of the mother;

*"I can't talk to her about man things, she doesn't really know about that, I talk to my dad about stuff like that...girls and that."*

Stephen Moss, 14, one parent household.

But the idea that the mother remained the primary care giver persisted, and sometimes this was again in terms of very traditional, essentialist views about the nature of men, women and children;

*"I think it is better for children to have their mum looking after them, rather than being in a playgroup or something all day and being looked after...there's a special bond between a mother and her children."*

Chrissie Johnstone, 14, dual parent household.

It was not just young people who held views about the need for "one of each kind", nor was it only parents in dual parent, conventionally structured households. Parents in households where a parent was non resident and had no contact with either mother or young person could acknowledge its importance also;

*"I don't think there is anything better than having both parents. I used to think when I was younger and when I was more proud, I used to think that there is nothing a dad could provide that I couldn't. Now I see him getting older, there are certain things that he needs. All kids need male bonding whether it's a wee boy or a wee girl, I mean there are things that a father can provide that a mother can't and vice versa."*

Karen White, Mother, one parent household.

### **3.6 Not a depletion of resources, but a redistribution; the example of discipline**

Research investigating the developmental effects of young people living in non traditional (single parent) households has implicated such households as having negative effects (Acock, 1996, Simons, 1996). For this, a number of explanatory processes have been suggested. One such is the so-called "strain hypothesis" or the belief that detrimental outcomes are produced through the depletion of resources, be they economic or other, which results from only having one parent resident. Hetherington (in Simons, 1996) suggests that economic hardship is the fundamental and prior strain which increases stress and reduces the quality of parenting. An alternative explanation is provided by Nock (1988) who argues that after controlling for income, children of single parents still fare worse. He supplies an alternative explanation for this viewing families as a primary socialising agency; providing a model of discipline which corresponds to discipline models experienced outside the home, in school and the workplace. In single parent households, it is the way that lack of resources change the nature of the parent-child relationship, creating a more reciprocal, dependency based relationship instead of the "standard" functional model of a precise hierarchy and strict generational boundaries, that causes the problems for young people. Simply, the experience for young people living in single parent

households is of a dissonance between authority relations in the home and authority relations at school, eroding the sense of consistency across spheres of experience necessary to discipline and success in school.

In these data there is no evidence for respondents being aware of such a process. Concern for inconsistency between school's discipline and parental discipline was commented on in a number of homes, but not in a way that suggested parental structure as a cause. In fact such concerns went in the opposite direction, that discipline in schools was not sufficiently strict to match expectations in the home. The sense that the two elements, economic resources and parenting resources, combined to produce detrimental outcomes is reflected in the beliefs of the respondents. For example, when I asked one teenage boy how he felt about living in a single parent household, and what advantages may be gained from living with both parents, he told me that living in a conventionally structured household would be *"a good thing in that you get more stuff, because you can afford more, a bad thing because you have two people telling you off"*. However, a far more revealing insight into the relationship between family structure and process was revealed when respondents spoke of how discipline styles are enacted in households with non-resident fathers. It revealed that the non-residence of fathers may affect discipline styles, but not necessarily in the manner suggested by Nock. Discipline styles in such families may actually develop a new sense of hierarchy, which is discussed shortly.

Taking the first half of the alleged deficit, the depletion of resources in single parent households, it emerged that parents did make reference to such a process affecting their ability to discipline. Indeed, even well off parents in traditionally structured households had sympathy with single parent households on this issue.



The cost of raising children and having young people was seen as being made increasingly expensive by the consumerist emphasis which characterises contemporary childhood. In terms of day-to-day expenses, this was reported to have its strongest impact in the first couple of years after the parental separation. As this single mother, reveals, having less money certainly makes being a parent harder;

*"Financially, I have a lot more pressure on me, I feel I now have to be mum and a dad to them. I find that quite difficult, because Katy is such a difficult child. They're still wanting the same things, but the money is not there."*

Ann Kilbride, single parent household.

Here, *"being mum and a dad"* to her children means slightly more than fulfilling the expressive functions of the perceived roles discussed earlier. It means meeting the financial need also. In this parent's case, she attempted to do this by holding down two cleaning jobs, but still was unable to match the expectations that came with her previous partner's income. Interestingly, her daughter, who is suggested in the quote of having high expectations, also worked part time as a cleaner in between her school-work. The mother also welcomed and highly valued her daughter's company around the house, as *"adult company"*. This might suggest a flattening of the hierarchical structure implicated by Nock as causing a disharmony between discipline expectations at school and at home. However, as the daughter was sixteen, one would expect a more reciprocal relationship between them anyway, and as such this issue could be related to the age of the child over anything else. In addition, the relationship is not completely friend-like in any case. As the following quote reveals, the mother still feels it is her role to be the disciplinarian, a job made difficult by her circumstances;

*"To be honest with you, I don't know how to handle them, I don't cope well in this situation. It's difficult bringing up children. I don't think it would be so bad if I had somebody else near, they don't do as they are told....Katy will say things like 'Oh, you can't cope'."*

Ann Kilbride, Mother, one parent household

The phrase "somebody else near" can suggest more than in practical terms is actually needed. Although the presence of the child's biological father would cover this need, other single parents benefited from the presence of another adult, such as their own mother. The difficulty in coping experienced by Ann Kilbride was in part a consequence of the wider social exclusion she felt (discussed in the chapter on social capital) which means she is unable to call upon the resources of extended kin and friends. For example, her own mother, who might assist with parenting, lived across town, an infrequent bus ride away. After separation some mothers in the study reported that they lost access to what they previously considered the "family" car, compounding difficulties experienced with the drop in financial resources. For example, a number of parents with access to cars would talk about "cheap" family activities as being simply a matter of imagination, and things such as flying kites, going to the beach or a country park would often be suggested. However, it would seem that having access to a car was seen as instrumental to all these activities even if they are cheap in themselves.

To return to the emergent theme being spelt out here, that of the relationship of the non-resident parents with regard to discipline, it seems that in terms of respondents' understandings (both parental and young people) the absence of a father was not necessarily a bad thing. It was not necessarily the case that this produced a flattening of the family hierarchy either. On the contrary, in terms of issuing strict, authoritarian

discipline demands, living in a single parent household can make authoritarianism easier to accomplish:

*"This is where I say being a single parent can be very positive thing. Kids aren't playing one parent off the other. They are not getting a 'yes' off one parent and 'no' off the other."*  
Maureen Shaws, one parent household

The idea that young people in households "play parents off one another" was a familiar concept to the interviewees. One mother in a dual parent household even cited it as a deprivation suffered by children in single parent households, the implication being that this art of childhood can actually be applied in the adult world outside the home and as such is a skill to be cultivated. In respect of what is being argued here, it shows how value accordance can actually be enhanced by the absence of an authority figure who might otherwise send contradictory messages to children. However, non-residence does not necessarily equate to an absence of disciplinary input. In a particularly negative example, a non resident father would dissuade his children from doing their homework, an act which undermined their mother's discipline requests and showed that even in the formal absence of the father from the household, his influence over discipline was destructively evident. One could not help feel that this input was designed to cause trouble as the same father was reported to regularly stop maintenance payments to get his own way.

Even in the absence of two resident parents, it was still possible for both parents to contribute positively to discipline however. This is illustrated by the example of this young person from a single parent household, who suggests that two parents (even if one of his was non-resident) equals twice the discipline:

*"If your ma cannae get through to you, your dad might get through to you."*  
(Stuart Moss, 14, one parent household).

This idea, expressed particularly by the boys in the study, that patriarchal discipline had more weight attached to it than its matriarchal counterpart was of interest, not least because it still seemed to hold in the absence of the father from the home. This re-addresses Nock (1988) who based his research on the premise that single parent households had flatter hierarchies. This was shown to be untrue within single parent households where parenting had re-adapted to take place over different households to encompass the input of the non-resident father. It seems that the sentiments expressed in the phrase "wait 'till your father gets home" holds weight even if your father's home happens to be different from your own. Evidently, most young people's experiences and understanding of discipline are more complex than a simple doubling of parental resources when both parents are resident. Implicit within understandings of why two parents can equal twice the discipline are ideas related to views of gendered roles both within and outside families, and in the quote below we can actually see how the concept of discipline reinforcement comes from a perception of gendered roles:

*"If the child is living with just the mum, then the mum alone will be telling them not to smoke, but if the dad is there as well, that means that they might have more respect for their dad than their mum. Like your mum would be saying to you that you can't go out because you have to baby-sit your wee sister or your wee brother. But if there are two people telling you not to smoke then you will be thinking, they really must not want me to smoke."*

Paul O'Connell, 15, dual parent household.

This instance illustrates an understanding of discipline (parenting) processes in a household with a resident father. According to the young person's logic, smoking is not a bad thing just because two people tell you not to do it, but because of his understanding of the two people who are telling him. He believes that there are two different types of

discipline demand issued by his two parents. The first category of discipline demands relate to the day-to-day running of the household and are to do with the domestic sphere (in this instance "babysitting"), which are demands issued by his mother. His father's discipline demands are seen as separate from these and somehow infer "more respect". The reason that his mother's discipline demands are viewed as less urgent derives from his negative evaluation of his mother's sphere of influence, the domestic sphere which has traditionally been under-regarded in society. What is interesting however, is that these gendered divisions of discipline requests seem to be in operation even when the male parent is non resident, as we can see in the words of this male teenager;

*"Aye, normally my ma tells me not to take drugs and alcohol and that, but when my dad says it, it just goes into my brain more, because two of them are telling me and not just one of them, and because my dad knows people who take drugs and he's seen what has happened and he says it's a no-no."*

Stuart Moss, 14, one parent household

This young person's quote is key to the emergent theme I have attempted to display here. Again, at first glance, it may seem that he is making the point that discipline demands gain more authority with repetition. This is not the true extent of his belief however. In fact by situating the varying perceived authority of the respective parent's discipline demands in the context of each parent's experience, he is interpreting them as being qualitatively different forms of demand. This is significant because it is the perceived qualitative difference between parental discipline requests in the earlier dual parent household which led to them being taken on board. That a similar process also took place in the household with a non-resident father is significant to the argument developed here; that the processes can be the same between parents over households with different surface characteristics, if we include the input of non-resident parents.

### 3.7 Discussion

The original aim of the analysis from which these findings are drawn was to investigate how families are understood by those who are enacting the concept on a day to day basis. This enactment is apparently achieved without the confusion over conceptualisation which has affected sociologists. In this respect, the findings have been a useful validation of the method, in that they were drawn following Morgan's prescription that the key to understanding families are in understanding the practices which constitute them (Morgan, 1996). Put at its simplest, the term "single parent family" is a misnomer despite our coming to accept it as having an important meaning. In normal speech and social scientific literature it signifies a deficit for both the child and the parent. From the perspective of the parent, they are understood to have experienced a hardship through separation or from never forging a positive relationship with the child's father. It is through such suppositions, combined with the ideological legacy of the nuclear family which confined families to households, that single parent homes have become synonymous with the idea "lone" parenting. In fact, many non-resident parents still make a contribution, be it positive or negative, and it is the quality (importantly, the value consistency it accords, or not) of this contribution which can shape the effectiveness of the parenting.

The term also signifies a deficit for the child who is understood to be at a material and emotional disadvantage by virtue of their family background. This is firstly in terms of perceived material disadvantage, and two potential wage-earners are always going to be better than one, as the quantitative evidence suggests. However, if we look at one of the key processes, such as discipline, we find that rather than single parent households losing the input of a non-resident parent, the input can be retained under new circumstances and

conditions of influence. It is precisely the way that this parental process is articulated (or re-articulated after parental separation) that is the key to unlocking the statistical data connecting families' surface characteristics with developmental outcomes. In one case we saw how the articulation of the parenting process after parental estrangement had a negative influence, undermining any semblance of value consistency between parents. However, the final case illustrated complementary parental inputs, despite parental estrangement, which fostered a positive relationship in terms of discipline. That a positive parental relationship is possible despite the absence of shared residence should go some way to reassuring those with one eye on the trend toward non traditional, non nuclear family formations and another on statistical data showing their ill effects.

In regard to the understanding of families which this section sought to investigate, the fact that parents and children in families with non-resident parents can talk about the processes of family taking place across households with no internal contradiction in their minds, points to the direction sociological and public understandings of families are heading. Under these circumstances, when negative outcomes emerge it is not family structure itself which is pathogenic but the relationships which constitute that family, both within and outside the household. These relationships themselves can be reformulated from the classic model of modernist functionalism, which gave sovereignty to the parent-parent dyad as the basis of the family with children becoming additional extras, dependent upon the success of this primary relationship. In seeing the parenting relationship as one in which the parent-child relationship is becoming central, understandings of families are in fact adjusting at a time when research in the area is coming to recognise the influence of children as active agents in the construction of their own lives.

Three of the themes that emerged from the data in this chapter are further developed in the following chapter, specifically relating to the importance of value accordance, discipline practices and that these activities, axiomatic to parenting and family lives, can transcend the boundaries of the household. In terms of the broader thesis, this first substantive chapter has sought to establish that within notions of family there are themes that recurred throughout the data; that the establishment of a perceived unity of experience is an essential feature of how people understand family lives. This claim has great significance for the life-stage the young people in this study are experiencing as the teenage years are characterised by the establishment of autonomy and independence. The following chapters, especially Chapters 4, 6 and 7, will investigate how this attempt by parents to create unity and accordance both within and beyond the household interfaces with the developmental prerogative for young people to establish fledgling adult identities outside the household.



## **Chapter 4.**

### **Families as Social Capital.**

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#### 4.1 Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to explore, through the accounts of parents and their teenage children, the influence of social networks upon the shape and form of family life and activities. In this respect it continues the themes that emerged in the previous chapter by showing how social networks contribute to two important aspects of parenting and family; of establishing value consistency and assisting discipline. As with the processes of discipline in families with non-resident parents, it also shows how the activities that constitute parenting transcend households. In relation to adolescent autonomy, social capital shows this process does not take place away from the value systems of parenting but is bounded to an extent within it. As such, the findings presented here contribute to the overall thesis by showing how the establishment of value networks forms part of a family habitus which can influence life course transitions.

In recent years, the idea that social networks are influential has been revived as the notion of social capital has gained theoretical currency. This is despite its status as a concept that, as I will be showing, as yet has no definitive formulation, since competing theorists have offered different interpretations. A theorist of particular interest to this study is Coleman (1987, 1988, 1990), since his exposition of the concept pays particular attention to the relationship between family structure, the number of resident parents *and* siblings in creating and maintaining access to social capital. Whereas findings from this study support and develop a practical understanding of the importance of Coleman's key idea of intergenerational closure, they also reveal that Coleman's understanding of family dynamics and processes has underplayed the contribution of younger family members to household economies. I hope to show that Coleman's ideas have much to offer in understanding the place of a family's interaction with wider networks in the reproduction

of young people's life chances, and his work has undoubtedly illuminated the data collected in this study. However, the evidence collected here suggests that as the shape and form of contemporary families has changed, Coleman's theory is in need of updating. Just as families have not remained static in their surface characteristics, so too the relative importance of family members' roles have changed in their contribution to family social capital.

Additionally I suggest that Coleman has also ignored the potentially negative effects of high social capital, particularly of how close-knit social networks are not unilaterally beneficial to every member of the community. Finally, the way in which social capital is operationalised as a concept is also developed. The qualitative methodology adopted in this study meant that social capital was not viewed as a measurable property, but more in the spirit suggested by Morrow (1999b) "*as a set of processes and practices that are integral to the acquisition of other forms of capital*" (p744). By using the concept in this way, we can begin to understand a key mechanism through which family practices can influence the life chances of young people.

#### **4.2 Social capital; a brief overview of the concept**

Although he was not the first to use the term, the current popularity of the social capital concept owes much to Putnam (1993) who conceptualised it as a property or quality possessed by communities. Morrow (1999a; 1999b) describes Putnam's conception of social capital as pertaining to the sense of belonging, reciprocity and trust that exists within and between communities, voluntary organisations and the state. Leeder and Dominello (1990) summarise Putnam's formulation of social capital as the norms and networks of civil society that enable groups of individuals to cooperate for mutual benefit and allow

social institutions to perform more productively. It was in this spirit that the Government Green Paper *"Our Healthier Nation"* (Department of Health, 1998) alluded to social capital in locating one possible determinant of good health in *"neighbourhoods where people know each other and trust each other and have a say in the way the community is run."* (para 2.16).

The concept has also been used by Bourdieu and is associated with his more familiar notion of cultural capital. Cultural capital, which covers a wide range of skills, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes possessed in varying amounts by individuals, is linked to the unequal distribution of economic capital. As all forms of capital interact with wider structures to reproduce inequality (Jenkins, 1992), it is through the possession of the various forms of capital that an individual can gain an advantage over others. Allatt (1993), for example, gives a clear account of how middle class parents can pass on attitudes and dispositions which translate into educational success. Conversely, Willis (1977) shows how learned attitudes and dispositions can determine labour market outcomes from the perspective of those who are *"Learning to Labour"*. In this often referred to volume, Willis elegantly shows how the anti-school, anti-authority attitudes and dispositions taken up by sections of working class youth assist their integration into low status occupations and ultimately deny them the social mobility afforded by their peers who adopt attitudes more consistent with the middle class culture of schools.

Social capital, within Bourdieu's understanding of it, refers to *"contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources"* (1993, p 143). In this formulation, the accent is very much on the role of social capital in the

reproduction of privilege and economic inequality. Rather than being a property of communities and the civic society as for Putnam, for Bourdieu it is possessed by individuals, as an indication of the potential economic worth of their social contacts.

Coleman's formulation of social capital, which predates that of Putnam and Bourdieu steers the mid-course between being a property possessed by communities or by individuals. He too conceptualised social capital as having a catalysing influence on the other forms of capital, and located its production in the relationship between the individual, family and wider social networks. His formulation is also influenced by the interest in adolescent development which brought him his original prominence through the publication of "The Adolescent Society" (Coleman, 1961). For Coleman, social capital is a set of resources *"that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive and social development of young people"*.

If other forms of capital, financial, physical or human, conceptualised in the social sciences are said to reside with or within individuals, social capital is very much a resource which resides in the relations between individuals, and is the means through which individuals can access and harness other forms of capital from those around them. In particular it can be key in the parent-child relationship and the socialisation process. For children and young people, the degree of social capital present within their family and community relations is as crucial as the amounts of physical, financial and human capital around them, if the enhanced life chances and benefits afforded are to be passed on to them.

It is his recognition of family's contribution in the production of social capital that makes Coleman's analysis particularly salient to the data gathered here. Central is his claim that

families in their modern, nuclear and privatised form represent a poor manifestation of domestic living arrangements for accessing social capital. For Coleman, families in former times would have been much more efficient producers of the commodity. One development in the modern era that he cites as eroding family social capital, is the separation of spheres of experience between home and work, and the necessity for most modern parents to work outside the home. Coleman (1987) writes of how initially it was only the father's time and attention which children and young family members were denied, as work increasingly took place outside the home and became more "corporate". Latterly it was also that of mothers, once it became necessary, or socially desirable, for their labour to be applied outside the home. He suggests that the establishment of a clearer distinction between home life and work life led to the development of parental networks outside the home, and thus, the social capital being produced by adults in the workplace by-passed their children in the home. However, the work of Allat and Yeandle (1992) discussed in the literature review, offers a differing British perspective on this claim. They show how work-based social networks can create useful social capital for older children as they make the transition to work. Additionally, they see the new forms of employment that replaced the old industrial ones as the originator of the decline in stocks of social capital rather than "corporate" society itself.

Returning to Coleman, the modern era that produced the "corporate" workplace also produced mass schooling, and the gradual handing over of child-rearing to agencies outside families such as schools, nurseries and community organisations. This process is seen as further separating the experiences of younger and older family members, creating separate networks with little opportunity for network closure between these ends of the household. Furthermore, the increasing privatisation of family life and the individualisation

of culture at large which followed led to a climate where each parent "*narcissistically attends to self development, with little attention left over for children, certainly for others' children*"(1987, p 37). The implication is clearly that community social capital is produced by strong families and available parents. Social capital is the gathered sum of family members' personal associations, which, shared across different spaces and made available to others, become greater than the sum of these associations. Modern, corporate society inhibits such sharing of associations, it is claimed.

Coleman goes further and suggests that the privatisation of family life is not the only process to inhibit the gathering of social capital. While the absence of working parents from the household is to the detriment of children's access to social capital, worse still, he claims, is the permanent non-residence of a parent, since regardless of the amount of human or cultural capital a parent possesses either within themselves or within their social network, it is worthless to a child if they are absent to pass it on;

*"The physical absence of adults may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital. The most prominent element of structural deficiency in modern families is the single parent family"* (1988, p 111).

Coleman also identifies a deficiency if the parents are present but family processes do not facilitate closure, for example, if a child or a parent spends a significant amount of time in communities beyond their family. As might already be inferred by the reader, Coleman also sees working mothers, particularly through single parenthood, as decreasing community and individual social capital. An additional and interesting factor believed to contribute to the decline of social capital is the number of resident siblings, which represents "*in this interpretation, a dilution of adult social capital*"(1988, p 111).

### 4.3 Intergenerational closure

A key concept in Coleman's understanding of the production of social capital is the notion of intergenerational closure, the absence of which represents a further circumstance in which the likelihood of social capital is decreased. At the base of this is the idea that the closure of social networks, in communities, and especially families, serves to reinforce norms of behaviour through collective sanctions. An example of the way this can happen is through the social use of gossip. Coleman proposes the formulation that if an individual (A) behaves in a way to another (B) that contravenes expected norms and values, B will tell another person (C) about this flouting of expected behaviour. In what Coleman describes as a closed system, there is a high possibility that A and C will know each other, therefore it is in A's interest not to behave in such a way that leads to the combined sanction of B and C. This has relevance to families and social capital when there is closure between parents in a community. Under such circumstances parents can communicate with one another and agree on the behavioural expectations they set for their own, and by extension each others' children, leaving them in a position to *"discuss their children's activities and come to some consensus about standards and about sanctions"* (1988, p 107). The closure of networks between families gives parents an added resource, since by agreeing sanctions they effectively increase the amount of adult monitoring that children receive as part of the process of establishing the *"trustworthiness of social structures that allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations"* (1988, p 107).

### 4.4 Research using social capital to account for adolescent outcomes

Although this study has utilised a qualitative, practice orientated understanding of social capital, it is worthwhile briefly outlining some of the existing quantitative research findings available. Much work using the concept has attempted to account for young



people's life course outcomes. Taken together, the research points to the generally positive effects of high social capital for young people. Within Coleman's identification of ideal circumstances for social capital production (two resident parents, an ideally small quantity of siblings etc) a series of hypotheses can be made to explore links between family structural and process characteristics and adolescent outcomes (be they behavioural, educational or developmental) mediated by access to social networks. In short, dual parent families with a single child and stay at home mother should represent the ideal in terms of the young person's access to social capital. Deviations from this model, one could hypothesise from Coleman's studies, would produce relative reductions in both quality and quantity of social capital available. In terms of family processes, Coleman's understanding of the origins of social capital would lead us to hypothesise that there are certain parenting styles which aid the development of social capital accessible to young people. In particular these are styles in which parents express an interest in young people's activities, and crucially, one would expect, involve establishing links with other parents; in Coleman's terminology, assisting network closure.

A significant body of research using social capital as a variable exists in the field of education. Coleman (1987) himself presents data showing that after controlling for human and financial capital in families, school drop-out rates were higher for pupils with a single parent, with several siblings and no maternal college experience. Although this last variable clearly refers to an index of cultural capital, the first two are hypothesised within Coleman's work as determining levels of social capital, and by extension, access to maternal cultural capital. A number of other studies have also related educational attainment to parental structure (Zimilies and Lee, 1991; Smith, Beaulieu and Israel, 1992; Lichter, Cornwell and Eggebeen, 1993; Teachman, Paasch and Carver, 1996; Sweeting,

West and Richards, 1988) and number of siblings (Smith, Beaulieu and Israel, 1992), although the latter association may be spurious rather than causal, resulting via additional factors correlated with both family size and intellectual development (Guo and VanWey, 1999). Contrasting somewhat with these findings is an analysis of children's use of time, focussing on *"activities presumed to affect their cognitive and social development"*, that found few differences in respect of parental structure, number of siblings or maternal work. One exception was higher television watching among children of mothers who were at home full time, compared to those in part-time employment (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997). This accords with the finding of advantage in a number of areas including educational attainment and economic position among young people who during their teens had lived with a single mother who was employed, rather than at home full time (Kiernan 1996).

Coleman's (1988) suggestion that lower drop-out rates from Catholic schools signify higher social capital in the surrounding community has also spawned research (Hagan, MacMillan and Wheaton, 1996; Runyan, Hunter and Socolar 1998). This has included efforts to show links between educational attainment and measures of intergenerational closure. These studies have had conflicting findings however, for example, while Carbonaro (1998) reports a positive association between closure and maths achievement, Morgan and Sorensen (1999) using the same data set, conclude the opposite, and instead suggest that *'horizon expanding schools'* may foster more learning than *'suffocating' norm-enforcing schools in which 'excess monitoring represses creativity and educational achievement'* (p.663).

Studies operationalising social capital as a variable have also concentrated on non educational life course outcomes such as the age of leaving home. Mitchell (1994), for

example, found that there was no consistent pattern among young people in single parent families (held by Coleman as an indicator of low social capital) in age of leaving home. Indeed it was those young people in families with step parents (offering compensatory social capital) who were more likely to leave home the earliest, a decision perhaps advanced by increased conflict.

#### **4.5 Findings from the research data; non-resident parents**

The aim of the present analysis is to use the accounts of parents and their teenage children to explore the notion of social capital as it relates to families. According to the scientific literature, the absence of a parent (assumed to be, and most often, the biological father) is generally hypothesised to have a detrimental effect upon a family's capacity to accumulate social capital. In the families I studied, those with a non resident parent were in all cases without a father. In terms of their understandings of support and parenting, respondents would often identify difficulties caused by this absence, although these difficulties were often believed to be surmountable. Across the cases studied, mothers in single parent households did not feel they were doing that badly and, despite strong evidence of problems which could be related to an absence of social capital in the family unit, these difficulties could often be emolliated through the contribution of other factors in the process and practices of family, household and parenting organisation.

In the case of the one parent households, the absence of a father who represented a male role model was often recognised as a missing element in both the household and the parenting received by the child. However, two other elements were also present in the accounts. Firstly, that there were alternative compensations available, and secondly, that the input of the biological parent is not by definition in itself always the most satisfactory

input anyway. Sometimes, the mother herself would be able to offer the compensation needed in the absence of a father as in this instance below;

*"I feel his own dad should be taking him aside and sort of talking to him about it. Well, he's not here! So I'll do it. It's not a problem. I've told them that I am here for them to talk to them about anything, no matter how bad they think it is, they know to come and talk to me."*

Karen White, single parent household.

In contrast are the words of the single parent mother covered at the end of the previous chapter, who told me she found it hard coping with teenage children in the absence of another resident and responsible adult, a complaint which could be re-interpreted as an absence of social capital caused by the absence of a second parent which impacts on the ability to parent. As such, it can be further interpreted as a process that explains the recognised associations between parental structure and outcomes for young people. It shows that compensatory alternatives are not always satisfactory. This concern could also be shared by other family members. For example, the teenage daughter of the same household worried about the effects of an unbalanced family in terms of gender roles.

*"I worry for Mark because we've not got any brothers or anything. I mean I've got my mum to talk to and that's like a girl thing, but Mark, I think he misses out a bit."*

Ann- Marie Kilbride, 16, single parent household.

The young person's anxiety about the situation of her younger brother gets to the heart of the way through which social capital allows other forms of capital to be passed on to children. Her belief is that in the absence of a same sex role model, her brother is missing out on something vital to the process of his development. However, if we look beyond the household and to the role played by extended kin, we begin to see that the social capital offered by these wider family relations can off-set the balance somewhat and can, in this

set of circumstances, contribute to the development of social capital. The absence of a parent in this way fosters alternative compensatory processes to increase the social capital present. Accordingly, when we hear her brother's interpretation of his own situation, he is more optimistic;

*"My dad is quite a good golfer but I never see him, and he always used to go 'yeah yeah. I'll take you to the golf' and things like that, but I only went with him once and he was rushing me and I couldn't take my time to play my shots and things like that, it was no good. My aunt and uncle, if they take me, they let me take my time about it and they'll actually help me with it. So I can't go with my dad because he is never here, so it's good having my aunt and uncle around."*

Mark Kilbride, 14, single parent household.

The example of a young person's aunt and uncle offering compensatory social capital in the absence of a father and male role model highlights a flaw in Coleman's location of the origins of social capital in familiar ties of residence. The flaw is that individuals other than biological parents can fill the role of offering social capital. However, the more we learn about this particular example, the more it underlines the importance of spatial proximity. Unfortunately for the young person above, who evidently benefited from contact with his aunt and uncle, they were unable to offer uninterrupted assistance; since their work took them overseas, the young person's golfing activity was sporadic.

A more satisfactory compensation is found in the household below, where a lone mother compensates for the deficit she perceives through utilising non-family associations;

*"I would say that most of my friends are friends to my kids as well and that they are generally interested in what the kids are doing and I think that is important ...I think it creates balance. I think we are a very girly household and Drew has particular problems in that being the only boy and sometimes my male friends are very aware of it and they'll*

*come particularly to chat to him, ask him boys stuff and such. They sort of single him out for special attention and I really appreciate that."*

Maureen McMaster, single parent household.

More evidence that non biological and non familial relations could compensate for the absences of parents comes in the following quote, which is significant if the reader understands that *Gordon* is not a blood relation, but the father of the teenage respondent's brother, although just as significantly, not his mother's current partner.

PS *"If you had a problem , who would you turn to first?"*

DA *"It would probably be Gordon."*

PS *"Right, why would you go to him first?"*

DA *"Because he's not part of the family but is more of a friend than he is a parent. I would rather go to my mum, and then Gordon. My dad, I'm not so sure about, he doesn't really like answering questions."*

David Anderson, 14, single parent household.

What the above instances display is that alternatives to the input of resident fathers are available; what it does not show however, is how satisfactory these alternatives are. One can assume that some input is better than none at all, and in two of the examples at least, the young people themselves suggest that the alternatives are preferable to the input of their fathers. Of course we have no measurement to ascertain whether the alternatives are better than in a more traditional household structure with two resident parents engaged in the act of parenting. It does, however contribute to the hypothesis and view of families in transition offered in the previous chapter, that the processes that make up family and parenting do not need to be carried out by those resident in the household or those legally responsible for young people.

Finally, another possible form of social capital could be the contribution of grandparents. In households with only one resident parent, the compensatory input of grandparents is often greater than in dual parent households (Thompson 1999). Below we hear of grandparents offering a high degree of vital support that is important in providing compensatory social capital.

*"David's round there quite a lot, when I'm late from work, they also pick Daniel up two days a week. Financially, I wouldn't say they help out, but they really help out child-care wise."*

Helen Anderson, single parent household.

Coleman's conceptualisation of social capital in relation to family overlooks extended kin, let alone former partners of mothers who may not necessarily be the father of a child in question. The types of assistance displayed above are not only recognisably acts of *parenting* per se but also examples of resources that can be described as social capital. It might also be assumed that the quality of assistance given by the blood related kin is superior to that given by the non-blood kin association on the basis that it is a more secure form of transaction. However, a way in which non- blood related family assistance can be superior is illuminated if we refer back to the notion Coleman identified as 'intergenerational closure' and the idea that it is necessary for an accordance of values between the parenting style and beliefs of a parent and the values of others whom children come into contact with whom may have an impact on the children's own value formation.

It is not only Coleman who places high priority on the conjugal unit as the focus of family life and as key in determining outcomes. Sociologists of the family (as described in Chapter 1) have long been preoccupied with a conception of family that sees this as the heart of the family. Evidence here suggests researchers from various perspectives who

focus to much on the conjugal unit are missing a variety of interactions beyond the household that are key to understanding processes involved in shaping outcomes for young people.

Previous authors (Morgan and Sorenson 1999) have commented on the fact that occasionally different parents, and often more so, grandparents, can provide values which far from enhancing life chances can actually be to their detriment. This is particularly the case in societies that are undergoing a degree of transition, when the values that led to social and labour market success a generation or so ago are not necessarily the same as those required today. In single parent households, this can mean that reliance upon grandparents for discipline and looking after children for significant periods of time, can produce a tension between the adult generations and a contesting of a parent's set of values. This is illustrated below by a parent who disagrees with her own mother's interpretation of behaviour such as "answering back". Where she sees the questioning of parental authority in positive terms, as providing an opportunity for the negotiation of boundaries and developing a sense of independence and an inquiring mind, the grandparents view such behaviour as impudence to which they might respond with sanctions. The different life experiences of the parent and the grandparents have produced a difference and tension in values and their understanding of what it means to be a good parent.

*"My mum and dad have totally different ideas and totally different principles. They have a different way of relating to David and some of the things which they try to impose, I wouldn't and they often try to override me. When I try to have a word with them it's all 'No, no, no,' they try to make out I am ungrateful, or something like that you know. I think that they are a bit old fashioned....I do need a bit of guidance, some times I am a bit too 'right-on', but it just feels like they are trying to override me."*

Helen Anderson, single parent household.



#### 4.6 Working parents

It is not just parental structures and the residence or non residence of biological parents which can inhibit social capital development. Within Coleman's analysis, the modern family and in particular the separation of public and private spheres are located as the root causes of reduced social capital available to young people. One of the most noticeable trends in family arrangements in the last few decades has been the widespread inclusion of women in the labour market. Again, the data collected in this study suggests that this process characteristic of modern families can be interpreted in both negative and positive terms in respect of their effect on levels of social capital. Below a middle class mother identifies the removal of both parents from the home on a full-time basis as denying children access to family social capital. Fortunately, for her, as we will see later, her work regime means her family can be organised so as to reduce the deficits she believes other households suffer from.

*"We've come across families where the parents are both doing respectable jobs and that is always their greatest downfall because both parents are out working. The kids are left with childminders, baby-sitters, they are shunted into their bedroom to sit in front of their own television, that sort of thing. They have very little parental input...they don't communicate with their family, they're just left to get on with it."*

Mary Prestwick, mother, dual parent household.

In the vast majority of families in this study, mothers made a contribution (and in the case of one parent households, the sole contribution) to a family economy. Obviously such involvement in paid work was essential to bringing in money to the household. The need to bring in an income, which is often necessary for day to day existence, is blamed by Coleman as reducing access to social capital. However, in some instances, strong

connections were made between having money and spending positive quality time with children. Thus the effects of working parents in reducing social capital are off set by two factors, firstly the clear economic necessity to work, and secondly the benefits that come with an increased income that can raise the quality of human and emotional capital invested in young people through the facilitation of more quality time. This is illustrated in the section below where a mother who has recently gained full time employment after being a student talks of how she sees quality time and income as linked;

*"We have the occasional treat days don't we. Grant cheque days, remember the grant cheque. If we get a wee bit of money that we weren't expecting, we go to the baths or the pictures, like do two things in one day don't we? I think soon we will definitely be spending a lot more quality time together as a family because I will have the money to do so. Like at the end of the week I will be able to say 'right. Lets go and do something' without leaving a bill unpaid"*

Karen White, single parent household.

As she states, a degree of financial security not only allows parents and their children to spend quality time together engaging in a shared activity, but also produces a stress-free environment which facilitates positive family relations. She continues here;

*"I don't think there will be as much stress as there is when you are worrying about money. There is no bigger worry than that someone is going to knock on the door asking for money."*

We can also perhaps take issue with Coleman's belief that the establishment of networks in the public sphere prevents the positive social capital it produces from benefiting other family members. As is revealed in the quote below, associations made at work can provide a useful resource to parents which ultimately can improve parenting skills, thus benefiting children.

*"My friends in work, one's got three boys and she's separated like me. I bounce ideas off her and she bounces them off me. Another friend in there, her husband's only there at weekends so she's a single parent through the week."*

Ann Kilbride, mother, single parent household

It seems then, that the claim that parents working outside the home decreases access to social capital is more complex than it first appears. From the perspective of family members at least, there may be compensatory mechanisms that produce a net balance over all.

#### **4.7 Siblings**

Coleman's hypothesis (1988) that a high number of siblings represents a dilution of available social capital to young people in families is perhaps also more complicated than it first appears. His view is grounded in a belief of the nature of childhood that views children as passive socialisees. In the present study there was strong evidence that older siblings in particular, far from diluting the social capital available, actually increased the amount of exchanges and resources of a non-monetary kind available to and within families. One particular way in which this resource benefits parents is through the process of value maintenance within families. Importantly, older siblings can act as providers of social capital to parents and their younger siblings alike. For example, in this study there were often reports of younger family members being taken on trips to swimming pools and town centres by their older siblings, gaining valuable information about life outside the family home and allowing a staging of independence from parents. This form of practical support is also underpinned by more value orientated input, with older siblings often acting as 'assistant parents' in terms of maintaining the value consistency outlined as important

by Coleman. Below we see how "network closure" can operate not just between parents in families, but how siblings become integral to the closure too;

*"What we have discovered is that the older siblings of our children's friends act as older siblings to ours, it sort of acts a bit like family, the older ones keep half an eye on the younger ones, which gives everybody more freedom."*

Paul Prestwick, father, dual parent household.

Older siblings can also act as role models for their younger brothers and sisters. If the values of older siblings are in accordance with those of the parent(s), they can act to reinforce these values by way of example. A mother and daughter illustrate how this can work in a beneficial way below;

Mother *"I think it is nice for Joanna to have big brothers because she gets to know their pals as well. It's quite good you going to Stirling and getting to know your brother's flatmates."*

Young person *"If they hadn't gone to university and everything, I don't know if I'd feel as strongly about going. I've seen, like what I have seen and think I'd quite like to do that as well."*

Lanark, single parent household.

However, sibling role models can have a negative effect also, perhaps best summed up by a young person who claimed *"If your brother or sister start taking alcohol, you'll start doing it as well"*. This belief was actually borne out in a number of accounts of early experiments with alcohol undertaken in family contexts such as parties with the knowledge and assistance of older siblings. However, such instances were not necessarily viewed as completely negative by parents. Indeed, experimentation under the watchful eye of older siblings could actually be viewed positively by those who held the view that young people will do these things anyway. The following extract is significant because it was given to me in the presence of the young person's mother, illustrating that there was a degree of

toleration of certain behaviours if the general trajectory was considered to be going in the right direction;

*"He's got a lot of freedom and stuff, he's got good friends up there and goes out every night, stays up until four in the morning. He get his essays done as well."*

Joanna Lanark, 16, single parent household

As well as value transmission, older siblings can also be a source of practical support. It was a normal expectation in the families studied that young people would take on more household activities and chores as they got older. Actions which might at first sight appear trivial, such as looking after younger siblings while a parent went out to the shops, or bridging the time between a younger sibling arriving home from school and their parent, would be subsumed under the description of social capital, if the exchange was being provided by a neighbour.

#### **4.8 Value maintenance**

Many parents made reference to the usefulness of having informal links with the parents of their children's friends, which was considered beneficial both in respect to the idea of discipline and also as providing a lead in the practical task of parenting. Below we see an example of the way that parental decisions about appropriate norms and expectations relating to understandings of adolescent development were negotiated and arrived at through consensus between parents;

*"I speak to Christina's pals' mothers on the phone and we all have a chat with each other, and with Robbie's pal's mum. I chat to her. We tend to talk about what we're going to allow them to do, so we're all going along at the same pace."*

Christine Johnstone, mother, dual parent family.

And additionally, this same mother makes explicit the role of informal networks in enforcing these agreed standards in relation to outside activities.

*"If there is anything I feel I am not happy about I would phone up and say. It was her friend's mum who came and told me Christina had been caught drinking because it happened in her house and I wouldn't have known, so we've got that kind of relationship because I would rather they came and told me and said what was happening."*

Christine Johnstone, single parent household.

Other children's parents could also act as a reference point from which parents could assess their own parenting, expectations and family processes;

*"I speak to other mothers as well you know...it's the same with any working family, the kids do their bit as well. The family across the road, they've all got their chores to do as well...I think we are just on a par you know, I don't think we are different from any other family. I deal quite a lot with other parents, I'm on the school board as a clerk so I mix with a lot of parents and we all seem to share the same sort of ideals at the end of the day."*

Marie MacManus, dual parent household

Having a degree of consensus appeared to reassure parents about the safety and conduct of their children while outside the family home, and outside their policing gaze. This was regardless of whether or not this trust was misplaced, it appeared that simple familiarity was reassurance in itself. In the following example a mother recounts how her own knowledge of the local residents allowed her to overcome initial reservations when assessing a potentially hazardous situation for her daughter;

*"I mean when you see some of these boys, and they've all got on these tracksuits and baseball caps and you think 'oh my Gawd, what are they like', but then you get to know them and they're fine. It's funny, she was going about with this crowd and it turned out I knew all their parents, I know all their parents and they're all nice, its like having a security blanket for me, to know she is mixing with people that I know the parents of."*

Christine Johnstone, dual parent household

*"I was shocked, I started going out with this new friend, not that long ago, she came to the door one night and my mum sees him and says 'What's your second name? Oh I know your mum, I know your dad, I went to school with your auntie.'"*

Christina Johnstone, 15, dual parent household

The reason that familiarity produced reassurance is a consequence of the fact that with familiarity, assumptions are made about similar attitudes and values as part of this familiarity. Similar standards and expectations are perhaps inferred between people who have similar or shared experiences. This was highlighted through discussions of newspaper articles depicting young people engaging in "delinquent" behaviours. Although parents would initially allude to circumstances within the family background as the root cause, when urged to explain this further they found a more specific answer elusive; seemingly it was not connected to either the number of parents present in the household or to income. Parental neglect and lack of discipline would be more often identified as root causes. Given this understanding, having an acquaintance with the parents of your children's friends is an effective method of ensuring that your own children are not brought into contact with such delinquent behaviour, since it is the values and attitudes of the parents, rather than the children themselves that are perceived as causal.

The closure of networks is important in the sense that it represents a closure of values as defined by Coleman. Parental understandings of the "safety" of their children corresponds not so much to their physical safety but to the safety of the values they are coming into contact with. This is perhaps summed up most eloquently by the following parent;

*"It builds up a network of people, of places, safe houses, places where you know their values are the same as ours, their outlook is similar to ours, they're not likely to encounter something we wouldn't like."*

Paul Prestwick, dual parent household

It is in this sense that the notion of social capital as defined by Coleman, with an emphasis on intergenerational closure, finds a proximity with the formulation of social capital Morrow (1999b) identifies as "European"; the notion of social capital as defined by Bourdieu. A well developed empirical investigation of Bourdieu's notion of capital and its place within families, parenting and bringing up young people can be found in Allat's investigation of "becoming privileged" (Allat, 1993). In this research she showed how parents invested young people with the dispositions, attitudes and values for educational and labour market success.

The investment of capital in young people also entails monitoring values and experiences in spheres outside families as well as in it, in order to ensure a degree of consistency. In the following quote from the present study, a father reveals the link between monitoring the values of those their children associate with and the investment of the wider notion of cultural capital. He does this by describing the kinds of values he would prefer his own children not to associate with;

*"Usually if you enquire you can discover they have television in their bedrooms, videos in their bedrooms, radios and cassettes in their bedrooms and that's what they communicate with. Their parents don't want to know. They come in here and think it is strange that our children actually want to talk to us, find it odd that we sit at the table to eat. We've had people come round for tea and they've not been able to hold a knife and fork."*

Paul Prestwick, dual parent household

The logical connection displayed here, between decreased life chances and not being "able to hold a knife and fork" reveals a belief that family practices such as the social organisation of meals can influence a child's life chances. The connection is perhaps more



an associated consequence rather than a direct cause, the link being in the system of beliefs and practices which Bourdieu would subsume under the notion of habitus. As Allat (1993) has shown, parenting styles can be subsumed under the category habitus and, importantly, parents who feel it is necessary to discriminate between the parenting styles of their children's friend's parents are aware of this. In this respect, it was not only family processes within the household that are seen as key, but the processes in operation between families (perhaps *intra-family* processes).

#### **4.9 Constraints on social capital development**

So far in this analysis the evidence has suggested that the family centred constraints identified by Coleman (parental structure, working parents, number of siblings) may not all operate in the anticipated manner. Indeed the last two variables might actually have positive effects in attempting to garner social capital. Despite the ability displayed in the instances so far of family members to adapt positively to circumstances, it remains that some structural circumstances do impinge negatively on parental and family access to social capital at both the household and community level. In the interviews a number of structural constraints were identified by respondents. Area of residence was one such example. Shared feelings of similarity with the surrounding neighbourhood emerge as an important prerequisite to the utilisation of social capital ties found at community level. An example of area effect is in the following exchange in which the values of the young people in the area are seen as a negative influence, contradicting the shared values of the mother and her son. The conversation followed a question about what factors would improve their life;

Mother            *"I think having our own house, it's a bit cramped here and the area we stay in isn't that great either..."*

Young person *"All the boys that stay around here take drink, take drugs and that. Some of them are just trouble-makers. There's guys living around the corner who I'm not that scared of but still, it can be little bit scary."*

Anderson household, single parent household.

For those with a higher income, more control over their living arrangements was possible, and this ability to be mobile gave parents more control over the types of area they moved into. A "good" area would be defined by the quality of social networks available, and the proximity of the values of the residents to their own.

*"Coming into the big town, one of the things we were looking for was a definite area, something with an identity, because we felt that we had an area with an identity where that gave us a degree of safety. It meant our kids could go out and be recognised as being one of our kids. We wanted somewhere that would give us that feeling. The likes of the big estates at the back of town were a non starter, they've no sense of community, they're soulless, faceless places, all commuters, dead during the day. Down here, it's a community, there's a lot of families down here that have moved in the last five years, the whole street consists of families."*

Maureen Prestwick, dual parent household.

In this case, the family actually had the power to move away from the original community to improve their access to social capital. The importance of proximate values is expressed in the fact that the mother identifies the residence of families as a crucially positive factor. By moving into an area with "families" they are moving into an area where the residents display a host of characteristics (*dispositions*) similar to their own.

Not all areas provide this facilitator of social capital in equal measure however. In some instances it seems the very factors that are seen as desirable can have a negative effect and it is possible to have too much of a good thing. When asked what it was about their

previous neighbourhood which they didn't like, this family revealed that the high level of community integration had been experienced by them as negative social capital. Their teenage daughter had suffered from bullying by the other local children, the level of integration being so great in the small rural community that the same children were present in all the public spaces of childhood.

Moving to a more urban community does not necessarily ensure more positive social capital however. One single mother who had recently moved described her old neighbourhood; *"if I needed somebody to watch the kids I could always go to a neighbour and they could always come to me"*. However, in the new part of town to which she had moved, the composition of the neighbourhood (childless and older) was in contrast to her previous experience (same age with children) and this precipitated a difference in values; *"well I didn't get off to a very good start because of my neighbours. For some reason they took a dislike to me. They put in complaints about Mark playing football and then a couple of times Katy had her friends up and they complained about that."*

Ann Kilbride, single parent household.

Economic factors made a significant contribution to this situation since the mother in question did not have the choice the Prestwick family had over residence. She was housed by a housing association and had to take a property when it came available and her name reached the top of the waiting list. The spatial shift her family underwent at this time, unlike the case of the Prestwick family, saw the establishment of a lived contradiction between her own values and those shared by those around her, a contradiction which made her parenting role more difficult.

A further economic factor emerges again in the Kilbride family as a constraint on the input of maternal human capital to the younger children. Here she describes her contact with her own mother as a drain on her time and resources rather than as a contribution.

*"She's (the grandmother) on her own, so I go and see her between my two jobs, most days. Just now, I've not been able to see her as often. When my sister comes home from abroad, at least that is a little pressure off me."*

Ann Kilbride, single parent household.

The influence of wider structural factors are evident when asked if the grandmother was able contribute to the day to day task of parenting. In fact the effort and resources required to enable this grandparent to see her daughter and grandchildren due to poor access to transport meant that any little benefits were effectively wiped out.

*"No, she doesn't really help out. I don't have transport, she lives on the other side of town, down the bottom of the hills, so she's got to get a taxi here which is quite costly, so needless to say she's not here very often."*

From the data presented, two substantive discussion points emerge. The first of these relates to Coleman's understanding of the relationship between families and social capital and the mechanisms at work which produce differential amounts "garnered" by family units. The research presented here allows us to re-evaluate the importance of Coleman's work, not only as a response to changes in family structures and surface characteristics, but also the ways in which family is being understood ontologically. The second substantive theme relates, quite separately, to the notion of values and their structural importance in the reproduction of life chances. The findings presented in the next section can contribute to the growing understanding of the ways by which relative economic and cultural advantages are passed between generations, and in doing so, present an understanding of how family practices are integral to this process.

#### **4.10 Discussion - Qualifying Coleman's theory in relation to family structure**

As the concept of social capital is understood in relation to the set of practices and beliefs subsumed under the heading "family", Coleman's model remains the most complete. However, as a model of the mechanisms by which social capital is passed on to younger family members it has at its core, a deceptively unproblematised notion of family that is highlighted through the adoption of an ethnomethodological perspective. The criticism that can be made of Coleman is that in adopting an understanding of family that is recognisably modernist and Parsonian, he has failed to reflect the reality of contemporary living conditions in which the notion of family is made reality. This has implications not only for the understanding of families but also for the types of activities that can be interpreted as passing on positive benefits to family members.

The first point which leads to this conclusion is the fact that a great deal of the exchanges and obligations that constitute family practices take place between households rather than exclusively within them. This is not to be confused with a claim that social capital is a community level attribute rather than one possessed by individuals or families. Social capital can be measured in communities and areas, but within these geographical boundaries there are also networks of people who carry out duties that are understood under the cultural terms of family obligations rather than as simply being a good neighbour.

Hence, non blood – related adults can carry out obligations that might be subsumed under the understanding of parenting practices, sometimes providing contact that is more satisfactory at least than that of non resident blood relatives. I have not been able to

conclude here that this contact is equal to the social capital provided by a resident parent. In the cases discussed, it was only ever better than an absent father whose contribution to the task of parenting was negligible, non-existent or had a detrimental effect on family cohesion and parenting.

A second emergent issue in the accumulation of social capital is the contribution of dependents themselves within families. Coleman's theory tends to perceive the exchanges between parents and their dependents as completely one way. However, it would be unfair to suggest he was responsible for this trend in thinking about family. Like the bounding of families to the household, it is a mistake characteristic of the understanding of families widespread through all but the most recent European literature which in relation to notions of children's dependency has only been questioned in the last couple of decades. For example, the work of Prout and James (1997) and Qvortrup, Brady, Sgritta and Wintersberger (1994) has been influential of late upon a body of research that has adopted the view of children as subjects and therefore as agents too.

The findings here point to the important influence of older siblings who are further along the continuum of development that leads to the autonomy of adulthood. They are not just active agents in their own maintenance but also in the maintenance of younger family members. They therefore are involved in acts which in the modernist, Parsonian understanding, are linked to the idea of parenting. Of course, if we were to go back in time to before the rise of Parsonian functionalism in American social science, or indeed before the cultural invention of adolescence, we might not be surprised to hear of substantial contributions being made to the domestic and familial economy by all able bodied

members of the household. However, in its contemporary understanding, this participation of legal dependents in the household economy has been erased.

#### **4.11 Discussion - The importance of values; social networks and Bourdieu's habitus**

This chapter has concentrated primarily on the ways in which family members harness social capital. To do this I have taken families as relatively autonomous units (with the individual family members comprising the family unit in the sum of their actions subsumed under the understanding of the idea of family). However, as well as taking the view from the "middle ground" (exploring the matrix of interpersonal relations which straddle the boundaries of households, families and their surrounding community associations) by interpreting the same data in terms of value maintenance and value transmission, we can also explore the wider structural implications. Values can be seen as a key mechanism through which life chances are reproduced for individuals as they represent the unspoken system of ideas which shape action and practice. These ideas play a role in reproducing life chances and socio-economic situations when they comprise attitudes to, for example, education, the body, or risk. Therefore this is not to reduce the notion of habitus to values, but to recognise that values are component and important part of habitus and the element of habitus analysable from the data collected.

According to Bourdieu, habitus is central to the understanding of agents' actions (*practices*), through being the system of ideas which guides actions. Bourdieu writes much on this, but in one key definition it is described as;

*"[S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise*

*practices... Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules."*(1978)

The notion of habitus addresses two central issues that are of relevance to the data presented here. The first is the issue of the ontological status of values, their origin and relationship to action. If parents are using social networks to pass on certain values, how is this related to future outcomes? In the above quote we see the habitus as the unspoken system of rules that are not rules in the strict sense, but are implicit rather than explicit. Like the idea of family itself, the beliefs which comprise the habitus are so taken-for-granted to the actor that they do not need to be explicated, explained or referred to; that they work is justification enough.

The origin of this system of values, beliefs and ideas is not in the application of formal rationality by actors to experiences; habitus is itself a variant of formal rationality which, *"Unlike scientific estimations, which are corrected after each experiment according to rigorous rules of calculation, the anticipations of the habitus, practical hypotheses based on past experience, give disproportionate weight to early experiences."* (1978, p 56)

For Bourdieu, the formative experiences of family life therefore are key to understanding the way in which operational systems of ideas are developed as part of the social conditions in which the habitus is constituted. In the data presented, we can also see quite clearly the building of the early social conditions, through establishing ties that both contain social capital, and through which early formative ideas are constituted. What is more, these ties are being engineered by parents at a phase in the life cycle of young people when the networks from which they develop their values from the family to those outside the home are being established. Evidence presented here suggests that some of the parents felt they could provide a "guiding hand" in helping young people establish social networks



that reflect their own values. This is a possible way in which parents can assist the process though which adolescents gain autonomy.

In addition to the ontological state and origins of the ideal/psychological component of action, a second issue Bourdieu addresses is that of agency and structure. Bourdieu states that in the generation of the habitus there is room for individual agency; we are not completely prisoners of our personal histories;

*"There is action, and history, and conservation or transformation of structures only because there are agents, but agents who are acting and efficacious only because...as socialised organisms are endowed with an ensemble of dispositions which imply both the propensity and the ability to get into and play the game."* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p 19)

I make reference to these two theoretical points as each casts light on the findings of this study. In terms of the first point, the primacy of family in shaping the individual habitus, we can see in the families covered how the formative experience of family generates the system of ideas that constitutes an individual's habitus. Thus, in one middle class family we see on behalf of the parents, an active construction of networks that expand the formative social conditions that are seen as maintaining their relative privilege. The identification of a certain class of people belonging to, in their words, the same "clan", can be substituted with the word habitus without losing the original intention of the speakers. It also suggests that in some households, there is an active affiliation and identification with a particular class location, even if the word "class" is not used by respondents. Moreover, identifying certain people as belonging to the same class location as oneself, as sharing the same habitus, has a more practical consequence than just securing a sense of identity and orientation in the world but also shapes the provision of people and resources that form the basis of social capital exchanges.

Thus by investigating data on the uses of social networks within these families, we see not only how networks and social capital are utilised by parents within their parenting strategies, but also the degree to which access to social capital can be shaped by those structural factors, external to the idea of family structure. Unlike the hypotheses established earlier in the chapter from Coleman's theories, deviation from a normative model of family is not necessarily an impediment to garnering social capital in itself. Like the similar concept of cultural capital as formulated by Bourdieu, social capital ties are generated in and formative of living conditions which reflect wider socio-economic trajectories.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Mealtimes and families**

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## 5.1 The meanings and uses of mealtimes in families

This chapter addresses data provided by respondents in regard to their mealtime practices. Specifically, it refers to the impact that changing family structures and work patterns had upon on people's understandings of this activity, and in so doing it provides an opportunity to investigate a practice synonymous with a certain set of values (*familialism* or "traditional" family values) in the context of the living conditions (structural, financial and normative) in which they are enacted. Within the diversity that shapes the living conditions of contemporary families, I ask how do families feed themselves, and how are such feeding activities related to the changing idea of family and family time? Doing so revealed a continuity with the habitus, or values orientated, theme that emerged in the last chapter. In short, the values that shaped mealtime practices were related to the broader set of values that constituted the normative backdrop to child rearing practices of parents in the study families.

The decline of the traditional family meal is an issue not lost on both the popular imagination and researchers. During the course of the data collection and analysis a number of newspaper articles mourned its passing, coinciding with *Bisto*'s decision to end their long running advertising campaign based around the idea of the collective family meal. Although for the Bisto family it was a life-course effect rather than the consequences of marital separation or the pressures of long hours at work (both unlikely for a campaign which has become synonymous with an idealised perception of family life), it was still interpreted by some media commentators as being of great social significance. Reasons that families do or do not eat together are multi-dimensional and based around the practicalities of day-to-day life, but interesting differences also emerge around the notion of what it is that people expect the family meal to do for them and their families.

The existing literature shows the sociology of the meal as having a fragmented and disjointed history, only recently taken seriously as a topic of investigation. Although there has been something of a boom in the subject over the last fifteen or so years, widespread changes in family structure and the experience of family life has reopened the topic for further investigation. The data shown here illustrate a variety of experiences both congruent and in contrast with reported trends towards less structured, individualistic forms of feeding or "grazing" (Anderson, Macintyre and West 1993), which could plausibly be connected to the restructuring of family life itself. For this reason the chapter's main aim is not only to report the status and organisation of family meals, but to identify reasons for the similarities and differences between respondents' accounts. These explanations refer to both individual preferences and understandings (agency) and also the constraints and opportunities shaped by social and financial circumstances (structure).

## **5.2 The sociological history of the meal**

Like families themselves, the everyday nature and taken-for-grantedness of the family meal has been the subject of a conspicuous silence until relatively recently. Mennel, Murcott and van Otterloo (1992), who have perhaps in recent years done more than others to introduce the subject of food and eating to a wider audience with their introductory text, reveal the disjointed and marginal development of the sociology of the meal amongst the work of sociology's founding fathers. They suggest that sociology as a discipline first had to "grow up" and gain the respect of other academic disciplines before it could turn its attention to the everyday, and more importantly, feminised arenas of experience such as the domestic household, family and mealtimes.

Of the early studies, Durkheim's analysis of the religious significance of food was more an anthropological investigation of its uses, and reveals little of interest to the student of modern societies (Mennell, Murcott and van Otterloo 1992). Although Marx was silent on the matter of mealtimes, the importance of food in the Marxist interpretation of history was implicit in Engels' (1845, reprinted 1987) analysis of food access among the industrial proletariat. Here however, food itself was the resource under investigation as a proxy for the wider structural inequalities of industrial society. For Engels, food choice was determined entirely by issues of wealth and access, with perceptions of taste and the reason for the family meal as an almost universal and pre-eminent feeding form in industrial society left un-investigated.

Of all the early pioneers' work regarding meals, only Simmel's work on food and feeding (1910, reprinted 1997) seemed to accord with motifs in the contemporary literature. He moved on from the nutritional emphasis of Engels' materialist approach to bring culture into the analysis of meals. He identified the transformational nature of shared meals; creating groups out of loose individuals. He suggested that the significance of the shared meal was not that participants eat the same food, the fact is that they ate different portions and hence the centrality of the plate to the modern meal, but that people were "*creating common flesh and blood*" (1997, page 131). Here for the first time a sociologist imagined the significance of the meal in the formation and maintenance of social groups, applicable, if not explicitly so in his writing, to social forms such as families.

The regularity of the meal as a form is identified by Simmel as a defining characteristic of the civilised mind over the primitive. His assertion that primitive peoples "*do not eat at set times, but rather anarchically - eating individually whenever each person gets hungry*"

(1997, page 131) has interesting implications for the trend toward "grazing" amongst young people (Anderson, Macintyre and West, 1993). His identification of the hierarchy implicit in mealtimes, and the notion of eating out of turn, is later reflected in feminist interpretations such as that of Charles and Kerr (1988) of family meals where the male breadwinner's needs are privileged as the traditional "head of the table". Further, Simmel's identification of the "aesthetic stylisation" of the meal from table lay out to the style of conversation is reflected in contemporary work looking at consumption styles, and he even identifies class based differences: "Among the lower classes, where the meal is essentially centred on the food in its material sense, no typical regulations regarding table manners develop" (1997, page 130).

Such themes have since been returned to with the theoretical shift that has seen an emphasis on patterns of consumption, as a response to the increased prosperity and affluence that are more widely enjoyed in general by contemporary society. This climate has sustained the family meal as a credible topic for serious sociological investigation strengthened by its reclamation by the feminist movement (discussed later). Bourdieu both exemplified and brought to the mainstream this interest in consumption with the approach taken in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). Here, he sought to show how class stances and identification came to be established through common patterns of consumption. As industrial society goes through a transition characterised by an abundance and (formal) freedom of access to food and nutrition, it is the reproduction of identities through food and feeding which becomes the key issue for those interested in the sociology of food. Douglas comments of Bourdieu that he has shown how foods can become a means of social grading so much so that "apparently innocuous food tastes are guilty of mean social striving" (1972, page 9). However, I feel Douglas perhaps

underestimates Bourdieu's project with this remark. His intention was more than just the description of varieties of "conspicuous consumption" à la Veblen (1949), but the development of an understanding of how economic inequality is reproduced through actors assimilating a feel for the everyday workings of their social space (their *habitus*). Bourdieu attempts to bring the insights of the anthropological perspective, combined with the potential explanatory power of economic structuralism, to tie the taken-for-granted at the everyday level to the reproduction of wealth, prestige and honour at the societal level.

### **5.3 Anthropology, food and families**

Before exploring these themes further, it is worth addressing in more depth the contribution made by the discipline of anthropology with regard to food and feeding, particularly in relation to the formation and identification of social groups such as families. This is also relevant to my own data which looks at the form feeding takes, as much as food choice. The Structuralist approach of Levi-Strauss is a good example of anthropology's recognition of the cultural importance of food in relation to social organisation. From comparative studies he has shown how universal methods of food preparation have distinctive social meanings through identifying what he describes as "exo-cuisines" and "endo-cuisines" (Levi- Strauss 1963). The former refers to food prepared in ways that make it culturally more appropriate for offering to those beyond the boundary of the immediate social circle or family groupings, while endo-cuisines are offered within it. Endo- cuisine is seen as higher status as it demands more sophisticated methods of preparation. Levi-Strauss has thus identified how the type of food that is served sends a message about your status in relationship to a social group.



Douglas offers a development of this idea based on her own family economy in distinguishing between the categories of "meals" and "drinks". The lower status category of "drinks" are for "strangers, acquaintances, workmen and family" whereas "[M]eals are for family, close friends and honoured guests" only (1975). Quite stringent behavioural expectations are attached (at least in Douglas's upper middle class home) to feeding activities designated "meals". For example, participants are expected to sit at a table and only leave when it is deemed culturally appropriate. For children this often involves asking permission to do so. "Drinks" on the other hand are consumed in less formal settings (not necessarily at a table) and therefore have less stringent behavioural expectations attached.

Fieldhouse (1986) has continued the anthropological approach to feeding by explaining how food and eating can be seen as an integrated and coherent part of culture. He links food and the organisation of families in a number of ways. The first of these is via the way families, in their role as the primary agent of socialisation, have a powerful effect on an individual's food preferences (Fieldhouse 1986). Fieldhouse starts from the premise that cultures are highly selective in defining substances as either edible or inedible, often on criteria which have little to do with intrinsic nutritional value. He acknowledges that while these tastes are learnt first in the home, other socialising agencies such as the school, peer group and the media can also intervene. He also adds that socialisation can be a two way process, with children shaping adult food preferences as much as vice versa. (Of this Valentine (1999) provides an example of a young child shaping family preferences through her own adoption of vegetarian principles. The fact that she heard of vegetarianism through a school friend affirms the multi-agency approach to food socialisation.) Fieldhouse believes that the primacy of family within the socialisation process gives it a

more privileged position, thus explaining the high failure rate of "re-socialisation" or health education programmes.

A second way that Fieldhouse connects food and family is as "one of the basic mediums through which adult attitudes and sentiments are communicated to the child" (1986, page 4). His examples include the incorporation of feeding practices into discipline styles, positively reinforcing desired behaviour and sanctioning that considered undesirable, and the process of learning by example. This linking of attitudes to food may have powerful repercussions in adulthood, as Lupton (1994) discovered when she asked adults to write down food memories. What was often remembered were the social circumstances of the food event, rather than the food itself. These could be family arguments, punishments for not eating certain foods (establishing aversions into adulthood), sibling rivalries, or attempts to instil good manners meeting resistance.

#### **5.4 Feminism and the reclamation of the everyday**

Concentrating on the theoretical development of the literature we find that the rise of feminist critiques in the 1970s brought the topic of family meals into the sociological mainstream. The emphasis on gender relations also ensured that it was specifically the organisation of mealtimes that became the focus, and not just the analysis of food content. It was after this theoretical shift that Charles and Kerr (1988) used interview methods with mothers to study the experience and organisation of mealtimes, finding that food and feeding practices often reproduced families in a patriarchal form. They showed this happened via two avenues: firstly, that women felt pressure to ensure that family members received adequate levels of nutrition and the trappings of a healthy diet; and secondly,

social pressure for a family to behave in a certain way, concordant with what it is to be a "good" family. A "good" family meal, with all members present, was seen as a cornerstone of family life, deviation from this particular pattern being regarded as a sign of deprivation by the mothers they interviewed.

This notion of a proper meal had deeply ingrained gender implications in Charles and Kerr's study; it was always cooked by the mother and was almost always defined by the father's presence at the table. If the father was away, then the proper meal would be abandoned in favour of less structured and less formalised forms of feeding, often giving preference to children's tastes and preferences. Patriarchal priorities were also reflected through food consumption within families, with men's high status in relation to women and children being reflected through their greater consumption of high status foods, particularly meat and alcohol, against low status children's foods. Women represented a mid-way point in the hierarchy which was reflected in their eating patterns (high status when eating with their partner, low status when eating with just the children).

Charles and Kerr (1988) also emphasised the idea that the family meal as an important part of family ideology cuts across class boundaries. Middle class as well as working class families had the family meal as an important focus of family identity, of which Christmas dinner was the prototype; a celebration of family as much as anything often with extended family present (Charles and Kerr 1988). In contrast, De Vault (1991) plays up class differentiation within understandings of the meal. Within working class families, she claims the priority is to protect resources and support wage earners, whilst amongst the middle classes there is an emphasis on entertainment and an enjoyment of interaction for its own sake. This came across in her interviews where the middle classes talked of meals

as important sources of entertainment and pleasure. De Vault also found that men in these households would be more interested in food and cooking and would often be the prime movers in encouraging more adventurous food choices. Her explanation for this, however, is consistent with Charles and Kerr's identification of patriarchal relations shaping mealtime patterns, in that it is male career patterns that call for an emphasis on cooking and entertaining in the maintenance of social networks which lead to social and career advancement.

### **5.5 The restructuring of family life and meals**

Warde and Hetherington (1994) suggest that Charles and Kerr's (1988) notion of the patriarchal family is a very specific cultural one. Using findings from their own study, they concluded that the organisation of family meals as identified by Charles and Kerr may in fact be a consequence of a life course effect, specifically in nuclear families with young children. The families in my study, representing families with adolescent children, displayed some variation from Charles and Kerr's mealtime organisation. It is perhaps not unfair to comment that Charles and Kerr's conception of families and family meals already seems dated and there are problems with generalising their findings to all families. For example, Charles and Kerr's insights would not transfer so readily to single parent households where often the same parent is both "server and provider" of food and primary wage earner.

Sanjur (in Fieldhouse, 1986) is reported to have projected that the diversification of family structures would produce changes in the way food is consumed within them. In summary it is suggested that the extended family as a social formation became associated with the set family meal, the nuclear family with increased flexibility and less scheduling, and finally the single parent family with individual family members becoming more

responsible for their own provision of meals. Findings in the present study show that these projections have not necessarily been reached, with differences in mealtime organisation being displayed *amongst* family types. Additionally, a frequent feature in today's nuclear families which also has consequences for the organisation of food consumption and the enactment and reproduction of gender roles, is both parents being in work. Warde and Hetherington (1994) also found that as children in families got older there would be a move to more self provisioning by young people, which is reflected tentatively (with a clear gender demarcation) in the findings shown here.

Meanwhile, Murcott (1997) urges caution that we should not casually accept the decline of the family meal, since research into such areas can produce a disparity between what people say and what people actually do. She claims that *"the chances are that we have precious little evidence for the reality of meals as an activity in which people do or do not engage, present or past"* (p. 37). What she does support however, is the fact that the "idea" of the family meal has always been, and remains, pervasive in understandings of family life, regardless of the certainty of claims about its everyday reality. In those families that do engage in a sit-down-together family meal, she suggests that it is far from idealised, with issues of cost and convenience (one meal means less preparation time) often being expressed alongside a desire to do things differently if circumstances were better. New forms of feeding aimed specifically at young people and teenagers may also have detracted from the centrality of the family meal as the main feeding event of the day.

However, although the trend towards "grazing" or snacking is well documented, research shows that the increase in snacking does not necessarily mean a decline in family meals. In the late 1980s teenage young people in Scotland ate on average 5.5 times a day with this

representing equal numbers of snacking and main meals, and 88% of these respondents (who were 15 years old) ate a main meal in the evening with a parent (Anderson, Macintyre and West, 1993). The fact that young people are eating on more occasions per day points to the technological revolution in food production and consumption that has freed households from the necessity of collective feeding. The issue of what is possible could be an important factor in the organisation of household meals, and freezers, microwaves and convenience foods open up possibilities for new eating patterns within families. Valentine suggests that a change in the ideology associated with family meals is understandable, as changes in lifestyle and domestic technology in turn promote and facilitate an alternative conception of families as a "stopping off" point; a convergence of individual pathways in the increasingly individualised experiences of time:

*"In particular, the growth of women in the paid labour market and the increased emphasis that is placed, certainly by middle class families, on providing institutional play and leisure opportunities for their children in order to keep them safe from public dangers (traffic and strangers) and to enhance their cultural capital, are, it is claimed, producing complex and diverse life patterns within postmodern families with the consequence that it is becoming less easy for members to co-ordinate their schedules so that they can sit down together."* (1999 page 504).

## **5.6 The organisation of mealtimes in families studied**

The existing literature problematises and challenges to some extent the existence of the "everyday" or "typical" family meal. The data gathered in the current study reveal that mealtime practices not only differed from an idealised vision of the family meal but also that what happened in practice did not follow a strict pattern. In reality, the "everyday" organisation could change from day to day in family homes; there were meals on weeknights which differed from meals on weekends for example. Even within the week,

individual nights would see variations as a response to the presence or absence of family members. My visits invariably caused a re-organisation of family meals in households, revealing how the contemporary family meal is not characterised by a rigidity, but an adaptiveness. Far from being a fixed point in time, repeated and re-enacted every night, its scheduling is open to continual change and re-negotiation against competing factors.

Despite this, a particular style of meal could generally be described by parents and children which, although not "everyday" in the literal sense, they identified as a practical norm from which other forms were a deviation. In a sense, these accounts were a practical compromise between the idealised version of the meal and the constraints of everyday life. Below (Table 5.1) I present brief summaries of each family's organisation of mealtimes which for comparability and to display the role of the meal in constructing family, focuses on one aspect of food organisation (whether they eat together) and one aspect of content (whether they have convenience or home cooked foods). It must be stressed that despite the quasi-quantitative way in which these are displayed, the aim is simply to illustrate the variety and forms of feeding that were evident in the families studied.

**Table 5.1****Brief Descriptions of Mealtime Styles in the Families Studied****Family Characteristics****Meal Style****One Parent households**

Low SES*	Would usually eat separately in time and space; young person at grandparent's house, but would occasionally (and preferably for mother) eat together in parental home. Home cooked food in former arrangement, convenience in latter.
Low SES	Older and younger siblings would eat separately. Self provision for older, mother would cater for younger and sit with them.  Space constraints and different food preferences a factor.  Convenience food.
Low SES	Would sit together for evening meal. Convenience food.
Low SES	Separately on week nights, together at least once at the weekend, convenience on weeknights, home cooked for "family" meal.
Low SES	Together, at table, mixture of convenience and home cooked foods.
Low SES	Separately, in different rooms. Prepared by Grandmother.  Convenience
Low SES	Eat together, convenience or take away food.
Mid SES	Eat separately, individual activities more important than collective meal. Convenience and home cooked food.
High SES	Eat in separate areas, flexible to accommodate individual activity.  Mixed convenience and home cooked food.
High SES	Separately with high degree of self provisioning. Convenience and home cooked.



High SES	Eat together at table. Home cooked food.
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### Two Parent households

Low SES	Eat together at table. Food choice determined by mother's work schedules; convenience when busy.
Low SES	Parents eat together, child eats separately sometimes different food from adults. Convenience and home cooked.
Low SES	Whole family eat together, workload spread between two parents according to paid work schedules. Home cooked and convenience.
Mid SES	Parents eat together, children have same food at same time but different activities (eg, watching TV). Convenience
Mid SES	Eat together same food, both parents prepare food according to employment. Convenience and home cooked.
High SES	Eat together when possible. Home cooked.
High SES	Eat together, different activities. Convenience foods and home cooked.
High SES	Together, home cooked food.
High SES	Separately, by sibling age. Convenience food.
High SES	Together, home cooked food.
High SES	Together, home cooked food.

\* For discussion and definition of SES please refer to Chapter 2

To help in understanding the data collected, it is worth considering some working hypotheses I developed from my reading of the available literature as a starting point for analysing talk I collected about mealtime practices. The first of these was that in terms of economic background we might have expected there to be differences in the organisation and form of family meals. This could have been on account of material and/or cultural

factors. Material factors might have revealed themselves in terms of the possibility of a collective family meal relating to there being enough time available. Having the option of all family members available to both prepare and consume a family meal is a privilege that relates to having a parent freed from working outside the home for the time it takes to shop for and prepare the meal. Similarly, having the time available for family members to sit together and consume a collective meal is contingent upon the same factors. From this material/ economic perspective one might propose that the further away a family is from an idealised middle class, dual parent structure with clearly separated, traditional gender roles, the less likely they are to engage in a traditional family meal.

However, we must also take account of another economic fact, that women are present in the workforce in significant numbers today and that even in dual parent households, a combination of cultural shifts and technological innovations are offering women more choices. Today's "superwoman", as The Guardian newspaper famously tagged Nicola Horlick (1990s fund manager and mother), combines a successful public role with a traditional domestic one, as an available carer as well as breadwinner. In less superhuman circumstances, we might at least expect to see women in dual parent households contributing to the family finances through participation in the labour market to some extent, especially with new domestic technologies freeing up time. Additionally, we might also expect the developmental capabilities that accompany adolescence to effect the organisation. Not only are teenage young people more able than their pre-pubescent siblings to contribute to feeding themselves, but in addition the desire for autonomy and peer group friendships outside the home might produce an idea of the household as a stopping off point. The desire to do things outside the home at this age, such as sports, commercial leisure opportunities or simply "hanging out with friends" might also make a

sit down family meal more difficult to achieve. As Valentine (1999) has pointed out, this might also have a cultural/ value determinant, with families wishing to pass on the values of their relative social class privilege *either* through an enforced collective family meal, or through the encouragement of autonomy and the "right sort" of activities that enhance life chances, through outside interests. Therefore we should not formulate hypotheses about whether or not a family choose to eat a family meal together purely in terms of domestic economics and the relative pulls of paid versus non-paid work. There is a cultural component too, in the way in which a family meal is meaningful or not to a family. Given Valentine's identification of the suspension of the family meal as being associated with both positive and negative parenting practices, I hypothesised that the decision to hold a family meal might be indicative of a particular parenting style relating to discipline and communication priorities held by the parents in an attempt to increase cultural capital. However, these same priorities could see the suspension of a family meal if a suitable alternative through outside individual interests emerged.

A fair degree of variation and diversity in the organisation of family meals was revealed. Furthermore, there were disparities between what people did everyday and what was considered ideal. There was also a lot of mixing between the use of convenience foods and home prepared meals with home cooked foods being reserved for "special" occasions when there was a "sit down" family meal. This would suggest that home cooked food and sit down family meals were synonymous and at the opposite end of the continuum from the flexibility afforded by convenience foods and technologically innovative methods of preparation. Income also seemed to facilitate more use of home cooked food. The fact that more traditionally structured families used home cooked foods would suggest a link to the increased income of two potential wage earners present. These findings would not run

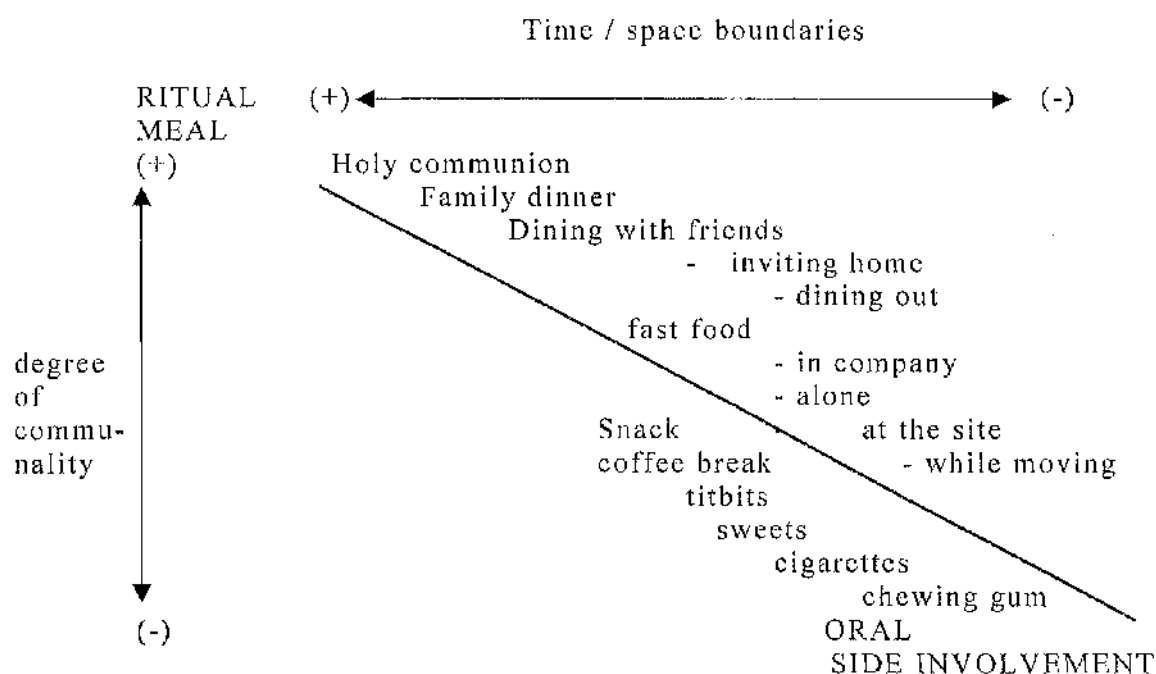
counter to the preliminary hypotheses established earlier. What is perhaps of more interest is the fact that in families which could not, for certain socio-economic or structural reasons, afford (in terms of cost or time) the collective family meal, nonetheless it remained very much alive in terms of the idea and possibility. Often they would still have family meals when time allowed (such as weekends or holidays) or, significantly, when an absent or extended family member was visiting; a phenomenon explained by the "communion" model of collective food consumption as shown below (Figure 5.1). Additionally, in those households in which a family meal was a possible and regular feature of regular feeding practices, this did not lead to the complete exclusion of less structured feeding practices.

A methodological issue which obscures a fuller comparison relates to the distinction I have made between home cooked and convenience foods. This is problematic not only because home cooked and convenience foods could conceivably appear on the same plate, but that respondents may also have different ideas as to what constitutes a convenience or a home cooked food. Very few food stuffs arrive in our homes without some industrial processing being involved in their production. Distinguishing at what point this processing, such as packaging to keep freshness, or the pasteurisation of milk, makes a "convenience" food is a decision as culturally bound as the decision to sit and eat a family meal together itself. Using my own estimations of what constituted home cooked or convenience food does not overcome the cultural boundedness of such definitions. What is more, if a child told me that their mother made them, for example, a lasagne, I could not always tell to what extent it could be categorised as being one or the other.

## 5.7 Understanding and explaining differences in mealtime practices

Due to the small numbers involved, the nature of the analysis and the methodological issue of possible differences between what people say they do and what happens in reality, I would not wish to overstate the rigidity or robustness of the predominant styles of meals I have identified as being linked to the family types represented in the study. However, as an exercise before moving onto analysing people's talk about mealtimes it was useful. What was highlighted in their talk was that some families had very strong and consistent ideas about the role of the family meal in their household and family. It was these ideas which proved to be more interesting than trying to ascertain how they actually prepared and consumed food on a regular basis. What did emerge from the table is that families would display a different proximity to the idealised communal family meal. The reasons for this are explored in the remainder of this chapter.

**Figure 5.1** The "transformation of eating culture"



*(Falk, 1994, p 31)*

Falk's model of the "transformation of eating culture" (figure 5.1) rests on the idea that modern "oralities" can be seen as a continuum from the highly collective and social "Holy Communion" to more individualised forms such as chewing gum and smoking which, although not food in themselves, have similar social and psychological connotations bound up with the modern experience of *appetite* (Falk 1994).

Using this model as the basis for an analysis of meal styles of families it can be suggested that the place of the collective family meal in ideology is connected to the reproduction of the social collectivity of families. In certain families the collective meal was accorded high status, illustrated through religious metaphors evoked to describe the role of the collective meal in sustaining family life. Sunday meals would, for example, be referred to as a "ritual" whilst others talked of a family "congregating" around the table. Its transformational character, making family from individuals was not lost on respondents.

*"I don't think food should be eaten in the bedroom really. I think you should sit together at the table; I think it is a very important part of family life."*

Helen Corkhill, dual parent household..

Elsewhere, activities that are facilitated by the act of communal eating are identified as producing and reproducing family.

*"It's an opportunity for everyone to sort of talk... chat to each other, to pull together as a family unit, and you don't get that if everybody is out during the day."*

Mary Craig, dual parent household.

However, the place of the collective meal in the day-to-day economies of households is not assured, despite the high regard it is accorded within the ideology of family life. Rather, the trend toward separate and individualised forms of eating was a prominent feature of

everyday life in the families interviewed for this study. A number of processes shaping mealtime practices seem to be in play which can be organised under the more general categories of *constraints* and *style*. The first term refers to explanations given by respondents for mealtime organisation which cite issues beyond their control and connected to socio-economic status. The second refers to those which identify preferences chosen by respondents which, although often shaped within what socio-economic status makes possible, also draw on other beliefs about areas such as parenting, family, or what is considered the best or normal way of doing things. These elements are also tied in with the values of parenting. The first of these I will discuss are those of *constraint*.

### **(A) Constraints**

The simple *desire* to eat together and to eat a certain form of food (such as home cooked) is often not enough to ensure that "traditional" collective family meals become a feature of a household. Issues of cost, time and space all feature in the way domestic feeding activities are organised.

#### **(i) Costs**

To take the first of these constraints, cost, respondents show that this can have a strong determining influence in the minds of some parents over the content of the meal. In the following extract we are talking about the idea of "a healthy diet" and the mother tells me of how income overrides considerations of health;

*"I can tell him [son] all I like about healthy eating, but at the end of the day, I've got to stretch my money as far as it can go. So on the one hand you're telling them eat plenty of fresh fruit and veg and this and that and on the other you can't buy it... I know what I can do, it's not that I'm not educated about what you need to be healthy but again it is the*

*money ...you buy food that will fill you up so you don't buy fresh fruit and veg and the meats and that ...I'm saying to Mark, 'don't eat fish suppers, they're bad for you, eat fresh fruit and veg', then I've made him something which is chips and soup with six slices of bread to fill him up, so you're contradicting yourself... I mean there's this giro in today, and that's backdated so it's about a hundred and fifty pounds, so I'll go to Safeway tonight and I'll fill the freezer with healthy stuff and fruit and veg and we'll look healthy for a fortnight, it'll be great and then we'll go back to unhealthy eating."*

Karen White, single parent household.

This mother quite plainly believes that income is an overriding factor over the types of meals they eat. Ideally she would try and build in her own beliefs about healthy eating but is unable to do this consistently. She makes this clear by saying how, when she can afford it, their eating style changes considerably and two styles are in operation according to the financial situation they find themselves; for this parent there is a contradiction between what her family can afford to eat and what she feels they should be eating. This quote is illuminated by Charles and Kerr's (1988) understanding of the relationship between diet and health beliefs in which they suggest that women's traditional idea of a healthy diet for their families is one based not solely on notions of nutritional science but of regularity. Thus a healthy diet equates to the setting down on the table of a meal of a certain quality regularly; failure to do this is seen as a sign of privation. It seems that ideas of nutritional science have now filtered into this understanding alongside the continued importance of regularity.

A subtle way in which income and cost affects mealtime style is through the use of convenience foods. In this way, the content of a meal can influence its form. Convenience



foods are not necessarily cheaper than fresh food but their use affects how time is utilised in the household. Their use can lead to savings through the fact that many parents found it difficult to get their teenage young people to eat fresh fruit and vegetables, and on the principle that wasted food is an expense, convenience foods were seen to be cheaper in the long run. Convenience foods not only shape the content of meals but their ease of preparation makes possible less structured and less organised family feeding patterns, giving them a clear advantage for working parents or young people who take part in after-school activities. Convenience foods can also more easily be prepared by young people in the household in a more independent manner.

## **(ii) Time**

The issue of paid work shaping the availability of time for, and nature of, the collective family meal was often unavoidable in certain households. Below, a mother talks about her own diet and the constraints that presumably not only affect how her meals are prepared, but those of her children as well.

*"I mean I know what I should be eating, but I just don't eat that because of the circumstances, because I'm not in at night to make a meal and by the time I am in, it's just a really quick thing in the oven or in the microwave for quickness."*

Ann Kilbride, single parent household.

This ease of preparation which makes convenience food the only option in households where time is at a premium is further compounded by the attractiveness of such foods to young people. This was revealed when I talked about the appeal of convenience foods over fresh foods with a young person from the same family;

*"There's always fruit there but I would never think to just take a bit of fruit instead of taking a packet of crisps. If I was just like hungry I would take a packet of crisps or a biscuit."*

Mark Kilbride, 14, single parent family.

The fact that constraints rather than preference led to a reliance on convenience food is underlined by the fact that on weekends, when she did not work, this mother provided a home cooked meal, such as a roast, which provided the family members present with an opportunity to sit down at the table together. On weekdays, however, this was both impossible and undesirable, as a consequence of time constraints and the established habits of family members. Additionally, the "teen appeal" of convenience food is shown to be a compounding factor as illustrated when the same young person talked about peer activity in which a considerable amount of time and money was spent on consuming convenience food, fast food and sweets. Here I asked what he spent his pocket money on when out with his friends;

*"Usually the first thing I would do when out on a Saturday is get something from the chippy and then go up to the square and buy sweets and stuff and we always go by the garage and get stuff from there."*

Mark Kilbride, 14, single parent household.

The domestic use of convenience food as a result of time constraints should be contrasted with its use in households where time is not in short supply. Having time available to prepare home cooked foods is not a sufficient condition for its provisioning. Even in families which do privilege and make available traditional family meals, convenience foods offer variety and interest which is appreciated by parents and, as will be discussed later, can complement their adopted mealtime style;

*"because of these convenience foods, there is so much choice now. When we were younger we got put down our dinner, told to eat it, and if we didn't like it, that was it."*

Eve Ferdinand, dual parent household.

### **(iii) Space**

The final constraint factor that emerged during the course of the interviews is that of space. Traditionally the dinner table has been the spatial focus of a family meal (Douglas 1975). However the availability of an adequate table should by no means be taken for granted in all households. Even in more affluent families the family dining table was often used for a variety of purposes. In two households the dining table had evolved into a workstation for the mother's work and the children's homework. In a third, it was becoming established for the family to eat meals from plates on their knees, as it became more common for the father to use the dining table as a desk when work was required to be done at home. In a fourth, less affluent household, there was a conflict of interest over what use to put the limited space within the house. A fold-out table was available, but its use would mean moving other furniture and upsetting the layout of a room used as a living room for relaxing and watching television. The predicament of the mother in the household was interpreted as a denial of choice through lack of access to the type of housing she would ideally choose. In this last instance, space can be seen as an issue related to socio-economic factors.

### **(B) Style**

The risk with emphasising the socio-economic constraints on individual families is to deny the amount of choice that parents have, and believe they have, in shaping family meals. Furthermore, it can also lead to an overemphasis on factors such as content and form, missing what parents are trying to do over and above the simple provision of food. As well as viewing the traditional family meal as an activity that produces and reproduces family as an ideology, on a more individual level it can be seen as something that produces and reproduces individual familial interpretations of this ideology. As well as understandings

of health beliefs and nutritional science, the way mealtimes are organised also reflects parental understandings of what it means to be a "good" or "bad" parent, to be a family, and of the emotional and developmental needs of adolescents.

It was clear when interpreting understandings of family mealtimes, that there was not one overarching ideology of family life in operation. What became apparent was that family members, in particular parents, had individualised versions of a wider family ideology, taking certain parts of it to fit their own beliefs and circumstances. These ideas were often related to the more specifically defined areas of parenting and child rearing. Family ideology in Bernades (1997) terms, what is considered "right" or "wrong" in the way family life is organised, in effect referred to the right or wrong way to bring up children. It was not only parents for whom this was important either, as is discussed in the following quote, which illustrates how the discourse of a "good family" informed a particular adolescent's thinking. The quote also reveals that the notion of having a time for togetherness, such as a family meal, is central to producing the essential collectivity of family.

*"I think it is really important to spend time with your family. It has been on the T.V. It is the key to having a good relationship kind of thing. Like if you can have once a week a time when everybody can sit down together, be it dinner, breakfast or lunch or whatever. Even if they go out for a meal, the four, the five how many there is in that family they should all do something once a week, all of them together to maintain a relationship kind of thing."*

Michael O'Connell, 13, dual parent household.

Similarly, in the following father's account, ensuring family time together through a meal is seen as compensation for the increasing independence of the kids.

*"The kids as they are don't spend a lot of time with us anymore as such. We spend every mealtime together, we always have meals together. So we get a lot more than maybe most families do – all be it if I'm away I still speak to them a couple of days a week."*

Martin Giffnock, dual parent household.

The ideology that families should be together was alive and well in these households and evident in the above quotes where the "togetherness" of families was seen as a defining characteristic of the "good" family. But what is it that they expected a "together" family to do? What functions do people think being together like a family at meals fulfils?

Looking at stylistic explanations of mealtime organisation cast some light on this question. Whether families chose to eat together (socio-economic constraints aside) or not, explanations related to five different aspects of parenting belief. Parents' positions in relation to these issues would either increase or decrease the likelihood of a regular collective family meal. These first of these parenting issues I coded as *discipline beliefs* which was used either positively to enforce a family meal, or meant that the meal could be seen as part of wider disciplining of children. Negatively in relation to likelihood of regular family meal, it could be used as part of a general discipline style which lacked formality and prioritised individual choice.

The second contributory explanation for eating together was the belief that parents should offer formal time and spaces for *emotional support*, and collective mealtimes were seen to offer this. This factor increased the likelihood of regular family meals. Thirdly and related to the former point, was a belief that it is important to *connect experiences* beyond a family with those within it to produce not only a sense of coherence of the world and self, but also to *monitor* educational or peer group progress. A fourth category of explanation, which

impacted negatively on the likelihood of family meals, was the belief that *individual activities* are an important part of a young person's social, emotional and physical development and that these override priorities such as family meals. This was different to the alternative discipline style identified in the first theme, as these individual activities were often quite rigidly adhered too, and offered an alternative to a definite family meal rather than the satisfying of whims. Finally, explanations would also be couched in terms of the idea that mealtime practices pass on information and attitudes which could be subsumed under the notion of the intrinsic *cultural capital of the meal*; the idea that by sitting down together at the table some form of advantage is being passed on to children that will benefit them in later life. None of these categories of explanation are exclusive from each other, they often overlap in accounts given, but they add to the understanding of what parents (mostly) and young people think the cultural and developmental functions of mealtimes really are.

Table 5.2 (below) summarises how the different intentions of parents shape the possibility of there being a collective family meal as described in the above sections.

**Table 5.2 Factors impacting on likelihood of collective family meal.**

	Likelihood of Collective Family Meal
<b>Discipline</b>	+
<b>Emotional Support</b>	+
<b>Connect Experiences/ Monitor</b>	+
<b>Encourage Outside Activities</b>	-
<b>Cultural Capital</b>	+

#### **(i) Discipline**

Taking the first explanation of eating together, *discipline*, it was obvious in some households that mealtimes were a discipline issue. There were two opposing views which related to discipline and meals. Firstly, that discipline was needed to ensure a collective family meal or secondly, more commonly, that discipline was a deliberately absent feature from domestic meals.

To take the former understanding of discipline first, parents can insist upon having a family meal, over which the young people have little say. However this is not always to the

mutual benefit of all family members. Here the dispute is not just over the fact that they are forced to eat together, but that the young person's choices are ignored.

Mother:       *"When we were younger we got what we were given, now there is more choice,"*

Father:       *"When I make it, they get what they are given, I can't stand seeing four dishes at a table."*

Young person *"He does, he made a curry and made me eat it even though it made me sick."*

Mother       *"I would prefer it that they ate something that they liked."*

Giffnock Household, dual parent.

In this family, its patriarchal structure ensured discipline was a feature of family mealtimes, at times resulting in some conflict and considerable upset. The reason that the father insisted on "the same" food was in line with the religious "communion" metaphors described earlier. Having the same meal together made a meal a family meal by, to paraphrase Simmel (1997), "creating common flesh and blood". An alternative explanation of the father's intransigence on the issue was a consequence of his own work related absences and his desire to "catch up" with the family time he had missed. This raises the question as to who benefited from the family time spent together at the meal; the children who received a set amount of guaranteed parenting time, or the father who used collective mealtimes as an opportunity to enact his parental role after his absences. It was interesting that the mother's presence in the home had been more consistent and she was not as keen on the enforced collectivity of the sit-down meals as the father was.

There may also have been a religious antecedent which strengthened the importance of the collective family meal in the father's mind. The Sabbath meal remained an important aspect of this Jewish family's routine, with extended family often present, and the mother



going to great lengths to prepare kosher food. Recently, the eldest daughter had begun to question some of the family traditions with a religious foundation, greatly antagonising her father. Elsewhere in the interview, the mother told me how she recently came round to the idea that her oldest daughter may choose to marry out of Judaism, and if she so chose to, she would value her relationship with her daughter over any religious considerations. However, she feared that her husband might not see the issue the same way. The family meal here can thus be seen to have two very strong features: firstly the creating of a common bond of family in a very traditional, patriarchal sense; and secondly in its echoes of the Sabbath meal, having a strong religious dimension. Both these aspects of family life had recently come under threat, firstly through the father's need to work away from home, and secondly, by both teenage daughters' increasing calls for independence. The established equilibrium of this family was under threat, and whilst the mother's response was to negotiate the change as an unavoidable feature of contemporary life and having children on the cusp of adulthood, the father's response was an attempt to revert to the status quo through the use of strong discipline and enforced togetherness.

Another way in which discipline can be related to mealtimes is bound up with the idea of disciplining oneself. Below a mother describes the not obvious benefits of having a degree of discipline with a younger child at mealtimes;

*"If a child has problems obviously sitting up at the table there would be problems because that child would be getting up and walking away... because you're sitting collectively you're disciplining yourself to eat your dinner, you've got this unit where everybody is sitting together, you can identify with that, you've got all these other things that come with that which are important like communication and time, and the fact that you're probably eating the meal at a decent pace."*

Morag McKinnon, single parent household

Here then discipline is a prerequisite for the younger child who has to learn to sit at the table. This quote goes further than identifying togetherness as good for its own sake, in beginning to touch on other factors which come with the family meal which are discussed below; the communication that is facilitated by being together.

In other families it was more common for discipline to be consciously absent from the family meal. The belief that was in operation in such households was that food should be enjoyed first and foremost. This explained why the collective family meal was not a regular feature of some households, with different things being consumed in different parts of the house;

*"Some nights like if we are all having something different then we will all have something different that night. Nobody is ever forced to sit and have something that they are definitely not happy with... We never sit round the table unless it is Christmas or something. They sit in here and I'll sit through there, unless they two are falling out or something and then one will come in and watch the news whilst the other would be watching the Cartoon Network"*

Sandra Townsend, single parent household.

Here, togetherness was seen as less important than letting younger family members enjoy their time at home. Conflict avoidance was central, with the making available of space if members are irritating each other. To have a regular collective family meal would run counter to this individualist focus.

## **(ii) Providing a space for emotional support**

The belief that parents should provide a space for emotional support is another explanatory factor for why family meals are considered necessary. Below we hear a mother complain that the physical lack of space within her household for a formal meal undermines her ability to communicate with her children;

*"Funnily enough I was just saying to a friend of mine, I hate eating in here because that thing goes on [TV], and its just you communicate better if you sit around a table, you learn more... "*

She develops her theory that there is a positive parenting advantage to be gained from sitting down together; remembering an incident when she was looking after a group of children and points out the problem solving capacity of the family meal, contrasting with her negative memories of poor communication during her own childhood.

*"before you knew it they were all having these wee conversations with each other. So it wasn't just the thing about eating a meal there was the thing that maybe wee Johnny's problem got sorted over it. The same thing might have happened if I had sat round the table with my Mum and Dad and brother and sister, I might have been able to communicate"*

Morag McKinnon, single parent household.

What exactly it is which is learnt, that is the point of the communication, is revealed in the following quote from the same mother;

*"Just to remind them, each of us that we are here, and to talk over any problems, a problem shared is a problem halved ... everybody round the table, there's a sort of safety, a security you know, and I think it is more enjoyable, more relaxed, there's less tensions, I think there are loads of tensions on people you know, being working."*

Morag McKinnon, single parent household.

In addition to her belief that sitting down together for a family meal is enjoyable, this mother is pointing to the separation of experiences that exist inside and outside the home and suggests that providing a space for a collective meal is beneficial in uniting these experiences, relieving the anxiety the separation may induce. What is additionally interesting is the issue of for whom the emotional support is useful for. There is a

suggestion that what is being created is not of one way benefit for the younger family members but actually mutually beneficial to older family members as well. It is interesting that she identified so readily the perceived benefits that the family meal gave her as an adult, challenging the premise I have established that the family meal is an act of parenting, and the implication that the benefits were top-down. Elsewhere, another mother spoke of how eating and relaxing with her teenage daughter gave her the opportunity to "talk to another adult", the nature of her work not only depriving her of the opportunity to talk to others, but perhaps also removing her feeling of having adult status as a low grade worker in a large institution.

This form of explanation is reminiscent of the sentiment expressed in the title of Lasch's (1979) book about family life "Haven in a Heartless World". In some households the collective family meal provided a space and time where the stresses of the outside world were suspended, giving both parents and children a space for relaxation and the reproduction of themselves as individuals, separate from their economic or school based roles as workers or pupils.

### **(iii) Coherence/ monitoring**

This issue refers to parents' attempts to link the separate spheres of experience that characterise being a young person and school student, an adult and paid worker, or adult engaged in domestic, unpaid labour. Such acts also provide opportunities to monitor how their child is doing in school via attempts to get them to talk about their day. It is possible that this element could be more keenly felt by adult family members over younger ones, especially given the fact that tension and conflict might result if the collectivity was enforced too rigidly. Some young people did identify the fact that they felt it to be

positive. However the theme of monitoring issues such as progress at school would emerge and the following quotes seem to illustrate how this was incorporated in family meals;

Young person: *"I quite like it when we're at the table, you can get to talk to people, you get to talk to your Mum and Dad and your big brother."*

PS: *"So what kind of things do you talk about if you sit round that table?"*

Young person: *"Well what my Mum done at work today, what I did at school, my Dad's work, what my big brother did at the weekend."*

Leslie Paisley, 13, dual parent household.

The making coherent of the different spheres of experience, and monitoring development within them is the parenting element of the emotional support explanation. It allows parents to keep up with what children have been doing at school which is seen as self evidently beneficial, while also allowing for the identification of potential problems in this area.

*"We talk about what we did in school because you've not seen your mum for a whole day and it's just good to see her again and talk to her about what you've done at school and things like that."*

Mhari McMaster, 13, single parent family.

*"And what I've done in my work sort of thing, gives me someone to talk to if I've had a bad day, I think it's important, shows you're sort of caring about them and you're interested in them, you know in their schooling, which I've always been."*

Ann Kilbride, single parent family.

The provision of space for this type of discussion was not always welcomed by young people in families, especially if they had been deliberately attempting to carve out a separate identity for themselves. In such cases, the separation of experiences was seen as an opportunity rather than a problem, especially in the family below with their particular conflicts over adolescent independence;

Young person: *"It's the same conversation every night – 'What did you do today? Has anything exciting happened? What are you doing tomorrow night?' Every single night.*

Father: *"Well all you do is grunt and groan and not say anything, so they are not interested."*

Mother: *"What would you like us to do then?"*

Young person: *"Nothing. When I was younger right and I couldn't go out and that I did a lot of stuff with you two, but now I would rather spend time with my friends than with you."*

Giffnock, dual parent family.

It seems a delicate balance is to be struck between the needs of the parent to reproduce themselves as members of a family "together" and the needs of teenagers. Parents need to strike this balance while facilitating the opportunity for talk over issues such as school and young people's friends, while the young people themselves may wish to attempt to maintain an identity separate from the one they are ascribed within the family. Within the home, their peer group identity is suspended by the relations of the family, as suggested through the above young person's expressed preference to spend time with her friends. The family meal as formalised family time also has implications for young people's fledgling adult identities that could cause conflict and tension.

A reason that the family meal can take on this character of being a site for monitoring, could be a result of time constraints, as was revealed in the following quote from a mother, who began by telling me about the monitoring aspect a family meal afforded, but pointed out that busy schedules could make finding time difficult.

*"I can only speak for myself but I like to see what he has done all day, I like to see what has been happening, and I like to know what he has been eating. So like, I know what classes he has been at. I think when he is eating you have got him sitting down there and you can sort of have a conversation. I think it's important to have that once a day, because*

*you can very easily have a lot on your mind... and before you know it a week is past and you haven't even said 'how's school?'"*

Karen White, single parent household.

#### **(iv) Individual activities**

In families where the togetherness fostered by a family meal was not considered a priority, explanations for this organisation could make reference to outside activities. It seemed that in these cases, the flexibility that characterises the transformation of domestic eating cultures was seen as positive as it made available time for outside activities beyond the household. Below a male young person tells of how his football training restructures average mealtime patterns;

*"If I'm going to football training I get my dinner before everybody else so I can leave early. Or if I have left before somebody has come in."*

David Anderson, 14, single parent household.

This flexibility can facilitate parental as well as young people's activities. In the following extract, a mother gives a very detailed account of the day to day activities of her and her family members in explaining why they don't have sit down family meals;

*"I mean mostly it's time, I mean Monday, that's my night at the badminton so that's my night right out, and I would go there about half seven but sometimes I'm not in until six so that is a quick meal on a Monday. And a Tuesday, Lewis goes to his badminton. Cameron in the meantime is in and out like a butterfly and Andy's left kind of getting what's there, but then again he's out on a Wednesday and Fridays, so there's always someone who's got to be out somewhere by seven, quarter past seven, you know and it does limit the kind of time you know. By the end of the week I'm too tired to cook, but they go their Dad's on a Sunday and their dad likes cooking so they always have a great meal on a Sunday."*

Ros Minto, single parent household.

This aspect of the decision not to have a collective family meal was in also evidence in another household where Scout meetings and rowing were considered important enough to take priority over a family meal. In this family, the beneficial aspects of the alternative activity were played upon, stressing the social aspect, the independence it fostered and the fitness element. In other households too, the family meal could be suspended for individual activities, but the benefits conferred on the young person by the alternative activity were not used as a justification. In such households, just allowing people choice and relaxation was seen as better than enforcing a collective meal. As with the Townsend household discussed earlier, it seemed that fulfilling family members preferences was the priority.

*"Well we'd usually try and sit at the table, or as tonight Christine sat here (in front of the TV) and us two sat watching telly, so it just depends. I think it depends on the telly you know, if dinner's made before Home and Away comes on, that's fine, we'll all sit here. If Home and Away is on, she wants to sit and watch telly."*

Christina Johnstone, 15, dual parent household.

#### **(v) Cultural capital**

I have coded the final explanatory factor that can influence the decision to hold a collective family meal as cultural capital. In the broad sense of the term all of the former explanations could be subsumed under this category. However, what I look at under this explanation refers to accounts in which a perceived cultural advantage is being passed on through the family's use of mealtime activities. Sometimes parents could be quite explicit about this, suggesting that their way of preparing and consuming food marked them as distinct from other people, and they were eager to instil their way of doing things into their children for their children's own advantage. For clarity, I should point out that the speaker



here uses the term "clan" to describe people whose interests, values and perceptions of the world (their habitus) are the same as his and his family's;

Mother: *"We make food from first principles wherever possible so that the children actually know how to cook."*

Father: *"A lot of our friends wouldn't have deep fat fryers in the house, If they do they haven't used it for years, or they seldom use it. They only use it for pakora now. You can go into a lot of houses of a different clan and you'll find that everything that is made is deep fried, every meal, or else it is bought in."*

Prestwicks, dual parent household

In a less considered way, mealtime activities can foster social class advantage through the broadening of tastes and cooking styles that young people are exposed to. DeVault (1991) has commented on the value of adventurous cooking styles in middle class culture as means by which to establish and take advantage of work based networks, while Prout (1995) has attempted to link cooking style and degrees of adventure to upward class trajectories. Both these studies see the advantage being conferred on either member of the conjugal pair. However, Allat (1993) has complemented such findings with her own on how parents in middle class households assist young people in giving them access to middle class networks of friends which helps in the development of social skills that are of benefit in the job market. Sharing a culinary knowledge and style with people of the same "clan" (to use the previous speaker's phrase) could be seen as part of the same process.

Certainly, in those families which did express an interest in varied cuisine, it was often cast in opposition to the tastes of their own parents, their family, and even the national heritage (with its own socio-economic connotations) in which they were brought up, indicating an overwhelming feeling of progression and a upward trajectory;

*"My mother once said we were all getting a bit Anglicised because we were putting fruit on the table and eating fancy vegetables like brocolli."*

Maureen Prestick, dual parent family.

*"We're prepared to try something new, I think it is one of the problems with my generation, it wasn't a prejudice thing, it was just that they liked what they liked and didn't want to try anything new...[we're] willing to try different things, different ways of cooking and stuff, different meals, but I don't just think in terms of health, I mean so long as they're inquisitive about the world and stuff."*

Eve Ferdinand, dual parent household.

The linking of cuisine style to inquisitiveness and a broader world view is a tangible way in which meal styles can be seen as part of the process of accumulating cultural capital. On more than one occasion the traditional "West of Scotland type diet" was talked about in terms of negative health consequences. This suggests that a process of redefinition has taken place in beliefs about what constitutes a "good" or "proper" meal and its inherent healthiness.

References to a "West of Scotland" type diet in fact refers to a diet that a few generations ago would have been considered nutritionally adequate and "healthy". Two things have changed over the last few generations which may have contributed to this redefinition: the first factor is the increase in health education in relation to food and the long term health consequences of certain food stuffs; the second significant change has been the swift transition of the area's economy from one based primarily on heavy industry to one increasingly dependent upon service sector employment. It is possible that the reason that the "West of Scotland type diet" is now seen as inadequate could be due to a combination of these factors changing the background conditions in which individuals and families develop their habitus; "the acquired system of generative schemes adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted"(Bourdieu, 1977, page 95). If we consider a

predominantly industrialised area containing a male population required to engage in daily heavy labour, nourished by families patriarchal in their structure, as the particular conditions which constituted the habitus, it is possible to see how this system of generative schemes would have undergone fundamental revision in the last few decades. In the past, the adequacy, or healthiness of a diet would be defined by its capacity to reproduce the energy levels adequate for sustained work. With a decline in male dominated, labour intensive occupations to more feminised service sector occupations and a shift in gender relations in both the workplace and home to increasing (formal) equality, we can begin to see how understandings of the relationship between food and the reproduction of selves and bodies has undergone significant change.

This relationship was perhaps best illustrated by a conversation I had with a father about diet and exercise. In this exchange he expressed concern about the fact that his diet was often unhealthy and that he did not get enough exercise. Knowing he was a bricklayer by occupation I asked him whether he felt his occupation would not provide exercise as compensation for his lack of organised exercise. He informed me that he felt this, although strenuous, was "the wrong sort of exercise"; what he needed was in fact more cardiovascular exercise. It seems that even within an occupation that displays many of the features of the old occupations which accompanied the growth of the "West of Scotland type diet", this form of living was considered unhealthy. A change in the perception of the body and food had taken place as the "background conditions" which form the habitus changed.

## **5.8 A role for family structure? family diversity, gender roles and food consumption**

So where does this leave the tentative hypotheses presented earlier regarding the effects of material and family structural factors on the provision of a "traditional" family meal?

Firstly, it was not possible to identify clear patterns of behaviour associated with either the macro such as socio-economic status, or the micro (parental structure). What is more, I would not have been doing the methodology justice by attempting such categorisations, and would have missed the insights gleaned from the interview data about the relationship between family style and mealtimes. By looking at the understandings that underpin different practices in families in different circumstances, it becomes possible not to see whether family structure or economic circumstances determine the practices, but rather how understandings differ in different circumstances. For example, family structure did not necessarily affect the likelihood of families eating together, but the way in which the role of a mother was *understood* within these circumstances would have influenced the chances of a regular family meal being consumed.

Previous research, such as that of Charles and Kerr (1988), that has looked at the relationship between family organisation and meals, has shed light on how the patriarchal organisation of traditional nuclear families shapes the experience and organisation of meals in these types of households. This type of research has shown a connection between a traditional family ideology of male breadwinner being present at the table and mother as "server and provider" of food (Kerr and Charles, 1986). Charles and Kerr suggest that even the temporary absence of a male breadwinner produces a change in the experience, structure and form that family meals take. For example, in the absence of a male parent, a mother's and children's preferences are more likely to be catered for. In terms of food

content, this may see the preparation of quicker, convenience foods leading to mothers fulfilling the desire to spend more time away from the kitchen.

So what about families in which the absence of a male breadwinner is a permanent feature? Given Charles and Kerr's identification of temporary changes in meal time practices, what is the state of affairs when the father is permanently absent? Consistent with their suggestion, in the dual parent families the presence of the father was still often felt to be the defining feature of a "proper" family meal, and consequently the availability of the father for such occasions was often discussed by respondents. Below we see how in the mind of a male young person, the presence of his father and the notion of a family meal are intrinsically linked;

*"Like my dad works quite late because he is a bookmaker. If my Dad is off and he is not doing anything we will try and have a family meal."*

Michael O'Connell, 13, dual parent household .

In dual parent families, it was almost exclusively the mother whose primary responsibility it was to prepare and cook most, if not all, meals. One more affluent family who had recently started to eat out for their Sunday meal underlined the usual expectation on mothers to do the cooking by explaining that these trips out gave the mother a break from the cooking. Such was the expectation (and the available finances) that giving the mother a rest from cooking did not entail other family members taking up the mantle. Another example of the gendered nature of cooking was that when mothers in dual parent families spoke of the socialising aspect of home cooked foods, in passing on skills to enable their children to fend for themselves when they left home, it was exclusively with regard to female children that this claim was made.

Although mothers did the majority of cooking in dual parent families, this was not exclusively the case. Beardsworth has previously noted that men often take on marginal food preparation tasks such as barbecues or preparing food for special occasions. In one particular middle class family, the father's passion for making occasional curries was in evidence and in another family a father did show evidence of a more "everyday" or routine contribution to cooking; I was fortunate enough to be offered one of his specialities, egg bread, on a fieldwork visit. Subsequent conversation with his teenage daughter revealed that this type of provisioning of food was indeed a regular occurrence which facilitated her mother's work schedules. Interestingly she used this as an opportunity to illustrate the differences between her father's and her mother's understanding of meals, with health issues and body image being stronger in her mother's.

*"If Mum wasn't here and it was my Dad it would just be toast and scrambled egg ... he would probably fill us up with everything. Bacon pieces, like two bacon pieces and four sausage pieces all the time ... Like my Mum she is always on about calories and that, she goes swimming"*

Susan Rose, 13, dual parent household.

It is possible to make a claim for a gendered conception of mealtimes taking place in these dual parent families which although not as rigid and traditionally patriarchal as in Charles and Kerr's study, still has echoes of it. The mother's assumed role was in the "traditional" mould as the provider of food and the father's was adapted around this traditional organisation as work patterns shifted, especially when the mother became the primary wage earner outside the home. The tensions and fractures which emerge as these family patterns shifted, so requiring a negotiation of new roles, were evident in one family in particular, where again, the mother's was the primary wage. The situation reflects the tensions that might accompany roles in transition;

- PS *"Are you generally in charge of family meals."*
- Mother *"Yes, mainly, which is a bugbear."*
- PS *"Have you tried other systems?"*
- Mother *"Yes. I have abstained. I have gone on strike. I have moaned about it, I have said 'you need to cook'. The kids, Lindsey can make herself something to eat, but meals I would take control of, it's what women do."*
- PS *"Does your partner help?"*
- Mother *"Occasionally, when I have gone on strike, he will make the Weans toast and beans which pisses me off as well, it's like his counter attack ... but he doesn't do much cooking."*
- Eve Ferdinand, dual parent household.

The problem identified by this mother was that when she called upon her partner to contribute to food preparation he did so either in a half hearted manner or in a way which did not reflect her understandings of a "decent" meal. This may have been a consequence of the fact that his perceived role as a parent did not include understandings of nutritionally balanced food preparation as he had not identified his role as being that of "server and provider" of meals. Unfortunately, the tensions between this couple became so great that I was denied further opportunity to interview them, and I was therefore unable to investigate the father's understanding of his parental role in relation to meals. However, to suggest that there was a degree of role conflict (on behalf of the father, who was asked to fulfil an unfamiliar role) and strain (on behalf of the mother, who had to adjust to being a breadwinner with no re-negotiation of household roles) does not seem fanciful.

The picture in single parent families, as might be expected, varies even more from the traditional organisation. In two such households there was a notable absence of anything resembling, at anytime during their weekly cycles, the traditional family meal. One of these families never ate together "except at Christmas" and the evening meal was never

consumed at a table, with individual preferences being catered for. It is unclear whether this arrangement was a consequence of the absence of a male parent, given that when the biological father had stayed with the rest of his family the mother reported "there being no family time to speak of". In fact it was the presence of the maternal grandmother in the household which facilitated such variety of choice (in mainly convenience food) since it was she who did the shopping and preparation of food. Maternal grandmothers also featured significantly in the domestic arrangements of two more of the single parent families, and in a fourth, most of the children's evening meals would be prepared and consumed away from the parental home in the grandparent's home. However, eating at the grandparent's home was an emergency procedure, (not a preferred option due to the inconsistencies in discipline strategy this created) demanded by the practicalities of study and work. As the mother told me, "She [the grandmother] is family when I need her to be". In the second of these families where collective family meals took place, the emphasis would not be on health or nutrition but togetherness and enjoyment, with pizzas and other forms of carry out food being consumed.

In the single parent families, as with some of the dual parent families, mothers' roles tended to have greater work orientation. As a consequence family mealtimes had a more ad hoc organisation, with extended kin often taking over certain parenting roles. This could have also reflected the life-course stage at which these families found themselves, with mothers going out to work as the time required to look after children reduced as they entered school. When single parents were able to share in or prepare family meals the emphasis was on relaxation, individual preference and enjoyment. Increased self provision, as identified by Sanjur (Fieldhouse 1986), appeared strongly related to gender and age of young people. Young males would often wait in for their mothers to return



from work in order to have their meal prepared for them (if there was no one else to do so) whilst females were more likely to get their own food, with the likelihood of this happening increasing as they got older. The single mother below, in a family with teenage daughters, tells of her philosophy regarding meal preparation;

*"I'm quite determined I'm going to have my life ...and they can make basic pasta dishes and they can make pots of soup and I feel they can do these things for themselves. I feel it gives me a bit more flexibility?"*

Valerie McMaster, single parent household

For women, food has been described as "the enemy" (Beardsworth 1997, page 80) not only in representing a threat to body image, which can manifest itself as a calorie consciousness incorporated into a health belief, but also as a threat to time. In Charles and Kerr's study, this threat was in the form of having to plan, organise and please family members. In today's families, there is a new dimension as a threat to time liberated from the workplace for relaxation and the reproduction of self and family identities. This threat is felt ever more keenly in single parent families where the mother's is the sole income. Hence we could imagine why there would be a greater reliance on convenience foods in such family structures. However, the existence of less structured family meals was in evidence in all family structures. What did distinguish them was that dual parent families often appeared closer to the ideology of the nuclear family, with its accompanying gender roles and the emphasis on collective feeding, whilst issues of practicality meant that single parent families had moved away from such established roles towards higher degrees of relaxation and reduced labour intensity.

## **5.9 Discussion: Linking mealtimes with parental values**

The family meal, while it may not be in retreat, has changed its shape from the relatively recent descriptions of Charles and Kerr (1988) . One thing that is certain is that, as Murcott (1997) has pointed out, the family meal still exists as a pervasive idea, as constitutive of notions of home, belonging and family even if one is not shared with family members every day. This was highlighted by the family who, rejecting the every day enactment of a family meal in favour of individual preferences, still had a family meal on Christmas day, suggesting the sanctity of the day in the family calendar justified the holding of a family meal in the traditional form.

The gendered nature of food provision in families was still in evidence, with mothers (or, in their absence due to outside work, grandmothers) still on the whole being responsible for food purchase and preparation, although the availability of convenience foods did free some mothers from this task in some instances on some occasions. What was of interest was the way that changes in family structure, parental working patterns, and food technology changed the face of mealtimes on a day -to -day basis, but there remained a resistance and a reluctance to accept the complete removal of the family meal as a social activity from people's lives. The family meal remained a welcome option for many of the families, one at which the body of family was reproduced on an occasional and sporadic basis. For those families who stuck a little more rigidly to frequent family meals, this was not completely a consequence of freedom from the constraints of paid work or more available time. Indeed where family meals were rigorously adhered to it, it was perhaps because time was so precious a commodity that communal eating events were seen as a good use of time. Not only being viewed as doing two jobs (nutrition and socialising), family meals were seized as opportunities to carry out a variety of family and parenting

duties such as facilitating communication, connecting the diverse pathways of life outside the family, and monitoring well being and progress at school.

To a large extent, the choice to hold a regular sit -down, family meal was a question of preferred style. Tellingly, of the exceptions to families who engaged in a regular family meal, many did so to facilitate the individual activities of family members outside the home. It might simply not be possible to have enough free time available in the evening to fit in personal activities and a family occasion such as a meal. The benefits such activities brought to the child were clearly seen to outweigh those of a collective meal and even in those families where a regular family meal was still in evidence, a sporting or outside activity such as a hobby would be considered a reasonable excuse for its suspension. It is this finding that points to the idea that the family meal as a family practice, is as much an act of passing on and investing young people with cultural capital as it is a management of feeding. When seen in terms of cultural capital transmission, outside activities can replace family meals precisely because both offer similar advantages in the mind of the parent. That a noticeable enforced family meal in this sample was the observation of a regular Sabbath meal in a Jewish household supports this view; that what is important to the decision to hold regular family meals is the commitment to invest in young people specific cultural values as well as pass on their perceived benefits. In more secular families, this can mean increased verbal ability, used to talk about oneself and experiences and to interact. This is associated with the enabling of an intergenerational closure of values that a collective family meal can assist. Additionally, parenting strategies in middle class households pass on the advantages and trappings of their relative privilege, clearly observed in the family for whom table manners, taught at collective family meals, were seen as a sign of belonging to their "clan".

These attitudes and orientations to the family meal can be seen in structural terms as one of the ways in which family practices reproduce life chances. It is not that the decision to hold a family meal or not can be seen as a prediction of educational and labour market success, but that perhaps by looking at the reasons *why* parents decide to hold a meal or not, we can gain an insight to a family's habitus, namely in the area of the types of skills and priorities they consider important aspects of "bringing up" a child or young person. Bolstering this thesis are those parents who hold a regular collective family meal because it passes on a certain cultural etiquette (cultural capital), assures a degree of nutritional sustenance (physical capital), ties up links between home and school, and develops self-awareness and verbal ability (emotional capital). However, reasons for not holding a collective family meal can just as easily be categorised as fostering cultural capital, such as encouraging independence and autonomy through sport or hobbies. Finally, even the economic necessity of reliance on convenience foods and self provisioning at meal times can serve to pass on detailed information about the nature of work and time management, and encourage a domestic competence in younger family members that might well serve them well in the transition to adulthood and independence.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Parental Understandings of Discipline.**

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## 6.1 Introduction

In this section I turn the focus to parental understandings of discipline styles. The analysis of discipline, as a component of parenting style, has a long history in developmental studies. So much research has been carried out in this area of the parent-child relationship, that from the myriad of daily exchanges that make up the dyad, it has become one interaction that researchers believe can not only be readily categorised, but has also been empirically associated with developmental outcomes. The ascription of scientifically demonstrable outcomes to certain styles of discipline is discussed below. However, the aim of this chapter is not to investigate the truth or falsity of this body of research, but to look at how discipline strategies are understood by parents. In recent years, parenting has become another area of life that has been made the realm of a body of experts and technicians. The aim has been to look at whether the empirically grounded ideas of the experts have been incorporated into the ideas of actual parents.

What emerged from analysing the descriptions of parenting style is that in taking the reports of particular discipline responses to children's actions, it became difficult to categorise parents in relation to a particular style. A fluidity and adaptiveness emerged around the ways parents said they behaved in relation to discipline. The discipline styles identified by the Developmentalists, rather than representing pigeonholes in which to deposit respective parents, represented to the parents themselves possible forms of action which form the repertoire from which discipline responses are chosen. When talking about the importance of discipline, none of the parents would offer a self contained logic which could be exclusively identifiable in the terms of any of the theoretical models of discipline (such as Baumrind's for example, discussed below). In order to understand how

respondents were talking about discipline, a degree of re-conceptualisation was necessary, which through my coding produced the continuum of discipline styles which are described later in this chapter.

## **6.2 Discovering the place of discipline styles within child rearing; discipline styles and developmental outcomes**

The attempt to understand the effects of the parent–child relationship has a history as long, if not longer, than social science and its preceding disciplines themselves. For example, Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) was a treatise on how to raise children which covered discipline strategies amongst wider educational concerns. Contemporary theories about parent–child discipline stress two aspects which correspond broadly to the concepts of *control* (roughly, pertaining to restraining children so that they act in accordance with parental values) and *reciprocity* (roughly, the encouragement of a two way dialogue between children and parents/carers over values that inform appropriate behaviour). Although the identification of these styles may bear different nomenclature within different studies, there is a general continuity.

In the post-Enlightenment era, discourses of discipline and parenting style have, at various times, favoured either end of each dimension. The association of discipline with control, as evoked by the word “disciplinarian”, belongs very much to the period shaped by religiously informed understandings of the parent–child relationship. This is illustrated by Newson and Newson (1968) who report an early manifestation of the control dimension in child rearing advice grounded in the religious morality of the Nineteenth Century Evangelical movement. These views epitomised pre-Freudian, Victorian values by stressing the importance of obedience through force when necessary. The claims of the

Wesleyan movement that a child "be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly" and "in order to do this, let him have nothing he cries for" demonstrates that the balance lay on the *control* dimension supported by the socially constructed nature of childhood before the impact of Freud. In this formulation, children were to be treated as young adults, with the following advice;

*"never hug and kiss them, never let them sit on your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead when they say good night. Shake hands with them in the morning."*

Letter from Susanna Wesley to John Wesley quoted in Newson and Newson (1968, p 403).

The view of childhood in operation is of the child as a potentiality which could tend equally to uncivilised savagery as to civility, determined by the presence or not, of the socialising influence of morally up-standing adults.

Later, the Twentieth century saw the influence of psychoanalysis which recast the understanding of the nature of childhood development, and in particular the role of parents in a manner which made them no less important, but reflected the erosion of theologically grounded beliefs about the essential nature of children. The Mid- Twentieth century also saw the incorporation of earlier Enlightenment philosophy into the understanding of childhood, for example, the empiricism of Locke which led to the emergence of the Behaviourist school. Proponents such as Watson believed that behaviours, particularly social ones, were learned because of their associated positive or negative consequences (Baumrind, 1978). The terminology which became incorporated into child rearing advice after Behaviourism was that of negative reinforcement (punishments) and positive reinforcement (rewards), as the key processes that determine childhood outcomes.



Another Enlightenment philosopher whose influence was revived in the Twentieth century was Rousseau, whose belief in the self actualising tendencies of humanity led to the diminishing of the control element in child rearing understandings. His treatise on education and child-rearing, *Emile*, opens by immediately urging caution since adults themselves are products of the social world they are brought up in, corruptible as well as perfectible; "*God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.*" This predicated the sentimentalisation of childhood as a special period, a perspective coming to the fore with the later alternative educational strategies influenced by the early work of Rudolf Steiner. Children were left to be children, and no attempts made to shape them against their wills according to adult ideas about how children should be (Gillis, 1974). This represented a period where, in some areas at least, the control emphasis was removed entirely.

In the contemporary research literature investigating parenting style and discipline, approaches focusing heavily on the control element or, conversely, the free expression of the child, would be considered extreme. The most influential studies have identified and isolated different classifications of parenting style which take account of both the child's and society's needs. The *control* dimension of Victorian advice remained in Baldwin's (1948) study but with the addition of the dimension '*democracy*'. The need for strong elements of both *democracy* and *control* were crucial for the ideal parent-child relationship as characterised by Baldwin. A further dimension of Baldwin's was the parental communication of information about the way the real world worked in their discipline strategies rather than making the parent themselves the source of such prohibitions.

Another American, Becker (1964) introduced the more expressive values associated with modern parenting via an identification of the necessity of *warmth (acceptance)* as opposed to *hostility (rejection)* for a productive parent-child relationship. The *control* element remains as the accompanying dimension (described as *restriction* as opposed to *permissiveness*). Again a balanced combination of both these elements is seen as desirable and ideal. Becker went further to illustrate how these dimensions could be incorporated into actual parenting practices through the identification of two more variables. The first, "power assertive discipline", included physical punishment, yelling, shouting, forceful commands, threats etc. the second, "love orientated discipline", involved showing disappointment, isolation and withdrawal of love, coupled with praise and contingent giving of affection and reasoning. Ainsworth (reported in Maccoby and Martin 1983) suggests that a style based on contingency such as this allows children to develop a sense of efficacy, so encouraging their development as independent, autonomous agents.

Authors have continued to recognise the importance of these two dimensions, the most influential of these being Baumrind (1967,1978) whose model was developed around thirty years ago, and refined by Maccoby and Martin (1983). Baumrind's notion of *instrumental competence* is a developmental ideal that combines an appreciation of children's needs as well as instilling the attributes and values that are regarded as necessary for success in modern society. It stems from a style of parenting that Baumrind describes as authoritative, and which reconciles the competing interests found within the child-parent relationship. Thus the parents should;

*"[A]ttempt to direct the child's activities in a rational issue orientated manner. He or she encourages verbal give and take, shares with the child the reasoning behind parental policy, and solicits the child's objections when the child refuses to conform...this parent exerts firm control when the young child disobeys, but does not hem the child with*

*restrictions. The authoritative parent enforces the adult perspective, but recognises the child's individual interests."*  
(Baumrind, 1978 p 245).

The need for the child to adapt to social norms, as well as engaging in self preserving behaviour, combined with satisfying their biological and emotional needs is achieved through rationalising behavioural expectations to the child. This in turn fosters a sense of efficacy in the child; if they know the rules by which they are expected to play, then they can take part more effectively, free of the anxiety produced by an uncertain world.

The "authoritative" style is considered the ideal within Baumrind's corpus of three parenting styles. Actions characteristic of this include the encouragement of verbal give and take, sharing reasoning behind family policy, and setting standards for future conduct. Whilst authoritative parents recognise their own rights as adults, they also recognise their potential fallibility as rule makers (Baumrind 1971). This style of parenting, it was hypothesised and subsequently proved, would produce more favourable outcomes for young people than a "permissive style" of parenting. Permissiveness is characterised by non-punitive, accepting and affirmative behaviour towards children, a style in which parents can offer themselves as a resource to children but with no contingent conditions attached, little guidance about future or expected standards of conduct and the avoidance of exercising control. Worse still, is the "authoritarian style", characterised by parental attempts to shape, control and evaluate their children's behaviour, discouraging verbal give and take, with the parent presenting themselves as an infallible source of standards.

Later, Maccoby and Martin (1983) in their overview of the parenting literature, added the dimensions *demandingness* and *responsiveness* which had the effect of distinguishing

between two forms of permissive parenting, one characterised by high responsiveness (indulgent) and another by low responsiveness (neglectful). The authoritarian parent became defined by their high demandingness and low responsiveness, while the authoritative ideal was characterised by a healthy amount of both.

The seal of approval for Baumrind's typology came in the form of empirical research that investigated and largely supported the claims of positive developmental outcomes associated with the authoritative discipline style. She had herself established some hypotheses and preliminary outcomes for the effects of parenting style on young children, such as lowered independence and less social responsibility for children of authoritarian parents (Baumrind 1971). Soon researchers looked at the outcomes for adolescents. Earlier research by Coopersmith (1967) had already suggested that an inductive discipline style (letting young people into the thinking behind standards so they can exercise their own self discipline) had positive outcomes for self-esteem. In particular, it was suggested that the firm rule enforcement aspect accompanied by the warmth and nurturing aspect of this parenting style was beneficial.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) also report findings which suggest that authoritative parenting is associated with the development of "humanistic" morality, a concern with the effects one's actions have on others rather than a concern over the consequences of breaking rules. Taking American adolescents' school grades as the developmental outcome, Dornbusch, Ritter, Herbert, Leiderman and Fraleigh (1987) found that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were negatively associated with school grades whilst authoritative parenting correlated positively. Such findings have also been reproduced by a number of studies which all identify positive educational outcomes associated with authoritarian

parenting styles (Aunola, Stattin and Nurmi, 2000). Simons-Morton and colleagues looked at the relationship between parenting style and young people's smoking uptake to find that they were less likely to smoke if parents "had high expectations, were knowledgeable about them, and engaged in authoritative parenting practices" (Simons-Morton et al., 1999 p 143). Looking at a different outcome altogether, that of early sexual experimentation, Feldman (1993) reports a battery of evidence to suggest that "non-virginity in youths has been associated with non-authoritative discipline styles" and findings from her study conclude that low self-restraint in sixth grade boys was associated with parents' (mothers and fathers) *indulgent* (child-centred) parenting behaviour.

Recent work has sought to contextualise discipline strategies within wider structural and socio-economic circumstances. Feldman (1993), for example, points out that parental marital status also made an independent contribution to predicting early sexual experimentation, and research carried out by Shucksmith, Hendry and Glendinning (1995) found that young people from one parent or reconstituted families were more likely to report low levels of acceptance and support and unrealistic expectations while those in families with both parents in work were more likely to report permissive parenting styles. In terms of socio-economic background it was also found that authoritative discipline styles were more likely to be associated with "middle class" (their quotes) households where structure and control were strong features of parenting, while "problem" households were associated with low socio-economic status. There was also a small positive correlation between more authoritative discipline styles and educational achievement of parents. These findings mirror those previously made by Newson and Newson (1968) who found social class-related variation in discipline strategy issues in such things as "Mother's interventions in children's quarrels"; "Telling their child to hit back" and "Indications of

reciprocity.” To take this final measure, it was found that high social class was more positively associated with not insisting on obedience if a child said they were busy and wholeheartedly participating in children’s play, a parenting action which could be interpreted as being high on the *responsiveness* dimension of Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) revision of Baumrind. Shucksmith, Hendry and Glendinning (1995) also found a correlation between age of the young person and parenting style, suggesting that styles are considered “age appropriate” with more controlling styles a stronger feature at early adolescence than late.

### **6.3 Parental understandings of discipline strategies**

How close are parents’ understandings to the scientific, empirically validated advice? To find some degree of closeness between “lay” (if parenting can ever be anything else) accounts and the recommendations of the research literature would not be surprising; Phoenix and Woollett (1991) in their critical analysis of the psychological construction of motherhood have suggested that authoritative discipline styles have become part and parcel of the idealised parent-child relationship. Indeed, in the current study families there was some evidence of a high degree of convergence with this pattern of parenting. This could be accounted for methodologically by the self selected nature of the sample which consisted largely of “functional” families. The reported interview data in this section suggests that the internalisation of Baumrind’s advocacy of an authoritative discipline style was present in a significant proportion of families. However, the simple categorisation of families into a particular parenting style was not a straightforward task. The interrogation of accounts of discipline and parenting strategies revealed a variety of responses both within and between households. In some circumstances parents appeared to hold very authoritarian stances in others, the same parents could be more responsive to

perceived individual needs. As such, the achievement of a particular discipline style, such as an authoritative one (given the research literature, it is perhaps not overly evaluative to think of this in terms of an "achievement"), does not represent a consistently practiced standard, more an idealised vision.

In tracing the component parts of a discipline belief or wider style that leads to parents signing up to authoritative and responsive parenting as ideal, understandings of two imbricated factors seem to be crucial. First, is the parents' operational understanding of adolescence, its essential nature and characteristics. As will be shown, at the root of a discipline belief is a believed understanding of how an adolescent behaves. A second theme, related to the former, are parental responses to a common theme in adolescence; the increased autonomy and independence that comes with the life course transition.

Understandings of discipline and parenting are often pragmatic responses to these increased demands for independence, ways of not only accommodating them, but strategies to manage their attendant risks. Reaching a discipline style that resolves these issues of allowing a degree of adolescent autonomy has another related advantage in that it allows a degree of continuity between the separate spheres of adolescence. This assists the process by which parents' values can be present where the parent is not physically present, such as within the peer group. Theoretical work concerning adolescence has suggested that the discontinuities of role and expectation that accompany the period are at the root of much of the uncertainty that characterise it (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). Thus, a parenting style that provides a bridge between these spheres is best placed to ameliorate the discontinuities experienced.

Additionally and crucially, the data show that the way in which parents achieve this management of the discontinuity of experience, can also help shape life-course trajectories beyond the adolescent period. Framed in this manner, discipline styles become not only ways of controlling young people, and ensuring smooth domestic circumstances, but strategies for ensuring successful transitions to adulthood built upon understandings of the workings of the outside world. Thus discipline styles which are characterised as "democratic" in Baldwin's terminology, or "encouraging mature behaviour" or "high standard setting" in Baumrind's, can be interpreted as more than evocations of received scientific wisdom but also as reflections of what Bourdieu would describe as the parents' habitus; the "socialised subjectivity" which provides the individual and familial logic which underpins practices (Williams, 1995). In this way, understanding the "background conditions" of an emergent parenting style becomes a possibility.

Parenting styles came to be represented in my analysis as a continuum or repertoire of responses rather than as set of mutually exclusive categories. Although Baumrind identified two dimensions of parenting style (demandingness and responsiveness) in which various amounts of the two produce her three famous typologies, during the course of my interviews I found that parents would allude to a variety of approaches. Some would talk of discipline emerging from the practices of every day family life; as habits becoming rules. Others would talk of the "off the cuff" nature of discipline, suggesting that as a practice, discipline was in some part improvisation. However, when asked what they thought was best for a young person, a number of parents were able to identify a broadly authoritative discipline style as the ideal standard to which they aspired. However, not only was such a style far from universal, but among those parents who did describe their discipline beliefs within the terms of authoritative parenting, neither was this approach



applied exclusively. An account which was more realistic and true to parents' understandings was of it being a tactic within a range of strategies.

#### 6.4 Varieties of strategies within the parental discipline repertoire

From interview transcripts, I coded a continuum of discipline styles reported by parents. As with those discussed in the literature, some are more general styles of family interaction rather than specifically or exclusively concerned with discipline. My categorisation of parents' reports was influenced by Baumrind's typologies, and as such the continuum can be seen to run from roughly authoritarian to roughly authoritative discipline styles. There were no parents in the sample who reported discipline styles which could be described as permissive. The following representation shows how the styles I identified relate to Baumrind's classificatory scheme.

**Table 6.1 Representation of themes as coded from the data**

Observed/ Reported	Baumrind's
Deterrent ( <i>fear</i> )	Authoritarian
Control	
Monitoring	
Communication	
Deductive/ Involvement	Authoritative

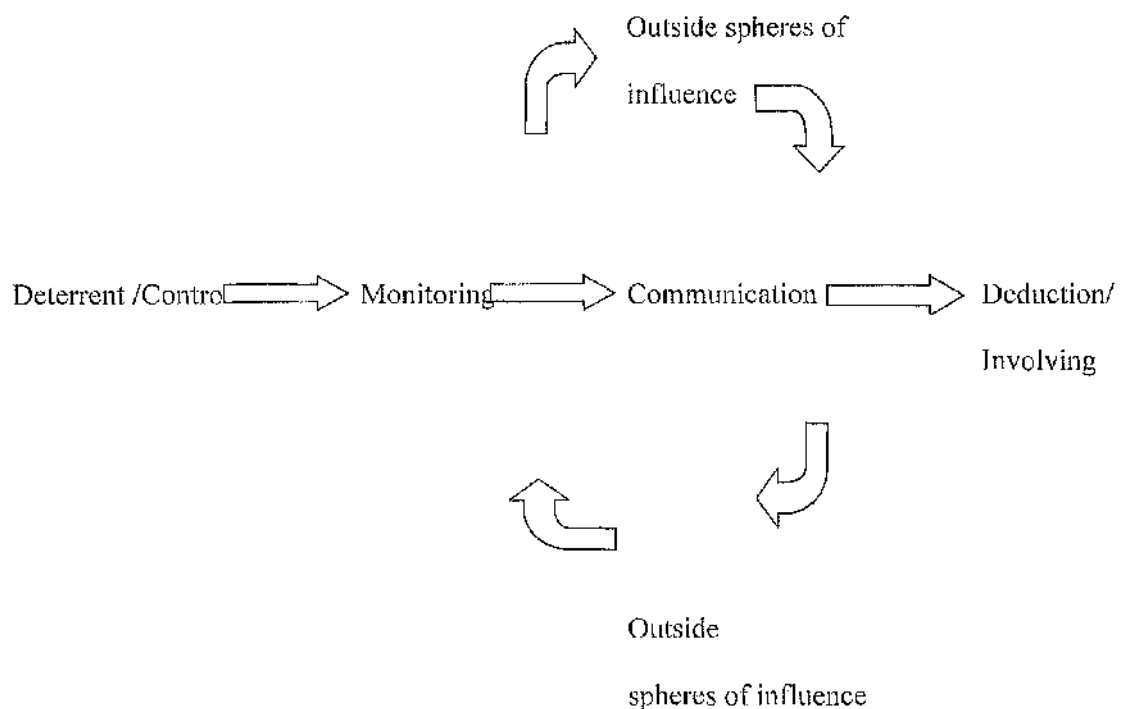
Here I will comment on the categories broadly and in relation to one another before describing and discussing them individually. The first two categories of *Deterrent* and *Control* refer to instances found in the data where parents attempted to actively control young people's behaviour through grounding, forbidding etc. The data under the heading

*Monitoring* describes instances of parents carrying out surveillance of their children's activities to ascertain whether they were doing anything with which they might not agree. The identification of *Communication* as part of the discipline repertoire is the most significant finding in terms of the continuum model through its pivotal relationship both with the other strategies and the wider environment in which adolescent independence is enacted. I initially viewed *Communication* as a form of disciplining in itself, but it is perhaps better viewed as a process which can facilitate a more reciprocal approach in that it links discipline style (a matrix of actions and beliefs *within* the parent-child relationship) to events beyond the immediate household and the emerging spheres in which adolescents are enacting their autonomy (the peer group, school, sites of youth leisure etc.). *Deduction* and *Involvement* emerged from descriptions in which parents attempted to instil what they considered to be correct behavioural standards in their children, but significantly, in a manner which sought to make them the agents of their own (self) discipline. In short this is the authoritative-reciprocal approach, and *Involvement* refers to the way in which the aims of the deductive strategy are incorporated in to the everyday activities of family life, as for example in giving children say over family events. The later categories on the continuum, especially *Communication* and *Involvement*, show how discipline strategies and wider parenting strategies, not at first sight connected to discipline *per se*, are in fact intertwined, especially in the achievement of discipline strategies which the literature establishes as producing more favourable outcomes. This would explain why in some families where there was not a focus on rules and discipline in a traditional sense (of being a "disciplinarian"), there were nonetheless tacit behavioural expectations in operation. For example, it was evident from my presence in these households that the younger family members were expected to show some degree of manners towards me, even if the enforcement of this expectation was not in evidence.

Figure 6.1 below shows how I conceptualised discipline style as a continuum.

Significantly, I began to view it as a continuum that intersected with the world beyond the parent-child dyad (or more usually, triad, depending on number of disciplining parents) through the *Communication* dimension of it. *Monitoring* could also occupy this pivotal space, but as is discussed later (Chapter 7), does so less effectively. Significantly, the communication dimension is necessary for parenting style to move on to the “desirable” *Deductive/ Involving* dimension.

**Figure 6.1. The Representation of Parenting Style as a Continuum Intersecting with the World Beyond the Home.**



## 6.5 The continuum model

### (A) Deterrent and Control

As the following extract from a father in a middle class dual parent household shows, various rationales may be present in one strategy. In discussing the best way of preventing young people from engaging in health damaging behaviour he gives the following advice;

*"I'm a great believer in shock horror. If you took them to a drug clinic and you knew somebody was coming off heroin and you actually saw genuine pain, all being traumatic, you have more chance of it sticking in their heads than saying you shouldn't take drugs because it is going to kill so many cells in your brain. There is no harm in giving kids the short, sharp shock treatment. It's like saying to kids if you want to smoke, there is a good pair of lungs and there is a dead pair of lungs. I think that is the right way to do it."*

Martin Giffnock, dual parent household

In one respect this is an authoritative, inductive discipline belief. It represents an attempt (although imagined) to make young people think about the consequences of their actions. However, within Baumrind's categorisation, it would tend to the authoritarian dimension. The above strategy is one of producing obedience through fear of negative consequences visited on oneself, rather than behavioural standards deduced from learned principles. The same father's belief that young people should obey adults and "do as they are told" because "in the real world, if you don't do as you are told, you end up in prison" has the same implications. It is not easily classifiable however, as although based upon a fear element it does make some reference to the world beyond the family environment and a perceived set of immutable rules. However, the expression of those rules is based on deterrent rather than rationality.

The lengthy quote displayed below has been kept in its entirety because it displays a number of beliefs that construct a discipline style. By spelling out why he feels there is a need for discipline in the first instance, the father alludes to an understanding of the nature of adolescence and how this perception informs the nature of the parent-child relationship. In his understanding, strong control, incorporating the earlier deterrent style, is necessary because without it young people will fall foul of their corruptible nature;

*"I think one of the things that you try to have is a bit of discipline. I think discipline certainly starts in the home, I have no doubt about that. My own feeling is that things started to deteriorate when they took discipline out of schools. The problem now is with all the politically correct stuff, you know the cases where children have sued their parents and after their parents have disciplined them gone through the legal system into court...the problem then becomes that you end up in a situation that if you say 'you're out of line here that means you're grounded for X, you're not going to such and such a place', I think that is a good a deterrent as you are going to get. I definitely think that the teachers not being able to use the strap now is a problem, the lack of discipline in schools is terrible... I think that the thing missing now is respect for authority. They have no respect for anything....it makes it very difficult for parents to keep discipline, there's so much publicity given to rights, children have got rights, rights for this, that and the next thing. But nobody ever sits down and thinks of the long term impact and all that happens is that kids spot the opportunity and before you know it you've a real problem with their behaviour and they keep pushing to see how far they can go."*

David Craig, dual parent household

Underlying these two beliefs is something akin to the Behaviourist explanation. Discipline acts as a deterrent against young peoples' corruptible nature and good outcomes for adolescents are produced by indicating immediate negative consequences for unacceptable behaviour. In this instance, the father's beliefs can be seen as strongly authoritarian. However strong control in other cases can also be allied with a strong sense of young people's developmental needs. Other parents would express the need for parental control

over young people as part of a wider parental strategy. The following mother sees tight parental control as a foundation on which the child's developmental needs can be fulfilled. In this respect, it incorporates two separate dimensions of child rearing in one act, having a degree of demandingness and responsiveness.

*"I think personally you have got to keep a tight rein on kids. Mark will come up to me and say like 'my pals say you are too strict' because he is in for nine and they are in for half ten. But I think you have to keep a tight rein on them. You can do your best to stop them drinking and smoking and staying out late, but at the end of the day there is a lot of low self confidence, low self esteem, like to go out there and drink gives them a bit of status and that, so you have to try and encourage them to have confidence in themselves. It could be awfully easy to be influenced by other people and like those that say I am too strict and 'they are all laughing at me' and the rest of it. I won't do that. My reason to Mark which he thinks is dead soppy is to tell them that I care too much about him to let him wander the streets until that time at night."*

Karen White, one parent household.

A number of beliefs are in operation in the above quote. Initially, we see appeals to young people's corruptible nature and hence the need to "keep a tight rein on them". However, rather than a Behaviourist type explanation being elucidated as the root cause of this, we see a different reasoning in terms of the perceived needs of adolescents to self-actualise; that "there is a lot of low self-esteem about" is proposed as the reason why young people stray off the straight and narrow, gaining status and esteem through rebellious acts that impress peers, or potential peers, if not parents, teachers and other adults. The identification of the active role that the peer group plays in adolescence is important. This parent has made the jump in terms of understanding the importance of social experimentation and developing identity that are a characteristic part of the adolescent transition to adulthood. This jump can be seen as positive on account of the discontinuous, staggered nature in which the autonomy of adulthood is achieved (Coleman and Hendry,

1990, page 9). This mother is describing a parenting style which both recognises the need for this transition and allows personal growth but does not leave young people feeling isolated and alone in their changing role. It has a larger role to play in the next coded style.

### **(B) Monitoring**

Exercising control over young people can indeed be more subtle than the straight forward laying down of *thou shalt* instructions. Close *monitoring* of their child's activities as a tactic provides parents with feedback and information about his or her development, peer group and peer group activity and allows the parenting to continue despite the opening up of physical space between sites of leisure and sites of parenting:

*"We try to be totally involved in what he is doing and know who he's with. I want to know. He has boys to the house because I would rather he was here with his friends than out. I don't want him to walk about the streets."*

Helen Corkhill, dual parent household.

In this family the need for young people to develop emotionally and develop adult identities through mixing with other young people is recognised, as are the potential risks associated with this. This family continue;

Father           *"If they are hanging around then I think problems are created that way. I'd rather they were going round to somebody's house and actually doing something, playing on a Playstation or whatever."*

Mother           *"There's got to be some direction in going out, not just wandering."*  
Corkhill, dual parent household

The above examples again show restrictive discipline strategies, but also include an awareness of the need of nurture. Monitoring, can however be employed in a more authoritarian manner as the following mother indicates;

*"They get money on Saturday, but I tend to know what they are doing with it that day. I mean my son, he spends money on magazines, but the Saturday before he went bowling. My daughter, I'm concerned about the money that she has got at the moment – she has got more than she needs for going out and buying lunch with her pals and she is going to be spending that on alcohol, drugs and cigarettes. I'm very conscious of that because I've done it, in fact I wrote the script. So I ask her 'What did you do with your five pounds', Oh I bought so and so', 'what did you do with the other four?' I'm cross-examining her all the time to see what she has done with this money. Her father told her at the weekend to get a part-time job. I said no way, she would have too much money to spend on alcohol, drugs and cigarettes."*

Eve Ferdinand, dual parent household.

Again, too much autonomy, too early, is seen as having negative consequences and this mother's style could be described as relying highly on the controlling (or *demandingness*) dimension and less on the *responsiveness* dimension. However, below we see more clearly how the same tactic can be seen as constitutive of a style that is more reciprocal, moving towards an understanding that the young person is becoming an agent of their own discipline;

*"My mum will ask me every time I go out 'where are you going? Who are you going out with, what time, around, will you be back at...?' and I'll say 'well, I might be back, if I go skating, I might be back at 11' because we get the bus home, and she'll say to me 'right, I'll be back in at half eleven at the latest.'"*

Christina Johnstone, 15, dual parent household.

And the mother adds;

*"We have generally brought the kids up to let us know if they are going somewhere in particular as opposed to just like if they are going half a mile away. They will come in and say they are going half a mile away. Like who they are going with and where they are going."*

Christine Johnstone (Christina's mother), dual parent household.



However, in the case of this mother's form of monitoring, further conversation revealed an interesting turn to their reciprocal relationship, which it transpired might not be as two-way as at first seemed. The mother reported a recent occasion when she discovered her daughter had started smoking, and described how the monitoring of her daughter adapted to this knowledge;

*"I do spot checks, smelling her hands to see if she's been smoking, or smelling her breath. I make a joke of it, I meet her at the door and say 'right, spot check.'"*

Christine Johnstone, dual parent household.

This strategy highlights limits to the reciprocity within the interaction; some degree of reciprocity is acceptable, but only when it is on the parent's terms. A more inclusive approach seems to work as long as the young person is playing by the rules laid down by the parents. If these rules become internalised then the discipline style can become more relaxed. If however, as in the above case of the young person smoking, the young person adopts behaviours and attitudes contrary to parental expectations, a less liberal discipline style will come into force.

### **(C) Communication**

A further and similar strategy cited by parents in their discussion of discipline is that of *Communication*. Here we hear a parent describe it as one of the most fundamental in that it bridges the gap between adolescent experiences outside and inside the home.

Father: *"I think the major problem is not communicating. I think the problem is that teenagers can lock themselves away in their own world, and the adults don't try to get into that world. And therefore there's a sort of barrier created for probably quite a number of years. I wouldn't like that to happen. Even though Alan has got maybe totally diverse opinions from say, both of us, we always like to keep the lines of communication open."*

PS: *"What happens if you don't keep open the lines of communication?"*

Father: *"I just think you drift apart, I think there would be a great divide. You have teenagers wandering the streets and arriving home late and going to bed and that's it. And therefore you don't really know what is going on, you're in the dark. I think that is very bad. I think that is where a lot of problems arise."*

Bill Corkhill, dual parent household.

In the above illustration of parenting style, the father has again identified the separation of experiences which accompany adolescent independence. This is important because the communication element allows access to the young person's world, and can as such be tied to the process of monitoring. The fact that a significant number of respondents described adolescence as a period of experimentation and of branching out suggests that the separation of experience between the young person and parent could be a possible source of difficulty. A philosophy frequently expressed by parents was that *"you can't be with them, watching them, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week"*. With discipline, good communication therefore provides some form of bridging of these spheres of experience. As such, the development of this level of discipline style becomes a crucial point on the continuum as it represents the point at which parenting style (which is developed in the domestic context) adjusts to the increasingly peer focused experience of the adolescent.

*"I've always said 'you can come and talk about anything, it doesn't matter what it is'. If they get in with certain crowds that they are doing certain things, it doesn't matter what it is, they maybe even know what they are doing is wrong, but don't want to look bad or whatever."*

Margaret McMaster, one parent household.

*"I have friends who have children of very similar ages who are getting drunk and smoking and those kind of things and I can quite honestly and genuinely say my children don't do that because if they did they would tell me because I'm not going to go right down their throat, I would actually sit down and ask them 'why did you feel you wanted to do it? How*

*did you feel when you had the cigarette? How did you feel when you were drunk?' We're always very open about things in this house."*

Karen White, one parent household

It may be suggested that the above parent is displaying a degree of self deception in believing her children will always come to her. However the underlying belief remains the same; that the best way to assist young people through this stage of the life-course and its attendant risks is to allow the opportunity to connect experiences and not allow the discontinuities of family and peer group roles to stifle the parenting task. Additionally, by asking the question "how did you feel when..." recognises the needs and efficacy of adolescents in constructing their own identities outside the role of dependent. It also seems that good communication facilitates a more authoritative, reciprocal discipline style, vital to establishing a family environment where young people can express their feelings;

*"I've always brought him up that if there's anything you don't like, let's talk about it, don't let's fall out or go in a huff, let's sit down and talk about it, come to a compromise you know, but let's talk."*

Eve Ferdinand, dual parent household.

This seems to work well if the young person is made to believe through the quality of communication that they are being treated as an equal by the parent;

*"I think if you talk to them on the same level, like if you don't speak to them in a condescending manner like teacher would. I think a lot of it is how you speak to a child, if you talk to them on the same level I think that makes a difference. My daughter, I can sit and talk to her."*

Ann Kilbride, one parent household.

In this instance, again there may be evidence of the mother also referring to a "script" rather than her actual parenting style. Elsewhere in the discussion, she described the relationship between herself and her child as strained, with them often falling out over

housework. The intention underpinning the belief however is clear; that the use of communication is as a connecting strategy between the changing roles of adolescence. In this particular relationship, the tension may have arisen from the particularly advanced stage the young person had reached in one element of her autonomy, namely in the sphere of paid work. Here she was an equal with her mother, sharing shifts at the local hospital. Back home, however, she was asked to return to the inequality of the child-parent relationship. It was clear that this young person had difficulty in accepting the authority of the mother as their frequent arguments around domestic requests attest. However, when the role was made equal through suspending the dependent status (not talking to her "like a teacher would"), domestic harmony was restored. Such a parent-child relationship might be described as "indulgent" as it is highly responsive but low on demands, if it were not for the fact that attempts to redress the *demandingness* element of the relationship produced obvious tensions. As such this dyad stands out as an example of possible negative consequences of recognising teenage autonomy through too great a discontinuity of roles; equal at work, unequal at home. To this end, the sharing of roles outside the domestic spheres also stood to undermine the domestic relationship.

There is a need, however, for parents to recognise and encourage autonomy outside the realm of their family situation. This need has been recognised by Marsland (1987) who points out a need for so called *auto-socialisation*;

*"Time and space ... handed over to young people to work out for themselves in auto-socialisation the developmental problems of self and identity which cannot be handled by the simple direct socialisation appropriate to childhood."*

(Marsland 1987, page12)

In the Kilbride household, the sphere of auto-socialisation had ended up by giving developmental efficacy to the young person that was contradicted in the domestic sphere because of the mother's proximity in both. This may be experienced by all adolescents who notice "brakes" on their independence in some areas and not in others. However, it has the added disadvantage of also showing the mother in contradictory roles, not just the young person. The next stage coded on the discipline strategy is an attempt at allowing a space for such "auto-socialisation" which avoids some of the attendant risks of the peer group more successfully than the Kilbride mother-daughter dyad.

#### **(D) Deduction and Involvement**

At the end of the continuum, deduction, that is the perceived ability to pass on "the rules" of good behaviour to young people, emerges as a desirable feature of the parent child-relationship. This linchpin of positive parenting in the scientific literature, and its central role in developing self efficacy, seemed to be well understood by the parents who used it; *"Obviously you would have to trust them at an age when they get into clubs, things like that, but again, I think if they're responsible and brought up to know right from wrong, then that's a start."*

Derek Paisley, dual parent household.

*"But really what I have tried to do is equip them to make their own decisions and so when they do make their own decisions I'm not going to complain if they can prove to me that they have thought it through."*

Mauren Shaws, one parent household.

Moreover, it seems that a deductive discipline style is expressed in the day-to-day practice of parenting through involving young people in the negotiation of rules and deciding wider family activities, as is revealed in the following quotes where the aim of discipline is to allow young people to be involved in their own standard setting.

*"if she says a time that I think is reasonable, I say right , OK, but I get annoyed if she is back later than that time. I'm trying to give her a bit of responsibility, deciding when she will be back."*

Sheila Paisley, dual parent household.

And, in a related manner, we hear another mother acknowledge the impossibility of being an infallible law giver;

*"I don't lay down the law. The only time I have laid down the law is when it comes to safety. When there is no right or wrong answer, it has to be an answer we can all live by...a compromise."*

Maureen Shaws, one parent household.

The development of self-efficacy in such families is not related simply to discipline and the explicit involvement in the formulation of rules, but also involvement in the sense of everyday family processes. An example is the introduction of alcohol to family gatherings on the basis that it exists in the outside world and by its introduction within the family, the parents are providing the apparatus for their children to make decisions when confronted with it outside their family setting (most likely in the peer context). The next quote shows a belief that ensuring young people's involvement in activities fosters a sense of self-efficacy and also the knowledge to use it;

*"I have no desire to tell them how to live their life but I hope to have formed their decision making apparatus for them when they are younger. I mean that's why I have bust a gut letting them join clubs, going to Scouts, having weird physical experiences like rock climbing and abseiling and goodness knows what else to give them a sense of physical confidence, meeting as many people as possible. I mean for the last I don't know how many years I have refused to phone shops for enquiries or to find out about things such as train times and so on. They can pick up a phone, they do it."*

Maureen Shaws, one parent household.

Additionally, the encouragement of involvement in sporting activities or organisations outside the home was seen by many parents as important to a successful parenting style. It seemed to be one of the ways through which parents could help their children learn new skills and independence outside the home but have some degree of reassurance about the types of associations their children were making beyond their watchful gaze.

In Table 6.2 below the families and discipline styles are matched to show how the analysis described here was instigated.

### **6.6 Do financial/ economic resources impact on discipline styles?**

It is fair to say that much of the academic research literature has actually been internalised and is part of the socially constructed knowledge about parenting. However, the fact that there are variations in the way families act out this knowledge and that different parts of it are incorporated into their parenting style raises the question of why this is the case. It suggests that the next stage of the analysis is to look at the situations within which these families find themselves to discover if any of these structural elements are influencing their parenting style. Whether economic status would determine a parenting style is a vexed question and could possibly lead to an overly deterministic interpretation. However, as a starting point to understanding the background conditions in which parenting styles emerge, and given the emphasis in this thesis on values and their transmission (a component of the cultural as opposed to the economic element of class belonging), it serves as useful to show the data I collected.

**Table 6.2 Parenting style by financial /economic resources**

	Deterrent	Control	Monitoring	Com'cation	Deduction/ Involvement
<b>High SES*</b>					
Shaws					
Corkhill					
O'Connel					
Giffnock					
Lanark					
Craig					
McMaster					
Prestwick					
<b>Mid SES*</b>					
Badminton					
Paisley					
Shandwick					
<b>Low SES*</b>					
Anderson					
Kilbride					
Ferdinand					
Harris					



Leighton					
MacLeish					
Small					
Rose					
Moss					
Townsend					
White					

\*For discussion about interpretation of socio-economic status please refer to section 2.6

Table 6.2, above, shows the discipline styles of the study families arranged by economic resources and demonstrates something quite interesting. In the majority of the families identified as having higher economic resources, there seems to be considerable success in reaching the end point of the continuum, and displaying what I characterised as an *Involving* parenting style. By this, I mean that families report involvement in family decision making as an essential part of their parenting.

There could, however, be a different explanation. Families that reached this end of the continuum, that is those who spoke less of rules and discipline in the traditional sense (of being “disciplinarian”) might just talk about discipline in a different way from those for who did not reach this end of the continuum. The identification of *Involvement* as a coding category is interesting in itself, as it represents an understanding of parenting and discipline which is at first difficult to incorporate into talk about discipline since the terminology traditionally associated with it, of rules, punishments and sanctions etc. does not seem appropriate. Given the interpretation that the way parents talked about discipline and behavioural styles is what really separates them, we can see why there might be an

apparent economic resource based patterning in the data display; that the origins of the difference are, once again (as in the previous chapter), explained culturally.

After putting the families onto a continuum of discipline responses and looking at them by apparent levels of resources, the next stage of the analysis was to look at the "negative cases". By this, it is meant the examples that seem to buck the apparent trend, i.e. those families from a lower socio-economic position whose parenting style reaches the end of the continuum, or vice versa, those more financially well-off who by the criteria used here, do not seem to be doing as well. By putting parenting in context and investigating the background conditions to parenting style it is hoped important intersections between the context of family experience and the development of parenting style will be revealed. As with the example of the Kilbride household discussed earlier, where a particular and extraordinary set of discontinuities could have explained the conflict which arose between mother and daughter, it is worth investigating the origins of difference in the other households.

From the families with greater apparent economic resources, a notable exception was the Craigs, in that their talk of discipline style had not progressed far along the continuum at all. This was the family in which the father lamented the rise of a "politically correct" attitude towards discipline and the sea-change in the recognition of rights for young people. Both parents also believed that this produced negative consequences for their parenting. In particular they felt it produced a contradiction between the values they tried to instil and the ones their children were receiving in other spheres of their lives, such as school and through the media.

- Mother                    *".....I mean teachers SWEAR, certain teachers swear, I mean they don't hear swearing in here. I know they hear it out there. To them (kids) that's just a joke, they think that's funny, and to me it's not funny at all, it's awful.*
- Father                    *"General standards in society have fallen, you'll hear swearing on the telly, even before nine o'clock...."*

Craig, two parent household

The incongruent nature of their own values with those perceived to be held in the outside world also produced difficulties in discipline, as it undermined the respect the two young people in the family had for their parents' discipline demands.

*"I don't think they (parents) get what young people are like, they just go on what us two are like. Like we've got to be in at half nine, half nine is nothing, other people I know are out till one. Half nine is like a joke."*

Michael Craig, 15, dual parent household

There seems also to be an apparent failure in the ability to link experiences within and beyond the household rooted in a contested understanding of the nature of adolescence (*"what young people are like"*). There is also evidence of what family systems theorists might term a "closed family system" (Olson, Russell and Sprenkle, 1983), where parental values are considered to be at odds with those outside the home resulting in a defensiveness. The young person is also well aware of a difference in attitudes between the outside world and that inside the home. However, in his understanding of it, it is the values and attitudes of his parents that are unrealistic and problematic. This linking of experience and finding a workable congruity of values has become more difficult with a recent retreat from the idea of spending family time together.

One activity, albeit exclusively male, which used to unite the parent-child experience within this household was playing football. By the time of my interviews, the young

people's interest in football was on the decline, as was their interest in any activities which involved a shared experience between the younger and older members of the family. When asked if they did anything with their parents, they protested that it was boring and for the things that they liked doing, such as going to the park, cinema or concerts, parents were not welcome company. It did seem to remain appropriate for parents to accompany them on shopping trips however. On the whole the young people in this family felt a separation of values from their parents. The point that there was such a sharp distinction between the public and private images that young people had of themselves reveals the difficulty in establishing the value accordance which can facilitate successful parenting outcomes. From the parents' point of view, this fostered a feeling that they could not do much to keep young people on the right path. The father frequently made reference to the presence of drink and drugs as a ubiquitous feature of young people's lives outside the home. There was a feeling that if they were going to do it, they were going to do it, whatever their parents did.

Most significant was the information that the mother provided to account for this breakdown of intergenerational communication. Their eldest daughter had for some years severed contact with the family after she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. Although the relationship was improving and her parents were supporting her again, the whole affair had considerably dented the parents' confidence in their parenting style. They felt unable to explain, after providing their daughter with a stable, middle class and functional family background, why their daughter had ended up on what they considered to be the wrong track (having a child instead of going to University). What they had believed to be a model up-bringing up to that point now seemed to reveal gaps in their knowledge and parenting ability. Now, as their younger sons approached the age of

developing more and more autonomy, an overwhelming anxiety characterised their parenting style producing in turn more tensions as their teenage son detected brakes on his independence.

To interpret this on a more conceptual level, we can see this stage in the family's history as, for the adults, representing a crisis of faith in their own parenting style. Conceiving parenting style as bound up within the notion of habitus, we can see how their generative schema and dispositions about the world needed, in their view, to undergo fundamental revision. Their parental strategies at the time of interview included reactionary elements and a fear of outside influences that had not been shared by their younger children. Their parenting style and habitus were formed within the background conditions of a stable, middle class economic situation, but challenged by the experiences they had with their daughter. Thus we can see how processes at the micro level can intersect with wider structural factors to produce differential outcomes.

More positively, a number of families with far more limited financial resources were categorised as reached the "Deductive/ Involving" end of the continuum. They are discussed in the following section.

### **6.7 Succeeding, but against the odds?**

In those described as having lower economic resources, four families (Anderson, McKinnon, Rose and White) display parenting styles which reach the "desirable" end of the continuum;. With the exception of the Rose household, all these are households that contain just one adult. A possible explanation for their standing in contrast to the other families with less economic resources is perhaps the occupation of their parents, since all

undertook jobs in the public/voluntary sector involving contact with children or families. The parent in the White household had just finished a social work degree and was about to embark on a career in the field; her recorded socio-economic status was perhaps a reflection of a transitional state rather than a fixed point. The mother in the Rose family had similarly recently trained as a teacher. The Anderson parent was a youth worker and the MacLeish parent, a Psychology student. I think these occupations might well have led to a more reflexive stance on their own parenting as well as a passing, or perhaps deep, knowledge of the research literature around parenting and child outcomes. As a consequence, this knowledge may have shaped their attitudes towards parenting or even the content of their public accounts of their parenting style. Certainly, these middle class occupations would equate to the holding of middle class values by these parents, even if they did not have higher financial rewards, particularly in the case of the student.

If there is a connection to be found between socio-economic status and parenting style, then a likely explanation that it is a case of lack of resources has some doubt cast upon it by these findings. The analysis here allows the separation of economic resources and cultural ones, and shows how in some circumstances money can be less important. Examples of income preventing the enactment of idealised parenting style were mentioned by some parents. However, the fact that the parents discussed above did reach the positive end of the continuum points to more process related resources that do not necessarily correspond to income but to cultural values. I have suggested that the professional standing of the parents in question might provide a value based compensation for their lack of material or parenting resources. Alternatively, the material resources of these households may have dropped as a financial cost of separation and accompanying discontinuity in their career trajectory.

In the White household this was particularly the case. The mother told me that if she had more money, she would take her son out a lot more and, importantly, would be in a position to invite his friends along as well. This would be a particularly effective way of monitoring peer group association. She felt that her lack of money had already had a detrimental effect on her son's development. For example recently, his friends had started going to Judo classes and I was told how the cost was prohibitively expensive for them. Here we see how a number of issues related to socio-economic status negatively effect this parent's ability to parent as well as she would like to;

*"His pals go to Judo, and football training but these things cost money. I mean the football training is only two pounds fifty, but you've got his bus fare up and down as well so you're a fiver a night on Tuesday and Thursday. And then he's got his away games and the parents contribute towards that as well, so it's a lot of money at the end of the day. But the other side is that if he can't do this he goes out and hangs about the street, I can't have his friends in the house, it's too small with the new baby as well, I can't have six guys in creating havoc. But that's what I try and do, I try and help his social life, get him involved in the right crowd and not getting in with the wrong crowd who are around on the streets...it's good for his confidence to do these things, because these things boost your ego....I'd love to have the money (to send him to judo) "*

Karen White, one parent household.

This mother has a clear belief that peer association and activity can shape life chances and believes involvement in certain organised activities can boost self-esteem. They are, as a family, financially denied a lot of these opportunities and she fears that the alternatives would have a detrimental effect on his life chances. Whenever she can, she compensates by having her son's friends stay the night and getting them a video. However, she believes these occasions are too few and far between. It is of course also worth noting that this mother is one of the parents from a low socio-economic background who actually has quite

a developed parenting style, in terms of the continuum which emerged from the data. This would suggest that in this case, the knowledge the parent possesses can act as a compensation for the lack of other resources.

However, other parents would not so readily make the link between income and ability to parent. Although some of the better off families would marvel at less wealthy parents' ability to overcome material disadvantage, usually thinking of the expensive nature of the contemporary consumer orientated experience of childhood and adolescence, this was not seen to impact upon issues such as the ability to spend time with children and adolescents. As noted earlier (section 3.6) better off parents would refer to instances of family activities which they believed were more a matter of imagination than money; activities such as flying kites and going for walks in places of scenic interest were often mentioned. What they did not acknowledge was that these activities also invariably involve having access to a car.

Even in less well off households, there could be a tendency to place blame on factors other than socio-economic inequality for difficulties in bringing up children. In one instance, Sandra Townsend, a mother who does not live with her children's father and manages on a low income, describes failing families as "neds" (the colloquialism for young people who are assumed to frequently engage in delinquent behaviour) "*Families were no one has ever worked*" in her definition. Paradoxically, she described her oldest son as a ned. She located the source of his poor academic record and trouble with the police within his individual personality, a fact she believed to be proved by the fact she had not had any trouble with her other two sons. Her explanation considers that there are simply some individuals for whom parents can do nothing. At the other end of the socio-economic



structure, one father also located the source of failing parents with single parenthood as he believed this encouraged children to believe it is possible to "*live on hand-outs*" (Father, Giffnock).

## 6.8 Discussion

The case for socio-economic circumstance shaping the achievement of a certain parenting style is not supported conclusively here. The data suggest that it is not the only factor, since some families, although being able to identify the limits which finances put upon their ability to parent, seemed to have well developed ideas of parenting and young people's developmental outcomes. In contrast to purely economic factors, I would not rule out the importance of social class in respect to parenting style through a notion of class that involved class-based attitudes and norms. The analysis moves closer to this perspective in the next chapter when I analyse the logic that underpins parenting styles. The reason this seems to be important is that many parents seemed to think that encouraging the "right" sorts of associations with peers was key to helping young people successfully negotiate their way through adolescence to adulthood. This suggests that parents, and indeed young people, believe that the parent-child relationship is not the only significant relationship that is productive of good life chances, albeit an important and significant one.

The continuum model, with its intersection with the world beyond the home through *Communication and Monitoring*, develops the theme that emerged strongly in Chapter 4, that parenting does not take place solely *within* the home but that conversely, adolescent autonomy, traditionally seen as a movement from the inside to the outside of the home, remains *bounded* by parenting style through the management of the values and beliefs young people come into contact with. The method of this parental boundary maintenance

can be either negotiated (*Communication*) or imposed (*Monitoring*). The continuum shows that the most successful styles are those which allow continued parental knowledge of young people's outside networks with the minimum of parent-child conflict.

The aim of this piece of analysis was to establish the proximity of respondents' views about discipline to the models offered by the developmental research literature. To accomplish this, a degree of re-conceptualisation was needed to ensure a fit between a grounded understanding stemming from respondents' accounts and the scientific literature. A comparison with Baumrind (1967) was considered the most appropriate as this model remains the standard, providing the terminology by which people, lay and scientific, attempt to understand the place of discipline within the parent-child interaction. That this re-conceptualisation produced a continuum is significant in that it suggests that good discipline is something that is influenced by a variety of factors related with the backgrounds of the families in question. These contributory issues are explored in much more depth in the next chapter which takes analysis of within-case logic as the starting point.

Even within the confines of an analysis which aimed to re-articulate the concept in the terms given by the respondents, it was possible to produce a preliminary examination of how economic circumstances might influence the development of discipline style. In terms of material and family resources, it seems that respondents did, to a limited extent, feel this to affect the enactment of a discipline style at the positive end of the constructed continuum. However, other factors, which again could be interpreted within a wider framework of the notion of *cultural capital* or *habitus*, may have contributed to the articulation of a particular discipline style.

## **Chapter 7**

### **A Logical Analysis of Parental Discipline Responses**

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## 7.1 Introduction

The previous section concluded with an examination of the parent identified discipline styles in relation to financial and economic status. The aim was to see if it could be used as a starting point towards an explanation of why parents adopted certain parenting styles. The data display showed that by grouping parents according to economic resources and looking at their discipline style, there were obvious negative cases which would suggest that any link between socio-economic and discipline styles was not definite and possibly even coincidence. However, by broadening the analysis to include cultural factors, the argument for some socio-cultural determinant appeared a little stronger. For parents in poorer financial circumstances, higher educational levels did seem to push their parenting style a little further along the continuum. What the increased educational level may have produced might only be a difference in the way parents talk about discipline, but it could be argued that this difference is significant as it shows a cultural influence.

In this section however, I report on the findings from an alternative form of analysis, logical analysis, which revealed that parents conceptualised discipline strategies as responses to the perceived risks that faced young people. This emergent theme led me to re-conceptualise the data in terms of notions of risk, which have been used in the analysis of young person's outcomes. The logical analysis also showed how conflict can arise between young people and their parents through different understandings and the operational logic surrounding notions of autonomy as a distinguishing characteristic of achieving adult status. Finally, I look at the parental logic of two contrasting families which reveals how understandings of risk, autonomy and conceptions of adolescent maturity can influence parenting style in terms of the re-conceptualised continuum of the last chapter.

## 7.2 Logical Analysis

In the previous analysis, a cross-case comparison, which is easily afforded by use of the NUDIST software package, was used. The coding process that it encourages, one that fractures data into discrete parts, led to the re-conceptualisation of discipline styles as a continuum model. However, I felt the form of analysis offered by the software package led to an over-emphasis of comparison *between* cases, as well as being influenced by preconceived theoretical ideas about parenting and discipline style. Logical analysis on the other hand, puts the subject's logic before the researcher's, and so offered the opportunity to look at the internal logic *within* accounts (Williams 1981) and not just similarities and differences between them.

By returning to transcripts in their entirety it became easier to identify operational logic in the accounts of respondents. The fractured data as coded for NUDIST can miss out important logical connections between beliefs and action if, for example, they are revealed at separate points in an interview and coded under different nodes. The aim here was to establish where the links between beliefs and action were and what these beliefs centred on. The notions of risk and of adolescent independence emerged as critical ideas that could inform parenting style and I show how different conceptualisations of these ideas can produce conflict in the instance of one parent-child dyad. Later, I use the accounts provided by two families (The Leightons and the Prestwicks) to illustrate the connections between conceptions of risk, adolescent independence and parenting style. The first of these accounts (the Leightons) was selected on the grounds that the NUDIST based analysis had revealed it as a family whose processes operated at the earlier stages on the continuum. The second account (the Prestwicks) however was arguably the most

“successful” in terms of an interaction style which appeared to be reciprocal and democratic and based around a high degree of communication. I chose these in the hope that the internal logic of the two households might reveal substantial differences which had explanatory power.

### **7.3 Risk and “the epistemological fallacy of late modernity”**

The advantage of re-conceptualising the origins of discipline styles as responses to risk is in providing an extra analytical device. Risk has gained considerable currency in recent years in sociological theory, largely due to the work of Beck (1992). The notion of a risk society is more than the recognition that navigating the life course has become more hazardous. Implicit within it is a re-conceptualisation of the understanding of the structure of society. The risk society is a new form of modernity in which the traditional certainties of class and gender-based trajectories and structured experience are removed for an apparently increasingly individualised life-course trajectory. This appearance of individualisation has been contested, however, by theorists such as Giddens (1991), who wish to retain the notion of a structuring influence at work within and between individual experiences. Even stronger critics, Furlong and Cartmel (1996), have challenged the widespread acceptance of the increased individualism as “the epistemological fallacy of late modernity”. They provide evidence for this by showing how, for young people especially, despite the diversity of experiences available, life courses remain highly structured by social and economic background in developed societies. This is particularly true for outcomes such as criminality, educational achievement, health and labour market transitions. The character of this inequality, it is claimed and illustrated, is in keeping with the structures of modernity, with class and gender being key. The direction of this inequality also remains the same, with *“late modernity involving an essential continuity*

*with the past; economic and cultural resources are still central to an understanding of differential life chances and experiences"* (Furlong and Cartmel, 1996. p.109).

Within my own study, as I came to see discipline styles as responses to risk, it became a useful analytic tool to ask to what extent the so-called "epistemological fallacy of late modernity" formed part of the respondents' conceptual apparatus. To what causes did they attribute the life course outcomes of individuals and, by extension, their teenage children? In a risk society, in which there is an ever greater appearance of individualism, where did these parents place the emphasis of causality? Attempting to unearth this logic in parental accounts was not a straight forward task. Unearthing notions of structural causality and separating them from the appreciation of individual efficacy available proved to involve more than identifying the appropriate "because" propositions. Despite this difficulty, the task was not without its rewards. A deeper investigation of the two examples of parental logic revealed understandings which chimed with and supported the findings of the previous chapters. It revealed a key strategy through which parents can have a hand in value maintenance; through having a communication link between families and other sites of peer association.

#### **7.4 Parenting styles as a response to perceived risk**

Before moving on to an investigation of the two case study families, it is necessary to show how parenting (and discipline) strategies can be re-conceptualised as responses to risk and how they relate to emergent ideas of efficacy. It became apparent from the transcripts that when parents spoke about discipline, what they were often talking about was a parenting strategy which was intended to keep young people safe from harm. Parents develop strategies which ensure their children's continued safety from the early years, when they

are completely dependent upon their parents for their own safety, to the stage of late adolescence when new dangers to life and, not insignificantly, life chances, emerge in tandem with a shift in responsibility for ensuring safety to the young person. Parents' understanding of discipline strategies combined an awareness of both these factors.

During early childhood, ensuring safety requires parents to remove children from contact with the causes of danger. I would be told of how parents would keep toddlers away from a fire, and as they got older, they would forbid them from going near a busy road. Within these two responses to risk we see how, as boundaries are being extended, new safety issues emerge which call for different discipline practices. A parent has to be vigilant with a toddler, but as the toddler grows, a degree of independence emerges and the parenting strategy adapts. Thus a parent will take full responsibility for taking a toddler safely across the road, but as the child is deemed old enough to venture out of a parent's sight, they may be told the busy road is off limits, thus removing the danger as a response to this new situation. The final stage comes when the parent lets the child cross the road independently of adult control, confident that they have knowledge of the green cross code, the rules by which the parent supervised early road crossings.

Despite being a re-conceptualisation as the management of risk, we can also see evidence of the previously described continuum within this development. The first two strategies are *control* strategies, although the second is somewhat different from the first as it involves the parent trusting the child to do as they say, and presumably a degree of *monitoring* (are they likely to go near a busy road?). The final strategy is more like a *deductive* strategy, as I have coded it, giving the young person the information to explore their new independence successfully and safely. *Communication* cuts across these strategies by allowing feedback



between the parent and child thus providing an assessment of when it is necessary for a strategy to change. The period of adolescence provides a parallel to the extension of autonomy that is involved in crossing the road. It is a period when, due to increasingly more time being spent outside the home and the close supervision of parents, new parenting responses are called for.

An additional factor within the adolescent experience is friendship groups. Having friends becomes a form of status in itself, and friendship associations help young people find a meaningful place in the world, develop emotional security and the independence to explore and develop their beliefs in a different environment from the family situation (Hendry, Shucksmith and Glendinning 1993). Importantly, the values that provide the backdrop and symbolic currency of interaction in this environment may differ substantially from those provided by parents, as the evidence of generations of teenage rebel figures attest.

As independence is sought, the risks which parents perceive emerge both from the peer group itself and the environments in which young people find expression. The distinction between peers and friends is subtle but important; peer groups provide the values and norms that young people may aspire to, but friendship groups provide the emotional backdrop to increasing autonomy outside the home (Hendry, Shucksmith and Glendinning 1993). In the following extract, there was a telling exchange between a parent and her teenage son about the risks that accompany his pushing the boundaries of independence;

Young person *"I'm not allowed out because my mum doesn't know what type of area this is."*

Mother *"You're getting older now"*

Young person *"More reason for me to be going out then."*

Mother *"That's one of the reasons I want to know who you are going about with."*

PS                    *"What is it about his growing older that means you should be careful going out?"*

Mother            *"Knives, drugs and drinking."*

Moss, Single parent household

As with the example of the green across code, independence brings the threat of tangible risk. The mother's response is an attempt to remove the risk in the same way that a parent who forbids a child near a busy road does. This parent felt unable to pass on the "green across code" of this situation; indeed she felt that there wasn't one. The young person's account of the situation displayed a belief that there was a logic to it, albeit one which he was having difficulty understanding. He himself had experienced physical attack, but his belief, revealed to me later that his assailants "were not right in the head" suggests that they were not playing by the rules he understood to be in operation. His seeking of autonomy and friendships outside the home was a theme throughout the interviews and he would continue to contradict his mother's wishes causing considerable unresolved conflict at this point.

The risk associated with enlarged boundaries were described frequently by parents. One mother described it in terms of a wariness about the "dark" in which two types of threat were involved. The first involved threats to safety (from attack), while the second threat came from the possibility of young people "getting up to no good in the dark", a safety concern founded within dangers of risky behaviours which are associated within the peer group/ friendship group. This parent, rather than seeking to remove the risk from the adolescent sought to develop a discipline response that took account of the young person's need to push boundaries as the starting point;

*"I don't like her out in the dark, now the darker nights are going to come in and she's back at school, it will be 9 o'clock as usual. But she is getting that bit older. You've got to give to her, she's turning into a young adult now. You've got to come and go a bit"*

Agnes Leighton, dual parent household

Thus a state of affairs is reflected in the sentiments of the young person described in the first example when he claims;

*"Your ma cannae fight your battles, because they can't go to school and batter every single person that's been bullying you."*

Stuart Moss, 14, single parent household.

### **7.5 Autonomy, friends and adult status**

Where there was conflict between parents and young people, the conflict could often be linked to differential expectations stemming from the adolescent developing a sense of autonomy. In the Moss family discussed above, a repeated theme was the mother's continued insistence that her son should act more like an adult. In other households, the young person's desire to spend longer amounts of time outwith the family environment also produced tensions (the reader may remember the Giffnock household in the mealtimes chapter). For the Moss', a very different household in terms of family structure and socio-economic status from that of the Giffnocks, there was a similar tension, also linked to notions of developing autonomy. The tension in this case was related not only to conceptions of childhood/adulthood and what defined them, but also to the epistemological question described earlier as to what factors were believed to be crucial in shaping life course outcomes.

These two issues are revealed in the dialogue below. The conversation followed the son bemoaning the apparent lack of consistency in behavioural expectations he experienced at

school. What you could "get away with" with one teacher was not acceptable to another, he felt this a difficult situation to adjust his behaviour to.;

Mother           *"You're supposed to be an adult now, they're treating you as you should be behaving yourself."*

Young person   *"You go about with your pals and that's what gets you into trouble."*

Mother           *"I've told you about pals."*

Young person   *"They're my friends."*

Mother           ( emphatically ) *"Outside school."*

Moss, single parent household

The two issues of autonomy (being an adult) and parental understanding of causality are closely connected in this dialogue. The definition of adult status is not needing to be told the rules; although adults often do not know the rules of new situations, there is a certain manner of behaving which is adopted whilst learning the rules, suspending usual assumptions. The fact that the young person desires the rules to be made more explicit in school situations underlines his immature status in the eyes of his mother. The dialogue contributes valuable information about the epistemological question of causality and agency in developing her understanding of the role of peers, or more precisely, friendship groups. There is a logic in the mother's understanding concerning her parenting style which could be described;

**Table 7.1**      **Summary of logic underpinning Mother's parenting style in the Moss household**

<b>Belief</b>		<b>Action</b>
<i>Definition of adult status (Ontological issue)</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Monitoring one's own behaviour</i>
<i>Understanding of causality (epistemological issue)</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Peers/friendship groups can undermine this end</i>
<i>Parental response</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Controlling strategies/monitoring is appropriate to ensure adult standards where peers/ friends are involved</i>

What is important here is that the parent not only sought to control her child's behaviour, with an implicit recognition of individual agency in shaping life chances, but also to control the influence of the peer group. This second factor recognises the causal influence of factors outside the realm of individual agency. In terms of the young person's understanding of the same situation, there is considerable difference in what adult status and autonomy means to him. Below he reveals his thoughts about the incompatibility of peers and parents, and thus the conflict which emerges from his mother's parenting strategy;

Mother      *"I would like him to bring home more friends than what he does, the boys and all, they're all right and I know their parents, but the newer ones, I don't really know."*

Young person *"but I can't bring every single friend round to meet you."*

PS            *"how do you feel about bringing friends home?"*

Young person *"it's embarrassing."*

The reasons for this embarrassment are not explored, but it is implicit that it is not embarrassment about who his friends are but more from the conflict in understandings the meeting of two spheres might produce. His mother's monitoring of his friendship group

represents a contradiction of his understandings of independent adult status. His logic is as follows,

**Table 7.2      Summary of young person's logic in attaining autonomous status and corresponding parental response**

<b>Belief</b>		<b>Action</b>
<i>Definition of adult status (Ontological Issue)</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Achieving independence from one's parents.</i>
<i>Corresponding understanding of causality (Epistemological issue)</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Friendship group is a space where independence can be discovered and expressed.</i>
<i>Understanding of the results of the parental response</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Parental concerns about peers and associated discipline strategies undermine sense of independence.</i>

The two different understandings held by the mother and son bring a tension to their relationship in areas where discipline is involved. While on the one hand, the mother idealises the authoritative-reciprocal model in her thoughts about teachers treating pupils like adults, on the other hand, she resorts to a model of control through monitoring in her day to day negotiation of discipline, in short telling her son what he should and should not be doing. The fact that this authoritarianism is resisted by the son does not weaken this point and it could possibly be a consequence of the mother's idealisation of expecting "adult" behaviour from her son; for her, adult behaviour represents behaviour that does not need to be controlled. For this young person, adult status originates from the individual and is an expression of one's identity.

This discipline response and the conflict it produces, has implications for another key issue; the bridging of the separate spheres of experience that accompany gaining

independence and autonomy. In the above example, the discipline strategy negatively effects this process. Here the ideas of growing up and gaining independence are given different priorities by the two actors. For the mother, the emphasis is on the young person gaining autonomy, of his locating the source of his discipline within himself, modelling appropriate behaviour which mirrors her own understandings. He should behave as if she were there even when she is not. In the mind of the young person however, sharing the same ideas about what he should and should not be doing is not a priority compared to his need to gain independence. His priority is the maintenance of peer networks which exemplify his independence from his mother.

## **7.6 Connecting the spheres of adolescent experience. Exploring parental logic in two households**

The style and quality of communication between parents and their teenage children can assist this bridging of experience, so increasing the continuity of behavioural expectations outside the home. I now present an analysis of the operational logic of two parenting styles in two households, again using the analysis of within case logic. The two families I have chosen to illustrate the different logical operations represent not only very different social and economical circumstances but also two distinct forms of parenting style.

### **Family 1: The Leighton Family**

This household consisted of two birth parents and an only child, a teenage daughter aged thirteen. Both parents worked; the father as a cab driver and the mother as a librarian. The father declined the opportunity to take part in the study as a consequence of the long shifts his work required, and the young person, although willing to take part was very reticent. My initial impression was that consequently these interviews were so poor that they would

not yield any useful themes. However, upon the actual analysis it struck me that the poor, effectively one-way interaction, between the mother and daughter (at least in the presence of a strange adult researcher) fitted into the understanding of the mother's parenting style.

Mrs Leighton's account of her discipline strategy reflects the idea that different strategies are used within separate areas of parenting. A straight forward *control* strategy is referred to in order to ensure that her daughter keeps the house tidy; - "telling her to pick things up". However, she reveals that "as they grow up" different forms of discipline become appropriate.

*"she's away at school all day so I don't know what they are buying. You know you've given them the money and don't know what they are eating through the day. But when she was younger, the main things were obviously teeth and making sure her hands were clean before coming to her dinners."*

This reveals a number of implications. Firstly that when it comes to behavioural standards outside the home, a monitoring strategy is not always possible. When the child was younger, a more controlling discipline style was appropriate and also possible; checking that basic hygienic standards had been adhered to. However, this strategy is neither effective, appropriate, nor indeed possible, as the young person enters the different spheres of experience beyond the family home.

An area where there was the absence of discipline in the narrow sense was diet. This stemmed from the mother's particular health beliefs regarding food. She believed that her daughter would eat for herself when hungry and as long as she satisfied her own appetite, there were no concerns in regard to discipline. She supported this with claims that her daughter knew how to prepare food and could get it herself when she needed it in between



the times that she cooked for her. In fact, even when the mother was aware of her diet not meeting health promotion guidelines, she did not respond to it with a discipline response.

*"She'll not eat a vegetable.../...she used to love broccoli she used to love turnip, cabbage, brussell sprouts, I mean she ate all them things growing up and just stopped...I'm not a great believer in forcing somebody to eat something."*

This discipline style with regard to food might be described as permissive. However this passivity is not evident when it comes to dealing with the influence of peers. Here, a more strict form of control and monitoring characterises the discipline strategy. Even the area of diet, which is left to individual preferences within the home, it is taken more seriously within the context of the peer group.

*"They were walking down to (town centre) everyday and I kind of threatened her, I says well I'm going to start giving you packed lunches if you don't start eating because I ask her everyday what she has for her lunch when I come in at night from work."*

This contradiction surrounding food makes more sense if understood not as relating to food, but rather to boundaries and the influence of peers. The peer group represents a different category of risk from those posed to health through poor diet, and, as peer association takes place outside the home and the parental gaze, a different style of discipline is necessary. Embedded within such a logic is the epistemological question of outcomes and understandings of their causality. The peer group, or friendship group, is seen as a key causal factor in negotiating risk and as such a different discipline style is required for dealing with young people inside and outside the home. The following quote provides a comprehensive account of her parenting strategy for outside the home;

*"We're quite strict with her, I always know where she is, even at night, but at night they go walking about. The phone box, they hang around there, then the wee garage across the road they go in there to buy sweeties, then they'll walk about....they used to go up one of these back bits up here and it's all friends from school. I don't like her up there, it's a bit*

*rough and ready...with me working in the library over the last few years you get a lot of the rough ones coming in, you know we've had the police in a few times and different things, but there are ones in her class that I'm talking about and I just feel they are definitely, they stand and smoke and drink and all that in the street."*

Her monitoring strategy has produced a detailed mental map of her daughter's possible whereabouts and the types of risks that might be associated with them. It involves getting a feel for the local network of young people, their activities and the places they hang out in. It is particularly interesting that she utilises her job in the library to do this and illustrates the level to which her monitoring is active.

However, the mother's discipline strategy is also shaped by the understanding that at adolescence, independence brings the need to develop the parent-child relationship which she discussed earlier as "coming and going a bit". She understands that as the process of maturity takes place, boundaries have to be extended, but significantly, only at a rate at which the young person is competent to deal with. To ensure this, the mother not only monitors her daughter's peer associations and possible risks associated with them, but also attempts to monitor her level of maturity in anticipation of increasing her boundaries accordingly. This dual aim is encapsulated in the statement below;

*"It's a different crowd. I mean this one crowd from up there, it's both boys and girls. I mean she's never had a boyfriend or anything like that yet, I mean she's too young I think. She's showed me some sense and I feel she's getting there."*

The monitoring of her daughter's level of development is also evident in statements such as;

*"Not that I want her to think I'm right all the time because I'm not, it's just in the sense that I feel she is growing up."*

Additionally she revealed she felt “proud” of her daughter on the occasions she obeyed her. This was illustrated in a key anecdote she gave about her daughter having the freedom to disobey over a particular discipline issue, but in fact doing as her mother asked (discovered through information gained from another parent).

The parental strategy shown here is a mix of controlling and monitoring with boundary expanding, which would suggest a move towards a more reciprocal discipline style. This combination is a product of the specific stage of development the parent views the young person as being at, combined with her own beliefs about the management of risk. She is aware of her daughter’s need to develop as a young person, but feels she needs to display the maturity necessary to handle the increase in independence afforded to her. The logic implicit in this parent’s understanding could be summarised by the following statements (see table 7.3)

**Table 7.3      Summary of logic underpinning parenting style in Leighton household**

<i>Understanding of process of achieving adult status</i>	<i>For young people to explore wider boundaries is a normal part of growing up. Young people eventually develop the wherewithal to negotiate their way through expanded boundaries.</i>
<i>Understanding of causality (Epistemological issue)</i>	<i>Home is safe Peer group presents risks to safety and long term well being</i>
<i>Discipline responses arising from understanding</i>	<i>Less control needed in confines of the home. Monitoring, and when necessary, controlling of associations young person makes outside home. Monitoring of young person’s displayed understanding of behavioural expectations as defined by parent. Adjusting boundaries accordingly.</i>

Viewing discipline as a continuum, the parent/child relationship in this case had not progressed as far as many of the families in the study. There persisted a sense that the mother still felt her young person to be immature in certain respects, but most tellingly, there appeared to be poor communication between the parent(s) and child. During the joint interviews, the parent dominated, frequently interrupting her daughter whose confidence in talking about herself to an adult was low. This may have reflected the parent's estimation of her child's competence. In the individual one to one interview the young person's responses were barely audible and brief, mostly not getting past one word answers even after prompting and rephrasing of questions.

The mother's discipline strategy for activities outside the home also relied heavily on reports from other people and feedback she received in her job in the community. This would suggest that she did not consider her daughter to be sufficiently competent to negotiate her own way successfully through the peer group, supported by her claims that "I'd find out anyway". As a consequence, this parenting style represents a snapshot of the parent-child relationship at early adolescence where controlling strategies have not yet given way to more reciprocal authoritative styles. However, it could be hypothesised alternatively that the adoption of a controlling and monitoring discipline style from the mother removed the need for good communication between the parent and young person. That is, that poor communication was a consequence and not a cause of the particular style.

### **Family 2: The Prestwick Family**

This household, on first impression, could not be more different than the Leightons. In this family, both parents worked, but had the freedom and the luxury to choose working patterns that fitted in around their family life. This resulted in the father running his one-

man professional firm from a study upstairs and the mother pursuing a career in social research, working part-time hours. They had five dependents (aged 5, 8, 14, 17 and 19) resident in the house for whom they acted as parents. I was able to interview their teenage daughter (14) and the mother and father. Moreover, this household offered a good comparison to the Leightons as their discipline style was shown to have moved further down the continuum and they had developed a much more authoritative-reciprocal, *involving* pattern.

For these parents, boundary extension was again key to their understanding of the status of adolescence. In the following extract from the mother, there is incontestable evidence of a reflective stance on their parenting beliefs;

*"One of the difficult things about parenting is that you want to protect them. I do a lot of gardening, it's like hardening off a cutting, take it out to a green house and you leave it somewhere, under supervision, to grow strength. Children are the same, they have to be let out, just gradually move the boundaries, but they're allowed to explore and develop within those boundaries. I'm quite happy with what we did this summer, and there are folk who think we off our trolleys because we let them out of sight."*

The logic that these parents are operating with is different from that illustrated by the Leighton family in respect of the parental understanding of the outside world and the safety issues which stem from expanding boundaries. The risk which new found freedoms carry is referred to when they say that other parents think "we are off our trolleys because we let them out of our sight." The logic here sees risk coming with independence, but also acknowledges that the risk can be negotiated in stages through a gradual and controlled expansion of boundaries.

*"When we were in the village, I at the age of three or four could go round to a friend's house that was totally out of sight, we knew that if he came across the way to there he was passing houses where people knew who he was, and it just developed from there. We have*

*been letting our kids go out of our sight from a very early age. I can't say that I don't sit at home and worry, but you've got to learn to do these things from a very early age."*

These parents spoke less of the need to control or discipline young people in the way that the Leighton parent did. This is not to say that they didn't have rules; as with the Leightons, the major concern surrounding the young people focussed on their safety. An additional element in their talk of rules and boundary expanding was a belief that expanding the boundaries helped adolescents to learn. While the Leighton parent would talk about boundary expanding as a *consequence* of parents having to "come and go a bit" as young people reached maturity, in the Prestwick household, expanding boundaries could be seen as a *stimulus* to the development of adolescent maturity.

*"We had so many skills at their age, skills of going on buses by yourself, of coping in a busy environment where you could find your way from A to B, and it wasn't until recently that Paul and I realised that our kids were coming up to third year and hadn't a clue."* This strategy of assessing their children's level of maturity and changing the boundaries accordingly is continued,

*"When we realised that they were gaining in confidence, they could go onto the prom or the grassy bit down there, and as long as down by the swings."*

This shifting of boundaries as a response to perceived levels in maturity suggests these parents couch their role as disciplinarians in slightly different terms.

*"We're enablers. Helping the children to develop as young people into young adults, and we try to have quite relaxed rules, I think children will themselves naturally limit what they want to do, and if you let them explore their boundaries a wee bit and every so often, 'that's as far as you can go, you're old enough to do that but no further'."*

As this quote also illustrates, rules are present and are important, but they are often provisional, waiting for the moment when the child will question them and push against them triggering a re-negotiation. While they describe their rules as "not brick walls but soft buffers" they are entirely convinced of young people's need for rules.

*"Teenagers like to know who they are, they like to know where the boundaries are otherwise they get very, very anxious. They are sufficiently anxious as it is as the biological boundaries are all over the place, there's great change physically and all of these changes they have no control over and they expect adults in their world to fix them."*

The use of control was not conspicuous in the Prestwick household, leading the mother to remark "I can't remember the last time we grounded anybody." This apparent absence of a need to enforce rules is also evident in the teenager's remarks about rules, which display consistency with what the parents had said;

PS                    *"what are your rules?"*

Young person *"Like they're not strict rules:- 'do what you're told', I don't know, there's probably ones you pick up on the way as you go along"*

PS                    *"What are they then?"*

Young person *"Don't know just to tell mum and dad like if anything is going wrong in school, tell mum and dad where you're going before you go and if you're going somewhere else come back and tell them. That's like safety."*

Control is not entirely absent from this family's discipline repertoire, not only in respect of safety, but, interestingly, also in regard to television viewing. Whereas safety based control seems to be shared with the Leighton household, singling out of an activity such as television viewing can be seen as evidence of a culturally based discipline issue.

*"We try not to have the wee boys watch it after nine o'clock when we say look this is not suitable for you, go to your bed.../... we try to make them do without TV in the morning, and weekend mornings the rule is don't watch it until you are dressed otherwise they slob all morning"*

This controlled attitude towards the television seems to stem from the parents' view of the television as potentially problematic in bringing up children. Elsewhere the father tells me;

*"I've seen families sit and the only person they're communicating with is television, it's not a person but I think for them it is. I've known a family where every child had their own room and their own television, and they're families where I know for a fact kids are off the*

*rails... they've got behavioural problems, they've got delinquency problems, they've got schooling problems because they are not talked to, they've got no communication with parents."*

This statement clearly underlines the perceived importance of communication in an effective parenting strategy, as part and parcel of the view of parenting as facilitating a successful transition to adolescence. An identified risk that accompanies adolescence in this instance is that of delinquency, falling behind at school and the associated risks to young people's life chances. The fact that television, as a barrier to communication between parents and children, is part and parcel of a possible delinquent pathway suggests that communication is perceived as a key mechanism in handling the separation of experience that accompanies boundary expansion that is part of adolescence. However, another possible pathway in which life chances can be diminished is revealed in their use of a monitoring strategy.

*"We like them to bring friends to the house. We can begin to make some sort of picture of who they are in with. The group that Susan is peripherally involved with are trouble. They've been in trouble and she knows that there have been a couple of instances where she's been quite fortunate not to have landed in grief and we've talked about it to Susan. Has been quite fun at times. It's in small doses and in a controlled fashion and she has to control it."*

But tellingly, she adds;

*"I can't say don't have anything to do with them, they are trouble."*

Obviously this parent could say exactly that if she so chose. However, revealed here and in the phrase "she has to control it" is the aim of establishing a deductive response to risks that face young people, shifting the locus of decision making to the young person, with the support and guidance of their parents. The discipline style operates on the basis that one day the young person will have to navigate their own way through the world in the continued absence of their parents. Just as a parent passes on the green cross code, and



monitors to see if their children understand and abide by it when walking to school for the first time, so responsibility for safety in terms of life chances also has to be passed on to the young person. The idea of learning through experience is key, and the Prestwick parents seem aware that it is the young person who will have the experiences and not them. However, it is also worth pointing out that as the Prestwicks are a more middle class household than the Leightons, the risks associated with hanging about and trouble stemming from this are perhaps lower, given they are better placed to buffer their children and contribute to their long term success.

The importance of a deductive discipline style is clearly identified when the father of this family introduces the notion of self to the discussion about parenting. I asked him what he meant by this;

*"What do I mean by sense of self? It's when you have an idea of who you are, you're not a reflection of everything that is around you. Little children have it, they know exactly who they are and sometimes teenagers can lose it a bit when they want to run with the pack. They become like chameleons, they take on the colours of the people they run with, but hopefully by that time they will have enough sense of who they are inside to mitigate the worst aspects of the chameleon behaviour."*

So, in summary, the parental logic of the Prestwick household can be presented as follows (see table 7.4).

**Table 7.4      Summary of logic underpinning parental responses in Prestwick household**

<i>Ontological Issues</i>	<i>Young people self actualise into adult status. They set their own limits of development</i>
<i>Epistemological Issues</i>	<i>The fact that young people can adopt the attitudes and beliefs of those around them (are "chameleons") can affect developmental outcomes.</i>
<i>Parenting response</i>	<i>To provide young people with opportunities to develop; parents as enablers. To monitor peer association/ television viewing.</i>

## **7.7      The role of communication**

We can see that in both these families there are discipline styles which can be understood as responses both to young people's safety and also to the widening of boundaries adolescence entails. However, the logic that is implicit in dealing with the consequences of adolescent behaviour differs between these two families, and within this difference we find more evidence to underline the influential role of communication, and how it is developed or suppressed within a parenting style.

**Table 7.5      Comparison of summaries between the two households of the relationship between beliefs and the development of discipline styles**

<b>Leighton</b>	<b>Prestwick</b>
Expanding boundaries is a necessary and <b>potentially harmful</b> feature of adolescence.	Expanding boundaries is a necessary and <b>developmentally helpful</b> feature of adolescence.
Young people push these boundaries themselves.	Parents can pro-actively expand the boundaries on behalf of the adolescent, so providing the opportunity to learn.
These risks can be controlled through <i>monitoring</i> young people's behaviour and associations.	<i>Monitoring</i> adolescent behaviour and activities enables parents to pass on advice and support when necessary.
After <i>monitoring</i> the parent is able to decide how well the young person is coping in the new boundaries and increase or decrease the boundaries accordingly. Decreasing the boundaries calls for a <i>control</i> strategy.	Maintaining good communication through <i>monitoring</i> has the added benefit of helping the young person develop a sense of self.
Returning to a <i>control</i> strategy effectively removes the locus of decision making from the young person back to the adult.	A strong sense of self enables them to become autonomous decision makers

These summaries, presented in Table 7.5, show the difference in what is happening between the two families. In the Leighton family there is a regulatory process; the adolescent pushes forward the boundaries, the parent monitors and assesses how they are doing. The parent and young person both know that ultimately, the parent can rescind the new boundary if the young person has not acted in a suitable manner. In the Prestwick family however, although the parents have the legal and moral right to do this, they do not talk in terms of using this power when it comes to dealing with the risks that boundary expansion brings to young people. The emphasis is very much on the young people self-monitoring through having developed a very clear idea of who they are themselves. This is perhaps the key area where the control element comes into this family's parenting style,

through making sure their children are following certain culturally determined preferences and dispositions, such as having moderation in their television viewing, which endows them with certain dispositions before entering the risky arenas of adolescence. This suggests why communication is key to this family's strategy. At one level it provides a means of monitoring and getting information about their children's activities, but this is not the only, or indeed its most important, function. The importance of facilitating good communication is to instil in their children a strong sense of identity and efficacy which is considered a more effective insulator against risks posed outside the home than control strategies.

Communication, therefore, is more than the mid way point on the continuum of discipline styles discussed in the Chapter 6. It is an intersection between the household and the world outside where the young person increasingly lives and learns, and in addition it has a function in developing the discipline style further. The mother in the Leighton household is committed and conscientious; the lengths she goes to in ensuring her daughter's safety involve a significant amount of effort and reorganisation of her own life. However, their relationship was also characterised by poor communication and a high degree of monitoring and control. Conceptualised thus, communication and the bridging of spheres feedback on each other positively. This occurs because communication is not only improved with practice but having knowledge of spheres beyond a specific family setting can provide the raw material for discussion; it can provide the examples and instances for the offering of parental advice. The more communication there is about outside interests, the greater the likelihood of a convergence of attitudes and values.

## 7.8 Family structure and parenting style

The Prestwick's strategy seems to make sense and the idea of instilling certain values is an intuitive explanation after Bourdieu and his notion of habitus. Similarly with regard to the importance of communication, Bernstein (1978, 1990) has illustrated how the form of parent-child communication can follow social class patterning. From my largely self selecting sample, those from higher socio-economic positions did enjoy certain material and cultural advantages which may have contributed to the development of their parenting style. A direction of future research could be to gather more comprehensive data that seeks to identify the relationship between social class and parenting style.

However, there is also the possibility of not only structural factors, in the sociological understanding of the term, but also structural factors, in the sense of family composition, coming into play. It is perhaps not insignificant that the Prestwick family is a large household comprising of five children, one of which is in late adolescence and another an adult. The child in this study was the third and she was fourteen. In the Leighton family, the young person represented the only child. As such, not only did she not benefit from having older siblings to learn from, but she also represented the parents first and only chance at parenthood. This idea that adults learn through each successive child and this informs their discipline style is suggested by the mother who claims; *"younger ones may well end up doing things at a younger age, simply because we have the hindsight."*

Of course, the mother of a lone child does not have this hindsight, and perhaps the regulatory approach that is illustrated in her style was carried out by the Prestwick family on their earlier children. Having experience of children going through adolescence and negotiating it successfully might be assumed to produce a more relaxed style from which

the younger children benefit, with more time being devoted to producing well rounded children with a strong sense of self. Additionally, the older siblings are also a disciplining resource, whether the parents know it or not. In the Prestwick family there was a sense that the older children were seen as positive role models. Having actually been shaped as well as approved by the parents in question, they are illustrations of the values and attitudes parents wish to instil in their younger siblings.

### **7.9 The place of young people's efficacy and the negotiation of risk**

At the beginning of this chapter, I identified the so called "epistemological fallacy of late modernity" as an idea that provided a focus in terms of a causal belief about life-chances that could cast light on the analysis made here. In terms of causal beliefs, both sets of parental logic appealed in some way to the notion of individual agency. In both accounts the theme was of agency as something that needed to be developed in young people. In the Leighton account the mother referred to it as her daughter "*showing some sense*", whilst the Prestwick set of parents were looking for indications of a strong sense of *self* developing. Both these formulations, and the parenting styles that were in operation on the basis of them, hold as ideal the notion that children can steer their own destiny if the influence of certain other factors are kept at bay. The most feared of these intervening factors appeared to be the peer or friendship group which it was thought, in both accounts, could undermine life chances if its influence was not insulated against by a well developed sense of autonomy within the young person in question.

The degree to which this fear of the peer group is well founded is a debatable matter in itself. Risky behaviours are introduced to young people through the peer group, be it early sexual experimentation, smoking, drinking, illegal drug use or introductions to criminal

activity such as shoplifting, vandalism etc. However, the peer group itself has come to be seen in more positive light in recent years by the research community (Gordon and Grant, 1997).

Processes parents see as detrimental are, according to experts, essential for the development of a sense of self. Theories of peer association have therefore suggested that the autonomy that the parents here believe insulates against the effects of peers, are actually part of the process that produces a strong sense of self. Cotterell sums this up in relation to a risky form of health behaviour when he writes;

*"Having friends who smoke does not constitute peer pressure to smoke...The presence of smokers in one's network of friends may be as much a matter of social selection on other criteria than smoking as it is a matter of social influence."* (1996 p129)

Parents who see peers as a threat are adopting not only a parentalist view which privileges their own values and tastes, but also a "hydraulic model" of transition, where the developmental path is pulled by family and peer group exerting forces on the individual. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) have suggested that peer groups provide informational as well as normative influence; that is, before peer groups shape behaviour they also provide information about the nature of objective reality. Abrams (1990) has distinguished between the different forms of social reference which people use when establishing this understanding of objective reality. The notion of "in groups" and "out groups" provide different validations of our own point of view. Those in our "in group" are those we expect to agree with us in the first place (in the teenage years, our friends) and when they do not we are faced with uncertainty. Those in the "out group" are those we don't expect to agree with us (in the teenage years, these may be teachers, parents, health educators) and when they do not our assumptions remain valid. This idea points to the continued role of

peers in personal development; self does not necessarily come from those around us, but it is supported by them.

#### **7.10 The role of structure in shaping values that inform parenting strategies**

However, there is one more possible turn in the circle of agency and structure. The theories of the structuralists who looked at peer association in relation to the trajectories of class and gender might still have something to say. Work such as that by Willis (1977), Sharpe (1976) and Griffin (1985) attempted to show the continuity between peer group affiliation in youth and continuities between youth and adult status. Willis, of course looked at working class boys reproducing their life chances, but Sharpe, whose feminist perspective showed how girls were constrained by the beliefs around them on “proper femininity”, not only offers an angle on the female teenage experience but also on the continuities present in socialising influences such as parents’ beliefs. Both Sharpe, and later Griffin, showed how there was a continuity between childhood and adulthood in working class female experience through peer group association being limited by domestic duties and gendered conceptions of role (friendships being more vulnerable, less continuous and less tied to future status than with boys).

For the two families I have presented, I did not have a great deal of data about perceived life course trajectories, but for such estimations, a little goes a long way. The mother of the Leighton young person told me her daughter had ambitions to become a hairdresser (the daughter did not disagree). In the Prestwick household, there was a hedging of bets. The nearest I could find in the data was the father telling me that he would not mind if his children ended up working in a supermarket checkout if they were happy. Given his own



professional status, the fact that he chose this occupation with its associated status as an acceptable pay off for being happy, might suggest we could assume that, happiness remaining constant, he would like his children to achieve higher goals.

Even if this were not the case, it was evident that the children in the Prestwick household were better resourced for educational success than the young person in the Leighton household. Their recent move to a new house produced an anecdote about the number of books they had, so many that they could not possibly find space for them all. I was left with no doubts they were a literate household as a prized desk (duly remarked upon) took pride of place in one corner of the room reserved for guests. The room also featured a piano and on the insistence of one parent "Love Theme From Titanic" was played expertly to me by the young person. If this was my indication of which outside interests I was to define their daughter by, in the Leighton household (which did not have a piano) I was told that her daughter never missed a Partick Thistle match, and she wore their shirt on my visit, giving me no reason to doubt the veracity of the claim.

To point out facts about the respective socio-cultural backgrounds of the two families reveals little that has not already been told to us by a generation of educationalists, who have linked educational achievement at school to environment, material and cultural resources, at home (Sugarman, 1970; Douglas, 1964; Boudon, 1974). However, it might also provide an explanation for the departure in discipline styles between the two households, if we assume that for the parents, the thought of their children growing up to be just like them would not be seen as such a bad thing. The resources available, or not, in each household would make the attainment by each young person of an adult status similar

to their parents a realistic possibility. If the material factors make likely this continuity, how do the respective parenting styles reflect this?

The idea expressed by the Leighton parent, that the household was a safe arena, could portend to a belief about home from the perspective of parental values. Which is that, the values, material standards and norms of the household are considered acceptable markers of normality and the values of the home are good operational values in this context. "Home" is synonymous with "safety" (as it often is in common usage) because of the predictability and certainty of values in operation. It could possibly have a gender connotation, in terms of the parent's perceived trajectory for their child home is feminised (the refusal/absence of the father in the interviews), unlike the outside world which is masculine, and additionally, possibly threatening to the emergent teenage sexuality (it seemed more often to be the parents of girls, rather than boys, who noticed whether their teenage children were "dating", although this could stem from the earlier maturation of girls).

In this context, for the Leighton household, the idea of autonomy and the pushing of established boundaries called for a monitoring of the young person's ability to cope with the demands of the new dangers. At the basis of this monitoring is the fear that the values outside the home may cause problems and risks for the young person. In the Prestwick household however there is a tangible absence of this fear. Worry is replaced by perceived opportunity for growth and development. For these parents, that children ask to have the boundaries extended is proof enough that they are ready. This appeared to stem from a self confident worldly-wisdom in the parents themselves, who having expanded boundaries for themselves were confident that it not only did them no harm, but actually benefited their

children. However, it is not that the Prestwicks wish to have their values undermined by those outside the home. "Outside" still poses threats to value maintenance, but it seems simply being aware of the salience of values in life course outcomes means they are able to be more relaxed. The experience of the Prestwicks' children is one the parents perceive they have more control over, a feeling that even when their teenagers flirt with risk, their instilling them with values similar to their own would see them through it safely (refer to their quotes on the notion of "clan" in Chapter 4).

The importance of values is stressed by Harris (1999) who, when asking what parents can do to give their children the best chance in life, suggests that sending them to a good school with a strong academic record and a culture of learning is best. This is not because of the quality of teaching or any adult centred characteristics, but because of the values of the peer group the child is likely to associate with. (In the British context, such privileges have traditionally been reserved for those who could afford to pay for a private education, but more recently in addition, for those who could identify a good school and get a placing request through the authority's administration.) In the two families discussed here, both sets of parents tried in some way to exercise the power of choosing their children's peers, and we can still see a strong indication that there will be a continuity in socio-economic situation between the generations of the respective families. The difference between the two sets of parents is not in their effort or determination to keep their children on the right path, but in the knowledge they have of the best sorts of values their children should have instilled. The Leighton parent knows which kind of values she does not want her daughter to be influenced by (the "troublemakers" she sees through her job). However each successful pushing of boundaries by her daughter brings with it uncertainty and fear, and a sense that she is not quite sure of the values herself. Conversely, the Prestwick parents

seemed to celebrate the implications for personal growth that boundary expansion brought to their children.

This explanation can frame the parenting styles of the two families and bridge the problem of agency and structure regarding efficacy. Parents can only pass on what they know, and generally this knowledge is perceived as good enough for their children if it was good enough for them. There were no examples in my study of parents having aspirations for their children significantly higher than they had for themselves; that they were provided with a fair chance was considered a successful aim. Additionally, when young people seek understandings of the nature of objective reality and form their own epistemological understandings of the world around them, even if they choose to reject those given to them by their parents, they would be more likely to compose alternative explanations from those they find around them.

In the community the Leightons lived in, there was not a great diversity of values, indeed the mother's monitoring strategy suggested she could understand and identify them all, mark out which ones were safe, and parent accordingly. The Prestwicks had more freedom, they could move their household to a different community (a decision based upon their assessment of the values of the respective communities), send their child to a private liberal school (and then back to a comprehensive), and introduce their children to hobbies and interests that would increase their cultural and intellectual capital. Within both these two adolescent worlds, the adoption of alternative world-views was limited by the values they had access to in the family, the school and the peer group. The responsible parenting displayed by both suggested that neither child was to engage in behaviour that would effect their long term life chances negatively, there appeared little scope for downward mobility.

However, by establishing a continuity of trajectory over the generations, the reproduction of unequal life chances was taking place.

### **7.11 A note on the cultural component of parent-child communication**

Recent research by Kerr has developed the idea that positive communication between young people and parents is predictive of lowered measures of delinquency. She notes that the existence of such findings suggest the need to re-interpret the parent-child relationship to "*a new model that focuses on communication between parent and child rather than on parental control of the child*" (1999, p1). The findings presented in this thesis accord with this view adding that positive communication, essentially disclosure of information from young people to parents, stems from a particular cultural interpretation of parenting. This is one which facilitates good communication through equipping young people with the prerequisites of this process and providing the space to both allow communication but also to develop interests beyond the home that become the subject matter of communication and the starting point for wider discussion. Whereas there is no evidence to suggest that a certain level of financial or economic resources are necessary or essential for the development of such a parenting style, the adoption of a broader social class perspective that looks at components such as social capital does reveal that such a parenting style can be constitutive of a certain habitus in Bourdieu's terms. This interpretation of parenting style within habitus is further supported by the evidence in Chapter 4 (Social Capital) which suggests influences which support and facilitate parenting style are at work outside the household as well as within it. Thus good parent-child communication, as in a manner suggested by Kerr (and supported by available research evidence) should not be seen as solely located within the parent-child relationship, but should view this key relationship as one rooted within the wider community.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Connecting Experiences: Adolescent Family Life as a Unifying Entity**

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## 8.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I return to the research questions I highlighted in Chapter 2. As with all research carried out using inductive methods, the answers to the particular research questions themselves are perhaps not as illuminating as the process by which we come to understand the data, and neither is providing the answers the sole point. As I answer the initial research questions here, I will use the answers to show how I began to understand the data and piece together a whole from the disparate stories and answers to each of the research questions. The major story coming out of the data is that of how parents are establishing, or attempting to establish, consistency in the values that their teenage children are encountering between spheres within and outside the boundary of family and home. Since this is the stage of the life-course characterised by less and less parental influence, as young people learn to express their independence outside the home, for parents, the linking of these separate spheres of experience becomes paramount for the perceived safety of the child.

How people understood the family backdrop against which this process was taking place could not be taken for granted as I collected the data however. The original research questions sought to problematise and question what families are and mean to respondents. This was appropriate methodologically, not only on account of the qualitative, and therefore phenomenologically inspired nature of the approach and the attendant attempt to bracket off one's own understandings, but also on account of the changes in experience of families witnessed in contemporary society. To understand better this issue, in this final chapter I will apply to what has been learnt from the inspection of actors' accounts some

ideas from Giddens' analysis of the recent changes in contemporary social experience, notably his ideas around *reflexive modernity* and self-identity. Originally, I also had an interest in exploring the structural consequences of differences in the ways in which family and parenting might be played out. To inspect the findings that might pertain to issues of social reproduction, and in particular, the reproduction of inequalities, I apply to the data to the conceptual framework of Bourdieu, and in particular his idea of *habitus* (1978).

Given that the original research questions were reported early on the thesis it would be helpful to reproduce them here before moving on to discussing them in relation to the findings. So, to re-iterate they were;

- Given the widely reported diversity in the structural forms of the contemporary family, how is "family" understood by those who live in it? Are there common understandings despite diverse individual experiences?
- What are families expected to do by those who live in and enact them? That is, what sets of tasks does the contemporary family enact in order to create the "cultural performance" that is the contemporary family?
- Is there evidence that a family's parental structure shapes the enactment of family; if so, what is the nature of these differences?
- Is there evidence that a family's socio-economic status shapes the enactment of family life? If so, in what way?
- What knowledge and motivations underpin parenting strategies?
- Do the values that are implicit within the construction and performance of "family" shape the life chances of the young people involved?



The research questions will be addressed again, but hopefully, rather than merely being a description of what has gone before in the results chapters, I will develop the analysis to show how the idea of parental value maintenance is embedded in the data. As the general discussion will be illuminated by reference to two key theorists of the changes and nature of contemporary society and the relationship between its individuals and its wider structures; Giddens and Bourdieu, I begin with a brief summary of the elements of their work relevant here.

## **8.2 Giddens, self-identity and families**

Giddens' account of the experience of contemporary social life addresses the growing sense of individualisation that characterises the experience of the life-course. For Giddens, the current stage of modernity is reflected in the particular way we experience the self in terms of identity and personal biography that has important implications for our experience of family and primary relationships. As the life-course becomes apparently more individualised and one's sense of self becomes greater, agents need to reflexively organise their experiences and biographies into a coherent narrative or trajectory. This is achieved through interactions with others in a manner which not only accords family interactions great significance within this process but also leads to a changing interpretation of what family can be and means to people.

As with other areas of experience, family experiences have been cut loose of a sense of a traditional or normative way of doing things and the idea of a morally appropriate, normatively defined ordering of courtship, marriage, child birth and child rearing etc. is less likely to be held by individuals engaged in the process. Families as an institution have become increasingly *internally referential*; Giddens' term for the way by which social life

moves away from tradition or taken-for-granted habit and instead "*lacking external referents supplied by others, the life-span again emerges as a trajectory which relates above all to the individuals projects and plans... (of which) ...decisions about when and whom to marry, where to live, how many children to aim for, how to care for one's children ... are more obvious examples*" (1991: p 147).

Internal referentiality in family life has its correlate in the personal sphere in the notion of the *pure relationship*, which replaces the romantic relationship as the relationship characteristic and "new" of the times we live in. The romantic relationship of course also underpinned the conjugal bond at the heart of traditional notions of family. It also underpinned, as Aries (1962) and Shorter (1975) have famously described, the modern understanding of childhood as sentimentalised and invested in. The pure relationship represents a move towards development of a trajectory of the self through relationships in a manner that reflects the stage of *Reflexive Modernisation*, it "*exists solely for what rewards that relationship can deliver... (and can) ...no longer be anchored in criteria outside that relationship itself – such as criteria of kinship, social duty or traditional obligation. Like self-identity itself, with which it is closely intertwined, the pure relationship has to be effectively controlled over the long term, against the backdrop of external transitions and transformations.*" (1991, p 6).

Its connection with the project of the self and self-identity has created the possibility of the "'separating and divorcing society' of today" (1992, p 61) where relationships are held together on the understanding that they are "*until further notice, that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile*" (1992, p 63). In light of this belief, it is therefore not too obvious to point out that certain relationships within families

are still characterised by a sense of duty and obligation, indeed the parent-child relationship. The pure relationship might be the prevailing and characteristic relationship of the times, but the parent-child bond is not so provisional and not easily disregarded when each no longer "gains benefit". However this is not to say that just as the parent-child of classical modernity was influenced by the ideology of romantic relationship of the progenitors, understandings of the parent-child relationship of subsequent stages of modernity may take on characteristics stemming from the pure relationship.

By definition it is a relationship of permanence, however, in terms of personal investment and how much the relationship is incorporated into one's self-identity, statistically, there are structural variations based around the gender of parent. The existence of the Child Support Agency, for example, and the social policies underpinning it suggests that in fact the paternal relationship does have some external referents from which appropriate standards are laid down. Not only in law, but there exists a set of external referents in culture in general which guide parents in terms of appropriate standards as to what it means to be a good parent, be it a mother, father or grandparent. However, as Jamieson (1998) amongst others has pointed out, male and female parents can experience this permanence differently and she cites research which suggests that up to 50% of children experiencing the divorce of their parents lose contact with the father and his kin. Giddens would not deny the fact of a structural element (in this case, gender.) determining how a reflexive life-course is experienced and interpreted. He is clear that internal referentiality is not the same as "methodological individualism". The individual is not separated from the wider contexts of social events; *"the contrary is the case; the self establishes a trajectory which can only become coherent through the reflexive use of the broader social environment."* (1991 p 247)

The original research questions provide opportunities to see the extent to which, from the data collected and its analysis, individuals are able to organise their family lives freed from the constraints of tradition and structural conditions. It has been clear from the analysis already carried out in preceding chapters that there is an interplay between individual preferences and factors that are determined by the conditions people find themselves within. If families are able to overcome traditional trajectories and transitions, it would be of immense importance in that it would increase mobility for certain social groups. Conversely, the data could be used to show the limitations of the individualisation thesis and show how apparent individualisation leaves traditional trajectories and transitions intact, in so far as an inequality still exists.

### **8.3 Bourdieu and habitus**

If Giddens can be seen as focussing on the apparent individualisation of experience at the current time (albeit with a recognition of structural constraint), Bourdieu's life's work was focussed very much on the structural component of experience. He analysed the culturally determined aspects of experience and in particular of how the values which inform action are linked to structural pathways and life-course trajectories. What is particularly of interest for the findings here is his notion of habitus. Habitus is conceived as being the link between social structure and practice, and as it is the ideational entity that informs practice, and the study of values represents an empirical way to begin exploring habitus. Bourdieu sees habitus as being shaped strongly by social conditions of existence and socio-economic background. His belief in the similarity of experiences that shape understandings of the world in the same socio-economic locations (class) is profound;

*"Though it is impossible for all (even two) members of the same class to have the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with situations most frequent for members of that class"* (1990, page 60).

#### **8.4 Do the values that are implicit within the construction and performance of "family" shape the life chances of young people?**

It is through the application of Bourdieu's framework that the final research question arose, that of *whether the values that are implicit within the construction and performance of "family" shape the life chances of young people*. I answer this question first because it might be easier to work backwards from this point. By establishing that I believe the answer to this question to be that they do, it is then easier to show how the answers to the other research questions contributes to a picture of how people are constructing families in a way which gives them a strong sense of agency and individualism, yet builds up into a larger picture of continued social reproduction, albeit reproduction under changed and apparently new circumstances.

The data has pointed to a process whereby values are secured and reinforced by contact with those in social networks (of which families and peer group are examples) who if sharing those values, continue to validate them. The life stage at which the particular set of young people who formed the focus of my study were at is theoretically interesting in terms of social reproduction, in that it is the stage at which individual agency is emerging as a key issue in their relationship with their parents and those around them. The stage of the life course characterised by adolescence represents an allegory of the agency/structure debate itself; in other words the question of the extent to which the individual can break

free of the restrictions imposed on them by their relations with others and location, or whether to take best advantage of these resources. Values are part of the apparatus stemming from social conditions and the choice remains whether to reject them or keep them on board, or rather *which* of those values to jettison. In Bourdieu's conceptualisation, the apparently provisional nature of practical knowledge is noted, however, he does give early knowledge a greater degree of tenacity;

*"The habitus which, at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by new experiences within limits defined by their power of selection, brings about a unique integration dominated by the earliest experiences, and of the experiences statistically common to members of that class."* (1990, page 60)

Crucial to Bourdieu's understanding of reproduction is the idea that *individuals "cut their coats according to their cloth"* (1990, page 65) and that

*"Agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and inaccessible, of what is, and what is not "for us". a division as fundamental and fundamentally recognised as that between the sacred and profane"* (1990, page 64).

In the families I interviewed, parents believed they were passing on the fabric from which young people could fashion their lives, and predictably, young people would often reject it. It is interesting that parents themselves would reject the values of their own parents, whilst young people would claim that their own parents didn't understand how things really were (and this point is returned to later when I continue the discussion of Giddens). Parents however clearly believed they had a role to play in shaping the future life-chances of their children through managing their agency and their entry into fields of experience outside a

family setting. At this point I will return to the beginning of the research questions to develop the main conclusion of this thesis, of how family life is becoming reflexively organised and the implications this has on parenting.

### **8.5 Given the widely reported diversity in the structural forms of the contemporary family, how is "family" understood by those who live in it?**

The answer to this particular research question contributes to the discussion of whether families can be seen to be increasingly "internally referent". The data was investigated in relation to this question in chapter 3 (if the question of internal referentiality was not itself raised). This was done through comparing the data gathered on what people thought family was against the Parsonian model of "traditional" family. What was immediately apparent when collecting the data, and frustrating when analysing it, was that for young people in particular there was a certain self-evidentness or taken-for-grantedness about families. For older children and parents however there was a recognition of diversity and variation, encapsulated by one mother saying "*there's so many different types of families these days*". In the main, respondents still needed help in spelling out these differences. In an everyday lived sense, family just *is* no matter how reflective we can be on it. What worked best was asking family members what they expected family to do for them (or more grandly, by adopting a practice orientated approach). From this a number of key themes could be identified. These were that the families were seen as a site of emotional expression with family relationships characterised as having a certain durability and quality different from those outside a family setting. This would suggest that family relationships are not as provisional as the *pure relationship* identified by Giddens as the late modern correlate of modernity's romantic relationship and the basis of the conjugal bond at the heart of the traditional family.

In respect of emotional expression, the spending of time together was seen as vital to its performance. It was of interest that this emotional expression was more than having someone there called "mum" or "dad", (the notion of family therefore, not entirely connected to an idea of structure) but the presence of someone who did the caring and was shown to care. Also of interest was how young people in families saw expression as a two-way street, one through which they could give as much to their parents as vice versa. There was also evidence to suggest that as children got older, this could be expressed through simply being available to talk about things, to act as "adult company" especially in the absence of a partner for single parents.

### **"Being there"**

It is not uncommon to hear people talk of their children, or children themselves (especially when grown up) refer to a parent, as their "best friend". The idea of "being there" for each other, as a two way process as was common in this data, perhaps shows the beginnings of a process whereby the parent-child relationship reflects certain elements of the *pure relationship*. This is not to say that the parent-child relationship becomes shorn of its duty or obligation element, but that there is a new contemporary element being etched on top of the traditional and morally defined obligations of the relationship. It is different too from the sentimentalisation of the child as characteristic of the previous incarnation of childhood. It is a truly more democratic relationship, one between the parent and child as equal potentialities, the child not so much a product of a romantic relationship and thus becoming a project for continued emotional investment, but as individual in their own right and on their own terms. In this respect, an element of internal referentiality compliments the external defined elements of the relationship.



The durability of family relations, cited by respondents despite evidence of increased divorce and separation, is a way in which family relationships continue to be experienced differently from the pure relationship. This durability enables families to remain the primary site of socialisation through notions of obligation and the permanence of relations between one another. This was evident in the way families were seen to operate with greater leeway regarding misdemeanours and manners towards individual family members, than they would to people outside the family. One respondent, for example, described her family as a "proving ground" characterised by the fact that family members would "stick around for you more". This idea of "togetherness" was again seen as important to both young family members and parents alike. These beliefs about the nature of family were central to all the families in the study regardless of their structures, however, in the case of fathers there was evidence of less permanence in the organisation of relationships not least due to the fact that it was fathers who vacated family homes after separation.

#### **8.6 What are families expected to do by those who live in and enact them?**

**That is, what sets of tasks does the contemporary family enact in order to create the "cultural performance" that is the contemporary family?**

The answer to this question continues the theme of the previous section in relation to the extent to which families are internally referent. What was characteristic of the data as a whole, was how in descriptions of family life, there was great variety in the activities people would use to describe their family time. Mealtimes were an important example. The differentiation and variety shown in the ways families organised feeding in households was a way into understanding how family was enacted as a cultural performance. Throughout the data there was a sense that mealtimes, and family activities in general, were organised less "the way families are and should be" more "the way *our* family does

things". In this sense however, *our family* does not span the generations. It is characterised more by breaks, rather than continuities, with the ways previous generations did things. This break with continuity could actually be used as a sufficient justification for conducting family life in a certain way, as parents attempted to *not be like* their own parents. These personal preferences often corresponded to parenting strategies. Their own parents could be "out of touch" with their beliefs about the way the world operated. In terms of the major theme in this thesis, the attempts of parents to maintain a sense of value consistency between the values they operate in the home and the values young people come into contact with outside, the influence of older generations presented the possibility of upsetting this process. It also shows how family and parenting is becoming removed from traditional ideas of kinship; clearly there is no sense of "the way our family do things" here. Even if practically dependent for support, in terms of identity, family members are becoming more individualised.

In Chapter 5, the interplay between internally referent organisation of mealtimes and the influence of wider structural constraints was investigated. Five possible themes relating to parenting were identified which could influence the way family meals were organised (discipline, emotional support, connect experiences/ monitor, encourage outside activities, or develop social capital). That there was this complexity in factors that shaped the decision of how to structure family meals *beyond* pragmatic considerations of cost, time or available resources showed how factors relating to parental *choices* configured to produce an enactment of family. It also points to how factors of individual *style* relate to the organisation of family and of how parental priorities can be present in the absence of a particular activity as well as through its enactment. Therefore, to answer the research question, the "tasks" of family can be seen not as externally referent *activities* but

*internally referent processes*. Therefore, one must be careful when developing means of measuring or defining "family" through reference to activities that assume a normal way of doing things. Any analysis of mealtimes for example, would have to take account of differences by uncovering the values and understandings which underpin feeding practices, rather than linking the organisational form they took with factors such as parental structure or socio-economic status. This ties in with the methodological focus of asking respondents what they expected their families *to do* for them rather than asking what they think families *are*. It is worth at this point commenting on the example of the exception to the rule of desired and increasing flexibility in feeding practices; the Giffnock household. By returning to this household, we can see an illustration of conflict through reference to internal referentiality, showing how conflict can arise through the failure of family members to interpret family life in the same way.

This family was traditionally structured with two (*formally*) resident biological parents. I make the qualification about their residential status because it was the repeated business related absences of the father which fed into the understandings of the perceived need for a family meal, not the family structure per se. The father continued to see the family meal as a cornerstone of family life but was becoming increasingly alone in this view, and conflict emerged as a consequence of his views being challenged. Other family members held the view that the family meal should yield to personal routines and not vice versa. It was argued in Chapter 5 that these differences emerged from the family member's individualised experiences of time. The father, as well as having religious reasons for wanting a collective family meal on the Sabbath, saw family meals as an opportunity for accelerated family time, a compensation for his absences on business through which the family could "make common flesh and blood" (Simmell, 1997) both physically and

metaphorically. This interpretation is supported by evidence in other households where the return of a family member to the fold after prolonged absence saw the holding of a collective family meal.

In this respect, the idea of a family meal remained ideologically potent. However, in a day-to-day context, the decision to hold a collective family meal is not synonymous with ideas of family but is shaped by practical as well as stylistic and parenting issues. These stylistic and parenting themes (that is, viewing the collective meal as part of a discipline strategy, to connect experiences of work and school with the home, as imbibing cultural capital, or alternatively viewing individual activities taking priority etc) are just as important determinants as is family structure. It was with these stylistic and parenting orientated beliefs that family members disagreed in this household.

### **8.7 Is there evidence that a family's parental structure shapes the enactment of family?**

Looking at the extent to which a structural factor, number of resident parents, affects the enactment of family life is a question which has to be asked simply on account of the plethora of quantitative research literature investigating this. Whereas such research literature (discussed in Chapter 1) has used as its starting point a hypothesis about the detrimental effects of living in families of a certain (resident) parental structure on young people, applying qualitative methods allows us to appreciate the relationship as a process that has continuities both within and beyond the family and cuts across the boundaries of home, household and communities. It is a process underpinned by the theme of value maintenance. In some circumstances parental separation affected the enactment of family life positively, ensuring that the family could dispense some of its defining functions

(expression, discipline) more smoothly. In other households however, the differences that led to separation could continue to exert a negative influence, or new negative influences arose from the absence of a parent.

It was shown in Chapter 3 (in respect of ideas of family life), that the issue of parenting was an area where there was a divergence of experiences linked to differing family structures. For example, some parents in one parent households felt a deficit in terms of available parenting resources, in sometimes quite essentialist terms, believing a male parent gave something different from a female parent (a theme repeated in Chapter 4, referring to available social capital within families).

The different experiences of parenting in single parent households (positive verses negative), were often a symptom of the disparity in values that frequently reflected reports of the decision not to live with the absent parent (generally, indeed always in this sample, the biological father). Hence, from the perspective of the resident parent, a positive consequence of separation (or a choice being made to not live with the father of the child) could be the increased value consistency that accompanied their being the only resident parent. Conversely however, inconsistency emerged if their parenting style was undermined or challenged by the non-resident parent. Such a finding begins to highlight the wider context of parenting relationships, that the parent-child dyad does not exist in isolation from relationships beyond the household. In terms of discipline, living in a single parent household does not always mean there is only one disciplinarian. Nor does it mean that a non-resident parent is an absent parent in terms of discipline.

In terms of the reflexivity of relationships that characterises Giddens' account of contemporary social life, the example of fathers' varying input is interesting. It seems mothers cannot reflexively choose to bring up children single-handedly as a variety of factors prevent this in the families I studied. The desires and wishes of the estranged partners themselves could be a factor, including their wishes to be part of their children's lives. Ingrained beliefs about the need for differently gendered inputs into child-rearing (the belief that male parents provide something, in terms of discipline in particular, that is qualitatively different from the female input). Financial concerns also factored, with parents either relying on, or feeling they were missing out on, financial contributions from non-resident fathers. However, this input of the non-resident father could go two ways and it was a dilemma none of the mothers successfully resolved. They felt a fatherly contribution would help with discipline, fathers were often talked about almost as having a natural authority (even if those exact words were not used), yet with the in-put of another adult came the possibility of a conflict of values over the specifics of parenting styles. This issue was best spelt out by a single parent talking of the contribution of her own mother to bringing up her child. Although the grandmother is clearly not the same as an absent father, the eternal dilemma is still represented in the mother's quote "*She's family when I need her to be*". Other adults represent a parenting resource, helping with finances and creating time, however, they also have values which have to be negotiated, their input comes at a potential cost of contributing to the beliefs a young person might have. In short, they may represent an unhelpful if unintended threat to the values of the mother.

In relation to the original research question regarding the effects of the residence or non-residence of a biological parent, the data shows that parenting, although culturally ascribed to those biologically responsible for bringing children into the world, takes place within a

wider context of the network of individuals (parents, other adults and young people's peers- suggests that term "up-bringing" is perhaps a fairer reflection of the process) that represents the backdrop of normative values in which young people achieve independence. In this respect, the aphorism "it takes a village to raise a child" appears to hold true in contemporary family situations. When seen within this complexity, the variations of outcomes found by research which categorises family situations as similar on account of family structure can begin to be explained. In the literature review, making sense of the available evidence was problematic because the measurable independent variables were factors located exclusively either on the interior (e.g. parental structure) or exterior (e.g. peer group) of the family unit (household). The more constructive research findings contributed to understandings of the relationship between families and outcomes by explicating a link between *processes* within the interior and exterior of families. Additionally, those studies which have focussed on family structure in terms of resident biological parents have also failed to take account of the presence of siblings of various ages who can assist in the development of social capital and discipline strategies that produce various levels of self-efficacy.

As parents thought helping young people successfully negotiate independence and ensuring a continuity of values was a way of encouraging the right sort of outcomes, the issue of family structure here is not so much that may be a proxy for other factors such as income, available parenting or disciplining resources etc.; a "status address" (as discussed in Chapter 1) through which a causal link between family circumstances and outcome is conceptualised in much quantitative research. In seeing how family structure relates to the processes parents describe in this data, we should look at parental structure in relation to processes that be might hindered or facilitated the process of value maintenance. For

example, the relations between non-resident parents can be as valid and crucial to the process as the number of resident parents in the first place. Additionally, the influence and presence of non-parental figures who may dispense activities similar to those usually carried out by parents, or carry out parenting tasks should also be investigated. Siblings too have a role in this regard, as often it is they, rather than the parents themselves, who are the family members accompanying young people over the boundaries of family based dependence to peer group or school autonomy.

### **8.8 Is there evidence that a family's socio-economic status shapes the enactment of family life?**

Again, it was the substantive parenting strategy areas of mealtimes and which shed light on this question. In terms of the wider theoretical questions, it relates to the limits of the individualisation thesis developed by Giddens and falls into Bourdieu's territory of how structural location may influence value formation. By looking again at mealtimes, we can begin to answer this question. I have already argued that looking at the material fact of number of resident parents does not cast light on the true reasons for why families eat together, an understanding of beliefs and motivations that underpin a reflexive organisation of such activities is necessary to complete the picture. In contrast, there was some relation between socio-economic or financial status and the organisation of mealtimes, some consideration of material constraints was necessary. However, again, given that there appeared no normal standard by which mealtime organisation could be judged, unpicking the stylistic influences from the material as a key determinant proved difficult. In people's understandings of mealtimes at least, the factors of style and constraint could become conflated. This was more common in the middle class households and, I believe, connected to the contemporary understanding of the notion of "lifestyle", in which the



influence of material factors, such as work, and personal stylistic influences, such as choice of how to live, are merged under a belief of individualised experience.

In the less financially well off households however, there was evidence of material constraints influencing the organisation of mealtimes. In, for example, relation to the perceived nutritional requirements that a meal should satisfy. With regard to time and space, whereas the latter could present problems in households of lower socio-economic status, the issue of time was not only a factor in all households but also tied up with cultural understandings of what to do with time freed from work or school commitments. A key cultural factor which could shape family mealtimes related to the understanding of parenting; asking if this could be tied to socio-economic status proved a better way of exploring a link between mealtime styles and socio-economic status.

This task was attempted in Chapter 6 where the varieties of parenting strategies reported in the text were grouped according to family socio-economic status. A pattern did indeed emerge, one by which the more middle class families had more success in reaching the authoritative end of the continuum (the parenting styles favoured by the research literature). Interestingly, a number of families in lower structural locations also reached the end of the continuum, families in which the parents had higher amounts of educational capital which had not been transformed into direct economic advantage. This could be embedded in family practices such as the organisation of mealtimes, as in the example of one mother who revealed her beliefs about the positive developmental effects of holding a collective family meal, presenting an opportunity to help younger family members with their problems. This illustrated how the enactment of family life was not shaped by socio-economic factors in a material sense, but rather in a cultural sense. Thus its enactment

could be shaped by cultural capital determining what is important to the parenting relationship and therefore to family life. In the case of this example, the emphasis on talk, communication and sorting out problems is indicative of a certain type of cultural capital.

### **8.9 What knowledge and motivations underpin parenting strategies?**

The literature review in Chapter 6 established that there have been many attempts to identify causal relationships between parenting style and young people's outcomes. Such literature has overwhelmingly suggested that parenting styles high on dimensions which roughly correspond to control and warmth/ reciprocity produce increased "success" regarding developmental indicators such as educational outcomes, self-efficacy and health. However, the very same outcomes that are attributed in these studies to parenting style have also been ascribed to socio-economic circumstances and structural locations in other literature, as was highlighted in the review. Very little research has attempted to assess processes that take place within the family as contextual, located in those that take place without the family (such as socio-economic situation).

Discipline styles became a focus of the fieldwork because they represented both a parenting practice and also a conventional marker of internal family processes. It was also important however that they represented something people could talk about easily. By looking at the knowledge and motivations that underpin parenting strategies I was attempting to ascertain what parents believe they are doing when they discipline and parent their children. Analysing the motivations and intentions within parenting styles not only allows us to see how close the beliefs of parents are to social scientific research findings on the matter, but also contributes to locating the origin of differences in parenting styles.

In respect of the proximity of lay beliefs to received scientific wisdom, the continuum interpretation of parenting style showed parents occupied various distances from those the research findings termed "ideal". Those whose explanations reflected the authoritative-reciprocal ideal were more often the better educated parents, regardless of whether this educational advantage had been transmitted into economic and financial advantage. In regard to the second issue, locating the origin of differences in parenting style, the data revealed evidence of parental discipline styles being founded upon notions of expected adolescent behaviour and understandings of the process of the transition from dependence to autonomy which characterises the life stage. The origin of parenting styles has not been addressed in the parenting style research literature. The first finding pointed to parental cultural capital as shaping parenting style to their children's advantage. The latter, in showing discipline strategies to be adapted to understandings of the nature of the outside world and how it worked, provides further evidence to support the use of Bourdieu's system of ideas for explanation, this time through the notion of habitus.

To re-iterate the origins of discipline style, the *Deterrent and Control* strategy was an approach founded upon a concern about young people's perceived corruptibility. This strategy was adopted by parents who believed that given the opportunity, young people would engage in risky acts from which they should be prohibited. The solution to this perceived state of affairs was something akin to Behaviourism, the aim being to discipline in a way that would lead to negative consequences being associated with such behaviour in the mind of the young person. With regard to the world outside the home, the peer group was seen as particularly dangerous. In explaining the origins of its potential danger, some parents alluded to the role the peer group plays in enhancing self esteem in a way which could be negative; to return to the comparison with Behaviourism, self esteem

could be boosted within a peer group that encouraged and rewarded (with admiration and friendship) risky behaviour.

The *Monitoring* strategy holds a view of adolescence which recognises the necessity of the peer group for growth and the development of adolescent autonomy. The peer group is however regarded as containing threats to adolescent safety as well as offering positive opportunity. Therefore monitoring of what young people are up to within the peer group emerges as a strategy for ensuring their continued safety outside the home. In the case study example I used to illustrate this strategy, the negative implications of adolescent independence were emphasised and as a consequence the parental strategy adopted was quite controlling of the young person's behaviour, in effect giving them little scope to break parental rules. Monitoring requires having knowledge of young people's whereabouts, associations and activities. However, it rests upon young people themselves being forthcoming in sharing this information. This corresponds with the findings of Langford, Lewis, Solomon and Warin (2001) who showed how young people in families that encouraged "open communication" would often be aware of their disclosures compromising their own autonomy, and disclosed accordingly.

Communication, not traditionally seen as a discipline style itself, but a facilitator of discipline, represented a key point on the model. *Communication* was used more positively than *Monitoring* and parents whose discipline beliefs accorded more strongly with the authoritative-reciprocal ideal saw good communication as vital to good parenting. Communication worked best when the intention was not to monitor young people's behaviour but to encourage and facilitate the development of decision making processes with a view to adjusting boundaries accordingly. This became clear through the logical

analysis of parenting styles in two different households (Chapter 7). In the more authoritarian household, close monitoring of the young person's activities was accompanied by evidence of poor communication and additionally a parental belief that the young person lacked the maturity for full independence. Conversely, the other case study family was characterised by more open communication with less authoritarian monitoring. The children in this household were actively encouraged to become more independent and explore new boundaries. This set of parents had subtly different understandings of the nature of adolescence and the process of gaining independence. Rather than having a heightened sense of the dangers that accompanied expanding boundaries they saw the expanding of such boundaries as a necessary opportunity to assist adolescent development. The positive role of communication in the second family acted as a means of linking experiences of the inside (representing dependence) and outside (independence) of the home. Whereas in the first, communication was seen as a part of a controlling, monitoring strategy, in the second it was used to facilitate children's introduction into "safe" networks of association and develop social and cultural capital that would not only assist the process of gaining independence but also future life-chances.

It was found that discipline styles represented parental attempts to manage the process of agency formation, and underlying them were beliefs about the way in which the world, adolescent minds and relations with peers work. As young people become more independent, parenting strategies adapt, in different ways, in attempts to ensure that there is consistency between the values the parents espouse in the home and those the children meet outside the home.

Communication becomes key at this period. In one household, the data highlighted a negative experience of communication in which a mother with eyes and ears about the town monitored her daughter's activities and the social networks that would become her secondary value networks (after the household). Her daughter's reticence could possibly be a reaction to this, based on an understanding that communicating openly about experiences and associations outside the home could lead to those experiences being curtailed. In another household, communication was more open, and the daughter had benefited from talking to her parents, as it led to the family's removal from a social network damaging to their daughter's well being and health. This positive benefit of the experience may have assured the young person that good could come from talking to parents. However, they too were equally aware of threats to their children's life-chances stemming from exposure to the wrong sorts of values, and their communication created a situation whereby their children talked more openly about their peer associations. In this case however, there was sufficient confidence in the stocks of cultural and social capital their children received in the home for parenting to be light handed regarding these other associations, not forbidding but just warning.

#### **8.10 Conclusion: Adolescent family life as a unifying entity**

The empirical examples of parenting and discipline style explored within this thesis can be seen to relate to socio-economic background through the idea of values or habitus. In the limited examples shown, evidence of an increased accumulation of cultural capital was seen to influence parenting style which in turn could effect aspects of family life which initially seemed to bear little relation to socio-economic, or indeed parental structure factors, such as meallime practices. The pivotal nature of communication on the discipline

continuum is crucial to establishing the idea that a role of parenting and family life in families with teenagers is in unifying experiences within and beyond the immediate family experience.

All families sought to assure some maintenance of values between their own beliefs and those outside the home which their children would come into contact with. This is not to undermine the notion of adolescent autonomy, but young people can only select their values from the options they are presented with at the stage of adolescence.

Communication can be conceived as not only the facilitator of the value maintaining strategies of parents but also a product which increases the cultural capital of young people. Conceived this way, parenting strategy as an internal dynamic can be linked not only to possible developmental outcomes but also to the context within which the parent-child unit exists; its structural location within the wider community. When the values of parents are not in accordance with those which surround them, likely experiences could be a feeling of having low social capital, coupled with the outside world posing risks to their children's life-chances. One can result may be discipline styles that would appear lower down on the continuum model. However, parents can also actively facilitate the building of social networks for their children leading to the continued development of values that they would approve of. There is therefore, room for the agency of the parent to overcome structurally determined constraints, but recognition should be made of the difficulties such parents face.

The findings here therefore point to a model of adolescence and family which does not distinguish sharply between external and internal factors as influencing developmental outcomes. When the values between parents themselves were not in accordance, this was

often shown to be a primary source of family disruption or parental separation. The unity of experience which family life seeks to create can therefore be understood in relation to both the “internal” life of family and the “external” of autonomy. Research should locate “the family” and also parenting, not within an internal privatised sphere but as an institution with open boundaries which not only shapes, but is shaped by the communities and values they are set against.

#### **8. 11 Limitations of the research and avenues for future study.**

Some limitations of the data presented here were discussed at the beginning of the thesis, but it is worth revisiting some of these points, especially bearing in mind that this project could only ever be a snapshot of parenting and family lives. For this analysis I chose to focus on socio-economic contexts of parenting as a key background influence. As has already been commented on, I did not choose to look at ethnicity or religious background. Given that a major finding of this thesis is the recognition of parental attempts to ensure consistency in values between what they teach their children in the household what they come into contact with in the “outside world” (where young people’s independence is being enacted), looking at the influence of belief systems and values provided by organised religion would have given additional insight. It would also accord with the findings pertaining to the salience of social networks, as organised religion often provides both a follow-able set of guidelines on how to live life (and therefore one assumes, negotiate the transition to adulthood) but also a potential support network of non-related people who share these values. For parents working out how to bring up children, the epistemologies described in Chapter 7 are often given, if not explicitly, and guidance on how to interpret them available from key community religious leaders and lay followers alike.



However, what the data presented here can not do is evaluate the success or failure of the parenting strategies and epistemologies of risk I have looked at. To do this one would need some marker of outcome and process. Outcome in terms of successful transitions to adulthood, and process in terms of how well the parenting style facilitated a positive parent-child relationship. Not only is it possible that the family circumstances and the capabilities of the young people develop over time, but risks which come into play had not yet emerged in the experiences of these young people and their parents when I interviewed them. For example, all respondents were still in compulsory full-time education. Later, leaving school or staying may well have been structured by factors such as perceptions of local labour market possibilities and the values held by those around them. For those experiencing a period of unemployment, the risks of exposure to further compounding threats to the life-course such as drug-use or crime might well be influenced by the value back-drop against which parents and young people contend.

A strength of the research is that it has shown that what goes on inside the home and what goes on beyond it are inseparable, - a reflection of the fact that "home", the site of family, has a flexible meaning with elastic boundaries depending on how the speaker is situating themselves at the time. How young people perceive the risks or opportunities for safe development within the areas they live was not developed in depth here however, nor was an appreciation of whether young people's assessment of the risks were the same as the parents and the consequences for negotiated parenting strategies if they did not concord. This provides an opportunity for future research along with an exploration of the influence of religious beliefs and influences emerging over time.

Finally, an appreciation could have been made of how different areas and social networks may provide different ways of perceiving risk according to gender, and subsequently how this shapes parenting style. To use possible examples, young men may be perceived to be at higher risk of falling into the criminal justice system whilst becoming pregnant might be a key perceived threat to life chances for young women. How this effects not only parental responses through their adopted parenting strategies but also how young people themselves negotiate the risks imposed not only by area but by gender would make an interesting research project.

#### **8.12 A note on parenting, young people and health.**

At the outset this thesis proposed to investigate the understandings of health and health maintenance strategies used by parents as part of a wider understanding of family life. As is commented on in Chapter 2 (the Lesson of Fieldwork 4) this line of inquiry produced what seemed at the time like uninteresting data. A reason for this can be proposed here to compliment the one given earlier in the thesis. The original reason was that health education messages are so well rehearsed and assumed as correct knowledge that it is difficult for respondents to take a step back from them. An additional reason in light of data collected here is that as young people enter this stage of the life-course, the threats to their health become less of a tangible disease/ ill-health type and more the life-course orientated type (how they are going to “turn - out”). The job of parenting therefore adapts, the aim is still to help keep children healthy but the threats to health involve not just elements stemming from say poor hygiene and diet (which with younger children are more in adults’ control) but threats within the life-course such as peer association, self-esteem and well-being.

In these areas, not only do parents have less direct control but they seem less bound up within the areas traditionally associated with health and traditionally advised upon by health promotion experts. So, although both young people and their parents can tell a researcher off-pat that they should eat five portion of fresh fruit and vegetables a day and exercise regularly, there seems less guidance from this body of experts around concerns such as making sure a young person is happy in school, is popular without falling in with the wrong crowd, is keeping away from drugs and drink, is not "dogging" school. At this stage of the life-course, "health" becomes, to use Prout's (1995) phrase, "an imbricated cultural performance" not only of class but also of the enactment of that stage of the life course. This means that health promoting strategies and parenting strategies become inseparable and merge more so than in earlier periods of childhood. In this regard, this thesis has in fact ended up being about health, but health bound up with the entirety of practices within the notion of habitus; not health explicitly but implicitly. For setting young people upon the "right track" to adulthood brings with it health consequences within the socio-economic and life course outcomes these young people will enact.

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