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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE STEPFAMILY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the stepfamily that was conducted between May 1985 and July 1986.

The main methods of social investigation were participant observation, unstructured interviews and documentary evidence. The study examines the role of myth and its importance in the stepfamily from the viewpoint of the stepparent. Special consideration has been given to consider the gender implications of stepparenthood and remarriage and the place of myth in the structuring of gender and stepfamily experiences. An opening chapter surveys the theoretical background to the study.

Chapter Two introduces the families who took part in the study and contextualises their concerns. There are further chapters which examine the myth of the wicked stepmother, the importance of reciprocity in stepparent-stepchild relationships, the gender experience of second marriage and myth construction in the stepfamily. Chapter Seven serves as a summary and concludes that myth has a dual function in stepfamily life. Specifically, myths impose constraints on the stepmother's freedom of action which is not evidenced for stepfathers. Nevertheless, through the construction of myths within the stepfamily, myths serve a legitimating role for both stepparents which form the basis of stepparental perception.

Appendices A and B are concerned with the research process and, given the personal nature of the research to the researcher, stand as an integral part of the thesis. In Appendix A two issues are considered. The importance of biography in the research process and the methods employed. Appendix B sets out the aides memoires used for unstructured interviews.

Finally, Appendix C contains stepfamily trees and serves as a presentation device to indicate the various stepfamily relationships.
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My daughter was a primary interruption to the writing of this thesis. I must therefore thank Christine
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Finally, any inadequacies in this thesis are my own and for which I take full responsibility.
INTRODUCTION

The image of the stepfamily in Britain is steeped in a mythology which conveys the most negative of impressions. We have all heard of the wicked stepmother of our childhood fairy stories within which this mythology is partly located. Yet, even the word 'step' has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon English word 'astepan' which means deprived or bereaved. Indeed, until the widespread advent of divorce, the stepfamily was usually created through bereavement. This is not, however, the case in Britain in the 1980's.

Divorce statistics (Social Trends 17, 1987) indicate that in 1985 there were 175 thousand decrees made absolute. This represented an increase of 11% over 1984 and is more than double the number of divorces made absolute in 1971 when the Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into force in England and Wales. Moreover, as the number of marriages between bachelors and spinsters declined in 1985, there was a rise in the rate of remarriages. Between 1971 and 1976 there was a large increase in the proportion of marriages where one or both partners had been married before from 20% to 31%. In 1985, remarriage represented 35% of all marriages.
contracted. Of these 32% were remarriages of the previously divorced.

With the rising divorce rate, the number of children affected by divorce has also increased. In 1985, there were 156 thousand children under 16 directly affected by divorcing couples. Although no statistics are kept of the number of children living in stepfamilies, these figures are indicative of the significant numbers who are likely to experience life in a stepfamily. Nevertheless, the number of remarriages which eventually breakdown is significantly high and in 1985 represented 23% of all divorces. For many children, therefore, in common with their parents, family breakdown is experienced more than once.

The large proportion of stepfamilies in Britain which these figures indicate leads one to question why the stepfamily has received so little attention in the sociological literature. Perhaps sociologists' lives have been largely untouched by this phenomena that it has gone unnoticed. Nevertheless, this is not true of my own life and this research arose directly from biographical experience. I am a stepmother. The phrase itself has the same connotation as "I am an alcoholic". It speaks of a problem.
My desire to consider this problem of the negative stereotype was a primary consideration when I began the research. My aim was to overcome this image by focussing on the positive elements of stepfamily life. Nevertheless, as many researchers would testify, the outcome has not been that which I envisaged. The research is indeed centrally concerned with myth yet it has led me to consider both positive and negative aspects of the stepfamily.

In **Chapter One** I examine the literature on the stepfamily and argue that we need to go beyond broad categories in order to acquire a deeper understanding of what it means to be a stepparent. In so doing we will see the effects of myth on stepfamily life in terms of management, strategy, decision making and gender.

**Chapter Two** is principally concerned to introduce the stepparents who took part in the research. The life histories which this chapter contains illustrate both the individual and the general in sociological analysis. The concerns which are raised in the life histories are the major concerns of the following chapters.
As I have stated the starting point of the research was the myth of the wicked stepmother. Cinderella and Snow White are the most common examples of just how wicked stepmothers are supposed to be. The central question of Chapter Three therefore is what implications this myth has for the role of stepmotherhood.

I examine the myth of wickedness in terms of its oppositional nature to the ideological requirements of motherhood. Specifically, I argue that stepmothers have to take account of the myth of wickedness in their everyday actions and dealings with stepchildren, family, friends and even those beyond the immediate family circle. This myth, therefore, is an overarching consideration in stepmothers' daily lives.

The concern with children's well being as society's future resources leads to an emphasis on their needs which far outweighs the consideration given to parents and stepparents. Chapter Four considers the relationship of stepparent and stepchild from the viewpoint of the stepparent. I argue that reciprocity is a key factor in engendering successful stepparent-stepchild relationships. In so doing, I indicate how myths about stepchildren become constructed.
Chapter Four is also concerned to consider specifically the stepfather-stepchild relationship. Despite the fact that 'wicked' stepfathers exist in both literature and reality, it would appear that stepfathers are largely unaffected by any mythology of this kind. Whilst I can only indicate why such a mythology does not exist, I do consider the forms of action which are available to stepfathers but which are not without penalty when exercised by stepmothers.

As the statistics above indicate stepfamilies are also usually second marriages for at least one partner. In the study, this was the case for both partners. In statistical terms, in 1986 16.8% of all marriages were comprised of both partners marrying for the second or subsequent time. However, second wives face a further negative mythology. They are defined as 'gold diggers' or 'floozies' (Walker, 1984) and are certainly not given the same status as first wives. Chapter Five therefore considers the gender implications of second marriage as a different experience for female and male.

Second marriage also gives individuals and couples the opportunity to begin their lives afresh. The extent that the couples in the study were able to do this is also the subject of Chapter Five.
The role and construction of mythology within the stepfamily is the major focus of Chapter Six. Nevertheless, the myths which are the concern of this chapter are not those of children's fairy stories, but are constructed by stepparents about their stepchildren and previous partners. The analysis in this chapter is centrally concerned to discuss how myths are created and sustained. How they influence perception and how they guide action.

Chapter Seven concludes the analysis on the stepfamily. I argue here that myth is a prominent feature of the stepmother’s experience of living in a stepfamily which is not equalled by the stepfather’s experience. This means that the lived reality of stepmotherhood is generally stressful and marked by low self-esteem. Nevertheless, the analysis of myth cannot be divorced from the implications of the various ideologies of parenthood. Specifically, the ideology of motherhood itself places far greater demands on women’s physical and emotional resources than that of fatherhood.

These features of the myth of wickedness lead to a greater understanding of the importance and place of myths which are constructed within the stepfamily. Here, I wish to indicate that these myths principally enable stepparents to cope with the various
disjunctions which they experience between the ideals of family life and the reality of stepfamily life. Nevertheless, I also indicate that a general case can be made here which would extend the analysis beyond the stepfamily.

Although the appendices stand apart from the main body of analysis, they should be seen as an integral part of the work as a whole. The research itself could not have been undertaken without the body of methodological wisdom which researchers over the years have accumulated and imparted. This point is even more pertinent in this study as the focus of the research was as much of direct concern to my own life as it was to the individuals who took part. Appendix A contains an account of how biographical features in my life influenced the research process. Appendix A is also concerned with methodological technique and argues that we can no longer consider that participant observation is a method inappropriate to family analysis.

Appendix B contains the aides memoires which were used as the basis of the unstructured interviews which were undertaken at the beginning of the fieldwork. Appendix C illustrates the extent of stepfamilial relationships in the form of stepfamily trees.
Finally, it remains for me to say that it is in the spirit of enquiry that this thesis is presented.
No-one identifies with the stepparent. The relationship is so stereotyped that even stepparents themselves are unsure what their real feelings are. They fumble along with mixed emotions of guilt, irritation, duty, affection and sometimes love.

(Maddox, 1975, p1)
This thesis is concerned with the role of stepparenthood. It essentially aims to go beyond the stereotype; to consider and examine the reality of the roles of stepmother and stepfather. There is in fact very little work on the stepfamily which is concerned to analyse particular features of stepfamily life. The majority of work has been conducted in the United States and there are only two British studies on the stepfamily. These are Burgoyne and Clark (1984) who conducted a study of 40 stepfamilies in Sheffield and Ferri (1984) whose work arose from the National Child Development Study cohort of children born in March 1958. A review of literature concerned more generally with the 'family' is also noteworthy for the relative absence of any sustained critique of the stepfamily. Given the predominance of this variant form of the family this is rather surprising.

In particular, the stepfamily is usually mentioned as a final outcome in the literature on divorce (see for example Smart, 1984(a), Parkinson, 1987(a)) and is indicative of the image of 'normality' implicit in two-parent families. In more general commentaries on the family, Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz (1977) are
notable for their early reference to the stepfamily. It is only recently that the stepfamily has received more widespread attention although it should be noted that the page or two devoted to the stepfamily in these works can only been seen as a token gesture (see for example Elliot, 1986, Goldthorpe, 1987).

In contrast to the dearth of critical analysis of the stepfamily, there remains a body of work where the primary aim is to give advice. The existence of this growing arm of stepfamily literature is indicative of the problems which stepparents commonly face. Unfortunately, however, whilst the work of such 'experts' is replete with examples of stepparental difficulties, the role of advice giver lends a moralistic tone which through their dialogue implicitly underline the stereotypes of stepparenthood.

The advice contained in these works is aimed at stepparents rather than stepchildren and so places on them the responsibility for any measure of 'success' or 'non-success'. For example, Burns advises stepparents whose teenage stepchild is resentful or uncommunicative to 'Give them space and don't go around with your feelings on your sleeve' (1985, p75). Franks in a discussion about the benefits of a 'good divorce' comments 'Mutual forgiveness, followed by mutual
giving, are highly necessary in an imperfect world. One of the paradoxes of human experience is that when we act generously towards someone we have felt angered with, the anger loses its force and may disappear altogether if the other person receives the act of generosity gracefully' (1988, p133). The interactive nature of relationships is lost under the weight of homilies of maturity and giving.

When it comes to the role of myth in stepfamily life, 'experts' have certainly acknowledged its existence, but have been keen to dismiss its far reaching implications. In particular, emphasis has been given to the role of the myth of the wicked stepmother. Here experts counsel 'A sensible adult behaving acceptably is a far more effective counter to the myth of wickedness than a conspicuous demonstration of niceness' (Collins, 1988, p45). Even Collins' subtitle for his discussion here 'Myths and Superstitions have no Place in a Modern Step-family' signifies its assignment to the periphery of concerns.

Essentially, 'experts' give advice which neither challenges the ideological assumptions of family life nor considers interaction as more than an opportunity to spout moral platitudes. Indeed, their authoritative status serves to bolster many of the idealised
expectations of family and stepfamily life as Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz indicate is the role of 'experts' generally (1977).

Given that the largest proportion of literature on the stepfamily is of this type, my aim is to indicate that this uncritical approach leaves many important questions unanswered. These questions relate primarily to the differing experiences of gender and to the manifest forms in which myth appears as a central feature of stepfamily life. Further, the minutiae of daily concerns and the interactive nature of stepfamily life are subsumed under broad categories which in themselves are treated unproblematically. If we are to reach an understanding of the stepfamily which goes beyond stereotypification, assumption and broad categorisation it essential that we adopt a critical approach to theorising.

I wish therefore to conduct a critique of the major arguments and theories of stepfamily life in the following way. I will firstly consider those arguments which relate to the effect on stepfamily life arising from the cause of remarriage. Secondly, I will consider the major theories which concern stepparent and stepchild relationships. Thirdly, I will discuss
the literature which relates specifically to the roles of stepmother and stepfather.

It is within this latter category that literature on the stepfamily is concerned with the effect of myth. The role of myth has far reaching implications in this thesis and whilst I will examine this at appropriate points throughout the discussion, I wish also to consider the literature on myth separately at this point.

ANTECEDENTS: DIVORCE, DEATH AND REMARRIAGE

One of the particular features of analysis of stepfamily life has been to distinguish between divorce and death as antecedents to remarriage. The central feature of the debate has been to distinguish between the idealised image of a deceased partner and the more physical intrusion of a divorced partner. Nevertheless, the debate is contradictory and its conflicting nature can in part be related to whether the focus of the study is the effect of these antecedents on the stepparent or their effect on the stepchild.
Ferris's work, which concentrates on the experiences of stepchildren, argues that there is a clear trend for relationships between stepchildren and stepparents to be more positive when the remarriage had followed bereavement rather than divorce (1984, p49). Her findings can be contrasted to those of Bernard who, similarly concerned with the stepchild-stepparent relationship, argued that a stepparent who replaced a deceased parent was more likely to be resented than a stepparent who replaced a divorced parent (1956, pp 318ff).

Burgoyne and Clark (1982) whose work concentrated on the experiences of stepparents argued that a divorced partner will be a more intrusive presence in a second marriage than the 'ghost' of a deceased partner. In particular, Burgoyne and Clark argue that the influence which a deceased partner can exercise will gradually diminish over time whereas the divorced partner will always remain a prominent figure in the life of a second marriage (1982, p137). However, Maddox, also concerned with the experiences of stepparenthood, comments 'Death makes stepparenthood harder' (1975, p73).

Maddox' comment should be considered in the light of her own biography and indicates one of the problems of
comparative analysis. Maddox was a stepmother by marriage to a widower. Her comment highlights the importance of giving precedence to the individual's own view. As Maddox further states 'There is, I can report, one group of people convinced that stepparenthood through death is easier. They are the stepparents by divorce' (1975, p74).

In addition to giving primacy to the actor's view, it is rather misleading to dichotomise death and divorce in this way. Rather, we need to consider both the distinctive and the similar structural and emotional consequences of divorce and mortality. It is only in this way that we can go beyond broad comparative categorisation as I wish to illustrate.

Access and maintenance arrangements are considered to be a distinctive feature of divorce generated stepfamilies. These features give rise to special problems which are not experienced by stepfamilies which are generated by bereavement. Whilst this fact cannot be disputed, this is not to say that access and maintenance are either permanent features of divorce generated stepfamilies, or even universally experienced by them. In particular, evidence suggests the less than permanent nature of such arrangements.
Masson, Norbury and Chatterton's study of stepparent adoption notes that only 14% of natural parents post-divorce had continuing contact with their children and in terms of maintenance arrangements, 30% of fathers did not make any payments (1983, p9; see also Eekelaar and Clive, 1977; Schlesinger, 1972). It is clear therefore that access and maintenance do not always go hand in hand with divorce. Moreover, access and maintenance may be the subject of close regulation through legal jurisdiction or it may be settled in a less formal way between parents. The resultant effect in terms of frequency, spontaneity and negotiation may have significant consequences for stepfamily life.

We cannot therefore assume that access and maintenance are features of every divorce generated stepfamily. Nevertheless, this is not to signify that they are not important. The literature here, as I have indicated, has been concerned with the 'intrusive presence' which these features give rise to in the stepfamily in terms of the stepfamily being able to operate as a 'normal' family and to the financial consequences of maintenance (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984). Nevertheless, the form in which continuing contact with a previous partner is maintained is crucial to the construction of mythologies about that partner. This feature of access and maintenance has not been the focus of attention in
the literature on the stepfamily and is a major area which this thesis hopes to contribute to.

In addition to legal and informal post-divorce arrangements, the decision to end a marriage is not necessarily made with agreement. Specifically, one partner will wish to end a marriage whilst the other partner may be less willing and even antagonistic to the idea. Hart (1976) has noted the importance of these differing experiences of the divorce process. Hart distinguished between these responses to marriage break-up by defining her respondents as either 'total active', 'total passive' or 'total intermediate' (1976, p112). Whilst Hart noted the problems of respondents' changing perceptions of their role in this respect, she argued that those who initiate the break-up of their marriage are far more equipped than those who were defined as 'passive' to cope with the resultant problems of transition from the status of married to the status of divorced (1976, pp115-118).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also considered the respective roles of marriage partners towards the initiation or otherwise of divorce. They argued that 'the differences between husband and wife over the decision to divorce set the tone for the interactions of the separation period' (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980,
p17). Thus, a parent who opted for divorce viewed their children as relatively well adjusted to the situation whereas a parent who disapproved of the divorce viewed their children as suffering from the divorce process (ibid).

These factors have also been used in connection with their effect in remarriage. By using definitions of 'initiator' and 'recipient' Burgoyne and Clark (1984) considered the factors which led the divorced and separated into new relationships, including remarriage. Burgoyne and Clark found that the 'initiators' were more prepared for the state of demarriage than the 'recipients' and that they quickly moved into new relationships and marriages (1984, pp 5ff). The 'recipients' however were more circumspect and cautious about decisions of this nature and experienced greater loneliness and isolation. Their expectations of second marriage placed greater emphasis on finding the 'right' person (1984, pp 65ff).

The distinction between 'active'/'passive' or 'initiator'/'recipient' carries implicit understandings of an individual's satisfaction with a marriage. The 'active' or 'initiator' will be deemed to have been unsatisfied with the marriage. The 'passive'/'recipient' will be considered to have been content.
These terms also find their parallels in commonsense views of the divorce process where, despite the changes brought by the 1969 Divorce Reform Act which came into force in 1971, one party is defined as 'guilty' and one party is defined as 'innocent'.

Whilst it appears important to consider the significance of these factors in terms of the preparedness and expectations of demarriage and remarriage nevertheless these questions do not arise in the case of widowhood. Upheld by social etiquette and moral stricture, the assumption here is that the marriage was a happy one and neither party wished it to end. However, this may not necessarily be the case. The degree of satisfaction or non-satisfaction which the widowed experienced within marriage may well match that of the divorced. Indeed, Marsden notes in his study of single mothers 'Nor were all the widows grief stricken, for something like half, the death had not been a major upheaval and several even found it a release (1969, p118).

In addition, the death of a spouse can be sudden or the result of a long term illness. Problems of adjustment in these terms may also find parallels to those of the divorced. Again, in this connection Marsden found 'there was a striking similarity shown in the attitudes
to death by some widows whose husband's had died suddenly or after long spells away in hospital. And where the children's father suddenly disappeared or departed, his spiritual 'death' for the wife left an aftermath strikingly like bereavement (1969, p117).

In the light of these factors, I would argue that the notions of divorce and death cannot be treated unproblematically or separately if we wish to consider their role in the stepfamily. These factors become even more important when one considers the experience of divorce and bereavement in terms of gender. On divorce, although there is evidence that the number of fathers gaining custody is increasing, it is still more usual for mothers to have custody of children (Maidment, 1984, p164). Mothers, post-divorce, are therefore more likely to experience the status of being a single parent. Fathers, on the other hand, are more prominent among non-custodial parents with the special problems this can bring in terms of access, housing and finance (see Rowlands, 1980, Lund, 1987). When these roles are reversed the importance of gender becomes clear. Thus, fathers who have custody of children are treated with more sympathy and given more help than mothers where the situation is seen as an extension to their 'natural' role. In contrast, mothers who elect
not to be the custodians of their children face a stigma which is not experienced by fathers.

In the event of death, either mother or father will be a single parent prior to remarriage. Nevertheless, their experience of single parenthood may well match that of the divorced. These factors highlight the need to give prominence to gender in an analysis of the stepfamily if we are to reach a deeper understanding of the significance of marriage to a divorced or widowed partner in gender specific terms.

Finally, the distinction between divorce and mortality generated stepfamilies overlays those circumstances where remarriage is a result of a combination of these factors. In these cases, one partner will experience the physical presence of the non-custodial parent whilst the other partner will experience the 'ghost' of the deceased spouse. These differing experiences further suggest that divorce and death, whilst useful shorthand terms, are too crude to be useful for close analysis. In particular, I feel there are too many anomalies to treat these terms unproblematically. For these reasons, I felt it important to overcome the dichotomisation of divorce and death and to consider the stepfamily as a particular gendered experience.
In so doing, the importance of ideology and myth in the construction of experience can be examined.

In addition to the contradiction and confusion in the literature on the stepfamily with regard to the effect of divorce and death on remarriage, the literature is equally confusing in its discussion of stepparent and stepchild relationships. I would now like to consider this area in more detail.

**STEPPARENT AND STEPCHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

There are two factors which repeatedly arise in discussions about stepparent and stepchild relationships. These are the importance of the age of the child and the importance of the child's and stepparent's biological sex. However, as will be clear from the discussion, these categories are not defined in mutually exclusive terms but use the biological sex of the stepparent as a factor in both areas. However, for the purposes of drawing out the problems of the categories of age and sex I will consider each of these categories separately.
Age and stepparent-stepchild relationships

Researchers of the stepfamily emphasise the age of the stepchild as an important factor in the likely success of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Without rigour or precision it has been argued that the younger the child on family reconstitution the more likely developing relationships will be successful. Thus, Franks argues in rather oblique terms that 'Stepmothers relate best to young children (1988, p66). Wallerstein and Kelly note with regard to stepfather-stepchild relationships that 'The relationships with the younger children, mostly those below the age of eight, took root fairly quickly, and were happy and gratifying to both child and adult' (1980, p288/9). Less precise, however, was their categorisation of stepmother-stepchild relationships. Thus 'Older girls were more likely than younger children to resent the stepmother and to elect not to develop a friendship with her' (1980, p299).

Notwithstanding these views, Ferri's analysis (1984) gives a contradictory view to the thesis that the younger the child the more easily that child adapts to stepfamily life. In particular Ferri could find 'no evidence to support the claims that younger children are most likely to develop positive relationships with
stepmothers and adolescents most likely to experience difficulties in this respect' (1984, p49).

In contrast to researchers' and commentators' views of successful and non-successful stepparent-stepchild relations as experienced by stepchildren, Maddox (1975) gives prominence to the stepparental view. Her comments also bear testimony to the degree of difficulty which stepparents face when living with stepchildren. Thus, Maddox notes 'Many stepparents, if given the choice of age of a stepchild, would argue that the older the better, for the older the child, the sooner out of the house' (1975, p68).

The ambiguous and contradictory nature of these research findings lends confusion to any assessment of the value of age as an important factor in stepparent-stepchild relationships. In this respect, Finch's comment is central when she remarks 'Put at its simplest, the problem about age as an explanatory variable is this: can age ever be said to explain social actions?' (1986, p19, emphasis in text).

Finch argues that despite its apparent independence and factual basis, age cannot be treated as unproblematic. One indication of the problematic nature of age can arise when one considers whether there is a direct
relationship of a causal nature between the age of a stepchild and the success or non-success of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Other considerations may need to be taken into account. Young children may be more adaptable, affectionate and responsive than older children. Young children have restricted powers to act on their own accord when compared to adolescents. Adolescents can elect to maintain relationships with non-custodial parents without the custodial or stepparents knowledge. Young children are more likely to be subject to arrangements made for them. It may be these factors which may be associated with age but are not caused by age in its own right, which are important.

Other considerations also become important which may link age to other aspects of biography. In this way, we may need also to consider the sex of the child and the sex of the stepparent, social class, race, and reasons for family reconstitution. As Finch argues 'Age should be seen as one important social division in a complex pattern of social divisions which intersect with each other' (1986, p25). To put it bluntly. Age is too crude a category to be used alone.

In addition to age, the question of biological sex has also been considered a key factor in the likely success
or otherwise of stepparent-stepchild relationships. As I will illustrate, ambiguity is still a major problem.

**Biological sex, gender and stepparent-stepchild relationships**

The sex of the stepchild and stepparent is considered to be an equally important factor to that of age in the likely outcome of relationships between stepparent and child. Thus, in addition to age, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) distinguish between male and female child and male and female stepparent. Similarly, Ferri (1984) assigns the same importance to distinguishing between these categories.

The findings in this area are no less clear than those relating to age. Franks' view that 'stepmother-stepdaughter relationships are the most problematic' (1988, p66) is supported by Ferri (1984). However, Ferri also argues that 'Boys, too, are less likely to get on well with stepmothers than natural mothers' (1984, p48). Wallerstein and Kelly note that 'Little girls were especially responsive to the affections and admiration of the new stepfather' (1980, p289). Nevertheless, in terms of the physical and educational development of children Ferri argues that children with
Stepfathers fared less well than children with stepmothers (1984, p115).

The problems in this area relate in part to differing foci with regard to what is being measured. The discussion here therefore has a similarity to that above regarding the effect of divorce and death on remarriage. Thus, Ferri's analysis is concerned to compare the steprelationship with that of the natural parent and to compare outcomes of stepchild development with those of children living with both natural parents and with lone parents. Wallerstein and Kelly, however, are more concerned with personal relationships within the stepfamily when they suggest that the 'little girl-stepfather' relationship was particularly harmonious (1980, p289).

The problems also relate to assumptions which are made with regard to biological sex and gender. These tend to be used in a co-terminus way making little distinction between the biological state of male and female, child and adult and the gender implications of particular roles of stepdaughter, stepson, stepfather and stepmother. The quotations above from both Ferri (1984) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) are indicative of this where the use of terms such as 'boys' 'stepmothers' and 'girls' 'stepfathers' do not take
account of the gender role of stepson and stepdaughter or the biological sex of woman and man.

In order to attempt to overcome some of these problems the discussion throughout this thesis will use the distinction of biological sex and gender stated by Oakley (1981(a)). Thus:

'Sex' refers to the biological division into female and male; 'gender' to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity' (Oakley, 1981, p41).

The decision to do so is pragmatic. Oakley's definition offers a simple understanding of the division between sex and gender. Nevertheless, whilst I do not wish to enter a discussion with regard to the social construction of biological fact, it should be stated that simplicity is taken at the cost of precision. In particular, one needs to be aware that 'Whatever distinctions are made between the biological and cultural it would seem to be important to recognise that there is a constant interaction between them' (Morgan, 1986, p35).
The problems which I have discussed here indicate that whilst the stepparent-stepchild relationship has indeed been the focus of much debate, overall there remain many problems of analysis and definition. I would argue that these problems arise in part because of the primary concern to consider outcomes in terms of the stepchild's emotional, physical and educational well being. The role of 'experts' as I have previously outlined play a prominent role here. The emphasis which they give to the child's interests through a support for the idealised structures of family life, leaves little room to consider the more problematic aspects of gender and age. In particular, the age and sex of the child appear to be treated in isolation. In this way, the interactive nature of the stepparent-stepchild relationship as a two-way process is overlooked.

These concerns led me to consider that age, sex and gender should not be treated separately but their interrelationship should be examined in terms of the interaction between stepparent and stepchild. As I am concerned in this thesis with the experience of stepparenthood, it is this feature which is the focus of attention here.
A further problem associated with the use of the gender terms masculine and feminine is that they tend to lead to essentialism and whilst it is important to retain gender as a key variable the problems of reification and taken-for-granted stereotypes remain (Morgan, 1986, p37 ff). Thus, Morgan argues that we need to deconstruct gender in order to maintain a conscious awareness of its complex and composite nature (1986, p44).

I now wish to take up this issue in connection with a discussion about the roles of stepmother and stepfather.

**STEPMOTHERHOOD AND STEPFATHHERHOOD**

Discussion with regard to stepmotherhood and stepfatherhood locate these statuses within the spheres of our understanding of mother and father roles generally. Indeed, gender roles form a crucial explanatory theme in commentaries on stepmotherhood and stepfatherhood and this stands in contrast to the comments I have made above.
Specifically, the roles of stepmother and stepfather are seen to have parallels to the roles of mother and father in first marriages. Burgoyne and Clark (1982) for example argue that stepfathers undertake a role more in keeping with expectations of fathers generally. That is one of material and emotional support. The stepmother role in turn emphasises the day to day care and responsibility for stepchildren which is also in keeping with expectations of the mother role (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984). Thus, stepmothers are placed centrally within the stepfamily whilst stepfathers become almost peripheral.

I would like to take up these issues a little more fully by considering the roles of stepfatherhood and stepmotherhood.

**Stepfatherhood**

Burgoyne and Clark argue that 'as long as we continue to lack a full and adequate understanding of the constituent elements, practices and meanings relating to 'normal' family life' our understandings of stepfatherhood as a different activity to fatherhood cannot be fully explored (1982, pp197/8). In particular, the notion that as fathers, and
stepfathers, live on the outskirts of family life, their role is less problematic is open to question.

Research into fatherhood suggests that fathers face unique problems. Thus, Backett (1982) states that whilst mothers may experience dissatisfaction, they had nevertheless achieved a satisfactory subjective base for their role as mothers. However, mothers' expectations of fathers included that they should have direct involvement with their children. 'Therefore, the problematical nature of being a father lay in negotiating with the mother a mutually satisfactory degree of direct involvement in home and family life, during the non-job time perceived as available' (Backett, 1982, p.195, emphasis in text). Being a father therefore raises special difficulties which are not experienced by mothers.

Studies of the father role in role-reversed families indicate the similarities which fathers experience when they take on a role which emphasises domestic concerns. In particular, fathers experience the same sense of isolation and depression as mothers (Lamb, Pleck, Levine, 1987; Russell, 1987). Nevertheless, the meaning of fatherhood cannot be divorced from more economic concerns which support the ideological role of breadwinner. Men's earnings are generally higher than
women's and decisions to reverse roles are usually only made in times of unemployment or where wives are in professional forms of employment (Russell, 1987).

The world of work therefore impinges heavily on the father role, limiting the amount of time he can spend in the home. Moreover, as Leonard (1984) illustrates men's career prospects are usually pursued at the same time as the onset of children, meaning that fathers are even less available than previously.

These insights into the role of fatherhood lead us to the position where we can no longer discount the distinctive nature of fatherhood and stepfatherhood. Burgoyne and Clark's (1982) findings in this area note that there were clear differences between the father and stepfather role in that stepfathers took a more conscious role in parenting of children and had to face at the very minimum a symbolic presence of the non-custodial father. Nevertheless, stepfathers remained the authoritative figure in the stepfamily and largely saw their role as supportive, emotionally and economically. In these terms, as Burgoyne and Clark argue 'in the absence of any broadly based set of assumptions about what constitutes a 'good' stepfather it is apparent that more normalized, though equally diffuse, images of the good father will serve as a

These comments stress the importance of further work on the role of stepfather in order that it can be more fully understood and developed. In particular, the stress on the instrumentality of stepfatherhood needs to be examined. Nevertheless, this thesis is not only concerned with the way in which the ideological requirements of the father role are transposed into that of stepfather, but I also wish to consider the experience of stepfatherhood as both a similar and a different experience to that of stepmotherhood.

In this connection it has been noted in the Introduction that despite the existence of the wicked stepfather in literature and in reality, the role of stepfatherhood appears to be relatively untainted by any mythology of wickedness. Whilst Burgoyne and Clark note that 'Such negative stereotypes and feelings can have a powerful effect' (1982, p207) this thesis is concerned to discover the extent to which this is true for stepfathers (1982, p207).

The role of stepfather as a relatively neglected and largely unproblematic area in stepfamily literature is not matched by the issues which are raised with regard
to stepmotherhood. Indeed, as with commentaries about the role of motherhood, the stepmother has received significant attention and I would now like to consider this more fully.

**Stepmotherhood**

I have indicated above that direct links have been made between the ideological requirements of motherhood and those of stepmotherhood. Such an ideology speaks of caring, giving and devoting oneself to a child. But not to the exclusion of caring, giving and devoting oneself to a husband. As Rich indicates 'The welfare of men and children was the true mission of women' (1977, p49). This ideology of dualistic, yet competing, care is encompassed within the stepmother role in a variety of ways. As Burgoyne and Clark indicate stepmothers not only take on the day to day care of stepchildren but are seen to take responsibility for the way in which stepchildren 'turn out' (1984, p146). In terms of the division of labour in the family this too would also appear to be reflective of more prevalent forms as 'there was no general pattern of movement towards second marriages in which heavy emphasis was placed upon sharing of household tasks and duties' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p95, emphasis in text).
The ideological requirements of motherhood and wifehood cannot be seen to be distinct from that of housewife. Moreover, 'women's expected role in society is to strive after perfection in all three' (Oakley, 1974, p9). Nevertheless, the need for perfection stands in opposition to a mythology which speaks of wickedness and cruelty. In this way, the myth of the wicked stepmother cannot be discounted despite attempts to do so.

Ferri comments 'The literature on stepfamilies is packed with extensive accounts of the almost universal 'wicked stepmother' mythology, and with interpretations of classic tales such as Cinderella and Snow White, which draw heavily on psycho-analytic theory..... Although we can treat the folklore image of stepparents with reservation, if not scepticism, the picture presented by more empirical investigations of stepfamilies is hardly more reassuring' (1984, p1). This dismissal of the importance of the myth itself is reflected in Burgoyne and Clark's work (1984) where mythology is not linked at all to any analysis of the stepmother role.

The 'extensive accounts' to which Ferri refers are to be found particularly in American literature on the stepfamily which do indeed relate mythology to
psychoanalytic theory. Examples of this can be found in the work of Deutsch (1945) and Pfleger (1947). Brown sums up the psycho-analytic framework in terms that 'The psychoanalytic interpretations of the myths as an explanation of child development fit in with the psychoanalytic model of social work which was predominant for a considerable time and is today still influential. The persistence of the myths through generations gives substance to the child's psychological need to split the real parents into an angel and a witch and it can be seen how, in stepfamilies, the splitting can become over-emphasized and damaging to the relationships' (Brown, 1982, p10).

It is not the remit of this thesis to consider the merits or demerits of psychoanalytic theories of the stepfamily. Nevertheless, the mythology of the wicked stepmother also receives extensive reviews in work which is primarily aimed to give advice to stepmothers, and importantly, is usually written by women who are stepmothers. These works universally refer to the historical background to such tales as well as to noting their importance in stepmothers' conceptions of their role. I think here this is a clear case of 'insider' knowledge to which Ferri and Burgoyne and Clark did not have access and which indicates how important ethnographic work is.
The omission of a consideration of the role of the wicked stepmother myth in British research work is a major area of neglect. Moreover, the commentaries in 'advice' books fail to make a systematic analysis of the role of myth and its relationship to ideology. They are in fact more likely to accept the psychoanalytic theory outlined above. Nevertheless, I would argue that one of the most important factors in understanding the role of the wicked stepmother myth is in terms of its relation to the ideology of motherhood and its consequent effect of reality. This position becomes more clear when we examine more general work on myth and its relationship to ideology and reality. It is this theme which I now wish to consider.

**MYTH: ITS PLACE IN THE STEPFAMILY**

It is easy to discount the stories of Cinderella and Snow White as mere fairy tales. They form part of our childhood which outwardly would not appear to have any relevance to more adult concerns. Indeed, the more usual meanings of myth suggest an element of untruth. Oakley (1974) uses the term myth specifically to indicate lack of truth in her discussion of woman's place in society. Oakley states 'In the ideology of
woman's place, two statements popularly believed to be true, but actually untrue, are these: 'Only women are, ever have been, or can be housewives,' and 'Only women as mothers are, ever have been, or can be the proper people to rear children.' The former can be called the 'myth of the division of labour by sex' and the latter the 'myth of motherhood' (1974, p156). Mount (1982) similarly uses the meaning of myth to specifically argue that many theories of the family are not based on fact and are therefore not truthful.

Whilst this thesis takes the position outlined by Sykes (1965) that notions of truth or untruth are largely irrelevant to an analysis of the role of myth, the relationship of myth to reality extends this discussion a little further. In particular, we cannot argue that myth is a direct representation of empirical reality. The reality of myth is to be found in the way that myth helps society define situations which lie outside its normative framework. Moreover, they do so in a way which justifies the message of the myth. As Levi-Strauss comments 'mythical speculation ... in the last analysis do not seek to depict what is real, but to justify the shortcomings of reality since the extreme positions are only imagined in order to show that they are untenable. This step which is fitting for mythical thought implies an admission (but in the veiled
language of the myth) that the social facts when thus examined are marred by an insurmountable contradiction. A contradiction which ... society cannot understand and prefers to forget' (1967, p29).

In an examination of the wicked stepmother myth we can see how Lévi-Strauss' comments have a direct relevance. In particular, the ideological message of the myth suggests that to act in ways which are contrary to the requirements of motherhood is untenable. This is why our sympathies lie with Cinderella and Snow White and never with the stepmother.

However, the contradictions implicit in the mother role need also to be examined. Whilst the contradictory nature of myths about woman are highlighted in the opposing images of the Virgin Mary as the perfect mother and Eve, the evil temptress responsible for Man's fall from grace, de Beauvoir (1972) indicates that the myths of motherhood are in themselves counterposing. Thus, although it is through the deification of the Virgin Mary that woman as mother becomes 'the most highly perfected image of woman propitious to man' it was also 'as mother that woman was most fearsome' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p203). These two countervailing themes of perfection and fear exist side by side but are not allowed to be directly
confronted. However, the myth of perfection is predominant and therefore inhibits any opposing image which may threaten it.

Reminiscent of the psychoanalytic theory outlined above, although located in an existentialist framework, de Beauvoir argues that the tales of wicked stepmothers allow the expression of a 'masked horror of maternity' (1972, p206). Thus, man can encompass his negative feelings about motherhood within the mythology of stepmothers without damaging the purity of the concept of mother. As de Beauvoir states 'The saintly mother has for correlative the cruel stepmother' (1972, p284).

Whilst women and mothers face opposing images of good and evil, there are further contradictions in the mother role. In particular, the ideology of parental love can be contrasted to the emotional and physical demands of motherhood. How the stepmother, as social parent, deals with these contradictions needs therefore to be examined. In particular one may suggest that it is more difficult for the stepmother to ignore the contradictions of the ideology of motherhood in a way which natural mothers may. Specifically, the particular physical and emotional demands of 'mothering' may not be compensated by the more
subjective and taken-for-granted rewards of parental love.

In these ways, we cannot assume that the ideologies of motherhood, or even fatherhood, will have the same meaning for a stepmother or stepfather, as it may for natural parents. In particular, the 'step' role is marked by ambiguity with regard to both rights and expectations. This is clearly shown in the position of the stepparent with regard to the law. For example, the stepparent has no legal rights or duties in relation to his or her stepchildren, nevertheless the stepparent may be required to maintain them and may also obtain custody or access rights in the event of marriage breakdown (Masson, 1984). It is this ambiguity which makes the myth so powerful and the ideological influence so important to examine.

In addition to lack of truth, myths are also more commonly associated with exotic stories from primitive cultures or legends of Greek heroes and therefore may not be thought to be relevant to an examination of the stepfamily in the capitalistic economies of the west. Consequently it is easy to see that a systematic review of the relevance of myth to modern society can easily be overlooked. More especially, perhaps, when
children's fairy tales form the starting point for a discussion of mythology.

Notwithstanding these comments, in a discussion of the meaning of myth in British society, Tillyard comments that myth is 'the universal instinct of any human group, large or small, to invest, almost always unconsciously, certain stories or events or place or persons, real or fictional, with an uncommon significance, to turn them into instinctive centres of reference ... Made thus typical, the stories become a communal possession, the agreed and classic embodiment of some way of thinking or feeling' (1962, p11, emphasis in text). The degree of importance to which Tillyard assigns to myth cannot be underestimated. As Tillyard further comments 'Once a way of feeling or a mode of action has been embodied in the mythology of a large group of people it acquires an incalculable power' (1962, p27).

The power to which Tillyard (op cit) refers cannot be divorced from the ideological message of the myth. This is brought out forcefully by Sorel (1968) who discusses the effect of the myths embodied in the notion of the general strike. Sorel comments '...we know that the general strike is indeed what I have said: the myth in which Socialism is wholly comprised,
ie a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society. Strikes have engendered in the proletariat the noblest, deepest and most moving sentiments that they possess; the general strike groups them all in a co-ordinated picture, and, by bringing them together, gives to each of them its maximum intensity" (1968, pp127, emphasis in text). If, as Tillyard comments 'A healthy mythology is a nation's most precious possession' (1962, p28) it takes little imagination to understand its effect on individual perception and in consequence on reality.

In addition to the relevance of the myth of the wicked stepmother in stepfamily life, this thesis is also concerned with the construction of myths about stepchildren and non-custodial parents. These issues arose during the fieldwork period when I became concerned to understand the way in which images were shaped from interaction of the most nebulous kind. The work of Sykes (1965) became particularly important to understanding the importance of these images in terms of myth. Whilst Sykes' (1965) work is concerned with the workplace, his analysis of the role of myth has a far wider application as this thesis will stand testimony. Sykes is specifically concerned with the
role of myth in the maintenance and transmission of attitudes. The attitudes which were encompassed in the images presented to me by stepparents of their stepchildren and the non-custodial parent were part and parcel of the everyday life of the stepfamily. Sykes’ work gave me valuable insights into understanding the process of their construction and maintenance.

CONCLUSION

I have been concerned in this chapter to review the literature on the stepfamily and to outline the shortcomings and omissions therein.

I have argued that the literature is both confusing and ambiguous. Specifically, I have argued that the emphasis placed on divorce and bereavement as opposing forms of stepfamily generation overlooks the similarities of gender experience which are encompassed within family reconstitution. Further, I have noted that the categories of age and sex are used crudely and without reference to the interactive nature of stepfamily relationships.
In addition, I have noted the importance of considering the stepfather role with special reference to its distinctiveness and similarity to that of the stepmother.

I have also noted the absence of an analysis of the role of myth in the stepfamily. I have indicated that this is central to understanding stepmothers' concerns. Moreover, the form in which myth is constructed within the stepfamily gives valuable insights into the maintenance of attitudes towards stepchildren and non-custodial parents and their effect on relationships.

It is with these concerns in mind that this thesis is presented.
This rejection of the human subject highlights one of sociology's core contradictions: an interminable tension between the subjectively creative individual human being acting upon the world and the objectively given social structure constraining him or her.

(Plummer, 1983, p3)
INTRODUCTION

With this sense of counter position, Plumber (op cit) focusses upon the trend of positivism in the social sciences and the consequent dismissal of the more personal. In particular, Plummer refers to a general lack of recognition given in theoretical construction to personal documents and the collection of life histories. The importance of the group rather than the individual is the pivot of sociological analysis and can lead to a position where 'some recent 'sociologies' have gone so far as to eliminate 'the subject' altogether; the human being becomes an epistemological disaster' (Plummer, 1983, p3).

This is a far cry from the claims made by Thomas and Znaniecki who stated that 'We are safe in saying that personal life records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material' (1958, p1832). Nevertheless, the analysis of life histories has been subjected to criticisms which have been particularly concerned with validity and interpretation.

The question of validity primarily centres around notions of truth and the problem of retrospective
accounts. Put quite simply, one's memory and interpretation of an event may be quite different to that which actually happened or to attitudes at the time. Nostalgia and the protection of self-esteem certainly play their part in the telling of one's past history yet without getting into the thorny debate regarding what is 'truth', there are many ways in which accounts can be verified for their more objective truths (see Shaw, 1930, Bogdan, 1974).

The issue of interpretation mainly focusses on the ability of individual accounts to generate general concepts of social organisation and structure. In part, the problem can be seen in terms of the greater status which more positivist methods carry as Plummer (op cit) indicates. It is also argued that the fault lies with the pioneers of this method whose work was more descriptive than analytic and where principles for selection of data to be included in the life history were unstated or varied. As Mandelbaum notes 'Most social scientists who have pointed out the great potential of the life history approach for their respective disciplines have seen its chief difficulty the lack of accepted principles of selection, of suitable analytic concepts to make up a coherent frame of reference' (1982, p146).
Plummer's work (1983) adequately sets the record straight with regard to both the past performance of life history records and to their future potential in the role of theory generation. There can be no doubt that Plummer is right when he argues that 'no longer should we plead theoretical ignorance' in using personal documents (1983, p133). With these points in mind, I feel it appropriate that the purpose of the life histories presented here should be clearly stated.

**LIFE HISTORIES: A PROCESS OF SELECTION**

In order to take up some of the issues raised in the discussion above I wish to first of all note that there is another facet to life histories which cannot be ignored. They give 'flesh and blood' to sociological analysis. They remind the reader that we are talking about, and analysing, real people and real lives. It is partly to give precedence to the individual that is the concern of this chapter. In the accounts which follow we will clearly see 'public' issues: marriage, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood, childhood, adulthood, class, career. Yet these accounts demonstrate the inner experience of each. They resurrect the individual to a position of choice
and thereby set limits to the weight given to the compulsion of social forces.

In these terms I wish to give primacy to the actor's own view. Nevertheless, the question of validity and the process of selection which I have referred to above need to be considered in relation to the content of these life histories.

In terms of validity and the position of retrospective accounts, in addition to unstructured interview data, from which these life histories have been drawn, I also had access to the following documentary sources: diaries, photographs, letters, personal files on divorce, house sale and house purchase. Moreover the participant observation which I conducted during the fieldwork period allowed me to confirm these accounts. This was particularly so through the deeper knowledge of the individuals in the study I thereby gained and the events which I personally witnessed.

In connection with the process of selection, this has been a necessary part of the procedure in editing individual's accounts. I wish therefore to note the basis on which this has been made. The aim of the life histories presented here is that they should serve as a pivot to the discussion in the chapters which follow.
In consequence, selection has been based on the following criteria. Firstly, the life histories are a presentation device. They allow the reader to have some background knowledge of the individuals who took part in the study. Thus, I felt it was important to include 'hard' data in terms of age, occupation, number of children and so forth. In addition, I felt it important that the reader should have some knowledge of the more subjective aspects of personal life histories. In this way, the objective experience can be counterposed to the more subjective.

Secondly, certain issues contained in individual biographies became important during the fieldwork year. These points, therefore, are also included and serve two purposes. They act as a presentation device in order to avoid needless repetition. Furthermore, they locate the issue in its appropriate time and space. This is important in order that a wider understanding can be gained with regard to the reasons why certain issues are a recurrent theme in a life history and why particular issues only become important at certain times.

Finally, lest we wish to give further ammunition to those who would accuse us of 'mere empiricism', within the individuality of each account there are common
themes and differences from which we can draw general concepts. This was the third basis on which data was selected and I wish to consider these themes in greater detail now.

LIFE HISTORY THEMES

There are four themes within each life history. These concern first marriage, separation, divorce and bereavement, remarriage and children and stepchildren. Whilst each account reveals the distinctive features of each process for the individuals concerned, the common themes within each are important factors in our understanding of stepfamily life. I will examine each briefly.

All individuals in the study were married previously and were consequently second wives and second husbands. Comparisons therefore arose between first and second marriage. Nevertheless, it would appear that there are significant gender differences in terms of the effect which such comparisons given rise to. Thus it became important to explore the significance of first marriage on the experience of remarriage, stepmotherhood and stepfatherhood.
Of the ten individuals in this study, six were divorced (Simon, Jane, George, Frances, Louise, Meg). Each account portrays this process in terms of the factors which led to the break-up of marriage and are striking as individuals describe their overall commitment to making the first marriage successful. The life histories describe the effect on the children and the legal outcome in terms of maintenance and custody. Each account also indicate feelings and attitudes to the former spouse.

The life histories of the bereaved (Frank, Don, Henry and Susan) describe the tragedy of death and its effect on the family and work life. These life histories also describe the loneliness of their experience of single parenthood. The finality of death in respect of the ending of a life and the completion of legal affairs means that there can be no continuing relationship with an ex-spouse, as in the case of the divorced.

Embedded within the reconstitution of married life, therefore, these structural differences remain. Nevertheless, as I have argued in Chapter One, the distinction between mortality versus divorce generated stepfamilies remains an area of confusion within the literature on the stepfamily. One of my tasks is to assess the significance of this distinction.
Despite these structural differences, each account is constant in terms of the relative lack of knowledge individuals had of the realities of impending stepparenthood and the requirements it would make of them practically, financially, socially and emotionally. Certainly, there is an acknowledgement that 'of course there would be problems' (see Francis' life history) and there are suggestions (see George and Meg) of a growing realisation of the depth of the difficulties ahead. However, in every case, prior to remarriage, the basic attitude was one of optimism and faith. It is the central theme of this thesis to locate the roots of this optimism and to chart its progress.

Finally, a few brief words are necessary at this stage to further our insight into the way issues in each biography came to play an important part in the experience of remarriage during the fieldwork year. This can be located at both a general and a specific level. In general terms, through the process of the 'marital conversation' (Berger and Kellner, 1980, p313) and 'the courtship as confessional' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p84) the remarried had an understanding of their own past and that of their spouse which impinged on decision making and attitudes. This is a recurring theme in the chapters which follow.
At a specific level, more concrete issues were likely to reap repercussions during the fieldwork period. For example, Meg's account reveals a dissatisfaction with the legal process of divorce. The 'expensive' solicitor she believes her husband's girlfriend employed, gave him, in Meg's mind, an unfair advantage which she never felt able to fully challenge. This is an important factor to understanding her attitude towards her first husband and her decisions regarding maintenance payments for her two children. The issue of maintenance also became relevant for Louise during the fieldwork year and was a constant feature in Simon's life. Further relevant issues are indicated in the notes at the end of this chapter.

The life history accounts which follow are therefore organised in conjunction with these principles. It now only leaves me to introduce the individuals who so kindly participated in the study a little more fully.

**INDIVIDUAL LIFE HISTORIES**

Each life history begins with a brief summary of the individual's more concrete biographical details in terms of age, dates of marriage and remarriage, numbers
of children and employment. This summary is followed by an account, in the individual's own words, which was compiled from transcripts of tape recorded unstructured interviews (see Appendix B). The editing of these life histories was in accordance with the criteria outlined above.

I arranged the accounts in alphabetical order on a couple basis and to give primacy to the female they are set out with the woman's life history first. Thus, the life histories are set out in the following order: Jane and Simon BEAUCHAMP, Frances and George FIELDING, Susan and Henry HOLMES, Meg and Frank TYLER, Louise and Don WILLIAMS.

To protect the identity of the families who gave their time so willingly to this study, all names are pseudonyms. Where appropriate, places and towns have also been given alternative names.
Jane and Simon were both divorced before their own marriage. Jane's two children and Simon's three children were living with them during the fieldwork period and attended local schools. There were no children of this marriage. Jane and Simon's relationship with Simon's first wife, in terms of access and maintenance, was a continuing theme during the study.

Jane talks about her life abroad during her first marriage, the time she spent as a single parent and her meeting with Simon's children for the first time.

Jane was born in 1948 in Dover. After school she trained as a nurse and worked in this profession until her marriage in 1969 to Richard, an executive for an oil company. Richard's work was based abroad and after marriage they immediately moved to Nigeria. They lived in Nigeria for five years and then moved to the Phillipines where they lived for three years. Jane and Richard had two children: Joe born in 1971 and Harriet
born in 1973. Jane separated from Richard in 1977 and returned to England. She trained as a health visitor and continues to work in this profession. She met Simon at a day conference on psychotherapy and they married in 1984 after a short courtship.

**JANE**

I think things began to go wrong with having Harriet because Richard was an only child and at the time, if he were honest, he would have said he was quite happy with one child. I think it was me who wanted a second and he certainly couldn't relate to Harriet in the same way he could to Joe. I was ill when I was pregnant and he wasn't there when she was born. She wasn't a difficult baby, a perfectly normal baby, but we'd been spoilt with Joe who never needed feeding in the night and it came as a bit of a shock to him. He'd never had any dealings with the female of the species. He was travelling a lot and when Harriet was six months old we moved from Nigeria and spent six months back in this country and then we went to the Phillipines. His job there was to cover the whole of south-east Asia and he was away I should say sixty percent of the time which gradually got more and more as business picked up and I
wonder in fact whether my being hacked off and miserable didn't push him away even longer.

I hated it, being on my own. It got to the situation that whenever he was away something went wrong. Something minor like the electricity failed, one of the kids was sick or I was sick, and when he came back he was so tired he wasn't actually interested in any of us so it was a sort of Catch 22 situation, with him not being around when he was needed and no bloody use when he was around because he was so shattered. So we went, down this spiral.

In the end I decided to leave. I thought what was I going to be left with at the end of all this. Increasingly more miserable? Was I going to stay around because of the children or was I going to take the bull by the horns and be on my own. Finally, I worked out that I could really be happier on my own with the children because at the end of the day the children would leave home and what would I be left with? A shell of a marriage and a wizened old cow to boot.

But all this was really put off for about a year because of Richard's drink problem and when that finally came to light I can actually remember still to
this day thinking: "Christ, I can't leave a sinking ship but what do I do." So if you like the whole thing was deferred a year while that was sorted out and he was eventually admitted to hospital.

I didn't tell the children because they were too young. They were 4 and 6. Harriet can't remember much. Joe can remember a lot more. He can remember the unhappiness. I think we got passed the rowing stage. Joe lived a lie for a long time saying that we were living in England because I didn't like living in the Phillipines and the schooling was better here. Richard lived the same lie, so I heard from friends, though nobody really believed him. Harriet didn't really talk about it and to this day I don't know how she handled it.

So I moved in with my parents for nine months and then bought a house. I was on my own from 1973 to 1983. I did enjoy it because I made a life for myself. I trained as a health visitor and I think I was probably much nicer to live with after I'd got a job because I was getting out of the house. Fortunately I was able to get au pairs which worked very well. It was actually like coming home to a wife. You know that the meal was sorted and the washing and the ironing was
done and a cup of tea was made for me as I tottered through the door.

Richard would visit when he was on leave. I used to feel cross because every time he came he was laden with gifts and would take them [the children] here there and everywhere and lavish things on them and then sort of bugger off and basically he had all the good parts and none of the actual nitty gritty day to day care. At the time I was very angry about it but there's not a lot you can do about that really. Our relationship at that time was bad (1) but that was me. Throughout all that he strived to be thoroughly reasonable. It might have been easier if he could have been as equally unpleasant as I was trying to be. There was never any problem with money or anything like that. He was terribly British about it.

I actually asked him for the divorce but due to the fact that I was heavily into Simon at the time he actually got in with the divorce first which I think if I'm honest I was a fool because I probably could have got a lot more out of it financially if I'd divorced him years ago but at the time I didn't see any point in getting divorced and at the end of the day its mercenary to take that point of view and at the end of
the day I didn't do so badly. We didn't argue over anything.

When it came to how much he earnt there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that he was not telling the truth (2) but having said that I had no way of proving that. I did talk to him about it and he just swore blind that was all he was earning. There wasn't an awful lot I could do short of going to court and making things messy and I wasn't prepared to do that because of the children really. I didn't think that would achieve anything. I suppose at the end of the day I wasn't prepared to go for my pound of flesh. The marriage was long since over. We agreed joint custody, sold the house and split the proceeds. There again it was an amazingly good buy at the time and we both came out of it with a reasonable amount of money.

I remember meeting Simon's children very early on. I just thought they were perfectly okay, perfectly normal horrible children. I think I viewed it through rose coloured spectacles. Again because we were so much in love I just thought everything would be okay [laughs].

I think the first time I really sat down and thought to myself "Christ what are you doing" was at Christmas time. My kids were with their father and he'd [Simon]
been with his kids and she [May, Simons first wife] was going for custody. He was breaking his neck to make everything at home as nice as possible. It was one evening and the kids said they were hungry. He immediately got up and went to make them something to eat, which they ate, and they dropped everything then he rushed round and lifted everything up and I thought crikey I cannot take this because it's not how I would treat my own children and I began to realize there would be difficulties. But I didn't think they would be insurmountable.

I remember being nervous the first time I met them. He [Simon] was living with his parents. James and Angela were there. Polly was at Guides. Angela was learning the recorder. She was very affectionate. James was very easy going. Incredibly easy going. They certainly didn't react how my own children reacted when any man walked over the threshold. Joe particularly would barely speak to people. We picked Polly up from Guides. She was silly but she was 11. We also took a couple of her friends home. She'd never set eyes on me so it was all giggles in the back of the car. It was very easy.

I felt that they [Simon's children] were more in the way than Simon did. He had become very dependant on
his children and I was resentful of that at first because I felt that whenever the kids were around we didn't have any time to ourselves.

Having lived on my own with the children with the help of an au pair I was suddenly stuck in this place [present marital home]. I was very resentful to start with that here I was with one hundred and fifty percent more children than I'd been used to, working and having to cope with the whole business on my own. I was driving up to London and back and then having to sort out the food, kids, washing. Simon's very good but he wasn't getting home till much later than I was, so inevitably it was me that was having to do the majority of the hard graft. In retrospect I don't know how we lived through that (3).
Simon talks about his first marriage and the reasons why he and his wife separated and divorced. He discusses his feelings about being a single parent and his thoughts on becoming a stepfather to Jane's two children, Joe and Harriet.

SIMON BEAUCHAMP

Simon was born in 1942 in Oxfordshire. He has worked for a timber company since leaving school and has progressed to the position of Sales Director. He married May in 1967 and they had three children: James born in 1970, Polly born in 1972 and Angela born in 1976. Simon and May were divorced in 1983.

SIMON

We were married for 15 years. As far as I was concerned I was in love with my first wife. I thought she was terrific and I was very happy to be with her. Looking back I don't think she felt obviously quite the same. I don't think she had for a long time, 5, 6, 7, years and it worries me a little now because Jane says the same things to me that May used to say in terms of
endearment and love, that sort of thing and I can remember May saying them. I think we were in love for 5, 6, 7, years.

James was born in 1970. We'd been married for nearly 4 years. May was very wary about having children. I wanted children, she wasn't so sure. She was flying about from job to job. She never stayed in one very long. She got so fed up with this one job she gave it up and said "We'll have a baby" and we did. It wasn't really decided. Perhaps that's where we went wrong. It was assumed that she would stay at home and look after him. She had a bad time at the birth, he was breach and I said "I don't want to see you go through that again" but she said "In for a penny, in for a pound" so we decided we'd have another one fairly swiftly afterwards. So Polly came along 20 months later.

As far as I was concerned that was going to be it and I think May did too. It was a nice family unit. In 1973 we decided to build our own house. I think I had misgivings at the time but it was something which May wanted to do so we went ahead and did it. I could quite easily have said no but I think I felt (a) that I knew May wanted to do it and (b) it just seemed like a good idea so let's go ahead and do it. A lot of things
went wrong. The interest rates went sky high. We didn't sell our house before we started and that's the golden rule and we ended up with two houses and a lot of money being owed to the bank. It was a very very bad period and I think there's no doubt that it was that which was the chink in the armour if you like. That happened in 1973/74. I don't think I behaved particularly well over it. It really was a bad time for us. Angela occurred as a result of a farewell party in that house. She was born in April 1976.

My job took me to the North. We were there four years. I was working long hours getting home late at night. We'd sometimes pass on the door. May joined the local dramatic group (4). I understand she was quite keen on another guy. I found out a long time after. I didn't see any need for her to tell me. I'd rather not have known. I don't know how important it was at the time but it was obvious she was looking for outlets all the time and I was blissfully unaware of all of this. I suppose I was too wrapped up in work and not paying as much attention to May.

I was almost intentionally trying to make life difficult for her and when I try to analyse this I put it down to the fact that I was asking for her attention. Subconsciously I was aware that she had
moved away. It was very subtle but very often the same situation will arise with Jane and I. It's inflections of the voice, taking a view of a remark which has been made which is not the way the remark was meant to have been made but purposely doing it another way. It's little things, very little things. I certainly think I was a contributor to what happened and I feel guilty about it. I feel I drove her away almost but I didn't behave badly. It was subconscious. It was subtle. To get a response. I thought I was pretty good. It's only looking back I can see this.

I used to do a lot of things round the house. Washing up - there'd be no question of me not doing it. I would always do it. Things like that. It would be part and parcel. That's right. I could almost get at May by doing the washing up. I knew she was going to do it but I'd get up and do it knowing it was having a little twist at her. When things were beginning to go wrong I used to think we should go and see somebody. Let them analyse what's going on. They'll see how bloody good I am but I can see how the situation could arise so easily between myself and Jane.

My job brought me back here and in June 81 it transpired that May was heavily into this fella. We talked about it. She said she would try and forget
about him and we moved up to another village but it was too late. I don't think she made much of an effort actually. I can appreciate if you're in love with somebody you really want to be with them. I didn't appreciate that at the time. No way did I. She obviously wanted to go. She stayed from June to March.

During that time I made life so good for her. I made it very very difficult for her to leave. There was no sexual relationship in that period whatsoever, which really got to me having been married for 15 years [laughs] but I never did anything or tried anything. I just felt I must make life easy for her and eventually it would come. I was going to give it two years. I knew that I'd said that. She then decided in March she couldn't take anymore. She must go. She left. My world had fallen apart by then. I was rushing around trying to stop up the leaks for 6 or 7 months and it really crashed around me. I was in a really bad way for a while but I had the children and my whole life was centred round them. I had something to focus on and I worked for them.

I felt devastated enough when she asked me for a divorce but it was worse when she went for custody. I didn't have Jane at the time and I'd been fooling about with odd girls here and there but I hadn't had any form
of permanent or stable relationship. I felt pretty awful. I fought very hard for the children (5). I also fought her about the money situation because although I was very happy to split the proceeds of the house 50/50 I didn’t want to split up the money which would accrue from the barn which had been given to us by my father for us to live in. It was a wreck at the time so I refused to let her have any of that. I think I feel a bit guilty about that because if I’d been her I’d have done exactly what she did which was to have a go for it (6).

Once she’d gone I had to sort the children out. I used to drop them off at my parents in the morning on my way to work. They would have breakfast and go off to school. And for the first period of time May would come up three evenings a week, pick the kids up from school, give them their tea and wait until I got home. Then if I was going out I’d get a babysitter in. The other two evenings they’d go to my parents. Then May opted out of that. I can’t remember why. Whether it was financial. I had to pay her the petrol to come up. Then I started employing a girl four evenings a week just to get the kids sorted. I got a cleaner in too.

My life up to that point had been geared to being with a partner. When the kids were away for the weekend and
I had nothing lined up I was lonely. I would come home from work on the Friday and the house would be empty and I just didn't know what to do. I hadn't arranged anything. Nowhere to go and no-one to go with. I was lonely. What was a compensation which I didn't realise then was I could do what I wanted when I wanted and now I miss that because I've got somebody else to think about. I'm glad I've got somebody else to think about because that's what I want but at the time it was a bit lonely unless I'd gone to the trouble of arranging things.

For a little while I didn't think of Jane in terms of marriage. Not immediately. It didn't take long. When I suggested we got married I then began to think Joe and Harriet would be living with me. I certainly made a conscious effort to get to know the both of them. They were very difficult to get to know because they were very protective towards Jane. Joe certainly had assumed the father figure. I remember taking Joe out one Sunday morning to play tennis and I said "Do you want to go to the pub" because it was a lovely day (7). Big man type thing. We had a drink outside. I said you know, "Look I don't want to come in and take your mother over but I would just like to share her with you because I just happen to like her very much and I think she likes me. I just want to share her with you". And
I said the same thing to Harriet. She was very
unapproachable. Both seemed to be okay about it which
made me feel pretty good. There were no real problems.
They appeared to accept me even when I stayed the night
with Jane. In the morning there were not too many
problems.
Frances and George were both divorced before their own marriage. Frances' two children from her first marriage lived with Frances and George until they had left school and gone to college. George's four children from his first marriage were at boarding school at the time of George's marriage to Frances and they spent their school holidays partly with George and Frances and partly with their mother. George's children had also all left home although George's daughter, Anna, returned to live with George and Frances during the fieldwork period. George and Frances have a son, Luke, who was three at the time of the study.

Frances talks about the reasons why she and her husband parted and her thoughts about becoming a stepmother. She also details some of the problems which she has encountered, both medically and emotionally, in her marriage to George.
FRANCES FIELDING

Frances was born in London in 1939. She worked as a secretary until her marriage to Peter in 1958. They had two children Christine born in 1961 and Julian born in 1963. When her children started school Frances trained as a primary school teacher and continues this occupation as a supply teacher. Peter started up a manufacturing business and continues to be self-employed. Frances and Peter were divorced in 1977 and Peter moved to the United States on his remarriage. Frances met George in 1978 and they married in 1979. They have a son Luke born in 1983.

FRANCES

We were married 19 years and had two children who were 15 and 16 when Peter left us. He went off with the eldest sister of one of my daughter's friends. My daughter was 16, and this girl was 18. It was a sort of 40 plus passion. It was a big shock. I never expected him to do anything like that. I knew he had flutters. I knew he went off. He was away an awful
lot on business and I knew that very often he had a sort of thing going with somebody but he always told me about it and I always thought if he's telling me it doesn't really mean very much. Back he always came but this time he didn't tell me. I knew something was going on but I didn't know who it was. I thought it was an older woman altogether. In fact for a while I thought it was the girl's mother because, you know, such a disparity in the ages.

It hit Julian very badly his father leaving. He was just about to do his 'O' levels. Christine was doing her 'A' levels but somehow she managed to shut it out and focus on what she was doing. She's always been able to do that.

I met George through a dating agency. You know, they send you a list of telephone numbers and names. He saw my name and saw that I lived quite close, so he rang me up. It started from that. As far as his children were concerned, at the time I thought there would be no problem at all. You see being a teacher and being involved with children. I'd done some fostering. I'd obviously thought there would be difficulties. I'd had difficulties with my own children with their father going. I knew that they would be feeling those sorts
of feelings about their mother going but I didn't think there would be too many difficulties.

The first intimation that there would be was when I went to the meeting with George's eldest daughter, Sally. I didn't know it at the time because I'd never seen a photo of her or anything. We'd gone to the school to collect the children. His eldest daughter saw the car arrive, saw her father get out of the car and then she came to the car, took one look at me and then ran off. I didn't even realise it was her. I mean there you are in a boarding school full of girls and I just thought it might be a friend and she's gone to say that we're here or something. I didn't realise but she wouldn't come back for a long time. She was very angry actually, but not with me as such, she was just angry with the whole situation and that was the first time I sort of thought. I felt a bit nervous then.

It was a pretty fraught year. Christine and George didn't hit it off and it got sort of worse and worse and in the end I moved out with her [Christine]. If I hadn't found out I was pregnant that would have been the end of our marriage actually. I was 45 when I had Luke. We had one son who would be 5 at Easter [Charles referred to below]. I had a miscarriage just after I
came back from our honeymoon. I then had another miscarriage and I then had Charles who was born perfectly except that his lungs weren't quite right. He died. I really still can't quite believe that that could happen. Then I had a rather nasty miscarriage. I fell down the stairs. George had got flu and it happened at Christmas time. We had Christmas, that was fine. Everybody was here for Christmas and that was lovely but I actually fell down the stairs on Christmas day. George had flu and everybody went away, and on New Years day I started to bleed. The next day my daughter came back home and she and George weren't speaking then. She was absolutely incredible. She said "You don't look well mum". That was pretty awful really and after that I did really begin to think this is a silly game, you know. I don't want anymore. Then we had this tremendous break-up and Christine and I left.

Then I found I was expecting again. Christine was absolutely fantastic. She did all the shopping and cooking. Considering this was a child by a man that she hated. She did have a cry. "Mum" she said "I hate him. I wish you'd never married him, I wish you weren't having this baby, but if you're going to have it you're going to have it properly". She was going to college every day but she left a tray on my bed. She was
absolutely marvellous. Occasionally George would come round. I think he felt very awkward. But ever since Peter left I had been determined not to be a drag on the children. I knew I would need a lot of help and the person to help me is my husband. So I came back home a little reluctantly. George was very good. He helped a lot. He wanted another child. I really don't know why. I still can't really understand it but anyway we had him.
George talks about his feelings with regard to his first marriage, his children and stepchildren.

GEORGE FIELDING

Born in 1937 in Middlesex George went into farming after completing his national service in the navy. He is now a farm manager on a large estate. George and Linda were married in 1959 and had four children: Nicholas born in 1961, Sally born in 1963, Anna born in 1965 and Lucy born in 1968. George and Linda were divorced in 1978.

GEORGE

I felt very sad when we got divorced. I think sad for myself, pride and all that, and I think sad for the children too. The children were angry and cross because a lot of angry things were said. There were so many factors involved in the break-up. I think I was very chauvinistic in the sense that I expected a wife
to always be there. Linda was not a lazy person. Couldn't call her lazy. She had four children but you just don't appreciate it. Too much pride I think that was a lot to do with it. She left. I think she was really quite cross and angry. But I thinks she's probably quite happy now. I don't know. We just weren't getting on. The problem was there was no one thing that you could say was the reason unless she was terribly torn because the chap she's now married to used to give her lifts to work. Whether anything started beforehand and the two things went together you know. She was sort of drifting away anyway and once the children all got to school maybe she didn't feel there was very much to do. She wanted a much quieter way of life. Wasn't bothered about going out and wanted to live in very quiet places. Didn't want neighbours. That kind of thing.

It was more or less joint custody. I can't really remember those sorts of details now but the kids came to me and visited when they wanted. I'm sure it was joint actually. We'd just bought a cottage and she stayed there. I got a new job and moved here [present marital home] (8). I paid the school bills and all of that and they'd come here [present marital home] for part of the holiday. Nic didn't at all, and Sally did some of the time and then stopped. Anna and Lucy were
pretty good, you know. They'd spend half the holiday with me and half with their mum. So that all worked out fairly amicably but a very pragmatic way of life for them. It didn't worry me, not particularly, not at the time I don't think because I found them so cross and angry I wasn't sorry when they went you see. Whatever education they did after school they did from here. They came to live here permanently.

I didn't give it a lot of deep thought taking on Frances' children. Early on it was fairly alright but as time went on it got more difficult. It built up. The early rows were a shock. I think possibly because they're all in their different ways, perhaps with one or two exceptions, fairly strong personalities and all felt important in their own different ways. I think, well the sort of feed back I got, was Frances would be favouring her two, putting things up in the loft or whatever but um lots of jealousy and it was perhaps more difficult for Frances' children as they'd come out of their own house into a situation that others were in. I felt they should fit in but I don't think they did. They should give a bit but I don't think they did. I think they were too, I don't know they sort of came over as being selfish but I suppose equally I doubt whether mine, sort of, gave too much to Frances' way of wanting to do things.
As far as Frances' children were concerned it wasn't only taking on two more children. It was a boyfriend of Christine's as well. I didn't care for it too much when it got nearer the time as I began to become more aware I suppose of their personalities and, you know, the difficult side of things. You know, their personal habits when you sort of all get living in a room. You know, their presence was really quite overpowering and I think quite stressful really. And yes, I wasn't that happy at all but I thought they would have to conform, to sort of fit in. I just took it for granted that this would be a base and they could all operate from here.

We'd been married about three years before Luke was born. Things with him are fairly alright. I suppose one has one set of ideas seeing one set of children grow up, different ways of behaviour and how things have been dealt with. Well, obviously Frances is very different. Does things in a different way. She hasn't got the patience Linda had. You know, that sort of thing. Very difficult a second family, not only because I saw Linda with four children and Frances with Luke and there's a lot of things different. Whilst I remember perhaps the good things before, and I would like to see the good things in a similar way for Luke.
Susan and Henry were both bereaved before their own marriage. Susan's first husband died suddenly from an asthma attack. Henry's first wife had multiple sclerosis and had a long period of illness before her death. Susan's two children from her first marriage and Henry's two children from his first marriage were both living with Susan and Henry during the fieldwork period. Moving house and having a child of the new marriage became particular issues during the study.

Susan talks about the shock and distress at her first husband's sudden death starkly counterposed with the joy of her daughter's birth three days later. She discusses her feelings about being a single parent and meeting Henry's children for the first time.

Susan Holmes

Susan was born in 1957 in Hertfordshire. She trained as a nurse and worked in a large London teaching hospital where she met her first husband, Brian who was a radiologist. They married in 1978 and had two

SUSAN

We were very happy. When I found out I was pregnant again he [Brian] was so thrilled. He was very keen to have a little girl. He wanted a daughter. In fact things were looking good. He passed the exams he was working for. He only knew three days before he died he'd passed but he felt quite confident so he had a few months without the pressure of revision and expecting the baby. We were looking forward to the future. He'd been offered a job in Liverpool pending his exam results and he was really keen to go back there as he'd been to university there so it was a really special place to him. It was a good time. He got his results on the Saturday and he died on the Wednesday. I was out. I came back and found him lying on the lawn. He'd had an asthma attack. Hester was born three days later.

You go through so many feelings of anger. Why should he leave you with the responsibility of the children
and so on. You knew pain. And of course Ben at the time, he was two, was always asking about his daddy. I found it particularly hard by the Christmas time. He died in the August. The enormous burden it is bringing up children. That you had to be both mother and father to them and I felt I was failing. I didn't have the patience at that time. I'd got so many emotions mixed up together. Joy and grief. Pain and happiness. All sorts. It was very difficult. My strongest desire was for Ben to have a father figure. Christmas was a hard time for me. You know Christmas being what it is. I felt that the family wasn't complete. It went right rock bottom when Hester went into hospital. She went in Boxing Day and that was just dreadful. She was in there for a week. I suppose that was the rockest of rock bottom.

Gradually things started to improve. I started going to Cruse (see note 9) and it was good to meet younger people who had lost their partners. Unless you've been through something like that you can't appreciate how black it can be. You live eat and breath pain.

That was where I met Henry. I'd seen him before at meetings but one day we got talking and it went from there. Two or three times a week he'd come over, we
just used to stay in and chat. Sometimes we'd go out altogether with the children,

The thought of being a stepmother had quite a good picture for me. My mother had remarried so I had experience of the steprelationship. I remember feeling quite strongly partly the fact that my mother remarried so quickly after my father died and just feeling that my stepfather was trying to take Dad's place in his attitude to me. Which I now realise was partly correct but it was out of a deep sense of fondness whereas I took it as something that he felt he had to do and didn't really want to. Because I'd been lucky with my stepfather I felt quite positive about being a stepmother.

Henry and I started thinking really quite quickly about marriage. I was much more worried than Henry about his children. Henry said "There won't be any problem. They'll be pleased". (10) He was much more positive. I had quite a few conflicting feelings. I disliked the girls [Henry's children] for the way they treated Henry (11). Now with hindsight I can see why because Henry hasn't taken note or listened. But I felt you shouldn't treat another adult like that let alone your father. But Karen and Amanda were very much against the marriage. Henry asked them once what they'd do if
I ever told them off. Karen said she would leave home, I've never felt I could say anything after that.

They [Karen and Amanda] particularly didn't like Ben. They said they weren't used to having boys around. It's not so bad now. They will tolerate him a bit now. But, you know, they'd tell him to get out of their room, tell him to go away. He became very clingy, he's still a mummy's boy now really. But I had to take care of him more. Fuss him more, you know, that kind of thing. I heard Amanda say to him [Ben] once that Henry wasn't his Dad. I felt so angry, I thought "He is his Dad." It hurt very much.
Henry talks about his first wife's illness and the arrangements which had to be made to look after her and his children and their domestic life. He focusses on his thoughts about becoming a stepfather and the need to have some form of assessment with regard to whether he would be able to cope with the physical demands of looking after young children.

**HENRY HOLMES**

Henry was born in 1936 and was brought up in New Zealand by his aunt as his mother died shortly after his birth. He returned to England to attend university and is employed as a Research Scientist. He married Beatrice in 1964 and they had two children: Karen born in 1966 and Amanda born in 1968. Beatrice died in 1983 from multiple sclerosis. Henry married Susan in 1984.

**HENRY**

We did a lot of travelling in our marriage and I suppose the best times were related to some experiences we had on these holidays. We were both members of the
local historical society so we had a lot of interests in common like that as well as obviously bringing up the children, travelling, holidays. We had quite a lot of holidays.

In 1976 Beatrice started to get ill. She had months when her sense of balance went. She got out of bed and felt dizzy. So she stayed in bed for a month. We didn't know what was causing that. That got better and we had this holiday in Crete which was extremely good but she then started to have problems with walking. She'd stumble if she walked too quickly. I was very worried so that made one appreciate the holiday even more. She went for tests and they told me straight away she had Multiple Sclerosis. They didn't tell her but in fact I then told Beatrice after about 2 or 3 days and that was very upsetting for both of us. At that stage we didn't tell anybody else except for her parents and my aunt who brought me up. We didn't tell the children for a year. Over that year we got adjusted to the idea. She was 35.

At first it wasn't progressing very fast. Then over the next few years it got worse and we decided to find a house where she didn't have to go upstairs. We ended up in this one [present marital home] specially built and internally designed for someone in a wheelchair
(12). She wasn't in a wheelchair at that stage. This was 1978. By the time we moved in which was August 1979 she was progressively worse. Besides being physically handicapped she was mentally handicapped in the sense that her mind had started to wander but that was a benefit. From being a very shy retiring sort of person she became extrovert. Much more outgoing.

At the end she was being taken by ambulance to either the community centre at the hospital or the day centre which she went to. She used to flirt with all the ambulance drivers. She used to have a whale of a time which was completely out of character but I saw it as a great blessing as she wasn't embarrassed by things like her incontinence. She was also extremely cheerful, very happy. She was a lovely person to be with.

Her condition deteriorated very badly and the consultant told me she would not live longer than two years. She died within the next six month.

While she was alive we had masses of help. The district nurse came in every day and we had a home help so I didn't have to do any housework. It ended up with Beatrice being out at the centre all day so I could carry on with my work. Though I wasn't actually working full time I could still work a reasonable
amount. My place of work was very good. Then Beatrice used to go into the local hospital and stay for a week or so. So I could have holidays with the girls and have a bit of a rest because obviously it was a bit of a strain at that stage. And then we had a lot of various hoists in the house to help get Beatrice into bed but it obviously was a strain on the girls in a way. They couldn't express their worries because they knew I was under strain.

The help in the house continued for about a month after Beatrice died. After that I started paying for someone to come once a week to do the housework because I hate housework.

When Beatrice died people were very willing to listen to me because you want to talk. Then two months later I started going to Cruse (see note 9) which I found a great release because there again I could talk and it was at the June meeting that I spent some time talking to Susan and our relationship really very rapidly developed from that because of having these similar feelings about the long term and the problems with children. That sort of thing that you could strongly relate to emotionally.
Because I was worried there was going to be a lot of physical strain and whether I could actually cope, and various people said "You're taking on an awful lot taking on young children", we in fact went off for a holiday together, Susan and I and the two young children, to a hotel in Swanage, and in fact that worked out very well. We had very little problem. That was about when Hester was 15 months old and Ben was oh, about 3½ years, and that went very well. There seemed to be no particular strain. Although at this time Ben was very dependent on his mother, very clinging, due to the outcome of losing his father I should think, in fact he still was able to go and play with me and enjoyed playing on the beach and that all seemed very good (see Note 7).

It was interesting. In the last letter Susan had from Karen she was saying how much she missed her mother and I was thinking about that. For me it's much easier because I've got Susan and that completely replaces Beatrice and I sort of transferred, well, I think of Beatrice occasionally, but not really to any great extent. But in a way I may not even think of her [Susan] as necessarily a different person. I may think of her [Susan] as in a sense just being my wife and not define them [Susan and Beatrice] as separate people (13).
Meg was divorced and Frank was a widower before their marriage to each other. Meg's two children and Frank's two children from their previous marriages lived with them after their own marriage. There were no children of this marriage. Frank's daughter left home just after the fieldwork period began, married and had a baby during the course of the study. Frank's son joined the police force halfway through the study period and thereafter only came home for weekends. Meg's two children were still at school and remained in the home.

Meg talks about her first marriage and the reasons for her divorce. She focuses on the legal aspects of divorce and her account portrays some of the problems which she experienced as a stepmother.

Meg was born in 1942 in Birmingham. After leaving school, she worked in various clerical posts. She married James, a local government officer, in 1965.
They had two daughters: Julia born in 1969 and Virginia born in 1972. The marriage ended in 1981 in divorce. Meg and Frank had been colleagues at work but they did not start to go out together until Meg's marriage broke up. They married in August 1982.

MEG

I would describe my first marriage as happy, whilst I was in it. Though looking back, I can see the problems. James had a nasty temper and would hit me. He also drank a lot, especially towards the end. He would also be nasty with Julia and Virginia and that worried me. Children shouldn't be brought up in a home that revolved around drink and violence.

We were both members of a local operatic society (see note 4) and James told me one day that he had a 'fondness' for one of the other members. I didn't think anything of it really. Then one day his secretary blurted it out. She asked me if James was ill because a Dr Wilson kept phoning him. I tackled him about it and he told me there was nothing going on. I believed him.
The next thing was that I caught them together at a New Year's Eve party. I just rushed out crying. It was the wrong thing to do I know. I should have gone and poured a beer all over them. Anyway James followed me and told me not to make a scene as all our friends were there. I told him I was going home and left in floods of tears. He stayed at the party.

I wrote to her. Told her it had got to stop. But it just went underground after that. You know lunch time drinks that sort of thing. That went on for about two years and James was drinking more by this time. I think he must have been alcoholic. And I wonder now if she [Dr Wilson] was supplying him with drugs (14). His whole personality changed. I tried and tried to get him to talk about it but he wouldn't. He never did, right until the end.

Things got so bad in the end that I got a solicitor to write to him saying I was divorcing him. I didn't say anything to him about it until the letter arrived. And even then he wouldn't talk about it. We were still living in the same house. The solicitor told me I had to stop cooking for him so I did and I moved into Julia's bedroom. He stopped giving me housekeeping.
We carried on like this for a while and then I received a letter from a very expensive solicitor saying that James would admit adultery if I didn't name anyone. So that was it. Nothing discussed. He also offered me £30 per month maintenance. For me and two children! Ridiculous! Then at the beginning of June I had a phone call at work from his solicitor. He said the new maintenance offer was now £250 per month so there was no reason not to go ahead. I put the phone down, stunned, and burst into tears. It struck me then that this was it. That was when Frank saw me. That morning. He was very calm and it did calm me down. I thought well, I can be independent. He [Frank] managed [Frank was widowed] and it must be worse for a man.

I had to tell Julia and Virginia. I told them he'd [James] fallen in love with another woman and was going to live with her. I think they cried. Julia was about 12. But their lives didn't really change. They'd not seen much of him before.

I didn't really have a time when I was on my own. I started having lunch with Frank from the day he found me crying in the office and he'd come to my house after work for a cup of tea before going home. I would come up here [present marital home] alternate weekends when
my two went to their father's. We didn't go out much. In fact I complained about that and we started going to the theatre.

The first time I met Sandy and David [Frank's children] was a fortnight after my first date with Frank. Sandy was just 17, David 15. Sandy was in here [living room] and it irritated me she was there. It was the first time I'd been there. And I said completely the wrong thing to David I said "Hello David. You are good looking. Just as good looking as your photographs". He must have thought "Stupid woman".

I didn't think about them in terms of future stepchildren. In fact I remember thinking as I left here [present marital home] that first time "Couldn't live there". Frank had had the damp proofing done and there was no plaster on the walls or carpet on the floor.

I think Sandy and David resented the fact that Frank would call at my place after work for a cup of tea instead of coming straight home to them. David was particularly difficult. He would be very nasty to me. He'd ignore me. Or tell me to get lost (17). I finished with Frank for a short time. I think it was mainly through David. I'd had enough hassles, enough
trouble and upset, and bad temper and violence. I didn't want any of that. Fortunately for me, Frank persevered.

I joined Gingerbread (18) to meet some other people. I went out with one chap. He was very nice. He took me out on the day before Valentine's Day and came back for coffee after. We then heard a knock at the door. I went and there was a single red rose on the mat and a card. This chap said "Your friend must think a lot of you to come all this way at midnight to deliver that". So we [Frank and Meg] got back together.

I've been so lucky. I didn't plan to meet anyone else. He was so lovely. I'd never met anyone who'd let you be you. And there were no rows. When I think of all the years with James. The rows were terrible.
Frank talks about the emotional trauma of sudden death and its effect on his home and work life. His words also portray his feelings about being a stepfather.

FRANK TYLER

Frank was born in 1933 in Hereford. His work brought him to the Midlands in 1961 and he has remained working for the same company as an electronics engineer since that date. Frank and Emily were married in 1961 and had two children: Sandy, born in 1964 and David, born in 1967. Frank was widowed in 1980. He married Meg in 1982.

FRANK

I was married 18 years. What's to tell really. An ordinary marriage. My wife was 10 years younger than me. Same as Meg (see note 13). Emily was killed in a road accident. She went to work one morning and that was it. The police rang me at work. It was on David's birthday. A car came across the central reservation and that was it. I get upset even now [broke down]. You
think you've got over it all and you haven't. You never do. You can't. I just carried on. I went to work as normal and did the rest at nights and weekends. I met Meg about eighteen months later. I was definitely not going to get married again. I wasn't going to risk going through that again [the heartache of losing someone] but it just happened. It was the best thing that could happen.

The hardest thing was being on your own. The fact that you've got no-one to talk to. No-one wants to know. I mean when you're married you come home, you've seen something happen on the way and you can sit and talk about it. Kids aren't interested. You're completely and utterly on your own. That's the worst. The work load. You just do it. It's hard. Made me realise the worst job in the world is housework. It's the sheer monotony of it. You do it this week, you do it next. It's going to be there tomorrow. That sort of think I couldn't stand. It is. It's the worst job there is. I couldn't put up with it.

It [being widowed] put a strain on my job. At work for six months I was on automatic. I couldn't do anything at work. Jobs I used to do without thinking about became insurmountable. I remember one day doing something and I suddenly thought "I've done it!"
Without any problem! I've done a job. I knew I was getting better then. For six months I couldn't do anything. I went along you know but went through the motions but everything was hard. As I say a tiny problem became enormous. Just blew out of all proportion.

When you're on your own you let the children get away with murder because you haven't got the time or the energy. You can't be bothered. It's easier to say yes than to argue with them. They were effectively in charge. They got more or less what they wanted. They sort of ran the place really. They couldn't once I got married. That's one of the things they didn't like. I should have made life harder for the children instead of doing everything for them which I did. That was a daft thing to do. Now I think if they'd been working, I mean, I should have said to Sandy "Sandy, you're 15 and doing 'O' levels now. I'm sorry you've got to leave school and look after the house". If I'd done that when Meg came she might have said "Thank goodness someone's come". You're trying to be both parents and you're working twice as hard to try and make up for it. You couldn't anyway.

I can't really say I thought about being a stepparent at the time. I wanted to marry Meg and the children
came with it. I never really thought about it.
Obviously I thought when we got married we'd have a few
problems but nothing I thought we could never overcome.
I didn't get married for the children. I got married
because I wanted to marry Meg so it was just something
that happened when I got married. A minor part of
going married I thought. Having two children of my
own of course it wasn't a major change in my life
really. If I'd had no children I might have thought
about it but two, four, six, what's the difference.
Children are children.

You get problems. There we were trying to make it work
and they were doing their level best to make sure it
didn't. That was the impression I got [laughs]. It
applies to all of them. They'd obviously got a
different attitude towards it than we had. I can't
think of any particular problems. They were just
horrible kids and kids are horrible anyway so I think.
Probably Meg more than me it seemed felt it. It seemed
more important to her. Women look at it differently to
men anyway. She took it more personally. You know.
Meg's children were nasty to me. They'd say things
like "You're not my dad". Well, fair enough, I'm not.
I can understand that. I don't expect them to be nice
to me. I mean, they came here. They'd been made to
come here and live with me and they didn't particularly
want to. I can see that. They were nasty and abusive and called me nasty things. That was part of it you know. It didn't worry me. I just hoped in time it would all settle down. Nothing particularly stood out. They were just kids reacting to a changed situation. It takes time. Don't let it get you down. It all sorts itself out eventually.

David's changed out of all recognition. He wouldn't even speak to Meg. Now as far as he's concerned he looks up to her more than he does to me (see note 17). It's fantastic. He's grown up. He doesn't get all upset about things that don't matter as kids do of course.
Louise's first marriage ended in divorce and Don was a widower before their own marriage. Louise's three children and Don's three children all lived with Louise and Don after remarriage. There were no children of this marriage. Don's three children had since left home to pursue their careers. However, during the study period Don's son Clive returned home for a brief period after leaving the army. Louise's children were all still living in the parental home during the fieldwork period and attended local schools. Moving house was an important issue for Louise and Don during the study.

Louise talks about her first marriage and the problems it raised. She also speaks of becoming a stepmother and how she saw it particularly in terms of a 'job'.

Louise was born in Lancashire in 1948. She worked as a nurse until her marriage to Jonathan in 1969. They had three children: Alex born in 1970, Belinda born in 1973 and Michael born in 1976. During her marriage
Louise had a variety of occupations but returned to nursing after her divorce in 1978. Louise met Don at a party and they lived together for twelve months before marrying in 1979.

LOUISE

I met Jonathan at a dance. He was only around for three months and then he went off to Yorkshire. He was training to be a BBC engineer but he didn't get to the end of the course. We saw each other once a month. We then went on holiday the following April and I got pregnant and Alex was born in the January. We had wanted to get married and engaged anyway so it wasn't too much trouble.

We got a lot of parental opposition. My dad wanted me to have an abortion. I remember thinking when we got married. You know, how you get a premonition you'd done the wrong thing. I really felt I'd made a mistake.

We weren't too bad. Alex was born. That was quite happy. We hadn't got much money. We had a flat that was too expensive. We moved two days after I left
hospital with Alex. Jonathan drank quite a bit. I don't know. It was bearable. We were still quite happy. I got post-natal depression which didn't help. We were alright for a couple of years and then I got restless and wanted another child. I'd got married young and I wanted children quickly. Jonathan didn't really want another one yet. He said to wait till Alex was seven. I wasn't willing to do that. Then I got pregnant with Belinda and things got a bit sour then.

Then he had to go away. Four months before Belinda was born. That was alright to a degree. But it meant he was coming back at weekends. I was a wee bit tired. You know, seven months pregnant. He'd come back tired. I heard later he'd been out socialising. I had heard there were other women. I don't know. It got so bad that I was determined when Belinda was born not to tell him. You know. He'd come back and Belinda would have been born a couple of days. It had got to that stage.

After Belinda was born we moved to Norton. I decided to put everything I had into the marriage. You know, I tried to get the perfect house. Everything was cleaned. I became a registered child minder. You know, I tried to make it nice. The trouble is. I was so busy trying to make it nice that by the time he [Jonathan] came back I was absolutely shattered. And looking at it, he
was working funny hours and we weren't actually getting the extra pay so I think he was making out he was at work when he wasn't.

He [Jonathan] then got an offer of a job running a social club. I wasn't very keen. I'd never cooked for large numbers. I was expected to do the cleaning. So we moved into that. I had to cook for wedding receptions. Once we had seventy people in after a hockey match. I'd never done anything like that before. And I'd got two little ones and had to get people to look after them and that didn't help. But we managed to get through that.

In the meantime, I don't know how but I got caught with Michael. I don't know how. I think he must have got through the sheath and the cap. I know there was no reason why I should have got pregnant so that didn't go down at all well.

Jonathan became an alcoholic. He used to get so bloody drunk he'd open drawers and pee into them. For want of a better word he was really foul. It got to the stage when he was really drunk he'd get violent. He didn't actually hit me but it was getting that way.
I'd already got the idea that he was very friendly with the girl behind the bar [Mavis]. He'd be out while I was looking after the bar. In the end there was some question about the accounts [at their place of employment] being fiddled and we had to leave. Luckily we had our names down on the list for a council place so we managed to get a house.

Jonathan didn't even turn up for Christmas dinner that year. My dad said "It's okay for you to go down but how far do you want the children to go down". It hit (see note 16). We decided to separate but he didn't want anyone to know so we carried on but went our own ways.

We got to about the April and one of his mates came round. You know, he must have thought I was fair game you see. We were talking and he said "You know about Mavis then and I said "Yes, I know about her" and, silly devil, he told me the whole damn lot. That Jonathan had been going out with her for two years. Jonathan phoned the next day. Apparently the place he worked at had been burgled. And I said "Well you've got another problem. I've found out about Mavis and put the phone down".
[Louise and Jonathan continued to have sporadic contact and then Louise met Don at a party.]

Jonathan took an overdose and told his mates to ring me up and try to get me to go back to him. He got himself admitted into a mental hospital. Even the nurses were ringing. Asking me to go and visit him. Don said "If you go and see him we're finished". You know. It's up to you. It's your choice. But if you go over there you still care. Jonathan had threatened to kill me as well so it was okay I'd got Don. What I was supposed to have done to him [Jonathan] I don't know. To my mind he'd done everything to me. Luckily all this time I was going through counselling which really helped me.

The last time I saw him was on the court case six years ago. When he went to court they wouldn't even let him have access because of his behaviour.

When I started going out with Don I was a bit stupid to be honest. I didn't really think too much about his children. I was at that stage where I couldn't really fight and I was just being carried along. I don't really think I thought about it.

I remember the first time Don took me to meet them [Don's children]. They were all sat next door [next
room]. I can't stand games and Don said "Let's play Yangate" and I don't play games like that. So they were all sat down, dressed up very nicely, obviously washed and scrubbed. The house was immaculate. They got me a cup of tea. We sat there and we had quite a nice evening. They were on their best behaviour. I think Don had had a word with them and told them they had to behave otherwise there'd be hard consequences (see note 10).

When we were talking about getting married - because I lived here [present marital home] for six months before - I did have a few reservations. Not about Don but whether I could cope with the eldest of the stepchildren. I wasn't quite sure. He was still at the trouble maker stage. He used to pick on my three kids and I was worried about that.

I did regard it very much as a job [becoming a stepmother]. I wanted Don and it was a price I had to pay. I never thought of it as a choice. At times it got so hard. Don was being a father to mine. I wasn't earning so I regarded it as a job, a mission in life.
Don talks about his first marriage and the turmoil of bereavement. He discusses how he felt influenced by his wife, even after death and his feelings about his stepchildren.

**Don Williams**

Don was born in Nottingham in 1940. His parents divorced and he was brought up by his paternal grandmother. Don joined the police force and married Jacqui in 1963. They had triplets, Jason, Jimmy and Clive, born in 1965. Jacqui died of cancer in 1977. Don met Louise six months later. They lived together for twelve months and were married in 1979.

**Don**

My first marriage was okay. I don't know whether it was good or whether it was bad. Couldn't really tell you. You may think that's silly. It isn't so silly. We met just at an ordinary dance. I wasn't terribly committed. Jacqui was. We met in Nottingham. I came to work down here and she followed me down. We were both single. She got a job in Newtown. I was posted to Newtown and we got married.
We went through the trials and tribulations of children and it was never very happy. Lots of strains. Though we thought a lot of each other, there were a lot of strains in the marriage. Then she got cancer and how much that contributed to her behaviour I don't know because she got very nasty in the last two years. On getting cancer she got very nasty and bitter and we'd only been here six months [present marital home] when she got that. The boys were getting up to, what, eleven, I think. So we was getting over the worst. Getting to that plane of settling and building when this comes along and made her very bitter.

We didn't know how long she was going to live although we thought probably it would be many years but she'd be ill. So it was difficult and not long enough to analyse the problems of the early years of the marriage. Whether or not those problems were a real problem or whether it was just the kids. Then we got the problem of her getting very nasty and bitter. So you never had the chance to analyse it.

She was at home until she became incontinent. It got to the stage where I couldn't look after her and carry on working at the same time. We had a nurse come in for about a fortnight but it was too much for a district nurse to cope. It got so critical that she
was taken to hospital. It was very quick at the end. Quite honestly I hadn't expected it.

One the Monday she wasn't too bad. She could speak reasonably well. Tuesday she was pretty poor but she was giving the impression she was drunk which was put down to the drugs. So there was no reason to think she was going to die. Even at that stage. When I got home she was talking to the boys [Don's children] on the telephone quite normally. So she'd obviously made an effort to talk to them. She must have known the end was near. And I was phoned at five in the morning. She'd had a rough night and was asking for me. I rushed over and I walked in, she just opened her eyes, saw me, took three or four deep breaths and died. It was total shock really. It was just like her being killed. I'd got no idea.

I was in such a confused state. My stepmother came and stayed with me for a few days and that took the pressure off. I remember when she left and I shut the door. It hit me. I broke down then. I really couldn't cope. It really was terrible. Then I knew I was on my own. I'd got problems.

The police force wasn't helpful. They put me back on the beat on nights. I'd got three thirteen year old
kids and that's what they did. So that created a lot of problems. I had to leave them to go to work. They were becoming unruly. I came home one day and found the front porch smashed up. One of them had tried to get in. I'd got the neighbours complaining at their behaviour. I could see I was going down fast.

I went to Gingerbread (see note 18). I was persuaded to go there by a friend. I thought that would help. That's where I met Louise although I wasn't looking for anybody. She was in a bad way. I could identify with her problems and I was able to help her with the things she needed and she was able to help me with the things I needed.

It's funny though. I wasn't interested in meeting anybody else. I didn't want to meet anybody else, but my first wife was called Louise (19), so it was Louise and Don, no change. Jacqui (first wife - see note 19) was a nurse. Louise is now a nurse at the same hospital. There were three children in the first marriage. Louise has three children. So we doubled up. Richard [Louise's son] the baby. He was the last person Jacqui took into the operating theatre for an operation. She [Jacqui] came home and told me about this lovely little baby. She really took to him and I mean I didn't know Louise then. The first time I met
Louise was after Jacqui had died and she was telling me about Richard and going to the hospital and the two tied up. It was funny that Jacqui came and told me about this lovely little baby and now he's my boy. A lot of things make you suspect that there is life after death. When a person does have an influence on your life and I don't think they pass over straight away. I think Louise was chosen by Jacqui to be the one to look after her boys [Don's children].

Mind you, I'd never really thought about myself being a stepfather. I'd obviously heard of it from my job. I'd always considered a stepparent family as a problem family. You heard the wicked stepmother syndrome but you certainly didn't hear of a happy integrated stepfamily.

Obviously when I met Louise the first thoughts were of confusion if truth be said. I'd now got another problem. I'd got to decide on how it was going to be. The way I played in was very much how the children were going to be. So I set out a little bit to brainwash my children. I set out as well to brainwash Louise's children to accept me. You've got to win their love and affection. A bit sneaky really (see note 7).
I think I did this with Michael. He took to me very well. He took to me straight away. Absolutely no problem right from the beginning. Belinda was a very difficult girl. She was very affected by the divorce. I basically left her and let her come round on her own accord. Still being kind but not pushing it. Alex even more so. I tried to become his friend so eventually over the years he's come to accept me as a friend. But even now you don't push it too far. Occasionally I have to come a bit hard and heavy and I think that helps because he knows you care. And that helps to build a relationship. To know that you can only go so far. If they go over the top they're pulled up.
CONCLUSION

I have discussed in this chapter the place of life history materials in the social sciences. I have further argued that the inclusion of life history data in this thesis forms a central reference point for the chapters which follow. They do so in the following ways.

Firstly, the life histories give precedence to the individual and so remind us that, above all, human kind is the concern of sociological analysis. Secondly, the life histories act as a presentation device to allow the reader to place the concerns of the individuals who took part in this study in their appropriate time and place. Finally, each life history contains general themes which are the focus of this study. These themes include first marriage, separation, divorce, bereavement, remarriage and family reconstitution. Each theme is examined in this thesis in order to further our understanding of stepfamily life.
Embedded within each account there are sub-themes. In particular, there appear to be significant gender differences in terms of attitudes and experiences of stepparenthood. I now wish to explore this issue more fully in an examination of the effect of the myth of the wicked stepmother on the experience of stepmotherhood.
NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO: BECOMING A STEPPARENT:
LIFE HISTORIES

1. At the time of the study, Jane and Richard's relationship was very amicable. See Chapter Five for a discussion of this.

2. The theme of a husband not being honest about his financial affairs is also raised in Meg's life history and is indicative of the lack of control women experience on these matters during divorce.

3. At the time of the study Jane and Simon had employed part-time domestic help.

4. Meg's life history also indicates that her first husband began a relationship with a woman from the local dramatic society. I think this is a point of coincidence in this study given the small number of people involved. A further factor in the study is that Louise, Jane and Susan were all nurses. Again, given the small number of participants, I can only judge this also to be coincidental.
Simon was awarded custody of all three children. However, May's interest in the children is reflected in Jane's attitudes. See Chapter Four for further detail.

The 'barn' was a continuing source of conflict between Simon and May during the fieldwork period.

This conscious attitude of getting to know future stepchildren is paralleled in Henry and Don's life history. The gender implications of this are discussed in Chapter Four.

George and Francis lived in tied accommodation.

Cruse is a national organisation offering support to the bereaved.
NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO (CONTINUED)

10 See Louise's life history for her description of Don's attitude. There are similarities here to the attitudes described here by Susan about Henry. In particular, both men appear to wish to minimise any potential problems which their own children might raise.

11 Susan felt Henry's children were disrespectful.

12 The place of residence and the reminders it holds of a previous spouse is a theme taken up more fully in Chapter Five.

13 Henry's comments portray the similarity with which he views Susan and Beatrice as 'wife'. Don talks explicitly of the similarities between Louise and Jacqui as positive features in the relationship. Frank also makes the comment "same as Meg". These comparative features between first and second marriage are discussed in Chapter Five.
NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO (CONTINUED)

14 The construction here of an image of what is commonly termed 'the other woman' has links with the discussion on Images raised in Chapter Six.

15 Meg felt that because Dr Wilson was financially comfortable and could afford to pay for 'expensive' solicitors her own chances at law were significantly reduced. This is one of the reasons she attributed to her poor outcome in the divorce settlement. This point is further raised in Chapters Four and Six.

A further issue which should be noted is that it may well be a myth that Dr Wilson paid for James' legal representation. Such a view was assumption on Meg's part rather than factually based. Nevertheless, the effect on Meg's perception of the situation is that which I have outlined above and links can be made here with the discussion on myth throughout this thesis.
16 The incident described here would appear to be very much a critical event in terms that Meg realised her marriage was over. Louise describes a similar event in her life history.

17 Frank's life history describes the outcome of David and Meg's relationship. The theme of stepparent and stepchild relationships is the focus of Chapter Four.

18 Gingerbread is a national organisation which offers support to the separated and divorced.

19 I have given Don's first wife the pseudonym of Jacqui to avoid the confusion of using the same names for both first and second wife.
Rosy were a little maid as had a stepmother and her were so wicked and good-for-nothing as twopennworth of God-help-us stuck on a stick. Rosy had'n' no love for she. (An English folksong cited in Briggs and Tongue, 1965, p28)
INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus from research on the stepfamily that the role of the stepmother is far more difficult than that of the stepfather. (Smith, 1953, Bowerman and Irish, 1962, Duberman, 1975) Burgoyne and Clark give three reasons for this (1984, p15 ff):

1. Due to unsatisfactory and temporary arrangements for child care, children in motherless families experience far more disruption and distress than children in fatherless families. From the outset therefore the in-coming stepmother faces a more difficult family situation.

2. In statistical terms, stepmothers are more likely to have been unmarried and childless than stepfathers. Their lack of experience of both marriage and childcare means that they are required to make greater adjustments than stepfathers both to living as part of a married couple and to living with stepchildren.

3. The role expectations of motherhood stress that mothers not only undertake the wide range of domestic tasks associated with child care but
they are also held to be publicly accountable for such children in their care. Conversely, the role expectations of fatherhood relate primarily to that of breadwinner. Fathers, and stepfathers, therefore have less direct contact and responsibility for children than mothers and stepmothers.

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute and thereby extend our understanding of why the role of the stepmother is more difficult than that of the stepfather. One factor which Burgoyne and Clark do not consider is the effect of the myth of the wicked stepmother. Nevertheless, this featured in the accounts of the stepmothers in this study. For these reasons, we must consider the role of myth in constructing stepmothers' perceptions and experiences of their role in the stepfamily.

I have argued in Chapter One that one of the most important factors in understanding the role of the wicked stepmother myth is in terms of its relation to the ideology of motherhood and its consequent effect on reality. This chapter begins by considering the ways that stepmothers encompass such an ideology within their understanding of their role in the stepfamily. It then illustrates how stepmothers perceive their actions
to be judged in terms of a mythology of wickedness which is the very antithesis of their understanding of the mother role. Finally, it considers the effect that this disjunction between ideology and mythology has on stepmothers' own assessment of their role within the stepfamily.

**A PRIORITY OF CARING**

I have argued in Chapter One that one of the central ideological features of motherhood is that of selfless care and the nurturing of children. This ideology is conveyed in Rich's description of the archetypal mother as 'the source of angelic love and forgiveness in a world increasingly ruthless and impersonal' (1977, p52). Selfless love therefore means that the needs of husbands and children come before the needs of mothers.

An indication of the extent to which mothers undertake the requirements of this ideology in their everyday lives is illustrated by research on one of the most basic necessities of life - the distribution of food within the family. Research findings indicate that rather than cater to their own tastes, wives cater to the tastes of their husbands. In low income, single
mother families food is a key area of budgeting and mothers reduce their own intake rather than that of their children (Graham, 1984). Women are also more likely to have lower status food than their husbands. (Charles and Kerr, 1987). As Charles and Kerr indicate 'As providers of food for their families they (women) come to subordinate their own needs and interests to those of their partners and children. (1987, p 173) Such research illustrates the depth to which women take for granted the subordination of their own needs in order to fulfil their role as carers within the family.

The stepmothers in this study held explicit notions of their role as carers. Meg sums up this notion of a woman's place when she discussed her initial feelings towards Frank in the early days of their courtship. Her comments are all the more interesting when one notes that Meg was also in paid employment when she made these comments. Meg thus remarked:

I didn't like to see Frank doing so much. On Friday he used to do the washing. After a man's been at work all week it isn't right that he has to come home and do all the housework and cooking.
Meg also had strong feelings of maternal responsibility. She spoke of difficulties in her relationship with her stepson David when she first began to visit Frank at his home (1). Her feelings of distress were tempered with an attitude which placed caring at the forefront of acceptable feelings. Meg commented:

He would show things to his father he wouldn't show to me. "You've got your own place why don't you go there". Slamming back doors shouting "Why don't you sod off". Of course I used to get upset, very upset but well, with both of them [David and Sandy], I was determined to care.

Frances and George had also faced difficult situations with their stepchildren. George had finally stopped his stepchildren from visiting the house (2). Frances does not see that she can or even should take similar action. The attitude expressed by George's action does not accord with good maternal practice. Frances made these comments in this connection.
Frances: I'm quite good friends with all his children and he isn't for mine. It doesn't seem to bother him. It would worry me. I don't think I could, I certainly couldn't ban his children from the house. I couldn't.

CH: No?

Frances: No. How can you do that to children?

In addition to the realm of expressed attitude, the division of responsibility for caring can also be seen in terms of decision making. Frances illustrates the primacy with which she acted in the role of carer despite an opposing philosophy from a more legitimate caring figure - the natural father. Frances related this incident:

I remember particularly when I was in hospital having Luke. Sally [Frances' stepdaughter] had done her year at college and she'd decided that she wanted a place of her
own. Well she got a flat in an awful district. The winter came on and the pipes were all frozen up and well it was dreadful. George came down to me in the hospital you know and told me Sally had phoned him up to ask him to help her with her sink that was all blocked up and I just said "Get that kid home". He said "Don't you think she should struggle on". I said "No I don't". She was ever so unhappy. George has this funny thing that there is this cut-off age when children should be on their own (3). I have always felt children need you as long as they need you and they will go when they are ready. You need to be there when they need you.

Frances' words indicate the degree to which she expressed a caring role for her stepchildren in contradiction to her husband's own view. Maddox wryly sums up a stepmother's propensity to act in these terms with the following comment. 'Blessed Mother. Intercede for us. It is a familiar role for women' (1975, p 161).
I have noted in the Introduction that tales of the wicked stepmother permeate every culture and from early childhood pervade our consciousness. I have in consequence argued in Chapter One that the existence of such a myth bears a direct relation to our lived reality. In Malinowski's terms myth is a 'hard worked active source' used by society as a guide to action and assessment of that action (1954, p101). In her work on the position of women, de Beauvoir (1972) similarly poses the two questions that I now seek to consider. Namely, what is the importance of myth in daily life and to what extent does it affect the customs and conduct of individuals? Again, de Beauvoir sees the answer in the relationship myth bears to reality.

De Beauvoir is concerned with myths of femininity, those stories, and more importantly, those ideas which describe woman. De Beauvoir's theoretical basis is located within French existentialist philosophy. She argues that women's identity is relational to man. Man, acting in the world needs an Other to 'affirm his existence and to break away from immanence' (Oksely, 1986, p73). Woman is this Other. In consequence she is object and never subject, her reality always defined
through men. In her analysis of myth, de Beauvoir seeks to demonstrate this.

De Beauvoir argues that the myths of womanhood and femininity create definitions which, despite any contradiction between experience and myth, are changeless and absolute. Thus reality and experience may deny the myth, but the myth remains pre-eminent. For example, 'we are told not that Feminity is a false entity but that the women concerned are not feminine' (de Beauvoir, 1972, p 283).

In connection with the state of stepmotherhood, Bohannan makes a similar comment. Stepmothers, 'have a cruel reputation throughout the world even when they are good and loving surrogate mothers, they suffer from this stigma (1975, p 133/4). In consequence, women's actions and ipso facto those of stepmothers are defined in terms of the relevant myth.

I now wish to consider how stepmother's feel they are judged in terms of the myth of wickedness. In this connection, the discussion is located in two spheres: Public accountability and Private responsibility.
Public accountability

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that one of the reasons given for the more difficult role which stepmothers face is that they are held to be publically accountable for their stepchildren (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984). Thus, just as a woman's competence and standards as a mother are judged by the cleanliness, behaviour or general upbringing of her children so too are stepmothers judged with regard to the stepchildren in their care. Such public accountability was well recognised by the stepmothers in this study. Their concern on this issue falls into two areas. The disquiet they felt with regard to how they and their actions were viewed by friends, neighbours and the more public world. In addition, a concern about the impression that their stepchildren gave publicly of family life. In particular the image of the wicked stepmother was felt to be the paramount view of them held by others and portrayed by their stepchildren.

Clive (Don's son) had returned to live with Don and Louise whilst he was unemployed. This arrangement was conceived by both Don and Louise as temporary and would continue only until Clive found work. There was some pressure placed on Clive to do this within a reasonable
time period as Don and Louise were in the process of moving to a smaller house. Nevertheless, they both felt that as Clive had lived away from home for the past three years a renewal of his independence would be automatic.

Don in particular went to great lengths to use his network of personal contacts to find employment for Clive. In addition, the relationship between Don and Clive was at times explosive and fractious. On one occasion I arrived at the house with an appointment to meet Don and found he was not at home. He later telephoned me to apologise saying that he had 'had to get out for a while' as he had been having 'problems' with Clive. They had been arguing less than half an hour before the time of my appointment. Clive eventually found employment and accommodation. However, the tense relationship between father and son meant that Clive did not leave on the best of terms with Don and Louise.

Notwithstanding Louise's knowledge that both she and Don were agreed on their course of action with regard to Clive, Louise still felt that it would be she who would be held culpable for Clive's departure. Louise's feeling that she would be held publicly accountable is even more pertinent when we take into
consideration Don's own attitude to his children. Don had frequently commented that "I've always maintained that when they're eighteen they're on their own" (see note 3). In addition Louise was also concerned that Clive would portray the situation publicly in negative terms. Louise remarked:

You know what he's [Clive] saying don't you? We're kicking him out. And what people will think. It's her getting his father to do it. The wicked stepmother thing.

Meg faced similar issues after Sandy, her stepdaughter, had left home. Sandy was renting a cottage from her boyfriend's parents, Victor and Josie. She later became pregnant and Sandy and Marcus decided to get married. Frank and Meg were invited to meet Victor and Josie to discuss the wedding plans. Meg felt that Josie in particular was critical of her qualities as a mother. Meg also felt that part of Josie's assessment of her was due to comments by Sandy which portrayed her in a disparaging way. Meg made the following comments:

She [Josie] told me she doesn't believe in mother's working. She doesn't think it's right. Of course she doesn't work. I really felt as if she was having a go at me. As if I was neglectful
or something. Otherwise why would she say it. And I don't know what Sandy has been saying. I think Josie has got the impression that she has been hard done by by her wicked stepmother. They [Victor and Josie] said that even if Sandy and Marcus don't get married, Sandy would always have a home (4). Why should they say that unless she's [Sandy] said something. I told her she'd always have a home with us. I said that that's what I said to Sandy on the day she left. That she'd always have a home with us.

These two examples illustrate the way in which stepmothers assume that they will be judged publicly in terms of a myth of wickedness. Thus, although stepmothers themselves do not believe the wicked stepmother myth as they do believe the myths which are constructed about stepchildren and previous marital partners and which are the subject of Chapter Six, nevertheless they do believe that society will judge them in accordance with this myth. In this way the mythology has a direct relationship to stepmother's perceptions as we have seen above.

Stepmothers were, however, confronted at times with definitions which are primarily linked to their gender
rather than their status. However, this is not to say that the effect of these definitions in themselves did not lend themselves to stepmothers having rather a low self-esteem and therefore would make the wicked stepmother myth a double burden. In particular, husbands would comment to me privately, and I have no reason to suppose that they did not at times make these comments to their wives publicly, that they thought their wives were 'neurotic' or 'go over the top sometimes' (5). In this connection, it is the private world of the stepfamily which I now wish to consider.

**Private responsibility**

We have seen that stepmothers not only assume that society will be harsh judges of their actions but that their stepchildren also will be bearers of tales which portray them to the public world in unfavourable terms. I now wish to consider how stepmothers feel they are judged within the family.

One of the problems which stepfamilies face concerns their financial circumstances. Burgoyne and Clark (1984) indicate that financial arrangements on divorce continue to have their effect on remarriage. Stepfamilies may be receiving maintenance on the one hand from the stepmother's ex-husband and paying it out
on the other, from the stepfather to his previous spouse. In addition, due to the presence of children from previous marriages and decisions to have further children on remarriage, stepfamilies tend to be large in size. Consequently budgets can be tight. As a result, Burgoyne and Clark argue that the 'material inheritance of the past, which continues to shape the everyday domestic life and potential conflicts of remarried couples, is itself structured by the policy and practices of public law and welfare institutions' (1984, p135).

Whilst it is true that public policy contributes to the structuring of stepfamily life, Burgoyne and Clark do not consider the question of its meaning at the interactive level of stepfamily members. For example, money difficulties or settlements can also be an area where stepmothers feel that their very presence is perceived by their stepchildren to have had a detrimental effect on the financial affairs of the stepfamily. In this way, they feel that it is they, and not the policy and practice of public law and welfare institutions, who is held responsible by their stepchildren for the family's financial circumstances.

During his first marriage, Henry was in receipt of various sources of state benefit to help him care for
his invalid wife. The benefits he was receiving, combined with his salary, meant that the family were financially comfortable. The state benefits continued for a short while after the death of his wife. However, the cessation of benefit coincided, quite accidentally, with his marriage to Susan. Susan has an investment income from the equity from her previous marital home but it is not sufficient to cover the loss of state benefit. This effective drop in income has meant that the family budget on remarriage has to be more tightly controlled than in the past. Susan feels, with a sense of injustice, that Henry's children view her as the cause of their now stringent budgeting. Susan comments:

We have to be very careful with our money. There never seems to be enough. I think Amanda and Karen [Susan's stepdaughters] think we, me and the children are draining the family finances. They don't seem to realise that we bring in more than we take out.

Meg has similar thoughts about a compensation settlement made in connection with the accidental death of Frank's wife, Emily. As she comments, Meg feels she
is held accountable by her stepchildren for Frank's decisions:

Henry was still trying to sort out the compensation for the accident when we met. Emily was just the innocent victim. It had been going on for two years. He asked me what he should do. I told him it was up to him. The solicitor told him that they had an offer to settle out of court. Do you know how much it was? £3000. Ridiculous! I think Sandy and David blame me for that. I think they thought they were going to get thousands and it was my fault Frank settled. But I told him it was up to him. He said "She's gone and nothing will bring her back".

In addition to a view that stepmothers are held solely responsible for the difficulties which the stepfamily faces, they may also face direct sanctions on their behaviour which indicates that their position as stepparent is indeed qualitatively different from that of natural parent. The following incident related by Jane is illustrative of this.
I had arrived at the Beauchamp's during late afternoon in September. Jane's first act of welcome was to put the kettle on to make tea. As she did so, I asked her very generally "How are things?" She told me about an incident which had occurred at a dinner party they had given a few days previously.

The children were eating in the kitchen and we were in the dining room. Polly [her stepdaughter] had asked me to buy some tapioca so, even though I can't stand the stuff, I bought some. I told her if you want it, fine, but you can make it yourself. I think that's fair enough, don't you? Well, I knew what the reaction would be to having tapioca for afters, yuk, so I told them. Simon and Bill [family friend] started to joke about it, making of Polly. You know, we've got frogs spawn for pud, that sort of thing. They all thought it was hilarious. Then Polly asked if we could have macaroni cheese sometime. Well, I told her that's something you can have at your mother's. I'm not buying that. I only said it as a joke. They were all joking. But Simon really came down on me.

He said 'You can't say that sort of thing
to my kids'. But he'd just been joking about the same thing. I couldn't believe it.

The problems associated with food consumption and mealtimes have been documented previously (Maddox, 1975; Burgoyne and Clark, 1984). The discussion centres around what Maddox terms the 'emotionally laden daily bread' (1975, p 137). Food is a symbol of love and an area of conflict. Such conflict arises when tastes differ and children reject food prepared by stepmothers. Stepchildren may also make unfavourable comparisons with regard to food prepared by stepmothers. 'Mommy makes it better' is a summary comment. Conflict also arises with regard to different standards and expectations of mealtime behaviour. Maddox remarks that 'Just as the image of stepmother is witch, so the image of her food is poison' (1975, p 137).

Whilst Jane's remarks above relate to a difference of taste between herself and Polly, the issue which is paramount is the way that this difference becomes a focus for what is acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour. There are parallels here to Voysey's comment in connection with disability in the family that 'The 'same' phenomena can be evidence of 'good' and 'evil' depending on the particular aspects of parents' own and others' situations which they emphasize' (1975, p199).
The emphasis in this case was the distinction made between natural and social parenting which Simon gave weight to. Jane felt that she was acting within the social ambiance of the occasion. Yet she was left in no doubt of the unacceptability of her comments. She had stepped beyond the parameters of conduct permitted to a social parent.

I have argued in the foregoing that there are various forms in which stepmothers feel that they are judged both publicaly and privately in terms of a mythology of wickedness. I now wish to consider the strategies by which stepmothers manage this myth in their day to day lives.

COPING STRATEGIES: MANAGING THE MYTH

Stepmother's accept a definition of their personae within the stepfamily which includes attributions of wickedness. Clearly this notion of wickedness does not fit with other ideals which they also hold of good mothering. Neither does it accord with stereotypes of normal family life. The stepmother is therefore presented with opposing images of good and bad, evil and virtuous, abnormal and normal.
I now wish to illustrate how this disjunction between myth and ideology is negotiated on a day to day level. This discussion therefore has to be considered in terms of the way in which stepmothers manage the myth of wickedness. In Chapter Six I will discuss the obverse of this, namely how myth itself acts as a coping mechanism. However, the discussion which follows can broadly be seen in terms of the forms by which stepmothers attempt to manage the impression which others will form of them. Goffman notes that 'when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation' (1959, p26). I would argue that the motive in this case is to allay the imputation of a myth of wickedness. I will therefore consider this issue in relation to strategies which take place in the private domain of the family and strategies which occur in the public world of friends and neighbours.

Negotiating the stepfamily

In a journalistic account of stepmotherhood, Burns makes a comment which summarises the powerful effect of mythology on action. She remarks 'most stepmothers will verge on the masochistic in order to assure
themselves and anyone who's watching that they are not wicked' (Burns, 1985, emphasis in text).

One way in which Jane responded to this was to try to meet every demand which may be placed upon a caring parent, to the extent of creating pressure and fatigue. Jane's comments reflect the 'double shift' of being in paid employment and having responsibility for the home (Sharpe, 1984, p87). As Sharpe notes the most apparent negative effect of this is 'tiredness consequent upon a double shift - work outside the home followed by work inside it. (1984, p87).

This fatigue is exacerbated by the need to be seen as caring and loving by one's stepchildren. In this instance, Jane felt that she should attend Angela's (her stepdaughter) school open evening. This occurred on an evening when she was normally required to work late. A conversation I witnessed between Jane and Simon illustrates the extent to which Jane as stepmother felt she should show her concern and interest in her stepchildren.

Simon's response indicates that as a natural parent it is legitimate to waiver such dedication in favour of more pressing demands. Simon's attitude therefore further stresses the impact of the mythology of
Jane had returned home the evening before late from work. She found no meal prepared and the children were still up. Simon was decorating. They had had an argument and this was commented upon during my visit. In the course of explaining to me the reasons for their marital discord, I witnessed the following conversation.

Jane: I knew I shouldn't have come in. I should have turned round and driven on. It's alright for you. When you come home the kids are in bed and there's a meal waiting.

Simon: I'm sorry. I thought I'd get on with the decorating while I had a bit of time to spare.

Jane: It isn't fair that I have to do so much. And it's Angela's Open Day tomorrow. And I've got a meeting.

Simon: You shouldn't try to do so much. Don't worry about Angela. I'm often too busy to go to these school things.
Jane: But I've got to go. How will she [Angela] feel if I don't.

The need to assure their families that they are indeed not wicked means that a stepmother's behaviour must be beyond reproach. Comments from Louise's neighbour and husband illustrate the degree to which they, as well as Louise, were conscious of this process.

Louise's neighbour called on Louise during one of my visits. I had been talking to Louise about her first days as a stepmother as the neighbour arrived. The conversation proceeded as follows:

Louise: Beryl [the neighbour] will tell you what I was like, won't you? [turning to Beryl] [Beryl looked slightly bewildered] This is Christina. She's doing a study about stepfamilies and she was just asking me what I was like when I first came here.

Beryl: [laughing] She was always too busy trying not to be the wicked stepmother.
Louise: I was. It's true. I used to try to do everything for them.

Don, Louise's husband made similar comments. His remarks were made with reference to discipline in the family and illustrate the negotiation of different standards between natural parent and stepparent. The importance of this negotiation as a means of avoiding conflict within the stepfamily has been noted by Burgoyne and Clark. (1984, pp167 ff) The point I wish to make, however, is the terms within which decisions are made. As a natural father Don is a figure of legitimate authority to his sons. However, Don is clear that at least one of the grounds upon which he surrendered his authority was in deferment to the impact of mythology.

I used to be strict with them [his own children] and I should have continued but I let things go. She [Louise] had to think she could cope. I know for a fact that I'd tell them they couldn't do something and when I'd gone she'd say "It doesn't matter" and let them do what they wanted. She was very hung up on this wicked stepmother thing.
Burgoyne and Clark indicate that 'in particular stepparents felt that they lacked legitimacy as figures of authority because they were not 'real' fathers or mothers' (1984, p169). Whilst Burgoyne and Clark's remarks relate to both male and female relations, I wish to indicate the special importance of discipline for women (6). To do so I will consider discipline in the context of a mythology of wickedness. As an overtly negative, sometimes punitive act, discipline actually fits the requirements of the myth quite neatly. Given Don's comments above, therefore, it is not surprising that as in Louise's case it is an area where behaviour will favour avoidance rather than confrontation.

Susan also undertook a position which stressed avoidance. She made the following comments in connection with expectations with regard to keeping the house tidy.

I know I'm too easy with them. I expect them [her stepdaughters] to see that things need doing. I can't ask.

I did witness an occasion when Susan avoided any confrontation. Susan had asked Amanda (her stepdaughter) to look after her daughter Hester while
we 'talked' in an adjacent room. Hester in fact came into the room several times, asking for a drink or wanting toys and Susan asked her to find Amanda to help her. During our conversation, Amanda came in and announced that she was going shopping. Susan said "Okay" and Amanda left the house leaving Hester alone and unoccupied. Susan turned to me and commented.

It really annoys me when she does that. It means Hester isn't being occupied. We might as well stop [talking] now. There's no point.

Nevertheless, there are strategies which are utilised which seek to impose discipline but in a form which will not incur upon oneself the attribution of wickedness. This is to act through a more legitimate figure, that is the natural parent, by asking them to undertake the task.

Simon and Jane had invited me to dinner at a local restaurant. James and Angela (Simon's children) accompanied us. My field notes read as follows.

The atmosphere during the meal was strained. The occasion did not get off to a very auspicious start as before we had left Angela had said that she felt unwell. She had a headache. My reasons
for feeling that the atmosphere was tense was due
not to what was said but rather its absence.

Simon and Jane sat together on the same side of
the table. James sat opposite Jane. Angela sat
opposite Simon. I sat between the children.

Angela asked for sausage and chips. She did
not eat it, saying she still felt unwell.
Simon said to her "It's because you had a
late night last night". Jane took no part
in 'parenting' Angela. She neither commented
on her table manners, nor remarked on the fact
that she wasn't eating. This was left to
Simon. Patterns of direct conversation were
thus: James-Jane; Jane-Simon; Simon-James;
James-Angela; Simon-Angela.

As sweet was being ordered, Angela said she
felt a lot better. Simon said "I'm not sure
you should have pudding. You didn't eat
your dinner". Jane said quietly to Simon
"If the decision were left to me she
wouldn't have any". Simon murmured his
agreement to Jane's comment. However, he
said nothing directly to Angela. Angela
ordered her sweet without anything further being said.

Jane's attempts at placing sanctions on Angela did not come to fruition. In effect Simon had dismissed her viewpoint. This in itself contributes to a self-image of wickedness for Jane as her comments at a later point in time indicate. Jane:

He's [Simon's] only just beginning to take notice of what I say. Before I felt he thought I was just being cussed and nasty.

Frances similarly looked to George to achieve an outcome which she desired. During August, Anna (Frances' stepdaughter) had returned to the parental home as she had been experiencing financial difficulties. George had previously lent her a deposit for a flat she had rented. Anna returned on the basis that she would repay this sum of money once she had sorted out her finances. Anna had also agreed to pay a sum of money towards her board when she was in a financial position to do so.

As the months passed by Frances began to express to me disquiet with regard to Anna's lack of speed in making
an offer to repay her debt or to make a contribution towards the cost of housekeeping. Nevertheless, she felt constrained to ask Anna directly about the situation. Instead she looked to George to make the necessary approaches:

I've asked him several times to have a word with her [Anna]. She owes us for the deposit and for the cost of keeping her. It's been five months now and nothing. I know George has mentioned it, but that's all. Only mentioned it. She said she would pay. But when?

Frances' dissatisfaction at George's handling of the matter eventually led her to take action on her own part. Frances told me:

Anna had a bank statement this morning and it was too good an opportunity. I told her she's been here since August and that it added up to rather a lot of money. She didn't like it. I know she didn't. But she gave me a cheque.
Whilst Frances was able to take control for herself of a situation she found problematic, such control also has its penalties. Frances could still not overcome a feeling that somehow she would be seen as the one in the wrong. She thus said "The trouble is. If he doesn't back me up it makes me look like an ogre".

It is important to remember that strategies such as avoidance or enlisting the support of a more legitimate authority figure are not used in isolation. Indeed given the failure of the latter method as an effective means of creating change, the only recourse available is to approach the difficulty directly. Nevertheless, there is still the problem of being viewed rather negatively which Frances faced. An alternative method is to rationalise and thereby objectify the need to exert control.

The form which this rationalisation took for Meg was in the compilation of rules. Meg comments on the system that she and Frank implemented:

It was such chaos with so many children. And so expensive. The water heater would be on all day. And everyone would be wanting baths in the morning. So we drew up some rules. They would each have their bath day and they
couldn't have baths if it wasn't their turn. We're on Economy 7 so baths had to be taken either before 7.00 in the morning or after 10.00 at night.

Jane would make public acknowledgements with regard to the similarity of her actions and the myth of wicked witches. Thus, when she had had to discipline them she would shout to all the children "Watch out, I'm on my broomstick". Alternatively, if Jane was discussing previous behaviour with me and the children were present she would turn to the child and comment "I've been on my broomstick this morning haven't I?.

By confronting the myth directly, Jane's actions can be seen in terms of a strategy designed to cope with the mythology of wickedness by attempting to control the impressions which others may form about oneself and one's actions. As Goffman comments in this connection 'This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan' (1969, p15). Jane's own acknowledgement of the myth is sufficient to defuse its impact.
We can see that the implementation of rules or statements of intent apply to all children in the household. This in itself is a sign that the stepmother is not acting unfairly or even wickedly. As all children are treated as equals in this way it is a further means by which any assignment of the myth can be refuted.

The various coping strategies which have been the subject of discussion here have been located within the private domain of the stepfamily. Nevertheless, stepmothers also develop various strategies to overcome the myth of wickedness in their more public dealings with the world beyond the immediate family.

**Negotiating the public world**

I have argued that stepmothers perceive that the public world of friends, relatives and even strangers will err towards a harsh view of their motives, thoughts and actions. Moreover, as Voysey indicates 'It is in public that parents' 'good identity' is most at stake' (1975, p50). Voysey therefore argues that it is in the public world that parents' practices are most likely to accord with ideal prescriptions. There is therefore a felt need to rectify any misunderstandings which may have arisen in the minds of such publics. This can
either be accomplished by public displays of caring or
by passing on information which portrays the stepmother
in a favourable light. Meg employed both of these
methods in the course of Sandy's wedding.

Although Sandy was no longer living in the parental
home, Meg had invited Sandy's relatives to the house
for a drink before the wedding. Sandy had initially
said that she would spend the night before her wedding
with Meg and Frank. The morning thus provided an
opportunity to demonstrate the unity of the family and
can therefore be seen as a public display of caring.
However, shortly before the day Sandy told Meg that she
had decided to stay at her own home for the night and
would travel to the wedding with Marcus' parents. This
caused Meg a great deal of distress. Whilst Meg tried
to understand Sandy's reasons she was also aware that
the united front she sought to make visible to Sandy's
relatives may not be possible. Indeed the imputation
would be quite the reverse. She commented:

I don't think she's being deliberately
hurtful. Just thoughtless perhaps. But
she's hurt me a lot lately. I can
understand why she wants to stay at
her own place. All her stuff's there I
know and it's easier for her. But what's
everybody going to think when they get her and Sandy's not here. They'll wonder what's wrong with us that she didn't want to be here.

While the setting up of such a display of caring can be viewed in terms of a strategy to influence the impression of others, as Meg's comments indicate the outcome may not always be that which was planned. This ineffectiveness of the strategy has to be seen in terms of the discussion earlier that stepmothers do not feel it legitimate to attempt to directly control the actions of their stepchildren. In particular, Meg did not feel that she could say anything to Sandy about her decision.

Nevertheless, in the event although Sandy did not spend the night at the parental home, she did spend the morning of the wedding there to be with the other guests. However, Sandy's decision to do so was not through the intervention of Meg or Frank, her father, but was the result of intervention by her brother David. As Meg commented to me "David made her do it. I don't know how". In this way, siblings can act as legitimate authority figures in the same way I have noted earlier natural parents can.
The fine detail of the wedding itself was also a focus for showing care for Meg. A relative of Sandy's had offered to make the wedding cake and, in the interests of diplomacy, both Meg and Sandy had agreed. However, when the cake arrived Meg was concerned at its lack of decoration. Despite the joint agreement between Meg and Sandy, Meg feels she will be held responsible for the 'look' of the cake.

It's got no decoration on it. No bells or rings or birds. All it's got is a cheap looking champagne glass with Christmas ribbon hanging out of it. What will people think? They'll think I don't care.

In consequence, Meg felt obliged as a sign that she did care to buy further decorations to be placed on the cake.

The wedding also provided Meg with an opportunity to rectify what she considered was a mistaken impression of her by Sandy's new in-laws Victor and Josie. I referred earlier to an incident during Meg's first meeting with Victor and Josie where Meg felt as if she was being criticised by Josie. Meg was placed next to Victor during the reception. Her opportunity to give Victor a different impression than the one she supposed
he had of her occurred when they began to talk about
the making of wills. Meg spoke of her actions as
follows:

I told him that we'd left our will to be split
equally among all the children. Do you know he
looked surprised. "Really?" he said. "Yes"
I said. "They'll all get equal shares".
I think Sandy has led him to believe something
different.

The false impressions which Meg felt were held of her
by Victor and Josie are those which arise from a
mythology of wickedness which acts on the consciousness
of the stepmother in both her dealings with the private
and public world. The strategies which the stepmothers
in the study developed to overcome this myth, as I have
shown, were various and were not always successful. I
have argued that this lack of success can be seen in
part as a consequence of the myth itself which prevents
stepmothers acting directly on their own accord. In
addition, the ambiguous nature of the stepmother role
can inhibit freedom of action.
ROLE AMBIGUITY

I have attempted to illustrate above the ways in which stepmothers act in order to overcome a private or public assignment of their motives which defines them as acting in a contrary form to that required of a good mother. In each of these instances they can either act as friend or mother or neither. The ambiguous nature of the stepparent role generally has been noted by others (Walker and Messinger, 1979; Ferri, 1984). In particular commentaries compare the stepparent role to that of roles within the nuclear family. Thus, Walker and Messinger argue that 'remarriage family roles differ from nuclear family roles in two key respects, the degree of clarity about which behaviour is appropriate for a role incumbent, and the degree to which the role is either ascribed or achieved' (1979, p186).

The uncertainty of her role and place within the stepfamily which a stepmother experiences can also be combined with an expectation that her presence will be seen as presenting problems to her prospective stepchildren. Susan's comments with regard to her feelings about meeting Henry's children for the first time illustrate this:
I was a bit wary but I felt quite positive about it. I was very nervous, frightened about what they thought of me, not really knowing what my position was, how they saw me, whether they saw me as a threat.

The extent to which stepmothers accept the legitimacy of their presence as being threatening is indicated by Jane's comments. As Jane's life history illustrates, Simon's children were welcoming to Jane when she first began to see Simon. However, Jane's children behaved with hostility towards Simon at the start of their courtship. Joe in particular would make rude comments or ignore Simon. Jane's view that her children's behaviour is a normal reaction to the circumstances endorses common sense understandings that stepparenthood is problematic.

I thought it was peculiar if you like. I thought it was unusual that they should be so welcoming of a stranger who quite obviously was something big in their father's life. I did find that peculiar. Although it had been easier for me I felt that my children's reaction was actually more normal that there was
the prospect of another man in their life
whereas his children - not in the slightest.

Jane's comments highlight one of the perceived problems of stepparenthood for children that they will be replaced in their parent's affections by a new partner. As Wallerstein and Kelly note children "were concerned that they might be shunted to the side and replaced or excluded by the new marital relationship" (1980, p291). In addition, the step-role in terms of stepping-in for an absent parent is also viewed as potentially problematic as Susan's comments indicate:

It mainly worried me that they [Susan's stepdaughters] would feel that their mother had been pushed out. That I was getting in the way of their relationship with their mother.

Stepping-in for an absent mother was a course of action which quite clearly presented itself to Meg. During the course of Sandy's wedding, and as part of the ritual expectations placed thereon, the photographer called for 'Bride and Mother'. The phrase will be heard at every wedding but as Meg shows its meaning will be of particular significance to a stepmother. There is no automatic and even unthinking
acknowledgement of right as there would be for a natural mother. Meg's words indicate the dilemma which she initially faced when effectively challenged by the photographer to either take up the role of mother or to disclaim it. Her words also highlight the insecurity which she felt in making this decision. Specifically, Meg did not know how Sandy felt about the situation.

The photographer shouted "mother of the bride. Come on". I looked at Sandy and well. I didn't know what to do. What did she want. Then I thought. Blow it. I've got every right to be there. After all her mother's dead. So I said to Sandy "Let's oblige".

Meg's comments indicate not only the ambiguity of the stepmother role but also her lack of clarity about Sandy's own feelings. Nevertheless, there were occasions when stepmothers were aware of the stepchildren's attitudes and feelings and I wish to encompass this within a discussion of the role of praise in the stepfamily.
THE ROLE OF PRAISE

The importance of praise cannot be underestimated in the management of a mythology which defines the stepmother as wicked. This is because the allocation of praise provides a statement that just as the parents of handicapped children so too stepmothers are 'fulfilling the responsibilities of parenthood and maintaining a normal family life'. (Voysey, 1975, p211) For stepmothers praise validated their very presence within the stepfamily and confirmed that they were indeed acting in accordance with good motherly practice. In short they had some form of tangible sign that they had achieved the ideological requirements of the mother role. Praise therefore becomes a signal that, despite all, they are not wicked stepmothers.

Praise can come in many forms and from many sources. The praise which Meg received came indirectly through gossip. Meg's mother was travelling to Sandy's wedding by bus and by chance Sandy's aunt was on the same bus.

They [Meg's mother and Sandy's aunt] got off at the same stop and my mother said she thought she must be going to the same place as she'd asked the bus conductor to put her
off. Well my mother asked her and they got talking. Do you know what she said? She told mum that Sandy's mother would have been much harder on her, [Sandy] being pregnant before she got married, you know. And she certainly wouldn't have given her such a good wedding. In fact, she said Sandy's mother would have been very angry with her indeed.

The degree to which this information was important to Meg is reflected in the fact that she told me this story on three separate occasions.

Susan received a more indirect form of praise in the shape of a show of affection but from a more direct source. I arrived one morning at Susan's house and as she opened the door, the very first words she greeted me with, with a large smile on her face, were:

I must tell you. Amanda came up to me and hugged me. She said she loved me.

There was no doubt, in my mind, that her evident happiness and the immediacy with which she passed on this information meant that Amanda's show of affection was of immense value to Susan.
Praise can also be found in positive feedback related to the minutiae of daily life. And it can come in a very indirect form. Frances expressed pleasure at the way Anna had met her personal standards. Frances saw this as a sign of acceptance. The following comments are in respect of the way Anna set the table for dinner. Frances:

She made a lovely job of it. Just how I like it done. We did have very different sets of standards when we got together and I know all of them have jibbed a bit but latterly they've said to me, well not said to me but made comments such as, you know, Frances has done it the right way and that's how it should be done.

Signs of acceptance can also be received from a spouse. Throughout the fieldwork Jane was concerned with ongoing problems of access and maintenance in connection with Simon's children. In many ways her concerns fit Burgoyne and Clark's (1984) primary argument that the heritage from the past will continue to make its effect felt in the present. In this particular instance, settlements and arrangements made at the time of divorce continued to present problems to Simon and Jane. One of the ancilliary problems which
arose from this situation was a difference of opinion between Simon and Jane with regard to how much Simon’s children should know about the divorce settlement and its current effect on their lives.

The effects of their disagreement with May (Simon's first wife) were particularly felt by Jane and were therefore feeding into the marital relationship. May had repeatedly asked for maintenance to cover the cost of the children's weekend and holiday visits to her. On one occasion this had caused Jane to become very upset. She described her emotions as follows:

I began to think about things, you know and when I got back I was determined to stand up for myself. We had a blazing row. I broke one of the kitchen cupboards. It's still broken. You'll see it in the kitchen. I ended up sitting in the car sobbing.

Simon decided to tell the children about the divorce settlement. This was of particular significance for Jane. By discussing the divorce with the children he was conveying to them that he and Jane had legal and moral grounds for their refusal to pay May maintenance. Thus, their actions in this context could be seen as
reasonable and not the result of Machiavellian plots by their evil stepmother. Further, it has to be noted that the need for the children to be told came from Jane. Thus, Simon was acting on behalf of Jane in a similar fashion to that discussed above. Jane made the following remarks:

He did something I've been wanting him to do for ages. He had the children in the living room and went through the divorce piece by piece. I've always told my children everything but Simon's never told them anything. He showed them the letter from the solicitor saying that May wasn't entitled to any maintenance and that in fact we were entitled to claim from her - but we haven't.

My field notes contain a comment that Jane 'was evidently a lot happier about the whole thing'. Praise can act as a turning point for the stepmother on a very personal level. Praise acknowledges in a very public way that the stepmother can in Frances' words sometimes do it 'the right way'. Thus, it acts in contradiction to the accusations of the myth.
My remarks above regarding Jane’s happiness stand in opposition to my field notes on previous occasions which repeatedly read ‘as she told me the tears trickled down her face’. Jane in fact summed up her sorrow herself when she said ‘I’m always ill when you come’.

Similarly, I have remarked about the evident pleasure which Susan found in Amanda’s act of affection. For Meg the wedding which she had been ‘dreading’ was ‘fine, no problem, lovely’.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been concerned to examine the myth of the wicked stepmother in terms of the reality of daily life which stepmothers experience. I began my discussion by locating the stepmother’s experience within an ideology of motherhood. In particular, I argued that stepmothers accept the notions of selfless care and nurturing which are encompassed within this ideology.

I then argued that stepmothers feel that they face a myth which portrays them in extremely negative terms.
I traced the forms in which the myth presents itself to stepmothers in terms of public accountability and private responsibility.

I further noted that the ideology of motherhood and the ascription of a myth of wickedness form a disjunction which has to be negotiated by the stepmother. This negotiation takes the form of strategies within which the stepmother attempts to manage the impression which others will form of her.

These strategies were various, were certainly not mutually exclusive and were sometimes ineffective. Within the private domain of the family they included over-compensation, avoidance, acting through a more legitimate authority figure and making public statements. In the public domain, strategies emphasised displays of caring and directly countering perceived false impressions.

I noted the ambiguous nature of the stepmother role with its emphasis on the problematic. Finally, I noted and the importance of praise as one means of resolution of that problematic.

In these ways I have sought to describe the effect of myth on the lived reality of stepfamily life and more
particularly on the lives of the stepmothers in the study. Whilst the stepchild has been an implicit feature within this chapter, I now wish to explicitly consider stepparent-stepchild relationships. This is the subject of the following chapter.
NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE: WICKED STEPMOTHERS:
The Myth Examined

1. As Meg's life history shows, the stepparent-stepchild relationship which Meg discusses here initially resulted in her decision to end her relationship with Frank. The resolution in terms of David's acceptance of Meg is noted in Frank's life history. However, these issues have direct links with the subject matter in Chapter Four.

2. See Chapter Four for a further discussion of this.

3. Frances' remarks about George's attitude are also held by Don referred to later in this chapter under the heading Public Accountability.

4. This comment was made in terms that Josie and Victor would continue to allow Sandy to rent the cottage despite any discontinuation in Sandy and Marcus' relationship.
NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE (CONTINUED)

5 The subject of men's comments about their wives is raised in Appendix A in connection with the research methodology.

6 Chapter Five considers this question more fully in terms of stepfatherhood.

7 It should be noted that the term "others" includes the researcher as well as the members of the family. In this sense, the researcher is a representative of the public world.
... it is clear that a stepfamily's success stands or falls on whether the step-parents and stepchildren can adapt to each other. The question of how the adult-child relationship can best be tackled should therefore be uppermost in one's mind in making the decision about whether to set up a stepfamily.

(Hodder, 1985, p16)
INTRODUCTION

Hodder's comments (op cit) indicate the importance which is given in literature on the stepfamily to the stepparent-stepchild relationship. As I noted in Chapter One in this connection, there is an emphasis on the use of age and biological sex as determinants of likely success here. Specifically, it is argued that good stepparent-stepchild relationships are easier to form with younger children than older and particularly adolescent children (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980, Franks, 1988). It is also argued that stepmother-stepdaughter relationships are the most difficult of all steprelationships (Franks, 1988). Nevertheless, as I have indicated, within this broad band of findings there is anomaly and ambiguity.

I have, however, argued that we need to give full account to other salient features of biography which will enhance our understanding of factors that are seen to be attributable either to age or sex. In this connection I will indicate the importance of these issues by considering the interactive and negotiable nature of stepparent-stepchild relationships. In particular, I will illustrate how ideals of family life
contradict with the reality of day to day living in the stepfamily.

There are two ideals which will be considered. These are the centrality of the child within the family and the ideal of love as a fundamental modus operandi of family relations. I will also consider the notion of reciprocity in connection with these ideals. In so doing this chapter will illustrate the ways in which the reciprocal nature of stepfamily relationships has a direct bearing on the successful or non-successful resolution of stepparent-stepchild relationships. In the course of discussion, the construction of mythology is briefly examined (Chapter Six considers this issue fully).
A 'CHILD-FOCUSSED' APPROACH

The importance which is given to the developmental needs of children has to be seen in the context of an equal emphasis on the family as the primary place where those needs should be met. As Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz argue 'It is increasingly apparent that the idea that we, as a society, are child-centred is a contemporary myth (1977, p10, emphasis in text). Rather, we live in a 'child-focussed, mother-oriented, expert-guided society' (Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz, 1977, p3) and the central point of such 'child-focussing' is the family. Indeed, children are considered an essential factor in the transition from 'married couple' to 'family' (Busfield and Paddon, 1977).

Within the family, the importance of children can also be seen in the primacy given to their needs over those of the mother. Thus, 'The 'good mother' is very often thought of as someone ... who puts her children and family before herself' (Busfield and Paddon, 1977, p165, my emphasis). Moreover, legal and social work decisions give precedence to 'the best interests of the child' and to children's rights and locate these issues in family based matters such as custodianship disputes.
Children who have experienced the loss of a parent through death or divorce are seen as children with special needs or special vulnerabilities. Children whose parents divorce are often described as coming from 'broken homes' and are seen as more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviour or to have poor school attainment. 'Experts' contribute to this belief. As Burgoyne and Clark note 'Such beliefs are legitimated in a variety of academic research and literature and in the occupational ideologies of many personal service workers such as teachers and social workers, as well as in popular fiction, TV drama and so on' (1984, p143).

The nature of remarriage and family reconstitution as representations of a deviation from 'normal' families which I discussed in Chapter One also gives rise to the need for assessments of any pathological outcome for children living in stepfamilies. Thus, Bernard (1971) conducted the Bernreuter Personality Inventory on children from stepfamilies to assess whether there were any personality differences between them and children living with both natural parents. Similarly, Ferri (1984) used data from the National Child Development Study in a comparative way to study the effects of remarriage on children. Psycho-social adjustment, emotional behaviour, educational attainment, physical
health, social and material circumstances were all factors for analysis.

Given the degree of importance which 'experts' and the general public attach to the needs of children per se and to the possibility of pathological outcomes for children living in stepfamilies it is not surprising that emphasis has been placed on analysing the factors which are likely to contribute to a 'successful' stepparent-child relationship. Although an assessment of this 'success' is linked to the wide variety of factors which I have outlined above, the more emotive sphere of stepfamily life is a further area where judgements are made. It is this subject that I will now consider.

PARENTAL LOVE AND RECIPROCITY

The life history accounts in this thesis convey a sense that remarrying couples had little specific knowledge about the degree of difficulties they would encounter when living as a stepfamily. Their attitudes are summed up by Visher and Visher when referring to stepmother expectations that stepmothers will 'Love their children instantly and equally to their natural
children' (1979, p50). Indeed, just as the family is considered the harbour for society's most positive values, so too the ideal of love is considered an indispensable part of family relationships. As Busfield and Haddon note 'It is widely accepted in this society that family life should be based on, and encourage certain characteristics amongst its members: love and affection, companionship and support, tolerance and understanding, generosity and altruism' (1977, p164).

Nevertheless, the notion of reciprocity has not been neglected in accounts of family life. Anderson (1980) notes the importance of this in his historical account of family life in a Lancashire mill town. Elderly relatives were left to the exigencies of the Poor Law if they were unable to contribute, in kind or materially, to the precarious economic base of their families lives. Reciprocity is also considered a value which children should learn. In a discussion on punishment and reward, Newson and Newson note 'To the extent that the expectation of co-operative behaviour is part of the notion of reciprocal obligations which middle class mothers are at pains to instill, the rejection of rewards on principle understandably has a middle class bias' (Newson and Newson, 1976, p340).
Notwithstanding these issues, whilst reciprocity in terms of give and take may be considered a value, when it comes to the issue of parental love the question is far more ambiguous. Although mutuality of love is the goal, the mother is considered to be the appropriate person to take the lead. Bowlby's work (1965) gives a clear example of this where the mother's needs have to be subsumed to the infant's. However, to be able to do this there has to be a complementary bond of love. Accordingly, Bowlby claims that 'Just as a baby needs to feel that he belongs to his mother, a mother needs to feel that she belongs to her child, and it is only when she has the satisfaction of this feeling that it is easy for her to devote herself to him' (1965, p77).

In terms of fatherhood, there are perceived gender differences. One such example occurs during the bonding process between father and child. In particular it is argued that this can be interfered with by feelings of jealousy on the part of the father. As Rapoport, Rapoport and Stralitz point out child care manuals accept the condition but put the responsibility for its correction on the mother and thereby highlight women's responsibility for the emotional sphere of life. 'Mothers are admonished to ensure that fathers were not made to feel too jealous of the baby' (Rapoport, Rapoport and Stralitz, 1977, p47). Thus,
fathers, in their own right, are not expected to commit themselves first in the act of parental love. Indeed, whilst a mother's love is unconditional, a father's love has to be earned.

To love a child, whilst it may have different implications for mothers and fathers, is therefore part of the common stock of knowledge which is held in our society. As Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz note 'Parents are expected to give all to child rearing' (1977, p10). Love is part of that all.

Reciprocity in consequence stands in opposition to the giving nature of love and therefore may be a difficult need to admit. This may be particularly so in stepparent-stepchild relationships where the emphasis is placed on the stepparent, as adult, being mature and balanced. In her advice to stepparents Burns' comments reflect this. Burns states 'Professionals unanimously agree on two invaluable attributes for a stepmother: patience and maturity' (1985, p9). The burden is increased when one considers the emphasis given to the needs of children which I have outlined above.

In an attempt to redress the balance of parent-child relationships generally Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz indicate the importance of the interactive nature of
love. They comment 'Parents influence and give to their children, but so do children influence and give back to their parents. Both sides of the interaction should be recognised' (1977, p30). Moreover, their argument that 'Reciprocity as a principle of family life is a dynamic aspect of maintaining some kind of balance and harmony' is the major theme of the following analysis (Rapoport, Rapoport, Strelitz, 1977, p30).

In order to develop this theme more fully I will consider the forms in which the reciprocal nature of stepparent-stepchild relationships was enacted within the stepfamilies in the study. I will do this by examining ideas of reciprocity in terms of a dichotomy of acceptance and rejection.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF RECIPROCITY IN STEPPARENT-STEPCHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

In order to assess the importance of reciprocity in the emotional sphere of family life, I will consider attitudes stepparents portrayed about their stepchildren. In particular I will illustrate how feelings of rejection or acceptance are formed and
changed. The construction of myth will be indicated. In addition, I will also illustrate how such attitudes crossed any boundaries of age or sex. In so doing I intend to convey the impact that this process has on stepparent-stepchild relationships.

An examination of stepparent's comments with regard to their feelings about their stepchildren portray two dominant responses. These were feelings either of rejection or acceptance by particular children. As we will see there is a direct relationship between these feelings and rejection or acceptance by stepparents of such children. At this point there is no distinction between stepmother or stepfather. Both experienced and held the same meanings of such attitudes.

**Feelings of rejection**

Stepparents, by the nature of their position as parent figures, were already placed in a situation where they were giving something to their relationship with their stepchildren. At its very lowest level this would be through financial, material and domestic support. The feelings of rejection which stepparents expressed must therefore be seen as something particularly hard to
accept. It bears testimony to all the stepparents in the study that they each attempted to do their utmost to maintain harmonious and satisfying relationships. However, the extent of hurt experienced meant that this was now always possible.

The forms of rejection which stepparents experienced ranged from direct comments from stepchildren to aspects of behaviour which were interpreted by stepparents as rejecting. George was clear of his feelings of rejection by both his stepchildren which he attributes to a comparison with his stepchildren's natural father. His feelings are confirmed in Frances' life history account in Chapter Two when she states that her daughter Christine said "I hate him". George expressed his own feelings as follows:

They [George's stepchildren] didn't like me. I'm totally different to their father, I think. I suppose as much as one tries to be friendly it didn't work out. I think I felt a little bit rejected by them.

Meg had similar feelings of rejection from Sandy. As an example of poor stepmother-stepdaughter relationships the cause is often attributed to sexual
jealousy, competition or physical resemblance. As Maddox notes 'In many cases the child is a physical replica of the last person in the world the stepparent wants to think about' namely the previous spouse (Maddox, 1975, p82). Nevertheless these factors were never mentioned by Meg. Moreover, the competition which Meg experienced was enacted with regard to Sandy's mother-in-law Josie and not with Sandy's mother Emily (1). However, Meg did experience a series of rejections which need to be considered as contributory to any difficulties Meg experienced with regard to her feelings about Sandy.

In contrast to George's certainty of his stepchildren's feelings Meg was uncertain about Sandy's real feelings. For example, a comment Meg made about Sandy was "She's a closed book". The doubt which Meg experienced was compounded by various incidents which left Meg unsure about Sandy's motives. Meg told me of one occasion when she went to check some arrangements with Sandy in connection with Sandy's forthcoming wedding. Meg commented:

She [Sandy] kept me on the doorstep.
She's done that several times before. I've told Frank to go
down to see if she does the same to him but he's not bothered.

Meg's comments indicate the uncertainty with which other's actions can be interpreted. They also indicate the lack of confidence which stepparents have with regard to their relationships with their stepchildren when compared to those of the natural parent.

After Sandy's wedding and during the time that Sandy was in hospital giving birth to her baby, Meg faced several incidents which were interpreted as rejections. These rebuffs were always seen in terms of a preference Meg had assumed Sandy had for her mother-in-law Josie. One such rebuff occurred when Josie had the wedding photographs before Meg. Meg's knowledge of this only came after she had visited the photographers herself to collect the photographs causing her much embarrassment and chagrin. Josie also spent a lot of time at the hospital with Sandy, leaving Meg feeling rather secondary.

The feelings of hurt which built up over this period culminated in certainty that not only she, but also Frank, had been rejected in favour of Sandy's family by marriage. Thus, in contrast to the expected norm that a mother would be the first to hear the good news when
her daughter gave birth, this was not the case for a stepmother. With reference to the birth of Sandy's baby, Meg commented "We'll be the last to know".

The permanency of damage which can occur as a result of the feeling of hurt and rejection which stepparents experience can be seen in Louise's comments regarding her three stepsons. They had been openly hostile towards Louise when she first began to live with them. In particular, they would refer to her as 'the cleaning lady' or 'dad's bird'. They would also move household objects from where she had placed them with the comment that 'Mum always kept them there'. However, Jason now calls Louise 'Mum' which may be considered a clear sign of acceptance. As Collins notes 'To call someone 'Mother' or 'Father' is to imply something fairly unmistakable about the relationship' (1988, p86). Nevertheless, Louise's remarks illustrates her doubts about this.

I don't like it [being called 'mum'].
You can't be 'mum' to thirteen year olds can you? I've talked to him about it and he said he means it. But I don't know.
Louise's uncertainty about Jason's motives reflects that of Meg's above. It would appear that where uncertainty lies, the stepparent is more likely to err towards feeling rejected than to take a more positive view. I would argue that this is an aspect of stepfamily relationships which highlights the social nature of such parenting. Whilst natural parents may be secure in the love of their child, indeed may even take it for granted, this is not the case for the stepparent. The ambiguity, which I have argued in Chapter Three, is inherent in the stepmother role can be extended here, when one considers that as stepparent there is no automatic right to a child's love as in the case of natural parenthood. Thus, stepparents feelings of rejection reflect the ambiguity of their own status.

This issue becomes clearer when we consider those cases where acceptance of the stepparent was the major feature of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. Principally, acceptance by the child of the stepparent was expressed in very clear terms indeed. In the following commentary there is no place for ambiguity,
Signs of acceptance

The signs of acceptance which stepparents experienced from their stepchildren were, first and foremost, evidence from the stepchild to the stepparent of some degree of care for that adult. For two stepfathers (Don and Henry) such signs came immediately in their relationship with the child. These children were, in Don's case fifteen months old (Michael) and in Henry's case eighteen months old (Hester). Given that these children were no more than babies, their affectionate response to adult attention is perhaps not surprising. The relevance of age in this case represents their appropriate lack of social and psychological development.

I shall consider Henry's relationship with Hester quite fully below in order to draw direct comparisons with his relationship with his stepson Ben (see section: Changing Relationships: Acceptance Realised). However, Don and Louise's comments regarding Michael illustrate the very personal nature with which they both saw Michael's response to Don. In addition, Michael's role as acceptor of Don is crucial to Don's responses. In this connection, I witnessed the following conversation between Don and Louise:
Don: Michael was just a few months old when I met Louise and he took to me straight away.

Louise: Yes he did. He never used to go to anyone but Don. As soon as he saw him that was it. He [Michael] cried when he left. I'd never seen anything like it.

Don: He's mine. I always think of him as my child.

The evidence that Don and Michael do indeed have a close relationship was clear on one occasion when I visited Don and Louise. We were talking about stepparenting whilst Michael was in an adjacent room watching television. During our conversation, Michael aged nine came and sat on Don's lap and said "You're not a stepdad. You're my dad".

Don's acceptance of the title 'Dad' can be compared to Louise's non-acceptance of the parental nomenclature. Indeed, Louise was often to remark on this and my field notes record the following comment on four separate occasions. Indeed, its importance to Louise is reflected by my recording this comment on my very first
visit to see Louise and Don. In particular Louise would comment to Don:

I get really resentful that you've [Don] got six [children] and I've got three. I have to put in more effort.

Louise's reference that Don has six children reflects the fact that her own children call Don 'Dad'. Nevertheless, as I have indicated above, when Jason calls Louise 'Mum' she is unsure about his motives. Whilst I am mindful of the gender implications here, and which I take up later in this chapter (see Stepfatherhood: Some Proposals) I would state that Michael's acceptance of Don has left Don quite clear about his feelings towards him. There is no ambiguity in Don's response.

For other stepparents in the study, such acceptance only came by overcoming difficulties and obstacles in their relationships with their stepchildren. I now wish to consider the changing nature of stepparent-stepchild relationships by further drawing on the notion of reciprocity.
I have set out two elements of stepparent-stepchild relationships. In particular I have argued that acceptance or rejection by a stepchild is a key factor in determining the nature of that relationship. I will now consider this process in a less static way by considering those relationships in the study which evidenced change.

In addition, in order to add further support to the notion that reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of such an analysis, I will draw on the categories of age and sex. In doing so I wish to illustrate that these categories cannot be isolated from a consideration of the role of reciprocity in stepfamily relationships.

I discuss below two case studies of changing relationships in terms of the above dichotomy of acceptance and rejection whilst also indicating the relevance of age and sex.
Changing Relationships: Acceptance Realised

Henry's difficulties with his stepson Ben indicate the degree of care which should be taken when one wishes to use age as an explanatory factor in difficult stepparent-child relationships. Ben was approaching four years of age when Henry and Susan married. Whilst he was the elder in relation to his sister Hester, who was approaching two years of age, he was still an extremely young child. Ferri's summary comment that 'Investigators who have taken account of age ..... are in general agreement that younger, preschool age children adjust most easily to stepparents' (1984, p9) therefore needs some examination.

Henry's explanation of the problems he experienced with Ben are in part explained in terms of previous biographical and parental experience. In this way, Henry's comments confirm Burgoyne and Clark's findings that 'respondents themselves were engaged in the process of making sense of the present in terms of the past' (1984, p99). Nevertheless, the impact of Henry's previous parental experience has to be tempered with the stereotypical notions of gender behaviour which Henry's comments reflect. Thus, the past is not the only source of information on which explanations are drawn. In this instance, wider ideas of boys and girls
behaviour are also pertinent. Henry made the following remarks in this connection:

Having two girls I didn't you know play rough games things like that. That boys like

One of the ways in which Henry experienced difficulties with Ben was through behaviour which Henry found psychologically demanding. Moreover, despite Henry's previous attempts to gauge the likely problems of becoming a stepfather which are indicated in his life history account (see Chapter Two), Henry's comments illustrate that once living together the difficulties he encountered were far more demanding than he had earlier envisaged. Henry remarked:

After we were married things turned out to be much harder than certainly I anticipated. Ben was particularly difficult and er, yes, I'm trying to think what the right word is, but basically he was just trying to stir things up. You know, intentionally destructive really. Not so much physically but mentally.
Ben was also physically rejecting of Henry. He would refuse to go to him or hold his hand. Whereas one may reason that adults should be mature about such issues, Henry's comments reflect the very personal nature of the emotional hurt which stepchildren cause. To the extent that it overrides mature balanced judgement as Henry makes clear:

Ben was very rejecting and that made it very difficult to ... well to be balanced about the behaviour that he was expressing. I mean on a sort of logical level yes one could understand why he was doing it but it was very difficult to accept it on an emotional level because it was, so much of it was directed against me.

Nevertheless, as I have stated relationships are not of course static but subject to reassessment and modification. The measures which Henry took to overcome his feelings of rejection are in accordance with Burgoyne and Clark's notion of 'conscious parenthood' where compared to the spontaneity displayed by natural parents the remarried tend to think carefully about conduct and decisions involving children (1984, p152). Henry and Susan read some literature on child rearing which proved to be
beneficial. However, whilst Henry provided the framework for change, it is important to note that its success depended upon Ben's acceptance. Henry commented:

We read that it was a good idea to ensure that each child realised that it was special by taking each child out individually rather than taking them always as part of the family and so we started doing that. I, well it must have been last Autumn, early on when things were still pretty bad, I took Ben up to London. He was dead keen on dinosaurs at the time so we went to the Natural History Museum. We also went to the Science Museum and that was one of the first times that Ben actually wanted me to hold his hand. He'd been very rejecting on that until then. But it was somewhat strange walking along the road and Susan wasn't there and he then wanted me to hold his hand. That was quite an important development.

Henry received a further sign from Ben of acceptance when Ben began to call him Dad. There is here a marked contrast in Henry's total acceptance of such nomenclature to that of Louise mentioned above.
However, Henry's rationalisation of Ben's motives have similarities to Louise's remarks in that they portray the insecurity of the stepparent:

Another major breakthrough was when Ben went to school after Easter. Within the first weeks he changed from calling me Henry to well not all the time, the majority of time calling me dad or daddy. Presumably because that's what the other children were talking about and he then wanted to say, my dad did this or whatever it was. And it was really to my mind, a very dramatic change over.

In contrast to Henry's difficult start in his relationship with Ben, Henry found his relationship with Hester significantly more accepting. A consideration of Henry's attitudes towards Hester draws out fully the contrasting nature of the acceptance-rejection dichotomy. Specifically, Hester had never rejected Henry but had gone to him demanding his love and attention as Henry comments:

Hester because she met me from so young, I suppose had always been very, well certainly accepted me if not loved me,
from very early on and she's quite keen on being cuddled so it was much easier to become affectionate to her because she was so reciprocating, or more to the point she was the one who came forward.

The more positive relationship Henry experienced with Hester meant that he did not have to create preplanned or thought out situations in order to overcome problems between stepparent and stepchild as was the case with his relationship with Ben. Henry remarked on this in the following terms:

Not so much [taken her out separately] with Hester. Partly because she was too young in a way and anyway she had always been well, in a sense, demanded to be special anyway. So she got a lot more sort of cuddling and well if we went out for walks or something, I would push her pram or hold her hand. So to some extent it wasn't necessary to do that. And she probably went out with me more often just to do things like going into town shopping and that sort of thing.
Nevertheless, Henry does experience behaviour problems with Hester but these are regarded in the light solely of what can be expected from a two year old, not as an indication of stepparental problems or difficulties in their personal relationship. Henry's description of an outing with Hester fully illustrates this:

Last time we went shopping we had bad tantrums. Hester decided half way she didn't want to go. She didn't want to go home. She didn't want to go anywhere. So we go into the building society and she sat on the floor and yelled and we went into the bank and she sat on the floor and yelled. I find it relatively easy to accept. Yes, she got into a fair rage in the bank but it doesn't actually worry me.

The features of age and gender which are inherent in Henry's relationships with Ben and Hester can be further considered to draw out the importance of the notion of reciprocity in stepparent-stepchild relationships. Whilst Hester was the younger of the children, in general terms Ben and Hester were both very young children. For these reasons, therefore, age
needs to be considered in relation to the wider aspects of biography.

We know from both Henry and Susan's life history accounts in Chapter Two that Ben was very close to his mother. In addition, he held memories of his father which clearly Hester could not. These may be the reasons why Ben was initially rejecting of Henry.

In terms of gender relationships, I am mindful of Wallerstein and Kelly's view (1980) quoted in Chapter One that the 'stepfather-little girl' relationship is particularly successful. However, in this case the relationship may have been favoured through biographical features in Henry's life. In particular, his parenting experience of his own two daughters would have given him confidence in his relationship with Hester which he did not have with Ben.

By considering these biographical features and acknowledging both the interactive nature of personal relationships and the interactive features of age and gender, I would argue that the notion of reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of stepparent-stepchild outcomes.
In order to consider this more fully, I now wish to discuss the opposite aspect of acceptance, that of rejection.

**Changing Relationships: Rejection Experienced**

The process of change which Henry experienced in his relationship with Ben also formed part of the fabric of stepparenting for Jane. However, in this case Jane's previously good relationships with her stepchildren Polly and James were to become problematic.

Jane's comments about her feelings towards her two stepdaughters, Polly and Angela, made at the beginning of the fieldwork period, add further support that age in itself is not a relevant criterion on which to base assessments of successful or non-successful stepparent-child relationships. Polly was the elder at twelve and Angela was eight. Accordingly, one may expect that Jane would be experiencing more difficulty with Polly than Angela. However, the reverse appeared to be the case for Jane commented that Polly was "Okay" whilst Angela "gets on my nerves somewhat".

In order to fully understand this one needs to consider past biographical details. Burgoyne and Clark discuss
a process which they term the 'courtship as confessional' by which couples discuss their previous marriages (1984, p84). In this way they dismantle various 'psychological and emotional barriers' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p84). Family history and the pictures of the children's previous family life this conjures up for the stepparent adds a further dimension to understanding the relevance of this process. In particular it plays an important part in forming the attitude a stepparent will develop towards a child.

When discussing his first marriage, Simon had commented that Angela was his wife, May's, 'favourite' and when Angela was born Polly became a little 'neglected'. Jane similarly told me that 'from what Simon has told me' this was how she understood the family relationships of Simon's first marriage.

Simon's view of mother-child relationships also received more tangible support during Simon and Jane's courtship when May applied for custody of Angela. Eventually, May applied for custody of all three children but this was explained as a rational response to legal procedures and expectations. Both Simon and Jane understood her action in terms that:
She had to go for all three in order to get Angela. It would have looked bad her only wanting the one.

In consequence Polly was perceived as the unwanted child and thereby evoked an appropriate sympathetic response. In contrast Angela appeared to be very much wanted by her natural mother. Such understandings of the family situation led Jane to comment that she "felt sorry for" Polly.

Nevertheless, Jane's amenable approach to Polly changed during the twelve months of fieldwork. The reasons for this can be linked to a feeling of rejection by Polly of Jane in favour of her natural mother May. Between January and March 1986, Jane and Simon heard from the children of May's proposals to move to Devon. In February 1986 Jane and I had the following conversation:

CH: Have you heard any more about May's plans to move to Devon?

Jane: Yes, stacks from the kids but nothing from her (2). We've heard they are planning to buy a restaurant but they haven't put their house up for
sale yet so I don't know how definite the thing is. [brief conversation about the pros and cons of being a restauranteur] I do have an idea though that Polly is planning to go too.

CH: I thought it was Angela that May wanted?

Jane: It is but I think May would use Polly as a lever to get Angela.

CH: What makes you think Polly wants to go?

Jane: I don't know. It's just a feeling.

Jane's comment that "It's just a feeling" is indicative of the sense of insecurity inherent in the steprelationship which I have previously outlined. In particular, this 'feeling' was supported for Jane by events which occurred during the same evening. The following extract from my field notes indicates how key events lead to the construction of ideas of this kind and in particular to a mythology about the stepchild (3).
Jane reported that Polly had received a telephone call from her mother's friend, Gill. Gill had been trying to get hold of Polly's mother but without success and had telephoned Polly to ask her if her mother had gone away. Jane said that she had asked Polly why Gill wanted her mother so urgently and Polly had replied that she did not know. Nevertheless, Jane commented that the fact that Gill had telephoned Polly was sufficient to suggest that "something was afoot" which involved Polly and that consequently some sort of conspiracy was going on.

When Simon returned home Jane recounted the above incident and suggested that he should telephone Gill and see what it was she wanted (4). Jane said that she thought "something is going on with Polly" and Simon agreed at first this was a possibility. However, his second thoughts suggested that Gill wanted to arrange a squash match as they often played together. "It could be as innocent as that" Simon commented. Jane accepted that this was a possibility.
Meanwhile, Polly had been trying to telephone her mother as Jane had asked her to find out why Gill had wanted her. When Polly returned to the sitting room, Simon asked her "Why does Gill want Mummy?" Polly replied "I don't know. I've been phoning but I can't get any reply. Should I phone Gill and ask her". Simon told Polly "Not to bother". Polly left the room.

When Polly had left Simon turned to Jane and said "That seemed perfectly reasonable to me. I don't think she's hiding anything". Jane agreed without demur.

The intangibility of such a seemingly minor incident is in itself important to understanding the construction of Jane's feeling of rejection. Whilst, in the final analysis, Jane agreed that "Perhaps I was seeing too much in it", nevertheless, the insecurity she felt was heightened by incidents of this kind. Moreover, as we have seen, Simon also felt at first that Jane's suggestion was a possibility. It was only through his own knowledge, which of course Jane does not share, that his first wife played squash with Gill that he was able to offer an alternative explanation. We can see here, therefore, that absence of knowledge about a
partner's past is also important to the formation of attitudes.

Notwithstanding Jane's agreement on this occasion that Polly was not involved in a conspiracy, Jane still felt insecure in her relationship with Polly as other incidents arose which Jane construed as rejecting. Thus, Polly gave up her paper round without telling Jane or Simon. Jane again felt that Polly had an ulterior reason for doing so but importantly she did not know what it was.

Again I would reiterate that these incidents are important in the construction of a mythology about stepchildren and as I will argue in Chapter Six, mythology has important consequences on the way that individuals perceive situations. In particular, the relationship became marked with a lack of trust. My field notes contain the comment "The relationship between Jane and Polly now seems to be extremely difficult". The perception which Jane held of Polly was encompassed within ideas of rejection. In order to further review the value of considering rejection as a key factor in stepparent-child relationships I now wish to give attention to the changing nature of Jane's relationship with her stepson James. By so doing we
can see that the same processes are at work in cross sex relations as they are in same sex relations.

Jane described her relationship with James as "good" at the beginning of the fieldwork. Indeed I witnessed evidence of this good relationship on many occasions during the first six months of fieldwork when Jane and James' relationship appeared warm and open. In particular, Jane felt that James had some understanding of her position and in consequence that he had some feelings of loyalty towards her. The following is an extract from a letter which I received from Jane which is indicative of this. The extract refers to a proposal from James that his mother, father and stepmother should consult the Marriage Guidance Council (5) about their difficulties. Indeed, James had gone so far as to make an appointment for them and Simon and Jane had received a letter from the Marriage Guidance Council offering an appointment (6):

We finally talked with James on Thursday evening and were able to state our side of the story. It was obvious that his mother has said a lot of derogatory remarks about us which he hasn't been able to look at from our side (as it
has never been discussed) and hopefully it gave him a less biassed view of things. For example, we were able to discuss the financial situation and hopefully give him some reasons as to why we feel she has opted out of any sense of responsibility.

The fact that Jane and Simon were able to give their 'side' was also raised in Chapter Three to indicate the importance for the stepmother to be viewed as acting in a reasonable way. Again, here it is important to Jane in that it allows the child to see the legitimacy of the stepparent's views. James' acceptance is of course crucial to this process.

My field notes arising from my visit to the Beauchamps after I received this letter note that "Jane was satisfied that James understood her viewpoint". Indeed, I note that this incident with James was made very little of by Jane, compared to that with Polly recounted above. Nevertheless an incident which occurred in April caused Jane to reassess her attitude.
Simon received a letter from May in which it stated that James visited her at lunchtimes from school. This fact was entirely unknown to either Simon or Jane and is illustrative of the fact that older children have some freedom of movement to make their own arrangements for visiting the non-custodial parent. Jane's comments bring the issue of loyalty to the forefront. This is a subject which has been well documented in the literature on divorce and remarriage with particular regard to children's feelings.

In terms of divorce, Wallerstein and Kelly note the feelings of conflict which children of divorced parents have in respect of divided loyalties. Thus 'The marital battle is often conceptualised by children as a pitched battle between two opposing sides. They feel pulled by love and loyalty in both directions' (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980, p49). Maddox notes the problems of having two parent figures of the same sex when she comments 'Stepchildren also have to solve the difficult puzzle of loving two parents of the same sex' (1975, p76). Collins further notes the reciprocal nature of loyalty when he describes it as 'the characteristic that allows us to develop and sustain mutual obligations' (1988, p28). Loyalty is therefore both conflicting and mutual. It encompasses the need
to show support which can be both divisive and reciprocal.

Jane's comments reflect the stepparents' view of the need to feel such mutuality. They convey the hurt and shock Jane felt with regard to the contents of May's letter. Jane expressed her feelings in the following way:

We had no idea he was going there [to May's]. No idea at all. Could you believe it. I thought he understood our side of things. But how do I know now? He must think she's got a point.

Jane's feelings that James had deceived her led to a change in attitude towards James. On a day to day level she became irritated with his presence and the more frequent time he spent in the house due to exam leave and teachers' strike action placed Jane under great mental strain. For her part Jane was aware of the unreasonableness of these feelings which she felt certainly caste her as the 'wicked stepmother' and can be linked to the discussion in Chapter Three. It was therefore something which she could not openly admit within the family but she began to take steps which would separate her and James so that she could minimise
the amount of time she would have to spend in his company. She thus encouraged him to find a job for the summer holidays which would involve staying at an aunts. In particular, the effect of the letter from May about the lunchtime pass led Jane to become openly antagonistic towards James. For example, she reported that she had had an argument with him during which she said as an ultimate disclaimer for any responsibility or reciprocity:

You're not my son and therefore ultimately I don't really care what you do or what happens to you.

Through an examination of the interactive and changing nature of stepparent-child relationships I have illustrated that the difficulties and the successes which are experienced by stepparents are not sex specific, either in terms of the sex of the stepparent or in terms of the stepchild nor are they age specific. Rather the need for reciprocity in the emotional sphere of stepfamily life and the repercussions where this was felt to be absent would appear to be a major factor in directing the course of stepparent-stepchild relationships.
Nevertheless, there are indications that some responses to stepchildren are gender specific. In particular, stepfathers were more willing to take direct action as a means of solving negative and conflictual situations. Stepmothers, however, as I have argued in Chapter Three, regardless of any difficulties they experienced with their stepchildren, often acted in an ameliorative way.

I now wish to consider the role of stepfatherhood in this connection to indicate the nature of these different approaches.

**STEPFATHERHOOD: SOME PROPOSALS**

I have argued in Chapter Three that the existence of a myth of wickedness attributable to stepmothers represents an effective constraint on their freedom of action. For example, the fear of their actions being construed as meeting the requirements of the myth places them in a position where they have to look for more indirect sources of control. However, whilst stepfathers in the study may themselves use indirect sources of control or be unwilling at times to exert any control over their stepchildren's actions, they did
not call upon mythical imperatives as explanations of their actions. Further, it would appear that in toto stepfathers experience more freedom of action with regard to their relationships with their stepchildren in these respects.

I have noted in the Introduction the fact that there is not a myth in society about the 'wicked stepfather' stands in opposition to their existence in literature, ancient mythology and reality. Perhaps this much we may attribute to male power. As de Beauvoir states 'myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man' (1972, p289). Thus, David Copperfield's stepfather Mr Murdstone exhibited rather evil tendencies as did Perseus' stepfather King Polydectes who sent him after Medusa's head. Factually, Maria Colwell was killed by her stepfather and reports of child abuse by stepfathers are frequently reported in the press.

In addition, as I have argued in Chapter One, the gender expectations of the father role also emphasise its instrumentality. Thus, fathers and stepfathers, give financial and emotional support to their wives (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, Oakley, 1981(a)). In this way their role with regard to children is rather more indirect as they are not responsible for their day to
day care. Nevertheless, the father role is seen to be one which carries 'traditional authority' and in this way is in line with male power in society generally. Fathers perceive that they therefore have greater legitimacy to act in the family in ways which mothers may not.

None of the stepfathers in the study ever referred to themselves or conveyed any impression that they perceived their actions may be thought of as 'wicked'. This stands in direct contrast to the way these matters arose spontaneously and repeatedly for stepmothers. Indeed, as I have indicated in Chapter Three comments about their wives' attitudes to the subject indicated that their own feelings were that stepmothers 'thought too much about it'. At this level, therefore, it was an issue which did not appear to have any significance for them personally.

Nevertheless, because of its limited nature the evidence I present here can only be viewed as suggestive that the non-existence of a mythology of wickedness and the particular gender requirements of the father role are significant factors to understanding the gender differences of stepfatherhood and stepmotherhood.
Burgoyne and Clark note the various approaches stepfathers had to the matter of discipline with particular emphasis to the differences which arose between couples themselves (1984, pp167ff). At this point I wish to consider the question of discipline in relation to the stepfather's view of himself as a legitimate father figure by considering two polar responses to the issue.

Simon's response to his stepson Joe has parallels to those of stepmothers outlined in Chapter Three in respect that Simon feels unable to directly discipline Joe. Thus, he makes tentative remarks which are designed to intimate disapproval and, when this fails, ultimately says nothing at all. Nevertheless, his reasons for this do not invoke fears of being viewed as wicked. In particular, they are because of the antagonistic reaction which it is likely to raise from Joe and because Simon does not feel he has the legitimacy of a father figure. I reproduce the following extracts from my field notes which relate to an evening meal I took with Simon.

Whilst we were eating Joe came in and said he was hungry. "That's not like you" Simon said. Joe got himself a
cheese sandwich. Joe was slicing rather heavily into the cheese and Simon said "Are you sure you've got enough?" Joe replied in a serious voice "No, I think I'll just have a bit more". Simon didn't reply but Joe looked at me and smiled. I smiled back.

Simon put the treacle tart on the table and Joe dived into it and cut himself a piece whilst Simon was doing the same. After Joe had gone, Simon turned to me and said:

"That's [his emphasis] another problem. I can't say anything. He'd only cause a scene but if it had been James [Simon's son] I would have and he would have waited until I'd finished cutting.

Don's freedom of action in matters of discipline with regard to his stepchildren portray quite contrary responses. Moreover, in contrast to Simon, Don clearly viewed himself as a legitimate father figure as has been raised previously in this chapter. His comments regarding his stepchildren and his natural children further portray this. In particular, Don remarked "I
don't think of them as stepchildren. Mine are more like stepchildren”.

Don was able to discipline all his stepchildren as various events reported to me by both Don and Louise indicated. In similarity to Simon, Don did not express any fear with regard to being viewed in a negative way. Rather, in connection with one incident regarding his stepson, Alex, Don invoked notions of adult authority and power as prime motivators for his actions. Don describes an incident which illustrates his ability to discipline in these terms:

There are times when I have to put my foot down and I have to be one hundred percent adamant if a dispute arises I will win it. Like Alex came home the other week and he was drunk. And he challenged me basically. I wanted him to have a shower because he'd got sick all over him and he wouldn't. I had to make sure he had a shower and it got physical. I got my own way. He did it and he was very sorry afterwards. If I'd have left it he would have won it and there was no way I would ever have been able
to come back again and maintain a discipline. I would have lost my authority.

Don's attitude here also has to be seen in terms of his philosophy that discipline is a form of showing care. As Don says in his life history account when referring to "coming the hard and heavy" with Alex that "I think that helps because he [Alex] knows you care". These attitudes, however, are the antithesis of those expressed by the stepmothers in this study who primarily equate discipline with acting in a 'wicked' way.

In addition to areas of discipline, stepfathers did not appear to experience the same pressure to act publically in a caring role. This is not to say that they did not care for their stepchildren but there was no imperative to show in a public way that care. For example, Frank's dismissive attitude to Julia exhibits none of the stress which stepmothers feel they are placed under to exhibit care and to overcompensate. Julia (Frank's stepdaughter) had gone to the local youth club for the evening and on her return came straight into the living room where Frank and I were talking. The brief conversation between Frank and Julia is illustrative of these features:
Julia: You didn't pick me up.

Frank: No.

Julia: Oh.

Julia leaves the room.

Finally, perhaps the most clear example that stepfathers have a freedom of action which is not experienced by stepmothers can be seen in the steps which George took to remedy a conflictual and antagonistic stepparent-stepchild situation. The difficulty of their relationship was sufficient and just cause to stop them from visiting the house he shared with Frances. It should be noted, however, that the house they were living in was tied accommodation, in which George was already living when he married Frances. The sense of belonging which George would have compared to Frances may well have further legitimated George's action here. I would suggest George would have found these steps more difficult to take if he was living in Frances' previous marital home (7). George expressed his attitude in the following way:
Frances knows full well that I found her children irksome. I mean, you know, they are living their lives and she sees them every so often. It's a side of life in which I have no place.

George's attitude extended to not allowing Frances to take their son Luke on visits to see Frances' son Julian. This situation had arisen primarily from a visit Julian had to the United States to visit his father. The events which occurred there, together with George's earlier statements above and in his life history account (See Chapter Two) also indicate how myths are constructed about stepchildren.

Whilst Julian was visiting his father in the United States, Julian's stepmother, Gwen, accused Julian of sexually assaulting his half-sisters. Although the case went to court in the United States, it was dismissed. However, George's comment was "There's no smoke without fire". He had consequently telephoned the NSPCC (8) to ask their advice about the likely dangers for Luke when associating with Julian. George commented:
They told me it was better that Luke had nothing to do with him because you can never be sure. Frances knows my views. I've told her she isn't to take Luke when she goes to see Julian.

The myth which was constructed about Julian had a direct relationship on George's attitudes and perceptions. In particular, Luke was seen to be in 'moral danger' through any contact with Julian. Moreover, George felt it sufficient reason that as a father he should protect his son in this way as an explanation of his actions. Myth therefore serves as a coping mechanism and I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

These examples of the differences between stepfatherhood and stepmotherhood would seem to further indicate the degree of importance which the myth of the wicked stepmother, as a stand in opposition to the ideological requirements of motherhood, has in contributing to the lived reality of the stepmother's life. Stepfathers call on ideas of authority and reason as explanations of their actions and therefore their actions are unproblematically located in terms of the ideological requirements of fatherhood generally.
In consequence, they are unhampered by any fear of such actions being viewed as problematic or even 'wicked' and can act directly and unequivocally. As I have argued previously, this is not the case for stepmothers.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this chapter that the use of age and sex as determinants of stepparent-stepchild relationships needs to be further examined in terms of the notion of reciprocity. Nevertheless, I have argued that reciprocity in the emotional sphere of life may be a difficult need to admit given the emphasis on the ideals of the centrality of children's needs and of love as a fundamental modus operandi within the family.

In particular, I have sought to show that reciprocity can be examined through a consideration of accepting and rejecting relationships. The stepparent, as parent figure, is automatically placed in a 'giving' relationship by virtue of the various parent roles and functions performed. She or he therefore looks to the child to be accepting of the stepparent. In the case of acceptance by the child of the stepparent, the
relationship is more harmonious. When stepchildren are rejecting of the stepparent, the relationship is characterised by distrust and hostility.

In addition, I have indicated how ideas of rejection can be constructed through key events which eventually lead to a mythology about a stepchild. The role of myth in the stepfamily is thereby further extended.

Finally, I have considered the distinctiveness of the stepfather role in relation to parenting to that of the stepmother. I have argued that the non-existence of a myth of wickedness, coupled with the particular ideological features of fatherhood, enable stepfathers to view their actions unproblematically.

I now wish to consider further the role of myth in the stepfamily by examining this with reference to particular features of second marriage.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR: STEPPARENTS AND STEPCHELDREN

1 There are two issues which are relevant here. Firstly, Meg attributes to Josie, Sandy’s mother-in-law, many of the features which other stepmothers in the study held with regard to the absent mother. An analysis of Meg’s attitude towards Josie shows clearly the construction of myth. Whilst I do not bring this into the text in Chapter Six as I specifically discuss there the construction of myths about non-custodial parents, I do wish to note the similarity of meaning which Josie had in Meg’s life. In these circumstances, the notion of ‘sexual jealousy’ is further overlaid. Secondly, I note Meg’s particular feelings about Emily in Chapter Five.

2 The role of children as ‘Sources of Information’ is taken up fully in Chapter Six.

3 I take up the use of ‘key events’ in the construction of a mythology in Chapter Six.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR (CONTINUED)

4 The fact that Jane asks Simon to undertake this task indicates Jane's acknowledgement of the legitimacy of Simon and May's continuing relationship. I discuss this further in Chapter Six in connection with the construction of mythology.

5 The Marriage Guidance Council was renamed Relate in 1988.

6 James' action here should be seen with reference to the discussion in Chapter Six of the role of children as 'Carriers of Messages' and 'Sources of Information'. James undertook both these roles and it would appear that this gave legitimation to undertaking the role of arbiter.

7 The issue of belonging and ownership in connection with place of residence is discussed in Chapter Five.

Both widowed and divorced who remarry are living not alone with the second spouse, but to some degree also with the first spouse.

(Goode, 1956, p336)
Goode's statement (op cit) forms the very essence of this chapter. Indeed, the extent to which second marriage is shared with the spouse of the previous marriage has, as I have noted in Chapter One, given rise to a debate which focusses on the differing effect divorce and death as terminators of a marriage have on any subsequent marriage. Centrally, the debate has been focussed around the issue of whether the 'ghost' of a deceased person is a less or more intrusive factor in the second marriage than the actual presence of a divorced partner.

I commented in Chapter One that the findings in this area tend to be contradictory but that this in part arises from the various foci which researchers have used. In particular, findings may be those which give perspectives which relate to the stepparent or they may be those which relate to the stepchild. Nevertheless, ambiguity can arise when studies are focussing on the same perspective. Thus, Ferri's (1984) findings that stepchildren have more difficult relationships with stepparents who replace a parent through divorce can be contrasted with Bernard (1956) who argues that the
stepparent who replaces a natural parent who has died is most resented.

Moreover, I have argued in Chapter One that we need to consider the particular structural and emotional effects of divorce and death in terms of both their similarities and their differences in order to gain deeper understandings of these processes and their effect on remarriage and stepfamily life. For example, despite any role they may have taken to initiate or have been the recipient of divorce action, men and women may well have different experiences of the divorce process due to custodianship or non-custodianship of children. Legal decisions which favour the mother as custodian of children is one aspect of this. Thus, generally speaking mothers continue to be full-time parents and fathers have to construct parental relationships on a part-time basis (Lund, 1987). The specific gender experience of the widowed needs to be similarly considered, particularly as both mother and father will remain a full-time parent after bereavement. By considering gender, rather than divorce and widowhood, the similarities and differences may be further explored. Literature on the stepfamily appears to have paid scant regard to this issue.
In order to more fully explore the importance of gender in both the experience and process of remarriage with reference to divorce and widowhood, this chapter considers the role of the second wife. In so doing, it illustrates the commonness of experience of this status. It examines the particular constraints which the women in this study experienced as a second wife in terms of the negative and comparative nature of this status. In addition the chapter is concerned to consider the questioning attitude to rights and obligations within marriage, and as parents, which second wifehood raises. It also considers the importance and the form in which the women in the study as second wives engaged in 'world building' (Berger and Kellner, 1980). Throughout, reference is made to the ways in which the roles of second wife and stepmother are intertwined. Finally, the role of the second husband is considered.
As well as being stepmothers, all the women in the study were also second wives. The twin status which they shared in this respect is also paralleled in terms of various mythologies which are ascribed to second wives. Accordingly, in addition to a well articulated mythology about the wicked stepmother which has been the focus of discussion in Chapter Three, there are also various cultural myths which society holds about second wives. These are not expressed in children's fairy stories but are well documented in the modern day 'blockbuster' and media presentations.

In true journalistic style Walker (1984) describes the myths which second wives face. She comments 'Who can say that they have not encountered the mythical archetype of the second wife? She comes in two basic styles: 'The full-chested floozy', who sets out to lure another woman's husband away from hearth and home, dangling her physical charms like a carrot in front of a donkey, or 'the scheming, conniving, gold-digger' who seeks not so much a healthy man in her bed as a man with a healthy account in the bank' (Walker, 1984, p2).

Second wives, and stepmothers, therefore face definitions of their status which convey extremely
negative images. It is this condition and the sense of comparison which it gives rise to which I wish to consider. In order to do so, I will first of all discuss the form in which second wives felt they were compared to first wives.

MOTHERHOOD AND WIFEHOOD: THE BASIS OF COMPARISON

The women in the study did not make statements which led one to conclude that either of Walker's 'two basic styles' formed part of their self-image in the same way that I have argued in Chapter Three that myths of the wicked stepmother do. However, it is clear from their comments and concerns that the previous wife was both an intrusive presence in their daily lives and a source of comparison.

The form of intrusion which these women experienced was, as I have noted, either through the physical presence of the previous partner or a more metaphysical image of the deceased. The likely idealisation of the deceased is subsequently counterposed with the reality of the divorced.
Hodder notes in her advice to stepmothers who marry widowers 'As a stepmother, the most difficult aspect for you to accept is the stepchildren's unrealistic glamorisation of the mother; in comparison you seem inadequate, grey and increasingly tarnished' (1985, p58). Burns makes similar comments when referring to a previous wife who has died that 'her memory may be more formidable to reckon with' (1985, p56). A deceased spouse is therefore attributed with an image which emphasises their faultlessness.

Nevertheless, such idealisation does not necessarily only occur in the case of death. The absence of a parent would appear to be a more salient factor. Wallerstein and Kelly note that when children experienced disruption and absence in their relationship with their fathers after their parents' divorce this led to idealisation of the missing parent (1980, p248).

In contrast to the idealisation of the absent parent, the physical presence of the non-custodial parent is perceived to be conducive to children making a more realistic definition of their qualities. As Collins remarks 'It is, of course, very much harder to idealise someone who is temporarily or fitfully absent rather than dead, because his or her inglorious reality serves
as a constant check on any unrealistic tendencies towards sanctification' (1988, p148).

However, through access and maintenance, the non-custodial parent can exert a power which the deceased cannot. In particular, the non-custodial parent can present 'unexpected and unpredictable interventions' which 'may continue to shape the fabric of everyday life in the new family' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1982, p137). (1)

The form in which the previous wife intruded into the second marriage and consequent steprelationships did indeed vary between divorce and mortality generated remarriages. Nevertheless, factors additional to divorce and bereavement also appear to be important. These were the length of time of remarriage, the age of stepchildren, the presence of a child of the remarriage and whether or not the second wife was living in the home her husband previously shared with his first wife. Moreover, idealisation of a previous partner was not confined to the deceased and non-idealisation was not confined to the divorced.

In terms of those marrying divorced men, Jane had been married for two years and her stepchildren were aged 9, 13 and 15. Further, the intrusive presence of Simon's
previous wife, May, was considerable. In particular, the issue of maintenance was a continuing source of friction. Moreover, due to the age of the youngest stepchild, Angela, access arrangements necessitated the active cooperation of all parties, including Jane as stepmother (2).

For Frances, who had been married for six years and whose youngest stepchild was aged twenty, the intrusion was negligible in terms of her relationship with her stepchildren. Nevertheless, Frances felt a particular sense of comparison in relation to her parenting of her son of her remarriage, Luke.

Louise, Meg and Susan were all married to widowers. For Louise the presence of the first wife is clearly linked to the age of her stepchildren and to the fact that she was living in her husband's previous marital home. This was also the case for Meg and Susan.

The life history accounts (see Chapter Two) clearly show that direct comparisons were made between first and second marriage. In terms of the comments made by previously bereaved men, Don, Henry and Frank all remarked that in some way their second wives were the 'same as' the first wife. George, previously divorced, is clear that he takes a more favourable view of his
first wife's parenting qualities. Simon, also previously divorced, speaks of the fear he experiences when common experiences in first and second marriage arise. Nevertheless, despite the varying nature of the source of comparison, and the issue of bereavement and divorce, the sense of comparison which the women in the study felt exposed to was primarily in terms of their qualities as a wife and mother.

Louise actually faced very direct comparisons with Don's first wife, Jacqui, as Don's life history in Chapter Two indicates. They shared the same name (3), profession and had a similar physical appearance. Moreover, Don himself stated that he felt 'Louise was chosen by my first wife to be the women to look after her children' (4). Jacqui therefore is the most perfect of mothers as, even after death, she ensures that her children's well-being is secured.

The 'ghost' of Jacqui was in fact a very real and continuing force in Don and Louise's life and they both spoke of its effect. As Don states, Jacqui's 'spirit' remained in the marital home until her children were over the age of 18; (5)

I strongly believe there's life after death. I strongly believe
that Jacqui's spirit was a very active thing in this house until the boys were well over 18. And I think if you ask Louise she would tell you the same thing. (6)

Jacqui's 'spirit' exerted an influence over the decision making with regard to Don's children which can only be interpreted as a form of control and discipline. Both Don and Louise described various incidents which they ascribed to Jacqui's 'presence', such as objects being moved or disappearing. These incidents were paramously seen as signs of disapproval from Jacqui that decisions were less than perfect. Louise commented that "It would happen when we (7) hadn't made the right decision about the boys [her stepchildren]".

Objects would 'return' once such decisions had been reversed or changed thereby suggesting that Don and Louise had finally made the 'right' decision. Louise was clear that the force which Jacqui extended over her life did not cease until Don's sons had left home as Louise's comments illustrate:

It was only when the lads [her stepchildren] left home that I
felt that Jacqui actually left the house. I was frightened upstairs, in the bedroom. I was absolutely frightened. I hated it when Don wasn't here. In fact I wouldn't go to bed half the time. I wouldn't go up there.

Susan is also clear that she felt Beatrice was seen by her husband and stepchildren to have been a perfect wife and mother. She would therefore make comparisons between her own actions and the type of behaviour her husband and stepchildren had conveyed were appropriate to Beatrice. Importantly, this led her to reconsider her own parenting attitudes. Susan commented:

I always felt that I was expected to do things the way they had been done in the past. I felt particularly with the girls [Henry’s children] that I was always being compared. I had to live up with my children the way Beatrice brought up the girls. I felt I was always in the wrong because I'd do things different.

In addition, Susan is equivocal that her husband's love for Beatrice and her impression of the pattern of their
lives together was also influential. The ideas that Susan has gained of Henry and Beatrice's life arise in part from the 'marital conversation' through which husband and wife construct 'the little world in which they will live' (Berger and Kellner, 1980, p308). Through this process the individual past biographies of husband and wife are reinterpreted to form a 'common memory' (1980, p308) (8). The effect of this is to lead to a sense of comparison in which Susan feels her own experience and biography create problems. For Susan, therefore, this in itself is a very negative experience as she indicates:

Henry loved Beatrice and you feel you want to be like her. Beatrice was quite laid back and accepted everything that Henry said. Things were quite calm for them. I was challenging Henry because I had been used to running my own life. I felt that that was a difficulty.

Jane similarly is aware that comparisons may be made of herself with Simon's first wife, May. Jane's comments illustrate that she had herself formed an idealised image of May and reminds us of the role that second wives themselves play in the construction of images of a partner's previous spouse (9). Nevertheless, Jane
has the opportunity to contrast an idealised image which she had pictured with reality. Jane describes her thoughts on seeing May for the first time:

I wondered what she [May] looked like. I thought she must be quite attractive. You know, being older than Simon. But when I saw her I just didn't see what there was about her. I was jolly glad to see she was nothing like me. I think that would have made me run a mile. It would have been as if he was marrying another first wife.

Jane’s words convey the importance for a second wife of being an entirely different person to the first wife. Nevertheless, this does not solely relate to physical appearance. One of the bases on which Jane felt she should be different to May was in terms of being a wife and mother.

In comparison to Susan and Louise, who have been presented with idealised images of the deceased, Jane has the opportunity not only to see for herself but also to hear negative comments from friends who had known May. In the main, notions of respect prevent similar comments being made with regard to the
deceased. However, although Simon's wife was defined as certainly less than perfect, the effect for Jane is the same as that for Susan. A felt need to be the perfect stepmother and second wife. The imagery which Jane uses illustrates her awareness of the idealisation.

I had heard things from Simon but mainly it was from other people. People who had known them as a couple. You know the sort of thing. The house was always a tip and the kids were always grubby and snotty nosed. I was determined to be the very opposite. I was the fairy godmother come to put things right.

The sense of comparison which Frances experienced arose particularly through her parenting of the son of this marriage, Luke. In this way we can see how the role of second wife has distinct implications for the role of mother. The poignancy of Frances' remarks here illustrate the depth of this comparison:

She [Linda] was always here [present marital home] with us. With the children [her stepchildren] mentally. And I think in all sorts of ways I was compared. I felt it particularly
with Luke. George even called me by her [Linda] name when he [Luke] was born. I know these things happen. That you'll forget and say someone else's name. But I didn't want to be reminded of her just then. It hurt terribly. He thought she was perfect.

Nevertheless, Frances is contradictory of the image she feels George portrays about Linda. Her reasons have the same import as Jane's comments. Principally, Frances judges Linda in terms of her qualities as a mother and finds her lacking. Linda's decision to leave her children is contrary to any principle of good mothering as Frances' words indicate:

I didn't agree with him [George].
I didn't think she [Linda] was better because she went off and left her children. Whatever sort of mother would do that?

Meg's feelings and attitude towards Frank's first wife, Emily, suggest also that she did not feel that she had to compete with an idealised image of Emily. It would appear, therefore, that non-idealisation is not solely confined to the divorced. However, in contrast to
Frances and Jane, who can use specific forms of behaviour as justification for her view, Meg cannot. Social mores do not allow us to criticise the dead. Thus, Meg calls on perceived wisdom in her conception that Emily could not have been perfect.

I never felt insecure about her. I didn't think of her as a person. Because she had died. It might have been different if I'd know her. I didn't feel I had to compete with anybody. Nobody's a saint are they?

One cannot, however, discount that at times Meg did not feel a sense of comparison. The pleasure which Meg expressed when told that she had provided a 'better' wedding for Sandy than Emily would have done is indicative at least of an awareness of this (10).

For each of the women in the study, the status of second wife led to comparisons which gave rise to a need to be as good as or better than the first wife. The arena for such competition is the domestic sphere. As Oakley states 'the most basic form of competition between women relates to the institution of marriage' (1981(a), p266). Nevertheless, the need to engage in a competition which gives the husband as trophy should not be seen as innate to the status of first and second
wifehood. As these accounts clearly show, husbands and stepchildren had a role which was conducive to engendering such competition.

In addition, the idealisation of a previous spouse is not only linked to bereavement and absence. In particular, we need to consider which features are being idealised. The statements above are clear that, for the women in the study, the ideals which were being presented to them, and importantly, which they presented to themselves, were those of motherhood and wifehood. Yet the construction of an idealisation also depends as much on the second wife's acceptance of the idealisation as on the extent that idealisations can be refuted. Death may be more conducive to idealisation but as Meg's comments indicate this is not always the case. Moreover, as Frances' statements suggest, it may not only be the bereaved who construct ideal images of a previous partner. It would appear that the divorced can also engage in this activity.

Nevertheless, the intrusion of the first wife into the marriage of the second, not only arose through comparisons of their qualities as wives and mothers. The place of residence was also a major feature where second wives felt the continuing presence of the first wife. Louise's comments above portray the continuing
effect of living in her husband's previous marital home. This was also the situation for Meg and Susan. The need to create a sense of identity and even a sense of security was a common theme for these women.

By considering the more material aspects of such an enterprise, these needs can mark an extension to Berger and Kellner's (1980) notion of 'world building' as second wives fashion to world in which they live. I now wish to consider this process of 'world building' in relation to the structural constraints of second wifehood. The discussion will be concerned with place of residence and will take the following form. Firstly, it will consider the primacy of male wishes with regard to place of residence. Secondly, it will consider the way in which the women strove to create a sense of identity in their new homes. Finally, the discussion will indicate the continuing need which these women experienced to live in a home which arose from the joint biography of the remarried.

The role of the women in the study is central to this discussion and in this connection I am concerned to illustrate the use of pragmatic statements as a form of legitimization and negotiation. In this way, I will further indicate the particular structural constraints which face the second wife.
A SENSE OF BELONGING

All the women in the study in one form or another moved to their husband's place of residence. Louise, Meg and Susan all moved into their husband's previous marital homes. Whilst Jane and Simon bought new property together their home was in Simon's home town and necessitated a change of job for Jane and a change of school for her children. Simon's children remained at the same schools and Simon's place of work remained the same. George was in tied accommodation, where he had lived alone since his marriage had ended. Frances moved into the tied house on marriage (11).

These findings do not concur with those of Burgoyne and Clark (1984). In particular, Burgoyne and Clark argue that because the legal process gives precedence to the rights of the mother to be the children's custodian in consequence the mother is more likely to retain the matrimonial home. 'Thus, when a mother in possession of the matrimonial home finds a new partner they will usually start living together in her old home, even if they move subsequently' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p138).

The fact that this was not the case for the couples in this study is on the one hand indicative of the
variable nature of the law with regard to divorce and property. With regard to property matters 'the courts have evolved various permutations to balance the interests of husband, wife and children, in differing circumstances' (Burgoyne, Ormrod and Richards, 1987, p68). As I have noted with regard to Meg's life history, at a subjective level Meg felt particularly disadvantaged in the legal process because of the disparity between the type of legal help she could afford and that which her husband obtained.

Notwithstanding this, at the time of the divorce settlement Meg had already met Frank and as Smart indicates 'the process of depolitisation and individualisation which solicitors and courts engage in' make it likely that Frank's presence would have affected the legal outcome (1984, p190). As Smart further comments this is due to the propensity of the courts and solicitors to see the decision making process in terms of 'the desirability of off-loading her [an ex-wife] on to someone else' (ibid).

Frank's presence had by that stage also entered the decision making process for Meg and is also indicative of the individualisation with which the recipients of legal jurisdiction experience that process. Thus, the opportunity to sell her previous marital home and still
have somewhere for herself and her children to live was an option available to Meg. Moreover, such a decision was seen in quite pragmatic terms as Meg remarks:

I had to sell my house because my ex-husband wanted his half. There was plenty of room here [present marital home] to extend.

Pragmatism was also the context of reasoning for the other couples. Indeed, Burgoyne and Clark noted a similar tendency that 'Relationships among the divorced tended to be described in ways which place great emphasis upon practical considerations and the constraints of a particular situation (1984, p87). In this way, second marriage in itself is viewed on a more contractual and reciprocal basis than first marriage.

Nevertheless, whilst not denying the very real and rational appeal of decisions of this kind, 'the reality of everyday life always appears as a zone of lucidity behind which there is a background of darkness' (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p59). Such pragmatism cannot, therefore, be taken at its face value. The fact that all the women in the study moved to their husband's home or home town still needs some explaining. I wish to indicate that in order to do so we have to take
account of male primacy and male power. This was evidenced in a variety of ways as I will now detail.

The pragmatism expressed by Susan refers to the more substantial aspects of Henry's home than her own and is indicative of his greater financial status. Susan commented:

We thought at first we would sell both houses and buy something new together but we would never have found anything as good as this (12). So we sold mine and the children and I moved here.

Don also portrays the reasons why Louise moved into his former marital home in terms that his own home was of a higher status. Nevertheless, Don's comments here have also to be considered in connection with his statement that he 'loved the house'. Don remarked:

Louise was living in a council place so it was obvious she should move here.

The assumptive nature of male primacy, and female acceptance, are also reflected in Louise's comments
about the move to Don's home. Louise explains how her belongings were removed whilst she was away:

I was away on holiday and when I came back everything was moved. The lot. Right down to the wardrobe. He'd [Don] done it while I was away. I thought I'd got a choice. My idea was to get a council exchange to here so I'd be nearer. But I just got on with it.

Frances' move into tied accommodation highlights the importance of the male breadwinner role. Whilst we may accept the pragmatism as rational and real, the unquestioning nature of the decision to move into what is effectively George's house lends weight to the importance of the male's occupation. Frances commented:

George came to live here [present marital home] when he and Linda separated. The house comes with the job so we had no choice really. I had to move here.

Jane also gives very practical reasons for her decision to move to Simon's home town. Nevertheless, her comments also reflect male precedence:
Simon didn't want to move his children to me. And as Joe was changing to secondary school that year I thought the move may not be too bad a thing. You know, get him away from the temptations of the city.

Despite the primacy of male wishes in terms of housing and the broad acceptance which each woman portrays here regarding her place of abode, the women actively engaged in imposing their own sense of identity on their homes. Whilst the heart of the following discussion concerns Meg, Louise and Susan, the process of 'world building' in this context was not limited to them. During the fieldwork year, Jane and Simon were busy with a range of structural and renovative repairs to their property. Frances also had described how she decorated the house after moving into it.

Even prior to the move, Susan began to shape the house according to her own designs. Moving to a house which was primarily designed for Henry's first wife, Beatrice, who was wheelchair bound, the house contained extra wide doorways and light switches and electric sockets at waist height. Although these structural
features were not altered, Susan arranged for the house to be completely redecorated as she indicates:

It was so dull and pokey. I insisted on having it redecorated. We did it before the wedding.

The move to one's spouse's former marital home not only raises questions of home decor, but brings with it a series of decisions regarding personal possessions. Joining two homes not only means combining two sets of children, but also means two cookers, two three piece suites, two sets of cutlery and so on. Moreover, the household items were purchased with a former spouse.

The process of facing a spouse's past life continue therefore as decisions are made about which possessions to keep. The emotive nature of inanimate objects and a sense of ownership is displayed in Louise's comments about the negotiable tenor of the exercise. Louise's words also remind us that the men may have been experiencing similar feelings. I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter. Louise described the decision making process in these terms:

We have a system. I get rid of one mine and he gets rid of one of his.
Nevertheless, women's role as housekeepers means that they are prime movers in respect of domestic duties. Susan illustrates that as confidence grows about one's right of place in the new home, so the degree of consultation diminishes:

After I moved in I started to sort the cupboards out. At first I would ask Henry if he wanted to keep things but, well, I thought, I'm the one who uses them. It's up to me, isn't it?

Nevertheless, there remain areas of the house where the reminders of a partner's past are too painful to face. Both Louise's and Meg's words indicate the continuing presence of the previous wife.

Louise: The attic's full of Don's things. It'll stir things up the day we get it out.

Meg: There's a bureau in there [indicating the dining room]. It's the only place I've never touched. All Frank and Emily's papers are in there. I never open it. I just can't.
Notwithstanding these various attempts to create a sense of belonging in their husband's homes, Louise's comments indicate that despite extensive internal redecoration and structural alterations, the continuing sense of living in someone else's house remains. Louise described her feelings about this in terms of specific rooms in the house:

It's funny, I like to sit in this bit [a new extension] because this bit is mine. The extension is ours. I mean Don has been great. He's done the house. The house is completely different. If she [Jacqui] came back she wouldn't recognise it. Everything of the first marriage has been cleared. But it took a while.

The Tyler's home was also redecorated and extended. Overall, Meg was content to live there, but she had no sense of permanency.

We plan to sell up and move to Scotland when Frank retires. Until then this will do.

Meg's plans to move house were actually realised by the Williams' and the Holmes' who both moved during the
fieldwork period (13). A consideration of their household removal gives further evidence of the importance of 'world building'. In addition, the pragmatic nature of the discourse throughout this period gives insight into the process of negotiation between husband and wife. In particular, I wish to argue that pragmatic reasoning acts as a form of legitimation which places the negotiation in the context of priorities and decisions which have previously been held as mutually acceptable.

The importance of legitimation has been noted by Backett who comments that the 'process of negotiating parental behaviour was characterised by the use of legitimations and legitimating tactics. These involved explaining behaviour to oneself and others so that it could be seen to be compatible with the mutually-held reality being created' (1982, p44). I will consider this more fully with reference to the concerns of Susan and Louise throughout their period of household removal.
NEW BEGINNINGS

There are several strands to the analysis of pragmatism which need to be considered in order to draw out the full implications of its role as a form of legitimation. In order to contextualise the negotiation process, this discussion will look at the nature of pragmatic statements and compare these with evidence of more subjective reasoning. It will also indicate how it is important to consider that Louise and Susan were prime instigators of the move. The interests and attitudes of their husbands, Don and Henry are also indicated.

In part, this discussion reflects Voysey's analysis of parenting disabled children when she remarks 'parents' responses tell us nothing about what it is like to have a disabled child in the family, but a lot about other people's ideas of what it ought to be like' (1975, p2). Thus, for the divorced it may be less legitimate to talk of second marriage in terms of romantic love when a first marriage based on these very principles broke down. Similar forms of practical reasoning may also be necessary to appropriately locate discussion within the realms of the mutually-held reality of the remarried couple. In other words, to place such discussion on
the marital agenda in a legitimate and even a non-threatening form.

The decision to move house in each case was primarily rational and practical. For Louise and Don the chance of buy a new home was viewed in terms of future retirement. Thus, Don commented:

It's too good an opportunity to miss.
It'll be a nest egg for us.

For Susan and Henry moving house was also a way in which they could ameliorate some of their financial constraints. Susan considers the likely benefits and drawbacks. Her diary records:

**Tuesday 11 March 1986**

3.30 p.m. Part of me feels it's a waste of time and money to move as I'm not sure how much we'd gain financially for a smaller house - if that makes sense. Are we going to have to pay almost as much as we sell this for for something much smaller.

Whilst accepting the rationality of these motives, in order to consider the way in which pragmatic reasoning
acts as form of legitimation one needs to take account of the more subjective feelings of Susan and Louise in connection with their living arrangements. Both Susan and Louise's words reflect the continuing sense of living in someone else's house. Thus, Susan commented in previous conversations before moving house was placed on the public agenda "I felt like an intruder".

Louise's comments were made only after the decision to move had reached its conclusive stages. The emotive nature of her words indicate how reminders of a partner's past life encompass every facet of the living space:

I always hated that house. I never bothered with the garden. You don't want to look after flowers another woman's put in do you. Really, you'd rather poison them.

In these ways therefore the need to move house was placed in a far more emotive sphere than more reasoning comments would suggest. The very personal beneficial effects of moving house also indicate the degree of discontent which Susan and Louise experienced. After moving house, their comments depict the pleasure of living in their new homes. Thus, Susan remarked "It's wonderful. It's just what we wanted". Louise
remarked "Don says I've changed completely. I go round singing. I never used to sing at the other house".

Moreover, the level of dissatisfaction with living in their husband's previous marital home can be viewed in the fact that they were each the prime instigators of the move. Louise had heard of a new housing estate being built close to their present home and had persuaded Don to see it. Susan had been out driving and by chance saw a house for sale in a road where friends from their local community centred lived. Susan remarked:

At the end of the road I saw this house for sale. I couldn't believe it. I went straight to the estate agents and got the details. It seemed perfect. When I got home I showed the details to Henry. He said it was worth a look so we went to the estate agents straight away and got the key.

Nevertheless, the issue is not a clear cut as this. In particular, Susan's comments in her diary portray her early thoughts on the matter and convey the tentative and complex nature of her motivations.
Monday 10 March 1986

7.30 p.m. The estate agents are coming tomorrow to value the house. I had this grand notion of moving. I think it's really only because I'm a bit frustrated and bored and somehow the thought of moving added some excitement to my life..... I feel rather unsettled. I don't know why. things seem to be okay between the girls [Susan's stepdaughters] and me. I think I need to work this through more.

The uncertainty which Susan expresses needs to be viewed in the context both of the pragmatic understandings with which earlier decisions to live in their present accommodation were made and in the context of their husbands' feelings about their homes. Henry had been positive about the benefits of the family home. He made these comments while he and Susan were in the process of looking for another house. "We're not going to find anything else like this".

Don had been quite vehement with respect to his home before any suggestion of removal had been raised "I'll
never leave here. I love this place. I'll never leave”.

In consequence the negotiation process between husband and wife reflects the resultant need to be accommodative. Louise was clear in this respect as she said:

I let him choose [the house type].
He was the one who didn't want to move.

The importance of gaining Henry's agreement can be seen in Susan's comments in her diary entry for the next day. Henry had designed many of the features in their present home and this was something which he particularly enjoyed. The negotiation to move, therefore, takes account of Henry's interests.

Tuesday 11 March 1986

1.30 p.m. I don't suppose we will move. I think it'd only happen if we could design our own house.

The tentative nature of the decision making process between husband and wife exacerbated the ready made
tensions of buying and selling property. Louise was particularly fearful that the purchaser for their property would not be able to complete the necessary transactions before the builders required their own completion monies. Primarily, Louise felt that if the purchase fell through Don would not consider an alternative. Louise commented:

We'll never move if we don't get this one. He [Don] won't go anywhere else.

Whilst pragmatic reasoning may offer immediate and understandable motives for particular courses of action in terms of the 'marital conversation' (Berger and Kellner, 1980) between husband and wife (14), the negotiable and accommodative nature of the discourse also indicates that more subjective motives will also be important. This subjectivity cannot be overlooked when one wishes to consider the deeper meanings for second wives of living in their husband's previous marital homes.

Moreover, this form of 'world building' is important to these women and to their marriages as an exercise in creating mutuality of experience. As Henry commented when they were negotiating the purchase of their
present marital home "It's given us something to share and that's been missing before".

The importance of a shared biography can also be seen in couples' needs to have a child of their marriage (15). The decisions which have to be made in this respect further indicate the specific constraints of second wifehood. In addition, decisions of this kind allow us to analyse the taken-for-grantedness of first marriage.

**CHILDREN AND SECOND MARRIAGE: THE QUESTION OF AN 'OUR' CHILD**

Busfield and Paddon note that 'there is little evidence that many (married couples) are choosing to remain childless throughout marriage' (1977, p133). The major decisions which those in first marriage make, therefore, do not arise in respect of whether or not to have children but are concerned more with spacing and number. This cannot be said of couples in remarriage where children are already present. Here questions of spacing and number although relevant are rather secondary. The major question revolves around a more indefinite 'if' where the decision to have a child has
further ramifications than solely making a 'marriage' a 'family'.

Burgoyne and Clark (1984) argue that the need to have children in remarriage can in part be seen as a consequence of the perceived limitations of social parenting as compared to the significance of blood ties. Burgoyne and Clark's data included stepfamilies where one partner was previously childless. In particular, Burgoyne and Clark argue that 'Not unexpectedly almost all the families in which custodian fathers married childless women had already had babies in their new marriages'. In this way their legitimacy as a mother was enhanced (1984, p158 ff). Nevertheless, Burgoyne and Clark argue that stepfathers, who are also non-custodial fathers, are 'able to derive sufficient fulfilment from the social aspects of parenting presented by their acquisition of stepchildren' (1984, p160).

The couples in this study were all custodial parents and therefore we need to locate their need to have a child beyond the scope of the limitations of social parenting. Nevertheless, the need to have a child, where this was evidenced, primarily arose from the women in each case. Thus, the importance of such a decision to mothers/stepmothers in particular has to be
considered. These points will be considered in relation to the range of issues which having a child of a second marriage brings forth. These issues included the family's stage in the family life cycle, the number of children they already had and the likely financial and accommodation implications. Whilst each couple displayed a range of variation in their attitude to the subject of having a child of the remarriage, nevertheless wider evidence suggests that the presence of an 'our' child can be seen as fulfilling one of the major aspects in developing a joint biography.

For Louise and Don the question of having more children had never presented them with any difficulties. Don had had a vasectomy and Louise felt, having had three children, that she had had enough. In addition, Don especially looked upon Louise's youngest child, Michael, as his 'own'. I noted in Chapter Four that Michael was only fifteen months old when Don and Louise first met. Moreover, as I also noted in Chapter Four Michael was particularly responsive to Don. The reciprocal nature of Don's feelings were summed up by Don who commented with reference to Michael that 'We've got a child of ours I think'.

George and Frances already had a child of their marriage, Luke, who was aged 3 during the fieldwork
year. For Frances, in part, the need to have another child arose out of an unresolved desire to have had more children in her first marriage. Frances' life history account (see Chapter Two) conveys the medical difficulties which Frances experienced in connection with child bearing. These had also occurred in her first marriage and Frances and her first husband, Peter, had decided not to have any more. Nevertheless, Frances commented 'I had wanted more than two'. Her comments regarding children therefore indicate that her ideas are located in terms of family size. Second marriage, therefore, presented Frances with a second chance where decisions in the past can be reassessed in new circumstances.

The sensitive nature of decision making with regard to having a child in remarriage was illustrated by the Beauchamp's and is summed up by Burns who comments 'To have a child or not to have a child ... the answer can be more divisive than any other issue facing stepmothers and their mates' (1985, p152). Jane's wish to have a child was resisted by Simon. In particular, Simon's reasons highlight one of the differences between first and second marriages. Those in second marriages will by definition be older than those in first marriages. Simon's comments therefore reflect ideas about the implications of having children in
terms of 'companionship, energy, patience and attention, all of which it is assumed become more difficult to provide if parents bear their children rather late in life' (Busfield and Haddon, 1977, p291, note 27). Simon thus commented:

You have to remember that we'll be in our late fifties before it's grown up.

The pain which Jane experienced over Simon's refusal to change his mind and the unresolved nature of her own feelings can be seen in her comment:

When people ask I tell them I'm not allowed [her emphasis] to have any.

Henry and Susan entered their marriage with the view that they did not want any more children. Henry was as similarly concerned as Simon that his age was an important deciding factor. In his forties, Henry had felt that he was 'too old'. With regard to having children in her first marriage, Susan had commented that they had planned to have more than two. Nevertheless, on remarriage Susan had also thought that she did not want any more children but as she began to realise that she did she felt that she had deceived
herself about her real feelings. In this context, therefore, the need to have children is in similarity to Frances in part related to ideas about family size generally. Susan commented:

No, I didn't think I wanted more children when Henry and I met but you kid yourself. I was sure I didn't but really I was fooling myself.

Nevertheless, the decision to have another child was not simply connected to ideas and wishes about appropriate family size and spacing, as it may be in first marriages, but required a variety of obstacles to be overcome. In medical terms, the most specific obstacle which faced Susan and Henry was that the decision to have children required Henry to have an operation to reverse a vasectomy he had had ten years previously. This caused Susan some misgivings as she wondered about the wisdom of such a step in terms of the discomfort it would cause Henry. Such worries were compounded by the attitudes expressed by Henry's daughters, Amanda and Karen. At this point, the roles of second wife and stepmother become interrelated. In particular, Amanda and Karen had expressed disquiet at the idea of acquiring a half-brother or sister (16). Susan said:
They [Amanda and Karen] said they wouldn't like it. They can't understand why we want children and if we did have one it had to be a girl as they don't like boys.

Nevertheless, whilst the feelings of other children are taken into account in first marriages, the form in which this takes is usually to ensure that older children are not jealous of any new babies born. Parents awareness of this issue is resolved in terms of taking appropriate steps during pregnancy and after the child has been born. For example, Leach advises mothers 'Don't make the older child feel guilty about jealous feelings' (1977, p401). However, in Susan's case, her stepdaughters' resistance to the idea was compounded with the worries she had expressed about the necessity of Henry's operation. These difficulties were sufficiently intrusive to cause her to have doubts about the feasibility of having another child. Furthermore, they engendered a sense of guilt about the primacy of her own needs (17). Susan's words conveyed these feelings clearly when she said "I feel selfish. After all it's my need. I'm the one pushing for it".

Despite Susan's fears and worries, she was "overjoyed" when Henry's appointment for his operation was
finalised. As the possibility of another child became more of a reality, so Henry and Susan's thoughts began to focus more directly on those which Busfield and Paddon (1977) highlight as facing couples in first marriage. This was the issue of spacing. Nevertheless, Henry's thoughts also make it clear that their decisions with regard to the age gap between children needs also to take account of Henry's age as a particular feature of this second marriage. Henry commented:

We think the age gap between the new baby and Hester [Susan's daughter, aged 3] will be too wide so we've decided to have two children not one. I hope it'll be twins then at least the age gap between myself and the babies will be lessened - if only slightly.

The issue of having children received minimal consideration for Frank and Meg. Meg's comments fit neatly the typology of stepfamilies drawn up by Burgoyne and Clark (1984). Accordingly, in this respect Meg's feelings would be defined under the type 'Looking forward to the departure of the children'
(Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p194). Meg expressed her thoughts in the following manner:

At first I thought it would be nice [to have another child].
But the children will be off our hands soon and then we'll have time to ourselves.

However, becoming a stepgrandparent was an important process for Meg and one which further highlights the questioning nature of a second wife's position in the stepfamily and the interrelationship between this role and that of stepmother. Two factors serve to highlight this. The first concerns the way that the public world confirms and conveys the lack of authority which the second wife/stepmother holds. The second concerns the way in which the taken-for-granted of first marriage becomes questioned in second marriage.

During the birth of Sandy's baby, Meg kept Sandy's grandparents, who live in Yorkshire, informed of the progress of the birth. As admittance to hospital and the actual birth were rather protracted, occurring over a period of forty-eight hours, agitation was expressed by Sandy's grandmother. In particular, she doubted that Meg knew the full 'story'. A more legitimate
authority was Sandy's mother-in-law, Josie. Meg described how she felt that this significant other defined her as lacking in authority:

I telephoned to let them [the grandparents] know how Sandy was getting on and she [the grandmother] asked for Josie's phone number. She didn't think I was telling her everything.

In addition, becoming a stepgrandparent raises concerns with regard to the issue of names. For grandparents, the preference for naming will revolve around the desire to be called granny, grandmother, nanny, granddad or even grandfather. For Meg her particular worry was that she would not be called any of the familiar titles given to grandparents but Sandy would encourage the baby to call her by her Christian name. Meg's consciousness of the issue highlights its problematic nature and the questions it raises with regard to the not so taken-for-granted nature of stepfamily life. Meg remarked:

I'm not going to be called Meg.
I shall insist that the baby calls me granny. I shall.
It is clear from the foregoing that the need to have a child of a remarriage or to become a stepgrandparent raises many questions and problems which are not usually of concern to those in first marriages. In addition, although I have been anxious to illustrate the especially difficult position of the second wife as a distinct role within the stepfamily, for the couples in the study the decisions which they needed to make regarding further children illustrates the interrelationship between second wifehood and stepmotherhood. This is not, however, to state that the role and position of second husband is not distinctive from that of first husband. It is this subject which I would now like to briefly consider.

SECOND HUSBANDS

I have argued that the existence of the first wife, either as an image or as a physical presence, has important repercussions on the role and experience of second wifehood. Nevertheless, it would appear from the dearth of sociological literature on the second husband that the distinctive features of this role have been widely neglected. In particular, data is implied rather than specifically concerned with this subject.
For example, Goode considers the effect that the presence or non-preservation of a first husband has on the wife's relationship with the second husband. Specifically, Goode considers the frequency of arguments between wife and second husband which arise in connection with the first husband (1956, p336 ff). It is the relationship between wife, first husband and second husband which I wish to discuss.

Whilst the men in the study had varying responses to their wife's first husbands, the most striking feature of each account was the negligible effect first husbands appeared to have on the lives of second husbands when compared to the data with regard to second wives (18). Overall, second husbands were dismissive of first husbands as if they were of no concern to them.

The ability of husbands to be able to do this should be seen in terms of their role within the stepfamily. As I have indicated in Chapter Three, it is the stepmother, rather than the stepfather, who undertakes most of the day to day domestic needs of stepchildren. In this way, stepfathers are very much protected from some of the least pleasant aspects of stepparenthood than are stepmothers. Further, the ideological concerns of fatherhood place stepfatherhood within the
parameters of emphasising a breadwinner role. The concerns of stepmothers are located principally in the emotive and subjective.

What it takes to be a 'good mother' is therefore singularly different to that which constitutes a 'good father'. In consequence, stepfatherhood takes on a rather more detached quality than that of stepmotherhood. Stepfathers, who primarily see their role as supportive, materially and emotionally, are distanced from such close and sometimes intensive involvements with their stepchildren.

This distancing is important when we consider the nature of the competition which may arise between second and first husband. As I have outlined throughout this thesis, to be a good stepmother is an extremely subjective and personal exercise. The form of the competition is therefore also very personal in nature. To be a good stepfather is rather less personal by comparison. The regularity and size of the wage packet may form the basis of competition but there can remain a rather detached quality to the interaction.

The attitudes of the men in the study to the first husband were either that he was irrelevant to their
lives, he had no place in their lives or he was encompassed within the stepfamily circle quite unproblematically. Importantly, none of the men spoke of the first husband of their own accord in the way that the wives did. This, I feel, is also indicative of the little relevance first husbands had to their lives.

George's comments directly link the material responsibilities of stepfather and father as the basis on which he sees appropriate contact. Beyond these matters, George feels that Frances' first husband, Peter, has no place in his life. George remarked:

I don't have anything to do with him [Peter]. I went to see him one. About getting some money for the children. But no. I have nothing to do with him.

Simon's relationship with Jane's first husband, Richard, was friendly and accepting, with elements of reciprocity. Richard enters Simon and Jane's house freely and easily. They have all enjoyed social occasions together, such as a meal in a restaurant and returning to Richard's flat for drinks afterwards. During the fieldwork period, Richard bought Simon and Jane a video recorder both for their use and also so
that they could record programmes for Richard to watch in Spain where he works.

There is therefore no animosity or denial in the relationship been Simon and Richard. The only source of aggravation which Simon expressed about Richard was concerned with the material aspects of the father relationship. In this case it was the amount of money which Richard spent on his children Harriet and Joe. Simon felt it was unfortunate that he could not afford to buy for his own children the clothes, gifts and holidays which Harriet and Joe enjoy. Nevertheless, this issue was not by any means a major area of disagreement and is indicative of the impersonal nature of financial competition. Simon is able to be accepting and empathetic. He remarked 'If I were him, I'd do the same'.

Frank's attitude to Meg's first husband, James, is interesting in that Frank places his stepchildren's relationship with their father in the context of more extended family relationships. By doing so, the periodic arrangement of children's access visits can be encompassed within wider understandings of 'ordinary' family arrangements. Frank's comments are also reflective of gender typifications of the father role in the sense that he is able to remain relatively
uninvolved in the arrangements for his stepchildren's access visits. Indeed, Frank's words suggest they are peripheral to his main concerns:

I never really think about him [James]. Obviously he comes and calls for the children. It doesn't really affect me. I don't get involved. I don't know him so it's like them going to visit an uncle as far as I'm concerned. Obviously they listen to what he says. He's their father and I'm not.

Louise's first husband, Jonathan, did not have access to her children during the study period. The reasons for this can be located in legal judgment, the non-custodial parent's attitude and the stepparent's feelings. Louise's life history account (see Chapter Two) indicates that Jonathan was not granted access by the courts because of his alcoholism and general behaviour. Moreover, Louise had stated to me herself that during the divorce Jonathan had said that he would 'Get out of the children's lives'. Nevertheless, Jonathan does send the children birthday and Christmas presents.
Don's attitude to access indicates the extent to which he also encouraged non-contact between his stepchildren and their natural father. In particular, Don feels that access should be discouraged. He places his argument impersonally, in the context of the needs of children. With regard to the presents which Jonathan sends, Louise depicts Don's feelings about these in terms that they do indeed represent a significant reminder of Jonathan which Don would rather not face. In particular, she commented that Don 'didn't like' such intrusions. Nevertheless, Don himself here gives the opposite impression about the presents. He is able to do so by reducing the significance of the presents to the children. In this way he dismisses any relevance they may have in his stepchildren's, and consequently, his own life. Don commented:

We never have any contact with him [Jonathan]. It's always been done through solicitors. So there are no problems there. It's very important in my view that you don't have contact for the children's sake. They will make contact when they're 18. When they've gone to school and when they've achieved something. It's up to them then. They'll be old enough to make
their own minds up. Until then they shouldn't be disturbed. They have their presents. We'd never stop the presents. Because we don't stop them and because we let them come they [Don's stepchildren] more or less shrug their shoulders at them. Throw them in a corner. They don't bother with them.

The relatively impersonal nature of this statement is also reflected in comments which Don made on another occasion concerning Jonathan. Louise had said to him in my presence that whatever Jonathan's failings he was still her children's natural father and therefore had 'undeniable rights'. Don's reply locates his argument also in terms of parental rights, but they are still at an impersonal level. Don thus said to Louise:

I think when parents are cruel to their children they should forfeit any right to see them. The natural parent isn't necessarily the best parent for a child.

The force with which these words were spoken were indicative to me that Don felt particularly threatened by any suggestion that Jonathan should have access.
Nevertheless, the form in which his statement was made can be compared to those which stepmothers made about non-custodial mothers. Stepmothers' words were located directly in the particular and the personal under the aegis of 'She is an unfit mother' rather than the more impersonal 'Parents who are ....' which is the form which Don uses.

There are two levels therefore which this argument must take account of. Firstly, the form of speech between male and female is conducive to interpretations of the abstract and the personal being similarly located in gender stereotypifications. The more abstract the speech the less likely the interpretation will be made about subjectivity of feelings. Impersonal speech forms also lend an authority which is denied to the more personal speech form (Spender, 1980).

Secondly, the degree of intrusion which a previous partner has in gender terms can also be evidenced through more structural features as I indicated above. For stepfathers, the basis of competition is less personal and the degree of involvement in stepchildren's lives is less direct. Whilst I can have no doubt that from time to time the first husband represented an unwanted intrusion in the lives of second husbands, these structural features enabled the
extent of any intrusion to be kept under greater control than was the case for the second wives.

Given these factors, I would argue that second wives faced a far more problematic situation than was the case for second husbands. Second husbands were very much protected from the force of intrusion of a first husband by various intervening factors. In particular, these were the detached nature of their role with regard to stepchildren and the impersonal form in which they could achieve the ideological requirements of fatherhood. In these ways, the structural features of the role of second husband enhance their ability to maintain control.

CONCLUSION

I have been concerned in this chapter to examine the institution of remarriage and to consider its interrelationship with stepparenthood. In particular, I have argued that we need to overcome a dichotomy of divorce versus mortality generated stepfamilies in order to consider the specific gender implications of remarriage.
I have, therefore, considered the role of second wives in remarriage in the following ways. I have examined the extent to which second wives feel first wives intrude into their marriage. Specifically, I have argued that the form in which this intrusion takes is on the basis of a comparison of the qualities of motherhood and wifehood.

I have further examined the way in which a husband's previous partner intrudes into the lives of the remarried through their place of residence. I have argued that second wives engage in a form of 'world building' (Berger and Luckman, 1980) in order to create a sense of identity in their homes. The extent to which they are able to do so is limited by the continuing presence of the first partner.

I have also examined 'world building' in the context of having children in remarriage. Here I have argued that second wives face various structural constraints which challenge the taken-for-granted nature of first marriage.

Finally, I have consider the role of the second husband. I have suggested that the structural requirements of their role enhance their ability to
cope with any intrusion which the first husband may make into their lives.

In summary, therefore, I would argue that the role of the second wife is far more problematic than that of the second husband. In particular, the interrelationship of stepmotherhood with second wifehood, means that the women in the study were doubly disadvantaged. Both roles are structurally, and consequently more personally, demanding. Moreover, both roles are embellished with a mythology which emphasises the negative. Stepmothers are wicked. Second wives are drones.

In order to bring out the major importance of mythology in the experience of stepfamily life, I now wish to consider how mythologies are constructed and used by stepparents on an everyday basis - a subject that is answered in Chapter Six.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE: THE EXPERIENCE OF SECOND MARRIAGE

1. This issue is further taken up in Chapter Six.

2. James was able to make his own access arrangements as Chapter Four indicates. The implications of this are also discussed in Chapter Six.

3. I have previously noted in Chapter Two that I have used different names to make the distinction clear between first and second wife.

4. See Don's life history in Chapter Two.

5. This was the age when Don's children left home. It is also the age that Don maintains is appropriate for children to be 'independent' from their parents. See Chapter Three, note 3.

6. Don was the initiator and constructor of this myth about Jacqui. Nevertheless, as the 'ghost' had 'left' before the fieldwork began, I have no way of knowing the extent to which this very elaborate and covert form of control was used by him with regard to Louise. In addition, I
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE (CONTINUED)

6 have no way of knowing what role Don's children may have add in substantiating the myth.

7 Louise uses the form 'we'. Nevertheless, I feel there is an element of doubt here and the term could be 'I'. This comment is made with reference to the remarks made in Note 6 above.

8 Burgoyne and Clark refer to a similar process which they use specifically in connection with remarriage and which they term 'courtship as confessional' (1984, p84)

9 The construction of images of a non-custodial parent is discussed in Chapter Six.

10 See Chapter Three.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE (CONTINUED)

11 Finch notes in connection with women living in tied accommodation that 'it removes from her any real possibility of participation in decisions quite fundamental to her lifestyle and puts them into the hands of her husband's employer. These are decisions about where she shall live, and the character and the quality of the accommodation of the housing, she shall occupy' (1983, p61). Frances's situation therefore needs to be considered as a special case in the light of these comments.

12 Henry's former marital home had six bedrooms, two bathrooms and three sitting rooms.

13 I discuss in Appendix A the relevance of moving house in connection with autobiographical data.

14 And of course, to the researcher.

15 I discuss in Appendix A the relevance of having a baby in connection with autobiographical data.
NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE (CONTINUED)

16 I comment in Appendix A how Susan used my own pregnancy as an example to Amanda and Karen.

17 See Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1983, p145 ff for a discussion on the generality of guilt inducing feelings in women.

18 The note of caution which I introduce should also be considered in terms of the limited nature of the data here. I discuss this further in Chapter Seven with reference to matters for further research.
CHAPTER SIX

MYTH AND MYTH CONSTRUCTION IN THE STEPFAMILY: AN ANALYSIS

The myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends on ready-made valuations rushes headlong. (de Beauvoir, 1972, p290)

A myth takes the form of a story that embodies certain ideas and at the same time offers a justification of those ideas. (Sykes, 1965, p323, emphasis in text)
INTRODUCTION

Sykes and de Beauvoir both highlight the role of myth in the construction of ideas. Moreover, this thesis indicates the particular effect which various mythologies about the stepmother and second wife have on stepfamily life. In addition it has examined the process by which myths are constructed. In this chapter I look more closely at the role of myth by considering the form and construction of myth as a way of making sense of the disjunction between various ideals of family life and reality.

There are two ideals which are the concern of this chapter. One such ideal is that of achieving a loving relationship between parent and child and thus stepparent and stepchild. Nevertheless, the expectations placed on stepparents and which they place upon themselves to love and care for their stepchildren stand in opposition to the range of negative feelings which stepparents may experience in their day to day relationships. The prevalence of these negative feelings is accepted by a range of 'experts' who assure the stepparent, quite rightly, that they are reasonable and acceptable. However, stepparents are cautioned that such attitudes should be controlled - outwardly at
least. Burns is typical in this respect when she states 'It is perfectly fine to feel negative about a troublesome, difficult child, but your actions shouldn't reflect your dislike' (1985, p195, emphasis in text).

Maddox argues that the reason why stepparents experience hostile feelings towards their stepchildren is because the 'stepchild is a constant reminder of the parent's sexual intercourse with a previous spouse' (1975, p82). This may be part of the answer but sexual jealousy was not acknowledged by any of the stepparents in this study (1). Rather, more concrete examples of hurt and rejection made their contributions to the basis of stepparental angst. As I have outlined in Chapter Four, stepparents' feelings on these matters were very real and very tangible. Furthermore, the myths which I discuss here were only constructed about stepchildren with whom stepparents experienced rejection.

A second ideal is that of achieving an amicable relationship with a previous spouse/non-custodial parent. The need to keep conflict out of such relationships arises predominantly from a concern for the welfare of the children of divorce. Again the role of 'experts' play their part in defining the ideal.
Franks argues that to achieve an amicable relationship requires 'flexibility and great generosity, and an essentially child-centred approach' (1988, p105). Wallerstein and Kelly in a footnote remark about the benefits to children of counselling parents about the effects of parental hostility. They remark 'One encouraging result of the counselling intervention was the ability of some parents to refrain from continued criticism of the other spouse when they understood what an assault this represented on the child's own self-esteem....The youngsters' decreased trust in their parents after separation may have been related in part to each parent's attempt to undermine the other' (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980, p28). The message therefore to stepparents is that an amicable relationship with their stepchildren is paramount if the stepchild's needs are to be met within the stepfamily.

However, these ideals are extremely difficult to achieve. I outline in this chapter the use of myth as a strategy to overcome the disjunction between ideal and reality. In particular, I consider myth as a coping mechanism. In addition, I discuss the process by which myths become constructed with special reference to the non-custodial parent. In so doing, I indicate how forms of contact with the non-
custodial partner are particularly conducive to the construction of a mythology.

WHY MYTH?

Although I have indicated in Chapter One the general reasons for considering myth as central to understanding stepfamily life, I feel it appropriate here to make some specific comments with regard to the importance of myth in understanding stepparents' and non-custodial parents' statements. Firstly, because of their general nature in the study, the statements made here about stepchildren and the non-custodial spouse have a shared value. Moreover, there are indications that such statements are reasonably common beyond the scope of this study. In connection with negative views of stepchildren, Maddox comments that 'Too many stepparents live with an uneasy conscience. Who is there to tell them that wicked thoughts and bad temper are endemic among stepparents...'(1975, p79). Burns has a chapter in her book entitled 'The wicked ex-wife' which is suggestive of the generality of such definitions (Burns, 1985, Chapter 5).
Secondly, these myths contain fundamental expressions of attitude. In this connection, Kirk notes that myths bear 'important messages about life in general and life-within-society in particular' (1974, pp28/9) or in this case, to paraphrase, life in a stepfamily. The delineation of these perspectives within the context of myth consequently enables us to analyse their specific role.

Notwithstanding these reasons it should be noted that the comments which individuals made about their stepchildren and the non-custodial parent were believed to be true by these individuals themselves. As Sykes (1965) argues belief in the truth of the myth is all important. He states 'The actual truth or falsity of the story is irrelevant; what is important is that the story and the ideas it embodies are accepted and believed to be true (Sykes, 1965, p323, emphasis in text). Backett correspondingly defines myth in the context of the division of labour in the home as requiring 'either minimal practical proof, or even no substantive proof at all' (1982, p78). Nevertheless, her respondents' belief that they had a fair division of labour was important in the myth's role as a coping mechanism.
These comments regarding belief in myth stand in opposition to the comments I have made in Chapter Three with regard to the myth of the wicked stepmother where denial of the myth's truth is all important. Nevertheless, this feature gives myth a very different role in the stepfamily than that of the myth of the wicked stepmother. It is this role which I now wish to further explore.

THE USE OF MYTH AS A COPING MECHANISM

I argued in Chapter Three that the pre-eminence of a mythology of wickedness leads stepmothers to act in certain ways and to acquire a consciousness of their actions which will enable them to overcome any ascription of wickedness upon themselves. In their broadest sense these forms of action may be seen as management strategies. In contrast to this development of various management strategies as a means of overcoming a mythology, I now wish to consider the use of myth itself as a form of coping with the disjunction between ideal and reality.

As I have commented the use of myth as a coping mechanism has been noted by Backett (1982). Backett
argues that myth forms one framework within which married couples deal with the various contradictions and dilemmas which arise in the negotiation of parental behaviour. Backett assigns the role of myth to a range of assumptions which were expressed by couples to support their belief in a fair division of labour within the home (1982, p77 ff).

Backett draws attention to the legitimating aspect of myth as a means of overcoming contradictions in expectations of parental behaviour. The purpose of legitimization in the context of a coping mechanism cannot be underestimated. In particular, legitimation cannot be separated from inherent contradictions in parenting stepchildren. I have argued in Chapter Four that stepparents face various forms of rejection from their stepchildren. When faced with such rejection stepparents are left with uncertainty regarding their stepchildren's feelings. Stepparents may also in turn be rejecting of such stepchildren.

The experience of living with hostile emotions is contrary to ideals of love within the family and sets up conflictual elements both objectively and subjectively. The effect on self-esteem and morale can subsequently be devastating. Stepmothers tears were, sadly, too frequently part of my fieldwork experience.
The dilemma therefore arises as to how such conflict between the ideals of love and the experience of hostility should be dealt with. An option open to the stepparent as a means of coping with this is through a process of objectification of that hostility and legitimation for it. Backett notes a similar process of objectification and legitimation among parents when she states 'The assumptions [of family life] were first objectified by respondents using them as legitimations in their accounts to me of family life' (1982, p10).

The form in which the objectification of this conflict was achieved was simply by verbalising feelings and attitudes within the context of an account of stepchildren's behaviour. In this respect, as Berger and Luckmann state 'The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification' (1966, p51). In the course of making such statements stepparents would point out behaviour which the stepchild had exhibited or misdemeanours which the stepchild had committed. By so doing stepparents were building up an image of the child's character in such a way that their own attitudes and feelings would be justified (3). This point corresponds with that which Sykes makes in connection with myth that 'The story element will embody certain
beliefs that justify these attitudes' (1965, p324, emphasis in text)

There are two categories of myth which were prominent in stepparents' accounts of their stepchildren: Comparative Myths and Harsh Judgements. I shall discuss each of these in order to more fully understand the nature of myths surrounding stepchildren (4).

**COMPARATIVE MYTHS**

Myths of a comparative nature were of two types. Those which made comparisons with the non-custodial parent and those which made comparisons with the stepparent's own children. I will deal with each of these in turn.

**He's just like his father/She's just like her mother**

Comparisons of stepchildren with the non-custodial parent only arose in the case of divorce. The mores which I have discussed in Chapter Five which relate to widowhood and death generally mean that it would be very difficult to make public such comments in a justificatory way. Moreover, those stepparents who are married to a divorced partner have met the previous
spouse and through their various relations in the past have a stock of 'stories' which are readily available for comparative purposes.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) note that resemblance to a non-custodial parent was a common parental perception. In particular, Wallerstein and Kelly argue 'Whereas in a happy family such resemblance might earn the child special favour, at this time [during divorce] the real or fantasied resemblance was, for some of these children a severe handicap. Such a child was sometimes singled out as the representative of the departed parent and made into a scapegoat' (1980, p101).

The focus of these myths was varied and would relate to characteristics which were seen to have been exhibited by the non-custodial parent and which had either been exhibited by the stepchild or, indeed, might be so exhibited in the future. Thus, comments ranged from 'His father could never hold a job and nor can he' to 'I think she might leave her own children one day just like her mother has'.

**Bad examples**

Stepchildren who were seen to be 'bad examples' to other children in the family were older than those
about whom the parent expressed anxiety. In addition, it was usually same sex behaviour which was treated as most worrisome. Fears from parents about the example being set by stepchildren included attitudes to school work and educational attainment, stepchildren's moral standards and general behaviour.

**HARSH JUDGEMENTS**

Backett notes that parents use both personality and physiological images to make sense of their children (1982, p110 ff). Stepparents similarly use personality and physiology to form their understandings of their stepchildren. Nevertheless, whilst parents may talk confidently about their own children's personality traits from a knowledge which spans from birth, the majority of harsh judgments which stepparents make with regard to stepchildren emphasise the lack of knowledge which stepparents feel they have. Thus, stepchildren are defined as disloyal, secretive, purveyors of untruths and bearers of malevolent tales about their stepparents within which they portray themselves as a modern day Cinderella or its male equivalent.
Comments such as 'He/She earns more than he/she says', 'He/she's a liar', 'You can guess what he/she's been saying about me' and 'He/she's always keeping secrets' were particularly common. Stepparents' expressions of insecurity with regard to their stepchildren's true feelings or thoughts can be seen in comments such as 'You can't tell by his/her face that he/she's lying' and 'You can never be sure'.

Through the construction of myths of this kind, stepparents were able to legitimate their own negative feelings and actions towards their stepchildren. Thus, one stepmother commented "I shall have to be at home when he goes because he'll take anything that isn't his to take". One stepfather remarked when referring to his stepson's moral qualities "He isn't safe near any children". For stepmothers, through its justificatory power, this form of legitimation was particularly important because it further denied the myth of the wicked stepmother. In these ways, therefore, these myths played a vital role as coping strategies.

The range of myths which I have outlined reinforce the social nature of stepparenting. Harsh judgements are not confined to stepparents. Backett notes that couples in her study presented 'alternative images' of
other couples' children which were certainly more negative than those which were expressed by parents themselves (1982, p103). Backett argues that parents themselves were unwilling to make such judgements about their own children and would always qualify unfavourable remarks by attributing problems or poor behaviour to a stage or phase appropriate to the child's development. These were signs of their understanding of their child. Backett argues that this need to 'understand' the child rather than taking the child at face value, as friends may do, is a particular hallmark of biological parenting. Nevertheless, the need to 'understand' the stepchild was also primary to stepparents and further indicates the ambiguous nature of their role. Neither full parent nor friend, the stepparent's felt lack of understanding leads to the insecurity outlined above.

With regard to comparative myths, those which make comparisons with the non-custodial parent must be seen in conjunction with the stepparent's negative attitudes towards the non-custodial parent. To compare a child with a loved parent is a very different matter to comparing a child with a parent who is seen to be the cause of upset or who is thought to behave unreasonably.
Comparisons between stepchild-natural child are the very stock of parental pride. They become problematic however when they are used as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) above note to scapegoat a child or to define a situation in which action is ultimately taken.

I now take up the issues of myths about non-custodial parents in terms of the construction of myth. I also consider the relationship between myth to individual perception and action with special reference to the myths which were constructed about the non-custodial parent.

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF MYTH**

The contents of the following discussion relate only to those women in the study who were divorced or were married to divorced men. The female centredness of the discourse requires explanation lest I create a myth which states that myth construction of the kind indicated here is solely a female activity! Firstly, the concerns which are exhibited here were primarily those which women discussed. Secondly, the nature of these concerns arises out of women's responsibility for the domestic and childrearing sphere of family life.
It is for these reasons and not to sex-type mythological construction that the data stresses the female role.

The fact that this discussion is also linked to divorce and not widowhood is also very important. The construction of myths about the non-custodial parent of the kind described here are only possible when the parent is a physical presence in the lives of the remarried. The discussion therefore illustrates one of the distinctions between divorce versus mortality generated stepfamilies. In so doing, whilst the theme of the chapter is the construction of myth, the data should also be viewed as descriptive of the distinctiveness of divorce generated stepfamilies.

I argued in Chapter One that rather than taking divorce and widowhood as all-encompassing terms, we should look at the elements of each to consider their particular effect on remarriage. In this connection, I noted that access and maintenance are two aspects of divorce which are worthy of special consideration. I now consider these issues in terms of their role in the construction of myths about the non-custodial parent. First of all, however, their place in divorce law and policy should be noted.
The overwhelming consideration in divorce law and practice is the welfare of the child. As Maidment states 'The child’s welfare as a pre-condition to the granting of a divorce reflects a modern belief that while parents may choose divorce for themselves and must face the consequences of their own decisions, children need legal protection against their parents' actions' (1984, p159). In this way, the notion of access needs to be seen as a belief in the beneficial effect to the child that continuing contact with both parents brings.

In terms of maintenance, whilst there are distinctions between issues arising in connection with the rights of the ex-wife to maintenance and those connected to the needs of the child 'All agree that the children should be given priority when financial arrangements are being considered' (Levin, 1984, p188)(5).

Nevertheless, whilst primacy is given to the child’s best interests, the practice of divorce is adversarial. Solicitors are in consequence acting in the best interests of their client and do so often in a hostile way. Burgoyne, Ormrod and Richards argue that at times the system may reflect the underlying reality of intense hostility between the parents (1987, p82). Nevertheless, the adversarial system can also give rise
to hostility and unresolved tensions which continue post-divorce and into remarriage. These tensions and their effects are fully described in the following analysis where I will argue that they provide the framework of palpability which makes the myth so pervasive.

The child-centred approach of the law is reflected in this discussion in the following ways. Firstly, issues surrounding the child, in terms of maintenance and access, are indicative of more general attitudes of the responsibilities of parenthood. In turn, the responsibilities of parenthood are the focus of the myths. Secondly, the children themselves, through access, have a major role in the construction of myths about the non-custodial parent (6).

These factors are taken up more fully by considering the construction of myth in terms of the following categories: key events, forms of contact and images.

**KEY EVENTS: THE MYTH TAKES SHAPE**

Sykes (1965) argues that we need to distinguish between the structuring of a situation and the shaping of a
myth. Situations are structured in terms of attitudes, beliefs and values. Shaping provides a coherent form for such attitudes, beliefs and values. The retelling of key events provides that shape.

In addition, Sykes stresses that the shaping of a myth also gives a story an emotive appeal. He notes, however, that 'although the appeal may be largely emotional, it is cast in at least a semblance of a rational form' (1965, p334). There is undoubtedly an emotive appeal in the key events recounted here. In particular they highlight the unreasonable nature of the non-custodial parent's actions. The myth's rationality lies in the justifications stepparents give for their attitudes.

In Frances' case both the non-custodial parent's behaviour was unreasonable and so was the timing. There was therefore a double injustice. The justification lies in the fact that Frances felt that she and George were already acting in a reasonable way. Frances made the following comments in connection with George's first wife, Linda's request for more maintenance:

We got an affidavit on our wedding day
would you believe from their mother
suing George for maintenance for the two younger girls which we thought was very unfair because George and I were paying all their school fees and she had all their family allowance books and we felt the family allowance for the whole year was sufficient to finance the half holidays they had.

Frances expresses disquiet at the injustice which she felt with regard to the amount of maintenance which she and George were being asked to contribute. Frances and George were therefore on the receiving end of such requests. The focus of unreasonable behaviour which Meg saw with regard to her first husband James was also related to maintenance. Nevertheless, in Meg’s case she was the one in receipt of maintenance and felt that the amount she had been awarded was derisory. Meg also expressed justification for her view point.

Meg had in fact been awarded £1 per child per year maintenance on her divorce from James. She therefore had recourse to look to James to contribute informally to their children’s upkeep. The justification which Meg offers for her view indicates the continuing responsibilities of parenthood – non-custodial as well as custodial – and the fact that those with less moral
obligation to give the children money do so. Meg made
the following comments when referring to a recent
access visit her children, Julia and Virginia, had had
with their father:

They [James, Julia and Virginia] went to
London for the day and do you know he didn't
give them any money. I know he took them on
the river but you'd think he'd give them
some spending money. I think it's strange.
My own father gives them 10p each every
week and always has done. And if he hasn't
seen them for a few weeks he saves it up.
But James. He gives them nothing.

Throughout the year of fieldwork, access and
maintenance were a constant source of friction for
Jane. These problems reached their peak at the major
holiday times of Christmas, Easter and Summer when
customary arrangements were delayed or in jeopardy. On
the latter two occasions particularly, May as non-
custodial parent was indicating that she could not have
her children for their customary visits.

Nevertheless, these problems need to be seen as a
continuation of past events where the issues of
maintenance, access and custody were already at the fore. Jane’s comments particularly illustrate the incremental nature of the shaping of myth in terms of key events. As Sykes notes 'The incidents used are carefully selected and simplified, and many different incidents may be fitted together into one composite story in order to achieve a simple but comprehensive account' (1965, p334). This process is clear in Jane’s account:

I met Simon in the June, May/June, and didn’t meet her [May] until the Christmas, and, oh yes, in that period of time all I heard about her, first of all that she was going for custody of Angela, then for all three. Was continually [her emphasis] asking for money, writing the most peculiar notes about how she wanted an insurance policy that was hers and if she died there’d be no money to bury her. The whole thing was just weird. And this continual thing from the children about how poor mummy had no money. When I finally met her, she was well and truly stuck up my nose. [laughs].

Jane also comments on a key event in her relationship with May - their first meeting. The adversarial nature
of the divorce process is continued through the adversarial position of first and second wife. Women's investment in marriage as a primary form of identity means that by virtue of their role of wife and ex-wife there can be no question of friendly feelings or emergent sisterhood. Divorce and remarriage set woman against woman. Jane and May were both attending a carol service in which James was taking part when they first met. Jane describes their meeting in the following way:

After the service, she came up to Simon about something about the children and Simon said, "Oh, this is Jane", and I said "Hello" and she said "Hello" and carried on talking to Simon. It has subsequently been thrown at me by her about how cool and frosty I was about meeting her. Christ knows what she expected. In the first place I was hardly going to fling my arms round her and say "Hail fellow well met".
Jane and May were brought together for the first time through their shared interest in James - Jane's stepson and May's natural child. The shared nature of the parenting role between stepparent and non-custodial parent in itself gives rise to the opportunity for misconceptions and hostility to arise. Frances' remarks in connection with her stepdaughter Lucy indicate her own sense of injustice:

We got messages back [from Linda, Lucy's mother]. Poor old Lucy. We'd forced her to do this and forced her to do that. Her mother believed every word of it.

Frances' comments also remind us that as well as issues surrounding children being one of the main foci of the key events which shape myths, children are also the reason why communication between parent, stepparent and non-custodial parent continue. I now consider this in more detail.
The role of key events in the construction of myth provides the shaping of the story element within which the myth is encompassed. Nevertheless, the construction of myths about the non-custodial parent is reinforced by the lack of direct contact which either the stepparent or custodial parent has with the non-custodial parent.

Simon and Jane were the only individuals who had direct contact with their former partner during the fieldwork period. I have noted in Chapter Five that the relationship between Simon, Jane and Jane's first husband Richard was amicable. Moreover, as Jane's life history (see Chapter Two) details, Jane was satisfied with the divorce settlement and no recurrent arguments existed.

It is in addition interesting to note that no myths of the type described here were constructed about Richard during the fieldwork period. The factors of direct contact and amicability are crucial in explaining this. In all other cases, direct contact was either minimal or non-existent. Furthermore, there were in each case continuing tensions about divorce settlements between
spouse and ex-spouse, although it should be added these were of varying intensity.

In order to explore this more fully, it is important to consider the reasons why indirect means of contact are preferred to more direct forms. In so doing we will see how the unresolved tensions of divorce continue to shape the life experiences of the remarried.

**DIRECT CONTACT**

Although Simon and Jane had direct contact with both their ex-partners during the fieldwork period, their relationship with May, Simon's first wife, was particularly acrimonious. Direct contact, in this situation, therefore had inherent dangers as there was always the possibility of expressions of animosity and resultant argument. Wallerstein and Kelly note that 'Raw feelings of both marital partners tend to be exacerbated by visits...The visit is an event continually available for the replay of anger, jealousy, love, mutual rejection and longing between the divorcing adults' (1980, p125). The following account illustrate the explosive nature of direct contact clearly.
Simon's life history (see Chapter Two) details one of the problems arising out of his divorce settlement in terms of maintenance and property rights. In particular, May felt that she had financial rights to a barn which Simon's father had given to him during their marriage. The barn had been the subject of legal argument in which Simon had been successful. Nevertheless, whilst the legal argument had been concluded in Simon's favour, financial arrangements continued to be a source of discord.

Simon's account of an incident which occurred whilst he was attempting to make access arrangements with May is an illustration of how direct communication can open up the way for the release of these unresolved tensions.

Simon had telephoned May to arrange the children's Easter visit. During the course of the conversation May had told him that as Clive (May's boyfriend) was unemployed and her own temporary job had finished, she could not afford to have the children for a long period over Easter. Simon reported that he responded to May's statements in the following way:

I wasn't trying to be nasty or awkward or anything. I just asked her why there was such a problem with getting work.
It's not as if we have an employment problem round here. There's lots of work. She [May] went mad. Started shouting and screaming down the phone. And then she put the phone down on me. I really didn't want to upset her. I really didn't. I was only asking out of concern.

Simon then received a telephone call from Clive. Simon reported its contents as follows:

He was shouting. Didn't I know that I'd left May in a terrible state. I said I did but I hadn't meant to at all. I said I just can't see what the problem is with getting work. He [Clive] said it wasn't a case of taking the first thing that came along and he wished we'd get off their backs. God knows what he meant by that. I'd had enough by then. I told him to "fuck off" and put the phone down.

Simon had no further direct contact with May over the next few weeks and I will detail below (see Indirect
Contact) the form communication took between Simon and May.

Meg did not have any direct contact with her first husband James. Her children would telephone their father when they wanted to see him and make the necessary arrangements. When James came to collect them, he would stay in the car outside. Meg's reasons for keeping any direct contact to the minimum can be located in her biography. Moreover, her remarks convey very strongly an awareness of the dangers that direct contact can lead to in terms of conflict:

I don't like to have anything to do with him [James]. I think because communication between us was always difficult when we were married. He'd just get violent. I still shake now if I have to have anything to do with him. I think I'm still frightened of him. And I'll try to be out of the way when he comes. I don't go and look out of the window or anything. I'll go into the kitchen when he drops them off.
In addition to the potential for acrimony arising out of direct contact, the non-validity of any relationship may also be cited as a reason for having no contact with the non-custodial parent. In the following remarks, Jane details the ways in which she will avoid contact with May. Her final comments place the legitimacy for her actions in the realm of responsibility for marriage break-up. Although Jane recognises the validity of Simon and May’s continuing relationship and responsibility for their children, at the same time, she denies any validity to her own relationship with May. Jane comments:

When I know she’s bringing the children back and I hear the car, I actually remove myself if I think she might come in. She very rarely does. I will consciously go out of my way not to see her. I mean she only lives up at Amster [a village three miles from their current home]. Not a million miles away and I mean I have actually bumped into her and just said “Hello” and walked on. I still maintain that their splitting up was nothing to do with me and as far as I’m concerned the less I have to do with her the better.
It is clear therefore that direct contact will either be undertaken at the risk of creating more damage to an already fragile relationship or at the risk of causing more bitterness and animosity. In addition, direct contact will be rejected on the grounds that it is not a legitimate action in the parents' present circumstances. The severing of the legal ties of marriage is reflected in the severing of direct contact. For these reasons, a more indirect means of contact will be viewed as achieving the same result without taking the same risks or acting in an illegitimate way. I now consider the ways in which indirect contact was achieved and maintained.

**INDIRECT CONTACT**

There are two forms of indirect contact which I shall detail here as the main forms of communication between custodial and non-custodial parent. These are sources of information and the transmission of messages. I will consider each of these in turn.
Sources of Information

The information which the stepparent and custodial parent obtain about the previous spouse is particularly important in terms of structuring a myth. The information which is obtained contributes to the formation of an image of the non-custodial parent's lifestyle and concerns.

The main source of information about the non-custodial parent was that which was passed on by children through their own contact on access visits. Given the nature of the information which is passed by children about previous partners as second hand, its truth value may be questionable. Nevertheless, knowledge gained in this way is treated as largely unproblematic by the custodial parent. Sources of information may be unsolicited or solicited.

The information about a parent which is unsolicited will arise in the course of conversation. I detail below a conversation which occurred between Polly and Simon during one of my fieldwork visits. The importance of this conversation not only lies in its illustrative value with regard to how information is passed by children about parents. It also illustrates the way the raising of these subjects by the children
themselves gives parents what may be termed a natural opportunity to ask questions about the previous spouse which does not make the child feel uncomfortable or disloyal.

Polly had returned home from school and quite soon after arriving at the house she asked if she could telephone her mother. When she returned to the living room after making the call, a conversation took place. The conversation needs to be considered in two parts. Firstly, it contains information which is relatively inconsequential to Simon’s present concerns. This constitutes the major part of the conversation and can be viewed as gaining information which is of interest for its own sake. Nevertheless, the direction and tenor of the conversation allows Simon to ask, finally, about an issue which could have important consequences on future access and maintenance arrangements. Simon asks about the outcome of Clive’s search for employment:

**Polly:** It was Clive. [her emphasis]

**Simon:** What do you mean “It was Clive”

**Polly:** I thought I saw Clive today but he didn’t say hello.
Simon: Why not?

Polly: I don't know. He was at Barlows. Mummy and Clive do work for them sometimes.

Simon: They work for Barlows?

Polly: Yes. They get occasional work there.

Simon: Did Clive get that job?

Polly: I don't know. He still hasn't heard.

We can see that Simon was able to raise the issue of Clive's employment within the context of a conversation initiated by Polly. Meg had similar cause to follow up a remark Virginia had made about her father. As can be seen from the life history data contained in this thesis, and as I noted in Chapter Five Meg particularly felt that she had not received equitable treatment from the legal outcome of her divorce. Specifically, she felt that James could afford legal representation which was superior to her own. In addition, in common with Jane's life history account, Meg disputed the honesty with which James presented his financial details to the Courts. The information which Virginia gives her adds
further support to her view that James' financial situation is far superior to that which he declared. I witnessed the following conversation in this connection:

Virginia: Dad lost £100 from his pocket last weekend when we were at the pub. It fell out of his pocket.

Meg: £100? Where did he get that from?

Virginia: He got it from the horses ['horses' is a euphemism for rent of pasture land and stabling.] He gets it every week.

Meg: (Comment addressed to CH) I always knew he had an income. I've just never been able to prove it. Now this £100 from the horses proves it.

In addition to children acting as sources of information in this direct way, letters sent to children can also convey knowledge about the non-custodial parent. Louise's first husband, Jonathan,
does not have access to the children (see Louise's life history in Chapter Two). His only form of contact is letters and cards sent to them at birthdays and Christmas. The contents of one letter raised a lot of unanswered questions for Louise and illustrates the ambiguity which partial information gives rise to. Nevertheless, the contents of the letter were clear about Jonathan's present situation.

During one of my visits I asked Louise whether she had recently heard from Jonathan. She replied that Alex had had a letter within which was enclosed a copy of a university graduation programme and a photograph. Louise showed me these documents. Jonathan had written to Alex to tell him that he had received a university degree. The graduation programme was enclosed as it contained his name and the photograph was a momento of the occasion. Nevertheless, the photograph pictured Jonathan with a female friend.

This was of particular interest to Louise. She wondered whether the woman with Jonathan in the photograph was his girlfriend with whom she had heard he was living (see below) or whether it was a more casual acquaintance from the university. The letter itself contained no mention of the woman at all. In addition, Louise questioned Jonathan's motives in
sending a photograph in which he was pictured with someone else. Specifically, Louise wondered whether Jonathan was making a silent statement to her that he had a girlfriend or whether there was a more innocuous explanation for the photograph. To date these questions have remained unanswered for Louise.

However, the contents of the letter itself, conveying Jonathan's academic success, were sufficient to cause Louise to comment "He's doing everything now that I wanted him to do when we were married. Making something of his life". In this way, the contents of the letter directly contributed to her image of his lifestyle and concerns which are discussed below.

In addition to children being important sources of knowledge about a previous partner, friends and relatives from the previous marriage also act in the same role. Thus, Louise knew from a cousin that Jonathan had a long standing girlfriend and had obtained a job near to where she was currently living.

Similarly, Frances was able to give me an on-going and detailed account of the key events in her first husband's life who had been living in the United States since his own remarriage. The wealth of detail Frances was able to provide was gained from relatives and
friends from this marriage who formed an appropriate
network of contacts.

The depth of information which Frances had about her
husband Peter included knowledge of his separation from
his second wife and his decision to fight for custody
of his two daughters of that marriage, Charlotte and
Felicity. Frances knew that Peter had taken
Charlotte and Felicity out of the United States in
order to avoid a court injunction giving custody to his
wife and that he had stayed in France before visiting
England and finally returning to America.

Frances expressed a certain sympathy towards Peter’s
situation which in part needs to be explained in terms
of comparisons she made between her first husband and
her second husband. In particular, Frances stated that
Peter was her ‘friend whereas I don’t think George is’.
Nevertheless, her attitude needs also to be explained
in terms of the problems which Frances felt Peter’s
second wife, Gwen, had caused for her son Julian. As I
noted in Chapter Five, Gwen had accused Julian of
sexually assaulting his half-sisters whilst he was
staying with the family in the United States. This
accusation had led to court action and Julian leaving
the United States.
The sympathy which Frances felt for Peter led her to offer to be a character witness on Peter's behalf in the divorce action. Frances particularly felt aggrieved at the accusations which she had heard Gwen had made about Peter. Frances commented on these as follows:

She [Gwen] has been saying all sorts of things about him [Peter]. She says he's beaten her up and been violent. I know he's not like that. He was never like that with me. He's not that sort of person. I know. I'm quite willing to say so too if he [Peter] wants me to. I'd vouch for him.

The form in which Frances made her offer of help to Peter was by making this statement to a friend of Peter's. As Frances commented 'I told Craig I'd vouch for him [Peter] if he wanted me to'. I now consider the transmission of messages in detail.

**Transmission of Messages**

In similarity to sources of information, children also play an important role in the transmission of messages between custodial and non-custodial parent. Collins
argues that using children as go-betweens between stepparent and custodial parent should be avoided as such a strategy involves 'depriving the children of their own importance and individuality' (1988, p182). In addition, using children as go-betweens between custodial and non-custodial parent also places them in a position of arbiter and gives them a responsibility which may be equally unfair.

Nevertheless, regardless of any moral or ethical question, the use of children in this way was symbolic for parents of the ending of their own relationship. It also reduced the opportunity for the new partner to feel insecure and threatened by the continuing relationship of the previously married. Moreover, there were further pragmatic reasons to be considered as such a method of communication carried fewer potential dangers of hostility and animosity being expressed.

I noted above that following the incident between Simon and May they made no direct contact to each other for some weeks. However, Simon took the children on their next customary visit to their mother on the assumption that she would be there to receive them. On arriving at May's house, Simon sent his son James in to check that she would have them and to ask whether they could
stay for an extra day whilst he and the other children remained in the car outside. Whilst Simon could easily have gone to the house himself and left James in the car, his decision not to do so has to be seen in the context of their recent altercation. Accordingly James returned and also had a message from his mother to his father. Simon reported that May had said, through James, that the children could stay but:

If I wasn't able to collect them could I give them enough bus fare so they could get home.

Simon and May were therefore able to avoid further risks of confrontation by avoiding face to face contact. Nevertheless, May was still able to raise the issue of financial responsibilities for the children. This time, however, without fear of repercussions.

Meg's annoyance at her husband's lack of financial contribution to their children's financial upkeep was slightly appeased by asking him to make contributions to particular events in the children's lives. However, Meg did not approach James directly about these matters but asked her children to act as carriers of these messages. One such one-off payment was arranged as follows. It is clear from Meg's comments that even
when children act as carriers of messages they also transmit information about the non-custodial parent:

Julia wants to go on the Youth Club holiday again this year. I told her I'd pay half and to ask her father for the other half. So when she went there she did. He said he would but he only had £60 on him. As she was leaving on Sunday she asked him again. He turned to Marilyn [James' girlfriend] and said "Have you got £20". Julia said she looked at him daggers but she gave it him.

In terms of more long term financial arrangements, Meg takes a more prominent role. In this way she acknowledges the importance of the request which is not fitting for children to make on their own behalf. Moreover, by taking a more active part the chances of success are increased. The children themselves had been particularly unsuccessful with regard to this particular issue when they had previously raised it themselves.

However, Meg does not contact James directly. The use of a letter provided the means by which to accomplish this without risking face to face confrontation.
Nevertheless, the letter is not posted. The children take it on their next visit. In this way, the contents of the letter will be received in a more favourable light than may be the case if it had arrived through the letter box unannounced. Meg's final comment displays her attitude towards James:

Virginia went to see her father this week-end. I sent a note with her saying that as the girls were older and wanting things could he consider giving them pocket money on a regular basis. Virginia came back with £4. £2 for each of them. He's promised to give them that every week. I must have touched his conscience.

Letter writing was also an alternative form of communication between Simon and May in which financial and access arrangements were sounded. The outcome can be rather long winded and circulatory. Thus, Simon wrote to May asking her if she could make a contribution to the children's school trip to France and May replied in writing that she had passed the letter on to her boyfriend Clive.

Simon showed me the letter he had received from May in which it stated that her reason for so doing was that
because she and Clive had joint financial arrangements effectively 'you [Simon] are asking him for a contribution also'. After I had read the letter, Simon commented "What sort of relationship have they? Not very close I don't think". The implications of the letter had therefore created an image of May and Clive's relationship for Simon which was not necessarily a realistic one. This image serves to bolster other images which have been developed about May and her present life, the accuracy of which has to be doubted given the nature of the sources of information.

Clive finally replied that he did not feel he could make a contribution to the children's school trip as he did not feel his own financial position would accommodate it. The effect of Clive's letter was to create anger by Jane and Simon at his refusal. They argued that with five children to keep their own financial situation was not that comfortable either. However, there was little they felt they could do about the situation and therefore the use of a letter, by Clive, was successful in avoiding what would probably have been more direct antagonism.

Notwithstanding these comments, there is one final point which I wish to make in connection with the use
of letters as carriers of messages. Whilst their more positive aspects can be said to be the avoidance of face-to-face conflict, in more negative terms any conflict which arises from them becomes deposited with the recipient of the letter. As there is no means of offloading this conflict directly onto its perpetrator, through a row for example, the letter also serves to justify the negative attitudes and images of the myth. The effect of a further letter from May to Simon demonstrates this.

In addition to organising financial and access arrangements, letter writing also provided a means through which disputes regarding the children themselves could be aired. One such dispute arose between Simon and May with regard to James. Simon had told James that he could not give him permission to leave school at lunch times. A short while later, Simon received a letter from May, stating that she could not agree with Simon on this matter. The letter contained her reasons, the nature of which were sufficient to make Jane, as 'principal custodian' (Burgoyne and Clark, 1984) of the children particularly angry. The letter stated:

I think James is responsible enough to have a lunch time pass. You must think so too as
he is left in charge of the other children.
....Some elderly neighbours told me the other
day what a nice boy he was.

Jane's reaction to the letter indicates her view that
although she is the person who undertakes the major
responsibility for the children's welfare and upkeep,
ultimately May, who has correspondingly been neglectful
of such parental duties, will receive the rewards of
Jane's endeavour. Jane's comments also reflect on the
perceptions of wickedness that stepmothers hold which
were discussed in Chapter Three:

What's she [May] done to make him
[James] a nice boy? It's me who does
all the washing, cooking and cleaning.
But if anything goes wrong it will be
my fault.

Jane's comments indicate that an image of May is a
crucial reference point for her understanding of May's
character and concerns. It also provides a basis on
which response is legitimated. Key events and direct
and indirect sources of contact each contribute to the
shaping and structuring of a myth about the non-
custodial parent. Essentially, they provide the
substance of image formation. These images are the subject of the next section.

**IMAGES: THE MYTH'S CENTRAL VALUE**

In a reference about the images which parents form about children, Backett argues that there were 'two main levels on which respondents constructed images of their child' (1982, p18). These were abstract images and grounded images. Abstract images were derived from the social stock of knowledge about childhood generally whereas grounded images arose from biographical situations.

The images which were constructed about the divorced spouse were also grounded in biographical situations as I have outlined above. Moreover, abstract images which I discuss here were derived from the social stock of knowledge which pertains to parental responsibility. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is an interplay between the two. Thus, grounded images will be supported by reference to more abstract concerns. Each of the remarks by the women in the study outlined below use biographical data to support their view of abstract concerns. In addition, abstract images can also convey
the appearance of a stereotype when these images are assigned to an individual. This, in fact, then raises certain problems if we want to understand the particular relationship between grounded and abstract images.

Sykes notes that a 'myth may contain a stereotype or stereotypes which are in themselves 'ready-made' structurisations of a situation' (1965, p324). Given that stereotypes are composite characterisations of a particular class or group of people, they express clearly social attitudes to the class or group in either a negative or positive way as well as portraying the corresponding attitudes and values of that group. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the data here whether the stereotype to which abstract images are assigned influences an individual's perception of a situation or whether situations themselves build up to the formation of an image which fits a stereotype. However, although Sykes states 'The subject of myth and of the various elements that it contains is extremely complex' (1965, p325) it is clear that a myth can contain both a structuring of situations as they have occurred and such ready-made structurations which the stereotype conveys.
In addition, assumptions about parental responsibility provide a ready-made reference point for the structuring of attitudes towards the non-custodial parent and in this sense image formation is abstract. In particular, the images which were formed spoke of the more neglectful aspects of the non-custodial parents behaviour. Moreover, these were referenced in terms of the ideological requirements of what constitutes a good mother and a good father.

Jane's comments regarding May portray this clearly. In particular, in Jane's view May had contravened one of the most important expectations of motherhood that the children come first. May had put her own needs first. She had left her children. For Jane this is beyond understanding. The image therefore portrayed in itself is one of wickedness. Jane remarked:

I never have been able to totally accept how she could have left the children. I can understand how she could have left Simon because I left my husband. I could understand that but I couldn't understand how she could have left the children.
The composite nature of biographical events and her attitudes regarding May's behaviour ultimately led Jane to define May as 'mad'. For Jane, this was the only way that she could make sense of May's behaviour which appeared to contravene all expectations of acceptable behaviour.

Frances similarly held a rather negative view of George's first wife, Linda. In a summary comment about the various unkind acts which Frances attributed to Linda, Frances' bases her attitude on the absence of qualities which are generally admired. Nevertheless, her views are tempered by a certain understanding of Linda which arises from their positions as the wife and ex-wife of George. Whilst the element of competitiveness which I described in Chapter Five is still present, it is moderated through experience. Frances expressed her feelings in the following way:

I don't like her [Linda]. I mean she's done it and she's said it [various unkind acts]. She does strike me as very mean and very selfish. I still think she's rather mean actually. I still don't basically feel we're the same sort of people. Empathy yes. Sympathy no.
I don't think she's a warm person. I don't think so.

The image which both Meg and Louise have constructed about their first husbands directly concerns their neglect as providers for their children. Their comments illustrate how strongly the ties of responsibility to children are perceived. Divorce does not sever the moral force of the obligation although it may make it difficult to enforce.

In particular, the information which Meg and Louise have obtained about their first husbands, James and Jonathan, leads them to develop an image of these men firstly as having deliberately evaded their financial responsibility and secondly as being financially comfortable.

Louise's comments indicate her justification for her attitude. Specifically, Louise feels that she is entitled to apply for a maintenance order which was not instituted at the time of divorce. Louise explained her attitude towards Jonathan in the following way:

It's not as though I've harassed him. I've given him plenty of time to sort himself out financially. I feel very
angry. He's got off scott free all these years. He's got a good job now and he can help towards Belinda and Michael. Belinda wants to go to university. That means she'll need supporting for at least another nine years.

Meg has similar comments to make about James' financial position:

I wouldn't mind if he [James] was struggling like we were when we were in Ashley [their marital home] but he's not. He's very comfortably off.

Meg also decided to apply for an increase in maintenance payments during the fieldwork year. There can be no doubt that the construction of myths about James and Jonathan were a contributory factor in the decisions to take this course of action. The message of the myth was clear. These men had evaded their responsibilities and were well able to afford to fulfil them. The evidence which had constructed and shaped the myth arose from a variety of sources in which key events and forms of contact played a major part. It has to be argued, therefore, in agreement with Sykes that 'Through these various elements myth has a very
considerable effect upon the way in which an individual perceives a given situation' (1965, p324).

Nevertheless, the myth cannot be seen as being the total answer to why individuals act as they do. The effect of myth on action has to be seen in terms of the wider concerns of the principal actors at the point in time that such action is taken.

**MYTH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ACTION**

In order to examine the place of myth in the total structure of decision making and process in stepfamily life, I wish to consider other salient factors which led both Meg and Louise to try to alter their existing maintenance arrangements.

There were two main factors which were important in Meg's case. Firstly, she had become particularly worried about the financial cost of her two daughters to her second husband Frank. Meg's feelings on this matter are directly related to those indicated in Chapter Five that in second wifehood nothing can be taken for granted. Frank's two children, Sandy and David, had left home. In consequence, Meg did not
feel that she was making a contribution to their welfare which would balance the contribution which Frank was making financially to her children. Thus, the duties and obligations which Meg assigns unproblematically to James become problematic when assigned to Frank. Meg's attitude confirms those found by Wallerstein and Kelly that 'Several women also felt a sense of obligation at bringing dependent children into the marriage' (1980, p287). Meg commented:

I've really become very conscious since Sandy and David left that Frank’s keeping my two. If their father would just send them so much a month towards clothes it would help. I've got the family allowance so that's £7 each I feel I can spend on them and Frank says to let him know if I need more but I don't like to. Frank doesn't mind but I do. He says he knew what he was taking on when we married and in a couple of years they will have both left but I think it's so unfair that he has to help keep them when their own father doesn't.

In addition, a second factor which needs to be considered is Meg’s own personal financial situation.
Meg had recently changed employment and this had resulted in a decrease in wages. Meg's comments show that she attributes this directly as justification for her decision to apply for an increase in maintenance. Further justification comes in the form of Frank's capacity to provide financial help through his ability to work. Nevertheless, we should remember that the fact that he does not work, and is perceived to be able to, by implication suggests his lack of responsibility.

Meg commented:

I've been in touch with the Court and asked them to send the back maintenance and also a form, if there is one, to apply for a variation. I earn less now and I think that's a good enough reason. Anyway, I don't see why the court can't make him [James] get a job. When we got divorced he said he'd got a depressive illness which prevented him getting work. He's well qualified.

There's nothing stopping him finding something.

In Louise's case, there were two further factors which made their contributions to her decision to apply for maintenance. One of these was that, as I have
discussed in Chapter Five, she and Don were moving house and any extra money would be welcome to help meet their financial commitments. Secondly, Louise expressed the same feelings as Meg of financial responsibility for her own children. In particular, Louise's feelings arise from her biographical experience. By corollary, therefore, Jonathan, as the children's natural father is also financially responsible for them. Louise commented:

I've always felt they [her children] were my responsibility. Not Don's. That's why I've always worked full-time. I don't want him [Don] to turn round to me one day and say "I've kept your kids". When it's happened to you once (7) you're careful to make sure you've got some independence.

It can be seen therefore that whilst myth is a very potent force in shaping an individual's perception of a situation, the myth itself is only one factor which leads to courses of action. Consequently, I would argue that the effect of myth and its relationship to action has to be seen in terms of the total concerns of the actor at that point in time.
As can be seen the construction of a myth has many elements. Key events, which form the substances of 'stories', give form to the myth. Within this 'story' values, attitudes and justifications are given. The values which are encompassed in the myths about the non-custodial parent relate primarily to the responsibilities of parenthood. The attitudes conveyed by stepparents and custodial parents is that these responsibilities have been evaded. Justifications arise through the use of key events and knowledge acquired about the non-custodial parent through various sources.

The strength of the myth's central message is the construction of an image about the non-custodial parent. This image is reinforced by the indirect nature of knowledge acquisition. Specifically, indirect methods are more conducive to supporting belief in the myth than denying it. This is due to the questionable nature of the information itself given its second hand value.

Finally, I must indicate that one cannot deny the process of selection and interpretation of key events and information by stepparents and custodial parents in the construction of a mythology. In particular, the adversarial nature of divorce and the list of
grievances and unresolved tensions which thereby arise are also contributory factors to seeking out and emphasising the more negative qualities in a non-custodial parent.

CONCLUSION

I have illustrated in this chapter the pervasive nature of the role of myth and myth construction in the stepfamily. I have considered the use of myth as a coping mechanism through the construction of a typology of mythical statements. In so doing I have sought to show how the construction of a myth about stepchildren enables stepparents to legitimate their own feelings and actions towards their stepchildren.

I have, moreover, argued that these myths highlight the contradictions which stepparents face. These contradictions relate to the various ideals of parental love and the reality of day to day life where 'resentment at one time or another in varying degrees seems to be more prevalent than love' (Noble, 1977, p41). The stepparental role is also one of contradiction as the individual is neither full parent nor detached friend and this is further highlighted.
I have also discussed the process by which myths about the non-custodial parent are constructed. I have argued that the use of key events enables stepparents to convey the myth in story form. These key events are selected from both direct and indirect contact with the non-custodial spouse. I have further argued that indirect contact, through children, joint acquaintances and letters, is more prevalent and more preferred as there is less risk of creating further antagonism to an already delicate relationship.

I have also discussed the images of a non-custodial parent which are implicit in the myth. I have argued that the image conveys the sense of evaded parental responsibility and is important in directing the individual's perception of a situation.

Finally, I have discussed the place of myth in the decision making process and I have argued that the role of myth here needs to be located within the wider concerns of the individual.

This chapter brings me to conclude my analysis on the role of myth in the stepfamily. It remains for me to draw some summary conclusions from the data which have been presented in the foregoing chapters and to
indicate the implications for future research. These are the concerns of the final chapter.
NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX: MYTH AND MYTH CONSTRUCTION IN THE STEPPAMILY

1 See Chapter Four, Note 1, where I indicate that Sandy's mother-in-law Josie, was the focus of Meg's antipathy which, I would suggest adds further support to the argument that more concrete factors have a key role to play here.

2 Backett further notes 'They were then further objectified by my process of selection and systematisation in order to present this account' (1982, p10). I can only endorse this comment.

3 This is not to say that stepparents' justifications were not in themselves warranted. Stepchildren do not always act in the most reasonable of ways and this is a point which should not be lost sight of.

4 I have been deliberately obtuse here with regard to keeping the discussion general in order to protect the individuals concerned who made these statements from any repercussions within their own families.
NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX (CONTINUED)

5 See Land (1984) for a discussion on women and maintenance.

6 See Chapter Four where children also take action as go-betweens in their own right.

7 Louise here is referring to her first marriage where she felt particularly belittled by her husband Jonathan.
remarried couples, when they consider their own family lives, try to believe that, despite complications of various kinds, they are 'making a go of it'.

(Burgoyne and Clark, 1984, p27)
INTRODUCTION

This thesis has been concerned to describe and to analyse the lived reality of stepparenthood. I now wish to draw some general conclusions from the data presented here. In particular, I wish to consider the place of the stepfamily and stepparenthood in terms of wider notions of family life and parenting. I will do so by considering the roles of stepmother and stepfather in the context of stepfamilial mythologies. This chapter will also include my comments on the policy implications of this thesis and areas for future research work.

THE STEPFAMILY: A VARIANT FORM OF FAMILY

The data presented in this thesis cannot be separated from the location of the stepfamily in society both temporally and spatially. In particular, the stepfamily as a variant form of 'family' will also be subject to the political ideas of 'familism' and the ideologies and values of 'familialism' (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982, p26). In a society which emphasises the positive benefits of family life, particularly in relation to
the needs of children, and which also uses the term 'family' as a positive and sought after value in a variety of taken-for-granted ways, it is not surprising that the remarried stress the need to 'make a go of it' (Burgoyne and Clark, op cit).

The optimism which the couples in this study expressed with regard to their expectations of stepparenthood prior to family reconstitution can also be located in the positive images of family life which we hold. The desire to recreate 'normal' family life arises in part from the strength of such imagery. Moreover, family reconstitution presents itself as a solution to the ambiguities of single parenthood and the more practical problems of childcare and domestic responsibility.

The life histories in this thesis indicate the degree of upheaval which divorce and bereavement give rise to in this respect.

However, although the idealisation of family life presents a goal to strive for, if not actually realised, the stepfamily is presented with ambiguous and contradictory images. On the one hand it holds a jaundiced image of second best and yet on the other it presents a face of 'normality' in the sense that the family once again comprises two parents. Society can heave a sigh of relief that the social problem of
single parenthood has been solved but the solution would appear to be rather less than ideal. The stepfamily is, in this way, very much hidden from society.

The role of the stepparent is similarly ambiguous. Neither full parent nor disinterested observer, the stepparental role operates in a vacuum of normative expectations. Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz sum this up when they state 'The ambiguity of this situation arises in part from a lack of consensus about exactly what function the stepparent should fulfil vis-a-vis the child, and in part from limitations in the extent to which a stepparent can play the part of a natural parent, no matter how much he or she may want or expect to do so (1977, p111). The desire to be a 'full' parent to their stepchildren forms part of the optimistic imagery of stepfamily life. However the contradictions which stepparents are presented with limited the extent to which they were able to achieve this.

Role ambiguity, therefore, forms part of the problem of stepparenthood. In order to judge its more specific relevance we need to consider its relationship to the various contradictions of the stepmother and stepfather
roles. I now wish to do this with special reference to the place of mythology in stepfamily life.

**THE MEANING OF MYTH IN STEPFAMILY LIFE**

I have described two forms of myth in this thesis which have opposing meanings in the lives of stepfamily members. For heuristic reasons I will distinguish between them in the following way. The myth of the wicked stepmother is the first form of myth which I described and because of its common availability to all in society I will refer to it as a 'public' myth. The second form of myth which I have presented is concerned with the individual personalities within the stepfamily. For these reasons I will refer to it as a 'private' myth.

In so doing, I am aware that these terms only broadly signify the distinction and meaning of the myths concerned and the place of the stepfamily in relation to them. The comments I make here therefore need also to take account of those of Morgan who states that 'the family is not only an interesting or special case in the attempts to relate the interpersonal and the structural but ... it is the institution in society
which is centrally concerned with these interconnections' (1985, p275).

In particular, it should be noted that each form of myth operates both publically and privately. Moreover, they do so separately and in combination and one should not overlook their various interrelationships. In addition, these terms tend to mask the social and ideological nature of the myths. This is particularly so with regard to the designation 'private' myth. Nevertheless, I hope that some of these features will be made more clear in the following discussion. I specifically wish to consider in turn the meaning of each of these myths with reference to the ideas, values and beliefs which they contain and their place in the stepfamily.

'Public' Mythologies of Wickedness

I have argued that the wicked stepmother myth is essentially concerned with the ideological requirements of motherhood. In particular, such a mythology presents an opposing case and indicates the likely repercussions of acting in ways which are discrepant to the values of motherhood and beliefs in the needs of children. As I noted in Chapter One, the myth therefore indicates the contradictions inherent in the
role of stepmother (and indeed mother) and it is through this contradiction that the 'public' myth provides 'a kind of anticipatory socialisation for those involved in transitions' (Measor and Wood, 1984, p18).

The form in which the myth provides 'anticipatory socialisation' is by specifically telling stepmothers how not to act. This leads to a situation where stepmothers have to devise various management strategies to overcome its maligning message. The power of the myth in this context can be seen in its rigorous effectiveness. Stepmothers go to great lengths not to be seen to be acting 'wickedly'.

For the stepmother herself such management strategies result in a degree of powerlessness which is not experienced by natural mothers. Specifically, stepmothers act by proxy in relation to their stepchildren. The natural father becomes a go-between. Stepmothers also strive to be 'perfect' mothers and this also renders them powerless.

This powerlessness needs also to be situated with reference to the position of women in the family and notions of 'familialism' (Barrett and McIntosh, op cit). Essentially, the mother-wife is the focal point
of family values, the 'angel in the house'. The stepmother and second wife, however, faces various mythologies which define her status as rather less than perfect and certainly rather less than angelic. To act in ways which support the myth brings severe penalties.

When these features are considered in combination with the ever present structures of domination and subordination within the family we can appreciate the extent of the stepmother's powerlessness. Backett (1982) indicates that mothers hold power through their greater knowledge of their children and the increased legitimacy accrued thereby. This is denied the stepmother. In the stepfamily, it is the natural parent who has the legitimate role with regard to children. Thus, the 'petty power' (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982, p65) of the mother-wife becomes the impotence of the stepmother-second wife.

There is no doubt that stepmothers certainly try to fight back, to accrue some power and some control over their own lives. But this is gained at the severe cost of guilt and loss to their self-esteem. And, more importantly, with the supreme risk of being defined by self and others as malevolent. We can see, in these terms therefore, the supreme importance to stepmothers
of the management strategies I described in Chapter Three.

Importantly, the effectiveness of the mythology of wickedness cannot be separated from various ideologies of motherhood and the ambiguous nature of the 'step' relationship. In the absence of any other normative framework for stepmotherhood, the requirements of these ideologies to put children and husband first, to be a carer of and not to be cared for, are the only form in which stepmothers can make sense of their role.

The situation for stepfathers, however, is slightly different. There can be no doubt that their position too is anomalous and ambiguous. Like stepmothers they have no automatic 'rights' attached to their status. Nevertheless, they are able to take a role which does not carry penalties for non-compliance. The 'public' mythologies of stepfatherhood, as I have indicated, are seemingly sufficiently ineffective that they can be discounted. In addition, the father role itself is not as well defined as that of the mother role, nor does it carry such exacting standards. Whilst this imprecision makes the father, and hence stepfather, role 'problematic' (Backett, 1982, p195), it also gives stepfathers more freedom of choice. When located in the structural power of family life this freedom means
that the role of stepfather is certainly less oppressive than that of stepmother even though on an experiential and individual level stepfathers may find their personal position exacting.

I would argue that when each of these features are taken into consideration, it is clear that the mythology of wickedness cannot be discounted from an understanding of the realities of stepmotherhood. Moreover, the countervailing themes of mythology and ideology for stepmothers create a further layer of ambiguity to an already undefined role. In comparison with stepfatherhood, stepmotherhood is doubly perjorative.

The familistic theme continues to be encompassed in the 'private' myths of the stepfamily. I would now like to discuss these in detail.

**The Stepfamily's 'Private' Myths**

I have indicated in this thesis that the stepparents in the study constructed various myths about their stepchildren and the non-custodial parent. The themes of parental responsibility formed the central message of these myths in a way which further highlights the contradictory nature of natural and social parenting.
The responsibilities of parenthood prioritise children's needs. As Backett states 'the immediate needs of children were felt to be predominant in the everyday familial interactions' (1982, p33). Nevertheless, in the stepfamily the children's needs may be divergent to those of the stepparent and natural parent. The more usual period in first marriages of time spent alone as a couple before the arrival of children is collapsed in stepfamily life. Children are ever present and the couple relationship has to be negotiated in the context of children's needs. Ferri remarks on this when she comments 'it seems clear that the rewards and satisfactions which remarriage may bring to the adults involved do not automatically entail corresponding gains for the children: their developmental needs do not conveniently change in response to changes in their family situation' (1984, p119).

Whilst children's and stepparents' needs may diverge, the stepparent nevertheless undertakes the routine day to day physical, emotional and financial care of children. At this level, the stepparent role is that of any parent. Nevertheless, the notion of a return for their work is the antithesis of good parenthood. Although Rapoport, Rapoport and Strelitz comment that 'Reciprocity is of key importance in family relations',
they do so in a chapter which is concerned with setting out the authors' biases (1977, p30). The place of their comment in the context of their work is therefore suggestive that such a view is not orthodox.

The 'private' myths of harsh judgements and comparisons contain parental fears and worries which arise from the contradictions of stepparental responsibilities. This is further evidenced in the fact that stepparents feel able to retell the myths without qualification. They do not feel they have to soften the remarks they make through comments regarding the stepchild's more positive qualities in the way that Backett suggests natural parents do (1982, p104). Their role, therefore, as social parent enables them to construct these myths. Nevertheless, the content of the myths, the stepchild's behaviour, is the very stuff of natural parental concern.

Notions of parental responsibility are also the focus of myths constructed about the non-custodial parent. As I have argued, the myths particularly state that the non-custodial parent has evaded his or her duty with regard to their children. In addition, the myths relate to specific gender requirements of parenthood. Thus, non-custodial mothers are criticised for their lack of physical and emotional care of their children.
Non-custodial fathers are criticised for their unwillingness to provide financial support. This in itself is indicative of the degree to which the stepparents in the study accepted and felt it appropriate that parental expectations should be understood as a gendered activity.

In similarity to the myths about stepchildren, the myths constructed about the non-custodial parent indicate the contradictory nature of post-divorce and stepparental obligations towards stepchildren. As stepparents, the individuals in the study accepted the obligations of parenthood. On the face of it, therefore, stepparental obligation would render ineffective the need for the non-custodial parent to remain responsible. However, as I have indicated this was not the case. The fact that the non-custodial parent no longer appeared to exercise their responsibilities towards their children was a matter of concern.

These myths therefore speak of the permanency of parental obligation. Divorce and remarriage do not terminate these. In addition, the myth also underlines the non-responsibility of the stepparent. The stepparent may be undertaking the responsibilities of parenthood and be willing to do so, yet ultimately they
are not his or hers to take. The stepparent is after all a social parent.

Whilst the content of these myths is stepfamilial, they hold a different place in the stepparents concerns than the myth of wickedness. These 'private' myths enable the stepparent to manage the various inconsistencies of stepfamily life. In particular, they become legitimations for action. In this sense they operate in a way which is favourable and useful to the stepparent.

Whilst the 'private' myths enable the stepparent to manage stepfamily life, the 'public' myth needs to be managed. It operates as a constraint on action as stepmothers have to devise strategies to overcome its message. We can see, therefore, that although myths point out the contradictions in the social order, the myths of the stepfamily also have contradictory and opposing effects. Nevertheless, there is a unity between 'public' and 'private' myths. Ultimately, through their various constituent elements these myths play 'an important part in determining how an individual will cognitively structure a particular situation' (Sykes, 1965, p324). I have shown, this cognition resonates through the everyday melee of stepfamily life.
This brings me to close my comments on the role of myth in the stepfamily. It remains for me to indicate the importance of this thesis in terms of its policy implications and for future research work.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The policy implications of this thesis are rather more implicit than explicit. In part this arises because the stepfamily is not regarded by society as a social problem in the sense that, say, single-parent families are. Indeed, as I have stated family reconstitution is seen as solving the problem of the single parent as 'normal' family life is recreated. Nevertheless, work on the stepfamily is not only of direct relevance to individuals living in stepfamilies but also to a range of professionals whose daily work brings them into contact with stepchildren, stepmothers and stepfathers. These professionals would include teachers, social workers, legal and health professionals and those concerned with therapy and counselling.

The stereotypifications and poor image of the stepfamily lead many professionals to consider that stepchildren particularly are faced with a rather less
than ideal family situation. The ramifications of
this are seen in terms of assessment of such children
where biases of this nature become evident. As Ferri
states 'The present [Ferri's] study's findings have
hinted that teachers have less than positive attitudes
towards parents in reconstituted families' (1984,
p120).

The poor image which such professionals hold can only
reinforce the various mythologies which confront those
living in stepfamilies. It will not be until we have a
greater understanding of, and a greater empathy for,
stepfamily members that such images can be rewritten.
In this broad sense I hope that this thesis will
contribute to a greater understanding of
stepparenthood.

In addition, there are some specific features which I
feel are of value to professionals working with
stepfamilies. In particular, the construction of
mythologies regarding the non-custodial parent arise
out of the problems of the divorce process. In
particular, the adversarial nature of divorce sets the
tone of opposition between ex-spouses. Moreover, the
essentially negative experience of the judicial process
which the individuals in this study described with
regard to their divorces leads to a situation where
unresolved conflicts continue to dominate post-divorce relationships. The situation is therefore inherently combative and explosive. I am aware that the divorce court reconciliation services aim to ameliorate some of these problems. Nevertheless, their facilities are not available widely and the proportion of divorcing couples they are able to deal with is inevitably small. It is essential, therefore, that we recognise how these structural features enhance the construction of negative mythologies about an ex-partner. Such mythologies only contribute to further strain in already fragile relationships.

Nevertheless, a greater understanding of the stepfamily can only be realised as more research work is carried out. I would now like to indicate the areas of work which I feel are important.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS

This study has concentrated on the roles of stepmother and stepfather in a study of stepfamily life. Nevertheless, it cannot claim to be exhaustive of all the areas of work which needed to be undertaken. There
are three areas of work which I feel specifically need further attention.

The first of these concerns work on stepchildren. Ferri's (1984) work is the only British study on stepchildren and is based on statistical analyses. The methodological emphasis of the study in consequence leaves the experiential and interactive realms of stepchildhood unexplored. In particular, such work would be a useful adjunct to the present study.

The second area of research I feel is important is work related to stepfatherhood and the role of the second husband. I have noted in this thesis that my findings particularly with regard to being a second husband were suggestive only. This situation needs rectifying if we are to understand the stepfamily in all its meanings.

I have also noted in this thesis that the absence of a mythology of wickedness is contradictory to images presented of stepfathers in the media. The stepfather as sexual abuser does not appear to have influenced male action in the stepfamily in the ways that stepmothers are affected by myths of wickedness. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the stepfather could not become the 'folk devil' of the future (Cohen,
It is only through further research work that the answers to these questions can be found.

My comments with regard to further work on stepfatherhood would support those of Cunningham-Burley (1987) with regard to research on fatherhood generally. Cunningham-Burley states 'A sensitive approach to collecting data from men is needed to explore the meaning and significance of the family' (1987, p104). The meanings of stepfatherhood should similarly be approached.

Finally, I feel that further work needs to be conducted on the role of myth. I indicated in Chapter Two that myth construction was not confined to stepchildren and non-custodial parents but also involved the significant others of wider stepfamily relationships. Moreover, if we consider the work of Sykes (1965), Backett (1982) and Measor and Woods (1984) it would appear that the role of myth has an application well beyond the stepfamily. Myth provides rationale and legitimation for action, it shapes individual perception and so feeds into action. A study of myth in other fields would therefore add to our knowledge of this pervasive form of knowledge construction.
A FINAL WORD

I have argued above that there is a need for greater knowledge of, and a greater empathy for, the status of stepparenthood. Beset by negative images, it is needful to emphasise the positive. Such a philosophy is encompassed in Ferri's work as she comments 'It is vital ... that the picture of the stepfamily presented in the media should not concentrate on its failures as exemplified by the news stories headlining abuse and cruelty by stepparents' (1984, p121).

The negative image encompassed in stepfamily terminology has also been the subject of much needed revision. Thus, Mead comments 'We also need some new kinship terms .... The word "stepmother", inappropriate in the case of a divorce, has unfortunate implications and is outmoded. The hundreds of thousands of second wives, struggling to give a good life to their husbands' children, deserve a better term' (1975, p124).

Whilst I agree wholeheartedly with the message, nevertheless I do not believe that this is the only way forward. A change of terminology or a stress on the positive will not unmask the underlying assumptions and
inequalities of stepfamily life. It will only add further mystification to a family form steeped in stereotypes and mythology. More importantly, we need to critically examine each facet of stepfamily life, to expose its contradictions. The knowledge gained thereby is the only road to progress.
...of all the social worlds that sociologists study, the family is one of the hardest to observe. The idea of a sociologist sitting in on a family during the hurly-burly of the family meal, children's bedtimes, and the like, solemnly and silently recording it all in a corner of the living room, is obviously absurd; and clearly the kind of interaction that would be observed in such circumstances would bear little relation to what normally happens unobserved. About the only family life which a sociologist can study by direct participant observation is his or her own.

(Goldthorpe, 1987, p1)
INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to challenge Goldthorpe's comments (op cit). Specifically, I wish to confront Goldthorpe's notion that participant observation is not a feasible methodological procedure in the context of the family. On the face of it, therefore, this chapter is concerned to detail the methodological process: the approach used in this study. This is certainly a primary aim and is written in the spirit of Bell and Roberts' words when they comment 'If sociology is to be more than a skilfully constructed device then the research process should be less opaque and more open to scrutiny (1984, p9, emphasis in text).

Nevertheless, such a process cannot be separated from the role of the researcher herself. There is a growing body of 'confessional accounts' (Burgess, 1984, p267) which indicate the importance of reflection by the researcher of his or her role from the earliest beginnings of 'thinking about doing research' to the production and dissemination of the product of these labours. In the light of these, I do not think there can be any doubt of the importance of such an exercise in that 'they do highlight the principles, processes and problems to which researchers need to be
sensitized' (Burgess, 1984, p10, my emphasis). In this way, I believe, they increase the potentiality of academic excellence for which we all must strive.

This chapter therefore also takes account of the need to write the researcher into the research process. Indeed, given the direct association of the research topic to my own biography this procedure is even more pertinent. As a stepmother myself, I felt often that I was indeed studying my own life. This therefore forms the second, but actually, the major theme of this chapter.

The chapter is organised to take account of the 'methodological' issues of the study's focus, access, role, data selection and data recording. Nevertheless, the emphasis is given to the personal in the analysis of these topics. The chapter therefore considers how the status of being a stepmother both helped and hindered in the field, how it raised certain special problems and how these were dealt with.
I commented in the Introduction to this thesis that this research arose from the biographical detail that I was a stepmother. Indeed, my initial submission to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding was to study stepmotherhood. The reasons which I gave concerned gaps in the literature and as I wrote in 1984 the need to concentrate on the 'processual elements of stepmotherhood in the context of ideologies of motherhood'. Whilst my reasons were factually based, there was a more subjective motive.

Stepmotherhood was, not surprisingly, an interest which was close to my heart. I had personally found it a very traumatic experience. It taxed me emotionally in ways which I could never have anticipated. Very often I had felt out of control. To the extent that often I would ask myself who was the child in the relationship? Myself or my stepchildren? Moreover, I never felt that anyone really 'understood' my position.

These very personal experiences had led me to a position which had a twin aim. Firstly, I wanted to research stepmotherhood in order that its findings would help other stepmothers. Secondly, I wanted the
research to engender an understanding of stepmotherhood in others. Such aims are reminiscent of Hammersley's initial career ambitions which he states were 'all in the realm of changing the world dramatically!' (1984, p42). However, as is clear from the very title of this thesis, the focus of the research underwent some change from initial inception to final report.

The process by which this change was evinced indicates the interplay of biographical blindness and intellectual development. It also indicates the importance of the supervisor in PhD thesis construction. In the dialogue which passes between supervisor and student many suggestions and ideas are put forward and discussed. Some are discounted, unheard or put to the back of one's mind for future reference. Others start one on a path of significant discovery. I wish to consider two of these which were important in directing the course by which the thesis would evolve. They were each connected with reviewing the literature.

The first suggestion which my supervisor made in this connection was to read a study by Coffield, Robinson and Sarsby (1980). Coffield et al had conducted participant observation in the family and the published work contained an account of this. My reading of this
marked a turning point in my thoughts about the form in which the study could be conducted. I had previously discounted any possibility of being able to conduct participant observation within the stepfamily. Indeed, I would previously have agreed with Goldthorpe (op cit) that such an approach was impossible. Nevertheless, Coffield, Robinson and Sarsby’s success was a clear sign to me of the possibility of this form of research.

The second turning point arose again through supervisor-student discussion and is particularly indicative of the blindness to which biography and preference can lead. In the course of discussion regarding the various ways I might approach the study of stepmotherhood my supervisor suggested that as there was a ‘lot of work on motherhood’ it might be worthwhile to consider stepfatherhood as well. Such an approach would therefore allow me to take account of the interactive nature of stepfamily life.

His comments certainly gave me pause for thought. As a member of the male sex and without the dubious honour of being a stepparent he indeed had the status of a detachment which could never be mine. I had never until that point considered including stepfathers at all. I held his comments in mind unwilling to let go
of my total commitment to stepmothers. Nevertheless, a reading of the literature, as I have indicated in Chapter One, suggested that there were significant gaps in the knowledge of fatherhood and stepfatherhood. The consideration became a possibility.

The incremental steps which I was taking towards reorientation however cannot be divorced from the more practical considerations of gaining access to possible participants. Whilst the frame of reference with which I regarded the study was undergoing change, in tandem I was also concerned with finding willing individuals who would agree to become the 'objects' of study.

The requirements of completing a thesis inevitably has a time component. This is perhaps more pertinent in today’s climate with the emphasis by the ESRC on 'completion rates'. The need for the possibility of completion within the four year time limit meant that although the fine details of how the research would be conducted were still unresolved, I nevertheless had to get underway my arrangements for access. In January 1985, therefore, the second term of my postgraduate studentship, I started access negotiations. I would now like to consider these with special reference to the personal.
ACCESS

There are numerous examples in the sociological literature where a special characteristic of the researcher was a key factor in obtaining access. Anderson (1923) had previously been a hobo; Delamont was an 'old girl' of the same school as the headmistress with whom she was negotiating access (1984, p25). Nevertheless, access is not a once and for all activity. It is an ongoing and permanent feature of the research process. As Spencer (1982) indicates access involves negotiation to the research location, to individuals and to documents. In order to take account of this I wish to refer to two distinct stages of access negotiation which are important to this discussion. I will term these introductory access and initial access.

Introductory Access

In using the term introductory access I am concerned to describe the process of negotiating entry to the group or individuals who are the focus of research where such groups or individuals are the responsibility of various gatekeepers. This stage was particularly important in this research as there exists no 'independent' or
easily accessible listing of stepfamilies from which to draw research participants. It was therefore necessary to make my initial approaches to the National Stepfamily Association, Cruse and Gingerbread as groups concerned with the remarried, the bereaved and the divorced and separated respectively. I hoped that these groups would be willing to forward a letter to their members on my behalf as a means of contacting stepfamilies who may be willing to take part. In this respect my personal situation and status was one factor that influenced the tenor of negotiation and the final outcome.

The purpose of my enquiries to Cruse and Gingerbread were primarily to gain access to past members who had remarried or were cohabiting. Nevertheless, the organisational structures of Stepfamily, Gingerbread and Cruse widely vary. Stepfamily was a relatively new organisation and had only been founded in 1983. It was run by the Secretary from her home. Gingerbread is largely based on self-help among members and the structure of Cruse emphasises 'professional volunteers. As a consequence, there are significant class and power differences between these group's ruling hierarchies and as I will illustrate these structural factors were perhaps as significant as the effect of more biographical aspects of access negotiations. In
particular, as I wish to show, I was submitted to a series of checks regarding the purpose of the research and my suitability to discuss sensitive issues which were reflective of both biographical and structural features.

My first contacts with Stepfamily were made by letter. As I was still at the stage of thinking that the research would only include stepmothers this was the basis on which I wrote to them in January 1985. Nevertheless, I was a member of the organisation and also a stepmother. I made both of these facts clear in the letter I wrote:

As a member of Stepfamily and as a stepmother myself I am undertaking a study of stepmotherhood at the University of Warwick where I am a postgraduate student.

I am particularly interested in stepmothers’ actual experiences and feelings about their daily lives. I am therefore writing to enquire whether you would be able to help me contact members of Stepfamily who are stepmothers.
In reply to this letter I was invited to meet the Secretary of Stepfamily at her home in Cambridge. Our meeting consisted of lunch at the local pub where the dialogue focussed on our own experiences of stepfamily life. The atmosphere was convivial and accepting. As the secretary had to return to work that afternoon, she invited me to the Stepfamily office where I was left alone to look through files for any information which I felt may be of relevance. This factor is I think particularly illustrative of a new and young organisation eager to enlist support.

The tenor of my negotiation with the organisation Stepfamily was directly related to my personal biography and its relationship to the organisation's own aims. In particular, the Secretary had commented that "There can't be enough research on the stepfamily". Moreover, my position as a stepmother in their view provided automatic assurance of sensitivity. "You know what it's like" was the framework within which our dialogue took place. Nevertheless, membership of Stepfamily was a crucial factor in the degree of access the Secretary was willing to give me. Although a relatively new organisation, Stepfamily had created a lot of interest and had consequently received many requests for assistance with various researches and television projects. The Secretary commented on this
and remarked that "We've decided because of the amount of requests we now get, only to put members' requests in the newsletter". I was fortunate that I fulfilled each and every criteria.

In the light of these comments, therefore, my request for a letter to be sent to members was refused on the grounds that it would be "too time consuming for such a small organisation". Nevertheless, the secretary did agree to insert an "open" letter in the Stepfamily newsletter. This was worded to emphasise the fact that I was also a stepmother and therefore to make the letter more personal. I hoped that this fact would improve my chances of a successful response. Given the national nature of Stepfamily it was also appropriate to indicate the areas which were within travelling distance. The letter was as follows:

Stepfamily have been very kind in agreeing to enclose this letter in their Newsletter and I write to enquire whether you would be able to help me.

As well as being a stepmother to two children aged 10 and 15, I am also a postgraduate student at the University
of Warwick undertaking a PhD thesis on
the stepfamily. My study is particularly
concerned with aspects of stepmotherhood
and the aim of my work is to develop a
wider understanding of the issues involved
in being a stepmother.

The most important part of my work concerns
stepmothers' actual experiences and feelings
about their daily lives. It is therefore
essential for me to talk to stepmothers and
their partners and it is in this connection
that I am calling on your help. If you are
a full-time stepmother and live in any of the
following areas - West Midlands, East
Midlands, Warwickshire, Leicestershire,
Oxfordshire, Shropshire - and both yourself
and your partner would be interested in
this study I would be very pleased to hear
from you. I would of course stress that all
information used in my study will be treated
in the strictest confidence. I look forward
to hearing from you and thank you in advance
for your interest and kind attention.

(Name and University address given)
I received seven replies to this letter, sufficiently few to indicate the need to pursue other avenues of possible access.

My contacts with Cruse can be directly contrasted to those with Stepfamily in the sense of the importance of insider status. Following a telephone call to Cruse to introduce myself and the research, I was asked to submit an outline of the research proposal in writing. This was duly sent. The contents of the letter are indicative of the stage of my thinking with regard to the focus of the research and were as follows:

I am writing to enquire whether your organisation would be able to help me. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Warwick undertaking a PhD thesis on stepmotherhood. The most important part of my work concerns stepmothers' actual experiences and feelings about their daily lives. As I am interested in contacting stepmothers who are married to the previously bereaved I felt it appropriate to contact Cruse.
In particular, I wondered whether you would be willing to forward a letter to your past members who may now have remarried. I will, of course, guarantee complete confidentiality in every respect. In addition, I would, of course, be very pleased to discuss any aspects of the research with you.

In response to this letter I received an invitation to discuss my plans with the local Chairperson at her home. The content of this discussion was less to do with the research aims and more to do with the need for sensitivity in discussing personal issues with the bereaved. The Chairperson also discussed her own experience of bereavement and I felt particularly that I was 'on trial'. There was no doubt in my mind that such sensitivity in dealing with these issues was an important factor for deciding access and in consequence the purpose of the meeting was to appraise my skills in this respect. "Unless you've been bereaved, you can't really understand" was a comment made to me by the Chairperson which encapsulates the initial focus of our meeting and which stands in direct contrast to the tenor of negotiation with the organisation Stepfamily.
My request for a mailing to past members was directly refused on the grounds of members' rights of privacy. In the course of discussion, I also suggested that they may be willing to insert an 'advert' in their newsletter. This was at first treated with caution by the Chairperson, seemingly to require the approval of significant others. In particular, the Chairperson said she had to "check with others on the committee". Nevertheless, it was in fact accepted with little problem.

The 'advert' was duly inserted in two issues of the Cruse newsletter for March and April 1986. Its wording indicates the difficulties I was experiencing with regard to access to the remarried. By asking for contact with single fathers I hoped that I would also pick up those about to be remarried. Nevertheless, the reorientation of the study which I have discussed above was also beginning to be incorporated in the access process. The 'advert' was as follows:

**Calling All Fathers**

**Can You Help Me?**

I wonder if you could help me? I am a research student at the University
of Warwick undertaking a PhD thesis on the stepfamily and as part of my work I would very much like to talk to male members of Cruse about their experiences of single parenthood. I would stress that all information will be treated in the strictest confidence. If you feel you could spare me a little of your time or if you would like more information, please contact me as follows.
(Name and University address printed)

I was also invited to attend Cruse meetings. As these would coincide with the publication of the newsletter containing my 'advert', the Chairperson suggested that she would announce my presence as "this may help you get a better response". However, despite these very kind and committed attempts to facilitate my research, I only received one reply to my request.

My negotiations with Gingerbread can in fact be directly compared with those I experienced with Cruse. In particular, my approach to Gingerbread appeared at first the most fruitful. I telephoned them to introduce my research and was invited to call into their offices to discuss it further with the branch secretary. Our meeting was friendly and informal. The
branch secretary agreed more than willingly to mail my letter to both current and past male members in order that I could make indirect contact with stepmothers and I supplied them with the appropriate letters, stamps and stamped addressed envelopes. These were forwarded to twelve couples and the main body of the text was worded as follows:

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Warwick undertaking a PhD thesis on the stepfamily. My study is particularly concerned to develop a wider understanding of the issues involved in being a stepparent.

The most important part of my work concerns stepparents' actual experiences and feelings about their daily lives. It is, therefore, essential for me to talk to both partners in a stepfamily and it is in this connection that I am calling on your help. I would, of course, stress that all information used in my study will be treated in the strictest confidence.
If you would be willing to take part in my study or would like to hear more about it, please write to me using the stamped addressed envelope.

I received no replies to this letter and despite the fact that follow-up letters were also sent, with substantially the same content, I never received any response.

My contacts with Gingerbread highlight the various rationales which gatekeepers use in allowing access to their membership. Gingerbread provided me with the access I sought with relative ease. Yet I was neither a member of their organisation nor was I researching a subject of immediate concern to their membership. I have no explanation for this except to say that the Branch Secretary had friends who were stepparents and possibly felt the research was worthwhile in its own right. Indeed, she tried very hard to persuade them to take part in the study but without avail.

In total I had eight replies to my various attempts to obtain contact with stepfamilies who would be willing to take part in the research. Whilst there could be a host of reasons to explain non-response generally, it appears that the direct relevance of the research was
an important feature. Thus members of Stepfamily had responded whilst those who were currently members of other organisations did not.

Notwithstanding these general comments, my first meeting with the individuals who had written to me, and indeed their letters, indicated some of the more personal aspects of their own response. Given the emphasis I had put on my own biographical details in the 'open' letter in the Stepfamily newsletter, I would like to consider these in order to illustrate its effect in eliciting their response. As this is very much a two-way process, in addition, I indicate my role in selecting the individuals who took part in the study.

**Initial Access**

I use the term initial access to denote the first stages of contact which I made directly with the families who took part in the study. As I have indicated above, the design of the research was under consideration at the same time as I was arranging introductory access. The poor response rate which I received was a major factor in delineating the research and therefore has to be seen in conjunction with my
changing orientation with regard to including stepfathers.

Of the eight replies I had received, I did not receive a reply from one stepparent to my initial and follow-up letters offering to visit to "discuss the research in more detail". Of the remaining seven, five were families where both partners were stepparents, one was a stepmother whose husband had recently died and one was a stepfather and natural mother. These factors confirmed my decision to include stepfathers more fully than I had initially envisaged. The five stepfamilies where both partners were stepparents provided me with what I felt was a unique opportunity to have some form of unity to the study in the sense that all the individuals were both natural and stepparents. Their varying lengths of marriage from one to six years and the varying ages of children, from two years to adulthood, together with the reasons for remarriage, also I felt would give me comparative data. The recently bereaved stepmother and the stepfather family provided me with useful pilot data but in the circumstances were not included in the main body of the research. Whilst I was able to glean these details from the initial letters which I had received, final decisions were in fact made after I had visited each
family in order to gain an initial commitment from these couples to the research study.

My decision to visit each family to discuss the research in more detail gave me some insights into their own motivations for initially contacting me. Nevertheless, there is no easy answer to the question of to what degree the fact that I was a stepmother influenced their decision. A willingness to participate in a research project stems from a complexity of motives which range from a wish to help a 'good cause' to receiving some sort of gain from the participation. Each person was asked why they had offered their assistance in this respect. Without exception all had seen their participation as furthering the cause of the stepfamily. Each felt their contribution would negate the poor image that stepfamilies face. One stepfather particularly commented "I want people to know that there are successful stepfamilies".

There were, however, more personal reasons for taking part. The research offered a form of contact with another stepparent. In particular, another stepmother. One stepmother's words reflect the need for contact which arises out of a sense of isolation. They also indicate the need for security in that
contact. Being a stepmother was not enough. However, combined with living in her old home town was. "I don't know anyone in a stepfamily. Then I saw your address and you only live down the road from where I used to live".

The nature of the research, the status of the researcher as an 'expert' in a particular field combined with my own biographical details meant that I was seen as a resource for a sympathetic ear. This was the basis on which another stepmother sought contact. Before we had even met she saw me as a source of support and this indicates the parallels between research of this kind and the counselling situation. All families had experienced problems and difficulties in their relationships with their stepchildren which particularly related to antipathetic feelings and prior to our first meeting this stepmother was anxious and worried about her situation. She had thought of telephoning me "for a chat" but had not felt able to at that time. A face to face meeting was necessary to close this social distance.

As far as the stepfathers in the study were concerned, it is a little more difficult to assess their personal motives for agreeing to take part in the research. As I have indicated my initial open letters were primarily
addressed to stepmothers and one would therefore expect stepmothers to be the ones who would express most interest. Thus it is no surprise that in all cases it was they rather than the stepfathers who replied. One letter particularly indicated that the prime response came from each woman. "I have spoken to my husband about this and we are agreeable ....". One stepfather's comments indicate why stepfathers were agreeable and this stems from a husband's wish to help his wife. "My wife wanted to do it and I agreed for her".

I would suggest that due to the focus of the open letters stepfathers felt that their role was one of support to their wives rather than one of equal importance. Nevertheless, research on grandfatherhood indicates the peripheral role which men generally see is theirs to familial research. As Cunningham-Burley comments 'The grandfathers ... treated the interviews very differently [to grandmothers]. They laughed and joked, came and went, and tended to be somewhat peripheral to the proceedings' (1987, p93). Stepfathers' role on the periphery of family life is further reflected in the fact that, as this thesis indicates, stepfathers generally did not see their role as problematic in the way that stepmothers did. As one stepfather commented "what's there to say?".
Notwithstanding these factors, during my first visit to the five families which I had singled out as likely prospects, I felt it was necessary to stress that I wanted to include stepfathers as well as stepmothers in the study. I also stressed that I would want to visit each couple "regularly for twelve months in order that I can take account of any changes which occur in this time". These remarks were taken by each individual very much at their face value. Each couple felt that it was a good idea to study change as they had already experienced many changes in their careers as stepparents up to that time.

In addition, I remarked that the research would involve some taped interviews but that in the main it would consist of me visiting "just for a chat". I felt it important to signal the kind of role I would be taking but these nebulous terms were also quite deliberate. Although, as I have indicated my plans were to take a participant observation role in the stepfamily, such a role could only be carried out with the willingness and acceptance of the families concerned. The personal nature of social research as a relationship between researcher and researched not only reflects on issues of dominance and subordination, stranger or friend and gender, in on-going research of this nature it also reflects on the more interpersonal factors of social
life. Ultimately, this becomes whether the researcher is a welcome intrusion in the stepfamily or an unwelcome one. I will return to this issue later.

I left each couple to discuss my proposal and said that I would telephone them the following week to find out whether they would be willing to take part. For my own part, I had been treated with a warmth and a welcome which calmed my extremely nervous interior. I never slept a wink the night before my first visits! I felt both empathy and sympathy for each family and could only wait even more nervously before I telephoned to find out whether they would be willing to take me on! Fortunately, they all agreed.

I had reached the stage where the actual fieldwork was arranged and finalised. It was now a case of actually carrying it out. I would like to detail my fieldwork experiences with special reference to my role of participant observation in the stepfamily. In particular, I wish to illustrate the strategies I used to enable me to accomplish a participant observer role in the stepfamily, the implications of the role in terms of developing relationships and the response of the stepfamilies involved to being the subjects of such a research role.
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION IN THE STEPFAMILY

I noted above that my intentions with regard to participant observation in the stepfamily were expressed in rather nebulous terms at my first meeting with the individuals concerned. Essentially, I argued that the success or non-success of the role depended very much on the degree of willingness each family exhibited. Nevertheless, this is not to say that I did not take a particularly conscious role in terms of enhancing the possibility of the enterprise in this respect.

Specifically, I reasoned that I would not be able to undertake a role in the stepfamily which was constructed in terms of me 'sitting in a corner silently recording' (Goldthorpe, op cit). Moreover, Coffield, Robinson and Sarsby indicated that 'Initially for us, the research relationship was easier to handle if there was a mutually acceptable reason for the visit' (1980, p12). Coffield et al were able to do this because of their material advantage over the research participants. Lifts in cars and the taking of photographs were areas where their presence was gratefully accepted. In my own situation, my study couples were in a far more materially advantageous
position than I. To find a 'mutually acceptable' reason for my visits could not therefore be located in these terms.

Coffield et al, nevertheless, make a further comment which also formed part of my thinking with regard to research strategies. They remark 'There was an unease in our relationship because, although our families knew about 'surveys', the idea of long-term anthropological fieldwork was unfamiliar to them' (Coffield, Robinson and Sarsby, 1980, p13). My own feeling was that if I commenced the fieldwork with unstructured interviews (see Appendix B) this would have three benefits. Firstly, it would enable me to collect background data about each individual which would be helpful through the fieldwork. Secondly, it would give me a mutually understood role in the stepfamily in the early stages of the fieldwork. This would also allay some of my own nervousness as I would have a defined and preplanned objective to my visit. Thirdly, it would allow each of us to develop a relationship and to get to know each other within a structured situation which had some shared understandings.

On the whole, this strategy worked exceedingly well. The 'interviews' gave a purpose to the visit for both myself and each stepparent. In addition, I was given
cups of tea and invited to stay for meals as part of the social process of hospitality. I was introduced to children and visitors and generally made to feel 'at home'. I was therefore able to extend upon these growing features of my relationship with each couple as I completed the unstructured interviews and began to visit 'for a chat'.

Nevertheless, there was still unease about the method of research which I felt and which was exhibited by some of the stepparents. My own unease stems from the nervousness I felt which I have outlined. For the first three months of fieldwork, my most anxious concern was the need for continuing access. My field notes after every visit record the comment 'Thank goodness they have agreed to see me next time'. On one occasion, on my second visit to this family, one stepchild asked me how often I visited the other study families. Whilst such a comment is indicative of the interest which the study families took in each other and to which I will return, the response from his stepfather gave me grave concern. I replied that my visits were usually fortnightly. The stepfather responded "You're not coming here again that soon are you?". Whilst I hastily rearranged my mental diary to comply with this felt overload on his part, I also suffered much anguish. Was I going to lose access? I
did not but I feel his comment indicates the extent to which we can expect others to 'fit in' with the sociological enterprise. As Bulmer states 'Sociologists do not command obedience like military strategists; they are rather like supplicants dependent upon their respondents' good will' (1977, p8).

In addition, comments from stepparents indicated that my role did not seem to bear any relation to the research enterprise. In particular, they would ask me "Are you getting what you want?. This can be compared to the "Was that alright?" which often followed a taped interview. In one case it was not until one stepmother had started to take sociology at night school that she had some deeper understanding of my role. This was the year after the fieldwork had ended. During the period that she was studying 'methodology' she thus said to me accusingly "Now I know what you were doing when you were visiting us". Notwithstanding these comments, there was at times an indication that the study families themselves felt that I had shared part of their lives and concerns. One stepmother, on the day that she heard that her house purchase had been finalised, turned to me and said "You've really lived through this with us haven't you".
Whilst these issues indicate both the consciousness with which I constructed my initial role in the stepfamily and the generalised lack of understanding which the individuals in the study had of my purpose, it nevertheless does not take account of wider features which had their effect on the kinds of relationships which I developed with each family. In particular, aspects of my biography were important in this process as I illustrate.

**BIOGRAPHIC COMMONALITY**

Although my initial fieldwork was designed to provide a basis from which I could develop a more participating role in the stepfamily, the sharing of experiences both including and beyond stepfamily life were also important features in the development of each individual and familial relationship. Finch (1984) notes how important the shared aspects of her biography were for her research participants in putting them at ease during the interview. In addition to gender identification, Finch makes special reference to the fact that when she was interviewing clergy wives she also shared this status. This factor gave an assurance of confidentiality and allayed suspicion to the extent
that clergy wives 'became warm and eager to talk to me after the simple discovery that I was one of them' (1984, p79). I would like to extend on this issue by analysing the extent to which the multifarious aspects of biography were influential in developing relationships.

The research process, in terms of listening to accounts of people's lives and thereby giving them a sense of importance is not often met with in the hurly burly of everyday life. It creates a special relationship which may only otherwise be encountered in a counselling situation. In common with Finch (op cit) I found that there was a shared identification with stepmothers which promoted the development of a relationship with them. It was from this basis of mutuality that I felt most able to build my relationship with the whole family. Such mutuality does not only lie within the realms of empathy and sympathy however. The myriad of tasks which are assigned to female domestic labour were crucial to the development of my role as participant observer within a family setting. Helping to prepare a family meal, clearing away, washing up were all ways I could participate in gender acceptable and unobtrusive ways.
In addition to gender, however, other aspects of biography were important in building relationships during the fieldwork. In this respect an analysis of the ways in which my personal history corresponded with the research stepfamilies illustrates how these features also promoted the development of relationships. The antecedents to remarriage was a major factor in this. Nevertheless, shared interests and hobbies were also relevant.

As in my own case, the Beauchamp's remarriage was the result of divorce on both sides. In addition to stepparenthood, therefore, there was common experience on which to base our association. It was with the Beauchamp's that participation was greatest. I ate meals, watched television, stayed overnight and had joint family outings. The Beauchamp's visited my home on two occasions, Jane and I went shopping together and Simon on one occasion took my stepchildren and his own children/stepchildren to Alton Towers for the day. The Beauchamp's home and my own were undergoing renovation and this also became an area of joint mutual interest. Moreover, Simon's business was connected with such work and on one occasion my husband and I used the services of his company for necessary work to our property.
The Fielding's marriage was also the result of divorce on both sides and I participated in their lives in many ways. I regularly stayed for lunch and joined in the particularistic events of rural life, such as visiting the travelling library. Outside interests also contributed to the development of our relationship. For example, my dogs accompanied me on some of my visits to the Fielding's and Frances and I would take them for a walk with her own dog.

The Williams' remarriage was the result of both divorce and widowhood. Again, I ate regularly with Don and Louise Williams, we visited the pub together and they invited my husband and I to join them for a meal one evening at a local restaurant. My participation with them was full at the level of couple to couple, but less so with regard to the cross family involvement which was the case with the Beauchamp's. In this way participation most closely paralleled the relationship I developed with the Fieldings.

With regard to the level of participation I was able to accomplish with the Tylers, whose marriage was also the result of both divorce and widowhood, I was able to build a close relationship with Meg. We spent many hours together talking over a cup of tea and often one or both of her children would join us. On the birth of
my baby, Meg and the children visited my home. However, I was less able to obtain that degree of involvement with Frank. I rarely saw them together as a couple and often Frank would be absent from the home when I visited.

I felt that Frank saw the purpose of the research as directly relevant to Meg and his own comments from our first interview suggested that he saw little relevance in the research to his own situation. Thus, he commented "I don't know what all the fuss is about", "I never had any problems". For my own part, in accordance with my general philosophy, I never tried to force the issue of his non-inclusion but accepted his right to decide the degree to which he felt he wanted to be part of the research.

The Holmes' marriage was the result of widowhood on both sides. Their domestic routines and lives were also areas where I was least able, of all families in the study, to obtain a high degree of participation. In particular, my visits mainly comprised of chatting in the living room and I certainly did not have the freedom of access to the house which I experienced with the other families. Towards the end of the fieldwork, Susan and Henry appeared more relaxed about my visits and began to welcome me into other parts of the house.
It is possible that had the fieldwork continued participation would have increased. Nevertheless, compared to the amount of participation I experienced with the other families in the study, I would have to describe my fieldwork with Henry and Susan as being limited in this respect.

I have indicated, using the factor of divorce as a major characteristic, that wide ranging biographical details influence the extent to which one achieves a participant or observer role (see Gold, 1958, Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955) in the daily lives of the research families. This is, of course, not the only issue. Questions of individual personality, family lifestyles and the varied dispositions each family would have to incorporating a 'stranger' into their private lives are also important factors in delineating the nature of relationships built up during the fieldwork. Nevertheless, I would argue that this biographical matching enables both the researched and the researcher to feel more at ease in each other's company. By reducing social distance it thus accelerates the level of participation and observation which can be achieved in the most private of domains - the home.
PARTICIPATION: HAVE I INFLUENCED YOU?

The notion of the researcher's influence in data collection is encompassed in ideas of contaminating the field. The myth of objectivity to which this gives rise has been successfully attacked by Oakley when she asserted that 'the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production [should] be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias - it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives' (1981(b), p58). A reading of Bowles' (1983) work would moreover suggest that objectivity has almost become a dirty word. Thus Bowles states 'Feminist academics have been attacking the God Objectivity ever since we entered the fray, but He is still very much with us, and will be for some time (1983, p36).

This acknowledgement of the importance of the subjective is indeed the theme of this chapter. Nevertheless, I wish to indicate through the use of two case studies the problematic elements of the subjective. In so doing I hope to draw attention to the difficulties which the oppositional nature of a debate
on objectivity and subjectivity belies. In particular, I wish to consider the external and the internal pressures to 'participate' in the lives of the study families as forms in which these problematic elements arise.

External Pressures: A Case Study

Oakley (1981(b) discusses the two-way process of interviewing and argues that the mutual trust which is built up during the exchange and answer of questions about each other's lives is essential to on-going research. On many occasions I was asked 'What do you think?' 'What did you do?'. Aside from methodological questions of influencing the field of enquiry, throughout the research I never came to terms with the responsibility such questions gave me. I was always concerned that any advice I might give could cause damage to already fragile relationships. Nevertheless, in long term research of this nature the issue is impossible to avoid.

Moreover, as I have indicated above, the exchange of relationships which built up over time meant that my own life was subject to direct observation. The study families got to know me probably as well as I got to know them. They knew of my major stepfamilial concerns
and would often ask me questions about my home life. They had the opportunity to see me at home, albeit on far fewer occasions than I had the privilege of seeing them. Thus, questions would sometimes not be necessary. Direct scrutiny gave its own answers.

Whatever one's decision with regard to answering questions, at times one is put in a position where it is impossible not to become involved. As Gans illustrates 'the fieldworker is under pressure from those he studies to involve himself' (1982, p55). I had however always tried to avoid showing my viewpoint when it came to questions where husband and wife disagreed. To keep access to both sides, I felt, meant not taking either side. As Gans further comments in this connection neutrality is important if one does not want to 'risk being rejecting by opposing groups' (1982, p54). When such situations arose I therefore had a set of stock phrases which were non-committal. Comments such as 'I don't really know' or 'It wasn't the same for me' usually enabled me to sidestep the question. However, as I wish to indicate one is only allowed to appear neutral for so long.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, Louise told me that Alex, her son, had been offered work for the school holidays. However, Louise did not want him to accept
it. Alex had just taken his 'O' levels and was planning to take up an apprenticeship with a local company in the Autumn. "He should have a rest before he starts work properly. Don wants him to take it but I think he should have a rest, don't you?". I nodded in reply and Louise's conversation continued on another subject.

I thought no more of this particular piece of information until Louise, Don and I sat together for lunch. Don brought up the subject of YTS schemes and the level of conversation was of a very general nature regarding these. The conversation was as follows:

Don: Don't you think they [school leavers] should take up these schemes if they're offered them?

CH: Yes. If they've nothing else to do.

Don immediately turned to Louise and said "See Christina agrees with me". Don then added to me "Alex has been offered a YTS for the summer. Louise doesn't want him to do it but I do".
My mind went back to my earlier conversation with Louise and I realised that the work Louise had mentioned was also on a YTS scheme. I had the distinct feeling that Don had engineered the conversation to gain support for his own view and I had neatly fallen into the trap. I was extremely embarrassed as I knew I had indicated tacit agreement to Louise when she had been talking to me previously. What was she now thinking? Don was joyful he had support; Louise was aggrieved at the outcome.

Don and Louise continued to argue over whether Alex should accept the work. I remained silent, racking my brains for some solution to my dilemma. There was none. I had stated a position and was held to it.

Fortunately, this event did not jeopardise my relationship with Louise. Thankfully, she realised that Don had placed me in such a position and commented that "He was always playing games". Nevertheless, it brings home forcibly the view that the researched are not passive objects but active subjects with their own control and power.
Internal Pressures: A Case Study

In addition to a felt outward pressure to 'participate' more fully than I would have preferred, I also, at times, experienced an inner pressure to speak my thoughts. Gans refers to this as an 'internal tug of war' and notes that this is experienced at its greatest when the subject of conversation was relevant to topics he was studying (1982, p54). For me the importance of the personal was crucial here. The times when this desire to speak out was at its strongest was when two features combined. Namely when I was faced with a research situation which had parallels with my own personal life experiences and which also conflicted with my political views of female/male relations.

The following summary from my field notes illustrates this. It describes how the desire to become personally involved builds up during the course of an incident. The decisive point at which one does finally become so involved is the result of one key comment.

I arrived one afternoon at the Beauchamp's to be greeted at the door by Simon. I was surprised to see him there as he was usually at work at that time. I followed Simon into the kitchen and was introduced to a woman who had just entered from the lounge. "This is
Joanne. A friend of ours” Simon remarked. Simon crossed the room and he and Joanne stood on the far side talking in a low whisper. I heard Joanne say “Call the doctor. She needs a doctor” and as their conversation continued I comprehended that Jane was the subject of their discussion. Simon’s presence that afternoon and the snippets of conversation I could hear led me to the conclusion that some key event had happened in which Jane was the central character. As their conversation continued I realised that Simon and Joanne were concerned about Jane’s mental state.

This bare fact was enough for me to feel the first flutters of anger and injustice. I knew Jane had been taking tranquillisers but I did not feel she was mentally ill. My own assessment considered that her problems arose from her position as a stepmother, not the result of neurosis. This judgement on my part arose from a viewpoint which considers particularly noxious the labelling of women’s outbursts of anger to be signs of psychological disturbance. I experienced very deeply a tug of war between the desire to act as a fellow step-parent and woman and to speak out, or to act as a silent observer. The latter position took precedence for the time being.
Joanne left and Simon began to make some tea. As he did so he explained a little of the afternoon's events.

"She [Jane] tried to cut her wrists. I had to hit her. I had to get her to calm down"

My mind pictured a scene of anger, recrimination and frustration which I envisaged led Jane to this act of self-violence. A sense of anger arose again at the thought of Simon, for whatever reason, hitting Jane. I was clearly prejudiced to Simon's actions and considered them in the context of an abuse of male power. Notwithstanding, I made no comment beyond "Is she alright now?". Simon reiterated that Jane "needs to see a doctor. I'm sure she's mentally ill". I quelled the desire to contradict him.

We went through to the sitting room. Jane was sitting in an armchair. Her eyes were red and swollen. On both a personal level, and in terms of any distinguishable research role, I felt inadequate. I did not know what to say or do. I sat down, said "hello" and waited to see what would happen. Simon poured the tea and handed it round. The atmosphere was tense and very awkward. Simon told Jane that he had explained to me what had happened. Jane began to cry, saying how "awful" she felt.
Jane described a series of incidents regarding the previous days events where she had missed Simon at the children's parents' evening at school, had arrived home late and felt the burdens of domestic work. It reminded me of similar thoughts and similar experiences. Simon made various conciliatory remarks such as he "understood" and that Jane "tried to do too much". Jane's reaction to this was that he "didn't understand" and "there was too much to do".

What does one do when sitting between a couple who are in the middle of an emotional turmoil? I felt I could no longer sit there in my silence. I had become part of a relationship with Jane and Simon which placed demands on me which were both social and moral. There was also a sense of expectation on their part that I could or would act as a conciliator. This particularly came from Jeremy who indicated a need for someone to sort the situation out for him. "I don't know what to do" he said several times to both Jane and I as they began to talk about what had happened. "What do you think Jane should do?" was a more direct request for my involvement.

I was able to resist succumbing to these various overtures for my involvement. However, Simon made one remark which signalled the point at which I began to
take a more active part in events. Simon told Jane that he thought she was "selfish". I was extremely disturbed at his viewpoint. The comment registered as a reflection of male chauvinism. Further, I strongly felt his view would be destructive to Jane's self-esteem. Nevertheless, I was aware of the fragile path I was treading. I was not a marriage guidance counsellor and clearly did not want to make matters worse. Also I did not want to be seen to be taking Jane's part to the detriment of my future relationship with Simon. I was still ultimately conscious that I was there to carry out research and I wanted to continue to do so.

However, the words were said. I told Simon that I did not see Jane's views as "selfish" but as expressions of deep seated needs. I knew as I said it I had changed irrevocably their situation. Jane rallied. She had found support.

When one knows that one has, by word or deed, changed the field of enquiry, the point of responsibility lies in assessing that change. Jane became more assertive of her right to have needs and wants. My comments had lessened the guilt. On one occasion she told me that she had refused to attend a family christening as she wanted the afternoon to herself. Simon had taken the
children alone. "I had a wonderful time in the garden" Jane remarked.

There can be no doubt that the challenge to his views which had been presented to Simon was to make his life more difficult at these times. With regard to the christening Simon observed that he felt "let down" by Jane's decision to stay at home. "It was a family occasion and she should have been there" he said.

My remarks had an effect over which ultimately I had no control. The question of subjectivity therefore becomes a moral question. I had access to their lives and concerns to which I gave a reflection which goes beyond the bounds of friendly relationships. We do not usually rush home after visiting a friend and write down everything that has happened, reflect on it, reread it at regular intervals and try to link the 'data' with other notes we have previously made. Yet I had done all these things in connection with each individual in the study in the normal pursuit of research. My analysis of the Beauchamp's relationship must therefore also be seen in conjunction with the comments I have already made. Moreover, I was extremely conscious of the likely effect my words would have. In the light of all these comments the question
remains: What right had I to 'influence' the Beauchamp's life in this way?

The question of influence can also be extended to less introspective aspects of the research process. Specifically, it was significant that the major changes which I experienced in my own life were matched by changes in the research families. The question arises, therefore, to what extent were my decisions influential in the lives of each family. A secondary issue also arose during the fieldwork which is related to this question. This is the use of biographical change as a research tool.

There were two major events in my life during the course of the fieldwork which brought these issues to the fore. The first was in relation to house purchase. At the start of the fieldwork, I was living with my husband in his former marital home. Nevertheless, in October 1985 we bought a house at auction and moved into it in January 1986. The second event was becoming a mother. I became pregnant in November 1985, a fact which I 'announced' to the study families in January 1986.
I now wish to consider the likely effect that these factors had on the lives of the stepparents in the study.

**Changes**

My household removal was well known to all the study couples and they each took a lively interest in the rigours of buying and selling. During this time I would be asked on each visit for an up to date report on events which I always furnished.

The subject of the study couples feelings about their own accommodation had been raised on one of my first visits with each couple and well before my own intended removal. The response I had, which is indicated in Chapter Five, was that overall all the study families were quite content with their homes and had no intention of moving. I was therefore extremely surprised when in January 1986 I arrived at the Williams' home to find a 'For Sale' board outside.

The first question to myself, and later to them, was “Had the fact that I was moving house been at all influential in their decision?” They both replied
quite categorically that it had not. They were moving because Don would be retiring in a few years and this was their last opportunity to take on a bigger mortgage and so move to a larger house.

George and Frances and Henry and Susan also purchased new property during the fieldwork year. The property George and Frances bought was primarily for investment purposes. They lived in tied accommodation and the cottage they purchased was immediately rented to provide an additional income. Henry and Susan moved to a new district altogether where many families from their church lived. Both couples stated that these were the reasons for their moves and circumstances in my life had not been influential in their decision making.

However, despite the disclaimers, there was a level at which events in my life were used as a checking out process for the feasibility of a similar course of action. This probing came in the form of questions. Thus, Louise asked me what my stepchildren thought of moving house and whether I preferred my new home to my old one. Similarly, Susan asked me how well my stepchildren had settled into their new home. All individuals expressed interest at the likely success or otherwise of our venture.
I have no direct feedback on the way the answers to these questions may have been influential with regard to moving house. Indeed, prima facie the statements of the couples themselves deny any influence. Nevertheless, one clear example of the way events in my life were used came with the announcement of my pregnancy.

Before I told Henry and Susan I was expecting a baby, I knew that they too were hoping to have a child. At that particular time they were waiting for a hospital appointment to consider a reversal of Henry’s vasectomy. Although they had made the decision for themselves, they were experiencing difficulty persuading Henry’s two daughters, Amanda and Karen, to accept the prospect of a new baby. This was causing Susan great concern.

One of the first questions Susan asked me when I told her I was pregnant was "What do your stepchildren think?". I told her that they were very pleased. Later, Susan told me that she had told Amanda and Karen my news. "What did they say?" I asked. Susan grimaced and replied:

"They said "She's got stepchildren hasn't she. What do they think?"
I told them that they were pleased but Karen said she wasn't convinced and Amanda said she wouldn't like it."

Susan had used events in my life as an example to her stepchildren in the hope that it would evince some change in attitude on their part.

One can never be sure of the extent to which one's actions influence others. Indeed, some would argue that concern with the concept of influence is a mistaken one. In particular, Collins indicates through the use of the notion 'participant comprehension' that 'observer effect does not arise' (1984, p66).

Principally, Collins argues in this respect that as native competence is the desirable aim this should lead the researcher to a position where he can 'share a way of life and should therefore experience it in similar ways' (1984, p65, emphasis in text). By implication, therefore, the problem of influence does not arise as it is an ever present feature of social life. The researcher as 'native' will only be as influential or non-influential as any other 'native' with whom the researched have contact in their day to day lives.

Notwithstanding these comments, the use of my life as an example to others indicates the lack of legitimacy
which stepmothers experience and which I have indicated in Chapter Five. In this way, therefore, situations arising from biographical change can provide an important insight into the meanings of stepfamily life in a spontaneous way and one which may not arise through question and answer techniques as I wish to further indicate.

Biography: An alternative approach to question and answer

As I have argued in Chapter Five the decision to have a child in a remarriage is a significantly different decision making process from that of first marriages. It can also be a very sensitive subject both between the couple and between the couple and their children. Because of its sensitive nature, I had not directly raised questions regarding individual attitudes to having children. As a researcher I ultimately walk away from the situation. The 'researched' cannot. For these reasons, I was waiting for the 'right moment' before raising questions about this issue. The announcement of my own pregnancy provided an element of spontaneity which drew varied and at times surprising reactions. This aspect of surprise served to
challenge certain incorrect assumptions I unwisely held.

George and Frances already had a child from their marriage, Luke, age 3. As they were both in their forties, with six adult children between them in addition to Luke, I did not expect there to be any lingering maternal or paternal feelings. Quite wrongly, I had thought any questions regarding the likelihood of further children would be irrelevant.

George and Frances expressed their congratulations to me when I told them my news. They asked me the usual questions regarding whether I hoped it would be a boy or a girl and when it was due. No more was said at that moment. However, over lunch that day Frances turned to George and asked him if he would like to foster a baby. George was evidently as surprised by the question as I was. Their ensuing discussion gave me greater insight into their personal feelings about parenthood which I do not believe would have been disclosed through direct questioning.
George: No I find it a strain
keeping a jolly appearance for Luke.
I couldn't cope with anymore.

Frances: You wouldn't have to keep a jolly
appearance. A baby doesn't make the
same demands as a three year old.

George continued to raise objections and as Frances
tried to countermand each one, the tears rose in her
eyes and began to trickle down her face. It was an
undeniably important issue for her and apart from the
distress I felt at her anguish it alerted me to
reassess comments she had made in the past regarding
childbearing. I could no longer take her feelings on
the matter for granted. In this instance, my
biography had served as a check on assumption in a way
that I doubt more formal question and answer approaches
would have elicited.

Whilst this discussion has concentrated on specific
features of biography it is important to consider the
more generalised aspect of gender relations as I
indicate.
GENDER RELATIONS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process, in terms of listening to accounts of people's lives and thereby giving them a sense of importance is not often met with in the hurly burly of everyday life. It creates a special relationship which may only otherwise be encountered in a counselling situation. Finch (1984) notes the ease by which a female interviewer can draw out the most personal information from female interviewees. In particular, Finch argues that 'However effective a male interviewer might be at getting women interviewees to talk, there is still necessarily an additional dimension when the interviewer is also a woman, because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender (1984, p76).

I can only agree with Finch's comments. Within my own experience there are understandings which pass from woman to woman which may not be matched in interviews with women conducted by men. Such understandings are expressed in terms of "You know what I mean" and "You know what men are like". Nevertheless, I would like to extend on Finch's discussion by considering the ease which the interviewer herself feels when conducting interviews with women. Gender identification is a two-
way process. Apart from a heightened consciousness of what was being said, very often my 'interviews' with stepmothers differed little from more familiar situations of listening to a girlfriend who was confiding in me. There was an intimacy and taken-for-granted quality to the interaction which did not exist when I talked to stepfathers. Indeed, whilst I could listen to stepmothers discuss and even criticise their husbands in an almost cosy way, this was not the case when husbands were less than kind about their wives. In these instances I would feel particularly perturbed with the content of the conversation as if I were committing an act of betrayal through the very fact of listening. Nevertheless, the cosiness of gender identification also makes it more important to render the familiar strange.

My fieldnotes contain an incident which I feel is indicative of this and read as follows: "Jane told me that she felt so frustrated and angry with Simon at the weekend that she "rammed him with a wheelbarrow". An act of violence from female to male yet my field notes are without comment. This stands in opposition to my comments above with regard to violence from male to female. In this latter instance I certainly did not feel any sense that Simon was being abused. Or Jane was an abuser. Whilst the process of gender identification
was clear to me in this instance, the example heightens one's consciousness of the issue.

Although I have been concerned with the rather more subjective aspects of the relationship of biography to the research process, biography also had a more concrete part in the collection of data as I discuss.

DATA RECORDING

The recording of participant observation data has been discussed by Schatzman and Strauss (1973). In particular, they argue that data should be recorded in 'distinct "packages" of material according to whether they constitute "Observational Notes" (ON), "Theoretical Notes" (TN) or "Methodological Notes" (MN) (1973, p99). My own system of data recording was very similar to this, in that I kept separate records of the same incident. In particular, to take account of the personal, my notes were organised in the following way.

My first set of notes consisted of "Descriptive Data"(DD): where I was, who was there, what they were doing. An example from my field notes illustrates this clearly:
Beautiful sunny day. Meg was doing the washing in the kitchen. The washing machine had been pulled into the centre of the room so that the hose could be attached to the taps. I could hear David moving about upstairs.

My second set of notes were more directly relevant to Schatzman and Strauss' category 'Observational Notes' where I recorded 'events experienced principally through watching and listening. They contain as little interpretation as possible and are as reliable as the observer can construct them' (1973, p100). An extract from my field notes indicates this:

The wedding cake had arrived and Meg was none too pleased with it. An aunt of Sandy's had made it and consequently Meg felt she could not say anything to her about it as she would have if it had "been bought in a shop". She commented very specifically on what she felt was wrong with it "It's got no decoration on it. No bells or rings or birds. All it's got is a cheap
looking champagne glass with Christmas ribbon hanging out of it". She then added "What will people think. They'll think I don't care".

My notes which correspond to these Observational Notes are relevant to Schatzman and Strauss' (op cit) categorisation 'Theoretical Notes'. These are defined as 'self-conscious, controlled attempts to derive meaning from any one or several observation notes' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p101). The relevant entry is therefore as follows:

TN: I think Meg's feelings about the cake signify that she thinks she will be seen as failing Sandy. This can be linked to her feelings about Sandy's pregnancy. This could also be seen as a sign of Meg's failure as a stepmother as an outward sign of lack of care. Perhaps why they wish for Sandy to get married. At least then there would be less stigma.
The fourth type of note which I recorded was of a personal nature in that it recorded my subjective feelings with regard to my role in the interaction between researcher and researched. My reasons for including this 'Personal Data' (PD) was, as the theme of this chapter illustrates, to analyse its effect on the research process and corresponds to Burgess' comments that 'researchers would then have the materials to conduct research on themselves' (1984, p267). The 'Personal Data' corresponding to the field notes above was as follows:

PD: When Meg talked to me about her feelings about the wedding it made me warm to her and feel sorry for her. I wanted to reach out and touch her. To make it better for her.

The process of recording data in this manner was important to building up a comprehensive and systematic record of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, whilst these records are as exact as possible as Hammersley indicates there is a reliance on 'on the spot' interpretations (1984, p54). The need therefore for ongoing analysis becomes important.
The analysis of data was an on-going process which is evidenced in the 'Theoretical Notes' which I kept. In this way I would refer back to incidents, as in the case of Meg above, or I would cross-reference events in terms of similarities and dissimilarities with other couples in the study. Nevertheless, the process of writing-up the data was the key place where various disparate ideas came to fruition and where I wish to make my final comments with regard to the personal.

Hammersley's report of writing-up research indicates 'the considerable role pragmatic considerations play in shaping the scope and perhaps the actual content of analysis' (1984, p61). Pragmatic considerations arising out of the personal were also relevant to the process of writing-up this thesis. In particular, I had a new baby who did not (and still does not!) seem to recognise the need for sleep. The writing-up process was therefore very much a fragmented one and consisted of a quantity of rough draft chapters spread over a time period of eighteen months.

My early drafts were an important part of analysis in that they brought together key ideas in a relatively
unstructured and variable way. For example, some drafts concentrated on individuals or couples as their focus and some drafts took major themes, such as stepparent-stepchild relationships, as primary. These drafts also represented the dialogue between researcher and supervisor in that they would be returned to me with suitable commentary. Moreover, it was through this dialogue that the theme of myth, as an organising feature of this thesis, first arose.

In particular, the early drafts returned to me would frequently contain the comments 'Is this a myth?' or 'Myth seems important here'. This dialogue, through the use of draft chapters, was a crucial stage in the organisation of this thesis. A more systematic application of these comments, together with the relevant review of the literature, indicated the significance of the theoretical structuring of myth, as this thesis bears testimony. The role of the supervisor combined with the personal were therefore significant features in this process.
CONCLUSION

I have been concerned in this chapter to detail the process by which this study was undertaken. It therefore needs to be seen as an integral part of the study itself. I have primarily argued that the role of the personal cannot be separated from the methods of study used. In particular, I have focussed on the use of biography as an important feature in access, role, data collection and analysis. In so doing, biography as a changing feature has been emphasised.
APPENDIX B

AIDES MEMOIRS

The aides memoirs presented here were used in conjunction with taped interviews carried out at the beginning of the fieldwork period and formed the basis of the life history data presented in Chapter Two.

The interviews conducted were unstructured in the sense that they were flexible and allowed the individuals in the study to focus on features of their biography which were important to them. Nevertheless, as Burgess points out 'the researcher has to establish a framework within which the interview can be conducted' (1982, p107). The aides memoirs were therefore designed to give that structure.

Aides memoirs B(i) and B(ii) were used with every individual in the study. Aides memoir B(iii) was used with the divorced participants. Aides memoir B(iv) was used with the previous bereaved participants.
APPENDIX B(i)

AIDE MEMOIR: BECOMING A STEPPARENT

1 Images of stepfamily life

initial attitude to prospect of becoming a stepparent.
perceived differences between natural parenthood and stepparenthood.
role of stepparent - what is ideal?

2 Stepchildren

first meeting with stepchildren.
importance of children in decision to marry/cohabit.
feelings about own stepchildren.
discipline/difficulties/problems
AIDE MEMOIR: BECOMING A STEPPARENT (CONTINUED)

3 Public Face

how do you explain your family situation to people outside the stepfamily.

4 Future

plans for future/any changes planned

5 Division of labour

child care functions - which tasks undertaken.
has this changed?

6 Extended Family

frequency of contact - with whom aid from extended family (who) attitudes to extended family relationships
APPENDIX B(ii)

AIDE MEMOIR: FROM CHILDHOOD TO FIRST MARRIAGE

1 Childhood

where born/when
brother/sisters - number
parents - occupation
education

2 Employment

type of employment

3 First Marriage

how long married
what were the good things? bad things?
interests in common
children
APPENDIX B(iii)

AIDE MEMOIR: THE EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE

1  Factors leading to divorce
    feelings at the time
    worst thing

2  Children's attitudes
    their reaction/feelings
    did they express any wish to live
    with the other parent

3  Legal process
    how soon did divorce proceedings
    begin.
    any disputes
    how were finances arranged
    custody
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AIDE MEMOIR: THE EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE (CONTINUED)

4  Attitudes of others

   reactions of family/friends
   any help from family/friends/neighbours

6  Single Parenthood

   most difficult parts
   anything better on own
   social life
   children’s attitudes

7  Contact with ex-spouse during marriage
    breakdown

   any/form/problems
APPENDIX B(iv)

AIDE MEMOIR: THE EXPERIENCE OF WIDOWHOOD

1 Bereavement

feelings at the time
worst thing

2 Children's attitudes

how did they react

3 Attitudes of others

reactions of family/friends
any help from family/friends/
neighbours

4 Single parenthood

difficult parts
anything better as single parent
social life
children's attitudes
APPENDIX C

STEPFAMILY TREES

The stepfamily trees contained in this Appendix represent a presentation device. They are included to allow the reader an easy reference to the various relationships of the individuals who took part in the study. They therefore include the names of individuals who cohabit with an ex-spouse in addition to the more formalised arrangements of marriage. They also, for the same reason, include the more extended stepfamily relationships of stepchildren's parent's in-law.

The stepfamily trees are arranged in the following order:

Appendix C(i)          Beauchamp
Appendix C(ii)          Fielding
Appendix C(iii)         Holmes
Appendix C(iv)          Tyler
Appendix C(v)           Williams
APPENDIX C(i)

STEPFAMILY TREE: THE BEAUCHAMPS.

RICHARD divorced 1983
    JANE married 1984
        JOE born 1971
        HARRIETT born 1973

SIMON divorced 1983
    MAY
    CLIVE
        JAMES born 1970
        POLLY born 1972
        ANGELA born 1976
APPENDIX C (iii)

STEFAMILY TREE: THE HOLMES

BRIAN
died
1982

SUSAN
married
1984

HENRY

BEATRICE
died 1983

BEN
born
1980

HESTER
born
1982

AMANDA
born
1986

KAREN
born
1968

REBECCA
born
1987
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