**SHARED PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION AND DIVORCE
IN NEW ZEALAND**

by

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ABSTRACT

Shared parenting after separation or divorce is an intricate, fluid process in which gender, power and ideology are implicated. The dominant focus of the literature is on sharply polarised assessments of the value of joint custody or shared parenting, and on the elaboration of the individual moral qualities ideally required by each parent which will help ensure the arrangement's success or failure. This thesis, however, addresses the systemic (individual and social) issues, and the processes of family life which facilitate or complicate the arrangement.

The conclusions indicate that it is inappropriate to view shared parenting as that form of custody which necessarily safeguards the child's best interests. Rather, it should be viewed as one among several possible modes of custody; and that the particular outcome for any family of a choice of shared parenting after separation depends largely on the ability of those parents to manage their relationship, in which systemic, as well as personal factors are significant.

The value of detailed qualitative research as a means to explore and understand areas of family life and relationships is demonstrated, in particular because of its power to reveal the complexity of family process. The crucial material evidence is the transcription of the unstructured, intensive, longitudinal interviews which generates texts suitable for a close textual reading or deconstructive analysis. Such an analysis opens for inspection the way that experience and the respondents' and researcher's textual production is constructed from and by gender, power, ideology, ambivalence, and process. It highlights the way in which elements of experience are often divided from each other and held separate as a consequence of the research act, and their interrelatedness obscured and destroyed.

The use of deconstructive qualitative analysis has facilitated a further redefinition of the researcher/respondent relationship. It has emphasised the importance of creating typologies which, within a specific category, can encompass a diversity of experiences and positions. It has challenged the usual mode of sociological writing in which only the authorial voice is present, and has indicated the significance of allowing a range of voices to enter the text, thus emphasising the uncentredness of the social world.

In memory of my parents,
Elizabeth Annie Barrowclough

and

Austin Morris Bisley

and

for my children,

Rachel and Joss

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INTRODUCTION

There are points in one's life where, retrospectively, one can date the beginning of a particular interest - an event or a book which sparked off a desire to take something further. With the advantage of hindsight, one can look back and assign a chronology, construct linear relationships, place the 'event' as centre. Although to do so overlooks and obscures the role of other 'events' which have had considerable bearing on the production of the thesis, including my long-term interest in families and the years I spent working as a social worker and latterly as a family therapist, there are nevertheless two events to which I can assign this retrospective significance. The first was a family with whom I had contact in the course of my work at the Wellington Child and Family Service who rang to say they were separating. Both parents had been extensively involved in caring for the children, and wished to know what arrangements might allow the joint caring to continue. I remained in contact with that family for about nine months, during which time they separated, established their separate homes, and worked out their shared parenting arrangement. In the course of our work together I became conscious of several issues. The only immediately accessible book on the subject (Galper, 1978), although filled with optimism about the possibilities of joint custody, was an American book, and some of the legal and other situations which the author and her ex-spouse were attempting to circumvent were not relevant for New Zealand families; and furthermore, in the context of the experience of the family with whom I was working, Galper made it seem all too easy. The book abounded with advice about how to set things up, and confidence about the value of the arrangement. There was little comment on the difficulties that families might encounter, not only at the outset, but also as the arrangement progressed. I was aware that my family was not finding the going as easy as Galper suggested they might, given their determination to make the shared parenting work, and the drawing by one of the children, of the two houses and herself between them, remained vividly with me.

About two years later I left the clinic with the intention of re-orienting my career towards research. My husband, children and I were also going to the United States for a year. I left New Zealand with two possible thesis topics in mind, one of which was a phenomenological study of joint custody. Within a week or so of arriving in Madison, Wisconsin, I went to a public lecture (the second 'event') given by Professor Martha Fineman, who was then serving on a legislative committee enquiring into changes in Wisconsin law to make joint custody presumptive (i.e., the custody of choice unless good reason could be given to prove that it should be otherwise). Some of the concerns that she raised then and in our subsequent, valuable conversations resonated with doubts and interests of mine. In the light of the prolific but often unsatisfactory American literature which I was reading, I decided that a study of New Zealand families which was differently oriented, and which was not concerned primarily to evaluate outcome after only brief contacts with families, would be of value.

I came to the study enthusiastic about the possibility that fathers might actually take a significant role in the bringing up of their children. At the same time I was very uncertain about the ease with which such a major gender reorganisation, in which structural change was clearly implied, would be achieved. I was very conscious of the optimism and fervour which permeated much of the literature I was reading, yet that optimism about the inherent goodness of human nature and the ease of self-actualisation did not seem so apparent in the (American) society about me. I found myself for a period oscillating rapidly between belief and disbelief, until I reached more of a middle point of scepticism where I assumed that the arrangement was not necessarily better or worse than other modes of custody, that there were likely to be points of tension given the circumstances in which it operated, and that there were likely to be some advantages.

My choice of a qualitative approach to the study reflected my long experience as an interviewer, my interest (and delight and despair) in family processes, and families' interaction with the society, by which they are defined and whose definitions they challenge. My experience of such processes led me to believe that a quantifiable approach would be inadequate to explore the dimensions of experience of families who were sharing parenting. Furthermore, such methodologies are too often intellectually sluggish in that they tend to confirm established ways of thinking and restrain appreciation of what might lie beyond. My reading of post structuralism as theory and method, and my recognition of its value for the sort of research I wanted to do because of its concern to make explicit the processes of textual production and the ideological assumptions inherent in the texts (both the respondents' and the writer's), has had a major impact on the way I have thought about the data and constructed the thesis.

Although it is easier to recognise the implications of some of the conscious ways that the thesis has been structured, it is also important to say that I have written it as a New Zealand woman living in New Zealand during the 1980's, and that my personal experiences, my cultural knowledge and my geographic location have affected what I could write. My experience as a therapist meant that I assumed from the outset that the arrangement would be complex in its effects and outcomes. I have to admit to placing myself more rather than less conservatively in relation to intellectual assumptions about the human capacity for change. I think that the human capacity for major change is limited, while recognising that some individuals can achieve extensive changes in attitude and circumstance. My cultural and life experiences have contributed to a particular concern with women's issues and experiences and with a desire to redress some of the imbalances in the treatment of women in much of the psychological literature on families. Equally, any exploration of issues of gender calls for an awareness of the issues for men and an appreciation of the points of clear demarcation and of fluidity in gender boundaries. It is, however, important to state quite categorically that my purpose in writing the thesis has not been to elevate one gender over the other. I do not wish to enter into a competitive framework in which one gender is seen as superior to the other, but to help clarify and to

draw attention to the manifold social, structural and gender implications of shared parenting.

As I have said, my intellectual and personal experiences have inevitably structured the way that I have read, analysed, and written up the data. The reading that I offer of shared parenting is only one possible reading. Others with a different genealogy, reading the same data, could well address different points, draw different conclusions. In line with post structuralist thought, I cannot claim the *definitive* reading, but what I can claim for my text is that it identifies the issues of family relationship, gender, power, ideology and social structure in shared parenting.

There is another point to be made. Questioning the possibility of achieving the definitive statement immediately has the effect of challenging the imposition of a single, and therefore dominant, authorial voice upon a text. Since most sociological studies, including qualitative ones, reproduce little of the raw data on which the study is based, the reader receives the authorial interpretation of the data with little sense of how that particular interpretation was reached. Early in the analysis of the data I realised that the incorporation into the text of extensive quotations from my respondents was theoretically and methodologically vital. Such a practice would give access to the actual material which I had placed in a particular interpretive framework, thus making the interpretation open for inspection and reinterpretation. It would also allow the very different voices of the respondents to range through the text and to assert their presence, their validity, their position, and their difference in all their complexity and vitality, in conjunction with my interpretation of what they had intended. This method recognises that, although I wrote the analysis, the respondents share in the textual construction, and it acknowledges my dependence on my respondents and the intimate relationship between us.

The thesis falls into three parts. The first four chapters, in which there is some recursiveness as I move between the theoretical and the practical, set out the theoretical and methodological assumptions on which I have constructed my analysis. Chapter One provides a review of the literature and sets out the issues I wished to address in my own research. Chapter Two begins with an account of the problems inherent in phenomenology, the theoretical perspective I initially intended to adopt, and moves on to establish deconstruction, with its requirements of close textual and ideological analysis, as the more useful way of approaching the data I gathered. Chapter Three deals with methodological and ethical issues, the processes of interviewing, the implications of participation in the research and the way the analysis was conducted. Chapter Four introduces the issue of voice, the significance of language and the importance of close textual reading in the analysis of the data.

The second part of the thesis concentrates on the families' experiences of shared parenting. As part of recognising the embedded nature of decisions, Chapter Five analyses the context in which separation occurred and the decision was taken to establish shared parenting. In this chapter relevant information is presented about the families' histories

prior to separation because of the the effect of those histories on decisions about custody; the implications of the manner in which the separation was managed are elucidated; the problematic question of the concept of the paramountcy of the child's best interests and the parents' definition of those interests is discussed; the nature of the information and community and family support available to the families at a time widely recognised as highly stressful is examined; and the families' initial experiences with shared parenting are considered.

Chapter Six continues the discussion of the issues raised by the decision making. In particular I address the question of gender and power in relation to the initiation of the decision to set up shared parenting arrangements, and draw attention to what I have called 'personal consciousness', the personal and ideological backgrounds which informed individual assessments of the desirability of shared parenting. Chapter Seven focuses more on the day to day issues raised by shared parenting: the establishment of routines; the nature of the transitions; the effect of reconstitution on the families; the parents' assessment of the consequences of deciding to share the parenting in relation to their appreciation of the interwoven advantages and disadvantages; and their experiences of shared parenting over time.

Chapter Eight deals with the nature of the adult relationship, which I have described as central to the functioning of the arrangement. It examines the demands of shared parenting on the adults; discusses the inadequacies of one set of 'interactional typologies' and sets out an alternative set which seeks to encompass process, fluidity and change; and returns to significant issues of power and gender in the adult post-separation relationship. Chapter Nine deals with the way that the adults shared out the financial costs, and points specifically to the gender and structural issues inherent in such arrangements. Chapter Ten is specifically concerned with the views of the children, and their assessment of the value and problems of the arrangement.

Chapter Eleven addresses the changes with which the families have had to contend over the eighteen months to two years period of my contact with them, and with the changes that they expect to meet in the coming years. It also returns to issues of process: firstly, to the changes in identity which parents experienced as a consequence of shared parenting and to the manner in which gender affected those changes; and secondly, to a further discussion of the therapeutic nature of the interviews and its implications for social work practice.

The final chapter, and last part, would typically have been called a 'Conclusion'. I have used the words 'Review and prospect' to avoid the implication of definitiveness, and that there was nothing more to be said. Rather than merely summing up what has come before, I have sought to move the material on, to think further about the implications of using the theoretical and methodological approach that I have taken, to explore the practical implications of my work, and to discuss issues of gender, power and structure which the research has highlighted.

There are two general points to be made. Firstly, although I have referred in Chapter One to 'joint custody' following American terminology, I have used the phrase 'shared parenting' in subsequent chapters, except when discussing aspects of the American research or literature. The latter phrase was used by more of the families in my study than was 'joint custody', and it has different political implications. The American usage refers to the fact that, until recently, the non-custodial parent lost all parenting rights, and that one of the reasons behind the introduction of joint custody was the establishing of the on-going legal participation of both parents in the care of their child/ren. The New Zealand phrase, on the other hand, takes into account that under New Zealand law both parents retain guardianship rights to the child and is indicative of an emphasis on non-adversarial custody proceedings. In place of the previous 'custody/access' terminology which is thought to emphasise winners and losers, the phrase 'shared parenting' stresses instead the general principle of continuing, dual parental responsibilities.

Secondly, as the writer, I am acutely aware of the unavoidable dissections and divisions that I have had to make of the rich and multifaceted data. Placing the data in one category rather than another is certainly not intended to imply a restriction of reference, although such an action was necessary for analytical purposes. Equally, some of the chapter divisions imply a discreteness in experience that did not exist in everyday life, so that Chapters Five to Eleven have to be read as illustrating specific dimensions or features of shared parenting and also as discussing events which continually refer across a range of experiences. My hope is that the quoted material will give some indication of the richness of reference and diversity of experience.

Notation

I have incorporated often substantial quotes from the respondents' texts into my own. The key below indicates the meanings of the symbols that I have used within those sections:

.....	indicates (subjectively) the length of silences between comments.
{ word(s)}	explanatory comment which I inserted.
(...)	omission of text.
[]	section of text impossible to decipher. Any word within the brackets indicate an informed guess about what was said.
(What?)	Single word or brief phrase which cut across the dominant speaker.
{ Yes but	Two people speaking together.
{ I am	

THE CONTEXTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

No text exists in a vacuum. Texts are historical products shaped by and shaping the cultures, politics and ideologies current within a society at the moment of writing. The reading of any text and judgment of its pertinence is similarly governed by contextual factors. Writers and readers may not share the definition of subject and subject area informing a text; they may view from different perspectives the field of experience and the issues within that field which it is appropriate or necessary to address. While these differences may constrain the reading of a particular text, they also are the basis upon which a text may shift the boundaries of a field of knowledge.

In a more immediate sense each text has its own biography and its peculiar context, constraints and freedoms. The joint custody literature, which fundamentally informed the directions of my research, was one of the contexts from which my own text developed. Reading the literature gave access to the discourse on joint custody, established the nature of the parameters already in place, parameters of content and of theoretical orientation where, in this instance, much had been accepted as self-evident. My approach to joint custody partly because of the New Zealand context in which the thesis has been written and partly because of what is distinctive in my personal and intellectual history is substantially different from that developed in the United States. Contexts, then, simultaneously inform, expand and restrict. The initial set of boundaries established by the available literature provided a way of moving beyond the content and theoretical position adopted by commentators and researchers in the United States.

Joint custody in the United States.

Articles about joint custody began to appear in the United States, mostly in the popular press, at the end of the 1970's. By the early to mid 1980's, the subject of joint custody occupied a prominent place in the literature on divorce, and significant legislative change redefining the role of the custodial parent had been effected in many states. Under previous family law, the custodial parent at the time of divorce was given full legal and physical responsibility for a child or children, and the non-custodial parent (often the father) lost all legal status and consequently was described as having been legally divested of his role in the family (Folberg & Graham, 1979; Roman & Haddad, 1978). The introduction of joint custody, with its distinctions between joint physical and legal custody (where the child spent some time with both parents in their separate homes, with parents sharing legal and physical responsibilities) and joint legal custody (where each parent retained legal rights but where the child resided primarily with one), was seen as a way of redressing the legal imbalance, and of ensuring that both parents retained full legal rights and that the child's psychological needs were met through retention of contact with both parents. The re-defining of roles and responsibilities is stated clearly in the Californian legislature, the first to introduce a joint custody statute:

The Legislature finds and declares that it is the public policy of this state to assure minor children of frequent and continuing contact with both parents after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage, and in order to effect such policy it is necessary to encourage parents to share the rights and responsibilities of child rearing . . . [Joint custody] means an order awarding the custody of the minor child or children to both parents and providing that physical custody shall be shared by the parents in such a way as to assure the child or children of frequent and continuing contact with both parents; provided however, that such an order may award joint legal custody without awarding joint physical custody (Trombetta, 1981, pp. 213 - 214).

The changes to Californian custody statutes¹ were followed rapidly by similar changes in many other state legislatures². Yet three years later, Hagan (1987) notes that the four types of joint custody statute which have developed are all problematic. The first type, subscribed to by about one third of the states, makes joint custody available as an option to the judiciary. This means that a judge may impose joint custody on parents, an exercising of judicial authority which sits uneasily with the belief that good will and co-operation between parents are necessary to such arrangements. The second group of statutes emphasises parental agreement as a necessary condition for joint custody. What Hagan believes is not addressed in these statutes is how 'agreement' is reached because of the presence of what have been called 'friendlier parent' clauses (Scott & Deryden, 1984). These clauses give the judge the right to grant physical custody to the parent seen by the court to be better disposed to allowing the other parent easy access to the children. Under such legislation, women who have been in violent, abusive relationships are potentially significantly disadvantaged. Refusal to endorse joint custody as the custody of choice could lead to an interpretation of their behaviour as 'unfriendly' and result in the father being given physical custody; while agreement to joint custody in order to avoid this outcome could lead to the perpetuation of a dysfunctional and controlling adult relationship. The third group (only four states) allows for joint custody on request. This approach creates the potential for difficulties like those that the second group could encounter, as well as assuming parental co-operation. Furthermore, the lack of guidelines about when it is appropriate to use joint custody could mean that the courts may confirm a joint custody decision in a family where such a decision is inappropriate³.

The fourth type of statute, into which half of the joint custody legislation falls, defines the arrangement as presumptive, i.e., it is taken as the norm, and other custodial modes are viewed as exceptions. It is restrictive, insofar as the courts are required to consider joint custody first, and other forms of custody may only be considered once

¹ See Cook (1984) for a discussion of Californian legislative intent.

² See Folberg (1984), Appendix A, for a list of joint custody statutes and judicial interpretations.

³ Some states have addressed this issue. Alaska, for example, has defined certain circumstances which must be taken into consideration before joint custody can be confirmed by the court. These include the actual amount of time the child is to spend with each parent, and parental proximity; the child's special needs; which parent would be more likely to encourage the child's easy contact with the other; the willingness of each parent to use dispute resolution methods, and whether there is a history of violence (Salm, 1984, a).

evidence has been produced which proves that joint custody is not in the child's best interests. The advantage of presumption is that it normalises what was seen to be an unusual form of custody, but at the same time Hagan thinks that there are inadequate means of ensuring that parents are prepared for managing the implications of the arrangement itself.

The social, economic, political and cultural motivations that informed this burgeoning of legislation are complex, dynamic and at times contradictory. The ideological underpinnings which have informed joint custody are several. What could be called the aspect informed by a feminist reading of society has been described by Blood & Blood (1979) and Morganbesser & Nehls (1981) as a development of the personal growth and humanistic philosophy of the 1960's. Grassroot parental pressure groups who endorsed the active day-to-day participation by fathers in child-care campaigned for legislative change (Woolley, 1978), and some parents who were divorcing chose joint custody, despite its 'illegality', in order to extend and give value to the paternal role. Feminist redefinitions, because of the consciousness of the exploitation and oppression experienced by women in the nuclear family, also contributed to a changing perspective of the masculine role in families. The writings of, for example, Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976), explored the possibilities of the development of an alternative male consciousness, in which the qualities of nurturance and gentleness currently located within maternal behaviour could become part of masculine self-definition, particularly through male participation in child-rearing. However, the ideology of the participant and nurturant male has resulted, as Scott & Deryden (1984) and Volgy & Everret (1985) have commented, in often unquestioned assumptions about the extent of the actual behavioural changes in the way that men relate to their families⁴. The assumption by many commentators that these changes have been widespread has then been used to lend weight to the general desirability and potential of joint custody.

The second strand in the dominance accorded joint custody as a mode of custody resolution lies in the interaction between legislative change and the extensive social concern about high divorce rates (in which images of loss and familial and personal instability are deeply embedded); the problems confronting solo parents, and in particular solo mothers; and the recent politicising of the financial consequences of separation and divorce for women and children. The attraction of joint custody lies in its assumption of continuity,

⁴ Recent research suggests that involvement by fathers in intact families in close, nurturant roles is not as widespread as has at times been suggested. See, for example, Backett, 1982, 1987; Brannen & Moss, 1987; Chesler, 1985; Richards, 1982; Russell, 1983. Role reversal has not been taken up by many families, and those who have done so have experienced a number of constraints and problems peculiar to that situation (Harper, 1980). For a critical assessment of fatherhood, see Lewis & O'Brien, 1987; McKee & O'Brien, 1982; Richards, 1982. New Zealand studies which comment on male participation within the everyday life of the household also suggest some difference between the rhetoric of the nurturant, involved father and the everyday reality. See Barrington & Gray, 1981; Gray 1983; McKinley, 1983; Novitz, 1978. Lewis & Salt (1986), however, state that there is some evidence that an increasing minority of men are more actively seeking a more involved role in the family.

both among family members and in the parental acceptance of family responsibilities, notwithstanding the disjunction occasioned by the separation or divorce. Under these circumstances a form of custody which could simultaneously address the issue of family dissolution at the sociological level; provide a form of custody that allowed for continuity of caring adults, and on-going paternal participation in families so that the children's best interests were preserved at the psychological level; and address the 'feminization of poverty' (Weitzman, 1985) at the economic, has considerable power.

Recent work on the effect of divorce on children has shown, among other things, that an involved paternal presence is significant for children's, and particularly boys', mental health. Much of the joint custody literature refers to the studies carried out by Hetherington, Cox & Cox (1979) and Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) in which attention to the child's experience of paternal loss was highlighted. These studies have also been instrumental in shifting the focus of enquiry into divorce away from assumptions about the individual pathology of the separated/divorced adults to the stages of post-divorce adjustment of parents and children, and to the way that the child's positive post-divorce adjustment in particular is facilitated or hindered by the father's presence or absence⁵. In addition to this research, which clearly grants fathers a more central role in the promotion of their children's well-being than they had previously been given, has been the studies of divorced men. These studies have emphasised how men's non-custodial status, which could be read as a legal reinforcement of irresponsibility, has contributed substantially to feelings of depression, powerlessness, loss and low self-esteem and that these feelings of redundancy and inadequacy were influential in the fathers' failure to maintain a visiting relationship and financial assistance (D'Andrea, 1983; Greif, 1979; Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978; Luepnitz, 1981).

Over the last few years, research in the United States (Fineman, 1983; Seal, 1979; Weitzman, 1985) and internationally (Cass, 1987; Eekelaar & Maclean, 1986; Johnston & Johnston, 1985; MacDonald, 1986; Smart, 1984) has indicated that while women and children are financially impoverished as a consequence of divorce, men's financial position in contrast tends to improve. The perception that joint custody can help redress the financial imbalance stems from the findings of the father-loss studies quoted above. It has been suggested that the greater the involvement of the father with his child after separation, the more likely he is to honour his child support payments, the regular payment of which plays a major role in keeping women and children above the poverty line and not dependent on welfare. Financially, then, joint custody appears to offer a means by which the financial hardship experienced by so many separated families can be avoided⁶. The

⁵ There is an interaction in some of the relevant literature between assumptions of maternal inadequacy, the desirability of paternal presence, and paternal superiority. For a critique of this reading see Blechman (1982) and Fineman & Opie (1986, espec. pp. 44 - 53).

⁶ In this context, it is worth noting that, although the New Zealand guardianship provisions intended that the non-custodial parent should continue to accept responsibility for his/her family, in the way that joint legal custody is intended to do, defaulting on child maintenance payments has been endemic. Further

economic argument, however, has a further and less altruistic aspect to it. Ideological questions about issues of dependency and the extent and nature of governmental welfare responsibilities also inform the debate. Joint custody in these terms becomes a means of simultaneously reducing Federal support for single parents and the Federal deficit since it was estimated that the cost to the Federal Government of unpaid child support lay in the region of \$4 billion⁷ (Horowitz, 1985).

The third strand in the argument for joint custody can be called judicial convenience because of the difficulties United States judges face in custody battles where many have had no specialist training in family law, and often lack independent assessments of the parents as an aid to forming the custody decisions. The possibility has been raised that one of the reasons for the strong support of the judiciary for joint custody is that, in effect, it provides a legal 'cop out' from otherwise very difficult situations (Carroll, 1984; Folberg & Graham, 1979; Foster & Freed, 1979)⁸. Gardner's (1984, p. 69) comment that the term '*joint custody*' is used to cover what is really *sole custody* to avoid hurt feelings' gives a further dimension to this argument. Not only does joint custody remove the need to decide against one parent, but it also provides a way of ostensibly disappointing neither.

The fourth strand that I have identified within the arguments supportive of joint custody is again ideological, but is removed from humanistic assumptions of nurturance and equality. Instead, it is more overtly concerned with the exercise of power and with male dominance. The literature of the fathers' rights movements, in which such notions are given expression, clearly reflects the ideologies of the New Right in the United States. Joint custody is desirable *because* it makes possible on-going control and power over the ex-spouse⁹. It is at this juncture that the instability of the principle of the 'best interests of

regulations to prevent avoidance of payment of maintenance for children have recently been introduced. See also Dodson (1985) on income withholding as a means to defeat child support defaulters, and Williams (1985) on formulas for estimating adequate awards of child support in relation to parental income.

⁷ It had been suggested by 1985 that women should not be eligible for AFDC unless they had taken out a legal joint custody arrangement with their child/ren's father/s, the intention being that this would provide a further avenue for the Federal Government to locate child support defaulters. Such moves were described as punitive and penalising women, who often did not want their children's fathers to know of their whereabouts because of the risk of violence; and because there was some anxiety that the men, who frequently had had little to do with the children might then start exercising their legal prerogatives in relation to the children (i.e., giving permission to marry, get a driver's licence, enter the Forces) as a means of punishing or controlling the women whom they would see as benefitting from the child support that the men were now paying (D. Jones, 1985).

⁸ Foster & Freed (p. D11), however, quote part of the opinion given by the Chief Judge in one of the major joint custody cases as warning specifically against such a situation: "There are no painless solutions. In the rare case, joint custody may approximate the former family relationships more closely than any other custodial arrangements. It may not, however, be indiscriminately substituted for an award of sole custody to one parent. . . . The emotional impetus to avoid making a hard choice, to reward both parents and to declare the contest a draw . . . should be resisted where essential pre-conditions for a viable division of custody are absent".

⁹ I was fortunate in being able to attend public hearings in Wisconsin in 1985 held by the Special Committee on Custody Arrangements who were studying possible legislative change in relation to custody law. A number of the men who spoke at the meeting did so as members of fathers' rights groups. The

the child' becomes most noticeable, because of the tendency to merge and supplant the child's interests with parental rights. In this respect joint custody is valuable because it establishes a fundamental legal right by which parents after separation retain their parental right to *control* the child, rather than that joint custody provides a means by which fathers can play a caring, involved role. In the discussion of these rights what is emphasised is the 'fundamental right of parental autonomy' (Canakos, 1984, p. 232), a phrase that does not immediately appear to incorporate concepts such as interdependence and co-operation, or take account of differing interpretations of 'control' which may be employed¹⁰. Statements such as 'the right of each parent must be regarded as equal with that of the other; and the right in question is not a right to total control but rather a right to the same level of control one had in the marriage' (p. 232), assumes equal involvement in child-rearing prior to the separation and ignores issues of power between couples and the potential abuse of that power.

Relatively few commentators raise questions about on-going power issues in the post-separation relationship (Bruch, 1988; Chesler, 1985; Fineman, 1985; Grant et al, 1984; Hagan, 1987; D. Jones, 1985; Kaplan, 1985; Scott & Derdyn, 1984; Hendrickson & Shulmann, 1981; Shulmann & Pitt, 1982/1984). There is general concern amongst these commentators that the equal parental relationship assumed by the dominant joint custody model is not universally valid. They argue that gendered power imbalances are frequently overlooked in mediation sessions, and that a joint custody situation is not in the child's best interests when the wife has been pressured into agreement by her ex-husband who is using custody as a means to continue to assert his authority¹¹. What their work highlights in general is the lack of research into the power dimensions of the post-marital

advantage they envisaged as arising from a legislative change favouring joint custody would be that their wives may well not leave the marriage if they knew that legal joint custody was the presumption; and that if they did leave, joint custody would enable the male to retain much greater power over his ex-spouse, and over the way she spent child support than he currently enjoyed under the existing legislation. See Chesler (1985) who found that the wish to control and punish their ex-spouses formed a major part of the motivation to contest custody among often abusive, and violent men in her study. The aggressive lobbying tactics used by these groups were at that stage being studied. The researcher noted that the groups' ability to give the impression of widespread public support meant that they did have a considerable influence on legislators (Mike Rausch - personal communication).

¹⁰ For a critique of the way that arguments about 'rights' assume equality of access to power, see Hendrickson & Shulmann (1981).

¹¹ Bruch (1988, p. 120) argues that, 'Even a skilled mediator cannot compensate for the sharp disparities in power and sophistication that often exist between divorcing spouses. . . . established patterns of interaction are virtually impossible for a weaker spouse to overcome under the pressure of unaccompanied face-to-face negotiations. . . . studies . . . suggest that gender-based power distinctions are present in much divorce mediation. Masculine control of male-female dialogues through the use of such techniques as monopolization of speaking time and the use of interruptions is so commonplace that even a trained mediator may not perceive the imbalance it portends . . . ' and she quotes other studies of informal settlements where women have, as a consequence of 'the pre-existing power relations . . . participate[d] in their own domination'.

relationship, all the more pertinent given the significance accorded the parental relationship in much of the writing on joint custody.

The joint custody model

Models are developed in order to explain social realities, yet the very nature of the model with its inevitable simplification and its 'shorthand' makes suspect and at times 'misleading' what is intended as explanatory and useful (Herzog & Sudia, 1971, p. 84). The misleading nature of models is further intensified because of features such as imputed unity, dichotomy, stability, and symmetry, so that differences in what is being measured and temporal elements which complicate prediction are ignored (pp. 88 - 90). In addition to these problematic qualities which complicate an easy acceptance of models as reflective of a unitary social reality on which recommendations can properly be based, Hirschman (1979, p. 174) draws attention to the underlying ideological content inherent in models and also suggests that the reading of a model is a complex action:

without models, paradigms, ideal types, and similar abstractions we cannot even start to think. . . . the kind of paradigms we search out, the way we put them together, and the ambitions we nurse for their powers - all this can make a great deal of difference. . . . in evaluating the broader social and political consequences of some ongoing event we must be suspicious of paradigms that pretend to give a clearcut answer about the desirable or undesirable nature of these consequences.

A model, then, can be viewed as an ideological construction, representative of a particular angle on social realities rather than a neutral or objective description. Viewing a model in this way encourages enquiry into what was suppressed in its formation.

In terms of output the literature on joint custody reaches a peak between 1980 - 1985, also a time of much legislative action in the United States, after which there is a distinct decline in production. Within this literature two identifiable tones emerge, partly linked to chronology - the time of writing - and partly linked to the nature of the writing itself - whether or not it is based on research. The writers in the earlier period tend to adopt an emotive, almost categorical tone, irrespective of their perception of the viability of the arrangement, and the perspective adopted is a 'commonsensical' one in which widely differing views about what children and parents are or are not able to cope with in relation to life-style and family structure are advanced¹². Those writers in this group who view the arrangement favourably describe children as adaptable and able to respond to change, and parents as able to prioritize their parenting responsibilities over and above their need to express personal animosities. Those viewing the arrangement unfavourably emphasise older psychological notions of the need for a stable (mother?) caretaker, children's potential vulnerability, and the inevitability of on-going parental hostilities. The second

¹² For example, whereas Woolley (1978) firmly endorses the arrangement Skoloff (1984) equally categorically opposes it.

tone, one of greater cautiousness, is adopted by a number of writers¹³ and by the researchers (Arbanel, 1979; Bowman, 1983; Irving, Benjamin & Trocme, 1984; Luepnitz, 1982; Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981; Steinman, 1981, and Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch, 1985), who point to problems of conceptualisation, lack of research, lack of unambiguous findings, lack of an ecological approach, and insufficient knowledge about those families for whom joint custody is more likely to be a stressful experience. More recently, Ahrons & Rodgers (1987) have written that very little is known about how families actually manage a joint custody arrangement. In contrast to Ahrons' earlier and more positive writings when she positively endorsed the concept, the authors believe now that it is a mode of custody that parents may be able to sustain for a short time only when both parents have voluntarily agreed that this is the best form of custody for their family.

Given this diversity of view, the dominant tendency of the writing on joint custody is to make joint custody appear a very attractive option. A critical reading reveals the existence of a model of joint custody which much of the writing either takes for granted or aims to validate. The main elements of the model are a concept of adult rationality, a positive social role for the law, and the claim that all family members benefit from the arrangement. The development of such a model can be seen to be in line with the earlier legislative changes rejecting the adversarial divorce processes in favour of no-fault divorce. These changes were premised on the belief that the destructive processes of the adversarial divorce made the socially desired amicable post-divorce relationships almost impossible to achieve.

The concept of adult rationality assumes the existence of flexible, mature adults, able to co-operate and communicate with their ex-spouses non-manipulatively in a way that highlights the child's best interests, so causing minimal disruption to the child's life and providing a caring environment that will provide more adequately for the child's and parents' psychological and physical needs (Carroll, 1984; Elkin, 1979, 1984; Folberg & Graham, 1979; Gardiner, 1984; Milne, 1978; Noble, 1983; Stack, 1976; Steinman, 1983; Truedell, Cox, & Cease 1979). Hostility is recognised as a potential complicating factor (Irving, Benjamin & Trocme, 1984; Kelly, 1984; Stahl, 1984) but not as insuperable provided that parents maintain their focus on the child's needs¹⁴. Ahrons (1983) suggests a woman's anger towards her ex-spouse reduces over time and in relation to the degree of perceived interest by the former spouse towards the child.

¹³ For example, Clingenpeel & Repucci (1982/1984); Folberg & Graham (1979) Hagan (1987) and Volgy & Everret (1985).

¹⁴ The assumption (Kelly, 1983) that couples do not divorce because of child oriented hostilities implies the ability to agree on child-rearing practices. Kelly (1984) believes in the 'reality' of parental co-operation, stating that post-divorce anger is sustained only beyond the two year period in merely fifteen percent of divorce cases. She does not discuss the way that, although the anger itself may not be sustained, the post-divorce relationship may be substantially altered as a consequence of the dynamics of the two years of distrust and bitterness.

Furthermore, in this model of joint custody the law plays a positive social role. Legal processes can facilitate the achievement of parental co-operation and continuity (Folberg, 1984), rather than serve to intensify parental hostility. Elkin (1979, p. A17) highlights this emergent legal role:

Joint custody is more than a decision. It is even more an attitude held by courts, attorneys, parents and society towards the divorcing family and roles we assign to the parents. Society's expectations of divorcing parents have been too low. They are capable of much more responsibility and commitment than we have permitted them to exercise.

The dominant image, then, is of adult, rational parents continuing, despite separation or divorce, to share family roles and responsibilities. In the light of a high divorce rate and continuing debates about the threat posed by separation and divorce to the nuclear family, the appeal of joint custody is obvious and has produced claims that it may even result in better parenting for a child than s/he would have received in an intact family¹⁵. This model of joint custody implies that although the surface view of the family structure would suggest permutation and dissolution, a more perceptive viewing would recognise that intactness, integrity, significance, and equality of parental roles could be retained. Concepts such as 'families are forever' (Elkin, 1984, p. 10), emphasising a focus on the re-integration of divorced families rather than their dissolution, are associated with this model as are notions of continuity and 'continued interdependence'. The latter are present in Ahrons' (1983, p. 57) systemic approach to issues of family change:

The central assumption is that divorce is a crisis of family transition which causes structural change in the family system. It results in changes in the family characteristics . . . but it does not necessarily obliterate one of the parent-child relationships nor the relationships between parents. The concept of continued interdependence between former spouses is central to understanding the continuing relationship within the family as the divorced family redefines its parameters.

The model, then, holds within it the promise of a new, more equal and less adversarial way by which children and parents can live a post- separation or divorce relationship. Substantial benefits appear to be available to all family members. Children are described as benefitting from a reduction of the sense of loss of the non-custodial parent (Arbanel, 1979; Grote & Weinstein, 1977; Salm, 1984, a), and from the support gained from the presence of both parents in a situation where one parent is unstable, or where the child is going through a period of conflict with one parent (Climgenpeel & Repucci, 1984). It is also proposed that there is benefit to be gained from the diversity of parental handling and different modes of living (Lupenitz, 1982; Stack, 1976), and from the experience of living in an environment where the child has the chance to see the parents coping successfully with their hostility towards each other. Steinman summarises the value

¹⁵ Lee Salk, a prominent psychologist who was involved in a bitter custody battle said "a (joint) custody arrangement provides some children with more attention than they got when their parents were living together" (Scott & Deryden, 1984, p. 460).

of joint custody as offering the child a clear message of being loved and valued, and of enabling the child to see the parents making a concerted effort (and going to considerable lengths in so doing) to take account of her/his needs¹⁶. In addition the child retains psychological and physical access to both parents (Steinman, 1983).

Parents are said to benefit as well, the father in particular maintaining the (assumed) continuity of the relationship with his child (Ahrons, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983; Bowman, 1983; Elkin, 1984; Gardner, 1984; Steinman, 1983). The continued involvement of both parents increases resources for childcare. Both parents may be seen to benefit from the opportunity to be self-determining (Elkin, 1984; Milne, 1978). Steinman (1983) suggests that both parents benefit from a bolstering of diminished self-esteem and guilt over the break-up through the continuity of an aspect of their pre-divorce life. Ramey, Stender & Smaller (1979) suggest that joint custody means that the mother is relieved of guilt feelings she might otherwise have had if the child had been deprived of a male model, and that women may gain in self-esteem by being forced or enabled through joint custody to go out into the paid work force. The more acceptable joint custody becomes as an option, the more women will feel freer to choose it, so developing a broader range of skills and experiences. This argument, however, is not one with which they are entirely happy as they then point out that feminists believe that joint custody can represent a strategic loss for women, because of the lack of equal economic rights outside of the home (p. 576)¹⁷. The possibility of reduced litigation is also advanced as advantageous to both parents (Bowman, 1982; Irving, Benjamin & Trocme, 1984; Ilfeld, Ilfeld & Alexander, 1982). Bruch (1981), however, quotes another study which found that increased litigation occurred in situations where the parents had agreed to joint custody as a compromise.

In summary, the benefits to families which it is argued flow on from the use of joint custody are: women experience a reduction in the stress associated with full-time

¹⁶In *Levy v. Levy* (1976), the judge stated "the court grants each parent joint control of the child's education and upbringing and reasons that by granting the parents an equal voice in the raising of their child much of the acrimony and ill will generated by the divorce will be ameliorated. Joint custody will also serve to give the measure of psychological support and uplift to each parent which would communicate itself to the child in measure of mutual love, mutual attention and mutual training" (Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981, p. 38 - 39).

¹⁷ A further embroidering, and one which I believe is quite distasteful, because of the implications of class snobbishness, the inherent superiority of the middle class and the rigidity of the division between satisfaction and employment, parenting and non-satisfaction, is given by Richards & Goldenberg (1985, p. 36). They write: 'the effect of joint physical custody on mothers has received less attention in the literature. Some women have reported a sense of loss . . . This response may characterize women whose career opportunities are severely limited. In fact, the argument has been made by feminist lawyers that joint physical custody may be unsuitable for working-class women. The majority of working class women are in low paying jobs that lack the advancement possibilities of jobs for better-educated middle-class women. Moving to a half-time mother role may be perceived as a deprivation by the working-class woman who has no compensatory job advancement possibilities (Uviller, 1978). On the other hand, one can speculate that mothers might welcome the free time'. My data, however, suggests that women did not so readily divide their lives and their sense of satisfaction so readily into familial and work spheres. The implication that having a successful career in some way compensated for the loss of time with the child was not confirmed by the majority of women in my study, most of whom were in full-time jobs, which they regarded as challenging and interesting.

responsibility for child-rearing and may be freed to pursue a career/job; men avoid the loss of their children and therefore the loss of their parenting role, a process seen to lead to a loss of self-identity, poor self-esteem and to the development of frustration often expressed in rapid decreases in visitation and in child support payments; the parental unit can be seen to benefit through its ability to offer support and assistance to each other, each parent gaining in flexibility and strength which itself assists in the processes of restructuring their lives after divorce (Richards & Goldenberg, 1985); the overriding benefit for the child is the maintenance of contact and the enjoyment of a full relationship with both parents. In terms of wider social changes, joint custody results in changes to role and expectations (Elkin, 1979), thus creating a more androgynous personality (Climgenpeel & Repucci, 1982/1984) and greater flexibility in the ways that the family structures itself (Salius, 1979).

There are some possible disadvantages noted in the literature, but they tend to be less emphasised and noticed by fewer commentators, than are the perceived advantages of the system.

Some writers have suggested that children, and especially pre-school children may be very unsettled by constant moving between homes, so that instead of developing a sense of continuity and stability they develop a sense of discontinuity, potentially enhanced by different parental life-styles, routines, peer groups and economic and physical circumstances (Climgenpeel & Repucci, 1982/1984; Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981; Steinman, 1983; Salm, 1984, a). Concern is also expressed that the assumed close and supportive parental relationship may assist children to retain fantasies about parental reconciliations; that maintaining social relations across different neighbourhoods could be difficult; and that children could suffer as a consequence of the structure of the arrangement where there was on-going parental hostility in which they could be caught (Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981; Gardner, 1984). Climgenpeel & Repucci also point out that an implicit assumption that joint custody parents are supported by either informal networks or formal institutions needs further research.

The disadvantages or problems which might arise for parents are believed to centre on the parental management of the post-separation relationship, because it is acknowledged that the possible development of a power struggle would contribute to difficulties in resolving child-related issues (Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981; Salm, 1984). Joint custody is also seen as potentially restrictive should parents want to relocate (Bodenheimer, 1977, 1978; Bruch, 1981; Salm, 1984)¹⁸, and as causing logistical difficulties. There is also some suggestion that the financial implications of the arrangement need further study

¹⁸ This issue was also raised extensively during the public hearings held by the Wisconsin Special Committee on Custody, May, 1985. Raines (1986) writes very categorically that when joint custody parents wish to relocate, they should be prevented from so doing by law. To support his argument he refers to literature indicating that children are destabilised by family mobility, but interestingly, he does not take his argument to its logical conclusion, i.e., that no family should be allowed to move! That he does not do so suggests the existence of a double standard for judging the separated and non-separated.

before the arrangement is adopted as valid for all families (Bowman, 1983; Patterson, 1984; Salm, 1984).

Gender-related issues are raised specifically by Bruch (1981), Fineman (1985), Grant et al. (1984), Henrickson & Shulmann (1981), Kelly (1983), Ramey, Stender & Smaller (1979), Shulmann & Pitt (1982/1984) and Scott & Deryden (1984). Their comments highlight the too easy assumptions of equality within the marital relationship (also reflected in the ostensible equalising of parental rights under gender-neutral legislation), and they suggest that the experience of each parent is liable to be different and ordered along gender lines. In particular, concern is expressed about the viability of joint custody when the adult relationship has been physically or emotionally violent; about the unequal distribution of power within a relationship which may result in women being forced to stay in a joint custody situation, or lose custody; and about the way a joint custody order may involve the loss of power and control for the women, whose lives are often still centred on the home. Finally, concern is expressed that within defended hearings women's parental performance is more harshly assessed than men's. Joint custody is seen as potentially removing an emphasis on what is best for the child, putting in place instead an emphasis on parental agreement and equalising the rights of parents, one of whom may have had little to do with the day-to-day care of the child. In this way, joint custody may lead to a denial of the value of the mother, and to her further loss of control over her life.

To summarise: the thrust of much of the literature is to argue the case for joint custody in light of the problems of single-parent custody, and to develop a profile of the adequate joint custodial parent. The most extensive list of parental qualities is developed by Elkin (1984) but a review of other writers (Carroll, 1984; Clingenpeel & Repucci, (1984; Gardner, 1984; Folberg & Graham, 1979; Folberg, 1984; Freed & Foster, 1979; Kelly, 1984; Noble, 1983; Steinman, 1983) indicates that the most commonly listed qualities required are: maturity; flexibility; co-operativeness; an ability to communicate and to solve problems; a respect for the other as parent; an ability not to interfere in the other's parenting role and an ability to separate spousal from parental roles; previous active involvement in child-rearing and the possession of the ability to come to a reasoned decision about the child's best interest. Conversely, the lack of these qualities would suggest that joint parenting may be a precarious exercise.

Research studies

The few research studies on joint custody (Arbanel, 1979; Ahrons, 1980; Bowman, 1983; Irving, Benjamin & Trocme, 1984; Luepnitz, 1982; Morganbesser & Nehls, 1981; Steinman, 1981; and Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch, 1985) that I have been able to locate are primarily outcome oriented. Although Luepnitz' major purpose is to compare single parenthood with joint custody, she also states her desire to understand the 'dailiness' of family life (p. 16) and Irving, Benjamin & Trocme describe their paper as part of a larger research study which will result in a theoretical model of joint custody. Only Arbanel, Luepnitz, Morganbesser & Nehls and Steinman actually interviewed the

children in the families. Importantly, especially in the context of legislative activity in the United States, most of the research was carried out when the idea was relatively novel, and most of the parents were both committed to the idea of joint custody and highly motivated to make it work for them. The families involved in the research were generally well-educated, white and middle-class who saw themselves as pioneers, a point which makes an across-the-board generalisation from their experience somewhat difficult, and on which Arbanel, Irving, Benjamin & Trocme, and Steinman also comment¹⁹. All the researchers, with the exception of Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch, who report on a three year longitudinal study of fifty-one joint custody families, present their work as preliminary, and there is general agreement that longitudinal studies need to be carried out. Although in the earlier studies, the parental level of satisfaction with sharing was generally high, it is significant that the tone of the researchers is cautious. Arbanel notes the importance of taking account of familial change and idiosyncrasies which can alter the 'fit' of the arrangement, and rejects the easy assumption that, because joint custody works for some, it should work for all. Equally, Steinman argues strongly against making joint custody presumptive. She believes that joint custody must be regarded not as a panacea but as a process. Similarly, Irving, Benjamin & Trocme also suggest that shared parenting should be one option amongst others, rather than the only one.

Not surprisingly the possession by parents of qualities of flexibility, toleration, co-operation and commitment to joint custody receive further endorsement by the researchers. In particular, Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch construct a series of parental characteristics, the presence or absence of which would indicate more precisely the likelihood of the joint custody succeeding, failing or being sustained under stress²⁰.

The advantages for the men are again described as allowing continuity and a greater degree of involvement in the daily lives of their children. One of the results of male involvement, Luepnitz concludes, was that men reduced their commitment to work, but women developed new skills outside the home, and were in this way forced to reorient themselves more substantially than the men. Bowman, also commenting on the increase in male participation in the lives of their children, describes a more positive father/child

¹⁹ Kelly (1984) notes the lack of research into families where the decision-making was done by an outside agency.

²⁰ The successful parents possessed qualities which allowed them to: (1) respect and appreciate the bond between the child and former spouse, and to maintain that despite negative feelings about the marriage failure; (2) stand back, and maintain an objectivity through the divorcing process in relation at least to the child; (3) empathize with the point of view of the child and other parent; (4) shift emotional expectations of the spouse from the role of mate to that of co-parent; (5) establish new role boundaries; (6) maintain high self-esteem, flexibility and openness to help. Conversely, the least successful parents were those who: (1) continued to hold on to intense, and continuing hostility; (2) overwhelming anger and a need to punish the ex-spouse; (3) had a history of physical and/or substance abuse; (4) held onto the belief that the other was a bad parent; (6) were unable to separate their own feelings and needs from those of the child (pp. 561 - 562).

relationship. Both parents felt that they benefitted from the other's support, and that the continuity of the family was preserved.

Some of the findings of the studies, however, did note aspects of the arrangement which were problematic. Ahrons suggests, in relation to the adult level of satisfaction with joint custody, that the less physical time the fathers spent with their children, the more they felt they occupied the role of 'visitor' and were marginalised within the family system, a finding which is, nonetheless, substantially ignored by her persistence in defining joint custody as not necessarily meaning equal or nearly equal quantitative time with each parent. Irving, Benjamin & Trocme point to lower degrees of satisfaction the higher the levels of Court involvement and the higher the level of parental guilt about the ending of the marriage. They also note that, the perceived benefits notwithstanding, there was continuing anxiety among parents about the long-term effects on the children of frequent moving between homes. Luepnitz suggests that the disadvantages for the adults lie in having to manage the post-divorce relationship, and in the more insecure financial status of women. The redeeming feature for the women in her study was that, although they were financially disadvantaged after divorce in relation to men, the sharing arrangement resulted in the regular payment of child-support. In contrast to the maternal custody families with whom the joint parenting families in her study were compared, none of the joint custody women had to go to court to enforce payment.

Statements in the research studies about the children's happiness, good adjustment, and valuing of the continuing contact with both parents are partially undermined by other findings. In three out of the seven research projects - those of Arbanel, Morganbesser & Nehls, and Steinman - the suitability of joint custody for adolescents is queried, since adolescence is a time when children need to start to take control of their own lives and loosen the parental bonds. Steinman's research also raised additional uncertainties about the overall positiveness of the children's experiences in joint custody. Although confusion around changing homes did not appear to be the major issue that some writers suspected it might be (some of the children thought of their ability to manage the moves satisfactorily as indicative of maturity), one quarter of the children in her study experienced some confusion in switching homes. Differences between homes in expectations and rules was not a problem, and joint custody allowed the children to feel free to love both parents. But the children experienced strain especially in the context of parental conflict over child management. Furthermore, the arrangement did not eliminate issues of loyalty. Steinman describes one third of the children feeling that they had to be 'hyperloyal' (p. 410). Although joint custody may in some instances be the least disruptive form of custody in relation to the child's previous experience as Folberg & Graham (1979) suggest, children were clear that they would have preferred their parents to have remained together, rather than to be living apart.

Despite some qualifications to the general conclusions of the literature, optimism dominates and the literature reads at times like a series of 'campaign slogans' in an

'election' for prevailing social values²¹. Much of the writing suffers from what Irving, Benjamin & Trocme describe as a 'surfeit of rhetoric' and a lack of balanced evaluation (p. 133). There is a uniformity about the way that many of the arguments are constructed. The same research is unquestioningly quoted in many articles as an adequate rendering of the reality and truth of the problems of separated families, so that the sensation for the reader is initially of the overwhelming validity of the case for joint custody. But gradually doubts begin to emerge.

The problems with the literature are several. Some of the difficulties arise, I think, because of the perceived need to develop profiles of 'successful' joint parenting families, so that the concentration in the writing has been to stress what should be (the evolution of the new moral order?) while not taking account of what is. The difficulty with the model informing the discussion is that it is extremely prescriptive. It does not admit ambiguities. It seems straightforward, thus disguising experiences that are complex, tense, and uncertain - those of parenting in general, and of separation and divorce in particular. It tends towards gender neutrality. It sets forth as part of the criteria the need for previous involvement by both parents in child-rearing, yet there is no questioning or evaluation of the culturally acceptable differences between behaviour for men and for women in relation to child-rearing²².

Dwelling on how parents ought to behave has obscured and glossed over consideration of areas of family life that need further investigation. I would argue here that the way in which family life is conceptualised is often too simplistic, that it is too often based on unquestioned assumptions, and indeed that the explicatory models of family structure and system are based on idealisations which have not yet sufficiently accounted for process and psychological events as well as biological and sociological ones. This has meant, for example, that assumptions about equality within the marriage are then carried through to a model of a separated family, so that issues of power and gender tend to be dismissed or ignored as irrelevant, an attitude all the more surprising in the light of extensive feminist research into gender inequality within the family. Furthermore, information about the poverty of women and children in women-headed households was

²¹ Rich (1983/1986, p. 156) notes the tendency of North Americans to see their 'particular issues as some kind of model or vanguard for [parents] everywhere. (This is a common North American, Euro-American, form of chauvinism)' (my substitution). Her words, although in this instance addressed to feminists, are apposite in relation to the joint custody literature, where there is frequently the sense that a new era in human relations is about to be ushered in and that what is being proposed as the significant part of this new era has universal validity.

²² Chesler's (1985) book, *Mothers on Trial*, about women who lost custody of their children, highlights this issue. Out of the twenty-five basic tasks routinely associated with child-rearing, ranging from the physical care of babies (changing nappies, feeding, bathing) to helping with homework, driving to sport etc., the men who were given custody in preference to their wives had either NEVER or very rarely participated with their children in the performance of these tasks. The fact that they had had such minimal involvement was *not* seen as a handicap in relation to their assuming day-to-day care. There are, however, some legislatures who have specifically defined the primary caretaker as the person who has performed a clearly defined nurturing, and caring role in order to ensure that a sole custody disposition is made in the child's best interests (Neely, quoted in Bruch, 1988).

available well before the interest in joint custody surfaced yet did not excite particular interest. What this suggests is that knowledge is frequently compartmentalised and segmented. For decades psychological explanations of women's inadequacy have been used extensively to explain the problems besetting solo mothers and the sociological, structural issues have been conveniently placed to one side. By individualising what are wider social issues of justice and redistribution the need for an ecological approach could be ignored. Such processes help disguise the way that political and ideological stances dominate the construction and distribution of knowledge²³.

One notable example of the interaction between knowledge, social policy and ideology in the joint custody literature is the way that the original, grassroots concept of joint custody as equal sharing of parenting responsibility was very rapidly subverted. The importance of the original conception lay in its challenge to the social roles, gender construction and expectations of men and women, yet the moment of revolution was subsequently lost as a consequence of the legal definition of joint physical and joint legal responsibility, which largely confirms current familial patterns of organising child-care²⁴. While it is clear what physical custody means *in practice*, it is much less clear what legal custody means for the legal custodian's relationship with either the child or the ex-spouse, and Johnson's (1982, pp. 8 - 9) comments on the New Zealand legislative provisions for guardianship are worth noting:

the post-dissolution custom in New Zealand of leaving the non-custodial parent a joint guardian with the custodial one is unusual and would be regarded in some jurisdictions as fraught with trouble and conflict. The explanation of New Zealand's satisfactory experience with this approach may be that non-custodial parents tend not to try to influence the upbringing of their children as much as their joint guardianship theoretically entitles them to.

If Johnson's statement is valid, then the inscription of the two positions of legal joint custody and physical joint custody within American legislation successfully undermines the entire edifice that was being constructed around the need for the child's on-going contact with the father. Legal joint custody gives rights of intervention in upbringing, a position which reinforces paternal rights to the child. What it does not guarantee is physical contact, which the research on the child's adjustment to the parental separation argues is psychologically necessary for the child. Indeed, there is some indication that very few families have joint physical custody (Fineman, quoting Glendon,

²³ For example, Blechman's (1982) review of the literature on the psychological risk to children in women-headed families is rarely cited in subsequent reviews of literature on the subject. One of the purposes of her review is to broaden the dimensions of the arguments - to introduce the sociological as well as the psychological - and to challenge the usual reading of Hetherington, Cox & Cox's assessment of the inadequate functioning of women and girls in women-headed families after divorce. For additional comments on the difficulty of getting feminist research 'accepted' see Spender (1981).

²⁴ Kitzinger (quoted in McKinley, 1983, p. 1) writes: 'Values change and the culture of child-rearing changes too. We cannot alter styles of mothering without ultimately changing the larger society and re-examining what it is to be a male and female, what it is to be a child, the role of parents, and the significance of the family in that culture'. Given the strong identification of current family patterns with the capitalist system, it is not surprising that the challenge initially posed by joint custody was re-directed.

1983; Weitzman, 1985). If, as Weitzman notes, referring to research on custody in Santa Clara done by Mnookin & Maccoby in 1982 - 1983, the custodial decisions labelled as 'joint' are merely a relabelling of custody and visitation, then this would suggest that the flow-on of benefits of contact to all family members, such as continuity, improved self-regard, and financial solvency, may not eventuate. A change in nomenclature may make couples feel better at the time of negotiating an agreement, but subsequent recognition of an empty formula may frustrate the anticipated behavioural changes.

A further problem is that the research has been considerably hampered by its methodology. There are two major criticisms. The first comes from within the quantitative paradigm itself. It relates to shortcomings which the authors themselves identify such as sample size, lack of randomness, and problems of universality. These criticisms relate not only to these studies but to the studies which are used to define and illustrate the issues of custody itself, where the limitations are described as both methodological, and conceptual (Kurdek, 1986; Levitin, 1979; White & Mika, 1983), because of the stated lack of more descriptive research into areas of divorce. What, however, is fascinating is the process of concretisation of work judged problematic, so that Kurdek, for example, first lists the limitations of the work on children and divorce, thus creating an impression of its instability, but then proceeds to use as authoritative the very work that he has criticised, so negating the very limitations which he has just described. This procedure is akin to the one aptly described by Derrida where he writes about the importance of thinking through more thoroughly the implications of concepts and the usual manner of critique. He suggests that one possible and 'daring way' would involve concerning 'oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy', a step which he believes might prove difficult for those 'who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of discourse they claim to have disengaged from'. The alternative and conservative choice made in place of the radical one

consists in conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used . . . ; there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other tools appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. This is how the language of the social sciences criticizes *itself* (Derrida, 1987, p. 284).

Criticism can also be directed at the research methodology. Although I do not propose to enter into an extensive discussion of the value of qualitative methodologies and the difficulties created by quantitative methodologies (which have been well presented elsewhere²⁵ and constitute part of my own decision to use and develop qualitative

²⁵ See for example, Bleicher, 1982; Blumer, 1967, 1969; Cicourel, 1964; Douglas, 1970; Gadamer, 1979; Giddens, 1976; Mackie, 1985; Morgan, 1985; O'Neil, 1975; Pelz, 1974; Phillips, 1973; Phillipson, 1983; Plummer, 1985; Silverman, 1985; Shutz, 1962, 1976; Shutz & Luckmann, 1973; Walker, 1985; Watson, 1976. Feminist writers have also criticized the quantitative mode extensively, in particular in relation to its refusal to entertain the issue of difference. See for example Benston, 1982; Greene & Kahn, 1985; Keller, 1983, 1985; McCormick, 1975; Oakley, 1981; Smith, 1975; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Vickers, 1982.

methodology), I want to reiterate some of the frequently encountered criticisms. These are that: quantitative methodologies are closed rather than dynamic; the need to be able to measure takes precedence over the nature of what is to be measured; there is reliance on a complex of beliefs and perceptions which are assumed to be universal and which do not need further questioning; and the ultimate concern is with control and power.

These methodological constraints have meant that issues of significance in joint custody have not been addressed. In particular, how joint custody families make their decisions and manage the on-going complexities of their lives has not been investigated. In other words, how families are, and not what they should be, has hardly been addressed by the research literature in the United States²⁶.

Although some of the studies interviewed both parents (e.g., Arbanel, 1979; Ahrons, 1980) there is no development of an intertextual approach to the accounts of each couple, in order to explore the points of contradiction and tension. Instead, such an approach is treated as methodologically toxic. Interviewers do not interview members of the same family out of a desire to avoid contamination of responses, an approach which then places each account in isolation and ignores the mutuality and shared experience out of which it grew. There is some recognition that experience is mediated by gender difference, but the fuller social implications of gender as a determinant of experience are generally not discussed.

My critique of the American joint custody literature identifies two fundamental issues. Firstly, the model (on which extensive legislative change has been based) which emerges from this literature assumes as general the existence of a particular style of family and parental relationship and many of the assumptions about the beneficial aspects of joint custody are insufficiently backed up by research. Secondly, the research methodology and orientation of the research has hindered a fuller understanding of how families in joint custody arrangements manage their lives.

New Zealand, shared parenting and problem definition

In contrast to the situation in the United States, in New Zealand there is no extensive literature on shared parenting²⁷ and I have been able to locate only three articles. Two of them (Davidson, 1984; Johnson, 1982) basically cite overseas research, list parental qualities necessary for successful sharing and suggest that shared parenting has

²⁶ Of all the researchers, Luepnitz's work is the most notable attempt to come to terms with these issues. But her method is against her, since it is not clear how one achieves a full description of 'dailiness' when 'forced answer' and limited choice questions are the research tools.

²⁷ Leibrich & Holm (1984) also comment on the paucity of New Zealand material on custody. In their discussion paper on the Family Court and the identification of issues needing research, they comment on the differences between United States and New Zealand law and the growth of the joint custody option in the United States, and suggest that consideration may need to be given to the specific inclusion of joint custody as it has been more recently understood within the Guardianship Act.

some advantages and some disadvantages. The third, (Maskill, 1981) is a review of access cases in custody proceedings, in which she is critical of the District Magistrates' decision-making processes in the four joint custody cases out of one hundred custody and access cases reviewed²⁸. Butterworths Family Law Service (1987) notes that joint custody can be used where both parents are genuinely motivated to continue close day-to-day parenting, thus giving maximal continuity to the parental relationship and avoiding both the visiting parent syndrome and the overburdening of a sole custodial parent. The exact nature of 'genuine' motivation is not defined, but minimal conditions are set forth: both parents must be individually fit as parents; both must be committed to the idea of joint custody and able to co-operate; and geographical proximity of parents facilitates the easy functioning of joint custody. There is a further comment to the effect that shared parenting will mostly come about as a result of parental decision-making, but that some parents, unable to co-operate, will need professional input²⁹. I was unable to find any law reports of court cases involving shared custody and the files of the Family Court were not available because of issues of confidentiality.

Exact numbers of families engaged in shared parenting are not available, because of statistical inadequacies within the system, because of the fact that a large number of separations stay outside the legal system, and because it is impossible to assume that the original custody decision will continue unchanged for a number of years. The phrase 'shared parenting', as does its counterpart in the United States, appears to cover a wide variety of situations, ranging from fifty/fifty sharing of responsibility to one parent having much less time with the child³⁰, because of the desire by professionals to prevent one parent feeling a 'loser'. For this reason, parents who are separating have been encouraged to think about their arrangement, irrespective of the amount of time each parent is responsible for the child, in terms of 'sharing' rather than 'custody', although this blurs structural and gender implications. As Smith (1985, p. 45) has noted, 'far from existing outside the family, the law and legal agencies effectively contribute to the determination of the role of the family and the rights, obligations and capacities of family members'.

²⁸ In 1980 legislation was passed considerably amending previous family law (see Family Proceedings Act, 1980; Guardianship Amendment Act, 1980; Family Courts Act, 1980; and Social Security Amendment Act, 1980) so that Maskill's research was based on cases heard prior to the establishment of the Family Courts in 1981.

²⁹ It is interesting to note that both the families in my study who were involved with the Family Courts did not meet at least two of the fairly minimal criteria outlined in Butterworths, i.e., those of commitment and co-operation. In one case both parents described that the sessions with the psychologist as unhelpful since they were purely for assessment purposes, and they believed there had been no attempt to offer any therapeutic assistance then or later with respect to how the couple would effectively share the parenting when they had a long and hostile history behind them.

³⁰ As Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch (1985, p. 554) note that 'Because the term "joint custody" has been defined in so many different ways, there is confusion among parents and professionals as to what it means'.

In the light of the very different cultural and legal milieu of the United States, and because of the paucity of research and the inadequacy of much of the American writing on the subject, a study of shared parenting in New Zealand is important. There are no previous New Zealand studies of any custodial mode³¹. Furthermore, simply to follow the lead of the United States and adopt shared parenting as the most desirable form of custody would mean adopting a concept the day-to-day consequences of which have not been explored and the tensions in the arrangement have been overlooked in the search for parental qualities which are more likely to ensure that it is successful.

One of the major values of reviewing the American literature was that it alerted me to the pervasive, embedded ideology about families and family structure and the extent to which that ideology was taken for granted and seen as universal. The second value of the review lay in developing an awareness of what was suppressed by the theoretical and methodological directions that the research and literature had taken, and in the recognition of the value of a qualitative and longitudinal study whose focus would be on the process of living out the decision made about custody. At a very simple level, the question I decided to address was: What is it like for the adults and children living in a shared parenting family? I believed that a study of family systems and structure could no longer afford to ignore issues of ideology, power, equality, and identity, and that a more detailed, intertextual and processual account of the adult separated relationship which would also incorporate these factors was significant in understanding more fully what such an arrangement involved for the participants. As part of understanding process, change and development in shared parenting an appreciation, unavailable within the American research to any extent, of the means by which parents had come to decide on this particular mode of custody would be necessary.

Within the process of researching and writing two other major questions came to the fore, both at a more abstract level than the first, and one of which was foreshadowed in my original thesis proposal. At that time, I wrote that the area of significance that I wished to investigate was the relationship between socially transmitted stocks of knowledge (Shutz, 1962; Shutz & Luckmann, 1973) and the individual biography. As the study progressed, and the ecological implications came more fully to the fore, the particularity of this concern became more apparent and receded further into the body of the thesis, but at the same time what emerged from it was the question (embedded but not acknowledged or addressed in quantitative research also) of the relationship between the individual and the general. In other words, what is the impact of a generalisation, in what ways can it be read, and in what ways does it restrict an understanding of the situation under review?

The second question, which became more insistent as the interviewing and the creation of the transcripts of the interviews progressed, was how to read the material that I was collecting? While agreeing with Halfpenny's (1979) statement that the knowledge

³¹ The Justice Dept. is currently carrying out research into custody and into the work of the Family Court.

produced by qualitative research is different from that produced by quantitative research, I have come to believe that the two methodologies as currently constituted are essentially two sides of the same logocentric coin. The question, then, evolves into one about the nature of knowledge and the ways in which qualitative research can become sufficiently liberated from its traditional phenomenological and quantitative framework to actually achieve the significantly different understanding claimed for it by its adherents. These issues are addressed in the following chapters.

Summary

The inadequacies of the American literature on joint custody derive from its typically atheoretical approach and methodology which have seriously restricted the breadth of the work. The major concern of most commentators has been to focus attention on those qualities possessed by individual parents which will result in the arrangement succeeding or failing. Attention to outcome too readily assumes the desirability of the arrangement which in turn assumes a particular family structure and power balance. Such assumptions remain unquestioned because of the fairly general failure to locate the family within the wider social context and because of the implicit model of the family as caring, nurturant and ungendered.

The methodology used and the direction of the research enquiry has also resulted in a suppression of process. The value of attending to process is that it allows some appreciation of the ways in which events happened, the conduct of the decision-making, and the historicity of the arrangement. A study of process moves attention beyond the possession of particular qualities by individuals to focus attention also on the family system; and it goes beyond the family system to note the way that these issues express and reflect current social concerns.

THE CONTEXTS OF THE STUDY: TEXT AS 'FABRIC'

Introduction

This chapter, like the first, is also concerned with aspects of textual biography. It sets out the theoretical orientation which informed my reading of the joint custody literature and the texts of the transcripts of the interviews I conducted, as well as the construction of the text of the thesis. As with all biography, there was an element of process, of movement from an initial position and mode of understanding to another as I came to analyse the interview material and sought a means of reading and writing which would incorporate, as a critical part of the reading I wished to produce, the multiple voices to which the interviews with the respondents gave access, the elements of instability and contradiction embedded in the texts, and the rejection of a mode of analysis that dichotomised or schematised experience. Understanding the 'text as fabric', to use Barthes' frequent and felicitous metaphor, proposed a very different way of reading a text. It broke from the traditional focus of a reading for meaning, in which metaphors of depth dominate. Instead it focussed attention on the breaks in the weave, only apparent through a close scrutiny, and on elements of density, texture, and colour. At the same time, the phrase incorporated the mythic reference to Penelope and the process of weaving and unravelling, of construction and deconstruction, of the cloth/text as surface over which interpretations moved.

Awareness of the way in which language is used contributed significantly to the reworking of my theoretical position, which in its turn has expanded my understanding of the theoretical and methodological base of qualitative research, its contribution to sociological understanding, and therefore to its very different constitution and relationship to knowledge from that achieved by quantitative research.

The phenomenological and the hermeneutic

I assumed a qualitative framework from the beginning of my project. My basic lack of sympathy with quantitative research derives from a view which I have found is shared with an increasing number of sociologists, that the perception of the objective, 'scientific' assumptions of much sociology are both philosophically and methodologically unsustainable; as sociologically misleading and stultifying; and as blocking the elaboration of experience, imagination, and ultimately, creativity with its alter ego, playfulness (Phillips, 1973)¹.

The second reason for a qualitative orientation was related to the directions I wanted to pursue in my research which would be obstructed by a non-qualitative approach. A detailed, intensive study would, I believed, throw more light on families'

¹ Phillips writes, 'Play, by freeing us from a heavy dependence on method, may enable us to confront the world without scientific 'blinkers' required for membership in the sociological community. Play may not only give free rein to imagination, intuition, and creative urges, but may help us to see more clearly' (p. 163).

experiences of shared parenting than would a further quantitative study, where essentially the same concerns already addressed in the American research would be re-worked. At a philosophical level phenomenology gave priority to the primacy of individual experience since basic to the phenomenological position is the valorising of the individual against the dehumanising, abstract society. Phenomenology acknowledges the existence of multiple realities. It recognises too the significance of the act of communication, conceptualised as a moment of bridging the gap between two consciousnesses, a reaching out to another across shifting realities, and it recognises the fluidity of the boundaries between the individual and the social nexus.

The concern of the phenomenologist², and other schools of thought informed also by phenomenology such as ethnomethodology (Cicourel, 1964; Douglas, 1976; Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1974/1986) is not to pursue that which might be subsumed under the label of the typical, but to expand appreciation and understanding of everyday experiences in an everyday world. By 'bracketing' his/her approach to the world, the researcher is assisted in disengaging from implicit assumptions or 'taken-for-grantedness' held in relation to the existence of the everyday and to the construction of reality, so permitting the subjective nature of multiple worlds in which both the researcher and the subject are implicated to emerge. This position explicitly undercuts much of the positivist framework, as Geertz (1983, p. 34) points out:

The strict separation of theory and data, the "brute fact" idea; the effort to create a formal vocabulary of analysis purged of all subjective reference, the "ideal" language idea; and the claim to moral neutrality and the Olympian view, the "God's truth" idea- none of these can prosper when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense rather than behavior to its determinants.

What a phenomenological approach offers is a mode of enquiry which goes beyond the boundaries imposed by quantitative research. It centres on the relevance of everyday experience and on the value of an exploration of meanings of the social actors in order to extend awareness of meaning, and a fuller elaboration of social processes. But within the phenomenological framework I found a series of internal contradictions. The diverse, complex, and multiple worlds were theoretically reduced to a single, consensual moment of 'non-competitive' truth (Pelz, 1974, p. 207) in which the question of by whom and how truth value is determined was omitted from consideration. Instead of the interaction posited between individual and society, individual experience became privileged as the source of truth and society conceived as an alien and external force against which the individual is pitted. The theoretically fluid and developing identity was caught and held within a (theoretical) moment of self-actualisation and achievement of authenticity. The ethnomethodologists whose stated intention is to explore (and thus problematize and de-familiarize) the mundane world, and to focus on the accomplishment of 'communication,

² For example see Heller, 1970/1984; Mackie, 1985; Pelz, 1974; Shutz & Luckmann, 1973.

decision making, reasonableness, and action in everyday life' (Rogers, 1983, p. 84) develop their analyses around assumptions of rationality and the underlying structures and rules governing behaviour. The method masks a significant ideological struggle:

Although a battle is being waged for the subjectivity of every individual - a battle in which real interests are at stake, for example, gender-based social power - dominant, liberal-humanist assumptions about subjectivity mask this struggle. Common sense and the liberal humanist tradition . . . suggest that every individual possesses an unchanging essence of subjectivity. Consciousness is thought to be a continuous stream rather than a fragmentary and contradictory effect of a discursive battle for the subjectivity of the individual. The exclusiveness of the assumption of a particular form of subjectivity, which rules out its alternatives, together with the individual subject's misrecognition of herself as the true author of her thoughts, speech, and writing, gives the articulation of subjectivity in language the temporary appearance of fixity. This sense of fixity seems to rule out change (Weedon, 1987, p. 105).

Nor is the phenomenological account of the communicative act adequate. Shutz (1976), for example, has devised a typology of relationships in which distance and the formation of the stereotype determine the nature of the understanding that can be achieved. He suggests that at the most intimate and idealised level, a 'we-relationship' exists whereby direct experiencing of the other is possible through sharing of a common time and space (what he calls 'temporal and spatial immediacy' (p. 21)), a relationship that, as the ability to experience together becomes more tenuous, itself becomes more stereotypic and distanced. The difficulties with this explanation are twofold. Firstly, it deals with idealisations within the formal mode of philosophical exposition, so divorcing the reading from the everyday world supposedly under investigation. Secondly it implies an ultimate point at which differences are submerged and a commonality of view shared, a position in which a monologic exchange between equal partners is taken as typical, and it ignores the normative power of the individual, reinforced by a social praxis and relations, to achieve a dominant or dominating ascendancy of viewpoint. By presupposing the ability to understand *as the other has understood*, and by implying the ultimate transparency of the other and the existence of an ultimate point of meaning and significance, phenomenology defines the communicative act as one of consensus, where difference and power are submerged and suppressed. As Rabinow notes, within both the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, the capacity to understand is rooted simultaneously within one's own self-definition and shared cultural expectations, so that one is caught in a circle. '[T]o agree on what makes sense necessitates consensus; what makes sense is a function of one's readings; and these in turn are based on the kind of sense one understands (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979, p. 7).

Although a hermeneutic approach appeared to offer a way of reading texts which accounted for a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities, it was also unsatisfactory because of its attention to determining the meaning of, rather than production of, the text. Within the hermeneutic paradigm a text can sustain multiple readings, with each level of interpretation open for re-interpretation, the basis of which is drawn from the interpreter's cultural tradition in order that the 'truth-claim of the text can come to the fore' (Bleicher,

1982, p. 72). Under these circumstances, the interpretations within a text, although remaining stable and unambiguous at the point of each reading, nonetheless have a succession of interpretative possibilities as social and cultural understandings succeed each other. Of this process, Fish (1979, p. 248) writes that a text 'is stable in more than one direction, as a succession of interpretative assumptions give it a succession of stable shapes'. Meanings are thus displaced as social and cultural perceptions change, but 'meaning' itself remains as the goal of reading. Relativity is an attribute not in the text itself, but of the readers who approach it. There are moments when it appears that the text has broken its bounds and the reader is able to achieve a degree of independence from the author, and to move, in her/his interpretive acts, beyond authorial intent so that the bounds of the text have been broken:

But the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of the author. . . . Henceforth, only the "meaning" rescues the meaning, without the contribution of the physical and psychological presence of the author (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 78).

But such moments are almost immediately restrained. The relationship between reader and text is viewed as consensual and is described as a 'productive enterprise' (Bleicher, 1982, p. 72) enabling 'a widening of one's own horizon so that it can integrate the other' (p. 74). The discovery of the true meaning of the text remains as the reader's task. Under this system, the reader is constrained by the necessity of remaining within the social framework and of accepting the structures of the text as given and as unremarkable.

Deconstruction

In the remainder of this chapter I want to account for the way deconstruction has informed my reading and analysis of the transcripts of the interviews which formed the data base for my research, and written the thesis. The following paragraphs outline very briefly the different reading of texts produced by deconstruction. These are followed by a longer discussion of Barthes' notion of 'text', and the last section of the chapter discusses aspects of textual production, with particular reference to suppression, power and ideology.

Deconstruction makes its radical break with traditional philosophical assumptions around the notion of the 'signifier' through the extension and development of Saussure's work on the arbitrary nature of the signifier and signified. Rather than accept the signifier as 'pre-existent', Saussure noted the way meanings/institutions aggregate around particular concepts, so that while changes in meaning over time have occurred, the original meaning becomes irrevocable. The current usage becomes accepted as natural and enduring and the 'spaces of interpretation' (Leitch, 1983, p. 5) are covered over. The arbitrary relationship of the signifier to the signified is rejected in favour of a 'floating' signifier. This means that, in the absence of essential meanings, a signifier within a linguistic system can express

meaning only through *différence*. Each signifier exists in a different relationship to other signifiers.

What Derrida does is to take up and considerably extend the analysis of the sign. Through a complex series of transformations³, Derrida displaces speech from its position of privilege as indicative of presence, reason, truth and authenticity (Norris, 1982) by repositioning writing as more than just literacy in the Western sense of the word, and as encompassing all non-phonetic experience, and as that which then precedes speech⁴. Under this system, writing becomes *écriture*, a concept which Leitch defines as that which 'signifies any practice of differentiation, articulation, and spacing' and which 'designates the primary processes that produce language', and which is intended to 'force a break with normality' (Leitch, 1983, pp. 26 - 27).

Derrida also extends the meaning of *différence* to that of *différance*, in which the theory of meaning in logocentric writing is further challenged. There are three different significations caught here: '(1) "to differ" - to be unlike or dissimilar in nature, quality, or form; (2) "differe" (Latin) - to scatter, disperse; and (3) "to defer" - to delay, postpone' (p. 41). These simultaneous significations permit the emergence of the notion of meaning as supplementary, as endlessly created and endlessly deferred. Between signifiers there is free play. Associations are infinite. Meaning is forever partial. A single interpretation cannot encompass all possible meanings since its own existence has the potential to generate additional meanings not apparent to the first interpreter. The hermeneutical and phenomenological association of meaning with depth, so that reading is discovering the hidden meaning is rejected for a concept that of meaning spreads out over a surface, no one meaning being privileged over any other.

My understanding of deconstruction has been significantly influenced by Barthes' definition of 'text'. In his essay, *From Work to Text* (1971/1986), Barthes opposes 'work', whose constrained author/reader relationship he wishes to challenge radically, with 'text', where he wishes to review the

principal propositions at whose intersection the Text is located . . . ; the word *proposition* must be understood more grammatically than logically: these are speech-acts, not arguments, "hints," approaches which agree to remain metaphorical. Here are these propositions: they concern method, genres, the sign, the plural, filiation, reading, pleasure (p. 57).

Further distinctions follow:

³ For a detailed account of these processes and Derrida's building upon and differentiation from forerunners such as Saussure, and Freud, see Leitch, 1983.

⁴ See Benterak, Muecke, & Roe in *Reading the country* (1984), for a deconstructive reading of the Roebuck Plains in Western Australia. The authors have produced three interrelated readings of the Plains, one Aboriginal, one Western-historical and the other artistic (the artist himself drawing upon both North African nomadic tradition, and Western culture) which draw attention to the way in which different interpretive and cultural experiences govern patterns of perception.

[T]he work is a fragment of substance. . . . The Text is a methodological field. . . ; the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language: it exists only when caught up in a discourse . . . : *The Text is experienced only in an activity, in a production*. It follows that the Text cannot stop (for example, at a library shelf); its constitutive moment is *traversal* (notably, it can traverse the work, several works) (pp. 57 - 58).

The Text is subversive, breaking and challenging previous forms of categorisations; it is always at the limit. In contrast to the work, which 'closes upon a signified' (p. 58), where a final meaning or interpretation has been sought, the Text does not seek closure. The signifier is not "the first part of the meaning" (p. 59), and the signifier itself has an '*infinitude*' which refers to a notion of *play*, so that the

field of the Text is not achieved by some organic process of maturation, or a hermeneutic process of "delving deeper," but rather by a serial movement of dislocations, overlappings, variations; the logic governing the Text is not comprehensive (trying to define what the work "means"), but metonymic: the activity of associations, contingencies, cross references coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (p. 59),

so that the Text is 'restored to language', 'structured but decentred'.

Openness implies plurality, which extends beyond the possession of several meanings to an '*irreducible* plurality', where meaning is 'traversal' (p. 59), and disseminatory, depending not on ambiguity of content but on 'the stereographic plurality of the signifiers that weave it (etymologically, the text is a fabric)' (p. 60). The Text is extended beyond the immediately attributable sources by plural and anonymous sources, 'quotations, references, echoes: cultural languages . . . which traverse it through and through in a vast stereophony'. Its existence as an intertext, and the profoundly different ways of reading which its plural texture demands, constitute a challenge to the monologism manifested in many institutions and work. Barthes extends the radical nature of his challenge by his comments on filiation. Works are essentially possessed by their authors, and their intentions as to the meaning of the work are to be respected. In contrast

The Text . . . is read without the Father's inscription. The metaphor of the Text is here again detached from the metaphor of the work; the latter refers to the image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, and "development" . . . ; the metaphor of the Text is that of the *network*; if the Text expands, it is by the effect of a combinative operation of a systematics . . . ; no vital "respect" is therefore due to the Text: . . . ; the Text can be read without its father's guarantee; the restoration of the intertext paradoxically abolishes inheritance. It is not that the Author cannot "return" in the Text . . . but he does so . . . as a guest . . . ; his inscription is no longer privileged . . . but ludic (p. 61).

In the above passage, Barthes has introduced the word 'ludic', a word which insists further on a reorientation of traditional conceptualisation of the author/reader relationship, and which implies a view of the text as free floating, as unbound. Instead of seeing the text, as one does the work, in relation to 'consumption' (a word purposefully implying eating, digesting and passing through), the purpose of a text 'decants the work . . . and recuperates it as play, task, production, practice'. Insisting on the importance of regarding writing and reading as 'one and the same signifying practice', instead of separated by distance, Barthes suggests that the ludic qualities of a text results in the reader

playing the text through a dual creative process which he likens to the period where 'active amateurs' both played and listened to music, in what was a 'virtually undifferentiated activity'. The text, then, encourages the reader, transformed now into author, to take it further, to respond, to allow his/her creative and imaginative capacities full rein to extend the associations brought to bear by the reader's own intertexts, to '*make it go*', to discover the pleasure in the text through an unleashing of her/his own creative processes (pp. 62 - 63).

The concept of intertextuality is critical to a deconstructive reading, because it implies a major and strategic reorientation of the author/reader relationship and views the way in which a text develops very differently from a traditional standpoint. In a different article, Barthes writes:

We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture (Barthes, 1968/1986, pp. 52 - 53).

In another of his rich, packed sentences Barthes weaves the concepts of filiation and of traditional boundaries by which the notion of meaning as essence has been maintained in contrast to the manner in which he believes a text is created and from which it derives its energy. A text goes beyond what can be acknowledged bibliographically since its sources are so heterogeneous, disparate and contradictory⁵. Intertextuality demands consideration of the interrelatedness of texts, assuming that no text is complete in itself but refers always beyond itself to others. Each text has a "genealogy" (Leitch 1986, p. 59), a word which emphasises the lack of autonomy and incompleteness inherent in each text. Texts are recursive. They incorporate past individual history and cultural traditions, both equally unstable and recursive. The result, as Leitch (p. 59) graphically puts it, is that

the text resembles a Cultural Salvation Army Outlet with unaccountable collections of incompatible ideas, beliefs, and sources. The "genealogy" of the text is necessarily an incomplete network of conscious and unconscious borrowed fragments. Manifested, tradition is a mess. Every text is an intertext.

To read intertextually implies that all texts are incomplete, always referring beyond themselves, and giving no one voice greater privilege than another in constructing the meaning of an event. For example, an intertextual analysis of respondents' texts enables a comparison of the way that each text seeks to set itself as centre, and to establish its definitions of events and their meanings as accurate, and of the way that this action involves suppression of additional or alternative events and interpretations to which the reader has access through the related texts. The usual sociological practice whereby each

⁵ How, for example, would I cite adequately a tramping trip through the South-West Tasmanian wilderness which enters this text; or the many other moments of experience which, with different degrees of consciousness, have informed my writing?

respondent's account is read independently of others to which it is intimately related obscures these relationships, and too often results in the researcher regarding the act of suppression of information as deliberate omission or as an attempt to achieve a personally favourable account by the respondent, rather than the result of different ideological and gendered relationships. Such closed readings divert attention from the exploration of textual production.

The consideration of intertextuality highlights further points of instability in the production of knowledge and the inadequacy, therefore of ascribing a truth value to a particular account. Firstly, an account of a social event does not exist in isolation, but is structured, implicitly if not explicitly, by other competing accounts, whose entry into the text may be unnoticed by the researcher or even the speaker. The validity of an account given by a particular person is not in question. What is brought into consciousness by an intertextual reading is that the other⁶ is always present, and forms an unspoken sub-text against which the speaker elaborates her/his account. Thus the speaker's conscious or unconscious knowledge that another would have placed different emphases or stressed different values or produced a competing account leads to this, rather than that, emphasis. In this sense, the text is produced interactively rather than having a single origin in the respondent/author.

Secondly, perceptions of events are not stable. They are subtly or not so subtly altered by the passage of time, by psychological changes undergone by the perceiver, and by changes in the interaction between perceiver and the other. Such changes lead to a continual, but often unremarked, modification of perceptions and alter the way the event would be spoken of over a period of time. Thirdly, the actual reporting of the event provides a further opportunity for re-working and sometimes changing a previous interpretation or position as a consequence of discussion, and a refocussing of thought in relation to the questions that have been asked⁷. Fourthly, the account is structured/produced by ideology, so that a speaker's changing ideological perspective will redefine boundaries and emphases, so altering the shape of the event under discussion. This process of enquiry into the intertextual instability of a text is carried further into the interstices of a particular text through an awareness of textuality, a reference not only to the density, texture, colour, energy, and vigour of a text, but also to its mercurial nature. Textuality refers to the way that the dominant reading intended by the author/speaker is

⁶ I am using 'other' in a very wide sense, to accommodate a spectrum from significant other to 'other' as culture.

⁷ Briggs (1986, p. 14) comments on methodological problems in oral history which I think also bear on sociological research. 'The goal of oral history is to elicit information about past events. Researchers have noted the selectivity of memory. Yet a lack of awareness is apparent with respect to the fact that oral history interviews produce a *dialogue* between past and present. Interviewees interpret the meaning of both the past and the present, including the interview itself. Each query presents them with the task of searching through their memories to see which recollections bear on the question and then fitting this information into a form that will be seen answering the question. Oral history interviews are thus related to the present as systematically as to the past'.

undercut, deconstructed by the existence of internal contradictions and marginalisations of which the author is unaware, whose presence interrupts and challenges the flow of thought and suggests, often subversively, an alternative reading. As Gasché (1986, pp.135 - 136) notes, deconstruction draws attention to the emergence of the inner differences of the text, rather than suppressing them, because of the way that 'concepts and discursive totalities are already cracked and fissured by necessary contradictions and heterogeneities'⁸. The effect, then, of a deconstructive reading is to read each text from the perspective of its own margins, so denying its claim to centrality as that version which tells the whole truth.

In the light of Barthes' work on texts and faced with reading the transcripts of the interviews I had conducted, I realised that, while phenomenology and hermeneutics had offered a way into qualitative research, the answers they proposed to the problems I was encountering in reading the texts created by my research were conservative (Leitch, 1986; Norris, 1982, 1985) and did not describe the textual phenomena I was experiencing. In contrast to the closure of the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical standpoints - out of the multiplicity of experience, the meaning, truth and essence of an event would be distilled - what I heard (literally and figuratively) were voices demanding a reading which resisted hierarchical ordering and privileging. To have merely allocated a 'meaning' to a particular text, would have resulted in ignoring the way that the accounts had been socially 'produced', although the mode of production was largely unnoticed by the respondents and was given expression as self-evident and unquestionable. Barthes' description of the inadequacy of such an approach to interpretation, that it is no longer possible to think of the researcher's text merely as a "decoding" of the event to render it intelligible, reiterates aspects of his argument outlined above. Reiteration, however, is pertinent, because the significance of the issue, and because what he describes underlines how this theory of textuality is significant for conceptualising the respondents' and researcher's texts.

The critical aspect of the old event is *interpretation*, i.e., the operation by which one assigns a set of confused or even contradictory appearances a unitary structure, a deep meaning, a "veritable" explanation. Hence, interpretation must gradually give way to a new discourse, whose goal is not the revelation of a unique and "true" structure, but the establishment of an interplay of multiple structures: . . . it is the relations which organize these concomitant structures . . . which must constitute the object of the new theory (Barthes, 1968/1986, p. 154).

Social science has been oriented in the past to the unilinear definition of experience, where events under investigation are placed in a hierarchical relationship to one another unreflectively. It is unreflective because the mode of analysis does not include consideration of the moral and ideological derivation of that particular ordering; and because it is unable to hold contradictions as simultaneously valid but instead subordinates one dimension of component to the other. It is this stance which Derrida has called

⁸ Norris also notes the value of deconstruction in its capacity to identify 'symptoms of 'blindness' which mark [a text's] conceptual limits' (Norris, 1982, p. 23) and which, if left uninvestigated, shut off potential lines of analysis.

'logocentric', a universe whose focus on reason, on the 'Word of God' (Leitch, 1983, p. 25) and on a unified and final truth as the penultimate authoritative stance (the goal of science) is challenged by this kind of thinking. The implications of a different mode of interpretation are most emphatically spelled out by Barthes (1968/1986, p. 54):

by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a "secret", ie., an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to call a halt to meaning is finally to refuse God, his hypostases, reason, science, the law.

My argument in relation to the current practice of qualitative research is that, notwithstanding its attempts to indicate the existence of a more complex world than that which has been permitted to emerge from quantitative research, qualitative research has willy nilly partaken of the same experiential ordering as the former, has participated in the same attempt to find the "brute fact", 'logocentric universe' and 'truth'. The potential of deconstruction within qualitative research is that it allows the focus of attention to become less the allocating of truth value to statements, and more an investigation of the way in which those statements, and their implicit worlds have been constructed and are sustained.

Textual production

Binary thought

Binary thought, the process by which reference to one subject places the other in subjection and subordination, is deeply embedded in Western culture. The extent to which interrelated experience is subdivided from itself has been opened to question by feminism in particular⁹ and is part of the deconstructive concern with suppression and the structuring of categories and modes of reading which restrict, rather than liberate, the text. In Cixous' work, quoted in Moi (1985) and McLeod (1987), the identification of such processes becomes a highly political one in respect of Cixous' identification of the positive/negative - male/female paradigm finally with death, 'And the movement by which each opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time a war breaks out. Death is always at work (Cixous quoted in McLeod, p. 68). Since victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity, the victor is the male and the female is obliterated¹⁰.

The binary pairs that Cixous (quoted in Moi, p. 104) writes of are:

⁹ The ideological subordination of women to men is fundamental to social critique, and much feminist scholarship has engaged in explorations of the implications of such dichotomising. The aim of feminist scholarship has been on the one hand to challenge what Greene & Kahn (1985, p. 12) have called the 'single triumphant consciousness', while at the same time drawing attention to the way that such divisions, when acknowledged, render the feminine side of the opposition as 'negative and powerless' (Moi, 1985, p. 104).

¹⁰ One of the problems, as Cixous (Moi, p. 108) has stressed is that the terms 'male/ female', 'masculine/feminine' 'themselves imprison us within a binary logic, within, as Conley has said, the 'classical vision of sexual opposition between men and women'.

Activity/Passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Father/Mother

Head/Emotions

Intelligible/Sensitive

The persistently recurring oppositional couples that I have identified within the literature on joint custody, are:

best interest of child/systems theory

qualitative time with child/quantitative time

legal custody/physical custody

gain or benefit/loss or disadvantage

These are seemingly unrelated to Cixous, but a closer investigation reveals some interconnections:

best interest (intelligible)/ systems theory (sensitive)

qualitative (culture)/quantitative(nature)

legal custody (father)/physical custody (mother)¹¹

gain *or* loss (head)/ loss & gain (emotions)

Although some of the parallels may be a bit forced what I am attempting to illustrate is the rigidity of the divisions as they are constituted within the literature on joint custody. The way in which, within the literature, the constituting members are cast as polar opposites rather than as interdependent and informing each other reflects the widespread acceptance of such polarisations within the wider social milieu. The literature tends to emphasise the legal principle of the best interest of the child and the significance of qualitative time. The advantages and disadvantages of the scheme are treated as independent from each other so that the reader is presented with something akin to a balance sheet where the various problems and benefits may be viewed, but the way that they inform and affect each other ignored. What needs to be more fully recognised are the plural, generalised, and therefore potentially confusing procedures for determining the best interests of the child. These would be informed not merely by a legal principle, but by the actuality of a particular family's situation; and by a recognition that, experientially, the above divisions are questionable. To think of qualitative time distinct from quantitative time, of a gain or benefit apart from a loss or a disadvantage, ignores their intricate interdependence. The

¹¹ For this pairing and the one preceding it, see Ortner's (1973) distinction between nature/culture and male/female where male participation in the activity becomes invested with a significance denied the female.

actual complexity of families should frustrate easy categorisations. A textual and intertextual reading of texts created with the respondents shows that exclusive attention to one side of a binary opposition is reductive. A mode of analysis appropriate to the circumstances of family life must recognise the interrelatedness of all elements in the field and demands of the analysis a fluidity of approach, and a constant realignment of perspective, in which both sides of the equation are simultaneously held in view.

The relationship of the general and the particular

Whereas binary thought addresses the suppression and polarisation of experience across continua, and thus questions the validity of categorisations which perpetuate such interpretive modes and writings which result from them, enquiry has also been focussed on other modes of textual production in which suppression has played a role.

Social sciences are constituted by an investigation of the particular in order to draw a general conclusion, and the concern with categorisation, especially in quantitative research, has centred on the population size of the study and whether the categories used can safely be extrapolated to the larger population. Although qualitative research has emphasised the necessity of delineating the individual nuance, it has tended to revert to a normative (and therefore frequently a statistical) statement about the frequency with which certain behaviours occur, an averaging out of behaviour which suppresses significant differences.

The critical issues which I believe must be addressed are not merely to do with the generality of a particular form of categorisation. They are instead to do with what has been omitted in order to achieve that generality, and the stance taken in regard to category formation. It is necessary to enquire into the *production* of the categories themselves¹². Two ways of conducting such an enquiry presented themselves. The first, exemplified by Bronfenbrenner (1979), draws attention to the problem of categorisations which are too narrowly conceived. The second, about which Barnett & Silverman (1979) write, concerns the reading of the meta-level where category formation is structured by ideology whose presence and function is generally ignored.

The value of Bronfenbrenner's contribution is that he has sought to relate the micro and macro through a detailed framework which would permit the connections between the individual person or family and the wider social institutions to be studied. The ecological perspective he has proposed would, he thought, take account of the way that social institutions act upon and react reciprocally with the individual. He has posited the existence of two levels of interrelated settings: the microsystem, which he further divided into mesosystems, (those in which a developing person participates) and exosystems (those

¹² Foucault's, (1973/1975) *I, Pierre Riviere* . . . is in marked contrast to much sociological writing. The book, which brings together a variety of divergent, historical and conflicting voices, each with their reading of the murder marked by a particular ideological stance, does not seek to privilege any one reading, but in fact seeks to retain the plurality of voices and tensions arising from the existence of that plurality. See also Boon (1982, p. 26), who asserts that ethnographic writing should consist of 'an exaggeration of differences' rather than 'composing the mutual exaggerations into cozy universals'.

settings into which the person does not enter, but whose relationship to the rest of the social order affects the way that person develops); and the macrosystem, which he has described as the generalised patterns of ideology and social institutions within a particular culture. Visualizing society in these terms has had the added advantage of challenging what he called 'the deficit formula' (p. 290) which shows how investigative and professional effort concentrated on the micro level, too easily deeming it pathological, while at the same time ignoring wider systemic shortcomings.

Although the integrative mode of enquiry which he has envisaged is sociologically important, because the analysis must remain grounded in the particular, and also reach out to encompass wider social thematic concerns, there is a conceptual problem in his work. It is to do with the nature of his model. Although he has stated that the model is interactive, the extent to which the levels of abstraction that he has posited as one moves further away from the microsystem imply not only to the greater abstraction, but also carry the immediate within them, is not clear. For example, he did not seem to imply that through the study an individual family one is simultaneously to be made aware of the macrosystems which surround that family, and against and with which it interacts. Bronfenbrenner's analysis implies, therefore, a greater degree of distance between microsystem and macrosystem. If thought of as a series of concentric circles they would circle around each other rather than penetrate each other's space, exerting an influence on but not as intimately informed by each other.

While Bronfenbrenner's work is important in that he has emphasised the value in social research of a holistic approach, an approach to categorisation implicit in his work but not utilised by him, can be identified by reference to textual production. Belsey (quoted in Greene & Kahn, 1980, p. 22) describes the analysis of production as a means of opening to view the reproductive social processes, so questioning what is taken for granted. In this manner deconstruction becomes a means for creative investigation:

[Deconstructive criticism] seeks out the process of production of the text: the organisation of the discourses which constitute it and the strategies by which it smooths over the incoherences and contradictions of the ideology inscribed in it.

In their essay on ideology and everyday life, Barnett & Silverman (1979) note the 'fundamentally different approaches to categorization' (p. 3) current among anthropologists whose nature needs to be understood to reflect modes of production within the anthropologists' own culture. Because of the difficulties in forming categories which do not merely indicate the extent to which the anthropologist is bound by her/his own culture Barnett & Silverman describe the theoretical problems inherent in making a generalised statement as constituting one of the impasses of social science¹³. Their initial approach

¹³ See also Bleicher (1982) and Heller (1970/1984) who describe the issue as a dilemma of interpretive sociology.

evolves around a discussion of how anthropologists too frequently have simply transferred terminology from a social practice or structure in one society to another, thus disguising what may be very different modes of production inherent in the two structures. They state, 'The object of research is not to fill in a number of blanks under the category label, but to transcend the categories to uncover the unities which exist internally in a particular culture' (p. 7).

While plastering over differences may solve a formal conceptual problem, it does not address the way that those who have constituted those categorisations might themselves understand their relationship to the larger whole; and Barnett & Silverman note that what is of crucial significance is that structural definitions must deal more with the subjective element, thus injecting diversity into the overall definitional problem, which must, however, be investigated further.

In order to deal critically with our categories of analysis, we must have an analysis of them: an analysis which, if it does not relate them to a world larger than those categories, can be accused of merely participating in the social reproduction of this social form (p. 13).

What needs explication in any explanatory system is the ideology that informs the categorisation, its function, and the way it affects social relations. It is not enough, they write, merely to describe the need to categorise as, 'a general human tendency, which impels people to construct categories and to draw distinctions. That sort of universalism acts to deflect attention away from the meta-level' (p. 20). Categorisations, in other words, are social creations, not pre-existing entities.

For Marx, criticism and praxis began precisely by questioning those units which are thought to be actually in the world, which are not thought of as creations of ideology, by showing that the placing of these units outside ideology is itself an ideological strategy. The social formation is reproduced through restricting and bounding the range of thinkable possibilities, creating a sense of inevitability, and by uniquely situating the present as the setting of apparent choice (pp. 21-22).

Thompson makes much the same point. Only by challenging the ways in which ideology remains disguised and taken for granted it is then possible to question the function of the ideological.

For ideology operates, not so much as a coherent system of statements imposed on a population from above, but rather through a complex series of mechanisms whereby the meaning is mobilised in the discursive practices of everyday life for the maintenance of relations of domination. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, to search for ways in which the theory of ideology can be linked to methods for the analysis of discursive forms in which ideology is expressed (Thompson, quoted in Threadgold, 1986, p. 15).

The pervasiveness of ideology within the ways in which the social world is constructed often goes unrecognised because of the extent to which categorisations are accepted

uncritically as natural or self-evident, a process assisted by language use¹⁴. Because the speaker or author frequently assumes the social acceptability of his/her position there has been little attention paid to the way that mainstream thought is as highly ideological as thought which is marginal. Insofar as discourse represents an attempt to achieve a recognition of a point of view, in which an ideological viewpoint is present, then both ideology and discourse are intimately connected with relations of dominance. Weedon, (1987, p. 35) suggests that discourse is to be understood as 'the attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power', a statement which refers to Foucault's (1976) conceptualisation of power relations.

Foucault rejects an interpretation of power as a stable entity, derived from the simple consideration of power as the 'over-all unity of domination' (p. 92). The interpretation that he offers instead is complex and worth quoting from at some length:

power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus Power's condition of possibility . . . must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point . . . ; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power . . . : power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1976, pp. 92 - 93).

Discourse is not subservient to power, but power instead calls upon discourse to uphold certain strategies. Foucault (pp. 100 - 101) writes of discourse that it is

a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. . . . discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance . . . a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

In the permanently shifting world described by Foucault, ideology, power and discourse are in a continual state of flux in relation to each other, where each constitutes and is deconstituted by the other. Thus an ideological statement derives some of its authority from discourse, yet discourse, used by a different ideology, can destabilise the former ideological discourse and expose the power relations inherent in it. The work of the social sciences must move beyond a descriptive account of what social forms are to an analysis both of the manner in which ideology maintains and perpetuates social forms and the potential for change.

¹⁴ Weedon (1987, pp. 30 - 31) writes that according to Althusser, 'ideology functions for the individual . . . by *interpellating* her as a subject' so that whereas 'subjectivity appears obvious to an individual, it is the effect of ideology', and that the 'subject assumes that she is the *author* of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity'. Similarly, Threadgold (1986, p. 16) argues that, 'Ideology is always *other*, the voice of the *other*, not *my* voice'.

In order to exemplify the above statements I shall draw on Ahrons' discussion of systems theory and her concept of 'bi-nuclearity' as an example of highly ideological writing where a particular view of social relations, in which gender issues are ignored, is advanced as desirable and normal. I have chosen her work because Ahrons has been working intensively in the field of divorce and family relations, and has also focussed specifically on the nature of the post-divorce family, and on joint custody. Her work is frequently cited by others working in the same area.

Ahrons has been using the two concepts of systems and bi-nuclearity as interdependent and pivotal to her work since 1979, and her most recent and co-authored book (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987) contains the most elaborate account to date of her theoretical orientation. In one sense the authors can be seen to have risen to Bronfenbrenner's challenge, that one attempts to understand what is under investigation by attempting to change it. The concept of 'bi-nuclear' families is fundamentally an attempt to create a new normative structure for the divorced, to fill a major gap in literature focussing on the development of family structures other than nuclear, and to encourage research into divorce grounded on a family systems orientation (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987, p. viii). But from a different angle, their account is problematic.

The problem does not lie with the account of the theory itself which relies heavily on the work done by Kantor & Lehr (1975), in which the view of family relations as a series of complex interactions is advanced. Survival characteristics - those of purposiveness, members' awareness, collaboration, shared responsibility for outcome, and allowance for contingency - are noted (although what is striking about these characteristics is the element of rationality and constructiveness implied), and types of strategy - maintenance, stress and repair - discussed. The problem begins to emerge when this model of an open, and changing system is mapped onto a model of family development, a move strategic in itself which is part of Ahrons' & Rodger's stress on the normative phases of divorce. The reference here is to Combrink-Graham (1985) and to his elegant conceptualisation of family development as a spiral, where centripetal and centrifugal events create periods of closeness and of distance. The model takes into account recursive movements and the linking of intergenerational relationships and stresses. The overall effect is one of continuity and development. However, although Combrink-Graham writes of the centrifugal events as significant in allowing for individual growth, his model is primarily a biological and sociological one. He does not, and nor do Ahrons & Rodgers, consider the point where psychologically a family loses its sense of coherence and cohesion, or where there are discontinuities related to re-focussing of energy and a directing of gaze beyond the previous relationships. While the authors have attempted to circumvent the problems inherent in the previous model of divorce, which centred on the discontinuous, they offer instead a new model centring only on continuity, in which discontinuity is suppressed.

I can best illustrate the complexity, tensions, and breaks in continuity of experience which need to be accounted for by models of family systems with reference to changes in the family system of one of the families in my study. To illustrate how he had seen his relationship to family members - his wife, Anna, and two children, Rachel and Joanna during the marriage - Martin drew the diagram below, which conforms to Western idealistic notions of family structure, and which Minuchin (1974) advances as normative¹⁵. Such a diagram implies that both parents are equal in relation to each other, have taken an equal role in the parenting of the children, and possess an equal degree of knowledge about the children. The model suppresses differences in power and in knowledge, social status, and gendered experience.

Although in Ahrons' & Rodger's terms (1987, p. 115) the parents function as 'perfect pals' and would fall within their aegis as a well-functioning bi-nuclear family, the diagram of Martin's post-separation relationship to his family draws attention to differences in his physical and psychological presence.

Notwithstanding the continuity of contact and high personal regard in which he is still held by Anna, Martin's sense of his psychological and his sociological presence in the family has changed dramatically. Although the separation is in one sense plastered over by the structure in which he is willingly accorded paternal rights and influence, what is highlighted in his diagram is not continuity but discontinuity, in which his power as a parent is significantly decreased. Developmentally, psychologically, and systemically, the family has changed dramatically, as has Martin's place in it. But such discontinuities are denied in the bi-nuclear family model, where each parent is placed in exactly the same relationship to each other, the children, and society as they were in the intact family model.

¹⁵ Interestingly, Minuchin deconstructs his own model in his therapeutic practice by aligning himself with the man, who is seen as rightfully having the power in the family and is *head* of the household.

In family therapy one of the therapeutic highlights of understanding families systemically is the notion that change reverberates through the system. To change one part is to inevitably produce change in another. Yet although Ahrons & Rodgers state that they are viewing the family systemically, the model that they have developed is static and portrays a 'reality' of family relations whose ideological basis must be placed under question.

Such a model is not naive. It represents a conservative political statement which seeks to deny change while at the same time reluctantly acknowledging its occurrence and seeking to restrain it. It represents a highly particularistic view of families, in which differences within what is taken as the same overall structure are ignored, so that Elkin (1984, p. 12), for example, can write of families as being 'forever'. One way of understanding such a phrase is to see it as commonsensical, where the term 'family' can be understood to mean a reproductive unit for the purposes of child-rearing, except that the Western notion of family is centred on male dominance, heterosexuality, and particular emotional links between members. What seems obvious rapidly becomes anthropologically complex and ideological. The ability of the emergent bi-nuclear family to address and resolve some of the well-documented dysfunctional aspects of the nuclear family is not discussed.

The permeability of the model and the extent to which Ahrons has modified it over the years in conjunction with her research findings also needs to be considered. In her first article (1979), Ahrons wrote of the concept of bi-nuclearity as pertaining to the maintenance of a relationship with the ex-spouse. Such a relationship would centre, she believed, around child-related issues (although she does not take differential power issues into account) and would be likely to be achieved by only the most motivated families. But over time that initial model, seen as suitable for a limited number of families (but which was clearly 'better' than other types, because of the nature of the parental relationship implied in it) was elevated to a model of the way that all separating families should function. At this point things begin to get murky. Ahrons', and Ahrons' and Rodgers' use of the phrase 'bi-nuclear' seems to oscillate between an extremely general usage - all children have two parents irrespective of whether they are living together - and the desirability for all parents to maintain a close interdependence ('the process of the continuing parent-child relationship, however, also requires that former spouses continue to be interdependent' (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987, p. 43)).

Moreover, the model is adhered to despite evidence that separating families are not as enthusiastic about it as the therapists or the policy makers. Ahrons & Perlmutter (1982) note that separating families find the concept a difficult one to accept, and there appears to be a strong desire to exclude the former spouse. But this does not prevent them from writing that caring and friendliness between ex-spouses appear to be normative. The grounds for such a statement are that over fifty percent of joint custody parents (a sample of ninety-eight families) and thirty percent of mother custody families still wished to relate to each other, which can also be read as meaning that about forty percent of joint custody

families, and about seventy percent of mother custody families *did not* so desire. And because Ahrons & Perlmutter have chosen to portray this desire as normative, understanding why so many custodial parents did not desire to retain contact is, presumably, deemed irrelevant.

Furthermore, Ahrons & Wallisch (1986) note that by three years after separation there is a significant decrease in interaction between separated parents, and that there is a greater perception of significant and irreconcilable differences between couples, either in terms of personality or in relation to child-rearing practices. This information, however, is not used to query the model's validity. It is, ironically, sustained because parents, asked to describe their notion of the *ideal* post-separation relationship, described a relationship which permitted open communication, co-operation and flexibility, respect for the child's needs, and for the separation of child-rearing issues from marital ones. In translating these statements, their ideality is lost sight of and they are read as straight statements supportive of a particular ideology of family life which will both counteract public concern about the fate of the nuclear family and validate social policies that have insufficiently taken account of gender issues.

Summary

This chapter has defined the approach I have adopted in relation to both reading and analysing the material that has informed my study, and to my own mode of writing. Critical to this position is a theory of the text which defines it as plural, open, constituted within an intertextual field but also internally textured, and which understands that the purpose of writing is not to establish a truth (a goal taken to be theoretically and methodologically impossible to attain) but to analyse the modes of production and the discursive practices inscribed in the text. This orientation rejects as sociologically significant solely the determination of social and cultural norms and generalisations, and seeks instead to identify the processes informing textual production.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Although this chapter is an account of methodology it is impossible to make a clear cut distinction between the methodological and the theoretical (Silverman, 1983). The nature of the information that is gathered and achieved is a function of methodology and theory (Jones, 1983; Kantor & Lehr, 1975) so that extrapolation out from the data is inseparable from the researcher's mode of being in the world. Furthermore, the research act is a process, involving continual re-assessments of data and a critiquing of the adequacy of theoretical and methodological assumptions. This stance highlights the need to develop methodologies which take process and change fully into account not only as these elements bear on the subject under investigation but also as they form part of the context of active research.

The implications of this position go beyond the particular question of how I collected and analysed my material to touch upon basic assumptions about the nature of research and status of texts. The typical description of qualitative methodology as exploratory and quantitative methodology as definitive perpetuates one set of assumptions where qualitative analysis is accorded inferior status, because the evidence it produces is regarded as tentative. This stance ignores the potential of a deconstructive analysis to open up a variety of readings of a text, in which a number of voices besides that of the author are perceived to range through the text, and where a concern with numerical accuracy is replaced by a concentration on process and on textual production.

Admitting process as part of the research act challenges absolute definitions of experience and carries implications for the way in which data is interpreted and reported. A researcher can only discuss and interpret what was occurring at the time that the research was done. Yet the mode of presentation of much research, and the act of writing itself tend to appropriate experience and to represent it as something constant, unchanging and complete instead of incorporating process and changing perspectives¹.

Definitional issues and research design

From the time that I started working on my thesis three major and related questions were: How I was going to find the families willing to participate in the research? What were the criteria for inclusion in the study. How would I actually carry out the research?

I decided early on that the best way of recruiting families would be through the use of a snowball technique. This of course depended on the visibility of families within the

¹ My belief about the importance of taking account of developmental and temporal change in any discussion of family issues has been intensified by my reading of more recent literature on family studies (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Backett, 1982; Gilling, 1984; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Voysey, 1975; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980); by my experience as a clinician; and by the accounts of parents who spoke of their experiences of shared parenting at the seminar *Women and the politics of custody* (Opie & Morris, 1986).

community but it seemed more viable than attempting to use formal channels such as lawyers on whom I would then have had to rely to spend time locating possible respondents. As it was, my one attempt to use a more formal network ran almost immediately into a number of problems. I wanted to include, because my concern that my study should include as many dimensions of family experience as possible, at least one family whose shared parenting arrangement was the result of a court order, but was advised by the Justice Department informally that an application for access to Family Court records would almost certainly be turned down. The Family Court staff were very conscious of issues of confidentiality, and were anxious lest a request to parents to participate in research might be seen as intrusive and threatening.

I had also from the outset felt unhappy about approaching counselling agencies for referrals. Most separating New Zealand families have negligible contact with the Family Courts and the associated counselling professionals, apart from the mandatory conciliation interview at Marriage Guidance or another agency accredited by the Family Court when one or both partners have filed for separation². Having most of my respondents referred from counselling agencies could have resulted in an undue emphasis on stress and difficulty in their experiences. I did, however, decide that there was no reason to exclude a family referred from other sources simply because they had had some counselling help in the past. The Blacks and the Todd/Davis families had been ordered to attend counselling by the Court between three to five years prior to my interviewing them. The Todd/Davises had had a custody battle which had gone through the courts; the Blacks had decided on shared parenting as an alternative to a custody battle. The Butler/Summers, whose arrangements had proved very difficult to stabilise over several years, had had contact with several agencies prior to their participation in my study, and at the time of interviewing were having further sessions which were focussed on the termination of the arrangement. The Merrick/Richards had had about six sessions with a counsellor three years ago, partly because of behavioural difficulties with one child, and partly because they viewed very positively the possibility to talk about alternatives for custody with a disinterested counsellor.

The particular criteria for inclusion into the research that applied to the parents were that:

(1) They should be pakeha, a criterion developed after I had attended an Oral History Conference, which generated considerable discussion about the dangers of misunderstanding, bias, and appropriation of Maori culture³.

² Personal communication from the Wellington Counselling Co-ordinator, 1986. This interview, however, is not obligatory if the couple have had one or more counselling sessions in the year prior to their separation.

³ Oral History Conference, Wellington, April, 1986.

(2) I made no attempt to specifically recruit families across the socio-economic range. It is worth noting, however, that all but two of the parents had either completed a university degree or were in the process of so doing, that their occupations ranged from skilled trades to professional, that some, male and female, had been, or were at the time of my initial contact, unemployed because of their family commitments; and that two of the parents commented at some length on their belief that a fifty/fifty sharing arrangement was only possible for middle class families, because of the cost of maintaining two establishments.

(3) It seemed axiomatic that the study should include both parents because of the legal and ideological emphasis on sharing and mutual responsibility. Because shared parenting, at least theoretically involves co-operation and continuing adult contact, I believed that the chance to develop intertextual or comparative analyses would add considerably to the value of the study. I was, nevertheless, conscious that the result of my interviewing might be the collection of data which ethically I was restrained from using, an issue which I address below.

(4) The fourth criterion for inclusion was related to the time that families had been sharing the parenting of the children. I decided to include families who had been doing this from between one to six years. Anything beyond six years was, I thought at the time, too distant in terms of recollection of events around decision making at the time of separation, while families who had been sharing for less than one year may simply have been too embroiled in the process of getting the arrangement underway. My initial plan, however, had been to try to find families who had been sharing parenting for a similar period of time, and carry out a series of follow-up interviews to trace the ways the arrangement developed. This idea obviously necessitated finding sufficient families who had all been sharing parenting for, say, one year and it appeared unlikely that I would be able to do this. The alternative which evolved still allowed for a 'longitudinal framework'. Inclusion in the study of families who had been sharing parenting over different lengths of time could give access to the development of the arrangement over time, and enable a process of reflection back on past events. The carrying out of two follow-up interviews would also give information about changes that had taken place during my period of contact⁴. This decision had the immediate attraction of simplifying the task of finding families and my anxiety that parents who had been sharing the parenting for the longer periods of time might not adequately recall early events became less relevant because my theoretical framework emphasised the potential instability of information, that it is continually subject to revision and is formulated and communicated textually in an interaction with other texts.

As it happened, parents fairly consistently forgot dates of events. In relation to the events themselves, parents often commented on the way that their feelings had changed over time, and while there were occasional comments on the difficulty of remembering

⁴ I am indebted to Anne Meade for this suggestion.

reactions or feelings, the detail which I was generally given of events and the surrounding circumstances suggested that what was important for each individual was clearly recalled. One respondent said more often than others that he could not recall the feeling or event clearly. It seems probable that his non-recollection could be ascribed to the unproblematic nature of the arrangement that had developed, and his forgetfulness related to the lack of stress.

(5) The fifth criterion related a decision as to what percentage of time with each parent could 'properly' be called 'shared parenting', and whether I would impose a definition of the percentage of time the children had to be with each parent before the arrangement could be regarded as 'shared'. The alternative was to accept arrangements that parents regarded as 'shared' irrespective of the percentage of time the children were in each household. My difficulty in taking the latter definition was ideological. There are clear gender (and therefore wider social) implications of accepting as 'shared' arrangements those in which one parent carried out most of the parenting responsibilities, but yet the other was given kudos for 'helping' with parenting⁵. I decided, however, to accept the parental definition. This also accords with current New Zealand legal practice. Arrangements that recently would have been designated 'custody and access' are now being called 'shared' on the grounds that doing so emphasises on-going parental responsibility, minimises a sense of loss for children and parents, and avoids parental hostility.

In summary, the criteria that I adopted for inclusion in the study were these: that both parents were available for interview; that they designated their child care arrangement as shared; that they were both prepared for the child/ren to be interviewed; that they had been sharing parenting from between one to six years; and that they were pakeha.

The contract with the families was structured as follows:

(1) My first contact, following phone calls to each parent outlining the purpose of the study, took the form of a brief, pre-interview visit. I used this visit to provide an opportunity for us all to meet without the pressure of being actively involved in the research; to set times for meetings; to sign consent forms about participation⁶; and to have a preliminary discussion about the subsequent lodging of the tapes in the Oral History Archive.

(2) I contracted with each parent for an initial group of three interviews which would comprise observation and taped discussion, the intention being that I would therefore spend a considerable amount of time with each parent/child/ren combination⁷. I did not seek to spend an identical amount of time with each family. The amount spent

⁵ This point has been made by a number of feminist writers. See, for example Novitz (1978, p. 181), who comments on the need to clarify what is meant by the term 'helping'.

⁶ See Appendix 4.

⁷ See Appendix 1 for an indication of the time spent with each.

depended to some extent on whether both parents were full time in the paid workforce (where parents were at home when the children came back from school, I arrived on at least one occasion earlier in the afternoon) as well as on the length of their accounts. Obviously, not all had exactly the same amount to say. Each interview was planned to be two weeks apart although, in practice, other life events, such as exams, absence from town and difficulty with finding times when we were both available meant that some of the interviews were more spread out. I did only two interviews with Stephen and Martin. In both instances I think it was because the arrangement was seen as generally unproblematic and flowing smoothly. What it was necessary to say was said within the context of the two interviews. In the Nobles' case, we agreed that I should spend a substantial part of a weekend with them all since their arrangement, where Martin spent weekends regularly with his 'living apart' family, was different from that of other families in the study⁸. We also agreed that I would spend some time with Martin when his daughters visited him. This took place about a month after my weekend with the family.

I had initially planned to spend three evenings a week with each parent while the children were in their care. On reflection, this seemed unworkable, because it allowed insufficient space and time for either myself or for the family. Spreading out the interviews over at least six weeks had the advantage of giving me a chance to participate in some of the immediate history of the family's experience of shared parenting, and therefore to develop a sense of the process of the arrangement. It also meant that I was able to make a complete transcription of the tapes prior to the next interview, making it possible for further thoughts on what had been said at the previous interview to be raised.

(3) I also arranged for two follow-up interviews. The first was to be six months after the initial set of three interviews. The purposes of the interview related in part to ethical issues created by the research method. Before the interview I hand-delivered to that respondent a copy of the transcripts of the tapes we had made together, so that they could decide what material would be available for use in the thesis. The second purpose of the interview was to review any changes that had taken place in the families in relation to the shared parenting, and to get parents' comment on the original material and their perception of it from a more distant vantage point. At this follow-up I spoke again only with the older children. I had decided against taping the follow-up interviews, but did tape the last six because I realised that the material was a valuable extension of the first set of interviews. The Butler/Summers were both overseas at the time of their first follow-up. Both wrote to me subsequently in June, 1987, so there was little point in re-contacting them for further information six weeks later for the second follow-up.

(4) The final contact with the remaining seven families was a phone call in August, 1988.

⁸ I spent from late Friday afternoon to mid Saturday evening.

The interview schedule that I used developed as a consequence of some early and fairly general discussions with four parents in early 1986 (two of whom later became part of the study) and was modified slightly after the pilot study with the Blacks, whose interviews I included in the study proper, and again after completing the interviews with the first four families. I conceived the schedule not as a series of detailed questions but more as areas that I wished to investigate. It was designed to address daily experience, to facilitate discussion on the development of the arrangement and perceptions of change both in the past and the future, and to focus on the processual aspects of parenthood.

Ethical issues

The ethical issues which I thought that my study created could not be addressed merely by stating to respondents that their transcripts would be treated confidentially and that I would attempt to provide anonymity. I was certainly aware prior to beginning interviewing that the situation called for sensitivity on my part and that the respondents ought to have some control over what material from their transcripts was to be quoted or referred to (Wallis, 1977; Duster, Mazda & Wellman, 1979; Gilling, 1984; La Rossa, Bennet & Gelles, 1985). The issues which have to be dealt with are: the meaning of informed consent; confidentiality; control over the material once it leaves the mouth of the respondent and enters the interpretive, analytic framework of the researcher; and in my case, the disposal of the tapes on the completion of my research.

The articles by Duster, Mazda & Wellman, and La Rossa, Bennet & Gelles pose the problem of how, within qualitative research, one defines informed consent⁹. The former point out that to advise participants of what may take place would be to prevent the occurrence of the natural flow of events, already subtly transformed by the presence of the researcher; the latter that the researcher is unlikely to have a comprehensive idea of the exact shape that the interview will take or the areas that will be opened up for discussion and that consequently there is a danger of transgressing boundaries because of the ease with which such research can move from a research to a therapeutic framework.

These are valid concerns, and I certainly felt very aware of them and attempted to respond sensitively to them, especially because it was impossible to predict what might provoke distress in each respondents and therefore to warn each in advance. The best I could do was to say as a general statement that they might feel some distress, and to talk it over when it occurred. But one man, for example, felt fine at the end of the first interview and later that night felt very distressed.

The question of what is research and what is therapy is complicated and one to which I return later in the chapter. My belief is that although the two can shade almost imperceptibly into each other, there are also observable boundaries. Certainly, qualitative

⁹ Abrams & McCulloch (1976) comment on the British Sociological Association's concerns about the lack of a clear definition of 'consent'. Abrams & McCulloch's suggestion that each respondent must understand fully what is being written about assumes that the researcher is clear on this at the outset of the study.

family research has a broadly therapeutic function through the facilitation of detailed discussion around certain areas so that in some interviews, the respondent might feel that the concern had been clarified, in others, that there was a heightened awareness of concerns, the implications of which had not been fully thought through previously. The distinction which I sought to maintain and practice between research and therapy is that although such events happen in a therapeutic setting, the difference is that therapy embraces consciously the promotion of change in behaviour and/or attitudes and employs a range of techniques to accomplish the change defined as desirable. I did discuss with parents their concerns about the children if these were raised, or talk about the implications of getting counselling help. I did not agree to assessments of children when I was asked, but suggested an agency to which the parent could go if there was real concern. There were occasions when it was quite clear that to have moved the conversation in one direction would have formed the basis of a therapeutic intervention. There were other occasions when I thought that I was still operating within my guidelines, but clearly I had crossed normal family boundaries. In some families such occasions occurred when I attempted, briefly, to promote parent/child exchanges about the shared parenting.

Although the form that all participants signed said that their identity would not be known, I discussed the likely impossibility of total anonymity with each parent at some length, at the time of the first phone call, at the pre-interview visit and at the follow-up. Changing obvious points of identification (everyone was asked to provide a pseudonym and alternative occupation, for example) does not offer a water-tight guarantee of total anonymity in a relatively small community where there are surprising and unexpected interconnections between people; and preventing a too easy identification was a practical reason for not using a case-study approach.

At first blush, the issues surrounding confidentiality seemed straightforward. It would have obviously been inappropriate during the interviewing to discuss with either partner anything the other had said, although knowing what the other partner had said sometimes helped to interpret responses to some questions. Nor did I ask questions which challenged the interpretation of the event that I was being given on the grounds that the other person had offered a different reading. I did answer Anna's and Martin's question about the degree of similarity of their accounts, but equally may not have in a different household.

The issue which I had not fully appreciated until I began to tape was that the thesis would itself provide some access for each parent to the other's account (assuming they read it, which most said they wanted to). Writing an account which omitted all specific references and details in order to make it difficult to locate the personal origin of statements would have limited access to much significant evidence and restricted the intertextual analysis. I have felt very conscious of the personal nature of much of the data. Part of the reason for returning a complete transcript was to allow editing out of material to which the respondent wished no reference to be made at all, or to which only very general

reference could be made. In the event only a very few excisions in the transcripts were made. Three of the women and one man changed the tenor of some statements so that the revised statement portrayed the ex-partner in a more generous light than had the first remark. One person deleted a reference to a particularly difficult and recurring event and another excluded too easily identifiable material about a family member. Others added extra information about some of the events about which they had spoken. Three respondents had not read all of their transcripts when I arrived for the follow-up. One, who had made some caustic remarks about her ex-spouse said firmly, "I am not afraid of the truth". Two others said that they had lacked the time. There are, however, some comments where I have not identified the speaker(s) since I did not feel that I had *carte blanche* in my use of the material and have judged it necessary to quote some statements without attribution.

The second area where control of the material becomes problematic is at the point of interpretation. Interpretation is already an issue because the respondents confirm conflicting interpretations of each other and are aware that they have limited control over the interpretations others make of their behaviour. An exactly parallel situation exists in my use of the individual narratives. I am aware of not wanting to upset respondents who may feel that the view they receive back of themselves from my interpretation is unflattering and in their eyes inaccurate. However, my task in the writing is not to resolve these conflicts but to create an explanatory framework for them.

Although at the time of interviewing I was not certain about what my position was, by the time I came to write I was clear that I must retain control of the interpretation, and at the same time that my reading was one of a number of readings that the texts of the interviews could sustain. La Rossa, Bennet & Gelles seem to imply, as part of a comment that individuals have been devastated to read what was written about them, that the completed manuscript should be returned to the respondent for her/his authorisation of its acceptability. Yet such an argument implies the existence of a single, authoritative reading. I have discussed this point with some of the parents who felt on the whole that the issue of interpretation was my responsibility. Charles said, "You put the material together the way that you think fit". But one other respondent said, "Well, if I feel too strongly about what you've said, I can always withdraw".

The most relevant argument is that I have not written case studies and my interpretation of what was said is patently *not* intended as a character analysis of the individual respondents. The focus of the analysis is on a sociological reading, and therefore on the systemic and social issues to which their statements gave access. It is not on whom the people are, but on what was said.

The inappropriateness of reading my text as constituting a character analysis is further highlighted by an appreciation of the inherent instability of identity and of the incompleteness of the accounts, since in the analysis I could only call upon what was said and took place during the interviews and those accounts are actually or potentially in a state

of constant revision. Thus any attempt to isolate the 'character' of the person speaking becomes unadmissable. West (1979, p. 733) quotes Stimson to the effect that

Life-histories, whether self-reported or second level, are not unique or unchanging stories. There is no such thing as a once- and-for-all-and-all-time-single-true-life-history of an individual. The content and relationships of the life-history are influenced by the theoretical and practical concerns of the history taker or teller, and subject to revisions in light of changing personal fortunes.

I also had to decide what to do with the tapes after I had finished the thesis. Apart from destroying them, one alternative was to give them to the respondents, in which case much rich, historical information would possibly have been lost anyway. Instead, I asked respondents to sign agreements giving their permission for me to donate the tapes to the Oral History Archive. The forms authorising me to hand over the tapes were drawn up by the National Library. The agreement stipulates that the respondents control access to the tapes, which can only be used for research purposes, until a date nominated by them. Everyone agreed to the donation of their tapes to the Archive.

The Respondents

My anxiety that I would not find enough respondents was unnecessary. Although I was told that sharing responsibilities for the children on a fifty/fifty basis was less common, referrals for such families were more easily obtained than for those where sharing was not on such a footing, possibly because the fifty/fifty arrangements were more visible. I approached thirteen families about participation, all of whom lived within seventy kilometres of Wellington. I asked two families known to me personally whether they would participate. Both agreed. Seven of the families were referred to me by acquaintances, one woman offered to take part after a seminar in Wellington, and three families were referred by a local GP. Having obtained names of people who would be willing to consider participation, I still found it surprisingly difficult, especially at the beginning, to make the initial phone call. My predominant feeling was of intrusiveness, which persisted throughout the period of interviewing, but was most intense between September and December, 1986. It was partly related to anxiety about undertaking research. Partly too, I think that I had imbibed more than I recognised at the time the view that research was more likely than not to be disruptive and difficult for those taking part, a view which made it difficult to 'hold on to' the statements by most of the participants that the experience was by no means negative.

Families were only referred to me after one partner at least had agreed that I should contact him/her to discuss what participation would involve. Sometimes the person whose name I had been given was happy to raise the issue about the research with her/his partner. In other instances, I rang the other parent 'cold'. I suggested to all potential participants that they should think about the idea for a few days before deciding definitely whether or not to take part, and I then rang back to check on their decision.

During the course of that initial conversation, I outlined how I proposed to spend my time with them, said that I would be taping all interviews, explained about subsequent disposal of the tapes, discussed problems of confidentiality and control of the material. The importance of each respondent's feeling that it was likely that she/he would benefit personally from participation became apparent after the first set of interviews with one woman, where it transpired that she had taken part out of a general sense of goodwill and because her ex-partner had already agreed¹⁰. She was unsure what she herself would gain from the process and found the experience time-consuming and difficult. As a consequence of her experience, I spent more time talking with potential participants about what they felt they might gain themselves, given the amount of time and energy I was asking them to commit to the project.

The people who decided against participation did so for a variety of reasons. In three instances one or both partners felt anxious about issues of confidentiality; one person felt that taking part in the research would only make matters worse between himself and his ex-spouse; one person, who thought it was unlikely that his ex-spouse would be interested never rang back, and another family who had agreed enthusiastically rang back several days later having decided that they were concerned about invasion of privacy. The only point at which I felt that the question about participation became a difficult one for me was with the man who feared a worsening relationship with his ex-partner. I was at the time keen to locate some families where the sharing arrangement was less than fifty/fifty (he had the children for one night a week and most weekends) and he would not, when asked directly, actually say that he would not take part. I felt that I should not have to make the decision for him. Then other issues emerged which would have made the whole situation extremely fraught, at which point we agreed to terminate contact.

Out of the thirteen families approached, I interviewed eight¹¹. I had expected to interview from six to ten families, and was relying on the concept of 'saturation' (Gilling, 1984; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to define the point at which it would be apparent that I had collected enough data. 'Saturation', as Glaser & Strauss define it, is not to do with universality nor with absolute proof of data but defines the point where there is sufficient data to sustain the analysis, and when more data adds bulk but does not facilitate the emergence of a further categorisations (p.111). The use of the concept of 'saturation' involved clarity about what I will call 'the allure of form'. To have attempted to include a wide variety of the possible different temporal combinations of shared parenting arrangements (apart from being beyond my resources) would have overlooked the extent to which, within the different arrangements, the experiences discussed were becoming repetitive. However, I did make a point of interviewing two families where the sharing was less than fifty/fifty in order to get some sense of whether the issues which their

¹⁰ Only one other parent gave as the ex-partner's agreement as a reason for participation.

¹¹ See Appendix 1.

experiences highlighted were, in contrast to the fifty/fifty shared parenting families, idiosyncratic or had some structural significance.

Five out of the sixteen parents were currently in de facto relationships and these partners participated to varying extents in the research. One person was extensively involved in all the interviews. Another spent some time with me in general conversation, and joined in the taping at the end of the first interview; and the others were present for either all or a considerable part of one interview. I also interviewed one of Liz's teenage children to get a sense of what the arrangement meant to her, and spoke with one family's daily child minder. She had looked after the children immediately prior to the separation and during the first year of the shared parenting.

The value of participation

I hoped that participation in the research would be helpful to the respondents, as well as giving me the material I sought, being conscious, as I have said, of the amount of time I was asking respondents to commit to the research, and because of the implication I drew from the Justice Department's response that research was by definition upsetting and threatening to the participants. I have not found an extensive literature which addresses the reasons why people decide to take part in research projects or their assessment of the experience, no doubt because, as Oakley (1981) notes, it is a question that is often left unasked along with others that concern the process of the interview. Allport, quoted in Plummer (1983, p. 91) gives a substantial list of reasons, including exhibitionism, self-justification, a desire for order, placing events in perspective, pecuniary advantage, viewing the encounter as therapeutic, making a confession, and seeing the opportunity as a kind of public service. Askham (1982) suggests that people participate because they think the experience might be fun, for therapeutic reasons, or because there is a particular incident that the person wishes to relive. His first two points are endorsed by McKinley (1983) and by Oakley who relates the positive benefit that her respondents derived to the reduction of anxiety and a sense of reassurance, the perceived value of reflecting on and verbalising experience, and the changes that participation wrought in attitudes and behaviour. Scott and Lyman (1968), in a more social interactional perspective define talk as a central human need, and describe it as a 'shoring device' with the 'ability to repair the broken and restore the estranged' (p. 343). They describe accounts as means of making sense of the unexpected and designate them as one of two types. Either the speaker is presenting to what amounts to an excuse or a justification for an action or gives an account with an eye to the nature of its reception by others. They conclude that "*Every account is the manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities*" (p. 357). While my concept of the therapeutic encompasses the notion of 'making sense', the extension of their argument, that all accounts are either excuses or justification, seems to me to be somewhat limited and exclusory. They have appeared to ignore the other value of account giving indicated by Oakley, that of clarification and extension of understanding. Instead the direction of their analysis is towards a form of self-seeking and self-justification, and they

appear to hold to the notion of a stable self which the account-giver attempts to project onto his/her audience. Nor does their analysis address the more altruistic reasons that people in my study gave for their participation, although it may be that Scott & Lyman would ascribe to such motivation the conscious management of identity.

The wide variety of reasons that were given in answer to my question about why people agreed to take part pointed to a density of motivation, in which some anxiety about what was going to be involved, and who I was, was present. For example, Keith spoke of his wish to repay a debt to the counsellor who had worked with him and Maree over their separation, while at the same time voicing his initial hesitancy¹²:

I'm glad that {the counsellor} asked, "Would I take part?" because I owed her. Now that was originally the only reason that I agreed to do it. Now, I don't feel like that at all. I feel that I haven't just done it for {her} at all. I, you know . . . I didn't really want to - you don't really want to - especially when you don't know the person. Right? I didn't know you from a bar of soap. You could have been . . . nasty. Or you could have been . . . cold-blooded or . . . (3rd Interview).

Fifteen of the parents said explicitly that they hoped that taking part in the research would be personally beneficial, the benefits being seen as the value of discussing and reviewing with a outsider an arrangement that had in most cases been on-going for several years¹³. For Luke, it was important:

To clear my thoughts, to put forward my own points. This whole area, this shared parenting thing - it needs to be dealt with. Deciding to do this - this was the most important decision that I have ever made in my life, so the last 2 -3 years have been a growing experience.

Some spoke of the need to clarify points for themselves, of the need to throw light on the issues, or to address 'niggling doubts' (Patty) and to gain some perspective on the way the arrangement had developed. The desire, explicitly mentioned by some parents, to know more about how the children had fared, both from their point of view and from mine, was part of this. Some parents viewed the process of discussion with the children as useful, since either no discussion about the shared parenting decision in which the children had been involved had occurred, or because there had been no recent reviewing of the arrangement. The situation, however, was not devoid of anxiety. Mary, for example, felt that she had to make it clear to the children that re-opening the discussion was in this instance not connected with a custody battle, and my sense was that there a number of parents who were apprehensive that the children might say something that might throw the arrangement into question or would be upsetting.

Others said they took part because of a general interest either in the topic, which was clearly one close to their hearts, or because the whole idea of participation sounded interesting. In the following quotation Anna implies that the subject was of interest to her

¹² Maree also mentioned the same reason as an important factor in her participation.

¹³ This figure includes Liz Smythe who took a very active part in the interview.

and that a further reason for taking part was because she saw me as something of a role model.

Oh, *you are like a breath of fresh air!* I mean, if you lived for 4 years {here} dealing with the mentality {here}, *you* would be leaping at anything . . . anything exciting. (. . . .) Well, first of all, it is an area that really interests me . . . secondly, I like women who are doing really interesting . . . work . . . (. . .) and I suppose you - yes. You are going in the direction, developing in ways as a woman that I would like to develop in . . . umm . . . (*sighs*) . . . I just - when Martin said to me, I said, "Oh God, that sounds *really interesting*". And that was just my response. Yeah . . . a head thing . . . (3rd Interview).

Stephen felt that he had been to some extent jolted out of the way that he viewed the arrangement by the request to participate.

SG: (*laughs*) I was just intrigued. Umm . . . I, I think I said before . . . most people express surprise or . . . an interest. I don't think of it as unusual or . . . particularly remarkable . . . so it wasn't - I mean . . . sort of that . . . umm . . . the thing came up about, about this . . . umm, and I thought, "Well . . . maybe it is a bit out of the ordinary" (2nd Interview).

Closely connected with the expectation of personal benefit were feelings, again very widely shared, that there was a lack of information about what the arrangement was actually like and that sharing their experience would, hopefully, assist others. Stephen commented further:

So particularly when you talked about how, um . . . you were planning to publish and so on . . . not that I am interested in being splashed everywhere, but I mean, in terms of my experience of the situation . . . if it was of interest . . . and help to other people . . . it's good.

Lawrence, who had been a separated father with access after the ending of his first marriage and then a shared parenting father, felt that he was well placed to comment on the fact that both arrangements had their 'shades of grey', the greyness being differently located in each arrangement. He wanted to stress the importance of avoiding a categorical assertion that one arrangement was necessarily better than the other. Michelle felt that people needed to be aware of the pitfalls and to know that shared parenting arrangements are not easy but involve 'blood, sweat and tears'. Jane spoke of her sense of the value of sharing a pioneering experience, and of the personal benefit in doing so:

I agreed to take part because I was fascinated with, umm . . . realising, um, that what we were doing was/is reasonably new and I was fascinated at the idea of exploring that being a new idea. Also, maybe I thought that, umm . . . I would get some sort of insight about what I was doing (Follow-up).

Fay's comments made it clear that she did not consider that her participation had held much personal value for her. She had found the experience 'tedious' and did not believe that it had extended in any way her view of shared parenting. Her reason for taking part touched also upon the importance of making information available to other parents, and is expressed in much more forceful and ideological terms than other parents used:

I believe that what can be revealed is that shared parenting in its different forms is increasingly common. It is important that support is given to others who are considering it as an option, and to ensure that others are aware of it as an option. It is important that the idea become visible, and seen in the mainstream, so that people know where it does and doesn't work, and ways of resolving difficulties. {Research should establish} that this is a real and developing part of New Zealand life for others, and for those who want to break out of the myths of how society functions (Follow-up).

At the end of the third interview and during the first follow session I asked what it had been like to take part in the research. The response was overwhelmingly positive. People felt that they had enjoyed the experience, that it had been clarificatory, exciting, challenging, (because it made you question, as Liz pointed out, what you otherwise took for granted because you were in the middle of it, living it), therapeutic in the broad sense of the word, and had heightened awareness of some facets of the arrangement that could be improved. Jane, as a consequence of what the children had said, felt that she needed to manage conversations with Louise differently when she rang to report a fight with her father, so that Louise did not get the impression that Jane was backing her against Dave. She was also greatly relieved to discover (a question she herself had not felt able to ask the children) that her house as well as the family home was seen as 'homely'. Keith felt that the experience of talking together, which was not something they often did, had served to bring him and Sam closer. Stephen mentioned a similar aspect. Jim's presence during the second interview had opened up things between them, and they had later talked about Stephen's homosexuality, which did not appear to be an easy subject for Stephen to discuss with Jim. Stephen and John spoke about how they had felt about Jim's presence during one of the interviews in the following way:

JG: ... the thing that I found ... perhaps most unusual was ... sitting down, talking about things that we were talking about ... with ... Jim there. Usually ... I've talked about those things ... just me and Stephen ... about the way in which relationships have developed ... and ... how ... umm, Patty and Jim sort of slotted in ... weave in ... I suppose.

AO: (...) You, you ... express some concern about Jim's presence ...

JG: It wasn't concern.

AO: It wasn't? No. But sort of ...

JG: It was ... um ... sort of, it wasn't a familiar situation ... either the subject matter of ... the fact that the - firstly, the fact that he was - we were talking about him ... in front of him.

AO: Right. Looking back on it, do you - how would you - do you have that same sort of ... feeling -

JG: It was good. Yeah. I, I don't ... it is something that you don't generally do. You discuss ... um ... you often discuss people behind their backs (*laughs*) ... basically ... um ... so there is that. But the fact that there was somebody else. There was yourself ... which was also - ahh ... well, it is not like a normal situation either ... because the questions you were asking were quite searching ... ahhhh ... especially from the point of view that we couldn't give straight answers all the time. Mainly because they were things that we hadn't sort of put into words. They were feelings that you were trying to put into words, which takes longer than thoughts into words really.

AO: My impression was that as far as Jim - because there was a lot of non-verbal interaction between you (*to Stephen*) and him in particular in that second interview, and my impression when I left was that it actually seemed, like you said ... a very positive thing (Mmm) for him - to hear some of those things ... to get a sense in a different sort of way ... of the way that you value and love him. ...

SC: Yeah. Yeah. I felt all that. I think I ... at the time I suppose I got quite ... not uncomfortable with it, in an unpleasant way, but just again it might, I suppose I felt ... you know, that it was something that was unfamiliar ... yeah. ... In which case it was a bit difficult to put into words all the things ... (Right) ... but yeah. Yeah. I found it a really good thing ... as far as Jim was concerned, I was really pleased, really that he was there. (...)

JG: I found it interesting from the point of view - yeah I found it valuable for myself. But I also think that it was quite valuable for Jim to sort of ... see and watch us - all of us - being asked about situations which he probably hadn't thought about or taken for granted ... so ...

SC: Yeah. Taken for granted much more because he was much smaller . . . so that we do in fact do things - it is part of his life and he doesn't know anything else -

JG: You were saying, 'How does he feel about . . . sort of . . . him being here'? Well, he probably . . . hadn't sort of . . . thought about it. . . . "I wonder what people do think about it?" I got that impression anyway that he hadn't considered that . . . that a lot of the issues that you raised were actually questions that people were thinking about.

Taking part in the research meant that several of the women felt that their valuing of the arrangement was justified. Patty, for example, said:

It . . . it's made me *value* it much more too, because it's made me see, made me more aware of the good things, that there are many good points . . . sort of refreshed, renewed my enthusiasm, my faith in it, if you know what I mean (3rd Interview).

On the other hand, Michelle felt that the experience of reviewing and re-assessing the history of the difficulties she and Lawrence had experienced with shared parenting had strengthened her conviction that it was not working for Kay, and that she was correct to insist that the sharing arrangement must end.

It was also an experience which was slightly double edged and unbalancing. Throughout the interviews there were comments from a number of people that the act of engaging in the research had challenged their perceptions so that the arrangement came to be viewed as more problematic. One person said, "It's a can of worms". But my belief was that although this was slightly uncomfortable, it was not entirely unwelcome. The doubts had been there. The interviews allowed their airing and evaluation, and affirmation that the arrangement had, on the whole, something to offer. Some, though, felt doubtful about the value of their contribution:

DB: It is a little bit - like if I said that I wanted to interview you about your car-driving habits, after a while you sort of wonder what I was asking all these questions for because surely everyone drove cars in first gear all the time or something, so to some extent I find - I feel puzzled to see how you are going to develop any material of any wide interest, unless you were to impose your own philosophies on them . . . on the material and make a story out of it . . . (3rd Interview).

Nonetheless, he had found the experience a 'pleasant one' and enjoyed the time to talk about himself.

One of my reasons for returning a copy of the transcripts was to do with respondent control over what was finally to be used; another was not only to gain a further perspective on what had changed or developed in the family, but also a sense of their reactions to what had been said previously¹⁴.

¹⁴ I was very anxious about returning the transcripts. I felt a partial responsibility to give respondents a text which would have some merit and some value for them, so that for me there was an implicit question, "What will they make of it?", while at the same time, I felt very vulnerable in case anyone decided to excise large segments of text, or worse still, to withdraw from the study.

What was widely remarked on very early during each first follow-up was a sense of tension on receiving the transcript. Charles voiced the feelings of several respondents when he said:

I read them with considerable urgency I think

AO: What was the urgency about?

CD: I don't know. I was . . . thinking when you came up to work there . . . I had rather a lot to do to prepare for (. . .) but I didn't do it (. . .) I sat down and read them (Follow-up).

The intensity of the experience of reading the transcript was reflected by the frequent comments on the 'gripping' nature of the material, and the extent to which it was like a 'movie' or a 'novel' which required careful reading. Mary described the experience as one which she valued but which had nonetheless thrown her off balance, and she had 'spun out' the readings over three days. The sense of being thrown back into the time of the interviews and of 'hearing' again what had been said was also commented on. Often this was a positive feeling, because there was the sense that personally one had moved on:

JA: I was *fascinated* when I read it. It took me back to that time. I had forgotten where I had been, and the amount of process and progress that has gone on in my head. I really regret not making tapes myself so that I have a sense of how I resolved things and how far I have come since then . . . Reading brought it all back - how I used to go back to the house to sleep. At the time it did not seem overwhelming. I just did it. But now . . . AHHHH!

Other people spoke of the difficulties they had been experiencing with their ex-partner at the time of the interviews, and how distant that time now seemed. Reflecting back was a confirmatory and hopeful experience, attesting to the way that relationships could and did change and improve. Anna referred to the way shared parenting helped to retain personal bonds whose severing damages individuals.

I was trying to picture myself not knowing who I - who this family was and . . . you know - what interesting things they had done with their life, and I think I, I, I haven't seen it documented anywhere before.

AO: What? This?

AN: Mmm. This sort of information. I think if I had been doing it again I would want that sort of, want access to that sort of information. Because I think that one of the things that I - it really keeps hitting me - how difficult it is to change . . . and to move away from people that you have close bonds with . . . and we don't realise the damage that we do in making such (Traumatic?) mm, demarcation lines. Like, you know, "I'm in it, and now I'm out of it". And that must do untold damage to people. Forever. And they must live with the scarring of that. . . .

Doubts, however, were also expressed. Liz had previously been positive about the value of participation but now appeared to doubt it somewhat, characterising what she had said, as 'Words, words, words', as well as reiterating that the cost of the arrangement restricted it to middle class families, so that the whole research was of limited value. Ross said that to research families you 'need to watch their boots as well as their mouths'. Later in the interview, however, this more categorical assessment appeared modified by the statement that he felt that the research overall had given an opportunity to reflect and to

become aware of some issues that he thought he and Fay could have handled better, and Liz thought taking part had clarified significant aspects of her relationship with Tessa.

Reading the transcripts was not a completely positive experience for all. Michelle wrote of her 'embarrassment'. She felt that reading the transcript took her back to a past that was now over but had been painful and difficult. She did not like to think about it too much because she would have preferred to have acted more assertively from the beginning. Charles spoke of a re-surfacing at times of the old pain although I also wondered if there was for him some disappointment that the transcription did not 'say more'. Both Lawrence and Keith, whose shared arrangements had ended by the time of the follow-up found the experience painful, and distressing in many ways. Keith's distress and anger was related to his violence towards Sam, and his recognition that he had behaved in the way he said he would not. Lawrence did not read the transcripts until a year after their recording. When he did so, he wrote of being engaged by the conversation, of being choked with emotions, and of 'wanting to interrupt LB and tell him to come clean, instead of being so wonderfully evasive'.

Everyone (myself included) was taken aback at the physical appearance of the transcripts, which gave clear visual evidence of the broken nature of our speech, the unfinished sentences and the 'illogicality' of what had been said, and the lack of verbal precision. Some expressed a concern about their ability to communicate at all. John, who described himself as a 'fast communicator', was concerned at the extent to which he interrupted 'more that I would like to'. The Cooper/Pearson households gave their impressions as to why speech is so fragmentary. Tom commented on the way that non-verbal behaviour provides vital clues to understanding what is being said and enables a sort of shorthand to take place:

But also and also the fact is that you gave - when you are just looking at the transcript, you can't find the information - the voice, the raised eyebrows, the hand over - the whatever. Yeah, the, the, the, the, even though you may say, "Yes", "No" and "I don't know" . . . as all being the answer to one question, just the way you say them gives the answer that you can't see in the transcript. You can only see that (*Points to the transcript*).

John, while making similar points to Tom's about speech as an event closely associated with body language, raised another very interesting point, describing speaking as a risky event:

Yeah. I was concerned maybe . . about the repetition and the lack of understanding by myself . . about what I'd said . . and I, I think that it is basically . . I was commenting on the . . the nervousness of putting forward a point of view, because it may be judged by people. If you say things in a way which you feel are unfair . . and not quite exactly what you want, then the wrong value judgement could be put upon it . .

AO: Mmm. So speaking is to take a risk?

JG: Oh yes. . . . and umm . . . just to give an example. I am inclined to think as I speak . . sometimes you finish saying something, and think, "My, that was a good idea". You actually didn't think it. You spoke it. Um . . but just as . . quickly, it could be a bad idea . . and you have to try and retract it.

SC: I edit it before it comes out of my mouth. . . .

AO: So, so that part of the editing is then in a sense leaving you with nothing to build upon? Like if you speak, you've got, like there are words that you can then . . . play around with.

SC: Yeah. That's true. . . . But I can do that in my head.

JG: But the only problem with that is that I go rabbiting on and you say nothing! (*Much laughter*)
Mmm. Very true.

Speech may catch the speaker unaware, and result in an unintentional utterance which, spoken, cannot be retracted. The pauses, the ums, the changes of direction reflect the need to clarify thoughts around a particular question and to ensure that one says what one intended.

Respondents have traditionally been allocated a passive role in the research act and their comments on the value of the experience not sought. The placing of the respondent in a passive role and the lack of interest in her/his experiences as subject has helped perpetuate a conservative emphasis upon potential damage to the respondent as a result of participation in research. Adopting a methodology where both researcher and participant are active, and where seeking the latter's views about taking part is understood as part of the research process challenges this assessment. Certainly, the experience of my respondents clearly contradicts such a standpoint. For most of those in my study, the experience was significant and valuable, and empowering. The transcripts which they retained were spoken of by several parents as forming part of the family history and as documents to be preserved so that the children could read them in full when older. Certainly, there were doubts, hesitations and criticisms expressed at times, and no doubt people at times regretted their decision to take part (as I at times regretted my decision to do the research), but the overall tenor of the comments confirms that participation could in no way be described as a negative experience. Michelle said:

I've really enjoyed it. I said at the beginning that one of the reasons was that I wanted to clarify my thoughts. Which I've certainly done (.) I think that I was concerned to start with . . . that I might feel invaded. . . I didn't feel that at all . . . and um . . . um . . . and I think that that is something to do with just feeling comfortable with you. I think that I could have very easily felt invaded. . . But I didn't. I wondered - I know . . . after I agreed to it - I thought, "Oh God", you know? But I've found it really quite delightfully easy. . . . Truly (3rd Interview).

The process of the interviews

Bell & Newby (1977) and Wax (1971) point out that discussion of the processes of research have frequently been regarded as unimportant. Both books present autobiographical accounts of fieldwork in which the more difficult aspects of research are addressed with the intention of breaking down the myth that fieldwork is easily accomplished, and making visible some of the hesitations and doubts that many methodological accounts smooth over. Accessibility to this type of information assists newcomers to the field to conceptualise the difficulties and doubts which are endemic to the situation and not the result of personal failure.

Interviewing was simultaneously far more difficult, far more exhausting, far more challenging, and far more enjoyable and amusing than I had ever imagined or my previous experience in counselling had led me to believe it would be. I looked forward to going

most of the time, but invariably arrived at the house experiencing a high level of apprehension, uncertainty as to what I was doing, a desire to flee and doubt that whatever *koha* I had brought would be adequate for the occasion¹⁵. There were many times during the whole process when it seemed to me that invisibility would have been a distinct asset, regardless of the hospitality and friendliness of the families. Although the extensive notes that I made of the interviews during the time with each family, and on returning home, give ample evidence of doubt and anxiety about how to carry off the role, and of persistent tiredness, they and the transcripts also give much evidence of the laughter and joking that was part of the process as well as the care and thoughtfulness with which people responded to my questions.

The period of greatest exhaustion during my fieldwork was between October and December, 1986. Over this time I was often interviewing three times a week; attempting to keep abreast of tape transcriptions; maintain something of a presence in my family while I was leaving home often as the children walked in from school; coping with feelings of guilt because of their comments that I was never at home; and because of my barely minimal contribution to our domestic economy. As a consequence of this experience I organised the interviewing of the remaining four families in two groups of two, which proved much less stressful. Over time a pattern of interviewing emerged. For the first two interviews I would observe, eat with the family and tape. On the third interview I generally arrived after the meal and completed the interviewing. After two experiences of acceding to the suggestion that I interview the child at the first interview, I made a point of never interviewing the children until the second and sometimes the third interview because I did not want to rush things, and felt that they should have time to become more accustomed to me.

I had decided at the outset that taping the interviews and making full transcriptions was an integral part of the study. Because of prior clinical and research experience of interviewing using tape recorders or audio-visual equipment, I assumed that using this equipment would either not be regarded as intrusive or that anxieties about talking into a tape recorder would rapidly diminish. Ross and Liz commented fairly early on that they were not used to sitting round a table to talk, and my attempts to try and accommodate their style - which meant that we sat around, somewhat spread out, in a large room - resulted in poor quality tapes. After that I decided that I had to ensure that we were all positioned so that voices came through audibly on the tape recorder.

There were the inevitable technical and human error problems. On two occasions, for no clear reason, the tapes wound on but did not record, and I lost each time thirty

¹⁵ Gilling (1984) also mentions similar feelings of apprehension as she arrived for her week's stay with the families that she studied; and I think that Malinowski's (1967) accounts of his feelings of anger and disappointment towards his respondents can be interpreted in the context of the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in such research methodologies. However, Tiffany & Adams (1985) suggest that his behaviour can also be interpreted within a patriarchal, exploitative framework.

minutes of interview. When I discovered this, I put despair firmly to one side, fell back on a principle that if what had been said was important enough it would probably be alluded to again, swallowed my discomfort, explained what had happened and re-did the 'lost' section at the next interview. After the second mishap, I used a different tape recorder. One tape also developed a loud screeching noise that made transcription difficult. Martin and I virtually completed the the follow-up interview before I realised that I had forgotten to turn on the machine. Martin kindly suggested that we redo the interview, which fortunately was not very long!

Making the transcriptions proved to be, as I had expected, extremely time-consuming. I found that it was impossible to keep abreast of more than two sets of interviews a week, so that during the time that I was interviewing three families each week, I listened to one set of tapes prior to the next interview. Transcriptions of each tape (although my abilities as a touch typist improved dramatically) could take four or more hours a side, depending on the quality of the tape, the numbers of planes that went overhead, or motorcycles that roared up the hill at critical moments, and the audibility and enunciation of the respondent. However, doing the transcriptions myself helped develop a detailed knowledge of each one and assisted the process of reflection and identification of issues. Like so much of what I have come to feel about the research process, the decision to transcribe and to continue doing so in the face of what at times felt like considerable odds was something akin to a leap of faith, the full significance only being visible once much of the work had been done.

In retrospect, I think that some of my feelings of difficulty and uncertainty about entering the lives of the families arose because I had rather facilely assumed a parallel with a therapeutic session, without thinking through the differences sufficiently beforehand. The principal differences arise out of the different direction and focus, the role of the interview, and the nature of the relationship of the participants in the interview to one another¹⁶.

A family entering therapy presents their definition of the problem, which provides the initial focus, and the basis of the contract between them and the therapist. They move into a particular environment, where each member is expected to remain for the duration of the session. The task of the therapist is ostensibly explicit, i.e., that s/he help the family work through their difficulty, although s/he may not carry it out in quite the expected manner. From the therapist's perspective, a major responsibility is to promote family interaction in order to understand the nature of the system. The position in observational research is different.

Instead of wanting to get a diagnostic view of the family, I was more interested to see how they interacted over time and therefore to enter, rather than to stay out of, the family system. By moving to their home ground I was entering into their structuring of

¹⁶ See Chapter 4 for the discussion of my redefinition of the researcher/respondent relationship.

time rather than my own. I chose times to go when I assumed that parent and child would be 'together' (i.e., after school, or shortly after the parent got home from work). In fact, what frequently happened was that there was a minimum of interaction, although clearly life was going on 'as normal'. Parents and children carried on their own lives. Children had friends round to play, disappeared to friends' houses, went off to music lessons, did homework, stayed in other rooms or watched TV. At other times they played in the house, or were generally around but not necessarily spending time with the parent. In quite a number of instances the lack of interaction carried over to the meal times, when there was little said and the children left the table as soon as they could. I realised quickly that there were inherent problems in being, usually, the only other adult present. The adult unit then became the 'natural' focus for conversational activity, which meant that I was then possibly taking up the time that the parent might have been spending with the child. I came to realise that for several people 'doing research' meant talking and asking questions and that they did not feel comfortable with me trying to observe, rather than actively asking for information. I found myself constantly juggling with the problem of finding a level of interaction which did not just seem 'rude' (which I characterised as sitting there and saying nothing, and refusing to be drawn into the conversation) or overly involved (which I saw as talking too much), but the happy medium was certainly not always apparent and I wondered to what extent my own presence was altering family rhythms. I asked several families about this. Sometimes they seemed to feel that what was taking place was what mostly took place. On other occasions different family members gave different answers. There were other times when we had amusing conversations about what would constitute normal family interaction were I *not* there. Would they go to the beach, or for a walk? But by the time the decision had been made, domestic responsibilities loomed and no-one went anywhere. There were, of course, also periods of intense parent/child interaction, both positive and negative.

Under these less than straightforward circumstances I found it easy to question the value of the observation time. In the first instance, it gradually dawned on me that what I had set myself up to observe was substantially actually unobservable. I was seeing, as Charles put it, 'alternate week solo parenting', and not 'shared' parenting in the sense that there were few face-to-face parental interactions to be noted. But at the same time it was of considerable value to be in a position to make this observation, and to be able to note the sudden tension when one parent came to see the children, or the anger another felt when the clothes on the day of the changeover had not been delivered by mid evening.

Nor was I altogether clear initially about what it was that I expected to be able to 'discover' by observing. I was clear that I was not wanting to use the material in an evaluative way in terms of superior/inferior parenting. However, the value of coping with my frustration, sense of discomfort and uncertainty about the meaning of what I was

trying to do, became apparent over time¹⁷. For instance, I was frequently able to see behaviour which had been previously mentioned in conversations, thus confirming what I had been told. I was able, in several instances, to see the effects associated with the transition of the child/ren from one home to the other. It was very important to observe the different dynamics and temperature and mood change in contrast to the previous visit, and then was able to comment upon this and raise for discussion something that, had I just come there without previous awareness, I may have taken for a 'normal' atmosphere and situation. To have been able to see these things seems to me to be of incontrovertible value in interpreting the material that I collected.

I also think it was important that I did not just rush into the house to collect my material and then disappear, but had time to talk about other than shared parenting, to share who I was and to talk when it seemed appropriate about my own personal and family experiences. It is of course impossible to determine precisely what contribution this kind of informal contact made to the outcomes of my research, but I believe that it contributed to a closer relationship generally with my respondents and therefore to greater ease in most cases in our exchanges¹⁸.

The other problem that I initially encountered was deciding what constituted 'sufficient' observational time. There were two different models that I could call upon. The first comes out of family therapy, and asserts that one can get a good impression of a family system in a relatively short time, although it depends on one's right as a therapist to test and challenge family boundaries. As a researcher, my role was not to deliberately challenge family boundaries but to stay within them. The second model proposes that an observer needs to spend a much longer time with families in order to get a clear sense of how they interact. Hanson (1981), in her study of families, comments that it took about three days for the family to become comfortable with her presence and to let down their guard. Given what both she and Gilling (1984) noted about the stress associated with living-in with different families, I decided that attempting to spend a minimum of a week with sixteen different parent/child combinations was probably tantamount to a suicidal gesture, as well as placing considerable stress on my own family. The solution I adopted left me somewhat stranded between Scylla and Charybis. But I felt that it was personally manageable, and I was aware of its limitations. The strengths of the arrangement were that it gave me time to be other than just a researcher, and that spacing out the three interviews gave time to process what I had seen and heard and to ask further if need be.

¹⁷ See Brody & Endsley (1981) who comment on the importance of studying process in order to understand some of the full complexity of family dynamics. Kantor & Lehr (1975) comment on the necessity of studying the family within its natural environment because of the richness of the data which it provides. They suggest that part of the significance of ethnographic studies is that the family's internal life does not correspond to the behaviour described in the clinical literature, and that behaviour is focussed towards the habitual and everyday. Furthermore, because the natural environment is the familiar one, family defences are less likely to be high, and the conduct in the home therefore discloses critical information.

¹⁸ For comments on the facilitation of self-disclosure, see Jourard (1964).

By choosing to 'be there' rather than to just 'interview' meant that my role was by no means a 'pure' one¹⁹. To have attempted to play an objective researcher role would have been impossible to sustain over a series of interviews because of the length of time I was in the homes of my respondents as well as being personally out of character. The list of roles which I occupied during the research were several: masseuse for a baby with teething troubles, child minder for one father (who put his request for help for this occasion in an unrefusable framework, that this would be an excellent time for me to get to know the child. But I think that her level of anxiety both about being with a relative stranger, and feeling that she was in a position of 'hostess' prevented this from happening); purveyor of information about other families and their situations²⁰; a person with whom to discuss a changing situation outside of the research interviews; friend, in some cases, and therapist.

I am using the last word almost provocatively because it seems to me that this role, in this type of research is almost inescapable; and since that is the case, it is better to make a virtue of it and to explore what are the therapeutic dimensions in qualitative research rather than to shy away from them. It is inescapable because a question can be seen as a challenge to a previously defined reality which has lain more or less unquestioned. Avoiding challenging, even implicitly, peoples' definitions of their worlds is almost impossible, the difference being that the challenge is not intentional as it is in therapy. It was also, as noted earlier, impossible to anticipate the reaction to an apparently simple question. Nor could, I predict the direction the interviews might take. Indeed I think that for some families my arrival permitted the doubts, hesitations and uncertainties about the nature of the arrangement to surface²¹. Nor was it possible to formulate neutral questions. At the first interview (where I had thought that at least the opening questions were fairly neutral) discussion with one parent almost immediately focussed on the nature and implication of parental differences about beliefs, about style and presentation of self, and how these differences might affect a child.

Leaving a clinical or controlled setting and entering the familial world requires adjustment to the family's timetables and patterns and exposes the researcher to a whole series of obstacles which ensure that the interview does not necessarily flow in quite the

¹⁹ See Oakley (1981).

²⁰ I saw this as an important part of what I was able to give back to the parents. Few knew of others using a similar parenting mode, and I believe that it was valuable for me to answer questions after finishing the interviewing about what I knew to date of others' arrangements, and to confirm that they were not alone in experiencing doubts and difficulties.

²¹ I think that the other point that has to be taken account of here is that it is generally easier to talk about what is difficult than what is flowing smoothly because of the unremarkable nature of the latter. Kantor & Lehr (1975, p. ix) point out that even the most disabled of families spend a lot of time in everyday affairs. They say, 'Disabling processes occupy a considerably smaller subclass in the universe of family events than the literature of family pathology might lead us to believe'. Such points confirm the value of the observational periods. Although what was talked about often concerned doubts and difficulties I could also observe the functional nature of the day-to-day arrangements.

intended manner. People didn't always manage to get home when they said they would or forgot that I was coming. Interviews stopped, re-started, or ended around the arrival of visitors, TV programmes, getting children to go or returning them to bed (I waited once for three quarters of an hour for a parent to settle the child, to discover when he finally returned that he had gone to sleep while singing songs), sorting out fights over chairs, chocolate, rooms, and general bad moods. At the end of my last, and unexpectedly slow, interview with her, Jane explained that she was confronting possible major changes in her personal life, which accounted for her abstraction and uncertainties. On my first interview with Luke, I did no taping at all, because of the family fight ostensibly over lateness but also, as it transpired later, Luke's uncertainty about his own role as father. The children, for whose sake he had given up his work, were wanting to spend all their time with their friends and very little time with him. My notes on this occasion read as follows:

6.15 Dinner was ready. No sign of children. Luke slightly irritated. Reiterated that Diana had said that she would be back before 6.00. No concern about her safety, but cross since she had been difficult recently.

6.25 Isac came back. Luke reprimands him for not being home at 6.00. Isac's argument is that he was not told specifically to be home at 6.00 this day. He does not know where Diana is, but thinks that she was at her friend's. Says he is going to play with his friend. Luke says he isn't. Both go off to look for Diana. A friend rings again for Diana.

Luke comes back. Isac plays with the dog, who is discovered to be on heat. Luke returns to conversation about valuing the domestic side of life, but also feels the 'lure of the dollar'.

6.35 Diana still not back. Luke explained that she is stroping at the moment.

6.45 Luke goes off again to find Diana.

7.00 Diana comes back with all her friends, and the friend's mother who explains that the task of delivering the throwaways was impossible, and that the delivery area was too big. Luke was very restrained. Diana seemed somewhat on the defensive. Friends left. Luke served the meal. About half way through Luke began to ask very pointed questions about how Diana and friends had carried out task, and pointed out the ways in which they could have speeded things up. Diana began to get ratty back, and the mutual needling continued. Diana went angrily and in tears to her room. She came back and said that she was going to her friends. Luke said she wasn't and she wept again. She went outside and sat there. The friends appeared. Luke hulled strawberries for dessert. Called Diana, who said that she was not going to eat any. Luke told her not to be silly. She came in and both she and Isac took dessert outside.

7.40 The hostilities continue. Diana refuses to eat the strawberries, and makes a series of comments implying that they and Luke unlikeable. Luke trying to ignore, and not over-respond. Then tells her she's giving him a hard time and that it is time to stop. Asks her to feed the dog and the issue of when this is to be done starts another argument, since Diana accuses him of telling her to eat the dessert and simultaneously ordering her to clean up the dog's dishes. Luke tries to clarify the sequence. In the end he washes the dishes.

8.10 Both children are outside again, with friends. Luke tells them to come in - they are 'playing games and stretching points'. Diana slams the door in tears. Both she and Isac go to their room and talk to their friends through the window.

8.20 Luke goes to room and tells friends to go. Diana responds. 'We are not outside. We are just cooped up inside'. Luke says that they spend all the time with their friends and that he wants time without the friends. Diana counters that he has told them to play outside and that now he is trying to stop them.

8.30 Isac comes into the room where we are - I ask them if they want to talk into the tape recorder and play their conversations back to get a sense of what their voices sound like. They don't. Isac is told that he has to go to bed at 9.00. I say to Luke that I will leave at same time. Diana wants to have the dog in her room - Luke refuses because of the dog's being on heat.

8.40 Things start to quieten down. A discussion about watches starts, which seems to help clear the air, and Isac times Luke smoking a cigarette. Each child times the length of time the other can stand on her/his head. Equanimity is clearly restored. I leave at 9.00 feeling exhausted.

At such moments I wondered how I would ever finish the interviewing and decided that quantitative methodologies had perhaps some advantages!

The analytic process

My decision that a case study approach to the data would be an inadequate response to the data I had collected was determined partly by my theoretical position in relation to the inherent limitations of case studies, and partly by the mode of analysis that I adopted. Case studies purport to retain of a sense of the individual, the unique and the whole. The selectivity, partialising and ideology of the account is often ignored. At the same time the study remains rooted in the particular, and the significant wider social issues are unobserved²².

My sense of the inadequacy of case studies was reinforced by a semiotic interpretation of a tourist bus trip where the tourists purportedly re-traced the steps of the early European explorers through the Australian Blue Mountains (Payne, 1986). A case study can be described, borrowing Payne's terminology, as an 'architectural viewpoint', where the reader, like a tourist, arrives at the pre-selected site, follows the arrows pointing to the view, and takes away an 'already constructed image of what is to be seen' (p. 16), because the journey has been edited and the moments of exploration, hiatus and turning back eliminated from the armchair view of the world (p. 18). Similarly, a case study is a means of appropriation of another's experience, the fullness of lived experience being converted into revealing only those features of interest to the researcher who frequently presents his/her account as though it were complete and without recognition of the extent to which it has been structured by ideology.

By choosing to write a deconstructive analysis of shared parenting, I have also chosen not to produce accounts of each individual's experience of shared parenting after separation or divorce. Instead, I have sought to convey something of the everyday experience of families who are sharing parenting; to retain the multiplicity of voices from which my text has been formed; and to explore the gendered and ideological dimensions of textual production, thus emphasising the interplay between micro and macro, between individual experience and social structure²³. I have sought to produce a text which is dense and richly textured; which imposes an order across a range of disparate accounts; which emphasises patterns and juxtapositions of events in ways in which they may not have occurred in the 'raw' data²⁴; which moves the data on from the particular to the general and

²² MacIntyre (1979) says that case studies often allow little sense of comparison, that they tend to bury the general features, or lose the unique ones. Phillipson (1973 b) also points out that the problem of what constitutes an adequate account is always present, since even the most detailed account can only serve as a gloss on the full experience.

²³ See Silverman (1985, Chapter 4) where he argues for the importance of adopting a sociological position which incorporates both dimensions of experience. He notes that although much sociology has seen micro and macro as in opposition to each other, it is important to avoid the assumption that a 'fundamental choice must be made between these two perspectives'; that although neither level can be reduced to the other, that 'each *presupposes* the other'; and that sociology cannot be conceived as either 'meaning or . . . structure', but that while 'individual elements need to be identified . . . analysis [should] centre on their articulation within a network of relations' (p. 70).

²⁴ Abrams & McCulloch (1976).

more abstract and yet which still is valid in relation to the accounts from which it was constructed; which 'minimizes distortion' (Willis, 1976/1980, p. 91).

That some distortion of the respondents' experiences occurs within sociological analysis is well recognised and seen as inevitable and necessary. Phillipson (1973, p. 79) notes that methodology is a '*process by which a sociologist generates an abstract view of the situation*'. Baldamus (1972, p. 286) quotes Rapaport to the effect that

[t]he stuff from which human relations and social structures are made is not evident intuitively. It must somehow be distilled, or abstracted from the innumerable "events", and the selection of the events depends to a great extent on one's experiences, cultural background, and biases.

Similarly, Giddens notes that researchers while having a responsibility to 'pick up' the differentiations of meaning which are relevant to the accomplishment [of an interaction] . . . are in *no way* constrained to embody the same differentiations in their own formula' (Giddens, 1979, p. 151), while Backett describes a dual process of analytic abstraction. The respondents' accounts are the first step in the movement towards an imposition of order and abstraction, which is expanded upon by the researcher's processes of selection and ordering from that account. Such processes can result in what she calls a 'false attribution of clarity', in that what has been produced as partial and incoherent, in the process of analysis becomes distilled into a more coherent and clearer product (Backett, 1982, p. 10)²⁵. Barnett (1970, p. 150) describes the reorganisation of experience as critical to developing alternative ways of viewing events and as involving analytic and associative acts (p.161), thus enabling a 'recombination of elements' (p. 162). Willis (1976/1980, p. 91) points out that, 'Even the most 'naturalistic' of accounts involves deconstruction of native logic and builds upon reconstructions of compressed, select, and significant moments in the original field experienced'.

Writing up the data involved writing up notes of interactions and events that had taken place while I was with each family; transcribing the tapes; making notes about issues that I wanted to follow up on in the next interview, and on issues emerging from the data. This part of the research took from the middle of September 1986 to the middle of June, 1987. All of the first follow-up interviews that I was able to do were completed by December, 1987. By the time I had completed all the transcriptions and notes, I had approximately fifteen hundred pages of printout to be analysed.

Although there is now a substantial literature, which I have cited earlier, on the value and contribution of qualitative research, references demonstrating the actual analytic

²⁵ Plummer (1983, p. 123) however, warns of the obverse danger, pointing out that: 'A central theoretical assumption in most interactionist writing is that the personal life is nowhere near as linear and clear as many social science accounts render it. It therefore, theoretically, leads one to seek out the diversity, ambiguity, negotiation and emergence in the construction of an individual's life. The trouble with this view is that it might encourage the researchers to seek ambiguity, flux, contradictions and diversity where there is none. The very process of allowing a subject to ramble on about his or her own life will confirm the tenets of interactionist theory about the rambling and negotiable aspects of life', and Plummer concludes that, in general, 'it would seem that there is no way out of this problem'.

process are fewer (Becker & Greer, 1960; Backett, 1982; Bulmer, 1979; Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; McIntyre, 1979; Phillipson, 1973, 1973(b); S. Jones, 1985; Halfpenny, 1979; Silverman, 1985). What is repeatedly emphasised within this literature, despite its diversity is both that theoretical and analytical categories should be 'emergent' and therefore open, and that the conduct of the analysis must be consistently comparative. Overall the intention is to avoid foreclosing on conceptualisation and to 'preserve plasticity' by avoiding prior categorisation (Bulmer, 1979, p. 661), in order, as Willis (1976/1980, p. 89) suggests, to achieve 'surprise . . . by reaching knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigm'. Ricoeur, in writing about the meaning of subjectivity makes a similar point, that interpretation and understanding go 'beyond' the content of the data:

understanding has nothing to do with an *immediate* grasping of a foreign psychic life or with an *emotional* identification with a mental intention. Understanding is entirely mediated by the whole of explanatory procedures which precede and accompany it. The counterpart of this personal appropriation is not something which can be *felt*, it is the dynamic meaning released by the explanation . . . that is, its power of disclosing a world (Ricoeur, 1979, pp. 100 - 101).

One of the strengths of Glaser & Strauss's work is that there is throughout a close correlation maintained between the development of theory, in which the production of 'grand' theory is challenged, and the processes of analysis. Their intention is to develop 'grounded theory' (p. 1). Theory is, then, within the constant comparative method, a 'process' (p. 32) which grows out of the material rather than being either superimposed on it or rigorously defined prior to the study. They seek to generate theory which is open to constant modification and is

integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data. . . . Still dependent on the skills and sensitivities of the analyst, the constant comparative method is not designed . . . to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some vagueness and flexibility that aid the creative generation of theory (p. 103).

Nor is the researcher concerned to achieve a universality of reference, or of causation (p. 103), but instead to generate categories, properties and hypotheses primarily through a process of saturation of data. The stages through which comparative analysis moves grow out of each other, while simultaneously earlier stages remain in operation throughout the analysis. These stages are:

(1) *The comparison of comparable incidents*: This is a process which involves the generation of as many analytic categories as possible as they emerge from the data; the comparison of each incident categorised with the incident prior to it, in order to develop an awareness of the continua of the category and its dimensions; the recognition of the theoretical properties of the categories - its 'continua . . . its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relation to other

category, and its other properties' (p. 106); and the noting and coding of ideas as they develop.

(2) *The integration of categories and their properties*: This involves a movement away from the comparison of each incident with the previous ones, to 'the comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents' (p. 108). The intention at this point is to achieve the integration of properties through the comparisons, which then enable the analyst to 'make some related theoretical sense of each comparison' (p. 109).

(3) *Delimiting the theory*: The researcher at this stage concentrates on reduction, which Glaser & Strauss describe as the discovery of the 'underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties' which enables the formulation of theory with a 'smaller set of higher level concepts' (p. 110). This process is assisted by recognition of the saturation of data, i.e., the point at which it is acknowledged that an incident does not add to the category through the highlighting of a further dimension, but merely adds bulk. At this point the incident is not coded, a procedure which also helps reduce the amount of data with which the analyst has subsequently to deal (p. 111).

(4) *Writing theory*: The final stage is the writing of the theory, a process that then becomes a logical extension of the earlier stages.

Glaser & Strauss's model has not been accepted uncritically by all qualitative researchers. By implying that once the category has reached 'saturation' data no longer need be placed in that category Glaser & Strauss lose sight of the density of the experience which they are conceptualising. Willis (1976/1980, p. 89) has suggested that their notion of approaching the field to be researched without prior conceptualisations is not possible, and that the development of theoretical constructs which then close off alternative viewpoints may begin at a very early stage, a point which Bulmer (1979, p. 666) also makes and quotes Brown to the effect that

[g]rounding an analysis in member's own perspectives is probably easier where one is concerned with 'relatively short-term processes, sequences of behaviour that are directly observable or can be easily reported upon, and behaviour which has a repetitive character'

Nonetheless, I believe that Glaser's & Strauss's emphasis on emergence and a continual modification, and grounded development, of theory has considerable methodological significance and value in qualitative research. However, I also believe that their conceptualisations are open to the criticism that they have not themselves quite followed through the implications of their own model. Their emphasis on 'prediction', 'control' and hypothesis construction (p. 3) places their work more within a quantitative framework.

In a recent article Richards & Richards (1987) are critical of qualitative methodology in general, arguing that 'there is an enormous gap between goals and performance' (p. 23) and that there has been inadequate attention paid to the problems with

method. The failure to solve these problems have resulted in a lack of 'methodological discussion allowing innovative scholars to build upon others' experiences or learn from their mistakes' (p. 23)²⁶. In the context of describing the value of an analysis done with the aid of a particular computer package, they point to the various significant constraints that researchers not using computer analysis must contend with, suggesting that these constraints detract from the full development of 'grounded theory' because freedom is required to move beyond preconceived ideas and indexing patterns. Richards & Richards do not think the major constraints to the exercise of this freedom are restricted to qualitative work but their existence then throws them into conflict with the central tenets of qualitative methodology. The constraints that are highlighted relate to volume. They stress that the sheer volume of records generated through qualitative research immediately creates problems with the size of records that can be 'created, retained and retrieved'; the complexity of analysis that can be set up and handled; the constraints arising from the detail of classification of records which occur when researchers confront their inability to process and interpret records properly, and perhaps most importantly the constraints that arise through the process of analysis.

As analysis proceeds, so does pressure to settle (early) for simple and fixed indexing systems. Sheer clerical effort forbids running several at once or creating categories during the process of analysis. The complexity of unstructured data, its essential intransigence to order, encourages taking-over of analysis by themes that emerge early, discourages interrogation of the data for further themes, verification of those dominating analysis or investigation of their patterned occurrence. So a major constraint is on *flexibility and momentum* of analysis (p. 25).

The core of their critique is that although grounded theory seeks expansion and openness rather than reduction, and the analytic processes are intended to encompass change and development, nonetheless few researchers acknowledge how early analytic choices prevent the emergence of later themes, thus ossifying the analysis. The end result, they suggest, is that qualitative work can only offer tentativeness, a lack of authority and few certain conclusions, so that qualitative methodologies become 'associated with episodic and truncated research', case studies, and the noting but lack of exploration of the patterned occurrence of themes (p. 27)²⁷. Not surprisingly, they criticize a tendency to

²⁶ They do not reference, however, the papers collected in *Sociological Review*, (1979), in Walker (1985) or Morgan (1983) which represent a recognition of, and an attempt to meet, many of the issues raised by Richards & Richards.

²⁷ While their assessment of the low standing of qualitative work is valid, the impression they give is that it was solely because the methodological means for adequate analysis were lacking. What they seem to have ignored is the existence of a cultural constraint which both valued quantitative and seemingly 'scientific' work and at the same time denigrated alternative modes of viewing the world. Schor (1987), in a fascinating book, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* discusses the way that detail, over a period of several centuries, was associated with the feminine and therefore with inferiority and subversiveness. She notes: 'The irreconcilability of details and the sublime and concomitant affinity of details for the effete and effeminate ornamental style point to what is perhaps most threatening about the detail: its tendency to subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the periphery to the center, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background. Given the persistent association of all manner of devalored or threatening details with the feminine, it is scarcely surprising to find the insubordinate detail singled out as distinctively feminine' (p. 20), and her book is a

write in tentativeness with such phrases as 'many suggested' (p. 27). The remedy they offer is the use of a sophisticated computer programme, which provides the mode of readily accessing under multiple headings a range of previously differently classified data, and allows for calling up data not seen as relevant at an earlier stage in the study. Interestingly, they appear here to overlook Glaser's & Strauss's suggestion that the emergence of a new coding does not necessitate going back over previously coded material in order to achieve a totality of reference, but that the analyst merely continues the task, while incorporating the new code. They appear to have ignored the concept of saturation, and concentrated instead on that of inclusiveness.

Although I believe that the criticisms Richards & Richards have offered of qualitative work have substance, and that a computer analysis would undoubtedly have helped in my own approach (I did not have sufficient space to do the analysis on the computer), their approach emphasises different aspects from mine, most significantly highlighted by Richards' (1988) statement that at base qualitative and quantitative methodologies could offer the same result. What they are seeking is a means by which qualitative research can become associated with the achievement of definitiveness and completeness, both of which are accepted as feasible and desirable. Whereas my understanding of qualitative research is that it provides a means of generating enquiry about the structures of society, and how these are unselfconsciously sustained through discourse, Richards & Richards appear to define the purpose of categorisation as the ability to assign behaviour value in relation to its numerical status. Their concern is with truth, and truth here can only exist in a precisely quoted percentage. While from their vantage point, they may well be correct in asserting that much qualitative research could have been done more speedily and with few different results from quantitative, the solution they offer to the problem denies alternative ways of conceptualising the significance of qualitative research.

In conducting my analysis I have relied heavily on the mode suggested by Glaser & Strauss. Having completed the analysis of the first four sets of interviews I formulated a tentative outline of what seemed to be emerging from the material and drew a rectangular diagram which, while attempting to show interrelatedness, consisted of broad thematic headings and sub-sections listed underneath.

Stage two began as I moved towards completion of the interviews. At this point I began what turned out to be a very lengthy process of working through the transcriptions and coding each set onto a very large sheet of paper. I worked at each set of transcripts without direct reference to those I had already analysed to avoid the possibility of interference from previous analytic decisions. Each set of transcripts took many hours to

discussion of the gradual process of the reclaiming and sublimation of detail. The growth of interest in qualitative work and the further elaboration of qualitative methodologies has occurred over the last two decades, during which time philosophers and critics of the 'centre' (such as Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze & Guattari) who have challenged the peripheralisation of detail, have emerged.

complete, the first interview in all cases taking the most time because of the density of the material and many items were cross-coded to retain their breadth of reference. An account of a particular event might well refer simultaneously to an emotional reaction, the nature of the post-marital relationship, gender issues, and the value of a particular sort of support. I placed each 'event' under all the relevant headings and drew connecting lines between them. Creating this diagram drew my attention to the way that the 'event' itself was not stable, but its signification changed according to how it was coded, and to the particular frame of reference. Each coding, then, was more than just a multiple coding of the same event; it also represented a slightly altered perspective. I then noted the codings for each section on the transcript.

The significance and value of this procedure rapidly became apparent. In the first instance, there was a relatively clear emergence of a chronological sequence and the chapters, insofar as each moves the 'story' on reflect this chronology. The series of interconnecting lines between different categories gave visual force to the complexity and disposition of each set of transcripts, and indicated of the particular tensions in individual and family accounts. Constructing the diagrams also made me aware of the pressure towards linear sequencing of events although in the accounts, however, such clear sequencing is not so apparent because each recounted event has reference forwards as well as backwards. Recounting the past and envisaging the future was, for example, coloured by recollected and current evaluations of the marital and post-marital relationship. It became increasingly clear (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987) that the legal termination of a relationship has little connection with its emotional termination. Ending a relationship, so that one is no longer affected or constrained by the other, is a process of great complexity, requiring a considerable amount of time to work through.

The linearity of writing can lose sight of density of experience. It was easy for me to overlook the number of significant other events that parents were experiencing simultaneously in addition to the separation and the imperative to decide about custody. I drew chronological charts, showing the different and often stressful events which parents experienced during the time they were attempting to make decisions about custody.

Having completed the coding of the transcripts of the first four families I wrote up in a more detailed form my notes on the emergent categories and revised what I was by then calling my 'map' of shared parenting. The discrete themes in their rectangular box became a series of open concentric circles, the purpose being, as I describe below²⁸, to stress their interrelatedness, and to support a conceptual move away giving priority to specific components or features of experience. This map, however, I felt to be unsatisfactory since events were still static and centred.

It took several months before I was able to grasp a way of mentally visualising the interactional map. While waiting for something to surface I had made unsatisfactory

²⁸ See Chapter 4.

attempts to draw 'cross-sectional' maps where events were temporarily rooted and yet dynamic, uncentred and connected. The visual metaphor which I believe reflects something of the interactive mode which I was trying to suggest developed from a paper on recent New Zealand art which has rejected conventional boundaries (Barrie, 1987), and a discussion about Alexander Calder mobiles. Hanging in space, lacking a formal geometric structure, their skeletal forms symbolic of the pervasiveness of language, their 'leaves', spread out over time, delicately balanced, each of equal significance, the mobiles embody fluidity and relatedness, each 'leaf' section having a freedom of movement yet its own movement being affected by, and affecting, the movement of other 'leaves'. In terms of providing a visualisation of complexity, balance, density and integration of elements, the concept of the mobile offered a way of moving beyond strict linearity and the rigid ordering of experience.

Stage three of the analysis was to return to my charts, and key into the computer the information relating to each coding. Doing this gave brief notes on respondents' views on each topic, in which family and gender readings were easily located.

The fourth stage brought me back to the transcripts which I cut up and categorised. Because most sections of the transcripts had multiple points of reference, I spent hours xeroxing, labelling, then cutting up and sorting, and taking a number of my completed xeroxes back for further sets to extend the analysis. The result was a pile of folders nearly a foot high. It was only at this stage that I decided on chapter headings and the allocation of topics in each chapter. I carried out the final process of analysis of the data as I came to write each chapter.

Using a highly qualitative methodology has had its unsettling moments. Doing so meant managing my hesitations about qualitative analysis, and the ingrained methodological assumptions of professionals in the general field of family research that quantitative studies are more valid and 'real' in order to focus on process and to allow my interpretive structure to emerge.

MOVING BEYOND LOCAL COLOUR: THE VOICES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.

Introduction

The dimension of voice has typically been excluded from consideration when interview material is analysed and interpreted in sociological research. Where extracts from interviews with respondents have been included in a text, they are usually presented as complete and finished statements. Only occasionally is some of the recursiveness and hesitation of the speaking subject reproduced but these features are treated as nonsignificant. The effect of editing out these features is to create the impression that respondents present themselves as consistent in thinking and logical in the development of their thought and knowledge. Paying attention to the whole process of articulation opens up another view of the way that meaning is communicated, one which emphasises inconsistency, paradox, ephemerality. The nature of the spoken language perceived in this way is well defined by Barthes (1971/1986, p. 309 - 310) when he writes:

The corrective and perfective movement of speech is a stammer, a fabric that frays itself out as it knits itself together, a chain of argumentative corrections . . . : the eponymous figure of the speaker is Penelope.

Paying attention to these features of the spoken language broadens understanding of the complex meanings embedded in respondents' speech and affects significantly the conclusions that are drawn.

The texts of the transcripts were fascinating. They varied in length, one running to over one hundred pages, the majority being between sixty to eighty pages long. By looking at ex-partners' texts comparatively, it was possible to place the texts within two main groupings, each with sub-groupings. The first group, in which I placed the majority of the accounts, varied considerably in emphasis, direction, and in the expression of feelings of optimism, despair or concern. There was also variation in the degree of detailing of events. Within this group, all except one of the women, and only one of the men adopted with varying degrees of intensity a critical social perspective, locating themselves in a feminist (or in Ross's case a Marxist) ideological framework. The (mostly male) accounts of the remainder of this group functioned more as narrative within a taken-for-granted world where the same degree of questioning of the social structure present in the women's accounts was omitted. Three of these texts in particular were noticeable for the way in which key events were presented with considerable detail in a manner which had the effect of emphasising a particular ideological stance. Detail and ideology combined to increase the listener/reader's awareness that this account was to be regarded as giving the full and true version of complex personal and historical events. Intertextual comparisons between these ex-partners' accounts, however, made apparent areas of tension and omission and contributed to a fuller appreciation of the way gender and ideology informed the texts.

In the second group, in which I placed six of the accounts, the experiences of the ex-partners were often considerably different, and two out of the three women addressed structural and feminist issues. But in comparison with the first group there was not the same degree of tension and undercurrents of uncertainty, doubt, despair and anger. Differences were more obviously respected, and the respondents expressed less ambivalence about each other. This greater unanimity of view and recounting of what was presented as a shared, and much less stressful experience was particularly marked in the accounts of the lesbian and homosexual couples and their new partners.

There were also some gender differences relating to the way that respondents constructed their texts. The women in both groups, rather more than the men, occupied a different position in relation to their texts, in that they were immersed in, yet also more distant from, them. The women adopted a more evaluative, and critical stance in regard to their own actions, while not denying their validity. They were more likely to offer a sympathetic awareness of the others' position, thus making more positive verbal 'moves' towards their ex-partner, and to recognise systemic elements within the relationship. In this respect, more of the women, and considerably fewer of the men were closer to what Flynn (1986, p. 276) has called an 'interactive center', being better able to achieve a balance between detachment and involvement. In contrast, the men tended more to positions Flynn has characterised as overly detached, or overly involved, where the critical distance which allowed a 'dialogue' (p. 268) between the text and self was not achieved¹.

Although I generally began the first interview with each parent by asking for an account as to why they had chosen shared parenting as the mode of custody the texts by no means developed in identical fashion, each having its own idiosyncratic features and internal logic. In some cases respondents voiced substantive concerns about shared parenting almost immediately, and the relationship patterns and family themes given expression at that point were subsequently embroidered and expanded through the subsequent interviews. Others took a more historical approach. Some began at the point of separation, addressing that in a relatively neutral and matter-of-fact tone of voice. Others, however, began at the same point but their recounting immediately immersed me in a complex situation in which personal problems were accentuated by structural issues. In these texts especially, the chronology of the arrangement was often difficult to trace, a situation not helped by the fact that it was the event which had the emotional significance for the speaker, not its date. To some extent too, the length of time that families had been sharing the parenting influenced the emphases of the texts. Those who had more recently started sharing and those for whom the sharing had been difficult tended to speak more of the difficulties that had been encountered in the early stages of the arrangement.

¹ See also Bleich (1986). His article and Flynn's are recent studies seeking to understand the nature of gendered reading. Insofar as I have understood the speaking of the text to constitute an encounter between self and 'other', where the speaker may occupy different locations within her/his own text, then these studies offer valuable ways of thinking about the manner of textual construction by the respondents.

Alternatively, those parents who had both established their shared parenting arrangement some years before the interviews without too much difficulty, and whose current arrangement was functioning reasonably smoothly, gave less attention to this dimension.

My decision to make complete transcriptions of the tapes of the interviews was based on a theoretical and personal orientation towards ambiguity and difference as constitutive of social reality (Pelz, 1974; Plummer, 1983; Silverman, 1985; Walker, 1985). I also wished to record my respondents' speech in a manner that would retain its density of reference, multi-directionality and richness of expression². While qualitative research has provided general theoretical support for my approach, I found that recognition of the importance of language is not accompanied by detailed discussion, outside of a linguistic framework, either of procedures for making a complete transcript of interview material, or of appropriate methods of analysis³.

The act of taping directed attention to the problems of note-taking in such situations. Had I been trying to take notes of the long and often discursive interviews I would have had to contend with the potentially conflicting demands of retaining a grip on the direction of the interview, making immediate decisions about the value or significance of what was spoken, and writing down what was said in sufficient detail. Note-taking, at best a reductive activity (Barthes, 1971/1986, a), precludes the opportunity to return later to the full text and, in the light of subsequent interviews, to re-assess the earlier decisions about the significance of specific statements. In the effort to remain abreast of the verbal outpourings of one's respondent, there is a tendency to concentrate on the factual content rather than on the process of speaking⁴. Subsequently it is very difficult, as a note-taker, to recall speech patterns and the 'rustle of language' (Barthes, 1975/1986) without the aid of a tape. The reported statement (already reduced to the researcher's appreciation of what was said) can too easily become reductive and seem definitive simply because it has been stripped of its surrounding qualifications - the back-tracking, changes of direction, hesitations and repetitions. Consequently the reported statement is often in a starker and more authoritative form than would be the case if one is working from a transcript. In this light, note taking has to be seen as an act of closure on the part of a researcher.

² An interesting point of comparison is with case studies compiled by Wylie (1980) from interview notes where the elements which caught my interest are lost.

³ Dawe (1973, p. 33) says that, 'To capture, in Richard Hoggart's words, 'the *whole* sense of an experience . . . rich in simultaneous meanings', we need a language which communicates, expressively as well as instrumentally; a language which pays as much attention to style, tone, feeling, emphasis, inflexion and imagery as to the rigorous representation of formal concepts and logical propositions. For much of our [sociological] terminology destroys our sensitivity to most levels of meaning on which human activity and experience must be grasped'. See also Denzin (1971), Phillipson (1973) and Phillips (1973), all of whom describe language as critical to the assignation of meaning and comprehension but nowhere elaborate in any detail an appropriate methodology or theory. Equally, Brannen & Moss (1987) state that the language used by respondents has is theoretically significant, but do not expand the point further.

⁴ I am using "process" here, not in terms of the psychodynamics of the situation, but in terms of the speech process itself.

It is no longer sufficient merely to assert the centrality of language in the mediation of experience. To appreciate fully the complexity of experience demands a concentration on the more radical issues raised by the process of language itself. Paying attention to these issues requires moving beyond regarding language as a source of content and local colour, or as a means to enhance a sociological account by inserting nuance and complexity. Focussing on the process of language opens up questions about the nature of dialogue and of interaction within the interview, the existence of a rational, coherent subject, and the deeply entrenched Western metaphysical notions about the 'centre', 'essence' or 'rootedness' of meaning⁵.

Language/research interface.

The hierarchical relationship of researcher and respondent characteristic of quantitative methodologies, where the researcher is presented as dominant and the object of the research is seen as 'presenting [her/him]self directly to the observer' (Willis, 1976/1980, p. 89), denies the existence of an intricate and delicately balanced relationship and a process between the participants in a research act, a relationship that becomes all the more ambiguous in qualitative research. Within interactionist theory the description of both researcher and informant as participant observers implies equality yet because interaction is viewed as problematic the respondent comes to occupy a potentially deviant role⁶. The ethnomethodological approach likewise implies equality through the emphasis on the role both play in the creation and maintenance of the social process of the interview, but this position is rendered ambiguous and implicitly subverted by viewing the relationship as asymmetrical, and as one where the interviewer has greater power and authority⁷. Feminist research, because of its extensive challenge, both theoretically and methodologically, to the objectivity of the social sciences, has also challenged the notion of the inferior status of the respondent (Benston, 1982; Keller, 1983, 1985; Oakley, 1981, Stanley & Wise, 1983). Focus on the process of the interview enables further comment on the notion of equality of interviewer and respondent, and on the way that the interaction, verbal and non-verbal, between the participants creates a milieu which facilitates and constrains the development of the interview.

I recognised in the early stages of interviewing that the conception of the interview as a dialogue between equals (Oakley, 1981; Laslett & Rapaport, 1975) was inadequate.

⁵ The Western attachment to the concept of a centred universe is illustrated in the following quotation of Lacan's. '[T]he Copernican Revolution failed to dislodge the prestige of the centre: it shifted from man and the earth to the sun but it is still the idea of the centre that controls discourse . . .' (MacCannell, 1986, p. 16).

⁶ Denzin (in Silverman, 1985, p. 163) suggests that there are a number of factors which can 'distort' responses: the respondents occupying different interactional roles from the interviewer; the problem of self-presentation; the problem of 'volatile' relationships, which may lead to fabrication of the truth; the difficulty of entering subjective worlds; the relative status between the interviewer and respondent; and the 'context' of the interview.

⁷ Silverman (1985). For a discussion of these issues see especially pp. 156-178.

The supposition of the equal transaction did not recognise the different but also shifting power positions that I as researcher and the parent as respondent occupied in relation to one another. On the one hand, I became very aware of feelings of dependency on the good will of my informants, of intrusion into their lives, and of the way in which these acted as constraints on pursuing questioning. At the same time I was aware that I occupied a role which carried with it a certain status and gave licence to ask questions. Furthermore, although I felt that I had tried to ensure that people were taking part 'of their own free will', it became apparent that some felt 'freer' than others, and that situational factors affected the flow of the interview. An explicit illustration of this clash between the position of dependency, the right to act 'in role', and the issue of power in the relationship can be seen in the following exchange with Fay:

AO: I actually want to go back to the beginning (. . .) when you were talking about . . . your concern about Tessa feeling that in any way she was in a - in anything other than a normal situation and I realised that as you were talking that I was beginning to feel very constrained about talking with her at all because I thought that that was somehow going to be breaking the boundaries for you and was going to be creating difficulties. . . .

FJ: Well, my raising that with you tonight - I didn't mean to place constraints upon you. What I was trying to say was that . . . Ross and I were trying to provide the context, to let you know of the context in which we'd placed it and if you could understand that context, it may help you to place it in the same light. That was all. It was extremely important because of your coming into our lives . . . we know that, that Tessa's situation is as normal to us but is not . . . necessarily normal to the majority of society. She doesn't necessarily perceive that. If you hadn't come into our lives, then . . . that's the way it is. But it kind of puts a focus on it that wasn't there before and we are concerned that that doesn't . . . upset her perception of her life which we perceive to be very stable . . . (A.O. Starts to talk, but F.J. continues) Now, I didn't mean to say . . . that you have to represent it as this which it isn't. What I meant to say is that this is what Ross and I have said to her and we want you to know that as you proceed about the normal, different ways of living, which she knows and that you are interested . I mean she *accepts* that there are all different family situations but it would be strange to say, "Here comes this strange person who's interested only in your's". So we've said to her, "Here comes this strange person . . . we haven't known her before, who's interested in all different types of families and that explains why she's come to our's because our's is different from others".

AO: I suppose (. . .) and this is another purely intellectual thing for me, Fay, although I feel that it is a very different situation for you. I'm interested in how you're feeling that it is to talk about something is to suggest that there's something different about it.

FJ: Because you weren't known to us. You weren't here last week. And suddenly you are here talking about Tessa's life style. And for 7 years you haven't been here. I mean I think, that, that's . . . reason enough to cause someone potentially, to cause someone to stop and wonder, "Why are the questions starting now when they weren't there before?" If we had been raising these questions it would have been different. But you are a stranger. So I think that that is quite legit . . . to have - not fears necessarily, but to recognise that there is a different factor in our life now and that is somebody who is interested in that, and who wasn't there last week. And that may mean nothing, or it may be cause . . . to wonder. Now, if there is cause to wonder, it's in the context of, "We wonder about a lot of things. Not just your situation, but all family situations" (1st Interview).

Perhaps it was not surprising that during the next and very tense interview, when I began by asking what I considered an innocuous question, in Tessa's presence, about the amount of contact between her parents in relation to her welfare in the early days of their separation, the response was to assert that these subjects could not be discussed while Tessa was in the room.

Furthermore, conceiving of the process as dialogic and exploratory meant, as I have said, that the interview schedule I used was very open-ended. I found that the more I

attempted to move into the material, which meant moving away from areas of questioning planned prior to the interview, the more difficult at times became the easy or precise elaboration of what it was I wanted to ask because of a sense of pushing at the boundaries. I found at times that my own questioning became tentative, and lacked clarity. This was because I was attempting to satisfy three different criteria. I wanted to acknowledge what had been said, thereby ensuring that the person realised that s/he had been heard. At the same time I wanted to suggest that it might be possible to take what had been said further, without implying that the first answer was somehow inadequate; and form the question which would release further information without 'directing' the response to a particular angle. I was relieved to find that I was not the only one experiencing difficulties of conceptualisation. Anna said, "I don't know how clear I can really be. I can only *hint* at what I think I mean. I mean, I can only say what I think I mean".

The extent to which the interview, conceived as a process of exploration, is successfully collaborative raises questions about the nature of the respondent/researcher relationship which depends on several factors: the toleration of tentativeness created by the interview process; situational factors (whether either participant is feeling ill or tired); the notion of research entertained by the respondent and the respondent's perception of the significance of the research, both personally and within wider social horizons; the willingness to question 'taken-for-grantedness'; and a transcending of social convention to permit enquiry into tabooed areas. There were some subjects, the financial arrangements between the parents being one, where my question to some respondents would break the flow of the conversation and create a sudden barrier. Asking for further information increased my sense of discomfort as the response became more hedged, and I felt anxious about alienating my informant⁸.

I concluded that, in relation to constraint and facilitation, there were three fluid groupings into which the respondents could be placed, fluid because some people could be placed in different groups at different times. The visual appearance of the transcripts confirmed this observation. The first group, those who were enthusiastic and interested in the research, readily questioned their assumptions and spoke of situations which were felt to be difficult as a result of adult interactions, rather than as the fault of the other. The accounts they gave were detailed and expansive⁹. They tended to draw connections between their experiences and social structures and the interviews were easily sustained.

⁸ These sudden breaks in the conversation were usually able to be explained by reference to the same issue in the partner's transcript, whose account would provide an alternative reading of the situation, and confirm my impression of the interpersonal difficulties associated with it.

⁹ The fact that nearly all of the women, and fewer men came within this grouping could be interpreted along gender lines i.e., that women are 'better' and more experienced practitioners in the art of personal conversations. The other angle, which has to remain speculative, is to wonder in what way the interview patterns would have changed had I been a male. There were certainly several occasions when I wondered if I was inadvertently entering into a previously experienced marital patterns, where women 'wanted' answers, and the role of the man was therefore to resist the questioning.

Visually, the picture is of a minimal input from myself, and a maximum input from the respondent.

The second group was more problematic in that the information was not so easily acquired and there was an air of restraint in the manner in which it was given. There was not the same sense of flow and the dialogues stopped and started much more, in comparison to those in the first grouping. Follow up questions were not always easy to ask because what was said did not leave me with a great deal to build on. Sometimes the manner of speaking was due to a failure of memory. Here, Stephen clearly felt that he should be able to respond to the question:

AO: Were you aware at the outset of Jim's distress? Umm . . . you talked about the way that his behaviour - he became much brighter and happier, umm, is that something that Patty or yourself were aware of, that he hadn't been particularly happy, or was it only afterwards when you saw this change in him that you realised that things had not been going so well?

SC: I don't know. That is probably something Patty could answer better than me . . . umm I think that it was something - from memory- that became apparent after I came back, rather than being terribly apparent at the time I am not clear on that (1st Interview).

Sometimes the hesitancy was also due to the way a question might throw up a new and unconsidered facet of the arrangement. Hesitancy was also something of a personal characteristic. Stephen, for example, spoke, as I noted earlier, of formulating his responses in his head before speaking them, rather than speaking out his thoughts. Charles frequently spoke slowly and very carefully. His manner of speech often resulted in long silences which left me feeling anxious, intrusive and uncomfortable.

CD: Ummm . . . Y-es. Umm . . . I suppose that I am conscious that there is about 50% of the kids' lives of which I know very little.

AO: Mmm. The 50% when they are with Mary? (Mmm) What does that mean, that, that knowing very little?

CD: Ohh, I, I am not sure how you would put it any other way.

AO: What makes it significant? What makes . . . what brings it to consciousness?

CD: Oh usually it is likely to be kicked off by a sense that umm . . . I find myself missing them. This is frequent.

AO: And so the fact that they are not here and when they are here, there is always the sense of absence? . . . Because there's . . . the week over -

CD: They won't be here. There is that sense of . . . generally a greater degree of ignorance about the lives of my children. (2nd Interview).

In these situations my options were to avoid breaking the silence; to give leads in to possible responses; or to proceed with asking questions, the responses to which were sometimes regarded as so self-evident that the respondent was left struggling to make sense of the question, while I tried to ensure that he was not left somehow feeling inadequate for not having anything more to say. I am not sure I always succeeded. The visual appearance of the transcript is the exact opposite of the first type of response and I contribute much more of the conversation.

The third group, although visually appearing like the first, posed problems of a quite different nature.

FJ: Firstly - this is *MY* interpretation. . . of course . . . I remember that time and I thought of it at the time as *my* idea, *my* commitment and if nothing else came out of that awful time, it was that I was going to make sure that this was the achievement of our breaking up. That we stuck together in terms of bringing up Tessa. Now, Ross may see it differently, but I have *always* seen it that way. That *I* - it was *my* idea. *I* was determined to make it happen. *I've* always been the more outspoken one and he's been very passive and very quiet and one interpretation would say that he agreed to it and it suited him. Now, knowing him as well as I do, that's kind of like an observer's (.) - so one answer to that question is: That was my agenda and I convinced him of it. But I think that probably that was the way it was played out because I'm the talking one and he has tended to be the listening and acting one .

AO: So, I still come back to the question -

FJ: Hang on. That's one answer. . . That's the way I recall it. I can remember *so much effort* that I put in to saying, "This has got to be the fundamental principle" . . . and lots of arguments that went on. But he agreed with that. Now, the other way of looking at it is . . . that it was a principle easily accepted by both of us *anyway* because that's the way even when, even when we were together, Tessa had been brought up. *Unusually*, in our perception, relative to other kids of her age because, for instance, Ross's job was a major factor. He was the milkman. He went to work before the child woke up in the morning and he was back home after the first feed sort of thing. A very, I mean, he worked hard but a very short time in the day. So that child . . . from her *earliest* moments didn't know one parent any better than the other. Which I think is probably an unusual situation. When I started work part-time, when she was {a baby}, I would work until midday, take her to work and before I finished work, Ross was there to take her home and then before he really had got settled in, I was home again. So, in her first . . . umm, say two years of life, it couldn't be said that she spent more time with one parent than another. So, if we were committed, or, if I, my recollection of the time was that I was committed to convincing Ross of this joint parenting thing and he went along with it and was - and, and subscribed to it whole-heartedly, it wasn't going to be particularly difficult because it had always been that way. It had never been that it had been, *one* of us, rather than the other, who had brought that child up. We had always shared it and been equally committed to an upbringing -

AO: So where did that decision about sharing her, within the relationship before you broke up, because it's - the two were fundamentally linked together, aren't they? (Yeah) (.) You had both been really involved as parents - so how come you had both been so involved?

FJ: Why not?

AO: Quite! But I mean-

FJ: Can't conceive of any other option.

AO: No, I'm not asking out of - (laughs) (.)

FJ: I don't think that it was ever something that we chose to do. It was natural to both of us. I would *NEVER* be . . . the sort . . . of woman who had kids and stayed at home and looked after them essentially and then welcomed Dad home and he had his time with the kids. I mean, I *never* subscribed to that. I don't think, philosophically, Ross ever subscribed, or would subscribe to that. But we never discussed it. Maybe that's why we were together, you see. Umm, we were the sort of people and still are, who whose philosophical standpoint on parenting was one that saw it as a shared job. So I, I can't recall it ever having been discussed. I certainly never considered - well, I did consider it to the extent that I went on 6 months' leave from work, that there would be a time when I would be home full-time with the child - it didn't eventuate, but that was in the context of living with a father who wasn't full-time at work. So, we always - it was always planned. Didn't have to be planned. It was always *known* that both parents would be around to bring up this baby. And it just fitted our conceptions of what-

AO: So where, where did the whole philosophical approach come from? I mean, was it something that you had I suppose I am interested, Fay in why it is that people chose one sort of knowledge rather than another . (.)

FJ: I don't think -

AO: What had you experienced -

FJ: I don't think I ever, or we ever got to a point where we decided . . . that this was the way we would proceed. Now, I think that, now we were together for 7 and a half years - so it must have been 5 years together before we had Tessa, or conceived her, had her . . . before the birth and I mean, why are people attracted to one another anyway? We were of like mind, outlook and what have you. I don't think that it ever came to a point where we said, "*We decide* that this is the way that we are going to bring up our child" (1st Interview).

On the printed page, divorced from the speaking voice, and the speaker's physical presence, and standing in isolation from the full context of the three interviews, the full impact of this statement is lost. What, however, is remarkable about it at first sight is that the person speaking is using whole sentences, a 'feat' which is retained for most of the

interviews, and that there is a level of coherence which none of the other respondents manage for such lengths of time. There is undoubtedly a high degree of intensity, strength, commitment, determination, but above all, a sense of closure.

[W]e can speculate whether the sentence, as a practically closed syntactic structure, is not itself, already, a weapon, an operator of intimidation: every complete sentence, by its assertive structure, has something imperative, something commissory about it. The disorganisation of the subject, his timorous subjection to the mastery of language, is always translated by incomplete sentences, with vague contours, undecided being. . . . in ordinary life we do not speak in sentences. And conversely, there is a mastery of the sentence which is very close to power: to be strong is *first of all* to finish one's sentences. Does not grammar itself describe the sentence in terms of power, of hierarchy: *subject, subordinate, complement*, etc.? (Barthes, 1973/1986, p. 109).

The sense of closure lies in the precision of speech, which does not brook further discussion. The contrast with the first group is absolute. The apparently detailed account is not to be taken further. That is the way it is. To try to go beyond what had been said by asking about alternatives is to question ideological commitment and self-identity, and at the same time to manifestly demonstrate inadequacy by questioning the self-evident and obvious. The sign is "uniaccentual" (Volosinov, in Threadgold, 1986, p. 23) and alternative judgements and assessments are not to be entertained. Under these circumstances, the interviews were somewhat difficult, developing at times into a power-struggle in which the elaboration of different interpretations were suppressed.

The positing, then, of either an equal or stabilized hierarchical relationship between researcher and respondent does not accurately characterise the nature of this very complex relationship. In particular, it ignores issues of power and the way that power can be exercised passively, through constraint in information giving, as well as by a mode of speaking which represents the speaker's wish to dominate whether by the process of speech, the intricate presentation of detail, or the determined presentation of a particular viewpoint and ideology. Formally the researcher can be described as having the greater power by dint of occupying the role as questioner and therefore ostensibly retaining control over the direction of the interview. But within the process of the interview the hierarchical ordering breaks down and becomes much more fluid. Control of the interview is not automatically invested in one or other, but shifts between the two in what, with relation to a slightly different context, Pithouse & Atkinson (1988, p. 186) have called a 'delicate blend of dependencies'. It is the way that the shifts of power occur that affect the representation of the interview as exploratory and dialogic, and determine the nature of the information achieved¹⁰.

There is, however, a final point that needs to be made in relation to what is spoken in the course of an interview. The interview itself occupies a discrete point in time and has clear temporal boundaries, yet what is being spoken about has been lived and thought

¹⁰ That the power relationship between the two participants is unstable is further illustrated by reference to the latter stages of the research, where the researcher possesses the considerable power of analysis and interpretation.

about prior to the interview, and will continue to be so beyond it. The act of questioning inevitably focuses more on some issues than on others, provokes thought on this, not on that, and in this process brings to awareness points which may not have been thought of in a like manner before, therefore affecting subsequent responses and perceptions.

Correspondingly, what respondents have said, while valid at the time spoken, cannot be taken as a final word, but instead accounts must be seen as forever partial and forever undergoing revision. Language, then, is more than a neutral vehicle for the exchange of views or of information. Instead, the personalities and situatedness of the participants create a space of varying elasticity, which sometimes enlarges and sometimes restricts the breadth and depth of an interaction.

Identity and fragmentation

Performing a comparative analysis on the accounts of ex-partners pointed to the existence of contradiction, omission, and expansion which were present to greater or lesser degrees in all texts. A pattern emerged which suggested that the more conflictual and difficult had been the breakup and the subsequent experience of trying to share the parenting, the greater the differences between accounts in weighting of events. Conversely, in those accounts where the relationship had been less fraught after the separation there was a higher degree of convergence.

Both of the more obvious ways of interpreting these differences seem unsatisfactory. One would have been to see the difference as simply related to truthfulness but this judgmental approach would have resulted in the polarisation of accounts, the denial of a gendered reading and the granting of a dominant reading to one account¹¹. The second would have been to adopt a relativist position. But neither approach explains the way a text/account seeks to impose a dominant reading, yet at the same time is destabilized by its internal tensions whose existence, although marginal, cannot be ignored. In the following moment, the implication of unanimity of agreement and the advancing of best interests of the child is suddenly disrupted by the insertion of one clause:

KB: It was a godsend I think. It . . . was good in many respects. It was what I wanted, it was what Sam wanted. It was what - *whether she wanted it or not*, it was obviously the best, you know, under these particular circumstances that applied at the time (2nd Interview; my italics).

By itself, or in an unrecorded interview, this sudden break in phrasing would escape notice, but contextually, and in relation to the account of his ex-partner, the implications of such words assume considerable significance. Goffman's (1974/1986)

¹¹ A concern among sociologists has been with the truthfulness of respondents, and therefore with the credibility of their information. See, for example, Becker, 1967; Becker & Greer, 1960; Denzin, 1971; Silverman, 1985, espec. pp. 158 - 176. One of the difficulties that I encounter with the concept of triangulation (e.g., Greene & McClintock, 1985) is the underlying supposition that there is an ultimate truth. Silverman is also critical of the way that triangulation has been used to discount information from one field by elevating that from another as superior. He notes Garfinkel's argument that, 'action makes sense in context. We should understand how that sense is accomplished rather than appeal to our other knowledge to discount it' (Silverman, 1985, p. 21).

work on the management of self-identity, when confronted with such texts, does not go far enough. His theoretical account is based on a study of what are presented as fragmentary moments, but is inadequate for a study of a more sustained sequence. The identity presented by the people that I interviewed was not consistently maintained and 'the speaking subject, who can thus be cast as the unitary *origin* of his or her discourse' (Moi, 1985, p. 107) nonexistent. The violent speech patterns, macho imagery, and accounts of violence of one man are juxtaposed with his sense of himself as caring, gentle and cultured. In another family, the mother spoke with strong conviction of her beliefs about the importance of sharing children with the wider community, and with equal determination of her refusal to deal with her ex-partner's new wife on issues which concerned her child, although she recognised that the new wife was positively involved. Given the textual oscillations it is inappropriate to privilege or validate one identity, thereby editing out the actual variability recorded. To do so would lead to inaccurate conclusions. But the point at issue extends further than this. It is not whether one identity is 'better' than an other, but that each *exists*. Rather, acknowledging variability seems the prerequisite, and Lacan's comments on the shifting, uncertain nature of sexual identity have meaning within this context:

To be human is to be subjected to a law which decentres and divides: sexuality is created in a division, the subject is split; but an ideological world conceals this from the conscious subject who is supposed to feel whole and certain of a sexual identity.

The goal of psychoanalysis (and I would suggest, social science) then becomes 'the destruction of this concealment and . . . a reconstruction of the subject's construction in all its splits' (Lacan quoted in Mitchell, 1982, p. 26).

But this was not the only problem. All of the transcripts contain sections of varying length where a statement beginning in one direction moves off in another. Isa, in talking about the issue of allowing choice to her son in his purchase of presents said:

{Isac knew} that he could get away with it. He knows! I mean, I have to give him . . . in his relationship with Luke, you know, that's that, and I would have preferred him not to give toys, and it was to give it to his friend Tom, to Heather, a friend of mine, who knows I'm not - it's not like I am having to make excuses for Luke, . . . but um, he *let* Isac buy a gun (2nd Interview).

Such statements cannot be regarded as transparent i.e., unambiguously clear and unidirectional. This one simultaneously referred to issues of power in the post-separation relationship, to a position on the link between toys and violence, and to the threat to her personal identity lest Heather think that she was party to the purchase.

In addition to the problem of the shifting focus in the respondents' speech patterns was the prevalence of inconsistency, this time not to be seen in relation to identity and truth, but the product of social realities which do not submit to neat categorisation. Clear boundaries dissolve. An attempt to impose a dominant reading on an experience is then undercut by other facets of the same experience which also call for recognition. Although

Isa endorsed the idea of shared parenting for feminist and personal reasons spoke very positively of the contact between the children and Luke, she nonetheless mentioned that she had still, after three years, a very informal surveillance network operating so that she would know that the children were being properly cared for. Ross said that he was willing to participate in the study because it was important that others should know of the possibilities and advantages of such a mode of custody resolution; he then proceeded to address major concerns and hesitations about the very arrangement that minutes before he was positively valuing. Anna recognised the inconsistencies of her position, and her account oscillated between emphasising both the continuing association between herself and Martin and a need to be separate. Her opening statements pointed to this area of tension.

AN: Well I think that I acted in a rather schizophrenic way because I could not accept the idea of a broken marriage or the fact that we were separating. So I . . . developed the term "Living separately" So I have never . . . I suppose . . . I work on 2 different levels.

AO: And the 2 levels?

AN: (*Sighs*) On the one hand it's taken me probably all this time to really believe that I was separated . . .

AO: Which is now 4 years?

AN: Yeah . . . and in fact we are still very interwoven . . . (1st Interview).

Equally, she said firmly, 'No matter how that relationship had ended . . . I would have found some way to keep it going'. *And* yet she also moved abruptly from valuing Martin and his contribution to explicit resentment about him which disguised her own ambiguity about the house sale, *and* could still conclude her comment with a sudden softening of tone, where she drew attention to the wider systemic issues involved, and reaffirmed the importance of their relationship.

AN: And I think . . . he's aware of what he's missing . . . in the day to day business and I think that he adjusts to it, in his life better I think he does . . . I think I . . . I kind of make him more of a -

AO: Sorry figure.

AN: Than he actually is. I think that he's actually got a bloody good life for a man!

SG: Well, you do tend to go to alternatives (. . .) one moment he's deprived . . . then you get all resentful.

AO: . . . at times there is that feeling, (. . .) "It's not quite fair".

AN: She's noticing a chink in the story! (*laughs*) Yeah, umm, I suppose so. Well I don't know. Do I feel?

SG: You do!

AN: I do. Yes. I do! He's off on his bloody yacht next week . . . and he messes around to restaurants and concerts . . . I suppose that is where it can really hurt me . . . is the fact that . . . and part, partly I feed into this, but I don't really think that he has been honourable . . . in that he hasn't settled . . . he hasn't made it - because I have been really out on a limb, because I have - he's there in the house . . . Even though - I've gone through some very low periods where I have actually needed the security of something of *my own*. Even if it is just a lump sum in a bag. He's seen it. He hasn't acted honourably . . . and it is because of his own fear of debt . . . and stuff . . . umm . . . and he, he's, and I look at him as a man who . . . didn't have his life interrupted because he gave birth to 2 babies . . . he's onto his \$40,000 plus . . . and . . . um . . . you know, all his friends and his yachts and his stuff and I think he's been to Bali and England and Europe and Australia . . . if I allow that part of me to really get into it, I can really at times feel bloody bitter . . . but it is not altogether *his* fault because it is the way the system acts against women who leave the work force. And that is when I am thinking in terms of my career and being at the bottom of the ladder and trying to climb up again . . . but generally I think I am really pleased with the way we have worked it out. I couldn't have lived with an acrimonious set up where the kids were sort of used between 2 parents who had never resolved things (1st Interview).

What I was left with was a series of tensions within the text which, far from enabling a reading where one could point unambiguously to a 'real' or deep meaning (Bandler and Grinder, 1975), suggested instead the need to develop a reading which drew attention to the inconsistencies and for the instability and partiality of truth within a particular text. It would not be possible in the case of very many of the statements made in the course of the interviews to reduce them to a 'stable meaning' where 'the speaker, through an act of inward self-surveillance . . . ensure[d] a perfect intuitive 'fit' between intention and utterance' (Norris, 1982, p. 23). There is a real sense in which the above quotation is centreless and substantiates Derrida's critique of structure in that the text is neither immobile nor imbued with certitude, but instead slides and moves with sudden and unexpected changes of direction.

The function of [the] center was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure-one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure-but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure (Derrida, 1978, p. 278).

To recognise a text, therefore, as being uncentred is to enter into a multiple world, where instability and uncertainty are current. In this world, the 'truth value' of two texts does not have to be seen as competitive, but instead as offering unique and differentiated accounts of complex situations while the internal tensions of a text suggest a high level of ambiguity and the extent to which individuals are able to entertain simultaneously highly divergent points of view.

The questions that I raised at the outset of this section - the presentation of contradictory identities, the presence of omission and contradiction internally and intertextually, and the recursiveness and multiple directionality of speech - suggest that it is inappropriate to operate within a philosophical framework which de-emphasises ambiguity and stresses instead rationality and coherence. Instead, the characteristic traits of the transcripts identified by close textual analysis are fragmentation, multiplicity, 'endless displacement of meaning' (Norris, 1982, p. 29), uncertainty, inconsistency, and bias.

Analysis and the spread of rhizomes.

My intention during interviewing had been to start on what I conceived as 'surface' subjects and to progress, over the course of the three interviews, to what I considered to be more processual and therefore potentially more 'difficult' or 'deep' questions. Questions, however, that were innocuous in one setting, were not so in another or else, because of individual associations, very rapidly moved to complex areas of experience and meaning. The analytic process, too, confirmed the unsatisfactoriness of a hermeneutic framework which, as part of our 'arborescent culture' (Deleuze, 1983, p. 33) creates meaning hierarchies from which orders and sub-orders are derived. It proved impossible to compartmentalise or order texts as meaning 'this and not that', because the wide-ranging associations and ramifications demanded inclusion. The critical element in analysis then

becomes not reduction but enlargement, in allowing the different elements presence, in paying heed to the multiplicities and densities.

Within this context, the work of Deleuze in *Rhizomes* has proved vital in providing a framework which reflected the analytic process both intellectually and visually. The first step of the analysis was to 'plot' meaning and theme. From this first and very significant part of the analysis developed a series of interconnecting lines. I realised that the analysis could be started at any one point and gradually worked in/out/around to incorporate and touch upon the meanings embedded in the text. The image is that of a web of interconnections which stretch out, and round and through and beyond. To touch one strand is to send tremors through another. A shift in position involves touching upon another strand of multiplicities that are set in motion, not because they are more significant but because the connection is more immediate. To attempt to impose criteria of depth and of hierarchical ordering from a stable centre point would have been to ignore the evidence of meanings which stretched back into the site of the relationship of the parents, and into experience beyond that again, and at that same time reached forward to inform future expectations and actions.

Instead of roots, orders and models, Deleuze proposes rhizomes or tubers, multifacetedness and maps. 'We speak of nothing but multiplicities, lines, strata, and segmentations, lines of flight and intensities', and his concern is with 'land-surveying and mapmaking, even of countries yet to come' (p. 4 - 5).

The rhizome is in one sense fragmentary, yet it retains coherence because of its diversity, its ability to rupture and multiply and its range of different entry points. Of it Deleuze writes:

Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point on a rhizome can be connected with any other and must be. This is very different from a tree or a root, which fixes a point and thus an order (p. 11); and

Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is treated as substantive or multiple that it no longer bears any relationship to the One as subject or object, as natural or intellectual reality, as image or world. Multiplicities are rhizomic. There is no unity that serves as pivot in the object. . . . An arrangement is . . . this growth of dimensions in a multiplicity that necessarily changes its nature as it increases its connections (pp. 13 - 15).

There are, of course, temporary racinations, where temporary hierarchies are established. The primary metaphor is, however, of a process that 'is ceaselessly set up and that collapses, of a process that ceaselessly extends itself, breaks off and starts again' (p. 46) so that what Deleuze is stressing through his use of the metaphor of the map is that there are no boundaries, no centres, no beginnings or ends, a position which has considerable implications for research methodology and for social policy.

As I worked through the transcripts, I became aware of a further issue, which was very poignantly expressed with particular reference to the question of gains and losses from the arrangement by two of the women. Mary said, in answer to a question:

AO: But is it an issue for you? The children leaving?

MT: If they leave me? . . . Umm, well, I feel I've had . . . you know some sort of, ahh, preparation for that just by the fact that I am already half the time without the children.

AO: Do you think that that is a help?

MT: I don't really know, Anne. I don't . . . know . . . would have loved - I would have *really loved*, I think now, I would have liked to have had a much more continuous sort of relationship (2nd Interview).

She continued, weeping, to talk about her sense of her personal fragility in relation to her capacity to love, her gradual, painful moves towards being able to affirm herself as a loving and loveable person, only then to 'lose' for some of the time, the two children whom she deeply loved, in the context of an arrangement for whose structure she was responsible.

MT: I think that I initiated it.

AO: The separation?

MT: Yes. *I initiated the separation*. I think that I initiated the joint custody too. Umm . . . I knew a little bit about it as a possibility from - I had read a case in Wanganui that sort of broke ground (1st Interview).

Isa expressed feelings of loss very similar to those voiced by Mary although the shared parenting arrangement with Luke had evolved very differently from that of the Todd/Davises. The decision to share responsibility for the children had been much more the result of a shared initiative between herself and Luke. Their relationship was much less difficult and there were no problems about contacting the children at the other parent's house. Isa talked of the many advantages that the arrangement offered. And she talked about the pain, and loss and 'coldness' which it held for her.

IM: Well, I . . . having been raised in a big family, I've never come home to an empty house until . . . from what I can - until in fact the children left! And I used to get this incredible - if I came home and Peter wasn't there - this incredible sense of loss, of wanting to turn round and get out of the house again (. . .) and so when the children weren't there and I was in fact working, I came home feeling this kind of coldness . . . you know, it was lack of human . . . kind of activity and warmth . . . and umm . . . and that kind of incredible sense of loss. . . . It was - so that when I, I, I look forward to the fact that they would come home and put life into the, the house. More life in the house. (. . .) sometimes I have wondered in my mind about, umm . . . I don't really know what's going on in their life all the time, so there's that, there's not that continuity . . . you know, I think, *I know* - if you are with your children all the time, and pretty well, you know, aware of when they've gone out . . . you have some kind of physical picture or, and of kind of what they've been doing. . . . But that's not the case . . . when they are a whole week with Luke, I don't know the other half of their life. . . .

AO: . . . you hadn't expected your sense of loneliness? . . .

IM: No. I just thought - "Ah, gosh, it will be great to have some time out". You know? . I sort of thought, "*REALLY GREAT*, you know, to have no responsibilities for the kids". But I didn't think, you know when I think about it, it gets that kind of ache - and it's very akin to that loss I felt when my brother died. You know, it's very close - it's a grief (1st Interview).

To hear these words as they were spoken, and to allow the full impact of the

unintentional loss of consciousness made it impossible to

The identical point is made explicitly in Martin's statement about the artificiality of ordering in descending hierarchies the reasons that were pertinent to his and Anna's decision to set up a shared parenting arrangement. Instead he presents a much more holistic, interlocking assessment.

MN: There are various ramifications. There are various parameters there in the sense that Anna and I needed our own lives so that part of the separation - I couldn't even put a ratio figure on this - was to live separately. Part of the reason was because Anna already had left, had a strong link with Susan. Part of the reason was to keep up together so that we didn't lose everything that we had built up over the years . . . part of the reason was to keep an on-going family thing for the children. See, there are various things in there, and I really couldn't

AO: To give them weight is wrong?

MN: I really couldn't say. No. That's right. Yes. . . I don't know, I don't know that any one was more relevant than the other. There were a lot of things there. There were several things there. About 3 things there. . . . But I couldn't put any ratio . . . on those things. I couldn't put any percentage figures (1st Interview).

To allow these readings to emerge is to break with linear, binary traditions of thought. It moves an analysis away from one where events within an account are given priority, according to socially determined conventions of desirability, to an analysis where the totality, ambiguity and tension that constitute experience are able to be presented. The use of a rhizomic metaphor underlines the extent to which events which are located at different points from each other nonetheless still continue to refer to one another and it emphasises that those points of connection should be retained in the analysis.

Summary

I have argued that if we are to make full use of qualitative material, then the presence of tension, bias and overlapping dimensions of experience within texts must be foregrounded by the research methodology and their implications recognised for social policy. The logic of the tree is therefore the logic of a tracing, 'the tracing over something given as already made' (Deleuze, p. 25), whereas the map of a rhizome, as its tubers divide out from its temporary racination, is a construction whose value is that it is open, reversible and modifiable. Furthermore, the rhizome is a 'becoming' (p. 49). The adoption of a rhizomic viewpoint requires seeing research as not describing what 'is' but as immobilising a moment in time, artificially restraining what is evolving and changing. As Luke graphically said on reading his transcript six months later:

You ask me something a month ago, and then ask again 2 months hence and you'll get a different answer. You can only answer as your feelings are at that point. I was in a turmoil of working out what I was going to do for a living (Follow-up interview).

One moves on. The issue may still be there, but one's appreciation and perception of it is different. This also suggests the need to think of knowledge as tentative rather than stable or internally consistent.

Allowing the voice of the respondents (with all the embedded implications of instability) to be mirrored in the structure of the research itself suggests a completely

different relationship to the question of truth and therefore of dominant accounts. The issue becomes no longer whether what is said is 'correct' according to some objective criteria. What is sought instead is a sensitive reading, so that the reader/researcher is not just 'fixed in relation to watching' (Coward & Ellis, 1974, pp. 49 - 50), but occupies a position from which the multiplicity of voices (or positions within even a single account) can be heard.

At the same time, a dichotomising of experience needs to be avoided. All material is partial, both in the sense that it reflects a subjective account, and because a respondent can only express what is relevant for her/him at the time of the interview. But within the incomplete rendering there is still the totality of the account as it stands. To adequately record its dimensions calls for a departure from binary mental structures which serve to polarise and isolate, thus highlighting only certain facets of the situation. The sense of the indivisibility of experience comes from a careful attention to the process in which that experience is expressed, rather than from a quantitative attitude to qualitative material.

Such a position clearly places the making of social policy, itself a construct of rationality and order, within a complex set of constraints and possibilities. In particular, the adequacy (already under challenge by feminism and ethnicity) of a univocal view becomes highly questionable, as does the compartmentalisation and prioritization of experiences. Recognising the existence of multiple voices and the complex and interwoven nature of experience affects our 'reading' and definition of social realities.

DECISION MAKING: THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND LEGAL DIMENSIONS

Introduction

Little is said in the literature about parental decision-making processes. The emphasis in much of the literature on the rational, mature adult and the focus on the outcome of the arrangement appears to preclude the relevance of the past relationship as a factor in the decision-making; while the question of male familiarity with and abilities in child care is evaded through a series of assumptions arising from the ideology of the nurturant father, in which his capacity to act in a hitherto unexperienced way is generally not questioned¹. Ahrons (1980) says of the parents that she interviewed in 1978 that they decided on joint custody for the following reasons (listed in order of frequency, the first being the most frequently mentioned): because of their assessment of the best interests of the child; because both parents wished to continue their involvement as parents after the divorce; because the arrangement offered practical rewards; and because it was the fairest way to resolve custody. Bowman (1983), noting the mythical element of the belief that such a decision is natural (and therefore does not need further justification) says that the parents she interviewed chose joint custody to avoid a custody battle, thus locating the 'agreement' within the power politics of the family. Luepnitz (1981) says that families reached their decision through various processes. Six families always assumed that they would have joint custody if they separated. Others engaged in bitter conflict. The mothers in particular found the decision to share a difficult one, because of anxiety that they would be stigmatised as the parent who had 'given up' a child, and because of a reluctance to give up some of the control that they enjoyed in the private sphere. Most of the parents in Irving, Benjamin & Trocme's (1984) study indicated that they viewed the other parent as the decision maker. However, a few had agreed to or proposed the arrangement because of a hope that it would lead to reconciliation, or because of guilt over termination of the marriage. Others also hoped that they would avoid a custody battle. Morganbesser & Nehls (1981) note the decision as a difficult one. Steinman, Zimmelman & Knoblauch (1985) say that families whose arrangement the researchers designated 'successful' made a point of avoiding contact with the courts and legal processes. The research studies also note the general lack of information or role models available to the parents.

¹ See, for example, as a blatant example of this point, Chang & Deinard (1982, p. 242), who, on the basis of a postal questionnaire sent out to fathers who had successfully contested custody, accepted uncritically the paternal claims to superior parenthood, and significant involvement prior to the separation. Their assessment of the situation is highly ideological. They conclude that the single father is a 'highly educated, capable, self-confident person whose marriage has broken up because of his wife's change in life-style or increasing incompatibility. He seeks custody . . . because of his love [of his children] and his confidence in his ability to perform paternal parenting functions, in as much as he had been fairly involved in caring for and rearing his children prior to the disruption of the marriage. Many of the fathers have completed the adjustment process quite well without major problems. Those professionals [involved in child custody assessments] should take account of this and other seemingly positive and successful adjustments of custodial fathers'.

Before beginning my research I assumed that parents would go through a rational and joint decision making process. What I found instead was, on the whole, very different. For instance, in the Black family, one way of characterising the decision to share responsibility for Sam would have been that their highest priority was to avoid a custody battle. But giving priority to this aspect would have suppressed other significant elements, i.e, the parents' personal beliefs about how parenting and adult relationships *should* function, which incorporated opposed ideological views in relation to equality of women and power sharing within the family. The parents' evaluations of Sam's best interests were determined by the stance each took in relation to the above positions. Rather than Sam's interests which, in relation to the 'best interests of the child' principle would be described as allowing him easy contact with both parents and which would therefore have formed the objective and disinterested focus for the decision, his parents could only evaluate his interests *in relation to* their beliefs and ideological positions.

The decisions that the families took, then, did not just suddenly evolve out of nowhere. They were in all cases a response, some more positive than others, to the family history and in particular to the parental relationship. In this sense, the agreements could be characterised as constrained. In another, insofar as some attempted to challenge the previously established patterns of parental and commonly accepted gender interaction with the children (through a re-ordering of the parental relationship), they were also liberating. Understanding the process of decision making about custody by individual families as historical, ideological and intricate enables a fuller appreciation of the issues with which families proposing to share the parenting have to contend. It also makes it clear that the concept of the best interests of the child is in practice highly contextualised and does not represent the objective, disinterested position that the legal formulation intends.

No decisions are made in a vacuum. All are contextualised in some respects, develop out of what has gone before at the conscious and unconscious level, and represent different elements of social perception and beliefs about what characterises right behaviour. What was common to the parents in the study was the attempt to come to an assessment of how to settle the custody issue for the family. Alternatively, what was peculiar to each family was the inheritance of particular issues (some intergenerational) arising from its past history. Each decision about the way custody was to be shared represented a continuation of the attempts to address or grapple with those issues. In this respect the agreements were highly idiosyncratic and historically constrained. The history of the family was the immediate and significant site informing the shape of the agreement. As Martin commented, in the ending was also the beginning.

The site of the relationship

In most of the accounts there was little sense of the parental relationship as equal and involving much sharing of childcare responsibilities. The Thomson/Jones were the only family to have a clear parental consensus about the importance of both parents taking an equal role in childcare *and* putting those beliefs into practice. In her account, Fay

described their position as natural, logical, easily accepted by thinking people, and part of the spirit of the 1960's - a perception which rendered her implicit ideological stance less accessible for discussion. In contrast, Ross's was the politicised account. Ross gradually recognised the significance of participating fully in child care. Disliking the dismissive attitudes towards their children that he observed in many other men, and conscious of the fact that a relationship with a child had to be nurtured, Ross out of all the men in the study held the most clearly elaborated philosophy about paternal participation in childcare, which grew out of personal experience as well as being informed by a Marxist political and social analysis:

It arose out of the situation, really . . . my own sort of ideological understanding . . . and my work situation. They sort of go in tandem. (. . .) I was working . . . [] the sort of hours through the job situation which let me be involved with her upbringing and become a lot more politicised and . . . [] it so happened that at that point in time that . . . probably decided on the family since the job was in my view allowing that arrangement . . . ahh . . . the fact that I was outside of office hours. (. . .) I don't think that it was even anything that I was inspired to think about until it actually got to the time, and made the decision about having a child. . . . umm, seeing that the situation was quite favourable to us both putting time in, and particularly my putting time in . ahh . . . and um . . . that was perfectly consistent with sort of . . . my . . . sort of politicising (1st Interview).
I knew that I wanted to make an investment of time . . . that seemed - I had seen others working 7 days a week to earn enough money so that the kids never had sight - and I thought that that was just . . . crazy because they were in the same situation as I was (. . .) and working 2 - 3 jobs [] and the most precious asset that anyone could give a child was their time . . . and umm . . . this was something that was a never-to-be-repeated experience both for the parent and the child . . . and you know, in terms of getting one shot at the whole thing . . . it wouldn't run itself round again . . . so . . . my thoughts were that you can't get to the end of that process [] what a stuff up they'd made of that one. You can only run it through once (3rd Interview).

His critique of capitalism evaluated the way that work structures family and social relationships. In order to be a father in the way that he felt best, he had to be able to control his work situation.

I'd rather look at it {the father's role} in terms of how that was possible . . . and how it is possible depends on things like the structure of work and then say, and you start to look at some of the very fundamental problems because it is based around a 8 - 5 or a 9 - 5 concept and the whole family economy that's governed around that, that . . . those hours, having to earn that amount of money in those hours . . . so that you've got to start from that point (1st Interview).

What he and Fay sought instead was a mode where both parents had some freedom, and which allowed a balance:

I think that you need to have some sort of balance between the various parts of your life - between your working life, say . . . not only as a parent . . . because it seems to be very much of an either/or situation and it tends to . . . umm . . . shut, y'know, one, one area shuts the other out (. . .) you've gotta have balance . . . umm . . . you've gotta have that aspect because of, . . . y'know, just to be looking after kids all day . . .

LS: Yes!

Stephen and Martin, whose comments about the implications of looking after small children all the time lacked Ross's political dimension, nonetheless were aware of the stress that Anna and Patty were under and helped out where they could, given work

commitments. Both enjoyed doing so, and felt that they had built up a strong relationship with their children, although Stephen remained overseas when the marriage ended and it was not until about two years later, on his return, that he and Patty began to share the parenting.

In terms of paternal involvement the Blacks represent the other end of the spectrum. Maree said at one point that she had welcomed Keith's marginality in the family because of his violence towards her and the children, and because she disagreed with his macho values. Yet she also wanted the adult relationship to be different. She wanted to be seen as an equal partner in the marriage, and each parent to have an active and positive part in the lives of their children:

Well, I sort of wanted my children to grow up thinking that they had two parents and umm . . . that they both had a role in, in, in bringing them up . . . rather than Mum that did everything for us and Dad was the one who stood in the background and gave all the orders (2nd Interview).

Whereas Maree's account gave evidence of her desire for a relationship in which complementarity and equality were present, Keith's view of the adult relationship was informed by a very different ideology. Although at times acknowledging that Maree did want more sharing, his account revealed a very patriarchal view of the marriage where the male held financial and decision making powers; maintained an authoritarian, disciplinary role towards the children, which he resented yet was sustained in by the belief, shared by Maree, that she lacked the necessary physical force to control the male children; was distantly interested in his family (although working six days a week), and delighted at the numbers of neighbourhood children who gathered to their table because that reinforced a sense of family togetherness. But actual involvement on a day to day basis was less inviting.

I didn't have the inclination. I didn't want [] rows an' unpleasantness at home. Just wanted to come home and relax, really. If you've worked that hard to get somewhere you want to enjoy it the home was somewhere where I wanted to relax (2nd Interview).

Between these two extremes were the other men: Luke, who described himself as having succumbed or submitted to work pressures and his personal inclination to opt out, thus giving but little help with the family even when his boat was in port; and Lawrence, Dave and Charles. Lawrence had looked after Kay a lot when she was a baby. While the latter two saw themselves as involved with the children during the marriage, what was questioned by their wives was not the involvement but its nature. Jane described a fraught adult relationship, in which differing conceptions of the nature of the marriage relationship existed, where communication had become very difficult (they had never understood one another - at first it was just words, but then it became sentences that hung between them, and later, paragraphs) and where there was a constant sense of embattlement over the appropriate ways of raising the children:

So there was just this very unhappy . . . tense . . . silence which was broken by the children fighting . . . and me getting mad at them, and Dave getting mad at me for getting mad at the children (1st Interview).

Although she acknowledged that he did put in a lot of time with the children, Jane emphasised the playful, 'matey' nature of his interaction. Dave, however, thought that he had shared responsibility for the children (although some of his other remarks suggested that he understood this very differently from Jane, and tended to substantiate her position). He also saw himself as constrained on all sides in relation to defining how he would operate with the children:

Umm, well, I have qualms about whether you should be encouraging them at all . . . but . . . whether you should really be restricting them, directing them etc. I mean, there's 2 . . . roles - parental roles - and I mean all the time that I've been involved with bringing up Mark from when he was little we had this conflict . . . with my parents who thought that I shouldn't let him do that and should not let him do this . . . etc. And, and Jane also tends to be . . . more . . . "Stop them doing this. Make them do that", and that sort of . . . whereas I was quite strong on that. I mean, I had all these standards that I . . . get quite strict about. My own little ones (2nd Interview).

He spoke of the difficulties that he had experienced in attempting to be involved with the children in the way he thought right, his perception that Jane saw his relationship with them as threatening her in some way, the guilt that built up over task allocation versus childcare and his feeling that he had to some extent opted out of what he had seen as a no-win situation.

The women, except for Fay, saw themselves as having been primarily responsible for the children, even when, as in Maree's and Mary's cases, they were working full-time. The women tended towards defining childcare as physical care, presence and the maintenance of an overview of the children's needs. Mary and Jane made clear the distinction between playing and the on-going routine tasks which constitute much of the everyday with children. For instance, Mary said:

Well, I was the one who was always up at night, who'd be looking after them when they were sick, who was doing all the washing, cooking, tending, nurturing responsibilities, clothes buying. Everything really.

AO: So where did you see Charles' role in that?

MT: Well, at that time Charles worked in Wellington, which I didn't. I worked in Lower Hutt. . . .

Umm, he was involved in a *lot* of activities outside work . . . umm, which meant that he wasn't around too much in the night time, in the early , when they were awake. Yes. Umm, and he was always a co-operative parent, um . . . very happy to read them stories, take them for rides, give me a break. (. . .)

AO: (. . .) but you yourself were doing the ground work?

MT: The 85% (. . .) at least, Anne. And in fact other people who, ahh, who made any comment later said they often saw Charles standing out on a limb, with the children and I standing apart. The children and I were a unit and he . . . was detached (1st Interview).

When partners had been seen as relatively peripheral or absent, the women were anxious about their partner's ability to look after the children adequately (this concern was reciprocated by Charles, Keith, and touched upon by Dave). Managing that anxiety in order to share the parenting involved juxtaposing at times contradictory belief systems, in which past experience and present beliefs informed individual assessments of the best

interests of the child. This assessment was extended by an evaluation of the other's relationship with the children (seen by the women in particular as something they wanted to be enhanced); and also by anxiety about the way that the parental relationship would operate, and the extent to which the relationship could be changed.

The separation

I assumed that the handling of the separation would foreshadow the way that the shared parenting might work. In some families the separation did provide a means of making a conscious effort to change elements in the parental interaction and to handle things differently. As can be seen in Appendix 1, the rapidity with which families instituted shared parenting varied. Three families made up the first group. The Nobles moved into sharing parenting literally at the point of separation as did the Thomson/Jones once Ross had worked out his job to fit in with Tessa's needs. The Ashby/Bradleys decided to share the parenting in principle when they separated, and the arrangement was regularised once Jane had a house. Jane commented that if they had not separated when they did, the hostility that would have resulted would have made sharing the children impossible. Of these three families, the Nobles spoke most clearly of a planned and consciously evaluated separation. Both Martin and Anna spoke of recognising the inevitable in the light of the two year developments of Anna's relationship with Susan and Martin's homosexuality. Martin described the separation as a 'logical outcome', and remarked on the preparedness of both to acknowledge and allow it. But for all of that, the experience was a distressing and painful one, and Anna was aware of Martin's doubts about the viability of her idea of a separation which would nonetheless preserve the family unit:

AN: I don't think that he did understand {that this would be possible}. I think that he saw my going as the end of something . . . as the loss of family . . . the breakdown of a marriage, umm . . . I think for him too it was a loss of status . . . and perhaps a reflection on him that he somehow was a failure. I know that he had a great sense of loss with the kids going. . . . The thing that pushed me out, was constantly there for me, was that it was not a good place for me to be personally . . . umm, but I always knew that because of my feeling for family and kids that I had to find a way. Somehow taking . . . it with me. And I spent, I suppose, a long time convincing Martin . . . that we were not, we were not a failure, that we had not broken down, and in fact we had, I think that we had succeeded against all odds in staying together for so long, and ending up as friends which is what we have done. And with *still* an awful lot of affection (1st Interview).

Given their background of sharing and joint commitment to Tessa, the Jones/Thomson continuation of sharing parenting was not surprising. What was interesting, though, was that Fay's description of events suggests that the decision was in fact not quite as easy as may be supposed. The bitterness of the parting, which took a year before it became final, resulted at one stage in Ross's considering disappearing with Tessa. Here, Fay speaks of her reaction to the possibility, and her moves to counter it:

It just introduced to me this desperate element that, that is not the ideal situation. *I* don't want and I really believe that Ross *never* wants us to be in that adversary situation, and it made me convinced that I had to communicate to him my . . . utter belief in the fact that this joint parenting thing would work. Not only for Tessa, but for Ross and for me. And so to give him an alternative to reacting in that way. Because I

didn't want to react in that way . . . although, I mean, the signs would perhaps have it that if I chose to I would have *WON* but it wasn't in a winning and losing situation as I saw it. (. . .) When we were together . . . there was this assumption, and it almost went out the window because of the bitterness of the parting that dragged on over a year, and I mean we were both - we talked about it subsequently and we were both a little *mad*. You are a little insane . . . in that situation and *my* perception of Ross's behaviour . . . was that he, he acted entirely out of character and quite insanely. Now, he may have stories that say the same about me. But I know my perception of his acting that way *made* me go, "Click. I have to put all my effort into - not fighting back on those terms, but to show him . . . that . . . that I was convinced that the joint parenting would work". And I can remember sitting here with him one night, pleading with him that what I meant was not "24 hours = 24 hours. 6 hours = 6 hours" but what I meant was, "When you have Tessa, I exist to support you . . . to make a life for Tessa. Whatever support you require " - I can remember sitting here trying to tell him what I meant by joint parenting - "and when you give Tessa back to me you don't say, "Well, I'm living my life without Tessa and she's got her". You live your life when she's not in your house actively supporting what I'm doing with Tessa in my place and the only way we can do that is that I keep in touch with . . . the way you run your life and you keep in touch with the way I run my life and to the extent that it influences Tessa, we agree on the approach to be taken. When she's with you . . . it's your life. You, you have a life with her. I *have* to know what that life is because when she comes to me I have to be in a position where I can support what you're doing - in her mind" (1st Interview).

What became apparent is that even in situations where the separation had been planned, or where such a custody decision would appear as a logical and necessary outcome of the previous role-sharing, there was, nevertheless, an element of precariousness and hesitation as to what might be achieved. However, the existence of such precariousness was easily obscured by the strength of conviction with which the overall situation was subsequently presented.

The second grouping was formed by two families, the Richards/Merrick and Cooper/Pearsons whose arrangement developed over time. The Richards/Merrick's period of separation allowed them a breathing space and time for counselling about family needs. In the latter family Stephen described the period of separation and absence from his son, and Jim's reaction to his return as very significant in helping him to decide where his priorities lay.

The third grouping, in which I have placed the Butler/Summers, the Blacks, and Todd/Davises, are remarkable for the difficulties that they experienced in the evolution of their arrangements, for the use or intervention of social agencies and for the extent to which, especially in the latter two families, problems inherent in the marital relationship, in particular around the issue of power and the right of the women to leave the marriages, continued to complicate the process of decision making. This happened the more so because of the male perception of the separation as indicative an irrational rejection. Their bitterness became formalised: for Keith, in an idealised notion of the marital state; for Charles, in the certainty that the lack of a two-parent, intact family would leave the children permanently destabilised; and for both, in the belief that the person leaving was in some way morally inferior. None of three families found it easy to reach a stable arrangement for caring for the children. These different arrangements in various ways provoked a great deal of parental controversy and were seen, less by Keith than the other parents, as extremely destabilizing and/or distressing for the children.

Maree's account of the first two years after separation highlighted the on-going power struggle between herself and Keith, notably in the way they dealt with the financial issues of the separation and the struggle over where Sam was to live. These issues were further complicated for Maree by an unhelpful lawyer, by on-going hostility between herself and Keith, and by the way that her position reflected the wider, structural constraints that many women experience after separation.

MB: Well, um, it started off - I had the two children. Hugh was at college and . . . Sam . . . was about 10 when we separated and Hugh was just going through that really crucial age, um, of adolescence and he was at college and anyway I had both Sam and Hugh. Part of it was because I had the house and then, um . . . Keith wanted the house sold and it went on the market and although we were offered very little for it Keith put pressure on me, y'know to get it sold . . . um, y'know so that he could get his money out of it and even after that -

AO: Was he hard up financially?

MB: No. Not really. Because I was paying the rent on that house. I think Keith was just really being difficult at that stage and anyway, as I said-

AO: That was about a couple of years after the separation?

MB: About a year. There had been, um - of course, as I say, he put pressure on me and I thought that maybe I would be better off anyway, um, because I'd get the money out of the house, so y'know we - this was out of Wellington y' see and it was costing me an awful lot to come into town (. . .) and I had to - um, well I thought, "If I do sell it I will be better off", so, so I agreed and then, although we were offered a lot less, y'know, than we bought it for an', um, then I found that I was sort of out on the street.

AO: Because that the money that you had was not enough?

MB: Umm, well the money that I got out of the house was \$20, 000 and the lawyer, y'know, um, he put all sorts of obstacles in the way, and said that I couldn't afford to get a house . . . um, and he said that [] "And you won't get this and you won't get that, and you would be best to just go and rent". And I said that I didn't really want to do that because I'd fritter my, what I did have away. And um . . . anyway he said that, um, he thought that it was impossible but that he would try and get finance because Housing Corp. was out and everything was out. And he wasn't very helpful and um . . . mind you, it is difficult, y'know, for mothers to get money to buy a house. So, um, after a lot-

AO: Was the house, although you- you had been working beforehand but you didn't have any credit or what.

MB: Um . . . I didn't have any credit. No. Because all the finance was left in the house.

AO: Yeah. So once that was split, that sort of left you-

MB: Yeah. High and dry. And, um . . . as I say, the lawyer wouldn't help - he thought that it was going to be impossible to try and do what I wanted. And of course the Housing Corp. and all that turned me down. And in the end I ended up with 5 mortgages . . . but um . . . in the meantime, with the house being sold out there, I had nowhere to live . . . and I had two children, and so I let Sam go to Keith, and ah . . . then I had a devil of a job, y'know, because I couldn't support two children and nowhere to live, and certainly rents - they were right over my head.

AO: So, if you just had Hugh and you it was going to be easier?

MB: Then I could move in with somebody else, which I did. I ended up with having to move in with somebody else, ah, a friend, and ah . . . and . . . it wasn't all that good y'know. I wanted to get out into my own house (. . .) and then I couldn't get Sam back again.

AO: Had Sam been in any way missing his father beforehand?

MB: Ah, he . . . used to see him . . . and spend weekends with him . . . whereas Hugh rejected his father altogether . . . and

I wouldn't say he was actually missing him, but he was the one of course that wanted to go with his father and I couldn't support two of them um, with nowhere to live and, um, so because Sam was wanting to have something to do with his father and Hugh wasn't, then obviously, Sam was the one to let go. And then I found that I couldn't get him back again. (. . .) Keith said, "You've got your kid and I've got mine" y'know. "You shouldn't have him back", and, of course I wasn't happy with that. (. . .) I missed him and, umm, also I thought that Keith was really being nasty to me. He wouldn't even let him come over here at all Keith was - he was really at this stage still being quite . . . nasty to me and it wasn't until I finally got this house - I had to get 5 mortgages and it was a real struggle - (. . .) I just said to him that I could not carry on with the two of them, and he said, well, he would take Sam and I said well, I didn't mind, because I had, um, nowhere to go but, y'know, that this was to be a temporary arrangement and, um, as I say, even during the school holidays, Keith used to send him away. Used to send him up to his parents - didn't even give me a chance to see him in the school holidays (1st Interview).

The process of separation altered Lawrence's previously close relationship with his daughter, since he believed for some time that she was in somehow responsible for his estrangement from Michelle. His ambivalence and uncertainty did not make decision making easy, and at one point he was not sure that he wanted a shared parenting arrangement:

and I remember saying when Michelle used to reason with me that it would be better this way, and because after she . . . asked me to go . . . and some time in point of fact before I did go (. . .) there were occasions when we could talk about it . . . um . . . and she often used to try and soften the blow - I used to feel resentful of this (. . .) by saying, "Look, when we - you can have Kay some of the time". (. . .) The idea of joint parenting was planted then. And equally I can remember being quite bloody-minded and saying, "We'll see, won't we"?, you know, that I am not just going to be a . . . I can remember that, (*chuckling*) that I was not going to be inveigled into saying that I was going to joint parent . . . and again, this was part of the difficulty that I had (*laughs*) . . . that sort of, finding that . . . umm . . . oh, you know, that, that this was just me being sulky and resentful. Well, if she was going to turn me out, well, that was her problem. AO: She could make her bed and lie on it? (1st Interview).

Significantly, Lawrence located himself here as a site of conflicting desires about the value of shared parenting. Did he want to share the parenting because it maintained contact with Michelle, or because of the deep significance that Kay, the last child of this older man, came to assume as a 'bulwark against death', or because of Michelle's desire not to cut him out, nor to deprive Kay of a father? The uncertainties in which the whole family became enmeshed established patterns of interaction ultimately seen to be harmful:

MS: Well, for the first year umm, we didn't have a co-parenting arrangement. I had Kay and ahh . . . (. . .) Lawrence didn't . . . didn't . . . didn't feel that he was capable of having her. But also Kay was . . . very unwilling to, to be away from me. (. . .)².

AO: So although he had had quite a lot to do with her, he . . . there was some sort of . . . feeling that he wasn't actually able to manage . . . totally on his own?

MS: I think that that was part of . . . of the umm . . . problems of separating. I think he . . . that Kay was part of the break-up, but . . . umm . . . he became very jealous of her . . . I think, and in fact . . . he admitted that he did, and um, I don't know how much of that Kay picked up . . . but certainly there were terrible times after we separated when I . . . tried to persuade Kay to spend time with Lawrence and it was disastrous. . . In fact I sometimes feel that I pushed her too hard . . . at times . . . umm, *that* is water under the bridge now, fortunately, but we've had a very difficult history . . . of trying to co-parent.

AO: So how long did that period of her . . . not wanting to go, and your uncertainty about whether to push - I mean, how, how was, what was Lawrence's reaction to her unwillingness to stay?

MS: Well, it was all very traumatic, I think.

AO: For everybody?

MS: I think - yes. Umm . . . I think I . . . felt umm, . . . I could empathize with Lawrence and . . . but I also felt . . . really worried for Kay because I . . . ah, . . . it's a dreadful position to be in . . . where - well, I felt a bit like the jam in the sandwich between Kay and Lawrence . . . and ahh, and it seemed that I couldn't actually put a foot right in terms of . . . either of them, because umm . . . (. . .) Kay wasn't exactly ummummm spending heaps of time. She was happy to see him, but she was *very, very* concerned about staying. That was a problem for a long time.

AO: What did the two of you do about that?

MS: { Well, we fought a lot.

AO: { Because obviously you persisted.

MS: Well, we . . . persisted on and off. Umm . . . umm, I think I, I tried to do my damndest to . . . encourage and foster their relationship with each other.

AO: And what did that mean you had to do?

MS: It meant that umm . . . it meant that I had to encourage Kay to ring Lawrence and Lawrence to ring Kay and umm . . . often staying with them both when they were having time together . . . otherwise

² Kay at this time was still a toddler.

Kay wouldn't stay. (Mmm). And it got totally out of hand. It . . . it - Kay had far too much control in the goings on . . . when I, when I think back on it, it makes me shudder. There were evenings . . . when she would . . . we might try . . . I can't quite remember the sequence, but I remember we tried him having her for a weekend every fortnight or something, and .. she would ring me at 9.00 o'clock at night, absolutely beside herself, saying, "Come and get me, Mummy". I just *couldn't* ignore that. And I'd go and get her. Or . . .

AO: What stopped you from ignoring it? (Oh, what?) Was it . . . you were dead sure that, that was the only thing that you wanted to do, or were you also feeling angry, resentful, manipulated? . . .

MS: I didn't know what was going on. *I didn't know* . . . I was really worried for Kay. *Not* because of Lawrence, but because of the situation. . .

AO: {So you felt that you had to respond to her calls?

MS: { Umm, I was []

Yes. I did. I did indeed. I couldn't . . . just leave her there. Umm . . . because that was disastrous, because that just hyped up into the most . . . crazy situation where she would be going off to stay with him . . . back at my place 2 hours later and ahh God! - calls in the middle of the night to go back . . . for her to come back . . . umm . . .

AO: It was extraordinarily stressful?

MS: Oh, it was! It was just terrible. . . umm . . . I'd, I don't know what . . . looking back on it I guess, umm . . . Well, I could certainly see the different way I might have handled the whole thing, but I felt that at the time that Kay wasn't umm . . . that it wasn't really right for Kay to be doing that . . . to be going, and staying overnight and things (1st Interview).

The particular question which was perpetually before these two parents was: What happens when the current ideological construction of a child's needs conflicts with individual experience? But Michelle also voiced the problem to which all the families had to respond: What *was* right for the child? How could an answer to this question be separated out from one's own feelings about what was best? In other words, how does one deal with the ambiguous, the ambivalent and the unknown?

Decision making, information and support

Most of the parents in the study were conscious of their trail-breaking status in relation to developing an alternative mode of childcare after their separation. That status itself implies that there were not many maps or guidelines available, and that therefore there were other, compelling reasons which influenced their decisions. As with the families in the American studies, the New Zealand families lacked information about what they were attempting to establish. Even the parents who had more recently started to share the parenting had read little of the small amount of the easily accessible literature. Most of the families had had little contact with agencies who might have been able to offer advice, and a number of parents felt unsupported, sometimes for long periods, by family, friends and work associates.

None of the four parents who have shared the parenting longest knew of other families in the same position when they started. Both the women from these families now are often asked to call on their experience and give advice to others. Patty sees this as a natural development of her work and feels that her experience in this mode of parenting is a practical strength that she brings to her career. But for Fay, the requests for information are still ambiguous.

I've had people come from Auckland, who I scarcely know, saying, "I've been given your name. I'm told that you have this absolutely . . . ideal . . . umm . . . child-rearing, joint parenting arrangement, and so and so told me, who's a friend of somebody, who's a friend of somebody else in Auckland, and I happened to be in Wellington for 2 hours and would you talk to me about it?" And I get so cross. This has happened to

me more than once. I get so cross because it's like some *easy-going* thing that you dreamed up, some mathematical formula for - and you both subscribe to it and it works and word gets round and it fails to take into account that it actually rules your whole life. It takes an *immense* - people who say - "Oh yeah - I've heard about this wonderful couple who run their family so easily". I say, "Well, it may look easy from the outside but it takes - I mean you run your family - you invest as much into it as any other family organisation, whether it's difficult or seemingly easy". But the incredulous factions are those who . . . umm . . . ah - my family among them perhaps, who haven't . . . been in the situation themselves, can't conceive of being in that situation (. . .) who say "Oh, how terribly brave you are. You're *wonderful* to be trying this sort of thing out". And they watch with awe from the sideline because it doesn't touch their experience. It doesn't relate to their experience.

AO: Are you saying that they don't try to integrate it at all - that it is something that is kept very much out there?

FJ: Well, it's people who aren't in this situation. I mean, you asked me if I had ever known people to be critical and I can't recall of anyone being critical at all. There are the supportive people and those who . . . who would never find themselves in this situation and so watch with eager anticipation for the next episode and think that you are just *marvellous* for working it out as though it's some mathematical formula.

AO: But that's what's so irritating.

FJ: Oh, it makes me really cross.

AO: The crossness is the devaluation of the effort. Is that right?

FJ: No. I don't think that they get to the point of devaluing it. They don't . . . understand that any effort goes into it at all. The easier and the better that this organisation works . . . the less apparent it is to outsiders . . . that any organisation at all goes into it . . . as with anything. (. . .).

AO: And so it just looks like an absolute breeze?

FJ: Yeah. And aren't we clever? . . . Well, we are not clever at all. We are just determined. . . . But the more successful we are at it, the less determination appears to be put into it (1st Interview).

Seven of the parents who had more recently set up shared parenting arrangements knew one or two similarly structured families whom they approached for information, or to talk over problems. Luke made a point of mentioning the reciprocal support he and a friend in the same situation were able to give each other, and Isa was aware of the problems another friend was experiencing over the actual division of time that the children were to spend with each parent. Lawrence talked with his neighbour whose children also moved between their parents, and found these conversations very helpful because she was familiar with the difficulties and was very supportive of him. Jane canvassed the opinions of the children in a family she knew who moved between parents.

As I have mentioned, books were not significant as a source of information. Dave and Jane read Galper (1980). Jane found the book useful, mostly because she wanted to know that such arrangements were possible, and the positive presentation was a help. Dave, on the other hand, was more dismissive, seeing the book as boring, unhelpful, and mostly about who did the housework. Both suggested that the reason for their assessment related to what they had wanted to know at the time. Jane said that she would have found it harder to cope with a book that said there were likely to be problems, i.e, what she did not want to hear at the time, an attitude which Keith, who was initially bitterly opposed to shared parenting, also mentioned:

you know what it's like when you've made up your mind that you . . . ahh . . . I was very angry. Now, *nothing* that anybody did or said, suggested that I read . . . if it was, if it was . . . corroborated the way I was, you know, my ideas, then it would have been good. It it didn't, it would have been a load of rubbish anyway (*laughing*) written by people who did not know what they were talking about or something. . . . Written by Marce's friends. Not mine! (2nd Interview).

One woman, who had studied some law, consulted law reports (the only other source of written information mentioned as consulted). While she was unable to glean practical, routine advice from the reports she found it helpful to know that the principle was established and accepted within New Zealand law.

Only six people mentioned a reaction from workmates to their arrangement. Both Isa and Fay had positive responses. Isa described the response from other, often older, women at work as endorsing her stance in a way which supported her ideologically. The reaction Fay got, while couched in more personal terms, had considerable significance for her. During the early stages when she had often been upset or worried she felt that her colleagues had had time to listen to her, and that there had never been a suggestion that she was letting her personal problems get in the way of her work. Such support was extremely reassuring as well as personally endorsing. In contrast to these women, Mary's experience had been very different. She reported being openly criticised for not looking after the children full-time before the breakup, then for allowing Charles to take part as well and then for not using the children as a bargaining chip when there were difficulties. She felt for a long time extremely lonely, isolated and vulnerable.

Dave never talked about his situation to his colleagues. Lawrence had mentioned his situation to a colleague who was also separated, but the conversation had never really developed. The other two men, Luke and Ross had had somewhat similar reactions from workmates. Ross described his experience of being an actively involved father over the years as follows:

Like with other people, there's not much understanding of what lay behind that decision . . . y'see, I still get it every day with Paul. "Oh, you're babysitting today?"

AO: From . . . work mates?

RT: Mmm. Generally. Yeah . . . I say, "I'm not babysitting. I do this, y'know, regularly, and my . . . that's what I've chosen to do in terms of their upbringing". And I don't, a hell of a lot of people don't cop that.

AO: Why do you think that is?

RT: Conventional outlook. . . . That people are supposed to be bitter enemies once they split up, that the child should go to one parent . . . and that sort of crap. It's . . .

AO: But as far as Paul is concerned, is there also some feeling that somehow you've been had? That you've been exploited. That here you are looking after this child?

RT: No. People are surprised that he's . . . prob'ly taken round and . . . y'know he's with me, during, during the day and that I somehow sort of manage to cope with him and all that. There's some surprise that I do (1st Interview).

For Luke, though, the situation was a little different. The reaction from friends appeared to make him doubt his mates' interest and regard for him, which he found hurtful, as well as implicitly questioning his sexual identity. He felt that he had become something of an enigma:

Well, they either didn't talk about it or you'd get the situation where a friend would ask, umm, after doing it for a year, they'd ask, ahh, "How are the kids, like? How are - are the kids handling it all right?" After a year, for God's sake!

AO: So they said nothing for a year?

LR: No. No. It's - it was kept being said, it was like . . . *you weren't being noticed*. Nothing was being noticed, you know, that's particular to yourself. It made me realise who were, who were good friends, really

... and ... well, just through being noticed - what are you doing? Maybe I'm talking - I'm not really talking about my ego. I'm talking about ... *if they are your friends ... they should be able to see it ... being good ... being right!* (2nd Interview: my italics).

For most of the respondents, friends and family were the most significant actual and desired areas of support. Support from their mothers seemed to be especially important for the women in the study and several commented on lack of understanding from their mothers as painful, and thought that the inability to be supportive was because of conflicting notions of women's roles and correct maternal behaviour. Jane said:

well I think that they do find it difficult that I don't have the children all the time. But I think that they still haven't got it really into their heads that I have the children half the time. They still actually feel that because I am no longer living in the family home and Dave does have the children that Dave does have the children 90% of the time and I have the children 10% of the time, and there is still that ... as much as I say to them, "I have the children half the time" - but you know they still ... *refer* and talk as though I don't actually have the children much at all. (...) it's a real blockage about what mothers should be (1st Interview).

Ross and Luke said that their parents did not understand their decision. Ross placed this in a generational perspective. Luke, while acknowledging this element, also described his parents' inability to really understand what he was doing because of their concept of gender. Their definitions, especially his father's, did not allow maleness to be read in the way that Luke was constructing it.

In two families there were comments about in-laws. Jane was very upset at the attitude of Dave's parents to her. 'They just *sliced* me off with a knife'. But for Luke, the presence and practical helpfulness of Isa's parents was valued, and the neighbourhood also functioned co-operatively, so that he was not totally on his own with the children. But friends could also be critical, or just not especially interested - damning with faint praise - as Luke, Mary and Maree noted. Maree, echoing Ross's comments about the community perceptions of how separated couples ought to behave towards one another, said that the man that she had lived with could not understand why she still occasionally went with Keith to school events. He believed instead that she should have no contact with Keith. Maree said of his attitude, 'But you can't just do that to your children. People don't understand that'.

On the whole, social work agencies and lawyers played little part in the decision making processes. Lawyers tended to be seen as professionals who should be avoided because of the likelihood that tensions would be exacerbated, and consulted only if necessary after the actual decisions had been made. Two families had made a point of completely by-passing any judicial agency at all, on the grounds that this was something that they needed to sort out themselves. Stephen and Patty had gone to their lawyer only after they had decided what they wanted, and had been encouraged by her enthusiastic response. They also felt that their plan had been given a very positive, if slightly bemused, reception at the Family Court when they turned up for their divorce hearing. Two of the

families had gone at different times for help with counselling. Both Luke and Isa saw this as extremely helpful, Isa particularly so:

the counselling that we had was a very *important* part of that, when we came away from our families, we came away, you know, from our domestic environments, we came away from our work environment, and we found some kind of common . . . threads to work with. And I think that the counselling was a *central* part of that. The fact that it . . . that we - it was a phone call away. We got in when we wanted . . . they were flexible enough to accommodate Luke's fishing . . . you know, cancellation of a few appointments because of fishing and things, and it was short. It was *six* hours in total, I think . . . 6 hours. You know . . . that's a very short space of time, with us making decisions in between.

AO: But it focussed the making of the decisions?

IM: It focussed the mak -

AO: It meant that you *had* to focus, and you *had* to decide?

IM: *Absolutely*. That we would not have - I don't think we would have done . . . on our own
 No, I think the 6 hours - the best 6 hours in my life - the best time, I've spent. I'll try and put it precisely. It was the best 6 hours I've spent in my life (*Laughing*). The best and most painful! (1st Interview).

For Michelle and Lawrence, however, the situation was not so clear cut. Both spent some time with individual counsellors, and at one stage Kay had been psychologically assessed to try to determine the nature of her fears about being left with Lawrence. What appears to have happened, though, was that the counselling focussed on either intrapsychic or adult interpersonal issues. Michelle in particular noted that none of the counsellors until the last one seemed to have been prepared to move beyond the conventional wisdom of the desirability of contact between Kay and her father and the inherent value of a shared parenting arrangement, to question whether with the arrangement, having never been stable for more than a short period of time and still producing distress in Kay, should be continued.

Both the Black and the Todd/Davis families had extensive contact with the Family Court. As part of the conciliation procedures the Blacks had extensive marital counselling. Keith had believed that the counsellor was working to reconcile the marriage (and therefore siding with him, since he had wanted Maree to return) and had not appeared to understand the counselling as an attempt to redefine the principles on which the marital relationship had been based, in order that custody decision making could be facilitated.

The two families described their experience of the Family Court in quite different ways. The Blacks saw considerable value in having the decision effectively taken out of their hands. Keith realised at their last mediation session that he 'couldn't fight City Hall' (which may be another way of saying that he realised that he would lose custody if they went the next step beyond the mediation and counselling sessions), and spoke warmly of the judge's ability to sum up the situation. But it is also clear that the decision did not represent an unambiguous termination to the on-going parental power struggle. Although Keith might have lost the skirmish he had by no means lost the war. He described himself (a fact which Maree's account corroborated) as keeping a very close eye on events to ensure that Maree looked after Sam 'properly', with the idea of taking the case back to court when he decided that she was not providing adequate care.

Both parents in the Todd/Davis family (Charles initiated the action, not, he said, as a dispute about custody but as a dispute over Mary's having reneged on a commitment to move out of the house and allow him to look after the children five days a week instead of the weekend) found the experience of a court case harrowing. Mary especially expressed herself very strongly about the whole process and the length of time it took. It went on, she thought:

Indecently long, Anne. Far longer that it ever . . . should have done. . . . from . . . go to whoa. From the time he approached his lawyers who notified me it was coming on, and then waiting for the hearing, then to bring in these . . . professionals of all sorts . . . it, yes, 18 months of . . . umm total uncertainty, umm . . . ever diminishing - I had very, very little self-confidence at that time in my life anyway, and what with every belief sort of running out, and, umm, ahh yeah, yeah, over that 18 month period, it was (. . . .) yes, again, I didn't think it really, Anne, I have had some tough times, but I didn't really think we would ever quite recover from this. I felt, umm . . . it was too painful (1st Interview).

She also spoke of the very visible increase in the children's distress and tension over the period, and her belief that during that extremely difficult time, no real help had been given. The assessments of each parent's parenting skills had been for the Court, and she did not think that they helped to clarify anything for her personally; indeed, she felt judged as wanting by the psychologist whom they were seeing. She was also terrified that she might lose all custody, since she felt that a conservative judge might react negatively to her past psychological problems. This meant that at a time when she should have been psychologically 'there' for the children, she found herself holding back from too close an involvement to avoid the pain should she lose them.

Only the Blacks and Todd/Davises appear to have negotiated any sort of legal agreement in relation to the structure of the arrangement. The extent to which the agreement set down specific agreements varied with the Black's being more more specific than the Todd/Davises. Maree, however, was able to appeal to the agreement in order to confirm ground rules in some areas, but not in others. From Charles' account, their agreement was basically one of principle and did not address how they would put it into practice. For example, it specified the need to communicate rather than clarifying what steps should or could be taken to remedy the situation if communication broke down. The inference which I draw from Charles' comments is that it was at that time impossible to set out how the agreement would operate in practice:

CD: . . . none of the legal agreements actually specify . . . a . . . how it's {the time allocation to each parent} split up.

AO: So they are rather vague on that point?

CD: They're silent. . .

AO: Why did they not specify how it was to?

CD: I rather suspect from memory that we probably agreed not to agree on it . . . in the sense of putting it into a written agreement, a sort of contractual type agreement.

AO: Right. . . That that would formalise it too much and make things too black and white (Possibly, yes.) or would be partly that between you and Mary there were still some areas of conflict?

CD: Yes. Probably there were still some areas - Ohh it's not really easy to recall. It started off that there had been nothing . . . but . . . ahh joint custody ever mentioned and in a legal sense we had equal responsibility, equal, equal parental authority such as it is . . . ahh . . . (1st Interview).

Best interests of the child

Under New Zealand law, the best interests of the child must be given paramount importance in determining custody. Butterworths enunciates the principle in a manner which implies its self-evident nature, in words which disguise its complexity and obscure the extent to which custody determinations are morally inclined and reflect social convention and ideology:

Although at the theoretical level there may be room for argument about the meaning of this principle, for practical purposes its effect is that the *only* relevant considerations are those which can be shown to have a bearing on the child's welfare. The interests, wishes and relative needs of the parents for example are in themselves not relevant, except in the unlikely event of the alternative placement being equal as far as the child's interest are concerned (Butterworths, 1987, pp. 6015 - 6016).

Butterworths go on to make the point that there must be a broad concept of welfare, with no undue emphasis on moral or material considerations. What must be sought on the child's behalf is the placement which allows for the 'development in the child of standards and expectations of behaviour within our society' (p. 6016). Furthermore, in contested custody cases, psychological aspects should assume the greatest significance, although it is not quite clear to me how the aspects mentioned below can so easily be separated from psychological well-being, which is given highest priority. The section quoted below, while making an important point, implies an objective base from which such judgements can be made:

It is in these respects that the child is most vulnerable and differences in the level of physical care, material comfort, intellectual stimulation, educational opportunity, and moral and spiritual guidance offered by the alternative placement will commonly be less crucial. Welfare must be looked at in the individual circumstances of "*this* child with *this* father, *this* mother, *these* brothers and sisters and *these* particular surrounding circumstances". The result necessarily has to be personalised to meet the welfare of each particular child (p. 6016).

Other writers, however, have seen the concept as more problematic and as only being able to be interpreted in the light of realistic and available options. Jeffries in *A. v A.* (1976, p. 281) comments that the concept is 'seductive in its simplicity, but in reality conceals a most complex, far-reaching judgement'. Gilling (1984), quoting Brous, Green & Jagg, notes the confusion, professional bias, and sectional interests embedded in the notion, and draws attention to the ability of the law to promote contradictory concepts simultaneously. Overseas commentators treat the concept as problematic, noting its vagueness (Trombetta, 1981), the problems of assigning weight to particular factors, and the extent to which so doing is a political, ideological and also a predictive action (Scott & Deryden, 1984). The recent changing ideological climate in the United States has led to the view that the child's best interests are represented by the financially advantaged parent, a position which places women at a disadvantage in a custody suit (Weitzman, 1985). Fineman (1985), while also commenting on the difficulties inherent in the concept, fears that the movement away from attempts to determine what the child's interests and a nurturing environment are in practice, is conducive to the development of a climate where

numerical divisions and the rights of parents become more prevalent. Bruch (1988, p. 112) notes:

The difficulty with the best-interests test, according to many thoughtful critics, is that it gives improper bargaining leverage to a parent who has not been significantly involved in daily child-rearing tasks. Because the test is so vague, the results of a custody contest cannot be predicted precisely enough to put at ease the mind of a primary caretaker for whom the custody decision is extremely important, even if the other spouse was relatively uninvolved in the child's care during the marriage.

In order to establish clearer criteria to guide the court in a sole parent custody disposition and to rectify the problem some of the American legislatures have developed what is called a 'primary parent presumption', where the primary parent is described as the person who:

(1) prepares the meals; (2) changes the diapers and dresses and bathes the child; (3) chauffeurs the child to school, church, friends' homes and the like; (4) provides medical attention, monitors the child's health, and is responsible for taking the child to the doctor; and (5) interacts with the child's friends, school authorities, and other parents engaged in activities that involve the child (Neely quoted in Bruch, 1988, p. 112).

Morganbesser & Nehls (1981) point out that, although in contested cases there may be some attempt (fraught with all the difficulties noted above) to decide what is in the child's best interests, there is no literature on how the question of best interests is decided in non-contested cases. They suggest, while not addressing the implications of the statement, that the person with the most power is likely to gain the concessions.

The significance of the concept of 'best interests' lies in its recognition that the child's interests and needs are more likely to be submerged at times of family disintegration because s/he is the least powerful member of the family system. The problem with the concept, however, is that it seeks to embrace equally the ideal and the practical, a substantial part of the difficulty being that it attempts to locate a stable, unbiased, and definable centre in a situation which is essentially centreless, where no absolute and final reference can be made to what is in a child's best interest without reference to, and therefore evaluation of, the familial and social system of which he/she is a part; and furthermore, the criteria against which best interests are measured are themselves subject to gendered evaluation and to change³. In addition to this, the act of defining at a particular time what constitutes a child's best interests involves, usually, the privileging of one principle. Historically, there has been a progression through the father, to the mother, principle, to that prevalent now, i.e., that having both parents involved in upbringing is 'best' (although such a principle may ignore prevailing social realities). The weight of this moral and social judgement of what is 'best' in principle then produces a situation in which a particular family may theoretically be permitted to challenge that definition because the importance of individualised decisions is endorsed, but in practice

³ Some psychologists have spoken of their concern about the sexist, racist and classist attitudes which result in rational and controlled behaviour (male) being rewarded in Family Court settings, while irrational and emotional behaviour (female) is regarded negatively. See Levett (1986).

find such a challenge difficult to sustain. It also assumes that there is a 'best' solution, whereas the parents or the Family Court may be confronted with a complex situation where all avenues are open to qualification.

In reading the discussion below, the following points need to be kept in mind. No assessment is neutral and objective. Parents commented often on the difficulty - indeed the impossibility - of keeping separate their notion of the best interests of their children from their own desires and hopes. How they saw the world coloured their assessment, as the assumptions and ideologies of professionals colour their assessments, of children's needs. This being the case, it is no longer sufficient to simply state that X is in the best interests of the child. Instead, the question needs to be taken further, to ask what political, ideological, sexist, and racist attitudes and assumptions produce that assessment.

Although there is no detailed information of which I am aware about the factors and issues that contribute to parents' decisions about custody, the commonsense (and tautologous) assumption is that parents decide what is best for their children because parents want what is best for their children. This argument rapidly merges into a validation of shared parenting being the best for the child because shared parenting avoids loss of a parent and maintains continuity, so that parents who, for whatever reasons, have decided to take this course of action have necessarily acted in their child's best interests. This somewhat simplistic line of argument is undercut by a close examination of the texts of the interviews. A cursory review of their reasons would support the line of argument that parents made their assessments with respect to what they felt was best for the children. A more detailed examination of the texts, however, suggests that there were a number of other factors influencing adult assessments of the child's needs. These bore upon adults' perceptions of their own needs and their appreciation of systemic family issues. At times some of these factors could be in opposition to other factors, at times they might complement each other. There was a recognition in some texts that parental ability to co-operate was critical to the ease with which the arrangement would operate. This position facilitated a reading of shared parenting which identified parental happiness or satisfaction with the arrangement with child satisfaction, and therefore reversed the direction of the 'best interests' principle.

Children's needs were not by any means ignored, but they were intermingled with a range of other considerations which were given equal weight. For instance, five parents said they seriously toyed with the idea of moving on once separated, but rejected the idea finally as unhelpful to *all*. Dave said he wanted to:

disappear . . . from everything . . . but . . . um . . . it was better not to have done that, I think. Been a lot better not to have . . . 'cos I would have just - it wouldn't have done me any good and it wouldn't have done the kids any good . . . wouldn't have done Jane any good. She wouldn't have been able to do what she's done if she had had the kids full-time (1st Interview).

Michelle also had wanted to leave Wellington but was constrained from doing so because of feeling that to do so was unfair to Kay, that she deserved time to be with her father, and that she (Michelle) would have felt too guilty about cutting Lawrence out at that stage.

Other parents hoped that the child *and* the adults would benefit from the arrangement. Some of the women spoke of their anxiety about solo parenting, and saw shared parenting as a means of avoiding those well-documented stresses. Maree felt shared parenting would give Sam access to his father and force him to choose between two very different approaches to life; make Keith face up to his responsibilities; facilitate her attempts to develop her new relationship; reduce the burden of child care on her, while introducing the element of equality she perceived as absent from her marriage. Mary hoped that the children would have a richer life with less tired adults, and wider social and experiential contact, and believed that Charles should have an opportunity to parent. Martin thought that the intended continuity would benefit children and adults, and so strengthen the arrangement:

MN: the primary link was . . . it is terribly difficult to put it. The primary link was the children, and the children not being upset any more than they needed to, having access to us both, and *because* there was no sexual jealousy, there was no reason why we couldn't spend time together happily . . . (1st Interview).

In other cases the decision that shared parenting would be good for the children involved acts of generosity to the other parent. For example, Isa, who acknowledged that she and Luke had had disputes about money, spoke of the way that Luke helped finance her purchase of the house because, as she said, he felt that the home was for the children, though her's in name.

Fay at first appeared to subordinate her interests to Tessa's. She herself would have preferred not to have such an arrangement. 'I can say that the overriding reason for pursuing the joint parenting was Tessa's good'. Yet her valuing of shared parenting develops from her perception of the sort of life and experiences a child should have, which in turn reflected her own principles.

There were also points where ideological positions came into conflict with practical issues. All of the women believed in the principle of extensive paternal involvement with their children, but some had to contend, in the context of advancing shared parenting as desirable, with doubt about paternal abilities. There were also indications that at times the decision to persist with a particular course of action was less to do with the child's, and more to do with the parents', needs. Here Anna speaks rhetorically of the value of continuity, but she identified guilt as a factor in her decision, and presented adult and child needs as synonymous:

I think that I - I didn't know what to expect . . . when we first started this system. It was a kind of blind hope that we would be able to work something out because I had *such a strong need* for the continuity of our family unit *in some form*. And part of that was based on the fact that I felt guilty because I was taking the children from him, partly because I didn't know whether I would make it with - there was definitely a bridging mechanism for me going on there.

AO: That I can always {go back? And he'll want me back?

AN: {Go back? (Laughs)}

I don't know. That didn't occur to me. And

I suppose apart from that I believed that there were different ways in which you could live (. . . .) that there did not need to be that terrible cutting off . . . the cutting off of that history. What do you do with that history? It is part of your life! Even taking it with me, I didn't want this to happen for me, my children or for Martin. So I guess I, it, it was . . . oh, it was ignorance . . . hope . . . (. . .) a blind belief that I could do it . . . that we could work out something that was different (3rd Interview).

Overall, the evidence from the texts is that parents reached their decisions with reference to a wide range of beliefs and hopes for the future which indicated the extreme difficulty of sorting out and holding separate the needs of one member of a family without reference to the needs and desires of others as indicated by Michelle's account:

MS: I certainly didn't have any, umm . . . any idea that it would . . . be as . . . demanding . . . as it has been and as difficult to sort out - not only sorting out the people, but sorting out my own feelings about it and my own concerns . . . umm . . . the whole business of trying to deal with - what we were talking about before - dealing with . . . somebody you are trying to separate from, who is at the same time, the father of your child . . . (mm) and umm, it, it's as if those two things are in direct opposition and um, I think it is one of the things that I have found very very difficult, um, is my . . . earnest and honest desire to umm . . . help maintain that relationship between Kay and Lawrence . . . umm, I mean, in, in a good sense, umm . . . without, remaining part of that system . . . and umm, (Right - do- ?) and it's been extraordinarily hard.

AO: Yeah. And in fact . . . are you almost saying . . . the only way you cannot be part of that system is by stopping the arrangement?

MS: No. I am not saying that at all. Um . . . you see, that, as far as I am concerned, that system . . . is in perpetuity because *we are her parents* (Right) but the system - I don't mean the system as it was. (Right). I'm meaning the fact that we are her parents means there is a system there, and I don't have to operate it in a way that I chose not to, but I have a certain, umm . . . responsibility towards that system . . . because he is the father of my child, and, umm, she is my daughter. You know - all of those connections. Umm, so it wouldn't matter where we were in the world. There would still be . . . that connection between us . . . that can never break . . . and I think . . . the task . . . is to come to terms with the system in a way that suits you and suits everybody else. And . . . umm, I can, easily see ways that it might suit 2 of us -

AO: But not the third?

MS: But not - I can't see ways that it is going to be ideal for 3 of us. (Mm) There is only one child. . . (Mm) and, umm, only 2 parents . . .

AO: Right. And so in a way . . . it's almost a constant modification of those needs, or, or allocation at one point in time - somebody's needs are being met, to the detriment of somebody else. and then -

MS: That's how it feels. It's like there is always a compromise. There has to be, (Right) and I guess when you are dealing with more than one person, you have to compromise in any situation (1st Interview).

One family whose accounts were highly consistent with each other did locate the decision-making process more clearly and unambiguously than most within the context of their perception of the child's needs, an assessment aided by the evolution of the arrangement from a particular set of circumstances. After the separation overseas - a gradual parting of the ways in response to Stephen's acknowledgment of his homosexuality and Patty's having an affair - Patty returned to New Zealand with Jim. Stephen came back to visit, and then returned again, this time permanently about two years later. Because of accommodation problems and because both parents still felt close to one another, a position they, like the Nobles, felt able to sustain because of a lack of sexual jealousy, Stephen stayed with Patty and Jim. Patty's account located the decision-making very much in terms of what she and Stephen saw to be in the child's interests, and placed Jim squarely as the initiator of the action:

It was Jim's, umm, expressing a wish to see us both . . . every day that, umm . . . led us to decide, led us to decide that that was the way that we would do it . . . Umm, his dad had been away for a long time and then came and stayed with us until he had sorted out living accommodation for a month or so and . . . it may have been 2 months. I can't remember. Maybe even 3 months. Oh, we are like brother and sister, so it wasn't a problem. And he got so used to the idea of us both being there, that when he and I found a flat and left his dad in our old one-bedroom flat - we found a flat to share not too far away - only about 10 minutes walk, umm . . . he felt a bit upset and said, you know, "Why can't we live, like I want to see you both every day. Why can't we both live all together". Of course he was only 6 at the time, so it was hard to explain (1st Interview).

And in later interviews their responsiveness to what Jim wanted was reiterated:

PP: but the kids instinctively know in terms of . . . love and contact with loving people, and you know . . . that sort of thing, that their people, the people who are important to them . . . they know how much they want and how much they need, and I felt that it - also also in this case him being the only one and . . . being extremely important . . . to the arrangement that um, that it . . . that what he wanted was very important. . . . And I thought that it was a very wise . . . (Choice?) Yeah. (3rd Interview).

But although Jim's needs were important, other considerations of equal and practical significance, especially what his parents could contend with, intruded:

PP: It is, was as far as I was concerned, what suited us, that, that, was (Critical?) Yeah. And Jim, you know . . . it boils down to him saying, "I want to see you both . . . every, every day". . . . so this was the way we arranged it. We satisfied his wish, because in, in . . . in as parents . . . considering what he had been through without his father and . . . with a mother that was depressed and we wanted the best for him . . . he, he, knew what was the best, and what he wanted was emotionally the best for him . . . and it looked to me, it made sense to us . . . in terms of time sharing, you know, it seemed . . . the most sensible. It was what he wanted. I(Mmm) and we felt that we needed to make up for him, I guess . . . for what he had been without . . . in terms of time and attention and stuff . . . and umm just . . . (1st Interview).

The arrangement would also, while ensuring daily contact with him, give Jim the distance Patty believed he needed from her. Stephen also couched some of his comments in relation to meeting Jim's *and* the adults' needs:

I think that his very, very initial reaction was was somewhat shy and then he was thrilled, basically, to have me back . ummm before, a little while before I managed to get a full-time job and so I used to go and pick him up from school, and my feeling was that he really loved that . . . and also remember discussing with the teachers. They found that he had improved . . . noticeably within school.

AO: Over the period that your contact had resumed? (Yeah) So that would have reinforced any feelings of your importance to him?

SC: Yeah. Yeah. I was in no doubt about that. Yeah. Thinking through, I think that that sort of contributed to feeling that the day about . . . thing was probably a good idea, or seemed right at the time. Yes. I remember distinctly now . . . that swept aside any sort of doubts about coming back or . . . anything like . . . I, it made me quite sure that I had done the right thing.

AO: So not only was it important to Jim, but it was also important to you that Jim in fact responded in that way, that, that you saw for yourself that you were important to him (Mmm). Yeah.

SC: I think that it was good - it was important for Patty too . . . it was good from that point of view. . . . Well, I mean it gave her support in the situation and also it means . . . the unhappy child is much better.

In this situation both parents, wishing to compensate for the difficulties created by the separation, established an arrangement which was responsive to Jim's expressed wishes, and which took account of their own needs.

In other texts, although the dominant reference is clearly intended to be to the child's best interests, such references are undercut by the acknowledgement of conflict and unresolved power issues between the parents. Keith's grudging agreement to share the parenting was reached because he recognised the benefits of stopping 'all the *bloody arguing*'; and at another point, appropriating the role of child-protector, he said that he agreed because:

I was *determined* that he wasn't going to become a bloody . . . y'know, the prize of the taffy-pullin' contest . . . It would have been grubby. . . It was just not on (1st Interview).

But the way in which Keith described part of the decision-making process emphasised his reluctant participation in the scheme and his preference for maintaining a situation where Sam lived with him, rather than moving between two homes:

KB: his big brother was over here when all of this was going on and his mother enlisted his, his help, and of course Malcom is . . . is the, umm . . . the great peacemaker, you know, and, umm . . . he, he's a quite incredible sort of a kid actually he's a SHIT in lots of ways but . . . you know, in summary, he's very much of a . . . ah, a big brother to his mother and his father. . . and of course because he's got all of this bloody money, an', umm . . . and he's a very forthright sort of a joker, you know he's very - what he wants he gets ah, he happened to be here about this time, and he said to Sam, "Well, what do you wanna do"? . . . He said, "Well, why don't you just say, why don't you, instead of saying, "Yes, you'll go with Mum", or "Yes, you'll go with Dad", why don't you go with both? Why don't you go half and half"? . . . so . . . when I asked Sam, he admitted then, that, that really he, he would like to spend some time with her. Because I told him. I said, "If you, if you would like to stay here, you tell me . . . and . . . we'll take it from there" . . . I was, you know, but I can remember saying some pretty - because I was hurt. When you're hurt you do say things, I think. I think that you tend - well, I do - I tend to say things. I can be pretty vicious . . . and I know that I said to him, you know, "Sod you, you know, if you're not -". No I didn't. I probably didn't say that. But I said, "You do realise that umm . . . that . . . I don't necessarily have to keep that room for you, that umm . . . When you are at your Mum's, I might just decide not to keep the hou-" I don't know what I said, but I sort of . . . inferred that I didn't necessarily just have to keep the place just sitting here waiting for him to come back. Umm, I was pretty, pretty . . . hurt about it. (So basically -) I'd interfered with my relationship with somebody else . . . and I'd gone *donkey-deep* in debt . . . really, donkey-deep to get the bloody joint because he'd said that he wanted to come and live with me . . . now, all of a sudden -

AO: And the bastard had changed his mind!?

KB: Yup! And that's exactly what it was . . . little cow. You, you know . . . whatever the other rights and wrongs of it were, you've g- it pisses me off that I . . . went ahead and did this when I obviously didn't need to . . . but I did need to. This really is *our* home (1st Interview).

A decision against a custody hearing and a decision to share the parenting implies conflict resolution and the success of the conciliation counselling, but may also mask other, unresolved issues; in particular, the way that the parents will continue to relate to one another. Agreement itself may in some instances have to be regarded as problematic, as not necessarily in the child's best interests and as warranting enquiry into its production, especially in situations where parents have very different ideological positions about gender relationships, and where there has been a history of violence or abuse⁴. The

⁴ The HELP Foundation has commented on the extent to which, by using the argument that the child will be psychologically damaged through a cessation of contact with its father, the legal system supports the father's, as against the child's, rights. If the child's interests were to be paramount, which the law states they should be, then it should not prove as difficult as it currently is to obtain cessation of visitation, or supervised visitation when there is still some reason to believe that the child is at risk, albeit that determination of incest is not a simple procedure. But the current approach, which is often to regard

official ideology of what constitutes family may unwittingly give status to an agreement that has been made under duress, when further discussion of the validity of a particular family's proceeding with a particular sort of arrangement would be in order. For three out of the eight families, all three of whom had considerable contact with counsellors or with the Family Court, the giving of priority to a single psychological factor, the assumption of the desirability of the child's maintaining contact with both parents, appears to have obscured the need for further questioning about the way that the arrangement might work. At the Todd/Davis hearing, Charles reported the judge as saying that he could see no reason why their 'progressive' joint custody arrangement should not be continued:

Maybe the courts just heaved a sigh of relief and said, (*laughing*), "If a separating couple comes together with a joint custody, we'll say, "Yes, and the decision is their's and not our's. We'll just endorse it . . .".

Neither he nor Mary recalled any discussion of difficulties that had arisen, or which they would face as a consequence of a custody action, which would complicate the workings of the arrangement. Similarly in the Summers/Butler family, although they had contact with several agencies, there seems to have been, until the last counsellor, an acceptance that their shared arrangement was in Kay's interest, on the grounds that both were 'fit' parents and neither wanted to exclude the other, although the arrangement itself was constantly changed, and Kay was obviously triangulated and stressed. While it might be argued that the problem lay in the parental inability to separate finally and that counselling needed to focus on that issue, the counsellors simply assumed that the shared parenting was in Kay's best interests and failed to address the manner in which the continued difficult parental relationship suggested that on a practical level the arrangement was not functional for this family. Michelle said:

Well, my friends who were social workers and teachers said to me, "For God's sake, what are you doing? Um . . . she really needs to be with you and . . . umm . . . seeing Lawrence, but not going through that process . . . of having to be there" . . . Um, but then I had the most monumental pressure from Lawrence . . . umm . . . the, the counsellors that we saw really didn't . . . umm . . . they were more intent on trying to sort out what the problems were between Lawrence and Kay, than in coming to a resolution of where Kay should be, considering that it was so . . . blat - well, so perfectly obvious that Lawrence was really insisting, well, trying to insist on a co-parenting arrangement (1st Interview).

In contrast to Michelle, who concentrated on the problems she experienced in trying to sort out what was a good arrangement for Kay, Lawrence emphasised his fear and concern about losing her. This made it very difficult for him to assess what Kay's best interests were:

I do think that my continued love of, and care for Kay . . . can . . . contribute something even though I don't, I don't think that this is unimportant for her. In fact I don't feel conceited about it . . . um, the

mothers who have raised a concern about incest as manipulative is not adequate either. HELP is concerned about the numbers of girls whose mothers are legally required to ensure that unsupervised visitation take place where there has been no absolute determination of incest, but where there is still reason to believe that the child may be at risk.

contribution that I can make. I am bloody sure that there are awfully important contributions that Michelle can make, but I still think that there are important things that I can do for Kay . um . . but . . um . . . I don't actually . . candidly, I don't think that it was this sort of . . intellectual . . intellectualised consideration which was important then. It was a sheer gut reaction. "Yes, I do love Kay. In fact, I can't bear to think of living without her . . and yes, the reason I want a joint parenting arrangement is, yes, I do want to live with Kay" (2nd Interview).

There are a number of points which can be commented on. Firstly, a close reading of the texts confirms that the 'best interests of the child' is not a variable that can be separated out and held constant against other unstable components of an agreement. The concept has to be read as itself unstable, informed and affected by the system of which it is part. It is part of an interlocking whole, where the interaction of parts requires acknowledgement so that the child's interests and the parental interests need to be considered, and contradictions examined. Within a shared parenting arrangement, the family system that evolves is not completely independent of the previous family system so that aspects of that system will continue to touch the child's experience.

Secondly, parental agreement on an arrangement, which is the mode of decision-making given preference within the Family Courts, may not necessarily result in an agreement ultimately beneficial to the child, or even for his/her parents. From a comparison of the Black's texts it becomes apparent that both parents accepted the idea for radically different, and conflicting reasons. For Maree, such an agreement symbolised what she had been unable to achieve in the marriage:

and of course, the other thing was that I was determined in that the boys were going to, were going to learn to share . . . and I meant, and I thought I'd be starting that by having a sharing custody arrangement - *equal involvement, y'know, because it never was while we were married, and I could start that process, y'know, um, when we separated . . .* (3rd Interview: my italics).

Keith's intention was somewhat different. What his account suggested was that recognition of the possibility of losing custody led to his reluctant agreement. While the power axis might, therefore, have appeared to have shifted to favour Maree, his agreement invested him with potential power to monitor and control Maree and her care of Sam in a way that a custody preference for Maree would not. He said of Sam's first period back with his mother: 'I was watching like a . . like a . . . there's never been anybody monitored anything - nobody knew it except me'. What this particular instance suggests is that parental agreement may obscure the existence of an on-going marital struggle; and that this may be fuelled by major differences in beliefs about the nature of marriage and relationships. The argument about best interests can hardly be regarded as self-evident.

Thirdly, although it is now widely accepted that the meeting of parental needs in intact families is important if the parents are to fulfil their functions adequately, the paramountcy of 'best interests' once the parents have separated seems to undercut this view. While it is now legitimate for parents in intact families to have individual needs, it seems still not to be so appropriate for separated parents. It must be clearly acknowledged that parents have needs, the interpretation of which will affect their decision making. Once

those needs have been allowed as valid, then they can be discussed as part of the whole process, rather than have their existence denied.

Fourthly, and this has particular relevance in situations where parents have come for counselling about custody, counsellors need to be more sensitive to the consequences of severe inequality in a parental relationship, and to question shared parenting decisions more closely, although to do so goes against current practice. Rather than the question being, "What are the best interests of a child?", which too easily can produce what is basically a reiteration of principles, the question that needs to be asked instead is one which acknowledges the connectedness of members of a group, and therefore addresses the family system: "What are the facilitative elements and constraints within this family constellation? In what way will these work towards the elaboration of a system in which the needs of all the family may be met, noting the necessity of compromise, and at times, exclusion of one person; and in what ways is that system likely to be subverted"? In this context Hipgrave's comments on the problems of dyadic research are apposite:

A language of [best interests of the child] can often serve to distort the psychological and sociological realities of an environment within which each individual is influencing, and being influenced by, those around him. Families . . . are units in a constant state of negotiation. . . . The tendency to reduce this ecological complexity to linear models based on particular [interests] needs to be readily recognised and treated with appropriate caution (Hipgrave, 1982, p. 172).

Summary

A decision to share the parenting is a complex event, in which the pre-separation relationship, the way that the separation was handled, and the social and legal environment affects the subsequent working of the arrangement. Although some families were able to use the period of separation to renegotiate and positively change the nature of their previous relationship this was not always possible. Shared parenting may perpetuate an unequal adult relationship, so continuing to complicate the arrangement for parents and children. Recognition of the ways in which decisions are reached renders inoperable a disinterested, objective judgement about the best interests of the child by either parents or professionals in the Family Court. I have argued that it is necessary to move beyond statements of what is desirable in principle to question whether that principle can be practically achieved; and as part of this process to appreciate more fully the way that such assessments are influenced by prevailing and often contradictory ideologies.

The second significant point is that parents, during an emotionally stressful and difficult period of their lives, received on the whole little support. The reason for the absence of support appears to be related to gender constructs. Although the families, and the fifty/fifty time sharing families in particular, were responding to the cultural demand that fathers spend more time with their children and become more involved as parents, in practice such behaviour was perceived as potentially threatening and as subverting well-established roles.

DECISION MAKING: THE PROCESSES

Introduction

This chapter extends the discussion into the background of the decision to share the parenting, in which the best interests of the child, held in the American literature to be the primary reason for the parental decisions, is read here instead as one among a number of contributory influences. This chapter focuses on the interpersonal processes of decision-making. I discuss firstly the decision making as influenced by considerations of power and gender; and the centrality of the women's role as initiator of the idea is placed within an account of power which challenges the notion of its attribution to a specific location or sphere and sex.

Secondly, I explore the parental commitment to shared parenting, persisted with despite the lack of support and information, as constituted by what I have called 'personal consciousness'. I have used this phrase to describe the way experiences from families of origin and the views that parents held about the significance of parenthood contributed to their wish to remain involved with their children's upbringing.

Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I give an account of the families' early experiences of shared parenting, in which the commitment to the principle and hopes of what might eventuate were given practical expression, and the obstacles and good experiences realised.

Before returning to the research data, further attention must be given to my use of the term 'power'. My usage specifically challenges the traditional dichotomy between the powerful and powerless and suggests instead a reading of power as an element which is inherently unstable, and potentially open to subversion. Such a definition relies heavily on Foucault's¹ (1976) and Lukes' (1974) interpretations of power, and on Sprey's (1975) and Turk's (1975) accounts of familial power. It also acknowledges feminist scholarship which has questioned the adequacy of a conceptualisation of power in terms of public and private spheres, where women as a consequence of inhabiting the latter are viewed as relatively powerless in contrast to men.

Until comparatively recently, power in the public sphere has been defined unidimensionally (Lukes, 1974). Within this definition emphasis has been placed on conflict and on observable behaviour. What this model of power and a later, more refined, two dimensional model has excluded, according to Lukes, is the recognition that the exercise of power may function through a process of non-decision making, through the suppression of conflict, and through non-awareness of alternatives or choice. Drawing on Bachrach and Baratz's work, Lukes also indicates that 'power' is not a unified concept but has a range of different typologies, embracing coercion (the securing of compliance by a threat of deprivation); influence (no direct coercion occurs from A but B changes a course of action); authority ('B complies because he recognises that [A's] command is

¹ See p. 41.

reasonable in terms of his own values", and that the command is reasonable and legitimate (p. 17)); force (the choice between compliance and noncompliance is removed); and manipulation ('compliance is forthcoming in the absence of recognition on the complier's part of either the source or the exact nature of the demand upon him' (p. 18))².

Lukes' model of power which incorporates a range of modes in which power can be exercised is comparable to the definition of familial power discussed by Turk (1975) and Sprey (1975). The model which they propose is one in which power is conceptualised as relative, embedded in interactional patterns and involving compliance and compromise. Because the power of compliance derives from the fact that agreement influences subsequent interactions, those often portrayed as 'weak' are not devoid of power. Available to them are alternatives - the use of compliance, or the achievement of limits through non action, which may also have the effect of negating indirectly the effects of the other. Finally, as Turk notes, power has to be seen as transcending immediate temporal limits. To define one person as definitively powerful in relation to a particular event assumes the ability to define when that event is 'closed'. Within these definitions power becomes an inherently unstable, interactional (not hierarchical) and nuanced element in a relationship.

Two of the outcomes of feminist scholarship have been the recognition that biological essentialism is an inadequate explanation of women's social and political inequalities and the formulation of gender as a social construct³. Within this frame of reference attribution of sex-specific roles and behaviour are no longer accepted and the availability to both sexes of a wider range of social roles and behaviours which cross traditional, Western gender boundaries is postulated. Furthermore, the dichotomy between public and private spheres, in which the private, domestic realm inhabited by women is seen as inferior and women, although acknowledged as powerful within this sphere, were believed to lack power in the public arena, is invalidated. It is now recognised that the historical portrayal of women existing within a closed, domestic world, which both established and confirmed their inferiority, beyond which their actions did not reverberate does not adequately describe their lives⁴. Duffy (1986) through an analysis of the

² See Arendt (1986), who is also critical of the way that terms that referring to power have been used interchangeably and synonymously. Lukes (1986) reiterates the need to expand and probe definitions of power, to understand power as a relative concept, and as going beyond the achievement of an immediate goal in order to achieve longer term goals, interests and beliefs. Maree's defining of shared parenting as the means by which equality would eventually be achieved (p. 117) is a practical expression of this point.

³ See Rosaldo (1973) and Ortner (1973) for early elaborations of this viewpoint and Connell (1986) and Nicholson (1986) for later and more critical discussions.

⁴ For a discussion of the inadequacy of this viewpoint, and the extent to which it has overlooked and obscured the significance of Western women's participation in the public as well as the private sphere see, for example, the articles in Cox (1987); Greene & Kahn (1985); Mitchell & Oakley (1976/1986). The facile assumption that women have been universally subordinated because of private and domestic roles has also been challenged by anthropologists. For example, see Powers (1986) and Smith (1954), whose accounts of women in Ogala Indian and traditional Nigerian Muslim societies demonstrate that women both carried considerable power in what has been designated by Western writers as the 'public sphere' and were respected for their reproductive capacities. Such accounts confirm that gender is a social construct, not biological fact.

influence that upper class Canadian women were able to bring to bear on major social issues at the turn of the century, is likewise critical of the notion that women operated only within a particular closed sphere and questions the way that women have been historically portrayed as powerless. She too criticises the association of power with conflict and physical force, the possession solely of those seen to be making the 'real' decisions. Lack of attention to the nuances of power and to studies of women's contributions beyond the home have obscured the way that women have been influential in areas of particular significance for them, and have brought about the legitimization of certain social issues and the emergence of critical or alternative viewpoints.

The initiators of the decision

Defining the women as initiators in marital and custody decision-making would traditionally been accounted as confirming their influence in a limited, domestic sphere. It is very significant, however, that the women express interest in a mode of custody that has potentially radical social implications because of its implied redefinition of gender roles and therefore of conventional social structures⁵. What is from one perspective only a domestic concern, from another has much wider ramifications. But nonetheless the women's proposing shared parenting and the men's acceptance of their assessment of its feasibility continues to locate both parents within traditional gender boundaries. In most of the families the men recognised the women as the more knowledgeable parent and therefore the one more in tune with the child's needs⁶. Continuing deference to maternal knowledge in several of the families *even after* the men become more involved as fathers suggests that the process of reorganising social notions of what is appropriate behaviour for each sex is extremely complex⁷. Backett's (1982;1987) analysis of the negotiation of parental behaviour around child-rearing offers a useful comment on this process. She notes how the mothers in her study quickly became identified as the more knowledgeable parent because of the amount of time they spent with the child, despite parental ideologies which portrayed the father as contributing substantially to child rearing. Moreover, the interaction

⁵ See Harper (1980) who notes that the affirmation of new patterns of lifestyle can be seen as revolutionary, irrespective of the conscious intent of those living them. The difficulties, however, of achieving such changes should not be underrated. See Stein (1984) who, in writing about the possibility of fathers becoming significantly involved with their children quotes Pleck to the effect that effective change must occur at both institutional and personal levels; and Sandquist (1987) who describes Swedish social policy with its emphasis on an active paternal role as the result of an unusual combination of social, political and economic factors.

⁶ Although Keith believed that he should decide where Sam lived, my reading of his account would stress his punitiveness towards Maree and his emphasis on rights as the overriding factors, elements which locate him within a masculine gender system according to Belensky et al. (1986, p. 8) who, following Gilligan, describe the development of a morality adhered to by women as 'organised around notions of responsibility and care'.

⁷ Dave in particular spoke of the way he had to contend with his, the children's and Jane's awareness that he was not as *au fait* as Jane was with the children's lives, and of the times that they rang her, when living with him, to ask her for information which she no longer had access, e.g., where their lunch boxes were. Such actions easily could reinforce a sense of incompetence.

between child and father, which both parents saw as highly desirable, was frequently mediated and monitored by the mother. Backett suggests that the establishment and confirmation of gender roles is achieved through interlocking processes, whereby women are expected to be more knowledgeable about the child. This expectation is reinforced by the pattern of child-rearing which, at the same time gives women access to a certain degree and type of power from which fathers are mostly excluded, or exclude themselves.

What Backett is at pains to emphasise is that regarding the women as more knowledgeable about the children acknowledges a parental relationship to which men and women make different contributions. The result is the persistence of gendered family roles reflecting wider social systems. What is striking about most of the families in my study is their achievement of a radical solution (shared parenting) through conservative means (the parents retained traditional roles in relation to the decision).

In seven of the families the women initiated the decision to separate and to try shared parenting⁸. Their status and authority as the decision makers was both claimed by themselves and upheld by the men except for Ross, who said a friend suggested the arrangement⁹; and for Keith who allocated responsibility to successively to his eldest son, Malcolm, to the Marriage Guidance counsellor and to Sam¹⁰. The authority and determination manifested by the women when they spoke about the decision is revealed through the considerable contrast in the density of their language. Specifically, the women spoke with a detail and intensity absent from the men's accounts¹¹. Whereas Charles simply said, 'Oh . . . I suspect . . . Mary initiated it', Mary presented the situation as a chance to develop a different style of relationship more in line with valued feminist concepts:

AO: And what was it about the joint custody concept that seemed to (Appealed), that caught your imagination?

MT: Umm, *because* I felt strongly that umm . . . whatever quarrel I had with the . . . my husband .umm . . . it was not to be . . . ahh, the children's problem. That we were both, ahh . . . parents of the children umm, that I didn't *approve* of the ahh . . . mainly maternal bias . . . um . . . that I knew that he was very fond of his children and that . . . umm, that was . . . something that should go on, develop. They were very young .

⁸ Patty was the only mother who did not specifically take responsibility at some point for raising the idea of shared parenting.

⁹ Fay's account, however, emphasised her as the initiator. For her account of her role in establishing their shared parenting arrangement see pp. 85 and 100 - 101.

¹⁰ Maree's account was somewhat contradictory. At one point she suggested that Sam was responsible for breaking the impasse and making the suggestion (thus extricating himself from the unwelcome role of 'middleman'. 'And Sam was actually there {at the counselling} as well and said what his preferences were and he said that he didn't really want to, sort of, um, be in between, that he didn't want to stay with *Dad* all the time and he didn't want to stay with me all the time [Be] sort of shared. Well, of course that suited me, um . . . and so . . . it was really Sam's decision in the end' (1st Interview). However, I have included her as an initiator because of her clear support for the idea, in contrast to Keith's initial reaction, and because of the emphasis throughout her account on sharing and joint responsibility.

¹¹ Lawrence's account was the only male account which is *extremely* detailed and intricate. Part of the intricacy relates to his description of what was a very complex situation, but the orientation of his comments was quite different from the women's, in that the account was less an exploration of what might be possible, and the various constraints encountered, and more an attempt to try to make sense to himself why things had happened in the way they had.

. and there was a whole, you know, relationship ahead and so . . . I went to my lawyer - as soon as I approached him about the separation and asked if . . . we could have joint custody as part of our agreement.

AO: How did you see . joint custody differing from, say, umm, a primary custodial parent, with liberal access . . . to the . . . non-custodial parent?

MT: Well, I just felt that the children belonged equally to us . . . both.

AO: It was the emphasis on the . . . *belongingness* and the *equality* (Yes) that was important?

MT: Yes. This was something that Charles must *not* be deprived of at all. It was up to him what he made of it, but that there must be *no* division in my favour as far as the children went (1st Interview).

There were, of course, some men who spoke more elaborately than, say Dave and Charles, about their readiness to endorse the arrangement. During counselling, Luke decided that he did want to participate more in the lives of his children:

AO: Luke, you said that you made this conscious choice to be a parent, to be a father, to be a full-time father . . . umm - what, what led you to make that choice?

LR: Umm . . . understanding myself . . . mainly.

AO: Can you say a bit more about what that means?

LR: Well, basically, I can be very slack and quite lazy an', umm . . . I can let things slip away and I wasn't prepared, umm . . . to ever, to allow that to happen with the children, to let them slip away.

AO: But you'd seen it happening, you'd seen yourself (I know) slipping out of the family effectively with the fishing?

LR: Umm, well, yeah. That and, ah, also just knowing myself, that umm, ahh, what's the word? I'd . . . time and distance . . . umm . . . can dull . . . your sense of umm, your sense of, of closeness, of course.

AO: Mmm. To the children?

LR: Yes. Or to anything. But especially to the children. I talk about myself now. And, umm, I never, I didn't want that to occur, you know. It was, it was very important that it didn't occur, you know. That was one of the reasons. Two, of course, I feel like I can provide something. Like I can provide a sort of balancing act or whatever you call -

AO: Balancing act . . . ?

LR: Well, just to balance one - Mum and Dad you know . . . yin and yang. It's just to balance Mum and Dad, you know. Umm . . . yin and yang.

AO: What do you see yourself providing (Me?) particularly? In this balancing act. What are the things that you feel as a person that you want to give to your kids?

LR: Oh, a sense of reality. A sense of life. A sense of . . .

AO: What does a "sense of reality" mean?

LR: Oh, just living. Day to day stuff. Just, you know . . . oh, very much a, umm . . . you know, a level sort of person. I'm just - very flat feet, on the ground, (*laughing*) not on the air (2nd Interview).

But there is still a clear contrast between the way he speaks and the account of the decision making given by Isa. She began by saying that she was not clear what sort of outcome she wanted, or in what sort of role she saw Luke. But, as the conversation developed, it became apparent that she had a set of implicit conditions which in effect demanded change from Luke and left little room for manoeuvre, although she readily noted in a subsequent section the way in which Luke, having made the decision to be involved, then went ahead to plan the practicalities. Her use of the first person pronoun (*italicised* here) contributed to a sense of purposiveness and determination. Her speech patterns accentuated her role as initiator of the unconventional. Part of her power lay in her perception of herself as an experienced and competent 'solo' parent, a role which she had developed over the periods of Luke's absence, and which rendered her largely independent of him. There was no doubt that she saw herself at this time as having more power and control, and thus able to dictate the terms on which she would accept Luke's participation. Although she would welcome his input, she viewed herself then as the superior and more knowledgeable parent, a point made graphically when she said later that she 'kinda thought that I was the

better parent'. On the one hand she did not want to rush him into deciding what his role would be; on the other, she had no intention of acquiescing in an arrangement which was personally and ideologically unsatisfactory. Then, at the end of the section quoted below she talked about her doubts and uncertainties over Luke's ability to move into a much more involved paternal role, and implicitly questioned whether such a move would be in the children's best interests. But no sooner had she given voice to the doubts than she denied them through a re-affirmation of the value she accorded Luke's relationship with the children, although the echo of her doubts, once uttered, cannot be expunged. While accepting what Luke offered, her words implied that she was maintaining an overview of the arrangement in a way that he never did.

IM: Yes. Shared parenting to me is pretty well 50/50. That is taking responsibility for them financially and socially and kind of have their, their, to cover somehow a whole responsibility.

AO: Right. But did you turn up to {counselling} with a definitive idea in your own mind that that was what was going to happen? That you were going to go for shared parenting? Or did Luke have that idea? Where did that idea come from?

IM: You'd have to ask Luke about that one. I had NO . . . specific perception of what the outcome was gonna be. What in fact I even wanted. I *knew* that I would . . . having just finished my degree and having found work I knew that I could . . . support my children and care for them at the same time. I knew that that would be pretty impossible if I was actually financially supporting the children and caring for them . . . I don't know how I would have coped, *but* -

AO: You mean, if you were doing all of that full-time?

IM: All of that full-time. But one thing that I *did* know that I'd be prepared to take on that responsibility. I *had* cared for the children pretty well *all* the time that Luke was out fishing . . . I *had* . . . *strong* family support networks so I *wasn't dependent* upon Luke. It was the decision - any decision we made was dependent upon him making some decisions about the contributions that he was going to make . . . I *knew* I *didn't want*, umm, a . . . weekend father, a fun father. *That was not acceptable to me*. So I knew that *that was something that I didn't want* . . . I knew that . . . I *had other support* and it wasn't Luke that I was reliant upon. Ideally . . . some involvement with the children from his point of view . . . would be ideal, in that the kids loved him . . . and he loved the kids.

AO: But as far as you were concerned, it had to be more than a weekend?

IM: Yeah. And I *didn't want* any financial dependence upon Luke. I did not want - because money features - it is a very important - well, did more so, umm, it's a kind of very tangible . . . identifiable . . . very powerful . . . umm . . . tool, really, umm, and gauge that I *didn't want that*. I mean I didn't want any decision to be made on the grounds of money. I *didn't want* Luke to be paying me off . . . I didn't want any of that to happen. *That was what I didn't want* .

AO: Right. So, so in a way, would it be fair to say, that the issue of dependency on Luke, you were quite clear that that had - if there had been any issues of dependency for you before that those were now finished?

IM: Mmm. I had no emotional dependency on -

AO: - on Luke and you wished to be financially independent of Luke (Definitely) totally. Umm . . . but equally, that you weren't prepared, that in a way - that what you said is that you were prepared for Luke *either* to make a reasonable contribution, i.e., more than a weekend father as you were defining it, *or* he wasn't to have any contribution at all? . . .

IM: I think for me to take account of any decisions . . . for me, for me to even to respect the decision, any influence of . him as a father, he would have had to make a pretty reasonable contribution for me to respect taking notice of him (Right.) If that - it's a kind of complex way of seeing it but I thought, if I was on my own, I would make the decision accordingly, and if he wanted ANY, any involvement in the children's life, then he had to be (*chuckles*) . . . involved . . . It was like an earn thing.

AO: An "earn thing"?

IM: I felt that he had to be involved to make those decisions. He had to be involved to make any decisions about the children's lives. If he wasn't involved, I would make those decisions with the children and take the consequences.

AO: Right. And he couldn't, because he didn't know?

IM: He would only know if he was involved.

AO: Yes. But that's what I was meaning. He couldn't make a decision unless he was involved because he wouldn't have the information (*both speak together*) to make it. . . . SO in a sense, for you, there was something at the outset, although you hadn't clarified precisely what, although it was "a reasonable commitment . . . or or, get stuffed".

IM: Yeah. That was in the back of my mind all the time. I was not in any great hurry because I knew that with the family and friends . . . umm, we could share the children and I could somehow make do. So there

wasn't, wasn't me saying, "Make a decision now, or else"! There was . . . "If you wanna make a decision" . . . i . . . with no time frame until we go to counselling, but without some decision being made, I still felt that I had the full responsibility for the children. . . . And, umm, at the next session (in counselling) he came back and he said that he had decided that the children were . . . going to be the higher priority and that he had thought about ways that that could happen . . . that he could . . . sell the boat, that he could joint skipper . . . ahh, um, a boat for a company, so that the boat would be working all the time, and so that he could spend half of his - he would have one week on and one week off (Right) and so that the week on he would be with the children and the week off he would be out fishing. . . And when . . . there was . . . a practical solu- a practical way in which he could see his way clear to support the children and care for the children . . . umm . . . I suppose, Why not try? and so . . . we did.

AO: But did you have any qualms . . . I suppose I am interested in the extent to which people actually were - do actually trust each other . . . or whether there are doubts and hesitations which . . . probably are there in most relationships anyway, but perhaps at times of stress and, and separation, emerge more definitively.

IM: Mmm I . . . the fact that Luke was living with my parents very close by, and there were 3, you know, there were 3 generations living in the same household, and they were in the immediate area where all my support networks of women friends were - I wasn't concerned about my children's care . . . because it was beyond . . . Luke that the children would be being cared for in that community. So I didn't have - If Luke had been going into a new neighbourhood, into a . . . away from all those, those, supports, that support, . . . I would have been quite anxious. In fact there was one time when he lived in Mornington, away from a lot of the family . . . ahh -

AO: And he had the children over there?

IM: Yes. But then he lived in a bottom flat. Upstairs was a friend of his and a woman who was a friend of mine, who I knew would be (*laughing*) would be . . . an avenue for communication if I was really concerned about something . . . like if he was drinking or . . . umm . . . leaving them alone. If I had any of those concerns, if I had worries which I could umm - there were people to whom I could express them and ways in which I co - the children could obviously be cared for. . . So I didn't. And ultimately, Luke really loves those kids. He would . . . be much kinder and . . . to them . . . than, than our relationship was to each other . . . So I wasn't concerned in that way (1st Interview).

Read comparatively, the density, richness and texturing of both accounts is readily apparent, but the ways in which they are elaborated is very different. Luke began his account with an assessment of his position as it had been within the family (the historical element). He then indicated, still in very personalised terms (although later he was critical of male reactions to family responsibilities), something of how he came to occupy his particular ideological and emotional place because of his unpreparedness to allow the children to 'slip away'. Implicit in such a statement, and in its development, was the determination of what was personally satisfying, simultaneously with what was in the children's best interests - both intermingled with a sense of himself and his identity. This was extended into a brief reference to the power balance of the relationship, partially disguised in his nice phrase about 'yin and yang' which includes some hesitation about, and endorsement of, Isa. By revising his previously somewhat peripheral role, Luke wished at one and the same time to ensure continuity and contact with the children, *and* affirm himself as a parent, *and* ensure that the children benefitted from the particular gifts that he had, *and* adopt something of a protective role for the children against Isa's 'airy fairness', *and* thereby assert positively and from a position of knowledge some control and power/influence over the children's development.

The opening sentence of Isa's statement located her within the feminist ideological position that men should share parenting, in contrast to what is frequently taken for granted about parenting roles. This basic belief informed much of the way in which she structured her comments. Her account involved a recognition of the financial and emotional burdens of full-time solo parenthood and the historical dimensions of her own experience as a mother, her positive construction of her parenting abilities and knowledge

of family and community support. At the end of the section quoted here she returned to define her construction of the children's best interest in the context of their love and affection for Luke. Her awareness and valuing of their mutual affection was significant in directing her thoughts towards shared parenting and overcoming her doubts about how Luke might care for the children. In the following two passages, however, she noted the need to adopt a self-conscious position as a means of overcoming her hesitations. She had to:

consciously think about the contribution that Luke could make as a person (...) and I knew that there were specific things about Luke's personality that were different from mine - like he's a hedonist and got a sense of fun. And I think that I am much more of a martyr (...). I knew there were positive things (1st Interview).

And later she said that she focussed on the way 'that by living with them he would contribute to their lives, and I tried to look at those things'. Yet it would be difficult to place her account as predominantly affirmative of shared parenting, given the way it flowed between affirmation and hesitation. She could be seen to be caught between what she ideologically valued, what she saw as valuable for the children, the doubts she entertained at that time about Luke and her awareness that she was, perhaps, not being quite fair.

I was concerned that the kids wouldn't be eating properly, and that maybe he wouldn't, that, you know, that he wouldn't y'know, that he'd have them out late and do some of those things that I (*laughing*) as the better parent, had permission to do! .. But I was worried about -

AO: If he did then, it would just be an indication of his being inadequate?

IM: That's right. Those kind of messages were in my head (2nd Interview).

In the Noble family, Anna and Martin both said Anna first suggested shared parenting as a means by which continuity and closeness would be maintained. In speaking of the arrangement, she defined it as the means whereby she could meet her own needs, leave the the marriage, avoid the usual pain and bitternesses associated with ending a relationship, and still not lose sight of the wider family interests.

AN: I think that the big priority was me. I .. I was making a desperate bid against my own ... inner ... conditioning. I was fighting against my own resistance to leave .. I left and it was the part of me that knew that I had to go - for my own .. sake .. my own personal happiness, development, whatever you like to call it .. and it was not to do with, umm ... you know, wanting to go with other partners so much as knowing that I had to move from where I was because it was not a healthy place .. for either one of us to continue. So that was the first one. I was the first priority. And then, following very closely behind that was Martin. ... And the children ... because I was very aware of how much ... the family .. meant to him. And I mean that in the conditioned sense of him needing the wife and the kids and the whole backdrop .. but also I knew that he had a very strong commitment to the children .. So I was very aware of what I was causing him to suffer and because I wasn't doing it simply because I had got *fed up* with him .. and I wanted to get out, and try ... something fresh .. that was why I worked so hard. And because I was *determined*, I just *did not accept*, you know, that most of my friends, I suppose, had separated, and I had seen so much pain and real destruction and I was *determined* there must have been another way, and I was determined to put it in a positive framework, and I was *equally determined* that it would work (1st Interview).

Maintaining the family links was, she thought, the 'right' thing to do, and breaking out of the 'conditioned' mode of family life would enable them to 'actually start living our lives

... taking with us the good things that we had built'. She brought to the separation a determination to create something which would hold together even in adversity, and a desire to break out of the common destructive patterns of separation, thus questioning directly the socially accepted behavioural patterns of the separated.

Martin's account focussed more on the gradual recognition of the inevitability of separation, largely because of their sexual orientation. He recognised from the start that Anna's and Susan's relocation outside of Wellington (because they could not afford a home in the city) would mean that he would be less involved with the children on a day to day basis. He accepted his reduced role partly because he was able to affirm both women as 'good strong mothers' with their children's interests to the fore, partly because of his belief that girls needed their mothers more, and because of his knowledge that there would be no attempt to exclude him from the reconstituted family.

(Anna) had realised through talking to various people around about what an alternative living was like. That we could actually come to our own agreement, make our own arrangement and live our own lives and yet still in a context be together ...

AO: Mmm. That sounds ... terribly ... rational. Was that how it actually felt at the time? I mean, it sounds like it's dead easy. You come to these understandings and you do this and that and it all flows very smoothly.

MN: But it was all over a long period of time, really. You do it over a long period of time ... and whereas ... you mightn't ... realise the enormity of the whole ... as you go along ... it seems more and more likely that it can happen ... the more you think about it, the more you consider, the more you talk it through ... the more, the more ... the more rational it seems. ... I mean, we have been very lucky in the whole episode ...

AO: How was it - there wasn't any discussion or suggestion or you never felt that you should be, if you like, the primary parent? In the sense that this arrangement involved one person.

MN: Oh Yes. We talked that through be - I ... think that ... because ... Anna was not working at the time ... and wasn't for another 2 years after ... we had separated, and because I was having to be the breadwinner really ... because I had a lot of years' experience behind me in my job and a good salary to keep money coming in for us ... umm ... and I suppose because ... by and large and most children, particularly girls ... do tend umm ... to rely more on a mother than on a father ... umm, we arranged it this way. ... (1st Interview).

Although the women acted powerfully as the initiators of the scheme, it is quite clear that male compliance and active support was important in allowing the arrangement to develop with the minimum of fuss and difficulty. In the two families where support was not forthcoming and sole custody was sought, it was much more complicated to establish the sharing. In other words, idealism and ideology could be, and were, resisted.

Gender issues in decision making

In contrast to most of the male accounts, the women's (and Ross's) placed shared parenting in a much broader context. They saw in the arrangement the possibility of an alternative social model which revised long accepted social arrangements for child care, although the extent to which each was explicitly informed by feminist discourse differed. The value of the arrangement lay in its ability to provide equality of responsibility; continuity of parenting; an opportunity for the father to take an active part in the children's lives, (and for Maree, equality in authority). They endorsed paternal involvement because it did challenge the patterns of the relationships out of which most of them came, and challenged the wider social structures around parenting. What was noticeably common to

all the women's accounts (in contrast to fewer of the men's) was the frequent and explicit valuing of connectedness between parents and children. As Belenky et al. (1986) point out, this is a common way for women in particular to define themselves.

The explicit reference in the male discourse to shared parenting as implying social change is more tentative, and the discussion is framed more by personal than political concerns. Luke spoke of the male tendency to avoid childcare as 'naughty', although he suggested that men were 'hoist by their own petard' since they also missed out on the very positive and affirmatory aspects of involvement with children. Dave spoke of sharing parenting as fair and logical, and asked, 'What other alternative would there be?'; and Charles thought that at least it was better than weekend access. Furthermore, in contrast to the women's accounts, there was a notable desire to retain, and a valuing of, more traditional modes of relationship and child-rearing. So Keith, Dave, Charles, Lawrence, and Luke, with different degrees of frequency and vehemence, commented on their belief that the intact family was the family of significance. The alternatives implied some form of 'incompleteness', and the sharing of parenting was, in Charles' eyes, the 'least of the evils' - i.e., it was still fundamentally undesirable. In this respect, while accepting the role change, and in most instances coming to endorse it, the men started from a negative position - what was lost - while the women adopted a more forward-looking position - what was to be gained.

The decision making, for all that the women envisaged the possibility of different family relationships, was not reached without their awareness of the significance and importance of compromise and consensus. In some instances shared parenting was formulated as a means of circumventing difficulties that ex-partners might raise. Part of the energy Fay put into defining terms arose from her indirect knowledge of Ross's desire to disappear with Tessa. At other times the constraints had an historical component. Jane said at first that both she and Dave were always in favour of shared parenting and were determined from the outset to support each other. 'We never talked about it in any other way'. But those words also have to be read in the light of her recollection of Dave's threat, some time prior to the separation that he would go for custody, a threat which Jane took seriously. She proposed shared parenting both because she felt that it would work, *and* because it would defuse the potentially adversarial situation. On the other hand, Maree's wish to have an equal relationship with Keith and what she called a 'total sharing'¹² arose from a marriage where there had been considerable inequality of responsibility, and where

¹² She said, in response to a question about the extent to which they had tried to look ahead to potential difficulties and ways that they might deal with them, that for her the focus had been different. 'I think that Keith and I left there with the agreement that, um . . . well, we had - we left there realising that we both had a *right to know*, y'know, what the children were doing and, um, so that if one parent knew something and the other one might be interested, or y'know, if it was problems, y'know, that had to be sorted out with the other parent, so that it was *total sharing*. (. . .) Having a situation like that, it was the *base*. The *base* was sharing all the time, and so all the other things would . . . come into it, as, as the time went on and we adjusted to it, but it would still be sharing. And that was something we never had in the marriage. . . . that was something I wanted for the children *and* for me *and* for Keith (3rd Interview).

there was no immediately apparent reason to believe that the power balance of the relationship would be easily re-negotiated.

The constraints Michelle experienced in continuing to believe with Lawrence that the shared parenting would work out were in part related to anxiety about the distress Kay was showing. But they could also be described as ideological, and Michelle described as the site of competing ideologies around parenthood and motherhood, with which women in particular have to contend. She wanted the maintenance of contact for Kay with her father; she was anxious about herself as a solo parent; she was worried about Lawrence's dependency on the child; she felt some need to atone for the separation. As the selfless mother, with the best interests of her child at heart, she would acknowledge the significance of the father and welcome his contact with the child. As a mother, responding to the maternal roles of protector and nurturer, her concerns about the stress for Kay would lead her to reject shared parenting. As a woman, she was very conscious of the value of connectedness, *and* her personal and 'sociological knowledge' confronted her with the shibboleth of the inadequate solo mother. Like so many other women, she 'knew' that women could not make out on their own, and issues of dependency, integrity and identity complicated her responses.

Having set the idea in motion, several of the women found themselves having to sustain their vision of what was possible against their own temporary hesitations, and against those of their partners. Martin and Dave confirmed the importance of their wives' believing in the viability of the arrangement as bolstering their own sense of what was possible. And unlike the men for whom guilt at having initiated the breakup of the relationship was not an issue and who, with the exception of Stephen, did not make reference to it as an emotion that plagued them, some of the women were placed in a labyrinthine situation, where sustaining the idea subjected them to a variety of contradictory emotions. Anna found, as she had hoped, that shared parenting was a way of mitigating the extremity of the separation; it was also an arrangement to which she was deeply committed and which left her feeling resentful at times:

And I feel like I've actually carried a huge load with me. Like I've had respons - I have *felt* responsibility for Martin . . . I've felt responsible -

AO: Because you were the one who left?

AN: Yes. I walked out leaving everything there except the children's beds. And my suitcase. I never touched a thing in that house except some books that were mine . . . guilty . . . I don't like causing . . . pain. And I knew that I was really hurting him. And I think I am over-responsible. I became responsible for the happiness, his future happiness . . . I became responsible for maintaining the links of that family unit, And in making this work because, umm, I was . . . I was taking my children away from - I mean, I've carried a *huge burden* . . . And I think it's unrealistic . . . at times . . . (1st Interview).

Despite her advocacy of the arrangement Jane, like Fay, expressed doubts about the long-term effects of shared parenting on the children. Dave also at times spoke of his doubts about the wisdom of the arrangement, but Jane appeared to have them with a greater intensity:

But obviously for the kids, it raises tremendous disadvantages - having 2 houses. 'Where's home?'

AO: But is that a disadvantage? Is that your anxiety or what?

JA: Yeah. That's it. I don't know.

AO: That's the crunch question that you're too scared to ask?

JA: Yeah, I mean I would have thought that for the children that would have been a tremendous disadvantage, eventually having 2 houses, 2 bedrooms, 2 beds. . . . Where, where is home? (. . .) . . . it's just that, that the experience is so different from my own, that I can't contemplate what it would be like (1st Interview).

Michelle located her guilt feelings in relation to what she felt was an act of atonement:

I, I did wonder . . . much of my, um, effort was to maintain that relationship between them, was to do with, um, his status as a father, was, as to do with my *guilt* at having left him . . . and ahh . . . trying to atone for that by . . . delivering our child in that way. That's a *terrible* thing to say but I . . . often thought that there was a fair amount of that going on there. And I felt . . . so guilty about him that I . . . the child [] in a way to sort of, um, help him have a good relationship with Kay (1st Interview).

For the most of the women the decision to suggest shared parenting was not premised on certain knowledge of their partners' nurturant abilities¹³. From the beginning the women generally had to assume that the men would manage, their hesitations about this balanced against the hope that the children would probably gain from the contact with their fathers; and because they saw, as did Ross, in shared parenting a means of taking a personal stance against the structural inequalities in male/female relationships, particularly as they revolved around childcare. The men by and large occupied a different but significant role. Their positive support facilitated the transition into the sharing, and was sometimes not without personal cost. Both Ross and Luke were unemployed for a time in order to care for the children, and Martin had to redefine his paternal role once the family moved away from Wellington. What was striking was the way that the arrangements were able to develop when both partners were able to affirm the original suggestion, in contrast to those situations in the men felt unable to endorse the arrangement and only acquiesced because there was no option left; or where, as in the Butler/Summers' situation, both parents remained very uncertain about the nature of their relationship. In this family shared parenting was, to some extent, a means of detouring around the problems in the parental relationship, of disguising temporarily Lawrence's lesser involvement in contrast to Michelle's assumption of fuller powers over decisions about Kay, and of avoiding Lawrence's historically painful associations with the notion of 'access'.

Personal consciousness

Rather than take for granted the desire to be involved with their children it seemed to me that this wish raised some questions. Why was it, out of the various and competing ideologies current at any time within a society, that a group of parents should chose, or

¹³ Harper (1980, p. 118), like a number of other commentators on the imagery associated with fathers, says that fathers are still specifically thought of in terms of discipline, and as providing a link with the world beyond the home. She quotes Walter & Stinnet who reviewed a decade of fatherhood studies in 1971, to the effect that, 'The studies concerning children's perceptions of parents seem to converge in indicating that children perceive fathers as being more fear-arousing, more punitive, more restrictive, colder and less understanding than mothers. Such findings have implications and raise questions concerning the socialization and expectations of the male in our society, particularly as a family member'.

later, as in Keith's case, come to endorse this form of custody in preference to solo parenthood? Why was it that parents wanted to be involved with their children since, as one parent put it, it was often easier to think of reasons against, rather than for, parenthood?

One way of conceptualising these questions is to describe them in terms of what Shutz & Luckmann (1973) have called the relationship between the 'social stock of knowledge' and the individual biography. Shutz's & Luckmann's response to the general issue of the transmission of cultural knowledge is to propose a hierarchical, authoritative relationship between what they describe as the situatedness of experience which is the 'result of prior situations', and the stock of knowledge, which is 'the "product" of experiences sedimented in it' (p. 111). Knowledge is therefore at once subjective - what is relevant is formulated in the context of past experience - yet also draws upon a knowledge base that is accessible, and where the process of sedimentation lends authority to that socially acquired knowledge. However, the sort of 'prior situations' that Shutz & Luckmann have in mind are sociological rather than personal, and relate more to the transmission of roles, socially acquired behaviour appropriate to a particular role, and the status associated with that role. Bauman (1978, p. 187) describes such explanations as both general and 'formal', but insufficient as a description of the particular. Nor does their account, I believe, take cognisance of situations where the knowledge or approach which would traditionally have been called upon was deemed unsatisfactory and an alternative sought.

I have chosen to describe in terms of 'consciousness' the experiences which influenced parents in their choices, and in their desire to continue to be involved in their children's upbringing, rather than delegating (and accepting the delegation of) that responsibility to one parent alone. A more usual term would probably be 'motivation', but I have avoided using the word because of the connotation of the unconscious which itself implies relatively inaccessible reasoning processes. I also wanted to capture something of the intertwining between an experience which is idiosyncratic and subjective, and yet which draws upon available social discourses, as de Lauretis' (1986, p. 8) definition of consciousness makes clear.

Consciousness of self . . . is a particular configuration of subjectivity or subjective limits, produced at the intersection of meaning in the experience. . . these different forms of consciousness are grounded . . . in one's personal history; but that history - one's identity - is interpreted and reconstructed by each of us within the horizon of meanings and knowledges available in the culture at given historical moments. . . Self and identity . . . are always grasped and understood within particular discursive configurations. Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all . . .

I have analysed the parental accounts to the questions posed above as falling into two main, interacting categories, both of which are about the nature of experiences that parents wished their children to have, and some of which are about the significance of the reciprocal parent/child relationship. I will discuss first how parents talked about why it was that they wanted to persist in the parenting role (although how much some of reasons

parents gave for wishing to be involved were formulated as a consequence of their daily involvement, as distinct from being consciously thought through prior to the sharing is open to question); and secondly, the experiential component, in which what was highlighted was the desire to provide experiences for the child which were different from those the parents had experienced in their family of origin.

Parents saw themselves, through parenting, as participating in the formation of the next generation. Their unique contribution was to the children's development into adulthood. The precise direction and character of that development was determined ideologically, being based upon different interpretations of the nature of the parental task. Some parents hoped that their child would become, as Maree said, an 'acceptable member of society'; others, that s/he would become an autonomous, rational being who would have, as Charles put it, 'a sense of calmness . . . that was, civilised conduct in dealing with others'; and others wished their children to achieve happiness and positive self-esteem, and to value co-operative behaviour over and above competitiveness.

How parents defined their responsibility was clearly affected by their concept of human nature, and by the goals they were seeking to achieve. Keith, for example, who tended towards conceiving of human nature as potentially anarchic, placed a greater emphasis on the parental responsibility to impose control, although recognising that such control would be temporary. He saw his role as preventing his sons from

falling on their pricks like you have. You know, if you know that a certain course of action is *absolutely crazy* and can only lead to . . . to *real* sorrow and regret for the rest of your life. You know, there are mistakes that you can make that you never ever cease to regret. There are the ones where you say, "That's that". But other, other ones aren't quite like that and ahh . . . (*breathes heavily*) you'd like to think that you . . . could prevent your children from making the big mistakes. . . . Y'know, once again, it's a . . . it's in the lap of the gods a bit. (Mm, mm) They, they . . . everybody is their own person . . . if they want to be foolish, you can't stop people being foolish if they are hell bent on destruction (2nd Interview).

Where a more optimistic view of human nature was held, there was a stronger belief in the validity of personal expression, and in the child's capacity to learn and to be self-regulating, (with some adult guidance). Parental goals were accordingly less oriented towards conformity, and more towards helping the child develop its particular talents. The stronger the belief in the child as a potentially responsible, self-actuating being, the greater the emphasis on the enjoyment derived from parenting, and the reciprocal nature of the process of social learning and development.

Parents saw their role as very important. Being a parent was by no means a straightforward experience, a point made more emphatically by the women than by the men; but over time, the positive elements were seen to emerge more clearly. As Luke said, 'The child can be a real *shit* for eight hours of the day and then give you ten minutes of real joy, and that's it. That's all you need'. Parents emphasised their sense of commitment to being a parent. It was part of 'the natural order of things', Charles thought; or as Isa put it, 'parenting, like family, is part of life'. Moving into this role was part of adult experience and of making a commitment quite unlike other commitments. Michelle, in

describing the way she thought about the experience in terms of a refocussing of her life and energies, made explicit what is implicit in other texts. The act of parenting made possible a grounding in a life which went beyond one's own.

I think I am much more . . . more, um . . . focussed person now than I ever was and I think that that has had an awful lot to do with having Kay.

AO: Just in - in what ways?

MS: Well, in terms of my own life . . . my own directions. Um . . . I think having her . . . somehow, um . . . stopped me . . . forever butterflying from this, that and the other . . . um . . . I think for the first time I had to become constant in one way or another, and I actually think that it was high time that that happened and it has actually, since I have had her, I have this constant, um, this constancy . . . I've actually learnt how to - well, I've learnt about sorting out my own directions (. . .) settling into things that I have *never* settled into before in my life. And I think that that has something to do with, with becoming a parent. (Mmm) Umm . . . it's a kind of a commitment I suppose and maybe having made that commitment, I then began to think about the other commitments I wanted to make for myself (. . .) I believe that it has really focussed me (. . .) I actually had to settle on something because I had a child. You don't, you can't just walk away from a child (. . .) I actually began, I began to stay in one place and look at how, how I might direct myself, how I might really *use* my life . . . now that I had this fixture (3rd Interview).

In speaking of the way they valued close involvement with their child some parents emphasised a certain vividness of experience and immediacy, a concreteness which other experiences did not provide. Lawrence, when talking about his feeling of loss over one of the periods when he was having less contact with Kay, laughed at himself for feeling angry that he was no longer able to see her brushing her teeth, but was nonetheless making an important point:

The little things of everyday life were not there for me to deal with (. . .) Be involved with . . . um, but, you know . . . that, that aspect . . . that living together aspect . . . I mean, I *really* felt . . . um . . . I really felt I was losing something (2nd Interview).

Children also represented a degree of continuity in one's own life, as people to whom significant values, beliefs, and interests (which in Charles' family had an intergenerational aspect because several generations had shared the interest in astronomy that he hoped to hand on to his own children), and ways of looking at the world could be handed on. This knowledge might be highly personal:

LB: I think . . . um . . . that it is important for Kay to know the kind of person that I was. It is important for Kay to know the kind of things that I think are important . . . these questions revolve around moral questions . . . and life, behaviours . . . behaviours, since my behaviour to other people is obviously different from Michelle's . . . It is important that Kay is aware of . . . becomes aware of the way I approach people (. . .) because I think we are different people. (. . .) and I think that it right . . . to let Kay have the opportunity, if you like, of choice (. . .) I think that it is a thing for her in her adult life (2nd Interview).

Or it might be to help the children adopt a receptive, and open response to experience. Charles said that in encouraging the children to think and to read, and to ask questions (even though he felt that the response had not been overly enthusiastic to date) he wanted to impart the 'idea, the basic idea (. . .) that the universe is very interesting. I suppose . . . we may as well remain alert to it'.

Parents also spoke of the personally immensely enriching experience of bringing up children as a dimension of life which they wished to retain. Parenting was for some an affirmatory experience, which enabled one to consolidate and extend personal strengths, which gave one companions and 'friends for life' provided that one went about the task in the right way. Dave thought of the relationship as one which would be non-threatening, non-competitive, where the children rather than the adult set the direction:

I, um, I tend to accept leadership from the children.

AO: But without feeling that you've somehow got to be better than them?

DB: No. I would from another adult . . . I think . . . I would feel that I had somehow to sort of compete with them and especially probably from my wife. It's quite difficult to, um, accept leadership . . . umm . . . from the woman that you're living with (2nd Interview).

In talking about the way that the children made a significant contribution to the adults' lives, there was an intergenerational reciprocation implied. Although part of the adult responsibility was to make values and experiences available, these were tempered and challenged (not always comfortably) by the children. Anna spoke of the 'nerve-wracking' way Joanna and Rachel challenged her position, and forced her to rethink issues. Patty said of children that they offered 'a new perspective on life . . . a fresh outlook. You see things in a different way. You know, ordinary things . . . everyday . . . they'll find something new or see it in a different way'.

Lawrence saw Kay as having taught him to express himself, helped him recognise the emotional side of himself, and contributed to his self-esteem (a point made by other parents). Children also provided a richness, a different type of humour, a 'lightening of the load' and a diversion from the pressures of working life. Having constant contact with children gave a balance to one's life that was otherwise missing.

In addition to maintaining a role to which was attached such personal and traditional significance, parents also saw in shared parenting an opportunity to correct imbalances which they had experienced in their own lives and which they wished their children to avoid. They desired, on the one hand, to give a sense of family continuity and, on the other, to act differently from their families of origin.

Maree, Anna and Mary spoke more strongly than did other parents about the importance of continuity and valuing of family relations. The directions their remarks took were, however, different. Maree spoke of the insecurity she had felt as a child as a consequence of the way that her mother had run down her absent father:

Well, if everybody else thought, *believed that*, what she was saying, well, what did they think of me? When, y'know, he was my father, y'know he was *part* of me . . . and so y'know, by running him down, it had the effect of running me down, so that I lost confidence (. . .) And I got to the stage where I was walking around wondering what people were thinking of me. (. . .) I don't want to be mean to Keith . . . we've got to give the children the best of both worlds. They've got . . . not to be *denied* one parent because the marriage broke up (3rd Interview).

The continuity which Anna especially valued and wanted to preserve in the separation had a more existential flavour:

I suppose that part of it was a kind of . . . insurance policy (. . .) Against anomie. Against . . . a sense of not belonging. Against a sense of being (sighs) . . . lost or . . . alone . . . or unconnected. *All* those sorts of feelings I did a course (. . .) and we looked at families and I listened to this woman doing her whakapapa going *right* back and I had this *overwhelming sense* of utter aloneness . . . And I think that that's what it is - whether that is a particular hang-up of mine . . . or whether it's universal I haven't a clue. I mean, I have a sneaking feeling that we all feel it a bit. It's insurance against that ultimate cold winter where you are really alone (2nd Interview).

Like Maree, she located this belief in a desire to reverse her own experience as a child, so that her children would avoid feeling fragmented and living 'patchwork quilt lives that don't tie up'.

Within Mary's account two competing recognitions can be identified. She talked of her conviction of the *absolute* importance for the children of having both parents, instancing her recollection of occasional, meaningful times with her father whom she saw as 'the more lively parent'. But she spoke also of her own sense of division and later psychological confusion because of family conflict, much of which was expressed by silences between the parents which would last up to six months, and between whom the children (herself in particular) acted as intermediaries. Then in a later exchange, she very movingly talked of her perception of herself as unloving, and of the effort she put into developing a relationship first with a dog, and then with a child across the road, to see whether she could be the sort of mother that she felt she wanted to be, remembering and building upon aspects of her mother's parenting until she felt that 'perhaps I could . . . be loving and caring and someone could . . . umm . . . *receive* it'. The conflict she experienced in deciding for shared parenting arose out of having to let the children 'go' and to share the parenting with Charles, when their presence sustained the sense that she had of herself as loving and nurturing.

Another strand of consciousness, the desire to do differently than one's parents in one's dealings with the children, was mentioned more specifically by some of the men and by Jane, who strongly affirmed the importance, in the light of her difficult communication with her mother, of establishing an arrangement which would encourage communication between herself and the children, and between them and Dave. Luke saw the value of making a commitment to the children in the way his father had not done:

I've tried to do for my family as a man, as a father actually quite differently as to how my father dealt with us (. . .) a *lot* of my attitude to my children is, umm, is, is what my father didn't do, and what I would have liked him to do (3rd Interview).

Dave wanted to give his children a strong sense of self-worth through positive interactions with him. He particularly wanted through his contact with Mark to avoid giving the impression his father had given him of always being 'hopeless' at everything:

certainly when Mark was born I adopted the opposite . . . swing of the pendulum to Dad as far as you know, Mark - whatever he did - jobs and things - whatever he did I would sort of say it was right, and y'know, if he decided that nails had to be hammered in with the head first or the - I would say what a brilliant new idea it was . . . I nearly drove Jane to . . . despair, whereas my father - even if I had had the

hammer and put the nail in with one tremendous blow, would have said that it was damaging the hammer. Y'know, it wouldn't have been right, y'know (2nd Interview).

Both women and men talked about the absence of warm, positive parental relationships but it was the men who emphasised specifically the loss of a father or absence of a positive relationship with him. While Martin described briefly a family life which he saw as being very happy, only Ross talked positively at any length about his father (who died when he was young¹⁴), and gave a picture of a man who, like his son, went beyond prescribed male roles. He went on duck shoots and enjoyed opera, sung, and baked cakes. However, although Lawrence talked at one point of the need to know one's parents as individuals (his father died when he was very small. He became in Lawrence's imagination, a fantasy, 'superhuman' father. The effects of such an elevation were not easy to live with, and resulted in a loss of confidence), this was not the primary reason for wanting shared parenting. Lawrence located his wish to share parenting less in relation to that type of knowledge and more in a desire to avoid the difficulties he had experienced as a father with access after his first divorce.

By establishing a shared parenting arrangement parents expressed a desire to continue or to establish an active presence in their children's lives. They sought to hand on what they saw as desirable values and cultural experiences, as well as, in most instances, hoping to reverse aspects of their childhood experiences. They thought that such a reversal could be at least partially achieved through continuity of contact with the child and through communication which would be more easily maintained because of the frequent contact. At the same time, shared parenting represented a means of achieving a more balanced personal existence, which the women especially saw as significant and which in itself would contribute towards fairer and more equal gender relationships. Shared parenting, as it evolved in the respondents' texts, appeared simultaneously as an act imbued with personal significance in which were met issues of gender, power, ideology, recognition of children's and adults needs, and equally a challenge to a social structure in which these needs are segmented and fragmented.

Initial experiences

When planning the logistics of shared parenting, parents spoke of the importance of maintaining as much continuity as possible between the previous intact family and the new mode of living. They saw the minimising of disruption in the children's lives as particularly important, and tried to ensure that the children remained at the familiar school and that both parents lived fairly close to one another. Parental proximity was also important from the parent's point of view, since greater distances would have created transport difficulties, and complicated the actual transitions.

¹⁴ Nine of the respondents specifically mentioned that their fathers had been in one way or another absent during their childhood. Four died, one left following the separation, one was imprisoned for cattle rustling for some time, and three were, in their son's accounts, psychologically if not often physically absent.

Arrangement of the schedules and routines, once the idea was accepted, did not appear to present problems, although in one family there was an initial doubt as to whether one parent might refuse to return the child. Jim's daily swapping between his parents' homes was accomplished easily. He had a bike, the two homes were at that time ten minutes apart and the streets were not busy. Patty continued to be responsible for him after school, partly because she wanted to and partly because Stephen's work hours made it more difficult for him to be available. Ross and Fay began with a three day arrangement because of Tessa's age, and used the staff at Tessa's day care centre as well as daily phone calls to each other and to Tessa to keep themselves informed about her well-being. The Blacks decided that a three monthly swop would give Sam more stability. Isa and Luke and Jane and Dave built up to a weekly roster, the gradual approach in the first family being related to Luke's getting a suitable home, and feeling confident in his role; in the second, to Jane's buying a house in the old neighbourhood. Isa, who had moved away from the very familiar neighbourhood, was adamant that a period longer than a week would have been too dislocating for the children, and would have been too disruptive for her, since she would have felt even more that she had lost too much contact with the children. The Todd/Davis family also gradually moved towards a fifty/fifty time allocation, but this was accomplished over about two years rather than in the course of a few months. Martin visited and stayed with his family at weekends, was available during the week if there were crises, and paid the substantial phone bills. For some of the families there was a feeling that the arrangement just evolved without a great deal of discussion about when a firm fifty/fifty arrangement should be finalised. Jane described the change from what she called a 'Mickey Mouse' arrangement, when there had been no definite plans about when the children would be with her and when with Dave to a gradual stabilizing of times in this way:

I really don't know (how it happened). Umm . . . I suppose, for me, moving in here and more or less back into my own house again and that, that was a situation where the children could easily walk here after school - made the whole thing a lot easier and the need - y'know, the possibility of having more formalised, definite arrangement was, was much easier, I mean, I was, I suppose, felt so much more settled . . . and so it was just, I mean it was just, I mean that Dave and I didn't sit down and say, "Now, this is it". It's, it's, it just sort of happened (1st Interview).

Some of the early stages of some of the arrangements caused stress. Lawrence and Michelle spoke in detail of the agony and trauma of their early experiences, when their uncertainties about the arrangement and their relationship to each other contributed to Kay's distress. Birdnesting was another arrangement that the two sets of parents who tried it saw as unsuccessful, because they felt that their privacy was invaded, and the brief returns home were unsettling and difficult to manage. Charles also found that having the children for the weekends landed him with all the unsatisfactory consequences of that type of arrangement. Nor did the children find it easy to adjust when he formed a new relationship with a woman with two children of her own of very similar ages.

Only two families, the Jones/Thomsons and Cooper/Pearsons, presented their initial experience of shared parenting as almost entirely problem-free. But at one point Stephen had to decide that regardless of whether his partner moved away from Wellington, his responsibility was to stay to look after Jim. What both parents did speak of was irritation when clothing etc., did not make it to the other house. Of this early period, though, Stephen says that it helped him to

feel as though I was really part of his life. And . . . and this was the arrangement that he was happy with . . . and I really enjoyed being part of, you know, his workday life as well as the weekends. Just sort of . . . normal . . . [] still allowed me a certain amount of time to do other things (1st Interview). I don't remember any - problems associated with it. Prob'ly initially it was, it worked out well because it was just so easy. (Right) . . . I mean, Patty and I were about . . . so close to each other . . . so, we were both about equal distance from his school.

AO: Right. And you also hadn't just gone through a breakup.

SC: No. That's true.

AO: I mean, that's one thing that seems to me to maybe be quite important. .

SC: And I just - I mean, I had not long come back from overseas . . . and . . . so, Patty has a level . . . of support in, in being a parent, that she had not had for the previous 6 - 8 months or whatever it was. So it was a . . .

AO: So in that respect it was very positive? Yeah.

SC: And . . . I don't know whether Jim remembers, but he didn't seem to mind me being back too. . . . And I felt better about the whole situation. It, it was a . . . it was a positive thing at that point . . . happened under positive circumstances . . . as opposed to what happened immediately before hand . . .

AO: Right. So that put you onto a very good footing to start off?

SC: Yeah. That was it (2nd Interview).

In contrast, Maree expected and encountered problems. Sam was difficult to get on with after having had no contact with her for a year, demanding money, accusing her of having wrongfully left his father, and often dismissive of her and her values. She located the source of the difficulties within the power struggle that had been endemic throughout the marriage and the image of male/female relationships that had been perpetuated:

AO: Did you have any doubts that it could work? That early stage - were you worried about it?

MB: I felt that it could be difficult. (Why?) Umm . . . just because Keith's - it seemed as if for so many years he had had the upper hand and I thought, y'know, that, umm . . . it was going to be difficult for me to try and get over that one and I had found, *still* find it, hard.

AO: (. . .) there was still this anxiety that he was and in fact has continued in some ways to try and make you feel less capable and less equal?

MB: I felt it. But he has tried to make me feel as if I wasn't. And he's tried to put up barriers um, like . . . the money for instance. *No way* could you query it. "There's *no way* you can give the kids what I can give them", and um, y'know, he's trying to put up barriers like that.

AO: Were there other apprehensions you had at the time?

MB: Umm . . . only that he was more . . . forceful and um, he, um, had more power than me, and , to manipulate the children. (. . .) They seemed to listen to him . . . more than they did . . . to me, y'know - what Dad said went. (. . .) So Keith always appeared the stronger one, the one y'know, that you tried not to . . . um . . . displease, um, and if it was a choice between the two, well, it was always Dad that they pleased. And I thought that that was still going to be a difficulty and it has, um, to a certain extent (. . .) I understand now that, why they, they do it because they think, they *know* he's got the power and . . . um . . . (. . .) Dad has the power, but Mum'll understand (3rd Interview).

She found much of her contact with Keith threatening. He would ring, ostensibly to speak to Sam, and imply that her lack of precise knowledge of his whereabouts confirmed her inadequacy as a parent. Maree said she dealt with the situation by refusing to speak with Keith when he rang; by telling Sam, who was also critical of her, that he had made the

decision to be with both parents and that he must stick by it; by insisting on the validity of her values; and by refusing to change arrangements unless there had been prior discussion between herself and Keith. Nonetheless, she felt she had kept the peace for Sam's sake, with little reciprocation from Keith.

Surprisingly, few of the other respondents expected the difficulties which most of them encountered¹⁵. Several found themselves thrown by the separation itself, which was often unexpected. Jane had discounted advice that she might be upset because she felt that she would be so relieved to have finally made the break. Anna believed that she had already said goodbye to the relationship:

Well, I don't know. You see, when I left home . . . I really congratulated myself on how *wonderfully* I had stage managed the whole thing. You know? We had done all the counselling. I had really left the marriage . . . before I left it - or so I told myself. And wasn't I clever? And yet, the first 6 months here, my life just went upside down. I was, umm, a mess, and that really *shattered* me . . . because it made me realise that sometimes when we think we are doing - well what I, that I was doing . . . grand . . . And in fact I hadn't realised how complex - it was like, it's like untangling a cobweb, getting out of a marriage, because there are so many strands of you fed into it - some of which are *so* unconscious . . . It is only when you break the web . . . that it all starts manifesting itself . . . So it's not something that you can do on an intellectual level. (. . .) I hadn't banked - that did throw me. I hadn't banked on that . . . And there have been times when I have actually said to him, "Shall we get back together again"? Fortunately he's said, "No" (1st Interview).

Overall, she found things infinitely more stressful than anticipated. She felt, in her recently acknowledged lesbian status, extremely deviant, she and Susan had difficulties in their relationship, Martin came and went, but that was difficult and at times Susan would say on his arrival, "Well, here are the Nobles come to stay". Martin also found that the actual reality of separation was more complicated than anticipated:

by the time we made our separation there was a lot of - we have always been very good friends . . . as well, you know, which is a very desirable point. Umm . . . so that there was no . . . no . . . thought of . . . a total split or anything. Umm . . . there was no animosity . . . um . . . although I must admit that for myself I felt quite a bit of, for the first couple of months or the first several months I felt a certain amount of . . . anger, I suppose . . . in the way that it had worked out. Only because I was living alone . . . and suddenly I realised that I was *alone*. When I finally came to realise . . . that . . . that because I suppose basically I enjoy family life umm . . . and suddenly my family were 70 miles away . . . so . . . was it anger? Was it wasn't despair or anything. I . . . think I just felt terribly alone at times (1st Interview).

He was also upset by the children's difficulties and his own recognition that in some respects he now occupied a peripheral position in the family, although Anna disputed this¹⁶. Spending time with friends, contact with the family, the passing of time, and his own even temperament helped him get through this period.

¹⁵ Maxwell's (1988) research into the effectiveness of the Family Courts has indicated that the psychological health of those separating is affected by four main factors: 'the number and magnitude of other stressful life events that are occurring; . . . the extent of social support from those closest to the person; particularly from close friends, from family and from new partners; . . . the amount of time since the separation and the worst of the crises; . . . the amount of control over the choice of the separation'. Certainly a number of the parents in my study faced major personal changes on a variety of fronts during and shortly after their separation.

¹⁶ Anna said, in relation to continuity and her commitment to it, 'This is what I have said. I believe in this, in this way, and you can still have strong family input, still be part of the family. And *you* must

As has been noted earlier the women were the ones who felt guilty in relation to their partners, and they were the ones who, while often sustaining the men's conviction, had to deal with their own doubts. Fay, her strong ideological convictions about the value of shared parenting notwithstanding, found herself wondering just what Tessa was being expected to cope with, and interpreted Tessa's tendency to address her as "Dad" as an indication that she was stressed. (Interestingly, Isa remarked on exactly the same phenomenon but interpreted it as an indication of how well the children were adjusting).

In all of the families, there were problems with and/or anxieties about the children. In two of the families with one child, the parents felt that those children had had a harder time of it since there was no other sibling with whom to share and, in some way, mitigate the experience. Both Jane and Dave noted Louise's concern about the parent from whom she was currently absent. The Nobles' children also had a hard time, sorting out pecking orders between themselves and Susan's children, coping with Martin's absence, and the community perception of their parents as strikingly different. Both Charles and Mary were extremely distressed at the Cornelia's and Simon's regressive and difficult behaviour and by the extent and increase in Simon's aggressiveness. Luke found the children's response to him ambivalent. He realised that they were having to spend regular time with him in a way that was new to all three of them, but that their reactions meant he had to consciously reaffirm the validity of his action:

Oh, the doubts were . . . you know, they, they weren't entirely happy insofar as they weren't used to it. So . . . of course the doubts come in, you know, and you start thinking, "They are unhappy because . . . No. No. That's not the reason. Let's carry on". But . . . you have to sort of work at it. You have to sort of keep doing it (2nd Interview).

Other parents, though, also found aspects that they had not expected in relation to the children reassuring. Dave was delighted that Louise wanted to spend time with him. Jane interpreted the cessation of the previously incessant fighting between the children once the separation had taken place as indicating the timeliness of the decision. Once the regular pattern had been established Louise stopped asserting that she would prefer to live with Jane whom she had seen immediately after the separation as the more peripheral parent.

Work demands intruded, and in several families determined the particular combinations of time the children were to spend with each parent. Ross gave up his job and went on the dole for a time because the early start was no longer possible when he was looking after Tessa. Luke found that sharing parenting and the vagaries of fishing incompatible and applied for the DPB, although he was concerned about his ability to finance a proper home for the children. Isa, who had been so keen to get out to work, found that her life was unbalanced, that working full-time was exhausting and time-consuming and that school holidays suddenly seemed to create an insurmountable problem. Patty organised her career around a job that would enable her to be free in the

believe it or it can't happen. I can't make it happen on my own. The children can't make it happen' (2nd Interview).

afternoons to care for Jim. Jane experienced the difficulties associated with moving back into the workforce after ten years' absence and was very anxious about not being at home for the children after school.

Parents had to deal with personal issues. Mary, Isa and Jane all found the experience of giving up some of the caring of the children to their ex-partners very difficult and centred their lives around the children during their periods in the maternal homes. Jane also rang, called in to the marital home, or visited the children at school each day when they were with Dave. She was aware that the children did not quite know what to make of her frequent visits and that maintaining in maintaining them she was responding to her needs rather than those of the children.

Of the men, only Keith and Charles spoke of a sense of losing the children. For Keith this was also connected with his perception of himself as the better parent, and therefore with the question of power and control *vis a vis* Maree. Charles had hoped that the increased time with the children would reduce the stress on his new relationship and alleviate his sense of loss. But this was not altogether achieved. The 'numbness continued. . . . It's better to have ten nights rather than seven in a fortnight. Yeah'. He felt that the time with the children was not 'shared'. It was just 'distributed', a perception reinforced by the lack of communication between the parents.

Dave, rising to the challenge in relation to his domestic capabilities ('Well, I had had it hammered into me how hopeless I was at all that') developed extensive lists to keep track of supplies. Lawrence found himself distraught at Kay's behaviour and rejection of him, and equally distraught at the loss of involvement in the trivia of Kay's life. Both he and Michelle attempted to cope by struggling to get Kay to settle with him, arguing, talking and by having recourse to therapy. Their relationship was at times very angry and bitter, and at others, close and positive.

Mary began to have doubts about how the shared parenting would work out after the separation. Charles, to whom she had looked up in the marriage and seen as cool and controlled, now appeared irrational and emotional. Although she believed that eventually they would reach the end of their difficulties (nothing would last (. . .) I felt . . . yeah. . "This will be difficult for a while".), and that they 'would behave civilly, remain friends, talk - keep in touch, and that the children would go to two happy people', the reality was that there was virtually no communication between herself and Charles.

Although relations between the parents occasionally reached considerable levels of distrust and antagonism, the more common experience was of uncertainty about the other. This was particularly true of the women whose ex-partners had been less involved in parenting although they made conscious efforts to put their doubts to one side:

AO: So actually, as far as the kids were concerned, you didn't have any concerns at the outset, worries about it?

IM: Nothing major. You know, nothing that I can easily bring to my mind, other than the general concerns about parenting. I, I know I had to give him a chance. I knew that. I had to give him a chance. If things come up, then is the time . that needs to be kind of, things may need to be addressed. But, a, it's like giving him the benefit of the doubt. Like I *know* in my relationship, when it was . . difficult and in

conflict . I was much more judgmental of Luke. Like he *couldn't* do things right . . but I wasn't . monitoring him . for not . doing things . .

AO: Except you had your friend in Mornington, whose place he was staying. (That's right) and it seemed to me -

IM: There was always a guard -

AO: A section of monitoring, somewhere along the line.

IM: Yeah. It was never, "Would you watch out for how he's"-

AO: No. But the knowledge that he was, would be -

IM: Accountable in some way, I suppose.

AO: That somebody else was there, that you also trusted.

IM: Yeah. That was act - I haven't actually thought of it like that until kind of now, but that was always - in fact it came up again today with Heather, "Oh Luke seems to be managing really well". And I, I, said, "Do you see much of him?" and she says, "No. Not a lot". And I said, "Oh, that's good because if the kids, were", and I said, "Do you see much of Isaac"? and she said, "Oh, the kids move to and from". And I said, "Oh, that's good, because if in fact, they were hanging round at tea-time and not getting fed, I would be really concerned". I said that. . . which I thought was interesting (2nd Interview).

The pleasantly unexpected was acknowledged as happening occasionally. For example, Jane discovered that not only was Dave capable as a parent, but that he also wanted to continue with the arrangement. Dave found that after about six months he could do without lists. Patty found the break from full-time solo parent every second evening valuable. After the first six months, Keith had to admit that Maree was able to look after Sam, that sharing the responsibility gave him more freedom, and that it was in fact 'a hell of a good idea', with Sam benefitting from being a focal point in their lives, which he hoped would in some way make up for the years of disruption.

Summary

In this chapter I have offered a view of decision making as a process constituted by gender, power, ideology, and personal consciousness. I have noted that although the women were by and large influential as the proposers of shared parenting, this does not support an interpretation of power which is gender and site specific. Instead I have characterised the women's suggestion as politically and socially radical. Furthermore, I have noted the inherent instability of power, in that the ability to more easily achieve the desired arrangement depended upon some degree of consensus and compliance between parents and that women especially had to be prepared to relinquish some control over the children.

The discussion of the decision-making processes highlights consensus and compliance as significant elements in decision-making and in the sustaining of an agreement. A common tendency is to interpret consensual action as stemming from a position of weakness and to view those acting unilaterally as more powerful. The data from the respondents' texts illustrates the alternative proposition. Although I have described the women as acting powerfully through their recommendation of shared parenting their ability to translate the concept into a reality was only confirmed through an continuing interactive process. Their ex-partners' preparedness to respond positively to the suggestion made a considerable difference to the families' experiences of shared parenting.

The last section of the chapter surveyed the families' initial experiences as they began share the parenting. It would appear that, like most separated families, these also

experienced a period of disorganisation and pain. The process of reorganising a family, regardless of the degree of commitment to a mode of custody that sought to minimise disruption and preserve the valuable contribution of each parent, was nonetheless a complex one, during which time most parents experienced some doubt about the validity of the arrangement.

LIVING A SHARED PARENTING ARRANGEMENT¹

Introduction

As noted in Chapter Three, part of the reason for spending time with the families was to get some sense of the everyday in shared parenting. Often the events that occurred while I was with the families provided an opening to discussion about the workings of the arrangement. But for much of the time the family events mirrored events occurring in any family. Given the ages of the children, most interaction took place around meal and bed times, when there were conversations, arguments, fights over dishes, times spent playing games and watching TV together. Some children helped with meal preparation. Others didn't. The amount of conversation between parents and children varied, and was probably in any event affected by my presence. Sam and Keith showed me photo albums of various tramping trips they had done, joked, and decided about the TV programmes they would watch. Lawrence and Kay spent some very happy times playing duets on the piano. Fay read to Tessa once she was in bed. Jim did his homework and then drew very elaborate, detailed spaceship diagrams. Dave, who was working from home, changed out of his 'work clothes' at 5.00 p.m. to signify that he was now available to the children. The Noble and Green children cooked pikelets after their school fair and then did not clear up. Later that evening, Martin took over from the two women who were tired and organised dishes and bed. On the day I visited them, Martin, the two girls and I went for a walk through the girls' old neighbourhood, a walk which provided an opportunity for discussion about who had moved in and out of the area, thus creating a re-identification with the past. Children's and parents' friends came round. Some families ate meals together. In others, mealtimes were a much more diffuse occasion.

I came to feel increasingly that the boundaries between intact and separated families are extremely fluid and that one of the difficulties facing separated families is the ease with which behaviour, unremarked in intact families, is accorded problem status after separation. While there were moments peculiar to a shared parenting arrangement, such as the transitions between households which had become routinized, the periods of tension or stress² which these families experienced during my contact with them are, after all, common to intact family structures, although the content might be different. Furthermore, many of the issues about which parents spoke seemed, impressionistically, to be the sorts

¹ This chapter and the following three - the chapters dealing with the parental relationships, the financial arrangements and the accounts of the children all deal with different aspects of the everyday experience of shared parenting. The divisions are in one sense artificial, since each chapter informs the others, but necessary in view of the bulk of the material.

² For details of these events, see Appendix 1. I am using here the definition of stress which is used by Ahrons & Rodgers, (1987, pp. 44 - 46), who quote McCubbin & Patterson to the effect that a stress event is an event or transition capable of producing change in a family system, whereas a crisis is an event where the family is unable to restore stability and experiences continuing pressures to make changes. A stress event, however, may never reach crisis proportions.

of issues which all families have to confront, but which, because of the separation and the sharing, shared parenting families may have to deal with more directly. Reciprocally, the common assumption in research on the family that parents in intact families operate as a single working unit obscures the likelihood that those parents experience as many differences in values and styles of parenting as parents in shared parenting arrangements.

Unsurprisingly, there were variations in family style between families and within family units. Fay placed great emphasis on bedtimes as a significant time of interaction with Tessa but in Ross's house going to bed was much more of a matter-of-fact occasion. Stephen always went in to say good night to Jim once he was in bed, whereas Patty said her goodnights earlier. Knowledge of the lives of the children while they were with the other parent differed, and sometimes was a subject of comment. Expectations about the extent of help that children might be expected to give around the house varied between families and were not always consistent within the households of the two ex-partners. In at least four instances, where the mothers spoke of attempts to get the children to take some responsibility as a routine matter, the fathers had lower expectations, and did not follow through as rigorously as the mothers on their requests for help, or simply did not ask the children to help at all. Equally, expectations about behaviour and manners differed, a point on which Fay jokingly commented in a different vein when she told Tessa that a sore incurred at Campbell St. could not keep her awake in Lancaster St.

It was easy to assume that matters like interpersonal adult trust, differences in ex-partners' styles, and the sudden increases in tension associated with the arrival of, or a phone call from, one parent were peculiar to a separated family, and to suppose that they would not arise in an intact family. I found I was ready initially to assume that shared parenting families would deviate from intact families in such areas as parenting styles, discipline and expectations but on further reflection, this assumption seemed unjustified. As a consequence of spending the time I did with the respondents, I found myself asking more questions not so much about the everyday in shared parenting families, but whether many of the interpersonal and practical issues with which the shared parenting families had to contend are also significant in intact families.

The families' routines

Routines in a shared parenting family, as much as in an intact family, are of immediate practical value, and the literature on shared parenting quite rightly notes the importance of having clear, well-established patterns around changeover times as a means of giving stability to children and parents alike. It also became apparent from my research that routinized arrangements reduced possible points of friction in families where there was still a relatively high level of parental hostility. Although a clear knowledge by all concerned about the day on which the transition to the other parent was to take place, and how this was to be accomplished, was the most obvious of the routines that had to be established, parents had to define who was responsible for what. In intact families these areas are more likely to be either taken for granted or are irrelevant.

By the time that I interviewed them, most of the families had had a shared parenting arrangement for over two years, and family routines were settled. It has been suggested that parents should take specific responsibility for certain areas of life, in order to avoid conflict³. However, none of the families operated in this way because of the impossibility of compartmentalising situations. Although most parents did not rely on each other for day-to-day help and each house operated as a discrete unit, there were points of overlap. Parents shared costs of more expensive birthday and Christmas presents, but the actual celebration was by no means always a joint affair. The tendency was for the parent with whom the child was on the day of the birthday to provide the occasion. Whether the other parent came to the celebration depended on the parental relationship. On Christmas Day the children generally alternated between households, but sometimes the day would be celebrated jointly. Summer holiday times were shared out, with only the Nobles taking joint holidays. In one family, part of the power play between the parents was expressed by one parent stalling on telling the other of his plans, so that the latter felt unable to make firm plans.

Interestingly, in view of the difficulties many families experience around after-school care, illness and school holidays, little was said about the division of responsibility, although in most instances the women were no longer automatically able to provide the care. Sometimes, though, the women continued to assume primary responsibility for some areas. Jane had continued to take the children to the doctor, with the result that Dave did not feel that he was as conversant as he wished to be with this aspect of the children's lives. Stephen said that whichever parent Jim was with took time off work if Jim was ill, but that he (Stephen) tended not to ask too closely about ill-health. Michelle and Lawrence had a flexible arrangement if Kay was ill, but had had a period when both had gone together to the doctor about Kay's asthma, since communication lines had become confused, and information was inadequately relayed. Anna and Susan obviously took full responsibility for illness and after-school care, since Martin was too far away, but he would at times take the children for part of the May or August school holidays. Isa depended on her parents who lived close by for after-school care, and Dave and Jane, and Fay employed child-minders after school, and for some holiday care. Cornelia and Simon always went to their mother's place after school, and played with friends until she came home from work or Charles picked them up at a pre-arranged time.

Except for Patty and Stephen, there was little reciprocation over child-minding during evenings. Lawrence and Michelle had certainly helped each other out in the past but, by the time I interviewed them, Michelle, in recognition of Lawrence's impending departure overseas was increasingly turning to alternative arrangements. The commonly accepted principle seemed to be that each parent had to make their own arrangements. Isa made a point of saying that she had expressly resolved *not* to child-mind for Luke. She

³ Rhonda Prichard, personal communication.

had begun by doing so but then felt guilty if she turned down a request, and at the same time resentful and wary of being used. She decided that helping out merely perpetuated old roles and expectations about her availability. On the other hand, Fay wanted to be asked first if Ross wanted a child-minder for Tessa, and had also offered to child-mind Paul.

There was a generally expressed belief that the geographical proximity of the two homes was significant in facilitating the movement between the homes (the children, though, tended not to visit the parent with whom they were currently not living) and helped in maintaining a continuity of neighbourhood. Isa noted that the significance of a shared neighbourhood was brought home to her when it seemed as though Luke might have had to buy a house some distance away. This would have had the effect of complicating the transitions, as well as taking the children out of the area with which they were extremely familiar, and reducing the amount of practical day to day assistance that members of her family were able to render. Only two families (excluding the Nobles, who lived too far away for a more regular sharing arrangement to be possible) either had lived, or still did live some distance from each other. Charles in particular saw his geographical distance (about sixteen kilometres) as posing an increasing problem, as Cornelia was wanting to spend more weekend time with her friends, who lived close to her mother's house. At the time of the first interviews, he was attempting to sell his house with the intention of buying closer to the area in which Mary lived. Stephen and Patty had had a period when they had lived some distance from each other and Jim had commuted between the homes by bus. More recently, they had both bought homes in neighbouring suburbs, and Jim cycled between them. While acknowledging that their arrangement would not work if they lived at opposite ends of the city, their feeling that some distance between the homes was not necessarily a problem may have been because they had managed a greater distance and Jim was generally responsible for getting himself from one to the other.

The actual changeover between houses appeared to be accomplished with a minimum of fuss or difficulty. The children in two of the families went to school from one house on the Monday morning with a small bag of clothing, and went from school to the other home. Kay did the same thing on the Fridays that she went to Lawrence's. In these three instances the parents took responsibility for delivering a larger quantity of clothing, and animals (who moved with the children in two families) at some stage in the day⁴. Tessa was dropped off to the other parent on Sunday evenings; Charles collected the children from Mary's. Jim biked to whatever parent he was due to be with. In two instances, the frequency of changeover had been determined partly by practical considerations, such as Dave's working patterns (he worked out of Wellington every second week), and, in the Thomson/Jones family, because Tessa was a toddler, and initially needed more frequent contact with each parent. Four of the families saw the week

⁴ Isa said she was surprised to find how important their dog was in providing the children with a constant presence in both homes. Unlike the parents, the dog was always there.

as a sensible period of time around which to organise the moves, (it was, Isa thought, part of a natural cycle), and most thought that a longer period without the children would be too difficult for the children and for themselves. In contrast to these parents, however, Keith and Maree felt that a three month period with each parent (with a weekly overnight stay to the currently non-residential parent) would give Sam more stability. All three members of the Cooper/Pearson family valued their daily transition arrangement because they described it as allowing them to see more of each other, a comment which seemed initially puzzling since quantitatively a weekly transfer would have given the same number of hours of association. The difference seemed to lie in the fact that although the daily transfer imposed a greater constraint on the adult lives than a weekly one would have done, they all maintained the rhythm of association which reduced significantly the feeling of discontinuity, and the loss of information about the children, of which other parents spoke.

In some families there was a phone call to confirm the changeover. Luke and Isa contacted each other shortly before the transfer, and sometimes used the time of the transfer to talk together since they did not have any time put aside on a regular basis for this:

before the children go, like on Sunday night or Monday morning, I ring and check that, "OK everything's fine. Coming tomorrow", umm . . . (. . .) We usually make contact with each other on or around that time of the swap. It's not something we said that we would do. I mean, I just wouldn't send them off to school and assume that Luke's gonna (. . .) be there.

AO: Having not heard from him all week?

IM: Right. As I wouldn't have let Diana or Isac go off and play with their friends without checking with the parents first. It's part of, you know, part of passing your kids on. I do the same with Mum and Dad, whatever. So . . . that's a regular kind of thing. It's a kind of unspoken essential really. But we haven't spent - said anything - unless something happens, and it is usually by phone rather than us putting some time aside. It, it is usually a phone conversation, um, or if, if we actually see one another in the handing over of the clothes, like, up at the swimming or, for example, me taking the clothes to him or him bringing the clothes to me . . . then we often - I, I might walk up to the car with him and talk about things . . . (2nd Interview).

But Mary and Charles assumed the arrangement to be a 'standing arrangement' and no contact was made. Martin said that there were no 'rigid expectations' about the frequency of his visits, and concerts or dinner arrangements would at times take priority.

The point where the routine was most vulnerable and caused the most difficulty - a point made by the children as well as the adults - was in packing the clothing and delivering back a full complement to the other parent. Clothing did not always get returned on time. No family maintained a full set of alternative clothing in each house because of cost (although this had happened with Tessa when she was small) and the omission of parkas or jerseys could cause a major upset, especially when the adult relationship was fraught. In light of the tension that at times surrounded forgetfulness, it was interesting that no parents used checklists (they said they didn't work), and that there was no fixed procedure in each family except Jim's about who was responsible for ensuring that clothing got back. Some parents made the assumption that the child was responsible, and

that accepting this responsibility for one's own possessions was part of a maturing process, but within this approach there were variations as to the extent of final checking that each adult would do. In recounting an incident when Tessa's parka had been left behind, Fay implied that she helped Tessa more than Ross did with the packing, and in the incident discussed below tried to reassure Tessa by saying that she, Fay, did not expect her to take the full responsibility for the forgotten parka⁵:

I'll give you an instance from today. . . is the endless, endless talk about transferring clothing from one house to the other. Right?

AO: I understood that she had one set of clothing here and one set of clothing there.

FJ: On paper. But both the rainwear are now down at Ross's place. So today at 10 past 12, I broke into Ross's house through a window in order to get her parka . . because . . umm . . . it was pissing with rain, and she went off to school today in a jacket of mine and, and a woolly hat. She had no - I mean she has got a parka jacket and an oilskin parka and neither of them came back on Sunday. Neither of them came back the Sunday before . . Now, if you're in 22 degrees, and it looks like you are going to have a clear week - now I can understand that you forget to bring the parka and the gumboots, but it is spring time and what have you. So I . . worried about that at work . . all morning and decided at lunch time to go up to Ross's place and get the parka so that at least she could get back to the (child-minder's) place after school. I got there. There was no-one there. So I broke in (. . .) But, that is just one example of the time it took me to go there and pick up the parka, which is no sweat, and, umm . . is not the cost. It's the emotional cost. The emotional cost was getting *cross* here this morning because we had no parka and Tessa saying, "It's my fault, Mummy". And I'm, saying, "It's not your fault, Tessa. It's spring time *and we should remember to bring the parka* from one room to the other. . one house to the other". And Tessa says, "No, it's my fault. I'm responsible for packing my bag". And I'm saying, "Dad should check". So I got all upset, went to work upset, thought about it all morning, while I'm meant to be doing other things and then thought, "Stuff it! Action", and got into the car, *tore* up there, broke into the house, got the parka, went to school, gave her the parka -

AO: And it fined up!

FJ: Yeah. Now, in terms of emotional energy of maintaining a relationship with Ross, I could have tracked him down on his answer phone and said, "*You* go home and pick up this parka, and deliver it", but you think, "No, you do it yourself". . . . I, I mean, it actually, maintaining an equilibrium is more important than saying, "This is your responsibility and this is mine". And it takes, it takes up more of your life than the outsider would see, coming in (1st Interview).

Isa decided that her contribution to easing the tensions of the packing and unpacking would be to pack the clothing, but to take no responsibility for books and toys. The consequence was that she found herself getting flack from Diana for not packing the right clothes, and the non-reappearance of the toys back at Luke's became quite an issue. The one family where packing was definitively and unquestionably the child's responsibility was the Cooper/Pearons, and this in some way appeared linked to Jim's central role in the decision making about the arrangement. There were, however, constant references to his forgetfulness, the inconvenience that this occasioned, and the efforts made to ensure that he did think to take all that he would need that day - sports equipment for after-school activities and completed homework being the most frequently forgotten items.

⁵ In an untaped conversation at the end of the third interview with Ross and Liz, Liz became quite dogmatic over the issue of forgotten clothing, saying that she felt that both Ross and Fay were too casual about it, that they could all do better, and that more effort ought to be put in to achieving this because of the problems that it caused. She and Ross also considered that more attention ought to be paid to Tessa's wishes about clothing.

There were three families where there were either very few or no comments about packing. The Ashby/Bradleys lived very close to each other, and Jane called in most days to see the children, so that anything that either she or Dave had forgotten to include could be dropped off. Michelle helped Kay with her packing, thought that Lawrence probably did not, but said she was not upset if things did not immediately reappear; and the Blacks did not mention the issue at all - possibly because with a three month move and an older child it was less likely that small but necessary items would be left behind.

At times, the routines needed to be changed. The ease with which changes were able to be discussed often reflected the state of the parental relationship, but the actual ease with which the proposed changes could be effected might also depend on other factors. For example, Isa noted that Diana was particularly upset at any change that she had not been told of well in advance (and even expected changes were traumatic for a time), so they tried to avoid any alterations to the routines. The family whose routine changed most often was the Cooper/Pearsons. Stephen thought that at one time their communication broke down, ironically because the arrangement was working well. He believed that the adults for a time had failed to put sufficient energy into clarifying changes because it was easy to assume that all parties knew what was expected. They all were tending to see the transitions as no longer needing consideration. John said, 'But it, it's like - family habits are something that nobody queries because they just happen'. The result, however, was that arrangements did get confused for a time, and Jim would appear at the wrong house, much to his chagrin and their embarrassment. Stephen said:

I, I have felt more you know, umm, I am happy with it at the moment, but I did go through a period about a year ago when I was starting to feel that it was a bit . . . just . . . what's the word? Disjointed? Yeah, well, I think, sort of, the arrangement broke down a bit, and umm . . . Often I wasn't quite - Jim would turn up and I wasn't quite . . . expecting him. .

AO: So what did you think that-

SC: I think that that was Patty and I - Our communication broke down. She would make certain assumptions about what nights he was coming and I would have different assumptions.

AO: Was there a particular reason for that happening? Because it had been going along for several years without any breakdown, and then suddenly after quite a period there was a bit of a breakdown. So what led to that? What led to the fact that your assumptions were no longer being discussed?

SC: Umm, well if something came up like . . . like I was going out or Patty was going out, and so he would be at one place say 2 - 3 nights in a row . . . umm, and there was this . . . a, a matter of working out, "OK, that's happened so . . . does Jim spend - do we go back to the normal day by day arrangement or does he come for the next - which night does he come"?

AO: Right. So you might make an assumption that he would go for 3 nights but she might make the assumption that he would continue to alternate?

SC: Yeah. Or it might have been the other way round. But, whatever. And I don't think that we discussed those things often enough.

AO: Because there was a period of difficulty in your own relationship with Patty? (Ahh . . .) Or, I suppose what I am trying to understand, if things - it sounded as though things had been going smoothly for a number of years, and then about a year ago there was this period of difficulty (Mm) and I am wondering what created the period of difficulty whereby it was difficult or whereby neither of you got around to clarifying what was happening?

SC: Actually . . . to be honest, I think it was more 'cos I am actually quite easy going about it but . . . umm . . . I think that John was actually beginning to find it more upsetting than I was, and that in turn made me upset, or made me - well not 'upset'. That is too strong a word but made me more concerned about it than - I dunno - than I would have been.

AO: Can you say a bit more about what was upsetting to John?

SC: Well, basically, this unclearness . . . um, as I say, I, whether Jim is here or not, that doesn't sort of - if I am here, it doesn't sort of matter. I mean, it's nice or . . . whatever. But umm . . . I think that John likes . . . to have it more clear what, what's happening.

AO: Mmm. How do you understand that? His need for clarity.

SC: How do I understand it? (Mmm) . . . Oh, he's basically more organised than I am, I think . . .

AO: So it is a temperamental issue? (Yes) (*Laughter*) Is that how you see it? (Yes) Mmm . . . How did Jim handle the changes then . . . that weren't totally expected? If he turned up to one of you, and found that he was meant to be at the other, or . . . if he came here and you weren't expecting him?

SC: He was quite upset actually. And I feel a bit bad about it too. (Mmm) It is, "Oh, you're not meant to be here". I mean, it hasn't happened very often, but it has a few times-

AO: You feel a bit awful about it?

SC: Well sometimes he has forgotten himself. It has been arranged and he has been told, but he has just forgotten (1st Interview).

In the context of parental plans and children's arrivals, Lawrence made an interesting point. Part of the on-going dispute between himself and Michelle was whether one parent should act as the primary parent and the other have access to Kay, and she to her/him whenever desired. Lawrence, who had realised by the time I interviewed him that Michelle would become the primary parent, pointed out that the very open-ended arrangement that Michelle proposed (where Kay could just drop in) would not work because the non-primary parent would not necessarily be in a position to welcome Kay when she arrived. The result would be, he believed, a sense of frustration and feelings of guilt.

As Rachel and Joanna became more established in their new community the Noble family gradually altered the arrangement whereby the girls were to spend a regular weekend in Wellington. The time with Martin was intended to give him and the children time together and to give the two women a rest. But, as Susan noted

But the children really don't like going to Wellington . . . terribly much. So -

AN: Their life is so established here that they see Wellington almost as an interruption to the flow. Once they get down there, they are fine . . . It's not necessarily to do with Daddy . . . it's to do with the fact that their life here is interrupted and the things they want to get on with . . .

AO: Is broken into?

AN: Is broken into (. . .) I mean, last year . . . we had sort of adopted . . . a umm, a pattern of sending them - well, I tried to get my kids down there at least once a month . . . but he mostly comes up here.

SG: Over the winter it doesn't work so well because my, our kids have sport.

AO: But what are you trying to achieve, what are you trying to meet by sending them down once a month?

SG: Oh, our needs.

AN: More our needs really, And also I have tried to encourage my kids to keep up links with other friends in Wellington . . . umm . . .

SG: I think invariably that if we gave any of the children choice, they would rather stay here . . . which is not a vote against Martin. It's a vote about their staying here. (. . .)

AN: I don't see it as a (. . .) problem. I think I see it as something that I am going to have to watch (1st Interview).

Later she said that it was up to the girls as well as the adults to make an effort to maintain family links.

During the period that I was interviewing them three of the families altered their normal routine to cover for a parent's absence and, just prior to my interviewing, Isa and Peter had had the children continuously for six weeks to allow Luke to travel out of Wellington to take up a short term contract. Those mothers involved in the longer periods

of care particularly noted that the longer period with the children was rewarding in a number of ways. Isa saw the time as 'much *calmer*'. Mary identified it as an opportunity to improve her skills as a parent, and regarded as a significant bonus the temporary suspension of the continual adjustment to the comings and goings. Nonetheless, she thought that a routine where the children stayed for a longer period with each adult would have its drawbacks:

MT: I have had the children all this time . . . and . . .

AO: How has that been?

MT: Which has been quite a long stretch. Yeah. I've thoroughly loved it, umm . . . just thoroughly enjoyed their company and you know, the way we have . . . worked out together and umm . . . you know, that's been quite nice (*laughs*).

AO: So they have been something of a compensation for a lot of things?

MT: Yes. Which have been going on. Yes. And, umm, you know, I think - it is one of those things, you know, where I get the children in fairly longish stretches - it doesn't happen all that often and, umm, you know, I can compare this time to other ones, say when they were younger in different situations and, umm . . . you know, I just feel now, umm . . . yes, it's sort of - I think what happens when you have your children for a longer stretch, you start to feel a little more confident as a parent, in a fuller context, than umm, you do -

AO: Can you say a bit more about that?

MT: Yes, because, it really tests your parenting skills, umm, over a longer period of time, as a solo parent through, umm, good times, at least in my case. I have had some lowish times. Umm . . . you know, good weather, bad weather, their ups and downs, umm, you know a whole lot of friends in or not, umm . . . you know, and I just feel, umm, how nice - how lovely it is, instead of 4 days here, you are anticipating already gearing up . . . for 4 days without them . . . yes . . . and, and it's sort of much more fragmented . . . pattern.

AO: Do you notice changes in them?

MT: Yes. Yes. Because ahh . . . umm, I have had this longer exposure to them as they get older, and also when they know that they are just going to be *with me* for a longer time, umm, we seem to all work in better, all pull our weight . . . you know, as a household better . . . so I find them a little bit more cooperative, a wee bit more . . . thoughtful ahh . . . you know . . . been . . . when everybody's more or less on the hop.

AO: Mmm. Have you ever thought of . . . ?

MT: A relaxation. Yes. There is a lack of tension somehow.

AO: Because they are not - I mean 4 days is - it still leaves them on the point of moving, doesn't it?

MT: Yes. Or re-adjusting to coming back, even if it's only a very minor thing, they, they still have got to make it. We all do. Yeah.

AO: Have you ever thought of attempting to look at the possibility of what it would mean for you if you were, for both of you in fact, if you were to have the children regularly for a longer period?

MT: No. I hadn't thought of it, Anne, *because* . . . umm . . . you know, I feel in some ways, a wee bit of a sense of mystery of what Charles' future moves will be . . . now I just sort of feel, umm, you know, perhaps wrongly, but I feel that he could be doing one of a number of things in the future. I feel that ahh, I will be fairly much staying put, but he'll be . . . umm, it's not quite so easy to anticipate what he will be doing. Maybe a bit more . . . ahh, movement at that end, but no. It hadn't occurred to me to suggest that. I don't think I would like that. I'd sooner . . . sooner have . . . ahh . . . smaller, but more frequently.

AO: Yeah, than the longer times without them.

MT: Yeah. And I think that that would be too tough for them too, you know, it must be . . . it would make it too mu - an even stronger demarcation line, I would think. I think that they would be - well, I know that his . . . house must operate differently to mine . . . and umm, I think that it would make, you know . . .

AO: So that there would be too much of a contrast?

MT: Yeah. I think that there would be. Really. For them to either look back on or look ahead to. You know, for moving over.

She went on to comment on how she felt about the brief, consecutive four days with the children before they moved again back to Charles and her response to that:

Well, you are gearing yourself up for loss all the time . . . it's, as I say, this time it has been very relaxed because we have known that it won't be . . . you know, that it will go on for quite a while by *our standards (laughing)*.

AO: Quite. But what does it feel like - the fact that you were saying that tomorrow they might not be here, they might be going across to Charles'?

MT: Now, oh, they seem OK. They seem OK. But I am getting - my only concern is . . . me. I am going to miss them. Yeah.

AO: How will you deal with that?

MT: Ummm . . . well, you know, as I think I mentioned last time, I have reached the stage now, where I am looking more out again . . . umm, started to get involved in a coupla things . . . umm . . . so even if I am not going to be involved over the next few days, I am . . . something is coming up or other . . . umm . . . and you know, forewarned is forearmed, I think . . . and I will use tomorrow to do a bit of, to bring a bit of work home . . . from work that I could have done any night over the last few nights, you know, but I will bring it home tomorrow night . . . (3rd Interview).

The fact that the children were seen as being more settled with the longer period with one parent suggests that even when the arrangement is working smoothly, it nonetheless imposes some sense of strain. What is also interesting is the implication that the parents have become acclimatised to the slightly more difficult behaviour and the fragmentations, and are generally unaware of them as such until the situation changes and a different vantage point becomes available. Yet there was a general consensus among these parents that a regular longer period with the children was not wanted. Dave said slightly sadly:

I must admit that it's usually . . . by the time that it's time for them to move, they are usually just getting into doing all sorts of nice things.

AO: Does that make you think at all of extending the arrangement so that they are here for a two week, rather than a one week?

DB: No. I think that it makes you get too used to it somehow (2nd Interview).

Luke and Isa both echoed this conclusion feeling that they would miss the children more after a longer period with them.

Routines were valuable because they set patterns and helped form expectations. Whereas the established routines, however, can be read as providing a type of security which all of the families could take for granted (everyone knew that the other parent would return the children and the children were familiar with the routine), the transitions themselves were nonetheless experienced as emotional events by some parents, and by others as requiring some readjustment for themselves and for the children.

Transitions

It was clear from what I observed of the points of transition in three of the families, and from comments made by parents in four others that the smooth organisation did not prevent the event from having its emotional side for the children and adults, as Dave's comment above suggests. Michelle spoke of Kay's slightly more difficult and weepy behaviour as the transition approached; Isa, of Diana's statements at various times that she wanted to stay at her father's because of his proximity to her close friends, and of her earlier tantrums if arrangements were altered; Patty, of the initial readjustment demanded of Jim if he stayed a longer time with his father because of the different requirements in the

two homes, especially in regard to housework, and her irritation at the way that he would seem to 'slow down'; Mary, of the children's initial tension on their return to her, although much diminished from what it had been. Liz raised another point about the transition:

LS: is her life just a series of starts and stops? . . . I don't know quite how to say it . . .

AO: Whereas if she was just in one - (Yeah) Well, how would you try and, and conceptualise Paul's life or the life of a child in 'the intact family'? Umm, would you see that in any respects as having it's own stops and starts or . . . because these ones are so *dramatic* (Mmm) in that they involve such, well, complete removal?

LS: Ummm, the things like - I might be talking about something with her during the week, umm . . . she often approaches things in a roundabout way . . . and it often might be something that she's worried about . . . and it comes out slowly and gradually and often I don't pick up on it, but I know that when I have been talking with her about something that she's been on about, and sort of chatting, and sometimes things become more clear [later]. "Oh, is that what she's been on about all week"!, and suddenly she's not there. There's another week . . . and so it's not carried through or . . . (. . .) Might not be a conclusion, y'know . It's hard to . . . because you don't actually think about it at the time . . . how much that sort of thing goes on.

AO: Where she says something but no-one quite picks it up and she moves on and when she comes back it's been forgotten, it's no longer quite relevant - yeah.

LS: Right. And it would sort of be it's the sort of things that happen and it would sort of be, umm . . . ohh it wouldn't be an obvious . . . thing to hurry it up or . . . things that you wouldn't normally think about with people in the house all the time (. . .) I just wonder how much of that goes on in her life how much that pattern is there. (. . .) Your mind is only half on, and she, and she talks so much any way. If she's there, *she's THERE* (laughs). And chatting an' a lot of it, average kid's drivel, about how many bites it took to eat the apple at playtime, and *boring* sort of (laughing) and you tune out to half of it anyway . . . umm . . . but there's probably things that I miss and don't pick up but if there was a sort of carry through . . . It must happen with Fay as well . . . but . . . but there would be a resolution to the whole - it's how important it is. I wonder about that. Umm is that a disadvantage? (2nd Interview).

The night prior to the changeover Sam and Keith were initially non-committal to me on my arrival and irritable with each other, in marked contrast to their mode of interaction of the previous week. Keith later remarked that the transition was not an easy time for him. Out of all the adults in the study he appeared most affected by the actual transition itself for a number of reasons, some of which are mentioned in the section of text quoted below - the extra importance that Sam assumed as the child who made the most effort to keep in touch during the early stages of the separation; the 'anniversary' nature of the event; his lack of trust of Maree, and his concern that she would not exercise proper control; guilt at the lack of provision of that idealised object, the good two parent home; recognition that by the time Sam came back, he would be changed, itself a foreshadowing of the fact that sooner or later Sam would leave home; and awareness that by the time Sam was due back again, a further readjustment of Keith's life style would be demanded. In talking about these issues, Keith employed a range of tones, representing a number of very different moods:

KB: y'see, the kids have become *incredibly* important, much more important -

AO: Since the marriage broke up?

KB: Yeah.

AO: Because he's almost become as another . . . mate?

KB: Yeah. Definitely. That'd be exactly what it is. It's, it is very much like a mate and they become Sam . . . I used to call him the 'landlady' . . . umm . . . because he's the, he's the fussy one. He's much better at keeping things tidy than I am. He's marvellous. We'd become a little, a little *unit* y'know, umm . . . a pair . . .

AO: And suddenly with the three months up, that's broken?

KB: That's exactly right and it's like another little separation and I s'pose subconsciously that there is a tinsey little . . . tinge of horror that must get prodded again. It's like poking a bliming [sore].

AO: The horror of the original separation?

KB: Dead right. Y'know, and you don't want to be separated . . . from people that you love. I mean, common sense says, "OK, he's only down there. I can go and see him *whenever* I like. I can ring up his Mum and say, "DO you mind if Sam comes down, if he wants to come down"? No, there'd be *no* restrictions whatsoever, that is all a thing of the past. We just . . . have no restrictions whatsoever on each other's access to the guy, and umm . . . no, that is actually getting better (. . .) ummm, but for all that, when he does go back to his Mum's . . . umm . . . there is that, there is just that little thing, that is just a little reminder . . . that separations are painful and can be dreadfully painful. In this case they aren't - it's not dreadfully painful but it's just uncomfortable for a day or two . . . And then of course by the end of the 3 months you've got back into a pretty swingy sort of life-style and . . . y'know, we do have the best of both worlds and we can be . . . pretty, pretty, umm . . . carefree, umm, pleasing ourselves sort of existence because we have no other responsibilities except to ourselves for those three months . . . It's a definite once a week -

AO: You mean when Sam comes here?

KB: Yup. And so by the end of the 3 months, you're thinking to yourself, "Oh blast it. I don't know whether I want to, to umm, go back to the fairly . . . puritanical (*laughs*) discipline, much more disciplined, umm life style that is required and dictated by the fact that Sam is going to be here" (3rd Interview).

Only two of the parents said specifically that they felt that there was little in the way of a transition phenomenon for them. Maree thought that she did not experience any readjustment since she always saw Sam at least once a week when he was with his father. Stephen said that he was not in some senses aware of Jim's absence, 'Because . . . I mean, it never seems strange when Jim isn't here because . . . you know, he's gonna be here the next night'. Luke echoed the same sentiment at one point. He too saw the children each day when they were with Isa as they came past to go to Isa's parents after school. But later he said that he found the children's departure difficult to deal with and had evolved a system whereby he retained some clothes that needed washing, so that he could then put them away in the children's drawers, thus symbolically holding the children in the home.

Although Anna felt that she had to gauge Martin's mood on his arrival at the house, Martin described the transition as easy. Arriving on a Friday night meant there was more of a fuss made of him. Arriving on a Saturday morning, he would find the day already in full swing and he just fitted in around what was going on, a situation in which he described himself as 'feeling fine'. However, as with Keith's quote, a number of different tones and contradictory perceptions can be identified. There was a veiled reference to his being on the periphery of the family (people were already gone). Yet the fact that they felt free to go indicated the way that his arrival was taken for granted, and paradoxically confirmed his membership of the family. His arrival was an expected event, so he just slotted in and became immediately involved. But equally he referred to his 'outsider' status and the changing nature of his role and position in the family:

MN: Because things have already started and you know that things have already started by 8.00, or by 9.00 or 10.00 in the morning, so that generally there is pretty much early rising in summer . . . that's the way. There are 6 people there. Most would get on with their own lives, interacting and doing in various ways, children to adults, children to children, adults to children . . . as I say, some people might not even be there by the time that you arrive. You might just . . . be there and immediately get thrown into something. It might be a confrontation. It might be settling a children's dispute . . . it might be . . . getting a load of manure for the garden or whatever. You might be thrown in immediately. You might arrive and be lucky

to have a late breakfast . . . it doesn't feel strange. It is incidental in a sense . . . it suddenly hits you. You've arrived right in the middle of something and you slot in regardless . . . so that can be quite different from when I arrive on a Friday evening. But it's still a good feeling.

AO: Right. So it is very easy just to be incorporated.

MN: To be there. (Yes. Yes.) Because you are going from being your own person straight into the family . . . it is something that I look forward to. Yes.

AO: Mm. Mmm. . . How do the kids see you? (*Martin laughs*)

MN: That is a sore point because for the last 4 years the children have talked about . . . adults being Anna and Susan . . . and Martin - in a sense, you, I have said to them, "Am I am not an adult"? (*laughter*). (. . .) How do they see me? Umm . . . part of an on-going thing, but they must see me as separate because I lead my own life here. Much of my life is lived here after all, under different circumstances and for a long time they saw me as part of the family, yet going away from the family. But more and more they see me as an individual (1st Interview).

The girls' visits to him in Wellington were not entirely straightforward as he and the two mothers appreciated. As time had gone on, Rachel and Joanna had become more conscious of the transition from one home and locality to the other as disruptive of their lives. Martin felt strongly that he had something to offer them and drew attention to the 'holiday atmosphere' that existed when they were with him because pressures changed, but acknowledged that the continuity in their everyday existence was broken and that he was less knowledgeable about their preferred activities:

It's a different ball game . . . rules. Different ball game because I think that things are far more free and easy here because they don't have the home pressures such as they have there.

AO: The home pressures being?

MN: The home pressures being that, that that is where their life is concentrated . . . that's everyday life there. Here it is more of a joy ride . . . (Holiday?) and a holiday . . . it's more of a, a . . . a weekend atmosphere of being a home away from home, there aren't the same pressures. I'm enjoying them . . . basically.

AO: (*laughing*) But?

MN: They have their moments. Umm, it's a different atmosphere. They might see a friend. They might not. We might just go out on a week - an afternoon swim. We might have a barbeque . . . next door. It's more of a . . . but they get very bored. . . umm, because there aren't the same things to do here and they are missing . . . continuity therefore of what things they might be doing there, of what they might be seeing. So they might tend . . . to watch television here, umm I actually find it rather difficult to suss out what activities they do . . . share . . . and actually spend that time . . . constructively together. You, you don't have, you, there is no point in spending your time totally constructively . . . Of course there have to be lulls, rest periods.

AO: But is there pressure to feel that somehow you have to . . . provide activities?

MN: No. I don't. Because I wait until they get to a bored stage. Sometimes they are actually happy . . . to come and be with me . . . and to be with each other and just play their own games . . . for hours on end in another house . . . with, well with - with me, but without me . . .

AO: With you there (With me there. Certainly) but not actually involved?

MN: Yeah. And so I might leave them to their own devices and just go for a swim myself . . . and let them - they don't want to come because they want to play a game or watch television. I'll take an hour and a half out for myself, come home again, and they've either had breakfast in the morning or they've just continued playing their games. They might be terribly bored and then we will do something together . . . ring friends or whatever . . . I generally play it by ear - their time here. Until, often I'll wait until they get to a bored stage . . . before we'll do anything.

AO: Right. And do they make the suggestion about activities? Or is that your role?

MN: It's a shared role. Sometimes they'll do it. Sometimes I'll do it. . . Sometimes . . . I'll suggest something but they don't want to do anything at all. . . it might be the location. They've actually got to go out of the house, down a lot of steps . . . drive out somewhere, umm . . . no. It is very much a shared role, that one . . . so. . . but it is a different ball game here. They tend to treat it as such and I do also (1st Interview).

The necessity of making an adjustment to the continual movement between homes was, even if minimal, remarked on by most parents. Nor were other types of transitional

activity easily managed, and reconstitution, as part of the movement away from the original family to the formation of a new unit, was certainly not an event that the children or adults generally took easily in their stride.

Reconstitution

At the time of interviewing, five out of the sixteen parents were living in reconstituted relationships, and three others had been in another relationship for a period since the separation. It is now widely recognised that reconstituted relationships have stresses peculiar to them. Greif & Simring (1982/1984) note that although the custody structure does have a major effect on the new relationships, the issue of custody has been ignored in the literature on step-parenting. They suggest that joint custody may facilitate the formation of the new relationship as well as reducing some of the tensions associated with such events. In particular, they suggest that the joint custody structure may lead to a diminishment of the child's fear of abandonment by the previously non-custodial parent; that the child is less likely to feel torn by the issue of loyalty for the 'absent' parent; that there is less chance of the 'absent' parent feeling excluded, and more chance of him/her being taken into account by the remarried couple; that parents are less likely to expect the new spouse to take over a parenting role; that men are less likely to be looking for a woman to mother their children, and more likely to be looking for a spouse; and that the blunting of the demands of instant parenthood allows time for the new relationship to evolve under less pressure.

It may be thought that shared parenting by its very nature implies an openness of relationship that could, without too much difficulty, be expanded to include another adult. The accounts given by the parents and partners in the reconstituted relationships imply that the situation is not quite as straightforward as Greif & Simring suggest. Reconstituted relationships which were not exclusory, and which welcomed the contribution of all the adults involved, generally did not seem to have been achieved at the time of the first three interviews except in the families where one or both parents were lesbian or homosexual.

Out of the hypotheses advanced by Greif & Simring only the last appeared to gain support in the context of parents' comments about the difficulties they had faced in this area. Parents stressed the value and importance of the time away from the children as a time when they could put energy into the new relationship, and several hinted that their relationship would not have survived without the break from the children. Isa and Peter were most explicit on this aspect, since Diana and Isac had been difficult and aggressive towards Peter⁶. Although the shared parenting should, theoretically, have assisted adults to avoid feeling excluded or redundant when their ex-partner formed a new relationship, this did not seem to happen. The formation of the new relationship involved the adults (the ones involved in the new relationship, the ex-partner and sometimes her/his new partner)

⁶ Peter spoke of a long period where he would wake up each morning to find that Isac had got into bed with them at some stage during the night, and Isac would turn to his mother and say, "I HATE Peter".

in a process of redefinition of place and position in the family in terms of the adults' relationships to each other, and in the context of the role the newcomer adopted in relation to the children. Such a re-working and expansion of relationships was not easy.

Several parents thought that their ex-partners complicated their new relationship, because of their jealousy or sense of rivalry with the new partner, and Martin, because of his continuing close relationship with Anna, found that the question of whether his loyalties lay with his partner or Anna unclear. 'At times it was a real complication, particularly when things weren't going well {in the country}'. Anna, too, felt at times in the beginning that she was in a balancing act, where Martin's arrivals were unsettling, as she tried to deal with the guilt occasioned by her awareness of his pain and of Susan's and the children's different needs. Nor did the partner who was 'displaced' generally find the situation easy. Their reactions ranged from extreme hostility to the new partner of their ex-spouse, to feelings in one case that the new partner had complicated the issue further by what the mother felt were unhelpful explanations of the children's behaviour, and her hostility to their mother; to attempts to set limits on their ex-partner's new partner's involvement with the children. Two parents spoke directly of the ways they had tried to establish boundaries which would have had the effect of distancing the newcomer's relationship with the child/ren, and which were intended to affirm the parent's special role. At the time when Isa met Peter, the shared parenting idea was beginning to be established as a reality. Although Luke was able to describe the issue as in the past, it had been difficult not to believe at the time that the sheer fact of Peter's presence did not in some way threaten his relationship and particular role with the children:

it's OK {now} and . . . you know, it, it it's a bit of a sensitive sort of area really insofar that umm, it's, it's hard to be specific about what's his job and what's my job, sort of thing, umm . . . but, but . . . I have to be [clear] with him about it, you know. I had to be a little bit emotional about it to maybe get it clear with the children -

AO: That you were still their father?

LR: Well, yeah. Right. That I was the father and that there were . . . there were things . . . for us . . . you know (. . .) that we want to do and that are ours (2nd Interview).

But for Fay, the shared parenting arrangement had been in place for some time before Ross started his relationship with Liz. The events she recounted took place a while ago, but the intensity of her language suggested that an automatic, easy adjustment to Liz's presence was not simple and that for Fay the issue was still open at the time of interviewing:

I struggle to maintain that feeling that others have a right to . . . an equal right to grow up with Tessa as I do . . . but a, a *prime* example is the haircutting. When it gets to the point of irritation, that I can't stand . . . umm . . . my only recollection is that it is only me who gets to this point, rather than the others - both Ross and Liz are much more easy-going than I am . . . then I have it out with them. Now on the haircutting-

AO: (Overlapping) Whose responsibility is the haircutting?

FJ: Well, now, I am. . . On the haircutting thing, Liz . . . is . . . a . . . a home-baked haircutter from way back . . . Right? Ross is . . . one of those blokes from way back who thinks it's a waste of money and a waste of time to go to a hairdresser, so if he can find someone who can wield a pair of scissors, you let them have a go. You do it, you see. Now, that's fine. I'm the sort of person who goes to a hairdresser. He's

the sort of person who doesn't. Fine. *But* . . . (. . .) when my child comes back to me, and this happened time and time again, some years ago . . . without *any* consultation, with her hair cut *radically* different like that short all over, when before she had her hair down to here and she just turned up as this different child. "Guess what? Liz gave me a haircut!". I mean, I let this happen a few times and then . . . what *really* turned it around was one day when Ross said to me, "It's time that kid had a haircut. She's looking really scrappy". And I said, "Well, that's because she's trying to grow out this *tacky* old haircut that she - that somebody gave her", sort of thing. I summoned up the courage, because that's what it took, because I was struggling with myself, you know, "Am I being pathetic about this and really sort of regimentary, or does it really matter what she looks like, and we are saving money and Liz's enjoying cutting her hair and Tessa doesn't mind? It's *only* me who minds". I struggled with that and I really finally came to the point that it's my bloody right as a mother to know when my kid's hair is gonna be cut or not (*chuckles*), and I rang Ross up from Whitianga, in fact, when he had *delivered* me this child with this *tacky* haircut and, umm, I said, "I am so interested in the way that Tessa's hair is cut that I am prepared not only to pay for it but to take responsibility to keep it neat and tidy according to your wishes . . . and I ask you, please, to ask Liz *not* to cut my daughter's hair". And I never, ever talked to Liz about it but it was - I also said to Tessa, "I would like, if Liz is doing a round of hair cutting in, in the family, I'd like you to say, Tessa, please, that, 'Mum will see that my hair is cut'". And Liz . . . didn't demur . . . at all. We *never* talked about it. They probably laughed and joked . . . down there . . . didn't - I don't give a damn about that. The fact is that I got back control of my . . . kid's haircut. Now, Ross came to me . . . about 3 week's ago - well, brought Tessa back, and said, "About time for a haircut, too. She's looking a bit scrappy, isn't she?" It's now accepted that it's - I said, "You're dead right". It's up to me to find the time, to find the money and get her hair cut for her, because I said that I wanted to get it cut properly. And he said, "*Fine* . I think you're mad. You're spending a lot of money. Nothing wrong with Liz's haircut. But if that is the way you feel, you do it".

AO: How has it been for you to . . . to

FJ: I felt it real, I really (*laughing*) I *really felt* she was trampling on my rights as a mother, that I would get this child back who looked different from the child I had sent away. And no-body had consulted me! Time and time again! (1st Interview).

Liz felt in retrospect that she had been insufficiently sensitive to Fay's feelings of displacement, and that events such as the above clearly indicated the strength of Fay's feelings. Liz' response was to withdraw somewhat from the situation, and make it clear to Tessa that she was to call her by her Christian name, and not 'Mum'. She found the situation difficult because she felt that she had not got 'into this possessive thing as a mother possessing a particular kid', and neither she nor Ross subscribed to the view that the biological parent should take precedence, although Ross qualified his stance by saying that his position as a biological parent had never been questioned since Fay had not had another partner.

The families where the reconstitutions seemed to be most easily accepted by adults and children were the Nobles (where the situation was not without its problems), and the Cooper/Pearsons. Martin was well aware that Susan's active presence in the family placed him in a peripheral role, which was easier for him to accept because of his long association with, and high regard for Susan:

they see me now, not so much as Daddy, as how did we term it?

AO: Martin? . . . Peripheral?

MN: Yes. Peripheral. As a friend (. . .) as part of their overall concept, but not necessarily - you see, they don't depend on me so much, because in the sense that there are two on-going parents there. I mean . . . I see them differently, and they see me differently (1st Interview).

The issues for the Cooper/Pearsons were slightly different. Their and their partners' comments focussed not an anxiety about exclusion, but on what was the appropriate role for John and Tom to play. This shared concern was given particular piquancy since all

four adults mentioned their belief that Jim, as an only child now had too many parents breathing down his neck. Within each couple, the difference in parenting styles and general approach to Jim created some tensions. Tom's theory of 'wallop' as a means to command immediate attention did not go down well with Patty, who felt that talking through a situation and making allowances was a more effective, long term method. John and Stephen also commented on John's higher level of expectation in relation to Jim's behaviour, and Stephen, feeling slightly pushed by John to be more determined with Jim about, for example, his expectations, was trying to insist more on Jim's help, although this was not something that he would have done if left to his own devices:

SC: I think that John is the stronger. Yes. He has a much clearer idea about what should and shouldn't happen than I do. (. . .) I would prefer to do it {the insisting} with me, rather than John, though I mean . . . I mean, John and I have discussed this and, umm we feel that it is much healthier if John does come out and say what is on his mind. I mean, we are all part of the same household, so we might as well go ahead and say it, rather than just hold back and feel resentful or whatever. That I am not doing the telling because I don't necessarily feel what John says or feels. But . . . it is working OK I think I mean Jim tends to be more resentful of what John tells but he does it (. . .) It seems quite a tricky one. I didn't sort of . . . anticipate it quite as . . . I mean, not that it's been . . . really bad, you know . . . they don't get along as well as I thought they might . . . (1st Interview).

John, who wanted greater clarity than Stephen about when Jim was or was not going to be with them, said on the one hand that he did not see the actual transition as a 'big deal because you go to school and you come home. You are always leaving and coming anyway', but on the other:

From my perspective {there} is more a sense of confusion (. . .) on everybody's part. Because I mean Jim sometimes arrives without his . . . whatever he needs and . . . umm, sometimes when I ask Stephen when he is coming and he is not really quite sure and has to ring and find out or something. So I see it as being generally confused . . . a bit confused (2nd Interview).

However, they all felt that they had been successfully navigating the various shoals, and implicitly endorsed Tom's opinion, that because so many people were affected by the changeover, they all needed to be clear about the arrangement, and that the system depended on them all working in together:

But you've got, as I say, you've got John supporting Stephen, doing his bit for the mad trio. (. . .) Right? And you've got me on the other side supporting Patty in her half of the mad trio. We are not trying to screw each other up. I am not trying to screw up John (. . .) and I am not trying to upset anyone's applecart this end, and I'll work in with them for what they want to do and if there is something that I need to do, I'll throw that into the pile early and say, "But I have to be somewhere at 7.00 so therefore you turkeys have got all night to play. But I am Number One, and you have to get me there by 7.00 and you do what you like" Or I do it myself (3rd Interview).

Generally, then, the new partner's role in the family was by no means clearcut, and was in several instances seen as complicating the situation although, as the Jones/Thomson and Cooper/Pearson parents indicated, means were found for managing the differences. However, four of the other parents, men and women, used the phrase 'piggy in the middle' to describe their sense of being caught between demands of the children and of the

partner, and to indicate their and the children's sense of divided loyalties. Maree described a situation where her new partner bitterly resented the intrusion of the children and attempted to exclude them, so that the periods when Sam was with his father provided welcome respites from the tension but left her feeling very angry with behaviour from her partner that she saw as selfish. Mary commented rather wryly that although her partner had been distantly helpful, and kind to the children, he had 'gobbled a lot of oxygen', and 'siphoned' off energy that she felt should have gone to the children.

Within the current relationships John, Susan and to a lesser degree Liz saw themselves as actively involved in a parenting role and the first two felt that their role had the support and endorsement of the other parent. Tom and Peter, however, adopted a more detached role - Tom because of the differences in disciplinary approach; and Peter because of the difficulties and tensions surrounding his entry into the family, his rejection by the children, his resulting ambivalence about the role and involvement that he would have preferred and his desire to make it quite clear to them that he was not attempting to usurp Luke's position. During the course of the second interview, he and Isa spent some time talking about the ways that he had in the past and could continue to usefully offer her support. Rather than intervening directly in a family row both thought that talking over alternative strategies to manage situations and offering moral support were valuable modes of behaviour. Both thought that his total withdrawal from an active role would be impossible since he was living in the house, was obviously affected by the children's behaviour, and could not (Isa was keen that he should not) take merely a passive role.

Greif & Simring hypothesised that the anxiety children feel when in a custody and access situation about the absent parent would be much less likely to occur in a shared parenting situation. This does not seem to be supported by either the parents' or the children's accounts of their feelings or behaviour towards the new partner. The issue of loyalty is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Ten, but it is worth mentioning briefly that several of the children had been or still were, at the time of interviewing, concerned lest one parent be lonely when they were not present. These feelings occurred even when neither parent was in a reconstituted relationship. Where parents had moved into other relationships, only one child (Tessa) appeared not to have experienced some conflict about the implications of the relationship on the other parent.

There is a consequence of reconstitution on the children which Greif & Simring do not mention. Where the new partner brought children of his/her own into the relationship, the period that the transitional child spent with the other parent might well be welcomed. Linda, Liz's daughter, found, as is often the case, that having a stepsister was 'terrible'. She had been the youngest, now felt displaced and welcomed times when Tessa was with Fay, but also found she then had to adjust to her return:

Mainly . . . I was quite jealous (. . .) as far as my Mum was concerned . . because I felt that Tessa got a lot more attention than I did, and it was true, mainly because I was so awful that Mum didn't want to have much to do with me, umm {after 6 months things improved} because I went flatting and when I came back I started to get on better with her.

AO: What was it like when you were living here and having Tessa here one week, and not another?

Linda: Oh, it was great! (*laughter*) Umm I don't actually remember . . . I can just remember not really liking her and not really wanting to have much to do with her [].

AO: But do you reckon that the actual, umm . . . the fact that you did see rather less of her in the end helped? If she had been living here all - or in the end, maybe it was difficult to get accustomed to her because she was here one week and gone the next?

Linda: Probably it would have been easier if she was here all the time. Umm . . . because I mean, a week is quite a long time not to see someone, and then it's a bit of an adjustment even if it is only a few hours once she gets back . . . everything changes on Sunday night when Tessa gets back, to the Monday.

AO: What do you see having to change?

Linda: Umm . . . just courtesy really. That there is one other person to think of.

AO: So you suddenly have to make space for yet another person?

Linda: Yeah. But you don't really think of it in that way. In the end you just accept it, and it just becomes . . . normal. I mean, as with any other living situation.

Shared parenting does appear, in light of the accounts given by the parents in this study, to assist a reconstituted relationship because the time away from the children could be given over to developing the new relationship. While parents did not not want their new partners to displace the other parent, or expect they would attempt to so, they nonetheless wanted some form of support from them. The new partner's desire not to usurp a role did not diminish the absent parent's sense of threat in most cases, and the children's difficulty in accepting the new partners was related to loyalty issues to the absent parent. Although at the time of the last follow up, five parents commented on the ease with which they were by *that* time able to allow the new partner's active role in relation to the children, and to recognise the value of their input, such a position was only attained over a relatively long time. The belief that reconstituted relationships ought to be able to include the other parent more easily ignores the extent to which parents generally for some time see themselves as displaced by a reconstitution, and feel the need to reassert their centrality and importance through rejection of the other's new partner, or by denying in some way the centrality of role that the new person may have.

Consequences of the decision-making

The period of decision-making can be seen as something of an idealisation, where decisions are made in the hope that certain advantages will accrue. It is only by actively living out the consequences of the decision that the complexities of one's actions can be fully appreciated. As has been noted in Chapter Four, the arbitrary dissection of a text into advantages and disadvantages of shared parenting does violence to the tangled nature of that experience, yet one of the problems is that in the process of transmission of experience it becomes linear and segmented. This splitting of experience and adherence to binary thought happens, it has been suggested, because of the difficulty of grasping an event which is simultaneously one thing and another. Writing of metaphor as a means to hold two heterogeneous elements close, Carson (1986, p. 73) says that:

tension of an acute and unresolvable kind informs this mental action. It demands of the mind "a stereoscopic vision" (. . .) or a "split reference" (. . .) that is, an ability to hold in equipoise two perspectives at once.

Thought is thus placed in a warring framework, from which it is rescued by metaphor. The metaphor that I want to develop here is intended to incorporate my earlier comments on the divisive nature of the conjunction 'but' which turns the flow of the sentence against itself. Instead, the inclusive nature of 'and' can be thought of as the meeting point or conjunction of two rivers, where the flow of each merges and the two rapidly become indistinguishable from each other. The experience, starting from different points, expands to a fullness and strength denied in the individual flows. In this context, Carson's comments on the derivation of the English word 'symbol' is apposite:

The English word 'symbol' is the Greek word *symbolon* which means, in the ancient world, one half of a knucklebone carried as a token of identity to someone who has the other half. Together the two halves compose one meaning (p. 75).

Analysis results in a disruption of the fullness of the experience, and the creation of discrete categorisations. It is therefore important to stress at this stage that no parent fully and unqualifiedly endorsed shared parenting; that the situation was not seen as clearcut; that part of any experience is the managing of doubts through holding onto important beliefs which can be asserted as positives; and that because doubts exist, this did not mean that parents necessarily wanted to change the arrangement completely. Even Charles who was most restrained out of all the parents on the value of the arrangement, noted that it was 'the least of all evils', and Lawrence pointed to the impossibility of making clearcut distinctions:

I am not clear that I do believe, taking the intellectual view of it . . . that it is altogether a success or not. But I enjoy it. So there we are. There we are. Say no more, and if I said more I shall be in fact . . . you know, trying to justify why I enjoy it. I really enjoy it (2nd Interview).

I mean it has been an emotional experience, in a way which my other family . . . haven't provided. Yeah. Sure as heck that has been . . . and by and large - I don't know . . . put the good things on the scale and weigh them, I would think there has probably been - *I wouldn't have got the joy . . . if I hadn't had the sorrow.* Yeah. Umm, I, *if there hadn't been the sorrows there, it would have been a very different sort of joy.* What comes out of the balance I don't know (3rd Interview: my italics).

And in the same way Michelle felt glad that they had tried the arrangement, yet simultaneously felt cynical about it and believed that it had greater disadvantages for them as a family than it had had advantages.

There are considerable degrees of contradiction within individual texts when it comes to analysing the advantages and disadvantages that each parent ascribed to the experience. What I want to insist on is that these contradictions have to be maintained, rather than explained away or discounted as not really significant. Thus Martin could speak at different points of the closeness of his relationship with both women and the need for a more distinct separateness, his delight in joining the family at weekends, the freedom the arrangement had given him to follow up his interests and the loss that he had suffered:

But in a sense . . . in one sense, I have been robbed of certain things of the children. Sometimes I can still feel a little bit resentful about that . . . in the sense that they live {so far} away. The major decisions are not necessarily mine to make, and the everyday decisions aren't mine to make (1st Interview).

To understand the experiences then, means retaining a sensitivity to the complexities of position, to the inevitability of contradiction. It means seeking to join, not hold separate, the two halves of the knucklebones.

The advantages for the children

One of the reasons for choosing a shared parenting arrangement was because it offered a chance for the children to retain contact with, and maintain immediate, more balanced and developing knowledge of both parents. Fourteen out of the sixteen parents saw this as more advantageous than not. The remaining two tended towards feeling that contact with the other parent might be more of a disadvantage for the child/ren than an advantage. Several parents thought that the shared parenting allowed the children not to feel pressured to adopt one set of values as against another, and in some instances mentioned specifically that the children were no longer subjected to parental arguments, or to feeling that they had to side with one parent, as they had prior to the separation. Maree felt that the custodial mode had meant that Sam was the best adjusted of all four of their children and that she was able to have a much better relationship with him. Both Patty and Stephen believed that Jim saw as much of them as if they had been living together so that in that way he was not deprived; Mary, that shared parenting offered the children awareness of parental strengths and, like Dave, wider experience than could have been offered by just one parent, and Jane and Isa felt that the regularity of experience on a day-to-day level was significant. Jane said:

JA: I think that the kids benefit from actually having to . . . live . . . with both their parents (. . .) having to live on a day to day basis, getting up in the morning, getting ready, and going to school and coming home and going to bed and just having to fit into a home life of both parents rather than actually having one who is there as a sugar daddy . . . or sugar mummy . . . (1st Interview).

Her comments about the avoidance of the 'sugar parent' relationship were echoed specifically by Isa, Luke and Mary.

Another advantage noted by Anna in particular was that the children retained contact with their father whom she saw as a positive male model for them:

AO: As far as the actual sharing of the parenting - do you have any regrets?

AN: No. I couldn't have - I can't conceive of any other way. I think . . . Martin's input as a man and as a male is really vital. I think that he's a lovely male model . . . for my kids (. . .). I think that he's got a long way to go to communicate . . . but he is certainly further down the track than he was . . . umm, I think that he is very gentle and he's . . . he's got a very good heart . . . and . . . he's got lots of strengths. He's a very disciplined person (. . .) he's caring, conscienti - he's just got lots of qualities I've always loved. He's an honourable person . . . he's trustworthy, you know, all those really *sound* qualities that makes him a good person So I mean, I can't see they would have been . . . less . . . they would have been worse off, I consider than if they had just lived with me. It would have been too one-dimensional. Especially since it is an all-female household. Umm . . . I like a balance (1st Interview).

Yet at a later point she is critical of Martin for not talking more explicitly to the children about his sexual orientation.

Six of the parents thought that the arrangement had demanded a higher level of maturity for their children than if they had continued to live in a two parent household⁷. While sharing this view, Patty and Stephen, however, did wonder if Jim's problems with forgetfulness were a result of feeling pressured by the arrangement, and resulted in his being yelled at more. Fay was prepared to concede that what she saw as Ross's failure to check whether Tessa had cleaned her teeth and washed her hair properly may have been his attempt to develop Tessa's sense of responsibility. Others thought that the children had gained a broader perspective through a fuller appreciation of parental differences. The Nobles and Cooper/Pearsons believed that the children had been able to come to a fuller appreciation of their parents' sexuality through having to live with its consequences and therefore come to terms with it because they realised *why* their parents could not live together. For Jim, the discovery of his father's homosexuality had been rather traumatic, especially during the period when the Homosexual Law Reform Bill was being considered when it had been brought home to him forcibly by the TV debates over the proposed changes that his father was then legally a 'criminal'.

The implications for children of their parents holding different values were mentioned by at least five parents. Prior to the separation, the children were seen as having often been subjected to conflict over values. For Isa, shared parenting considerably diminished this conflict and the children were presented with clear differences so that they could appreciate each parent as s/he was. Jane, on the other hand, appeared to share this view, in that the separation ended the constant and irritating awareness of differences and shared parenting meant that she was no longer confronted with aspects of Dave's parenting style with which she was in disagreement. But while this was easier on her, she was not quite sure of the effect on the children:

I think that Dave is . . . ahhh has totally different standards to mine, sort of, around the house, in terms of how it looks and how clean it is, what you eat, when you eat, you know . . . Umm, I think he has totally different . . . sets of values about what's important in life

AO: What's important for him, do you think?

JA: What's the most important thing for Dave? It's Dave's commitment to his parents, but . . . the . . . I, I'm just - on the fundamental social issues . . . Dave and I have totally different values and I think, you know, they are there, the children are going to get very conflicting messages . . . and . . .

AO: In terms of social awareness, in terms of race, Taha Maori - those sorts of issues?

JA: You know, I mean . . . Dave's sort of . . . goes overboard about rugby . . . you know, motor cars racing downtown round the harbour, KZ-7, you know, up the national flag, you know, I mean, which, around, which leave me *cold*. And . . . I mean they are there, and the children are going to get very conflicting things. I mean, they always have . . . you know, in that Dave's gone mad about the rugby and I go "Oh yuck," you know. I don't like it.

AO: Do you think that that matters?

JA: Well, I don't, I don't think it does matter and maybe it's actually quite good for the children because they are actually exposed very early on . . . to . . . two very, very strongly . . . different people (Mmmm) and very early on, actually have to sort of see them - that not everybody's the same.

⁷ Weiss (1979) notes that children of separated parents are often more mature than are children in intact families.

AO: Right. . . Do you think that now . . . now that you are out of that relationship, and with that whole . . . sort of sense of conflict removed, that it's sort of, particularly as the kids get older, it will be easier to talk about, in terms of the difference and making choices and those sorts of . . . areas, things?

JA: (*sighs*) Easy for the kids?

AO: Yeah. And easier for you?

JA: Well, it's certainly a lot easier for me

AO: Because you feel a bit less threatened?

JA: Well, I don't have to be confronted with what I don't like all the time, particularly by somebody that I'm actually in the same house with. Umm I I think - well, I don't know, you see. I think at times that the children find it a little bit confusing . . . in that, you know, they say, "Well, we know you don't like this, and why don't you like this, Mum?" and it's a little bit confusing that there can be two people whom they love dearly who . . . are so different.

AO: And do you find it very easy to . . . explain why you don't like it, or just say, "I see it differently"? Or do you feel a bit caught out, or on the defensive, or-

JA: No. I don't feel on the defensive at all. And . . . you know, I would hope that in my explanations to the kids as to why I react differently . . . umm I, I just put my own case, and I never, ever say, "Well, I think Dave's stupid for thinking the way he does". I mean, I, I . . . I would never do that. But maybe it's the same sort of thing as - and you know, maybe . . . the kids get a different message. Louise certainly got a different message about me telling her to go and growl at Dave. It was something that I thought I had been really careful about. (3rd Interview).

Maree, who was very conscious of extreme differences in values between herself and Keith, felt in the first interview optimistic about the possibility that Sam would choose her values in contrast to Keith's chauvinism, but during the third became distressed in the context of a discussion about Hugh's treatment of his puppy, and felt that there was little that she could have done to really challenge Keith's values without wider social changes:

MB: as far as the dog is concerned - and Adrienne said to me, "Y'know, the *dog shakes* . . . when Hugh calls it.

Sam: That's because of the way he speaks to it. I've, I have said -

MB: Because he's cruel to it if it doesn't obey. And Adrienne said to him, "Hugh, I thought you'd got the dog to like". And um, he says, "I did, and I'll love it", he says, "when it obeys me (. . .) I've gotta make it scared".

Sam: Yeah. Y' gotta do that. But he tries too hard . . . to make it scared. And Adrienne and I were talking last night, you know. We think that Hugh got the dog because . . . he wants . . . Adrienne to think, "It's your kid. This is my dog". He thought Adrienne was giving the kid too much love so he thought that he'd have something for himself (. . .).

MB: Yeah. But that's no *excuse* to treat it *cruelly* and make the dog terrified of him. He makes that dog terrified of him (. . .).

AO: Do you have some concerns about how Hugh will react to his child when his child gets older?

MB: Yes. I can see the same, the same *cycle*.

AO: That he will have to mistreat the child in order to make the child respect him (*MB echoes phrase*) in order for him to be able to love the child?

MB: Yeah. It's coming through with the dog!

AO: What does that feel like?

MB: Well, Golly. Hugh spent most of his time with me and I thought that I - it feels *terrible*. Because, y'know, even as a little boy Hugh spent most of his time with me, and it was only the 6 months that he spent with Keith (. . .) *Your . . . boys . you . know . being . like . their . father . because . I . let . them . be . like . their . father! (. . .)*

AO: Do you somehow feel that you could have done more?

MB: I don't, I don't think that I could have done more, umm, without the help of society, um, right at the beginning, I s'pose, um, to make things equal for all of us. I s'pose mothers and fathers, both parents have to have an equal involvement with the children . . . and I think that it's society that has to make those changes (3rd Interview).

Rather pessimistically, she concluded that the most she was able to do was only to 'offer alternatives'.

Another advantage noted by parents was that the child became the focus of attention. Fay, Isa, Keith and Lawrence spoke of their delight when the children returned to them. Lawrence used the phrase 'bursting with enthusiasm', and Keith felt that he could concentrate on Sam without the arguments and fights between himself and Maree acting as distractions from Sam's needs:

KB: We work our lives out together.

AO: Is that something that you did not do with the other {children}?

KB: Sure, I was far more dictatorial.

AO: Why were you so much more dictatorial?

KB: I don't know. I think that I was just selfish.

AO: So what led to this change? (. . .)

KB: It became important to me that Sam um . . . because he had gone through the, the, the horrible aspects of his Mum and I splitting up, that then . . . that I owed it to him that his life would be . . . as pleasant and as *full* and as controlled, I suppose the word is. But in other words, that he didn't dip out, you know. That there was as much as possible that, that the positive aspects of this were, were emphasised . . . (3rd Interview).

Finally, Luke mentioned that he felt that the arrangement had also brought the two children closer together, and given them a sensitivity to each other and an interdependence which he felt that they might not otherwise have gained.

Disadvantages for the children:

It could be argued that a good deal of the day to day stress associated with raising children comes from the necessity of having to make continual decisions about what is in the child's interests, often with the awareness that confirmation of the adequacy of that decision may be some way off, or at other times impossible to confirm directly. In this context it is interesting that six of the parents (including Liz), felt either that they would not themselves like to move between houses with the frequency that their own children did or, alternatively, that the whole experience was so foreign to what they themselves had experienced as children that it was impossible to imagine what it might really feel like. Jane was worried for some time about the children's having to expand their definition of what was 'home' and furthermore, that she was seen as outside the family by the children:

I don't know how much the children actually view this as being 'their' home and how much they see it as 'Mum's house'. I would actually hope that they come to see it as-

AO: What is the difference for you (. . .)?

JA: I guess it's sort of the . . . a sense of, of - I suppose for myself that I need to know that they have a sense of belonging with me and where I am, in my space umm you know, that they don't actually see me as being separate from, from them and Dave - being one little unit and me on the outside (1st Interview).

The fairly general lack of knowledge about how the other home operated on a day to day basis made a fuller knowledge of the children's response to the situation less available to parents. This lack of knowledge became more pervasive the more difficult the parental relationship. Charles spoke for several parents when he spoke of the 'great void (. . .) I just don't know what is going on. That is the fifty percent void'. Yet this is not to imply that parents worried constantly about the arrangement and the effects on the

children. Michelle said that while she felt a nagging anxiety about the way that Kay was affected by the arrangement, she certainly was not just sitting and 'moping' about it. However, both Keith and Luke noted the ease with which they tended to blame the arrangement when things went wrong. It was easy to assume that the children must be disadvantaged because of the unconventional parenting arrangement.

It seemed to me that the questions which parents asked about the arrangement were often to do with its possible destabilising effects. Could you, for example, explain Jim's seeming lack of friends on the arrangement, or was it more a temperamental feature, that he, like Stephen, just had one friend at a time; or to do with the fact that Tom was not always welcoming of other children? Would it, Luke worried, lead the children to think that, because their own arrangement worked well, this was a better way to raise families than in a more conventional mode? Were the children, Dave wondered, in some way missing out because they only were with one parent at a time, and therefore in some sense lacked the balance that would be provided by both? What, others wondered, were the long-term consequences?

The other concern, raised especially by Michelle and Mary, was to do with the child's sense of impermanence. Michelle felt that the movement, the changes and the adults' inability to separate emotionally, which was further complicated by the shared parenting, had contributed substantially to Kay's vulnerability. In talking of her perception of their situation over the years Mary's account moved between doubt and affirmation. She expressed doubt about its effect on the children, acknowledged the way that the arrangement served her needs at times of great stress, and concluded at the time of the interviews that there were some real positives. What is interesting about the way she expressed herself is that in exploring some concerns, she was also able to confirm elements of the situation that she viewed positively:

MT: Well, I don't really know about the children. There is some . . . sometimes I feel . . . umm, I'd like to know if this going to one to the other . . . umm *reduces* . . . ahh . . . their ability to make a commitment, you know, whether . . . umm, children need . . . ahh, something much more *central*, umm . . . to branch out from. They need more of a base umm, more of a *definite* sense of belonging to one particular place. I don't know about that, Anne. They may have been deprived of that . . . umm, in physical terms. (. . .) there are times when I . . . umm, have gone through a lot of anxious thought, quite emotionally bad phases over the last few years. I think, umm, that a lot was related to my personal situation. A lot was related to the very bad PMT that I was suffering from . . . umm, it's always been really good . . . umm . . . sort of to know your own cyclical nature a bit . . . and feel, ahh, that "I can hold back, I can hold back. The children will be going away", or not getting too worried if you were getting too disturbed because of the fact that they will only be exposed to this for another day and a bit . . . or things like that. Like when you know that there will be a respite from it. Yes. Yes umm, so those have always been one of the good things. I *still* don't believe that one parent can be adequate. [] 2, if there are 2 parents, and have something of each of them.

AO: Even when split? (Mmm). When you say, "I don't believe one parent can be as good as two" are you talking about -

MT: 2 very sound parents.

AO: Yes. Yes. What are you feeling that they would be missing if they had had only one very fond parent?

MT: Well, I wouldn't have had that energy, umm, in physical terms, umm, to give them the range of experience that they can have with me *and* their father. (Right) They'd be living a much more limited . . . sort of existence.

AO: So the fact that the kids go away gives them (Variety) Gives them variety, (Yes) and gives you yourself personally an opportunity to re-charge?

MT: Yes. I need that. Yes. And it gives them an exposure to a greater range of activities than one parent could make available.

AO: Right. When you talk about -

MT: *And people* (1st Interview).

But her hesitations about the arrangement persisted, and were given expression at different points of the interview. She wondered if the frequent changes had meant that the children had not adequately developed a daily routine, and if the breaks from parenting had meant that she had not developed sufficient expectations in relation to their helping around the house, while recognising that they could rise to the occasion when necessary. She reiterated her concern about the children's lack of a firm base, and expressed anxiety that they picked up too much of the hostility between herself and Charles, illustrating this by reference to a letter written by Cornelia during the period of the court case. Once again, at the end of the section of the interview quoted below, she came to a stronger point of resolution:

AO: Have they ever expressed any feelings about the packing and unpacking? The sense of movement?

MT: Well, once upon a time . . . about . . . 2 years ago, I was cleaning up Cornelia's room when she was away, and I found these various little notes, saying much the same thing under her bed, umm . . . it was rehearsing a goodbye letter to me . . . and - no to both of us, umm . . . "Dear Mum and Dad", ahh. "I'm sorry to be doing this to you . . . but I'm going away somewhere. I don't know where. I'll do my best to be happy. I love you both very much . . . I'm sick of being a yoyo. Don't come and look for me", and so I kept the one that looked like the final (Draft?) copy - yes - and umm, waited until I had Cornelia on her own, and asked her what this was . . . about, you know, and she never told me anything of how it felt and I asked if did it feel like this to her, and the poor little girl got extremely concerned for me that I had seen it, and . . . very anxious to tell me that she had only been joking . . . she was only pretending, that it was nothing, it was nothing to do with what she was feeling. But I felt that she wasn't . . . umm . . . admitting. I thought that she didn't want me to know, yes. And, umm . . . yeah . . . I think that was really about it, because you see any times I ask them about what was happening at Charles' - I didn't want to pry into his affairs, but they would clam up. I felt that they felt that it was something that they couldn't tell. But I *really didn't* know if there was anything in the signals that I had been giving . . . umm . . . why she should feel any sort of disloyalty or . . .

AO: What did you feel like when you found this note from Cornelia?

MT: *Devastated!* Just, umm . . .

AO: Can you explain what the devastation was?

MT: Well, to tell you the truth, you know for about 4 years of my life, all I seemed to be doing was lurching from one crisis to another. There seemed to be no end of things. I was having *AWFUL* problems with this man. I don't know how I should have tolerated those . . . I was having problems in . . . *every . . . corner*. I was having problems with Charles, with this house, my mother had lung cancer, there was other sorts of . . . *ev, everything*. There was no peace at all. NO let up. And umm . . . Oh, I just wanted Cornelia to talk, I just *wanted* her to tell me, you know, just -

AO: And so it also felt like some personal rejection of you, that you were her-?

MT: Yes. Yes. She couldn't talk to me. Yeah. But, you know, I really wanted to know what this *note* was all about. I wouldn't have really guessed from her demeanour, ummm -

AO: You've never been able to work out - I mean, you've just assumed that that was actually a "real" note and was -(Yes yes) and she's never said anything?

MT: No. No.

AO: It must have been - oh, just a really difficult -

MT: Yes. Difficult time. Yes, Anne, yes. Umm . . . yeah, yeah. I think there were times in it, when umm . . . I really did wonder whether it would be better for the children just to be mainly . . . with one or other of us.

AO: And what times set that feeling in motion?

MT: Well, sometimes, I think, when I would be under so much *emotional stress* I'd feel they definit- no matter what was going on with Charles, I'd feel that they would be better off with Charles . . . umm . . . and then, at other times, when I felt that he was, ahhh, playing up, being hostile, I'd think, "No. I should

have been strong. Yeah, they should really just be with me. . . It would make more sense, you know, that the other way wasn't gonna work". Yes.

AO: But now, you can actually say, with some . . . strong feeling that it has been -

MT: That I am very glad.

AO: And that it was worth the pain?

MT: Worth the pain. Yes.

AO: Despite the things -

MT: They seem to be doing so well, in their lives, Anne. Cornelia brought home her merit certificate that the top 10 got at the end of the year. She was 3rd in the class of a very, quite an achieving class, and you know, she's lov - and Simon is going very well with his work, and I just feel, well, their friendships are good, and that, and the teachers feel that they are pretty OK . . and ahh, I feel . . . you know, that, umm, if they have been *harmed* I don't see too much evidence of it, of that. Yeah. . . I hope I'm not being blind . . (1st Interview).

While Mary reaffirmed here the choice she had made, both points of affirmation quoted above are unbalanced by her other assessments, and by her comment that they had 'survived' the arrangement, a choice of a word which has connotations of toughness and tenacity, but also of extremity. What also has to be taken into account is that when a decision has been made to act, and that action has been persisted with over a long period of time in the face of considerable difficulty, then it is simply not easy to admit, or even to know, whether an alternative course of action would have been better.

Shared parenting, as described by the adults, in relation to their perception of the children's needs, did not add up to a wholesale endorsement of the arrangement. Some had many fewer doubts than others, but all expressed some reservations. As in most life situations, the advantages and disadvantages were there and informed each other. It is as though the arrangement has to be seen as moving between two planes. The everyday routines happened and these in themselves helped sustain a belief that the arrangement was viable and positive. But beyond lay consciousness of concerns, doubts and hesitations about children's needs.

The advantages for the adults

Some of the advantages of sharing parenting had been anticipated at the time of the decision. Others had emerged as time went by. Consequences of the arrangement, such as the diminished contact with the children, about which the women were particularly concerned, were later seen to have some advantages. Nearly all of the parents believed that shared parenting had contributed extensively to the development of their self-esteem and sense of identity.

For the men in particular, (excluding Ross, where the shared parenting continued the previous allocation of child-care responsibilities, and Martin) the arrangement meant that the children were able to become, as Stephen said, 'part of my life', in a way that generally they had not been before. Stephen found that the shared parenting meant a return to a previous norm, the, 'fairly . . . constant contact involvement . . . you know, and I felt really, really not happy when that wasn't happening (1st Interview). The gaining of knowledge about, and participation in, the children's lives was seen as very important by the men, and was consistently mentioned as a particular and often unexpected delight.

Parents too spoke of being able to enjoy parenting more than before, partly because of the time away from it. A reduction in interspousal tension over differences in values was, as noted previously, observed by several. Dave felt that he was no longer so open to criticism over his parenting techniques, and that he could do things in his own time, according to his own standards; Isa, that the conflict in values had diminished. The way that Isa spoke suggested that she no longer felt responsible for the sort of person that Luke was, and giving up that notional responsibility and the conflict associated with it was a relief:

Luke *knows* that I, that we, we just know that we see things differently (. . .). That once the children are with him, his values, perceptions, the richness of his character, the [] things - they are not my responsibility. That I offer something different to the children and my values are much clearer to them by having that independent relationship with them and Luke's . . . values are clearer to them because of his independent relationship (. . .). I think that that is one of the big reliefs of us living separately and recognising each other's differences and hoping that the uniqueness of each of our lives will enrich the children, rather than be a, you know, a point of conflict (2nd Interview).

An increase in personal flexibility was noted, either in relation to oneself, or one's partner. For example, Maree thought that Keith had become less chauvinistic. Keith, too, saw himself as very different in some respects:

{Sam} is really the most fortunate in some respects of all four of the boys because he had had the best of Mum and Dad. He certainly had the best of me. I am a far, far better bloke than I ever was when I was married. *Far, far better*. I'm more - really got my nut together, y'know, because you have to. I was determined I wasn't - I think M. just thought I'd sit in a pigstyand just, just I don't know - just die of cirrhosis of the liver or something but um y'know, that's not the way (1st Interview).

Mary thought both that she was more relaxed and more able to see the children as separate entities, and that Charles had increased in sensitivity to the children as a result of his involvement. Recognising that one was dispensable could only happen with the sharing of the children. Sharing then contributed to a broadening of one's horizons, a point made by a number of the parents. Michelle's first reaction was to feel that the shared parenting had had little to contribute to the development of self-esteem, a point of view which she changed in mid-stream:

I sort of feel that it is not the shared parenting that has done that {assisted with the improvement in her self esteem}. It is all the other things. It's been doing the degree, it's been taking myself off to Australia, despite all odds and all efforts to try and make me stay . . . was actually a very liberating thing for me to do . . . was to actually . . . know that I needed to do that and say it and do it, and *not allow* Lawrence or anyone else to actually stop me. Umm . . . and then to come back . . . and make a living for myself (. . .) Yeah. To be able to do all those things. Yes, I think it's been a sort of - Yes! I can actually see shared parenting as really contributing to that, um, although - let me think for a moment . . . I am wondering whether time out from Kay did actually help me . . . sort of, um, *salve* which pieces of myself when I needed to. 'Cos actually, if I hadn't had that shared parenting - Yeah. Y' - that is actually a very interesting question. I think that the shared parenting did have a lot of value, when I think about it, for me. Um I guess *because* of all that and all the things of powerlessness and all the rest of it . . . the time out I had from Kay was probably really quite valuable, in terms of, um, letting me catch up on people who were quite important to me (. . . .) 'Cos when she did, um . . . disappear, um . . . for those days, then I, I did use that time to um . . . get myself (*laughing*) right out of the roles of an ex-wife. And that was very valuable (3rd Interview).

The theme which Jane explored was also in relation to identity, but focussed more sharply on the way traditionally defined images of women had become unacceptable to her:

I think that if I had had the kids here all the time . . . I would have just ah . . . sort of submerged myself into the children (. . .) I don't know whether long term it would have been a particularly good way of coping. I think that the, um . . . you know, having times without the children here . . . umm, you know has really sort of forced the issue and forced me to look at the future and um, come to terms with it . . . come to terms with the reality . . . Yeah. So I think that it does make it easier (not having the children all the time).

And she went on to talk about the fact that, contrary to her expectations, Dave had coped, so that she did not have the children full-time as she had expected. She felt this was ultimately all to the good:

it would certainly have been very much harder for me to, um, to re-establish my life. I certainly - one of the things, one of the things that I've sort of come to realise, sort of, after having had the kids, and, and recognising the sort of strong socialisation that I had had about the role of mothers, that I didn't want to end up at the age of 45, like so many women, when the children leave home, that they actually have nothing (. . .) Yes. It is a loss of identity in a way . . . in that, umm . . . for a long time I suppose umm . . . sort of seen myself as being a mother . . . and then suddenly realising that actually, you know . . . I'm not. I mean, that's not my primary function or role any longer. And that's taken a long time to work through but - yeah - losing the control of the children and those sort of silly little ways - I mean, buying their clothes and things - I mean, in a way. Yeah. It's just one more thing (1st Interview).

Similarly Mary thought that shared parenting had made her value the children more, yet their absences had prepared her somewhat for the time when they would 'go their own ways'. Yet is also worth noting that both the women were talking about an event which they had defined for a long time as a loss, an event which involved a significant redefinition of themselves and which, although they could subsequently look back and applaud the step they took, was painful at the time.

Shared parenting provided a respite from demands and enabled parents to bring more energy and often enjoyment to parenting. Keith believed that taking responsibility for Sam ensured he provided a proper diet which had spinoffs for him too, and he enjoyed the way they organised life together. Luke enjoyed the fact that the kids 'know I am there', and Dave spoke of the way that more intense involvement in the day to day had meant that his relationship with the children had become much closer:

There is more involvement, I suppose . . . well, I quite enjoy . . . now getting a bit more involved in their problems . . . as it were. Their difficulties of life . . . as well as just, umm . . . games. (. . .) . . . Well, Louise's had some discussions with me about her relationship {with a school friend} . . . and Mark . . . has become more aware of what his feelings are like . . . (3rd Interview).

Fay's comments provide an indication of the way that many of the texts move across boundaries, so that the disadvantages, the loss, the loneliness, the loss of control, are interwoven with the benefits:

I've said to you I think that one of the singular benefits for Tessa is that . . . she gets . . . like fresh laundry once a week, a parent . . . who is dead keen to be with her . . . overjoyed to have the girl and eager to hear how she is, discuss things, support her . . . organise her week, do things together and then come the next Monday she's got another parent eager to do the same things. Well, conversely, I get a renewal of my joy in having Tessa . . . every fortnight (. . .) Never wears thin. Never wears thin. . . . Conversely again, . . . you have the loneliness and longing for her that parents who have their kids around all the time probably have forgotten about. But it just, it keeps that relationship with your child *really valued*. That's what I feel. I value it so much because it is precious and I have to share it, not day to day, with my mate but I literally have to hand it over . . . not that you have to claim all responsibility of love or whatever . . . but I *hand over* control of it and the organisation of it, week after week after week . . . But for that I get it handed back to me too. And that's neat. That's really good. And to see her - the joy . . . at coming back. I mean, she not only gets a keen parent, but she is loving . . . (3rd Interview).

The time without the children was described mostly as a very considerable benefit. As nearly every parent noted, it meant that you had time to pursue your own interests. Dave pointed out that you did not get ground down by the 'drudgery' of solo parenthood, and nor were you confronted with a situation where 'the other person was in someway . . . benefitting . . . from the fact that you were looking after the children most of the time', which he thought would be 'annoying'. Martin, who had least time with the children to some extent balanced that loss against his ability to continue his own life style in a fairly uninterrupted manner. And as Luke said, in answer to whether he made much contact with the children during the weeks they were with Isa:

Isa is more inclined to give them a ring and see how they are, whereas I, I am not so . . . so . . . inclined . . . You know, I've gotta be real about it . . . umm . . . I really look forward to seeing them, but also look forward to them going . . . I am still a selfish person. I still like . . . I still like . . . not being bound (2nd Interview).

Furthermore, the women said that the alternate weeks of child-care responsibility made coping with the pressures of full-time employment easier. Three of the women felt that they would not have been able to hold down full-time work had they been solely responsible for the children because the demands would have been too great. The alternating arrangement allowed them to make a commitment to work, and meant that they were able to schedule evening meetings where necessary during the times that the children were with the other parent. In this way the time that the children were with them was kept free so that they could give the children their full attention.

The disadvantages of shared parenting

Yet the childless time was also a difficult time for nearly every parent. The three exceptions were Maree, Stephen, and Ross. Ross commented:

I am pleased to see her. By the time Sunday comes round . . . by the same token, umm you know, she's not there, then, y'know . . . things just trundle on (2nd Interview).

Patty felt that the arrangement meant that she saw less of Jim:

there are times when I wish I could see a little more of him, have a little more time with him but . . . but that is only every once in a while (3rd Interview).

All the other parents spoke with different degrees of intensity about their sense of loss when the child/ren went to the other parent. While it is clear that the acuteness of the experience of loss had to some extent diminished over time (Michelle, for example, no longer felt 'desolate'), it had by no means disappeared, and the sense I was given was that parents had to deal with it each time the children moved. Against the freedom, the relief from the immediate responsibility and the 'holiday', as Dave put it, had to be placed the loneliness, the empty house, the feeling of missing out on part of the children's lives which were difficult to reconstruct (the loss of continuity was mentioned by many parents) as well as the readjustment that had to be made when they returned. One of Keith's reasons for advocating a longer period for the child to stay with each parent was because this reduced the frequency with which one was faced with the departure. That this experience of loss was seen as a necessary evil was apparent - it was impossible to have the advantages of the shared parenting without also experiencing the drawbacks. Mary remarked that she had learnt how to live without the children, but that she was happier when they were with her. Where the advantages of shared parenting were seen as minimal, as in Charles' case, then the sense of loss was all the more difficult to deal with. He spoke of his continuing, although reduced, sense of 'numbness', and Luke, as has been noted, kept back some of the children's clothes to retain a sense of their presence in the house. Jane was still finding after a year of shared parenting that the children's absence was difficult to manage. She had continued to make a point of seeing them every day, although she regarded this as 'unhealthy' on her part, because it meant that she could not 'let go', and therefore appreciated as well as resented the children's lack of overt interest in her visits.

The way that the loss was managed appeared to be through emphasising the advantages, and the building up of activities and interests as compensation. Parents learnt to live with their child/ren's comings and goings. But the fact that the sense of loss diminished somewhat over time should not be used to discount the intensity of feeling which was experienced by both parents. The arrangement does involve discontinuities, and readjustments in style and pace of life. In what is seen as the conventional family, the period when a child might be expected to leave home is foreseen for some time, and there is the knowledge that developmentally such an action is appropriate. While the period of mourning and readjustment that women have been seen traditionally to experience when a child leaves home has been given pathological connotations (albeit that women were seen as experiencing the 'empty nest' syndrome *because* of their internalisation of a particular ideology of motherhood) what becomes apparent here is that one cannot expect to compensate for loss simply by creating alternative pursuits. The argument has been put forward in the literature on shared parenting that women resist shared parenting because it involves a restriction of the maternal role (and therefore of power); and that, if women have careers (an option not available to many women because of structural inequalities and high unemployment), then there would not be the experience of loss (Richards &

Goldenberg, 1985). My data would dispute such simple causalities. In the first place, such an argument does not account for the feeling of loss which the men experienced, but which is surely not surprising in the light of the redefinition of identity which shared parenting demanded, and their discovery of their children. In the second place, such an argument overlooks the nature of the experience of loss in this particular context as a significant psychological event which requires time as well as energy to surmount.

In addition to the mostly unexpected experience of loss, parents spoke of a number of other drawbacks, which had become more apparent over time. Some of these are also noted in the American literature. A number of parents noted the restriction on relocation which the scheme imposed. Some found the necessity to have contact with their ex-partner a disadvantage and Luke, when things were difficult between him and Isa, felt that he would much prefer to communicate through the children. Fay spoke of the intensity of emotional commitment that she had made to shared parenting which left her with insufficient emotional energy to invest in another relationship:

It just takes so much out of me and it is *the* most important thing to me so that I sort of haven't got enough energy for other relationships (. . .) . . . what it means to me is that . . . umm . . . it's so emotionally taxing that, umm . . . it is the most . . . important thing to me that there is bugger all energy left in . . . invest in other people. (. . .) *And it takes up more of your life than an outsider would see coming in.* (. . .) I live this thing all day, every day. Ross cruises along for a long time and then blows or saves things up and then says, "Time we talked about a whole heap of things". But I carry them around with me and talk about them all the time, it seems to me, which is, for a person of my-make up, an immense emotional undertaking (1st Interview: My italics).

Ross, however, did not feel that he was so emotionally bound up in the arrangement:

if things are floating along reasonably well, we, you know, you don't try to get into any great philosophical sort of exchanges about the whole thing (2nd Interview).

The issue of career loss was also mooted by two parents, both of whom had been most affected in career terms by their parenting choices. Once again, the problem was not seen as either black or white. Anna, who felt that the extra commitment she had had to make to the children had increased her parenting ability substantially, and that she had enjoyed and valued the time she had given them, nonetheless felt that she had had to choose between a career and children, so that her career prospects were much more limited than Martin's. She said, 'I think that it has been very successful, but I don't know that I would do it again'. Luke, who at one point was struggling with what it meant to be a parent to older children in relation to the amount of contact necessary to sustain a relationship, wondered if he had put aside his fishing unnecessarily⁸. He instanced friends who had put in very little time with their children but who still seemed to have a close relationship. At the same time, though, he appreciated what he called his 'semi-retirement', with the opportunity it afforded to 'reflect on the past, the present and the future'.

⁸ At the time of the interviews, he was having an on-going argument with Diana about whether she would eat breakfast with him and Isaac or go next door to eat with her friends.

Despite the flexibility which shared parenting afforded parents during the week or other times that their children were not with them, some parents also spoke of the constriction of their social lives. Mary said that she 'never budged' while the children were with her during the difficult years immediately after the separation, and several other parents said that they stayed home to be with the children. Dave felt that the whole arrangement created for other people a 'basic uncertainty whether they are going to find you with the children or without the children'. Others, however, had felt in the past that they perhaps ought to have spent more time with the children than they had:

LB: But you see . . . when you, when you confine the thing for 5 days you are inclined to look back on the period of the 5 days and think, "Crumbs. That day I was doing this, that day I was doing that . . . and poor child. I have not even spent a moment with her". So, if you've got a continuous period and your mother and father are there every day of the year, you'd never look at it that way. There is always tomorrow (. . .)

AO: But in a way it is almost as if you have to make this slightly more special all the time because you don't have her every day.

LB: That's right.

AO: Slightly unreal implications for both of you.

LB: Yes. Except I don't think I get too affected by it (. . .) It is like all these things when you put a . . . I think I am used to it now, but certainly at some stages, um, I have been more worried about it than at others. You over-compensate . . . You feel almost duty-bound to provide a wildly entertaining . . . umm . . .

AO: An exciting and innovating time?

LB: Every, every sort of the, the period that the child is with you. And you can't go on like that. No. . . No. I think I have gone through that one. I think that that is past (2nd Interview).

Michelle who had commented on her freedom to develop her own life when Kay was with Lawrence, also spoke of the way that the arrangement imposed a different sort of constraint when Kay was with her:

Because I think that part of the co-parenting thing has meant that I have over-compensated . . . or felt . . . restrained . . . or sort of stayed put when Kay is here and to sort of try and give her everything she needs when she is around. I don't think that I have gone *too* overboard. . . . There has been that tendency (. . .) if I feel that she is having that settled . . . secure base, then I think I will feel a lot freer about, um, you know, going off and doing what I want to do . . . on the nights I choose to go out etc., because she is here . . . I mean, I don't know whether I am neurotic about it or not, but I feel it is different and it will . . . take away my anxiety about her long-term I suppose. And I won't be inclined to sort of partition off time left, right and centre . . . and devote myself exclusively to her, because there won't be that need, there won't be that . . . sort of underlying need to do that, or, or, sort of feeling (. . .) I suppose if you feel that your daughter is not getting something that she very much needs then you try and give it to her in other ways . . . Which becomes a bit disastrous, I suppose (2nd Interview).

More recently, she believed that she had begun to work through that feeling of having always to be there for Kay, deciding that it was now possible for her to go out. She mentioned the way that a friend would ring up:

she first started ringing and saying, "How about coming and doing this tonight?" I thought, "Oh, I couldn't possibly do that! I've got my daughter here". (*Laughter*) Now I think, "Well, you know, if you give me a night's warning, I think I might be able to arrange something". There's been a bit of movement there! (2nd Interview).

About half of the parents expressly committed themselves to being at home over the time that the children were with them, or at least to go out as little as possible. While

such behaviour can be read as partly practical (it is easier and cheaper not to have to use child-minders) and as partly compensatory (as part of an attempt to ensure that the children felt that they were available to them), it may be that such availability creates unreal expectations in the children about the nature of parenting.

Gender Issues

Although the issues of gender and identity are discussed more fully in Chapter Eleven, it is worth noting here briefly some of the gender issues that emerged as a result of shared parenting. There were clear divisions in relation to concerns and issues expressed. In general, the men were conscious that the adoption of a fuller parenting role demanded an increase in sensitivity and awareness. They recognised the need to 'learn the little things', the 'mother-type things'. Shared parenting created the need and the opportunity to explore the more feminine sides of themselves, an opportunity which seemed to be welcomed yet was not unambiguous. For Dave, the ability to be a 'more equal, more even . . .' parent was a necessity if he was going to perform his role adequately. But such a development had its systemic features. If he was to become more competent, then Jane had to be prepared to take a less central role:

AO: When the children are with you, then you would go to, say a school meeting or would take them to the doctor, or buy things that they need? Is that how it happens? Are there some areas in which Jane is still primarily responsible?

DB: Well-

Louise: Jane takes me - Jane took me to the doctor the other day.

DB: Jane -

Louise: And she took us to[].

DB: Jane tends . . . to do more than me. Y'know? She just, when I'm looking after the kids, Jane still . . . jumps in a lot and does things. I mean, she drops in . . . quite a lot, takes them to school and she tends- she takes them- I don't think I've taken the children to the doctor yet. Mainly because - Oh, I took Louise to the hospital, but usually because Jane jumps in and sort of says that she sort of needs to go to the doctor before I . . . would have . . . realised it or thought that it was-

Louise: Mum came in about my haircut and I had an earache and she had to ring up the doctor at school.

DB: Yes, so that's -

AO: How's that for you Dave?

DB: Well, I would prefer to be come a more equal, more even . . .

AO: You'd prefer to take the responsibility for getting them to the doctor (Yes) and taking them to get their hair cut?

DB: Yes, I would prefer that. Like I did raise it in the early days umm she was always rushing out to buy clothes and still is to some extent, but I sort of said I'd *like* to take more part in it because, y'know, just wanted to. The fact that Jane was more used to it, was more . . . ready to do it - in fact . . . felt more that she ought to be doing it meant that she was getting in there and buying them clothes whereas I would sort of . . . put up with -

AO: You'd wait just that bit longer and then-

DB: Yeah. And I would miss out (1st Interview).

Dave saw his self-employment as contributing to a greater flexibility which enabled him to drop in at school, get involved in school activities, and be home at times in the afternoon, all of which helped extend his knowledge of the children.

For Luke, though, the process of developing more sensitivity to the children was a learning process which came 'naturally' only to women. He made the following comments in the context of talking about the ease with which he felt he could have opted out of the children's lives when the separation occurred:

well, I'm realistic enough to know myself and to know that that's the way I could be, and it's something I have to continually fight, and so you know, you consciously do something about it, I suppose. But you still lack things, eh? You still lack, umm . . . umm . . . the social sort of - like you are trying to be a mother and father at once, you know, and . . . I *admire* the ability of women to be able to actually . . . *always* feel sensitive to their children though . . . you know *always* sort of . . . umm . . . react . . . whereas . . . with me, umm . . . it's, it's not quite that easy, eh? You know, it's got to be a conscious thing. You know, I've gotta consciously think . . . so and so . . . there's a little of a break there, you know.

AO: When you say, "consciously to be very sensitive to the children" are you meaning in terms of the kids' feelings . . . or?

LR: Yeah. In what they are doing, or reacting to, umm, how they ahh, how they are doing at school, or, or, just to be, yeah, just to be sensitive to them.

AO: But do you think that over the time that you've been doing this, that that sensitivity is, has changed, developed, grown? (Umm) Meaning, are you feeling that it is such a conscious endeavour now as you were perhaps at the beginning?

LR: Not as much. No. But it's continually, umm . . . have to do, I continually have to think about it . . . for me . . . you know, I am talking to you about my upbringing, eh? And, and, and me as a man, and I'm very much, I know that I'm, I'm quite a lot like my father.

AO: What, the tendency would be easy for you to be distant (Yeah) as he was?

LR: Yeah. So that's a very personal thing for me, you know, that's just a . . . you know I think we cope. I think we *cope*, you know. I think, ahh . . . well . . . I think I deal with it, you know, but you've just seen the children on the first night and, ahh, I feel sensitive to Isac coming here at the last possible moment sort of thing - having tea, and "I want to go out with my mates", you know . . . (Because?) and Diana's the same, you know.

AO: But what are you, what, what's that saying to you?

LR: It's saying to me that . . . ahh . . . What is it saying to me? . . . It's saying to me, ahh, that they'd rather be elsewhere

AO: But . . . in saying . . . "They'd be rather be elsewhere", are you actually reading that as . . . "They don't - I'm not good enough. They don't want me"?

LR: Could do. (Mmm, Mmm). . . I could. . .

AO: So you have to fight to stop yourself reading that into it?

LR: Yes (3rd Interview).

So while the men's concerns tended to be more inward looking and more concerned with the development of new roles as fathers, the gender issues for the women were on the one hand more outward looking. They expressed concern far more than the men did about their ability to get work and to earn enough to support the children adequately; they were conscious of the pressures of working and having child-care responsibilities; and some felt that they had to make a choice between career and work. Some continued to express concerns about the men's parenting abilities because they saw the men as less practiced and in some instances differently or less, bonded to the children.

Support networks

Climgenpeel and Repucci (1984) point out the importance of the support of formal and informal networks in a joint custody arrangement. They suggest that flexibility of working hours and a sympathetic and understanding school system are important as are understanding and helpful kin. In like manner, Bronfenbrenner (1979) notes that the interplay between the person and the environment, and the ways in which interaction between different settings can affect behaviour, is infrequently explored. In a recent study of newly separated women, and of the support which they found most useful, Ginsberg (1986, p. 348) notes that quality of support often remains undefined:

little information about the quality of support that is protective or lowers the risk of psychological problems [is available]. Even if it can be demonstrated that the presence of supportive relationships influences healthy functioning, the process by which this operates is not understood.

Families, obviously, as Bronfenbrenner wishes to make apparent, do not live in a vacuum. All family members are continually engaged in interactions with wider social systems which can reinforce or question the ways in which that member and that family are functioning. While it lay beyond the scope of this study to undertake an extensive investigation of the interaction of the different formal and informal systems, there were nonetheless comments by all parents about different aspects of the social systems. These comments ranged from an awareness of the constriction of ideologies surrounding the definition of 'family' as intact and heterosexual, as well as comments on the impact of the reactions of informal (family, friends and neighbourhoods) and formal networks (schools, and counselling agencies).

Informal networks

On the whole, there were relatively few references made to families or to family support once the arrangements became stabilised. As was indicated in Chapter Five, there was strong feeling from the women in particular about lack of moral support from parents⁹, and in one instance lack of support from siblings was also mentioned as hurtful. Jane, however, had confronted her parents about their lack of support by the end of the first three interviews. She felt better for having done so, although she realised that there was still a substantial gap in understanding between herself and her mother. In other instances, the value of supportive siblings or parents was noted, and the practical help that they were able to offer when they lived in the same city was appreciated. There was often, though, a sense of distance and disengagement when people talked about their families, and out of the eight families, only two sets of grandparents actually lived in Wellington. Of these two sets, only one was intensively involved. Their presence was seen as critical to the success of the arrangement. When they were living with her, Isa's children went to their grandparent's each day after school. The grandparents' willingness *and* ability to help with the child-care meant that Diana and Isac retained a major stake in the small and highly co-operative community that they had lived in prior to the separation, and still lived in when they were with Luke. Not only was Isa able to rely on family for after-school care and also know that the children would be safe in the neighbourhood itself because they were known to all the residents, but she felt that her family's presence was in itself protective of the children, and that her parents played a facilitative, supportive role towards Luke, inviting him down for family gatherings and celebrations. They were also able to intervene protectively on an occasion when Isa realised that her presence would have been an irritant, rather than a help:

⁹ Ginsberg (1986, p. 364) notes in relation to the study of recently separated women that in the early stages of separation or divorce women are especially vulnerable to family criticism and blame: 'Perceived support of the divorce from relatives appears to assuage self-recriminations and the agony of ambivalence'.

well, I think the thing is that my family is there, who are sensitive, and I know that she (Diana) always has got that connection. In terms of a, that . . . she's not necessarily in an all-male environment, because there are a lot of women and girls and my parents and family around her. So that's, that's how I accept that she's living in a relationship . . . you know, with her father . . . and her brother . . . umm . . . and I have expressed . . . reservations about his drinking . . . and so have the children, and I have expressed . . . my distaste for him driving . . . and I, you know, that is one thing that I have always, it, there is nothing new in that.

AO: Right. That has been on-going for a long time?

IM: Mmm. Umm . . . and . . . while I can express those reservations, I can't actually do anything about them, from here, where I am. I only hope that, that he will take some kind of heed, as far as they are concerned. Because he wants to - not because he's doing it for me, and because . . . it feels more responsible than to drink and drive and, ensure that umm, . . . the kids are kind of cared for. . . But ahh I s'pose I just have to, I, I, I dunno whether it's kind of age, you know, I feel, "OK. If the consequences are such, if something happens, we'll meet them when it comes".

AO: Do you think that it's partly actually . . . if you like, growing into the agreement, growing into the mode of living, that at the outset you don't know what is going to happen, and you've now lived with it 2 years - more or less -

IM: That's right. And none of those -

AO: Have happened.

IM: No. (And so-) Except once, when the children rang one evening. And they rang because he wasn't in the house. That *really shocked* me.

AO: And how did you deal with that?

IM: . . . umm . . . I was over here, and I was very conscious of the fact that I didn't want to . . . intrude, that that would cause problems so I rang my family, and my sister answered the phone . . . and I said that the children are upset and that Luke wasn't there. I didn't know where he was. But he could have been called out to a sick friend . . . I didn't know what it was. And so I, the important thing was that the children were cared for and that I wasn't . . . gonna go over there . . . ahh . . . if somebody else could. They were kind of worried, so I'd calmed them down, so I rang my family, and my sister went to them and wrote a note saying that, "The kids woke up, and you weren't there, so I've taken them to their grandparents". And in the morning I rang Mum and I was upset 'cos I woke up feeling quite shocked because I'd had an unsettled . . . and worried an', umm, that was, that was the biggest problem of him caring for the children that I've ever had to face. And, umm, I rang Mum and said how I was feeling and that I didn't know where he was, or why he was called out, and wanted her in some way to do something. . . Umm, she went down in the morning about 7.00, and mentioned, you know, that he knew that she had the children, and found that he was there and said that she had the children, that they had woken up upset and next time she thought that it was really important he, for whatever reason he was called out - I don't know to this day - he, umm, let, let somebody know. You know, let - somebody could have come down. She could have come down and stayed.

AO: Right. One of the things that seems -

IM: So there was a solution.

AO: Yeah - is that - it is certainly a solution, and it seems admirable, insofar as you have set up a system, and he's clear that somebody knew what had happened, and he was given ideas of what to do about it in a different situation.

IM: And that it wasn't me!

AO: But there are also elements of real constraint insofar as you couldn't go down, and say, "Don't do that again". And that has come across in other families too - that you actually, in order to keep the arrangement going, you have to be careful.

IM: I could have gone down there, but I know the consequences would have been very severe and that is -

AO: What do you think would have happened?

IM: I would have been told to mind my own business and I didn't actually know, I wouldn't get any information at all as to why he'd gone. I, I would just be told "to mind my own business, and that it was nothing to do with me, that he was caring for the children. He was doing it quite well . . . thank you very much". Yes. That would have been it. That is what I assume would happen (3rd Interview).

Some parents had friends, and in three instances, work associates, who remained important sources of confirmation. In Michelle's case, they continued to question the validity of the arrangement and to ask about the directions that she was taking which, while distressing, also allowed her to feel that her doubts about the wisdom of the arrangement were shared by others. And both Patty and Fay, as noted earlier, also saw themselves as lending support to other parents who wanted to know more about the

implications of shared parenting¹⁰. Although this was not an area about which I enquired in great depth my feeling was that in relation to informal support networks many parents did not have a great deal of support and at times felt quite isolated.

Formal networks - schools

I did not make any attempt to interview the staff of the schools that the children attended, but in the course of a discussion about other matters with the principal of one school it was made clear to me that women should not leave their families, and that the mother of one of the families in the study had in effect abandoned her children. Several parents mentioned the value of staff who were sympathetic and did not leap to adverse judgments about the value of their arrangement. Only Patty had found one particular teacher unsympathetic to what she and Stephen were trying to achieve. Schools were seen to play important roles in the lives of the families. They often provided a point of stability to the children over the period of the major family changes. They provided access to other adults who could see the children operating outside of the home environment, and were able to comment on how they saw the children handling the changes. And in some instances they provided the children with a touchstone against which they could measure the advantages of their custody arrangements. Isa, whose children attended a small inner city school where over sixty percent of the children came from separated homes, felt that the tolerance of diversity of living styles, and the children's awareness of their contact with their father in contrast to their knowledge of their friends' lack of contact with their fathers, had been valuable.

Counselling agencies

Only three families had used counselling facilities to make the decision about custody and of these, only one (the Butler/Summers) had sought further help, either as individuals (which was seen as very helpful, especially by Lawrence) or as a couple or family, which was mostly seen as less helpful. Michelle was deeply relieved and felt her 'gut feelings' to be validated when the counsellor at the last agency they went to took into account the difficulties the parents were having in providing a stable arrangement for Kay, and said that he did not feel that the shared parenting was working in Kay's interests.

What I found interesting was the fact that while parental relationships remained highly stressed in two instances, and other parents experienced periods of stress, parents did not return to or seek further help from counselling agencies. One reason seemed to be that they felt that they ought to be able to sort things out themselves. I was also told that the other parent would not agree to attend and there was no point going unless it was a joint affair. The Davis/Todd family felt that their experiences of the psychological services at the time of the court hearing militated against further contact after the hearing. It may also have been that parents simply were accustomed to levels of stress that appear high to an outsider, and therefore did not consider their experience in any way unusual.

¹⁰ See pp. 104 - 105.

Summary

Four significant points emerge from this analysis of the everyday experience of shared parenting:

(1) Although the actual routine of the changeovers was well established and, with the exception of Jim's occasional confusion, working well, the transitions - practical and emotional - were less easily managed, and the pain and sense of loss for the parents, spoken about in greater detail and intensity by the women than by the men, continued, albeit in a diminished fashion, over quite long periods. There has been a tendency to assume that this loss is merely because women are insufficiently oriented to the outside world of work and careers, or (among some New Zealand counsellors) to describe such loss as a manifestation of an attempt to control access, rather than to view it as a legitimate expression of grief. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge the legitimacy of many women's on-going concerns about their ex-partner's previous lack of child-rearing experience, rather than treat this concern as a additional attempt to exclude the father.

(2) In reconstituted relationships, shared parenting offered the considerable advantage of allowing time to the adults to develop and confirm their new relationship away from the demands of children. However, the other areas where it was hypothesised that shared parenting would reduce tensions remained problematic for most parents and some children.

(3) While it was apparent that parents advanced some specific benefits which accrued as a consequence of shared parenting, there were equally specific disadvantages. In writing of how parents perceived the arrangement, I have not attempted to attach quantitative weight to either category. The experiences were often spoken about a manner in which each implied or referred directly to the other, and it is this interrelationship which I have sought to preserve. Although it is difficult to avoid using such words as 'benefit/drawback', or 'advantage/disadvantage' which carry strong positive and negative connotations and which polarise experience, those dichotomised experiences then have to be reconstituted in all their complexity so that what is finally stressed is the way that each informs and is informed by the other.

(4) There were many points in the course of writing this chapter where I came up against my own assumptions of normality in regard to family life and, like the parents, felt inclined, unjustifiably, to see the difficulties that were experienced as a consequence of the shared parenting and therefore, ultimately, as a consequence of the separation. As a result of the experience of spending time and talking with the families, the inappropriateness of many of the arbitrary divisions between intact and separated families has become more obvious; and the extent to which parental division and difference is obscured within intact families by the models and assumptions used, more apparent. The difficulties of noting continuums between intact and separated families is complicated by the lack of recent, qualitative work which addresses the parental relationship and explores dimensions of this in terms of gender, class and ethnicity.

THE ADULT RELATIONSHIP FOLLOWING SEPARATION

Introduction

The relative ease or discomfort experienced by parents and children in a shared parenting arrangement depends substantially on the ability of parents to satisfactorily re-organise and to 'manage' their relationship after separation. The importance of a good parental relationship is noted frequently in the joint custody literature, and its absence seen as problematic¹. Achieving a positive relationship may be difficult because distance and hostility between separated couples are seen as the norm, and Ahrons (1980) has suggested that an adequate language with which to describe closer forms of separated relationships does not yet exist. There is, however, an increasing awareness of the psychological tasks facing the separated, in which disengagement from the other is no longer seen as an ordered, bounded event; instead it is described as a complex, extended process, which is not necessarily orderly, predictable or certain (Duck, 1982)². The authors who specifically discuss the nature of shared parenting relationships (Ahrons, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983; Ahrons & Perlmutter, 1982; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987; Ahrons & Wallisch, 1986; Goldsmith, 1980) emphasise the complexity of co-parenting; the need to establish firm spousal boundaries in place of the probably more fluid parental/spousal boundaries prior to the separation; the on-going interaction of ex-partners around child and family related issues; the increase in psychological distance over time; and the gradual diminution of hostility. A primary concern of these writers is to bring the notion of friendly contact and continuity of relationship after separation back from the realms of outer darkness where it has long resided, by advancing the notion of a continuing post-separation interdependence as normative and non-pathological. At times, however, the ideological definition of norms has taken precedence over everyday experience. Goldsmith (1980), for example, does not resolve the tension between her account of the existence of new 'normative' (i.e., friendly) behaviour and her acknowledgement that three quarters of her sample of one hundred and twenty-nine former spouses in mother-custody cases saw their relationship after separation as conflicted, difficult and involving major differences in opinions about child rearing.

Ahrons & Rodgers (1987, pp.115 ff.), as part of a study, the purpose of which was to explore the dynamics and processes of divorcing families, have developed a

¹ Steinman (1983), for example, notes that the arrangement is not likely to work when either or both parents are emotionally disturbed; when there are histories of alcoholism, violence and/or spousal abuse; when there is on-going hostility and conflict between parents, including an extreme lack of respect for the other as a parent; when there are major differences in life style; and when one parent denies the reality of

typology of four interactional modes of shared parenting relationships. The authors advance their typologies tentatively, calling them 'signposts' rather than 'markers', and say that the typologies should not be regarded as discrete. The types, each designated by an alliterative phrase which no doubt adds to its memorability, are:

Perfect Pals: The most distinctive attribute of couples in this type is the ability to retain their friendship (perhaps because of a life style decision) although the separation itself may have involved some conflict. Ahrons & Rodgers regard such relationships as creative and flexible, and as providing a strong continuity with the rituals of the previously intact family. The parents' ability to embark on such a relationship is described as stemming from the mutuality of the decision to separate. Neither felt abandoned by the other. The existence of a warm, mutual regard allows each to see the other as a responsible, caring person, open to compromise. Some anger may be present, but it will be muted. Some couples, but by no means the majority are able to take holiday time together. The researchers believe that this type of relationship is likely to be transitional because of the difficulties of attaining a more independent existence. They suggest that it is possible that a 'perfect pals' type of relationship may prolong reunion fantasies of both adults and children, but balance this potential drawback by the suggestion that the long, slow transition towards independence and greater separateness is possibly psychologically advantageous for the parents and children.

Co-operative Colleagues: Among couples in this typology a close friendliness is lacking, but co-operation as parents is possible. The couples accept the importance of compromise, and wish to avoid conflict in order to minimise the trauma of divorce. As with Perfect Pals, they are flexible and able to manage conflict but there are more areas where negotiation is necessary. Parents are able to offer practical assistance to each other, and they share some major life events. Unlike Perfect Pals, there are clear boundaries between spousal and parenting roles.

Angry Associates: Anger dominates the relationship. Couples in this group may continue fighting for years, arguments occur easily, and non-conflictual discussions are rare. Rather than having a mutually supported basis, parenting occurs as a parallel process and implicit agreements between parents are most unlikely to exist. Each expects contact with the other to be difficult. Conflict, when it occurs, escalates rapidly. Continual power struggles are likely. Children are unlikely to feel free to associate easily with one or both parents.

Fiery Foes: Parents in this type of relationship continue to experience intense anger at the other partner, and the ability to co-parent is almost non-existent. Contentious, litigated divorces among this group are also likely.

Typologies or idealisations such as these are, however, problematic. Despite Ahrons' & Rodger's disclaimers that the classification is tentative, the alliterative and onomatopoeic quality of the phrases used has the effect of constructing a dominant orientation, i.e., that the relationships are either friendly and equanimous, or co-operative,

or angry, or highly conflictual. The dominant focus tends to exclude or suppress other, often contradictory orientations which may exist simultaneously within the typology. They therefore imply relationships which are open or closed. Interestingly, Ahrons & Rodgers have omitted any discussion of issues of gender and power. There is no suggestion of a range of emotions within each type; and implicit in the construction of the typologies is the suggestion that each partner occupies the identical psychological space, and furthermore, that the relationship never changes. The typologies as they have been delineated can only be read as very broad generalisations, from which it is difficult to get any detailed sense of the richness, diversity and paradoxical nature of the parents' everyday experience. Prescriptions are offered about the need for the parents to re-establish roles and draw boundaries in relation to the children and each other. There is no account of what is involved in such a task, the complexity of which became more apparent as the analysis of my data progressed and as I gave further thought to the implications of such words as 'trust' and 'maturity' which are so casually and frequently used in the context of discussing relationships.

The demands of shared parenting

Many of the issues which parents in shared parenting arrangements have to address are present in intact families. But because it tends to be assumed that intact families function adequately until a point is reached when it becomes apparent that this truism no longer holds true of an individual unit, the tensions surrounding parenting (as distinct from mothering) have not been researched in any detail. This has meant that the difficulties and negotiation involved, and the existence of issues of trust and power, are only accredited as significant at the point of breakdown, when the difficulties the parents experience are too easily construed as a function of the marital problems, rather than being understood as reflecting as well areas of tension endemic to all parenting relationships³. There are, however, additional demands and paradoxes specific to shared parenting. Within the joint custody literature, writers have concentrated on the need for flexibility, openness, and communication as critical to parenting. What has not been discussed in any detail is what is required to achieve such positions, apart from the moral injunctions about the necessity of placing hostility aside in order to work together for the children's benefit. Communication is raised in terms of content (what should be discussed) rather than process (how does that discussion take place and what is its outcome?). The consequence is that the energy and determination required to maintain a functioning, separated relationship are obscured, as

³ When Ahrons & Rodgers say that 'angry associates' have a 'parallel', not 'co'-parenting relationship, the implication is that detailed sharing of information about the children, participation by both parents in the daily tasks, support, help etc. are the norm in most intact families and that it is only with separation or divorce that these things change. Brannen & Moss (1987) who researched aspects of life in families with pre-schoolers, say that fathers participated little in child-care arrangements and in other major issues, such as the wife's return to work. See also Backett (1982; 1986); and Russell (1983) who had considerable difficulty finding subjects in intact families where both adults accepted considerable responsibility for the children.

are the difficulties around the establishment and maintenance of trust and the way in which power is handled.

The most obvious issue confronting shared parenting couples is resolving and defining the nature of their changed relationship - the frequency of contact, and how that contact will be handled. Parents are faced with the paradox of defining themselves as separate and retaining some degree of connection, while avoiding the pitfalls of the interpersonal dynamics of the old relationship. They are thus called upon to manage a relationship where the incentive for establishing a relationship that ideally is both trusting and close, where each is prepared to make allowances for the other, is likely to be less than it was.

AO: I suppose (. . .) that there is always . . . potential for conflict . . . but the potential is that much greater because there's . . . there *can* be less assumptions of good will?

RT: Oh, not only that, because in a relationship you . . . may . . . be . . . more accepting . . . of the other's behaviour and outlook, umm, in the context of an overall sort of . . . thing, you know, where there are pluses and minuses (*laughs*) about the other person and that sort of, you know . . . that evens out. Now, where the pluses in the relationship are taken away and you've got only the bloody minuses (*laughs*) that makes, y'know, that makes the going a little bit difficult (1st Interview).

For the relationship to work well, trust that the other person 'won't bloody well trip you up,' as Patty's partner, Tom said, remains an essential ingredient. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'trust' as a 'firm belief in the reliability, honesty, veracity, justice, strength, etc. of person'. Granting the other these qualities may be difficult especially when the meaning of the word is thought about in the context of active trusting. To trust a person implies openness which also suggests a preparedness to allow vulnerabilities to become apparent. A willingness to share problems or concerns stems from the belief that the other is likely to respond positively and helpfully. Although, as Ahrons points out, shared parenting parents are mostly likely to limit topics of conversation to family and kin, thus drawing boundaries around the spousal subsystem, this does not altogether dispose of the problem. The question of trust in relation to the other's ability to care for the children, and the implications of talking about, or admitting to, difficulties with the children remain. In tense or conflictual parental relationships, problems with the children may not be easy to admit because of anxiety that such admissions may be read as a proof of personal failure, and may open the way for further action over custody. Equally, parents may not feel able to raise general concerns about aspects of upbringing because of an awareness of the fragility of the relationship, and a desire not to complicate the situation further. Children too may well behave differently with one parent, so that the one may simply not be experiencing the difficulties, and be disinclined to take the other's concerns seriously, especially when to do so may mean agreeing that the sharing is not working in the child's benefit.

Furthermore, when one parent who has had little to do with the children then becomes an equal caretaker, the parent giving up some of her responsibility has to take on trust that the other will manage well enough. On the day to day level she is likely to

experience little feedback as to how things are going. When there is little interaction between the parents, and because to ask the children in any detail what takes place at the other's home could be too easily construed as prying, there are few means of knowing how the children and the ex-partner are getting on⁴. The more difficult the parental relationships, the greater the constraints to knowledge- sharing and building trust. Nor, when the parental contact is infrequent and generally unrelaxed is it easy to upgrade one's perception of the other. The ideology of shared parenting demands something akin to a 'we-relationship,' while what is often experienced is closer to a 'they relationship' (Shutz & Luckmann, 1973)⁵.

Trust involves faith in the other person, and in particular faith that the parent will not harm the child⁶. Where the parental relationship is conflictual, trust is often an early casualty. Overall, it would seem that the greater the distance between the parents, the less the trust is likely to be, the fewer opportunities there will be for remedying that situation, the less goodwill there will be to make allowances or to place a positive interpretation on an event. Under these circumstances, trust becomes a precarious commodity and not a quality that can be assumed automatically to be present; and distance, rather than closeness, the norm.

Considerations about trust open for analysis the notion of power as pervasive, and central to all relationships. The way that power is defined and allocated between couples becomes a significant indicator of the ease with which the adult relationship will be conducted. Readiness to open oneself to the other, and the ability to define the nature of shared parenting or move the adult relationship in a particular direction, relate to power. Equally relationships are affected by power when one parent attempts to control the other, either through threatening or violent behaviour, or through other mechanisms such as through the control and allocation of finance or moves to terminate the arrangement. It relates to actions which are perceived as arbitrary, and is present in the ways in which patterns of communication become established. It is also implicit in the way that each regards the other, since positive regard aids the development of a flexible rather than a constrained relationship. In the more difficult relationships, for example, it becomes

⁴ Dave mentioned, for instance, that he could get some idea of how things were between the children and Jane when he rang by the sorts of noises that were going on in the background. However, such a mode of information collection has its distinct limitations.

⁵ A 'we-relationship' is based on immediate, interactive experience, in which the participating members are relatively unreflective about each other, where the attitude of each is open to the other, and where there is a sense of commonality of experience. A 'they relationship' becomes more distant, and therefore involves greater degrees of typification and anonymity. The other is experienced less directly, and the detailedness of knowledge present in the 'we relation' is lost, to be replaced by a higher level of generalisation (pp. 55 - 81).

⁶ There was at one stage a concern about incest in one of the families. Because instances of reported sexual abuse in families are believed to signal merely the tip of the iceberg, there is a real possibility of a child being placed in an unprotected abusive situation. The ideology of shared parenting specifies a concerned and nurturant male and does not take sufficient account of the gap between the ideal and actuality.

apparent that a negative or critical perception of the ex-partner itself provides justification for arbitrary actions, attitudes and behaviour⁷.

The way that the issues of trust and of power (which themselves were given a gendered expression within the texts) are handled affects the nature and conduct of the relationship. While such issues are endemic to all relationships, it is likely that the decision to share the parenting may result from their greater explicitness. What differed between the families in the study was not the absence or presence of trust and power but the way in which they were given expression, and the degree to which the relationship could be skewed when one person had significantly greater power than the other, or was less prepared to trust.

Re-defining the typologies of 'interactional relationships'

In place of Ahrons' and Rodger's (1987) alliterative but closed relational typologies, the typologies I have developed are intended to encapsulate change and process and to imply gradations of experience within each type. The latter two typologies, however, have a more static quality to them, reflecting a higher degree to immobility and inflexibility. Two other points are important to note. Ex-partners may not occupy the same psychological space, so that desire by one parent to improve relationships where relationships are more fraught, is constrained by systemic and personal rigidities. It was apparent in the families in this study that relationships changed, both for the better and for the worse over time, so that the positioning of families within a particular type, although valid at the time of the research, is not a final classification.

Type 1. Relationship characterised by a modified intimacy

Both the couples placed in this type described the decision to separate as mutual, and their ability to maintain a close relationship as a consequence of a lack of sexual jealousy. The most obvious characteristic of the two couples in this grouping was the sense of common accord and the extent to which they took each other and the relationship for granted, perceiving it as offering valued and positive support. Differences of power were apparent; they were not exploited or seen as divisive, although this did not prevent moments of resentment about them. The couples described each other as significant and valued people. Nouns such as 'friend' and 'support' and adjectives such as 'strong', 'caring', and 'aware' were used. There was a sense of real affection for the other and a lack of imposed conditions on the relationship. Compromise was possible. When Anna and Susan were unsure whether their relationship would work, Anna and the children returned home for a week to live with Martin and his lover - an experience which Martin described as 'difficult, but which he was prepared at that time to manage if necessary.

⁷ Harvey et al. (1982, pp. 111 - 112) quoting Orvis et al. note that the validity of an attribution may be impossible to establish since attribution changes over time. '[A]ttribution represents a process of on-going evaluation and restructuring, whose quality must change as the relationship's basic premises are intensified or altered . . . motivation, as well as the quality, of attributions change in the course of a close relationship'.

Contact with each other was regular and valued for its own sake. Patty and Stephen thought that they probably phoned each other two to three times a week. They both expected to child mind for the other if they were free, and they felt easy in approaching each other to vary arrangements. They described their shared parenting arrangement as initially dependent on a good relationship which then created its own momentum for maintaining that attitude. They and their partners helped each other in a variety of ways, with child-care, wiring of houses, car repairs, gardening, moving and house maintenance. Regular contact assisted ready discussion of issues affecting the children, and each parent thought of the other as the most appropriate person with whom to have the discussion, although both couples recognised that the communication was not always easy.

Conversations in neither family were restricted to child-oriented subjects. Personal problems were discussed, with knowledge that these would be taken seriously, and thoughtfully addressed (although Martin said that once when he was distressed about the ending of a subsequent relationship, Anna could not help because she was herself going through a vulnerable stage). Schools were visited jointly, partly as a matter of principle, and both sets of parents participated jointly in school activities. Martin spoke of the relationship in these terms:

I like the link. And as you probably saw, I love going up there, and being in among the people there, the family there, um, I like them, I like helping, I like working there . . . umm . . . it feels a good place to be and I feel part of it. I want to continue to feel part of it . . . and as I said, Susan has been such a good friend of mine (. . .) I, it comes down to this, that I really enjoy being there (. . .) I like being amongst them . . . because we have actually built something very solid in the last 4 years. It just, it feels really, really nice. I always like going there. Definitely so (2nd Interview).

But endorsement, enjoyment, and friendship did not proceed on an unbroken surface. Tensions edged and rippled. Both of the women were a little critical of the way that their ex-spouses responded to the children. Patty, endorsing though she was of Stephen, also queried whether Stephen had followed up the agreement to ensure that Jim helped in the house, and whether he talked much with Jim about his sexuality (an issue which also concerned Anna), or more generally about the amount of time he spent talking to Jim since he sometimes appeared unfamiliar with aspects of Jim's life which she had felt were self-evident. What was interesting was the way in which the criticism was offered. Having spoken of her concerns, she then proceeded to partially withdraw them and attempted to restore an unbroken surface by detailing mitigating circumstances which explained Stephen's lack of knowledge.

He . . . lets Jim get away with more than I would. Put it that way. He lets, he lets Jim take advantage of him, of his good nature. Dunno if that's a bad thing. It balances. We probably balance out . . . and Jim seems to be coming on all right . . . but there have been times in the past when we were having trouble with this forgetfulness and (. . .) when I felt that it would have been, when some pushing on Stephen's part wouldn't have hurt.

AO: Were you able to . . . talk to Stephen about that?

PP: Well, I talked to him about it . . . in respect to . . . housework (. . .) that chart business . . . um . . . Stephen's got lots of . . . good intentions (laughs) (. . .) Just very occasionally, um, I find that he doesn't know things about Jim . . . that, that um, (. . .) the one I talked about before when I found out

that he'd, that he didn't know about how strong Jim's interest in motorcycles was, and that Jim was reading *Popular Mechanics* and that sort of thing, and Jim's interests . . . that he hadn't . . . been in touch with - been quite as clued up.

AO: So how did you - you had this sort of anxiety or awareness maybe that Stephen didn't know this? I mean, what was your response? (. . .)

PP: Well, to begin with it was . . . it hurt me a little bit. But then I thought about it. I realised that part of it is a time factor, that I have Jim through most of the afternoon . . . and that I do things with him, like go to the library, which Stephen can't do (2nd Interview).

On another occasion she returned to similar issues. However, her tone was tentative. She used 'mention', a word which is muted and implied a bare touching upon a subject, rather than a stronger word such as 'tell', which is much more directive. She was clearly uncertain about possible boundary transgressions:

in a way I don't feel that it is my place to tell Stephen how he should parent . . . and that would be, it would be a bit like that, doing that . . . I did mention to Stephen, that I thought, ironically enough . . . that he ought to be a little bit harder . . . (2nd Interview).

It was clear though that sensitive matters could be raised, even if tentatively, and that to do so in no way implied throwing doubt on the other parent's commitment to parenting, or on their positive relationship.

Parents in both families spoke warmly of their relationship. But they were equally conscious of a gradual modification of their closeness, exemplified by Patty's description of the relationship between herself and Stephen as having been like that of a 'brother and sister' and then having become more like that of 'cousins'. The Nobles were also aware of gradual changes in their relationship, and the following quote from Anna's text expresses a degree of ambivalence and, at times, a muted frustration with Martin as well as the awareness of change.

AO: How do you manage - you said something before about joint responsibility. No. Decision-making . . . for the kids. I mean, how . . . He said, "I'm not responsible for the day to day care of them", or something.

AN: He said, "I'm not involved in them (Yes and you said-) and the decisions that are made about the children" . . . and I said, "That's not true - that's not true". And he says, "Well, certainly the day to day stuff" . . . and I think that he feels -

SG: Well, it is true to a large extent.

AN: Hang on. I acknowledge certainly the day to day stuff which is fairly . . . mundane but makes you (to SG) an active partner in parenting . . . I accept that. But I said, "You are as active in the decisions that are made - major decisions as you want to be".

AO: What would you see as being major decisions?

AN: Well, what would you think? Secondary schooling for one.

SG: But don't you think that you and I discuss that and virtually summed it up? Without reference to Martin at all? . . .

AN: Yes *WE HAVE*. But the other half of that, is that if, as I said, if he wanted to take more part . . . "If you wanted to play a more active role in decision-making then you certainly could. If you felt strongly about it, then we would take note". (Yeah) It's very difficult to know with Martin . . . when he's feeling . . . he isn't being a part of something and when he is. Umm, I actually find him quite a hard person to read. I don't know if Susan does. But I . . . I certainly do . . . I don't think that we can - I think that our communication has deteriorated . . . again it is better up here than in Wellington. . . . And again it is better with a buffer (Mmm) . . . between us. . . We have *moments* like we have a moment that day you went (off) and I was really down - nothing to do with him or the kids. Just . . . me and he stayed behind and said, you know . . . "What's wrong"? and we had one of those rare moments where we really communicate . . . and all the bullshit or whatever it is that gets in the way goes . . . and then we can really *talk* about issues like . . . solving the problem of the house. I mean, he has talked to me, we have had really good talks, and he's said to me, you know, that he's worried about the costs and things. That's *why*

I am aware that, even though my friends keep saying that I ought do something . . and I know what we have discussed and I must act in my way even if it is contrary to *everybody else's* and do it . . in the rather convoluted way I do things.

AO: But just to come back to this issue of responsibility and so on. One of the things that it seems to me is that *if* you have got somebody who is . . and in some important respects Martin is, it seems to me - do say if you don't share the perception - on the periphery of the daily lives (Mmm) . . important decisions are . . more easily made . . because you have that day to day *context* in which to place them. . So it becomes much *harder* - I mean, you, you can make decisions about the secondary schools because you know the secondary schools. You know what is involved. Whereas he has to rely on your interpretation of what is involved . . which - at a distance . . distances him from that sense of immediacy. Does that seem fair?

AN: I think that he has distanced himself . . because he knows that . . which means that he is less (Involved) . . or in, in, in not in a very good position to make a judgment . .

AO: Were you ever able to talk, over the last 4 years . . umm . with him. I mean, you talked about talking with Susan - no, you talked, Susan, about the almost incessant talk that you have, discussion and evaluation and re-orientation about the kids - but, but are you able to talk with him? Were you able to talk with him . about the children, and about what you saw as the difficulties and Rachel's difficulties.?

AN: Over the last 4 years? (Yes) Yes certainly. Again, it is all right if you hit the magic moment. I mean I used to . . wait until he got here and see - and read the signals . . if there was something that I wanted. I mean, I would try and - if I thought that it wasn't a particularly good moment I would try and hit the moment. That doesn't happen with Susan. We can sort of always . . (Right.) interact.

AO: And you've got more moments (Of course) to potentially interact, haven't you?

AN: I had the same problem when I was living with him . . you know . .

SG: Did you , did you talk with him?

AN: Had to hit the moment. (SG: Right).

AO: But, by living together there are more moments when you come into contact (True) to evaluate.

AN: I've talked to Martin a fair bit about the kids. *I have certainly talked* about the kids and especially when we were having problems with Rachel. I've talked to him, I've said to him, "How do you feel about how things are going, or do you talk to the kids about our lives"? There's nothing he has actually done. I don't know whether - well *I DO* think . . as time goes one and we've got into a sort of a pattern - I really think . . . it is becoming more . . his relationship with the kids in a way . . is becoming slightly more distanced . . and superficial . . and that the other primary person in the kids' lives in terms of, is Susan. Is Susan.

AO: And that perhaps becomes fairly . .

AN: Whether that is inevitable . . whether that's . . I dunno . .

AO: Do you feel that that is because . . his distance from here, the . .

AN: Yes. And I think perhaps in time he is changing too because he sees inevitably . . that it's not go- I mean, it won't change . . we aren't going to live together again . . I think, as a *protection* for himself . . he's gotta cut off . . I mean if he allowed himself to sit in Wellington and think, "What are they doing today (over there)? What decisions are they making"? he'd go mad. So I mean, he's *got to*. I think that any one who didn't have their children all the time, must have (Yeah) times when they cut off from it . .

(Right) for their own sanity but perhaps it is something that I should ask again, and check out with him. I haven't . . and I think that *part* of the problem is because our relationship is too blurred.

(Mmm) We need to clarify . . some of the . . set some limits and, . . demarcate the boundaries a bit better . . (Mmm) which is *around* finance, I feel . . umm . .

SG: It is an important issue psychologically.

AN: I mean, when we talked out here the other night, and he was talking about the children, and said, you know, that he was sad . . he had stated to (a friend) that he was sad that he wasn't part of the decision making and that he missed that day to day stuff, and I said, you know, "You can be . . as close as -" and he said, "For example, the children . . really want - I can see that they get a better deal from you and Susan". He said, "I wouldn't be able to offer the kids the life that you do". *AND* I think that's, that's *true* except that could change with day - to - day contact . . his life would change. As I say, it's an untested . . given umm . .

SG: When we are all away on holiday together the holiday that we had in Rotorua - that was really good, he was really involved with the kids.

AN: He certainly has . . the potential for it.

AO: So there are times . . when, if, if there is long enough, because a weekend basically is very short, isn't it?

AN: And quite often over the weekend, he will have things that he wants to be doing. (Yes) Spanish and things like that.

SG: Catching up on the *Listener* and especially if it's sunny, he will go out an' lie in the sun with his books . . umm, and he doesn't really interact with the kids . . very much at all.

AN: *Except I think that he's just generally* - He really does enjoy being here -

SG: Hanging round, getting meals together.

AN: And he likes the fact that he's got a home in the country.

SG: He's got his bike. He's brought his 10 speed up here, and . . . He takes the kids swimming and in the winter he, he's very keen to go off to hockey and soccer, yell at the sidelines.

AN: . . . But we do need to rethink . . . maybe we are slowly drifting . . . a bit further apart . . . than I
 . . . thought. I dunno (1st Interview).

The text moves between affirmation of and irritation with Martin, between moments when the structural impediments to his greater involvement are recognised, to sudden slidings when these are turned into something akin to personal failure - he could take more part if he wanted to - which is then excused, much as Patty excused Stephen. Martin's remoteness becomes for him a psychological necessity and the person who is increasingly significant is Susan, who is *there* and whose presence makes Martin's in some ways less necessary. The relevance of Anna's comments, however, extend beyond their immediate situation. What is also highlighted by her text is the need to give greater precision to the meaning of decision making in any parenting relationship. In a context where one parent remains more actively involved in parenting tasks Anna's ideological position about participation confronts the practical difficulties arising from Martin's lesser daily involvement. At the point where Anna was challenged about Martin's real ability to be as involved as she felt he could be, in contrast to what ought to be possible, she shifted ground. The difficulties inherent in Martin's position were given momentary expression when she noted that he had to 'parent out of context', thus rendering her assertion about the possibility of his involvement more ideological than practical.

In the American literature decision making is given considerable status as a parental act, and 'decisions' are recognised in relation to the significance of the issues, e.g., issues of health, insurance, schooling. In New Zealand's different social climate, the decisions which families had to make, and which appeared to take up more of their time and energy, were mundane but still at times difficult. Sometimes there were major issues - a change of school, the departure of one parent but these occurred infrequently. What was given significance, not only by Martin, who questioned the adequacy of Anna's formulations about his ability to participate in decision-making while not doubting that she intended he should be involved, but also by several of the other men, was the certainty that involvement in the children's day-to-day lives constituted meaningful and knowledgeable participation, and was basic to the formulation of decisions. The everyday, rather than the infrequently occurring 'major' decision, was therefore more important, a point briefly conceded by Anna when she talked of Susan's being the active parent because of her involvement in the 'mundane' day-to-day. Thus the inherent inadequacy of the distinction used in psychological assessment between quantitative and qualitative time becomes apparent. Each depends on the other. Qualitative time requires quantitative experience. The children and parent need both in order to get to know each other and to feel comfortable with each other, and to ensure that the parent has sufficient information on which to base decisions.

Anna also noted other ways in which Martin's role and his ability to share the parenting more closely was constrained by the structure of their arrangement. Firstly, the

person with whom she really shared the parenting was Susan, whose parenting abilities she respected and were clearly visible to her. Secondly, she drew attention to the way that within the marriage she had played a mediatory, interpretive role in relation to the children and Martin, suggesting that the adult parenting relationship had not changed in this respect, although there are hints that it could were Martin to care for the children on a daily basis. Thirdly, she noted the self-protective nature of his withdrawal, both understandable yet irritating. The couple retained their friendship, mutual affection and respect but not without a certain tension and the gradual emergence, at this stage, of psychological distance and the modification of intimacy.

Anna needed and wanted continuity and a commitment to the family. She also wanted, four years after the separation, some more clearly established boundaries and a clarification of finances which would confirm the termination of their marriage. She questioned, while simultaneously asserting its continuance, the significance which each could have for the other. Martin was Anna's 'security' and her life was 'interwoven' with his. But this had its uncomfortable side. She had a 'double life' and at times found herself 'flicking in and out' of being Mrs Noble. She suspected that Martin saw her as an 'albatross' and recognised that unblurring the boundaries was a psychological necessity if their lives were now going to move on and really affirm new commitments. Settling the marital property became a significant symbolic act, as well as giving her the material security which she lacked:

I actually think that I am ready to have my own money . . . I think I decided that if we can endure 4 years . . . even if we don't endure many more, I mean, , it's proven - I've proved myself, that what I set out to do I could achieve . . . certainly with the help of others, but my idea of where I was going and what I wanted to achieve in the going - I have proved that it was possible (2nd Interview).

In their relationship, as in some others, the house was given symbolic status. Martin was surer than Anna of the need to settle the property, thus re-defining their relationship. He was clear that they would not live together again. He said at various times, in ways which subvert his comments quoted earlier about togetherness. 'We must take the independence thing further'. 'We've all gone and grown in our respective ways' and 'We have to face {the property division} and the sooner the better. It must happen'. He noted that the arrangement had meant decreasing familiarity with the everyday, and that effectively the women had to make the day-to-day decisions. The lack of re-definition of the marital relationship had also become something of an impediment to the formation of a new relationship.

I could . . . this, this is another reason why I need independence, why I need independence also, and Anna must have her's as well. Because I have continually felt in the last few years since the demise with Nick, which is . . . (a little while back now) that I would not want to start a relationship with somebody else in our family home . . . in Wellington here while Anna still has a title to it . . . because I would never feel . . . comfortable in the sense that . . . that . . . whilst I, whilst I still . . . live in the house and have a part share in it, that Anna would . . . oh, this is terribly convoluted, isn't it? How can I say it simply?
AO: Well, say it and then you can re-say it.

MN: Sure enough. But I have got to say it for a start. (*laughter*) Can't find the right words, the right phrases. Umm . . . I wouldn't want to feel that I could start another relationship, or . . . be in a position to start another relationship with a man . . . *till* . . . Anna . . . was very much more independent of me and had her own house and property or whatever so that I wouldn't feel that . . . being in that home, that she wouldn't suddenly want it sold. That I wasn't necessarily - oh, gosh. I couldn't really feel my own person . . . I wouldn't want to start another relationship until we were both more independent of each other. That is when we take that final . . . more major step of both having the property issues -

AO: Declaring your independence?

MN: Right . . . Separate, separately having it . . . a land title each so that there wouldn't be any *problems* about . . . who you were sharing a property with, who you were sharing a living space with . . . you see, if . . . if the worst came to the worst and Anna and Susan - suddenly things fell apart, then Anna would have to have a place to go. Now, she would really have to come back here, to Wellington.

AO: Right and if you were -

MN: And how could that actually work if I was living with someone else? So we've *got* to take that final step . . . as much for ourselves as for each other . . . and make that break so that we can still have, we can definitely go ahead and have independence and form another relationship. But I wouldn't want to form another relationship and it's part of, as I said, of the frustration that I have felt over the past 2 years . . . I wouldn't want to form another relationship until . . . we have taken that final step, that next step . . . For those very reasons. In case things fell apart . . . and Anna and the children would have to have a place to come to . . . Right? Yeah.

AO: Right. That makes sense. So again it is to do with that, that whole, it is to do with the . . . divergence, isn't it? (It is) . . . that divergence and re-establishment . . . of, of yourselves as in fact separate and -

MN: Not being so dependent. Yeah. (1st Interview).

Martin's difficulty in making this statement arose because he did not want to imply a rejection of Anna. At the same time he wanted to assert his need for some clarification of their relationship, so that their lives could move on even if, as was suggested on various occasions, they all might live together again in their old age.

The relationships which constitute this typology are able to transcend the disruptive nodes because each person remains concerned and caring about the other. The relationship is valued for itself rather than just being perpetuated because of the children. The strengths and weaknesses of each are acknowledged, but the maturity of the adults lies in their refusal to exploit areas of vulnerability. Nobody has to defend him/herself against easily voiced, highly critical perceptions.

Since closeness after separation is still easily slotted into a pathological framework it is worth comparing elements of the relationships of these two couples with that of the Butler/Summers, whose accounts stressed the difficulty they had in separating and the way in which shared parenting became a means, aided and abetted by Kay, of retaining contact. In contrast to the Butler/Summers, the Cooper/Pearsons, and the Nobles in particular, made a conscious decision about being close. Although this was done in part because of an agreement about children's needs, the children were not instrumental in the adults maintaining contact. The adult relationship was valued *for itself*, and each partner was able to feel, generally, comfortable with the other. The separation was seen by each participant as a positive, if painful, decision. Importantly, the shared parenting was regarded not as an act of atonement but as having positive value for all concerned, albeit that Anna saw their style of parenting as a means of damping down some guilt feelings. The contrast between the way in which these families spoke about their relationships, and the way in which Michelle spoke about her and Lawrence's failure to separate was considerable. Distress,

resentment, anger, and an inability to resolve issues permeated much of both of their accounts:

MS: I have always been very, very - I mean I was, I thought that I was very much in love with Lawrence when I met him, and . . . got involved with him. I still have this great affection for him . . . which is actually more of a hindrance than a help . . . um, in terms of . . . sorting out other things. Um . . . I, I, I, . . . I think that I was still, I, I think that we took a *long* time to separate properly and I think by the time we were thinking about . . . about living in these two flats, we hadn't actually separated at all, and um, I and I, I was um, very, still fond of him, and . . . ahh, we seemed to have cleared the anger between us, or a lot of the anger . . . and it, which of course had been the major cause of . . . I suppose that we simply had ever really, got it, I - it became clear to me that he wanted a much closer relationship with me than I, I felt comfortable with and um . . . that was just disastrous. (. . .) he took {my withdrawal} as the most monumental sort of personal threat and . . . um . . . and so we began this whole, um, tension again . . . you know, me feeling terrible because I wasn't giving him the closeness that he wanted and him feeling terrible and pissed off because I . . . was not able to be that close. It was just awful (. . .) I thought that I had done everything humanely possible . . . to work out some sort of . . . arrangement between Lawrence and me (. . .), that I *couldn't do anything more*. That I had actually overdone my efforts to . . . um . . . have a friendly, reasonable relationship with him at . . . um . . . reasonably close quarters. (. . .)

AO: So would you feel that because of the whole issue of Kay and so on, that that actually militated *against* your separation?

MS: Yeah. If we hadn't had Kay, I am quite sure we *certainly* wouldn't have made the efforts we did, um, to maintain contact and to try and sort something out . . . between us . . . and the fondness might have stayed . . . but I doubt that I would have put that sort of energy into it. (. . .) If I was hard hearted enough now, and I was going through that again, I, I'd leave town (1st Interview).

There was also a further way in which the gradual modification of the the Nobles' and the Pearson/Coopers' relationships was facilitative (as Ahrons & Rodgers (1987) suggested such relationships could be) rather than pathological. This lay in the place that they gave to process. They did not attempt to hurry the act of separation and make it psychologically definite (despite the fact that other partners were involved) at a time when it was not. In their accounts there was a sense of acting in the fullness of time, when they were ready to move on and in a way which was responsive to the trauma of separation and the psychological and social tasks which it imposed. Anna suggested that she had fantasies of reunion. Maybe these were not a bad thing in themselves, and maybe retaining closeness and observing the process allowed them to be dealt with at the psychological level and then put aside, rather than be acted out. It is also clear that that all four had slowly come to recognise - by no means simultaneously, since the two men appear to have reached that position first and more firmly - that the marital relationship was really ended but that the friendship would continue on a different basis.

The couples were not uncritical of each other, and the lack of definition of boundaries in some areas of their relationships became less comfortable, and more constraining. There were in both families communicative breakdowns and irritations. The couples were not 'perfect pals'. It seemed likely that the relationships would in some ways become more separate. But there was a fondness and respect and concern for the other and a mutual valuing of the arrangement which assisted in the maintenance of the relationships in the face of uncertainty and difficulty. It may well be that the problem in noting the existence of such relationships is not related to the inadequacy of language, as Ahrons suggests, but to the ideological implications of allowing relationships between separated

couples generally to be defined as close rather than hostile and distant. Continuing a close psychological relationship after separation interrupts generally accepted moral prescriptions where (male) individuation and separateness is valued, and replaces that individuation with (female) notions of connectedness (Gilligan, 1986).

Type 2: Relationship characterised by a more distant friendliness

The phrase denotes both a range of positive emotions towards the other partner, including friendliness, toleration, and also some feelings of alienation from the other. Within the four families whose experiences contributed to the development of this typology, the decision to separate was not mutual, although in most cases it would have been regarded by the non-initiating member as inevitable. In contrast to Type 1, the friendliness was much more muted. Some of the parents felt that if adult wishes alone were to be consulted, then they would have preferred not to have to deal with each other. Although the relationships weathered difficulties, and a generally positive view of the other was retained, such a disposition was the result of a decision not to become bound up in negative perceptions and of a more deliberate effort to avoid this.

On the interpersonal plane, in contrast to Type 1, more precariousness, wariness, caution, and constraint was felt in relation to the other. Issues of power and control existed around competing definitions of parental responsibilities, values and sharing information about the children, and there was less of a sense, in some families, of shared value positions. Correspondingly, there were firmer boundaries around the parental systems and a more reluctant admission that new partners could have a legitimate and important role to play in the bringing up of the children. Nonetheless, there was overall a belief that the ex-partner had honourable intentions, although at times of individual stress this belief came under strain.

Parental contact was significantly reduced, most centering on the children. Some of the couples participated in joint social activities occasionally and of those, some did so on a much more regular and easy basis than others. For example, Lawrence and Michelle had coffee together quite often, Luke went to Isa's party, and Fay often stayed for tea when she returned Tessa. Sometimes children's birthdays had been celebrated jointly, but this was not always a success and the occasions had been filled with tension. Fay regarded herself as Paul's 'other mother', and had offered to babysit, as part of her desire that the two households should operate as a large, extended family although, where Tessa was concerned, the boundaries between herself as 'the mother' and Liz as 'Liz' were sharply defined.

Some couples stressed a desire to act co-operatively. Dave saw the shared parenting arrangement as making such behaviour easier than it had been in the marriage. His statements seemed to indicate a distinction between 'having children' in the marriage as a taken-for-granted state and the later decision to share the parenting, into which an extra dimension of consciousness and carefulness about relationships entered. With the

marriage ended, goodwill could no longer be traded on. He said, 'Y' know, you have to do what you say you're gonna do . . and all that. Which is necessary to co-operation', thus offering a definition of co-operation as meaning predictable, trustworthy behaviour which he later extended to include neither parent using the children to 'gang up' against the other. Such behaviour was easier to maintain because you were removed from the daily irritants of the other. 'That's all that you have to do. (. . .) There's not the petty day-to-day matters to cause conflict and we are free to do our own thing'.

Regular meetings, in which there was some sharing of parental perceptions of the children or discussion of any difficult areas, although planned for in two families, did not appear to take place in any. Instead, parents felt that they consulted when necessary. This meant that consultations took place mostly when something had gone wrong, so that contact often became associated with tensions. Isa and Luke rang each other immediately after some very difficult behaviour from Diana to discuss a joint approach, although in other, more parentally contentious areas such as Luke's moves to get on the DPB, in which it appeared that Isa's connivance would be necessary, discussions were impossible to arrange, possibly because a situation in which Isa might become the recipient of Luke's anger was not as easy for her to deal with as Luke implied:

LR: Well, we gotta talk about it, eh? It's crazy. It's crazy the way we can't sit down. (. . .) She should come round and loosen up and ah, have dinner with us and talk about it, but it doesn't . . . just always . . . sidesteps it. (. . .) Sidestepped going out for lunch or . . . having dinner together, eh, just her and I . . I don't want . . . to go back together with her again, or anything like that, but why, y'know? Why sidestep it?

AO: Maybe she has feelings very different from yours.

LR: Maybe she's frightened that I'll get angry and ahh . . . be, be nasty . . . Can always walk away So you can't be sensitive to what could be (3rd Interview).

Jane and Dave, the parents who had most recently embarked on shared parenting, thought that they probably talked together on the phone most weeks. Fay and Ross phoned each other if things came up (for instance, he phoned her during our first interview to talk about how the research might be represented to Tessa). Fay was probably the parent most vocal about the lack of meetings. She believed that she and Ross ought to go out more often, as they had on one occasion, to talk about Tessa and to enjoy each other's accounts of her. She also noted that Ross's first response to the idea when she had mooted it had been that something must be wrong.

Some of the distance between the parents seems to arise from the fact that, although theoretically it is possible to talk about parental and child subsystems as autonomous, parents clearly, in day-to-day living, do not find the distinctions easy to maintain, and experience a blurring at the edges or, alternatively, one parent might perceive an overlap which is denied by the other. In the following quotation Lawrence comments on the impact of different perceptions of behaviour. Ostensibly, what he was talking about was the child subsystem. But the parental system, distorted by an imbalance of power, also intruded in a context of determining whose definition of issues was to be accepted. If

Lawrence accepted Michelle's definition of the meaning of Kay's behaviour, then he had to accept that the shared parenting may not be working. What is also interesting is that the way he accounted for the difficulties ignored the wider issues which Michelle was trying to address.

But she {Kay} can be difficult. And I think that what Michelle says to me is that she is demanding . . . Umm . . . now I think again, it is probably one thing for me . . . to create an acceptable level of demand that I can tolerate in my 5 days, um, at my stage of life, with my priorities . um . . . and all those things (. . .) You can be looking at exactly the same child and reach two completely different opinions about whether she is demanding or not. And Michelle is at a different stage. She now has got her work. She is now much at that stage where I used to be. She is trying to make a name for herself. I think that in any case Michelle's sorts of standards and experience of parenting are different from mine. Um, there is nothing wrong with this being so. But again we are starting from different norms as it were, to what constitutes sufficient parental attachment. But it wouldn't, it wouldn't even surprise me if I were a fly on the wall, and could fly from one person to the other, to find that Kay's behaviour is actually no different there than it is here. It is just that the two of us -

AO: Are interpreting it differently?

LB: Are interpreting it differently (3rd Interview).

There was a general consensus that overt criticism of the other was to be avoided. To be overtly critical went against the spirit of co-operation, and was unhelpful in the context of the necessity of having to continue to deal with one another. Dave, in a statement that began by sounding quite critical of Jane, altered course in mid-sentence and turned the nature of the comment quite around:

I don't think that it would be good for the children to spend all their time with Jane. . . . They need - y'know - I don't think that she's that - I mean she's . . . not necessarily that good, as, as a mother for them in some ways.

AO: Do you think that it would be good for them to spend all their time with you?

DB: No. No. 'Cos they would miss out on all sorts of things. I mean, each one of us contributes - that's the idea of having 2 people. Each of us has a different thing. I mean, Jane's . . . does more . . . exciting . things probably. More adventurous things and unexpected things . . . and I'm sort of . . . (2nd Interview).

Both Ross and Fay spoke of the importance of holding the significance of the arrangement for Tessa to the fore at times when they felt irritated with one another. Rather than sounding off at Ross, Fay's response was to express her anger about him to friends:

So when it came to breaking up it seemed to me . . . um, an absolute loss if I were going to bring up Tessa . . . not to have Ross . . . as . . . part of her life. (. . .) I mean, I say, even now, in my bad moments, I would , would love to have Tessa with me all the time. But I would never choose to do that. I mean, there have been bad times recently and friends of mine say, "Go for custody". I say, "NEVER even consider it". They say, "Why not? You'd get it". I say, "Because I don't want to deprive her of her life with her Dad, which she has *always* had and it's a *wonderful* relationship" (1st Interview).

Equally, Ross spoke of the need for deliberate constraint when he felt irritated by Fay and of the importance of not dealing in global accusations, but of talking about specific issues in order to protect 'the two parent thing'. The importance of constraint was illustrated in Lawrence's account. He decided against a custody battle when Michelle went to Australia. 'Winning' in the legal sense of the word would have given him only a pyrrhic

victory. Sharing parenting in the way he wanted would have become impossible because of the hostility the court case would have provoked.

There was a common consensus about systemic boundaries in relation to two areas in particular. As far as the children were concerned, there was a common belief that children should not be allowed to play one parent off against the other, and on the whole no-one seemed to feel that they currently had problems in this area. After Kay began to rush from Michelle to Lawrence when she had a falling out with the former, they agreed she would be returned immediately. Dave said that such an agreement was implicit between himself and Jane but had never had to be put into practice, although Louise had at times rung Jane when she was at odds with Dave to complain about him. Everyone was clear that trust of the other was important and that criticism of the other's action and values was unacceptable, although it did not make differences easy to accept. Most believed that you should not attempt to insist on the observation of your values in the other's domain, but should acknowledge differences in value positions and make clear the rules for each individual home. Dave observed, 'Real conflict is when one parent says, "I *can't* get them to do the dishes because you let them not do them", or something like that'.

Differences in values were, at times, felt to be problematic. On the one hand, to put forward one's own values in contrast to one's ex-partner's meant confronting the child with significant differences in what was permitted or seen as 'correct' behaviour. On the other, giving credence to his/her values meant denying your own, and implied agreeing to a way of value position that was personally unacceptable. One parent who felt very strongly about this resorted to a compromise of sorts, some of the other parent's values being more or less upheld, and others, such as the child's scandalised but too self-conscious reaction to swearing, ignored. Fay commented on how she saw the implications of the different value positions:

So I rang him, or talked to him from time to time and said, "How come . . . you seem not now to maintain the same position on painting nails and having lipstick and Barbie dolls and stuff like that?". Well, in part that was a criticism of him but in part it was my saying, "Keep me in touch with what you are thinking and how your ideas are changing because . . . I certainly - you know my attitude on these things which still remains in my house. If things are changing in your house, I have to be able to explain them to Tessa as well as you do". Umm, and he accepted that argument . . . that he says, "Oh well, y'know, I've changed my ideas because of this, and this and this", and I'm saying . . . "Please keep me in touch with your changing ideas because . . . we don't want to confuse her. If ideas change, then we have to explain to her why ideas change". Now, I can say to her, "My ideas haven't changed", but it doesn't seem right to say, "Dad's ideas change and I can't tell you why". . . That kind of support. So that whatever she happens to ask about Dad's situation when she's with me, I'm in a position not to undermine his situation. Now, I *have* to continue to be in touch with his situation to understand it and to either support it or if I don't, to agree with Ross what the story will be. Because it's *important* not to undermine what he's . . . what his . . . he's got a right to lead his own life. Tessa's got a right to know about it but she doesn't have to save up her questions until she's with him. So I have to be in a position to . . . echo his upbringing of her when she happens, through no fault of her own, to be out of his house when she wants to ask a question. That's what I mean (1st Interview).

Taking such a potentially intrusive position depends on a relatively equal power balance, on the existence of goodwill between the parents and on the feeling that they can communicate with each other without too much difficulty. Despite the best of intentions,

communication between the parents was not seen to be a simple, easy matter and, as in all relationships, became more complicated at times when the relationship was under stress. When parental interests became diametrically opposed then the discussions became even more difficult as Lawrence found when he and Michelle were in the middle of the debate about her departure for Australia.

Michelle had given a course on communications. It, it must have been an evening . . . course at the . . . Polytech, I think. On communications . . . and she had left notes in my kitchen. This would have been about July that she did this. . . I remember leafing through the damn thing over that period . . . and it was all these things, you know, "I have a right to express my opinions." "I have a right to be heard", etc. etc. (laughs) So I [] rang up Michelle. I remember it was a Saturday morning. I went over to the telephone after having read - No. 6. on the list was, "I have a right to have, to have my opinions listened to", or something. So I went to the blessed telephone. I rang up Michelle who was only next door, and said I wanted to talk about this, and she didn't want to talk about it. I said (laughing), "I have a right to have my opinions listened to". And she said, "I have a right not to listen to them", and slammed down the phone. That's as far as we got. Oh God! It was dreadful! I shouldn't laugh about it. I was really absolutely at my wit's end (1st Interview).

During the course of the interview, he began to wonder if many of their difficulties were not related to communication problems:

I have come to the definite conclusion . . . belatedly (laughs) that although Michelle and I appear to communicate . . . I mean we have our difficulties but we do communicate . . . we are both quite articulate . . . I am damn sure that I am articulate. (. . .) but . . . both communicative people, we approach problems from . . . the antipodes . . . and somehow we never meet in the middle (1st Interview).

He located a source of the difficulties in radically different approaches.

I think we sort of - we reach things in a quite different way. (. . .). And a lot of her approaches actually antagonise me . . . they would be approaches which I would only make in, um, in conditions where umm . . . I felt adversarial . . . to the other person, where I felt I had to assert myself or be undercut. Um . . . and it may well be that, um, my indirect method of approach . . . is counted by her as some sort of vacillation and she may actually have the implication . . . that I am only half hearted about things when in fact I think . . . I really think quite strongly about them (2nd Interview).

Overall, his sense was that as the situation evolved, Michelle was taking control in a way which excluded him. 'Michelle is always telling me, assertively, clearly, umm, what she feels about things'.

For some of the other parents the predominant feeling was that discussions were often potentially difficult. Part of the problem lay in the lack of knowledge as to what 'space' the other was in, and the existence of previously unresolved issues could still rankle. As Luke said, it was important to make time to talk:

things can't be left unsaid, the opportunity is still there for - to fester and make judgments, and . . . and if you don't deal with it, and rationalise it, then, ah, you know, judgments will be made and, and attitudes will be set and generally cementing . . . those attitudes - it's quite dangerous (2nd Interview).

Past communicative difficulties also contributed to an expectation that matters would not resolve easily:

AO: you talked about your crossness and your grumpiness when you talked on the phone to Dave. Does that make it difficult to reach agreements (. . .) or are the issues difficult to reach agreement on?

JA: No, the issues aren't difficult at all. (. . .) I mean, it comes also back to patterns of interaction which have actually built up over the years and um . . . I find it incredibly difficult to talk to Dave because he never seems to understand what I am saying (. . .) I find it really irritating to have to actually go back and basically say what I've just said, but rephrased (. . .) and I may have to do that 2 - 3 times (. . .) I just get tense right away as soon as I start talking to him (3rd Interview).

Dave also experienced, at his end, feelings of irritation, mitigated by the fact that the phone communication meant that they could more easily terminate a conversation and come back to it at a later date:

Jane annoys me quite a lot . . . often. Almost every conversation ends up with some sort of annoying thing happening or . . . that's - if we were living together, I would just sort of attack Jane on the subject . . . and it would have gone on indefinitely, whereas now, it's just the end of the conversation.

If Dave thought Jane was in a bad mood he realised that trying to continue the discussion was counterproductive, but equally it was difficult to decide to ring off when there was an issue on which he needed clarification. As a consequence their resolution of issues happened in stages:

Usually it's 2 goes. First, might meet with some sort of anger. The next go . . . the matter has been there to mull over. (. . .) So it sort of works like that. Mention it the first time. Talk about it the second time, I guess. And that can probably work for me too, you know. Jane can mention something to me and I won't have time. I'll be busy with something else . . . and I will come back another time . . . and be all helpful about it (2nd Interview).

In other families, small issues remained unaddressed until enough sufficiently annoying events had occurred to warrant an explosion. One parent would find herself thrown back into quite intense feelings of irritation or frustration around the necessity to discuss and re-discuss issues which she had thought had already been settled.

The general difficulty surrounding communication, and the difficulty parents faced in talking about their own relationship and entrusting the other with their deeper feelings, meant that situations could 'fester' and, as in the account given below, begin to cast doubt on the validity of the whole arrangement. In the following quotation, the situation which Luke describes grew out of what he saw as Isa's preparedness to undermine his financial arrangements, and which she saw as his asking her to be an unwilling accomplice in fudging the truth. She felt pushed back into the less powerful position that she had occupied during the time they lived together, where she had to accede unwillingly to some of Luke's financial decisions. His feelings of anger and upset led to his reflections on inequality and lack of feedback in the shared parenting relationship with Isa, and spread out to a more generalised conviction that she did not trust him or value his contribution:

there's *nothing* of the children's even here, . . . they you can never bring back here what will stay here what . . . even toys, you know - like I buy them toys and they end up back at Isa's place and they stay there. She forgets to pack them, they don't arrive. Like clothes, you know. So she says, "Oh, they haven't

got enough clothes". But I know that she's got drawerfuls of clothes up there. So I don't have a back up with anything. So you are continually having that attitude of the children coming here for a week, and *not* the obverse of going there for a week. . . you know . . . (Right). Do you understand?

AO: So this feels very transitory, and-

LR: Well it *does*, if, if *nothing* stays (Mmm) . . . you know. Once the children are gone out of their bedroom it looks very empty (Mmm) because it, the toys, ah, you know, things like that *go*. Even the *games*. They go up there 'cos they like playing them here. I buy them games, and they end up at Isa's place and they don't come back. You know . . . it's a bit . . . it's a bit sort of . . . one-sided really. . . And that's what I'm trying to, umm - the remark that I was making about Isa's basic insensitivity to me, though. That as much as she pays lip service to what I'm doing, which I don't even feel, I don't even feel I should have to say what *I'm* doing. It should be what *we're* doing - umm . . . but it's, "I appreciate what you're doing", sort of attitude . but that's not even the matter. It should just *be*. It should just be. . . how it is . . . It's not (So you-) The *man* emotionally gets the thin end of the stick.

AO: "The man emotionally gets the thin end of the stick". When?

LR: Well, well, with, with -

AO: You mean with, whole (Because of) - the culture-?

LR: Because it's, it's the nature/nurture thing again, isn't it? You know, I mean, the children are obviously from Mum . . . you know, so, i, i, it's gotta all sort of, b, be, be taken into perspective as that, you know, so you've gotta - the *woman* is, i, in the situation like this, it's very important for the woman to actually *be* more in tune with what the man sort of has to cope with emotionally. I really, I really feel that, you know.

AO: Are you in tune with what you feel Isa has to cope with, which may be quite different - I mean -

LR: I understand what Isa. has to cope with. I don't . . . I, I'll move with whatever she wants to do if we can . . . you know, physically, as far as the children are concerned, eh, as far as our situation is concerned, we can move around a bit, as it's necessary for her . . . to, ahh - she's going away this week apparently. Maybe she's not, you know, but she said, so we had a double week - she looked after - I had the children a week before last - no, no. She had them the week before last (And last week?) and last week, you see, but Diana was away . . . for most of the week. And then she says, "Well, I have to go away this week for a conference in Christchurch? Can you sort of carry on? And, you know, I'll have them for another week, and I'll carry on sort of thing, you know". "Yeah. OK". The children are quite happy about it . . .

AO: So are you asking that you be given some credit -

LR: I don't want credit.

AO: Not credit, no. Acknowledgement?

LR: I don't even want acknowledgement. I just want understanding of how difficult it is . . . umm . . . to feel . . . like I've got a, a, almost I've got to say to Isaac - like "You have this transformer toy. *Leave* it here because it's . . . not coming back, you know. You're not getting a chance to play with it here. You're not getting a chance to make *your* space here.

AO: (. . .) in this sort of arrangement, the relationship has finished and the 2 of you are in many respects very peripheral to each other's on-going lives . . . and yet, at the same time, around some very central personal issues, you actually need to be able to speak, to be able to . . . to say how it actually feels, to somebody who actually now is no longer part of your life.

LR: Yeah.

AO: And whom you can't totally trust. (Mmm) Or maybe don't totally trust. (Right) and that's how - to me that seems like an incredible conundrum.

LR: Yes. Quite right. (. . .) I'd say that it'd be the biggest issue actually. (Mm) . . . be the, would be the biggest. (. . .) we don't joint parent as such. We ah -

AO: But can - I suppose in a sense what I am asking, Luke, is, "Can you"?

LR: Well if I - I am just sick, Anne, of . . . of *feeling*, you know, that . . . there is *so much* to talk about, that maybe there's, maybe there's just too much, you know. Maybe there's just too much to talk about because I'm - I feel, you know, that I've done heaps, eh? You know, just in *doing* it, you know, and without that sort of feedback, without it being umm . . . patronising or matronising sort of attitude, eh, without some sort of understanding of what you actually have to go through, eh? You know? I mean, it's everything, eh? It's economics, it umm . . . socially, it's, it's without making judgment on the other person. It's without being jealous of the, without jealousy of the other person . . . because . . . you know, where I am, and where she is, sort of thing . . . you know it's just . . . it's just saying, "Well done. Yeah. Had a good try". It's "Yeah, OK . . . you know, you, you've . . . been a bit lucky, eh?" Or, "You're doing a good job". . . . (Yeah) Umm . . . it's like Isa getting a job. I don't feel *jealous* that she's got a {good} job . . . but somehow she feels sensitive to it because things have been said - umm, they, they don't matter, eh? As, like, like, I've said that, ahh, "OK, you got your degree because I was doing the job at the time", you know. "It might have been difficult, but you got your degree". But that was said . . . a year, 18 months ago, you know. I don't *begrudge* her the fact that she's utilising her ability, eh? . . . It'd also be nice that, if you were given a little, ahh, oh well, you know, thanks for it. Thanks for it.

AO: So there's a sense of you doing it very much on your own, without . . . support. . . I am trying to think what are the right words.

LR: I honestly don't feel any of that out of Isa. No. I don't feel any support whatsoever. . . You know, even when I-

AO: Has that got worse, or do you think that there was more at the beginning?

LR: Well, it doesn't seem to get any better when I, I - this business of the DPB, eh? I make it - maybe I'm blowing it out of all proportion, but . . . it just brings up . . . *wounds* that I'd rather, you know, that had almost been forgotten . . . you know, that I was *prepared* - they don't matter a - to what we're doing. But suddenly she's written a letter without *discussing* it with me . . . without *talking* about it . . . about her attitude to the Family Benefit, you know, and I think that, "Fuck," you know, "Can't you actually" you know - and she's *already* written away the letter! You know, and *knowing* that I was going for the situation, she's *frightened*. . . It's almost like she's sort of going, "Thwack! I'll get in first . . . 'cos I'm scared at what will come out of this". . . You know, but it's not for me to judge why she does things, but, surely, I'm not an unreasonable person, eh?

AO: But there's obviously something which, for the both of you makes it very difficult to meet, to . . . to discuss and I'm -

LR: I think she's scared she'll like me! I don't know. I honestly don't know.

AO: What? Having, having stopped loving each other, to like each other is another big step?

LR: Yeah. . . Maybe she's afraid of that . . . Maybe I am too.

AO: Are you?

LR: Ahh, I was.

AO: Why? What was that?

LR: Why? (Mm) To like her? (Mm) Because I might start loving her again. . . it was a strong emotion. Don't want to go through that again. I don't have to worry about that any more. But I don't want to dislike her. I don't want to, eh, but she keeps throwing things at me that I feel, that really *annoy* me (Mmm), that I, well, I don't feel are *reasonable* you know, for 2 rational human beings who have tried to do this deal without the law, you know, without having to go through the Family Courts . . . you know, so, you can't stop. When 2 *rational* human beings get together, you *can't* rely on the letter of the law. . . . (3rd Interview).

Luke's speaking possesses a number of quite remarkable qualities. The text can almost be read as a monologue in which Luke, brooding over a number of incidents from the past, began to construct a powerful narrative of the situation and develop a perspective on the relationship in which he depicted himself in something approaching 'victim status', a perspective which could then become the basis for subsequent actions irrespective of the accuracy of his interpretation. Words such as 'apparently', which would normally read innocuously enough, are charged with meaning signifying an implied doubt about whether or not Isa really was going to a conference and because of Luke's realisation after he had agreed that the change in the arrangement would mean that Isa for the second time would have the children with her on Christmas morning. Attendance at the conference became a calculated strategic action against him in order to gain the children for Christmas rather than a simple, work-related event. The significance of other events which matter to Isa are down played, through Luke's characterisation of her reaction to the request from Social Welfare that she financially support Luke, as unfairly working against the spirit of co-operation that should prevail. This particular period of stress blew over because the parental commitment to continuing with the shared parenting made it possible for them to sort things out before the situation deteriorated further, but it may be that a series of such crises or stress events would be unsustainable.

This section of text is further remarkable because of the way that Luke raised issues of trust and distrust. He located some of his discontent in the lack of feedback, feedback which ought to acknowledge how much he had given up to look after the children. During this interview he gave another account of an event where he thought that

Isa had misjudged him⁸. While the *process* of the discussion was centred overtly on the parental relationship, it was quite clear that many of Luke's comments referred to situations and feelings beyond that relationship. This double reference suggests, then, that the adult relationship is particularly susceptible to pressure and that it becomes a locus for distrust and discontent, so complicating the parents' ability to work together.

Each parent had to manage a relationship which was (as in intact families) affected by consciousness of issues related to trust, and power, where boundaries had to be re-defined and yet were experienced as unstable. Discussion of the quality or type of parenting the children were receiving from each parent involved trespassing over the other's boundaries. Detailed information about what happened in the other household was not sought from the children because of implications of 'checking up', and knowledge about positive happenings as well as negative ones built up only very gradually. Communication on the day-to-day level generally did not occur. Each parent was responsible for the children while they were with them. There were few 'ritual' occasions when parents and children got together as a family, although there were sometimes other meetings. The occasions when communication happened easily were given a considerable significance. As Isa said, 'They give me and him evidence that we are working in together'.

Type 3: Relationship characterised by distance, hostility and silence

The dynamics of this type of relationship appeared to stem from one partner's unresolved anger over the separation and his/her feelings of rejection. The most striking aspect of the relationship was the disappearance of most interpersonal flexibility which was replaced by feelings of rigidity and immobility which both parents, especially Mary, found distressing for all family members yet, at the same time, felt relatively powerless or unwilling to change. The parents disagreed on the ultimate desirability of shared parenting. There was an almost total lack of direct communication between them on any matter whatsoever, contributed to by either an unwillingness to trust the other because of past difficult experiences or a lack of desire to have any contact. The two homes operated almost completely autonomously. The parents regarded contact as potentially explosive and liable to result in each feeling further upset and distanced from the other. In the family the systemic silence, which had developed from a sense of mutual powerlessness and as a means of avoiding battles, was a powerful constraint. The long-established difficulties with communication effectively hindered any re-evaluation of the way each perceived the other, since contact only occurred at times of considerable stress when negative perceptions of the other tended to be reinforced rather than modified. The dominance of the negative feelings then discouraged contact at other times and prevented the public emergence of a more balanced or more generous evaluation of the other. Negativity and distrust also substantially hindered co-operation with the regard to the children's care and it

⁸ At an earlier point in the interview, he spoke of Isa's 'look', in which she implied considerable criticism of him. What is interesting is the gender reversal - usually it is the female subordinated to the male gaze.

was often easy, especially for the partner who regarded him/herself as the injured party, to attribute the problems in shared parenting to the other.

Although both felt in some important respects trapped by their interpersonal system, there were significant differences in their descriptions of it. Charles emphasised 'rivalry', the distance which at best could be only temporarily broached, his sense of his powerlessness (which in itself becomes a powerful position), and his lack of desire to remedy the situation. In response to a question about possible further efforts to improve the relationship, he said drily:

Well, I dunno whether I will make another one. Um We had a run in just before I went away last week over the phone. Mmm. Umm Well In a sense I think that I probably see it as being very much a um . . . continuation of the sort of pattern that was in the marriage and, ahh we, umm . . . ahh . . the separation didn't actually resolve any of the tensions between us. It just got us out of earshot. (. . .) if at any stage, if Mary had, ahh, acknowledged that her conduct was not faultless . . um . . . perhaps even apologised for some of her more egregious activities . . . might have helped quite a lot (2nd Interview).

In contrast, Mary's account moved more immediately to an appreciation of the destructiveness of the adult system. Her text oscillated between optimism, when she talked about the possibility (after five years) of a better relationship with Charles, and despair, when she acknowledged the difficulties of moving the relationship onto a more open footing, and had to recognise the painful irony of the generational replay of her parents' distance and silences. In talking about the still unresolved hostility between them, Mary said, 'It is hard because I *fear* that, um . . . if it hasn't been come to grips with by now, well it will probably only get worse, and not better' and she continued:

it doesn't work as well as it should, and I would think that with the passage of time everything should have become a bit more *civilised* between *Charles* and *me*. We should be able to . . . speak to each other . . . just as parents of the children . . who share their upbringing . and um . . sort of try and be a bit more helpful and accommodating . . umm . . a bit more sensitive . . to the other (2nd Interview).

She spoke of seeing Charles as 'less and less approachable' and of no longer trusting his reactions; of feeling (as did Charles) that the mutuality of the contract was really only 'shared time'. In contrast to Charles, who appeared to want their dealings to become even more remote, she spoke of the importance of retaining some connectedness. What she would 'love' would be closer contact. 'I would dearly love to talk to Charles. You know, I would love to sit down with Charles . . . if *only* it were possible'.

Because of the expectation that things would be difficult, direct communication was reduced to essentials - asking for an item of clothing to be dropped off, or a change in the arrangement - and left to the last possible minute. Mostly, issues were addressed in writing, the benefits of which Charles described as:

Well it's more remote. Um . . . you are not obliged to see or hear the other person. AO: And there is a lapse between your communication and their response and you don't have to deal with them on the spot?

CD: Yeah. It's probably that. Yeah. Mmm you can, by taking a little time over it sort of ahh get down what you want to say quite succinctly (I'm sure) without . . . getting furious (2nd Interview).

Such communicative practices had a tendency to generate further distrust and hostility. During my contact with the family, Charles' last minute explanation of a need to alter the arrangement for two weeks was unacceptable to Mary. By leaving the consultation so late he had failed to stand by an earlier agreement about longer advance warning since she could not accept his statement that he had not known earlier that he was going away. Disappointment at the failure to consult earlier and a further diminution of trust resulted in a major row which Mary found devastating while Charles felt confirmed of his belief that the situation was impossible. Confidence in each other evaporated yet again. The possibility of regular joint decision making receded into the distance and Mary spoke sadly of the way that not even ostensibly noncontentious information could be passed on:

MT: I would dearly *love* more dialogue between Charles and I . . um . . . on this whole, just on the parenting . . . just this aspect I would like to be able to ask him, say, Cornelia as a teenager and starting to move out a lot more . . umm . . . whether he feels that she goes out too often or . . say, if she goes out quite a bit when she's with me, I might ring him, and say, "Oh, I think Cornelia should have a couple of early nights *at your end* because she might be getting tired or something". Or even say if she is overdoing it (. . .) And I don't feel that, that, umm . . . you know . . . that he, he will be very much in the mood to really listen . . . I, I'd like - well maybe he would listen but I would like just to feel that it was something that could be done quite easily (2nd Interview).

Furthermore, both parents spoke of the stress that the children were subjected to in talking to one parent in the other's presence, or even of speaking on the phone to the parent with whom they were not currently living. Because the children were very aware of the adult tensions, such conversations rarely happened or, if they did, were kept very brief, and this was another factor in reducing each parent's knowledge about the children's lives. Mary also worried that the hostility might mean that the children could not review the arrangement, because of the difficulties in getting their needs across two such 'opposing forces', although before the exchange with Charles about his absence she had begun to feel that they might be able to implicitly work towards an easier relationship.

The parental difficulties meant that there had been virtually no family occasions since the separation. Shortly after the separation, they had celebrated the children's birthdays once as a family but the practice then stopped. The parents did not go to school interviews together. Each reported different comments from one teacher about how well the children were doing and each used those comments to support the view that they held about the efficacy of the arrangement. Very occasional conversations took place about kin, and Charles had gone to Mary's mother's funeral.

Yet the adults' profound sense of alienation was called into question by Mary's comments which suggested that the hostility, distance and silence notwithstanding, there was still a possibility of a more neutral relationship. Mary regarded Charles as having become more caring and reliable. She felt that if she had major concerns she would

approach him and that, although they never talked about it, each offered tacit support in relation to shared values. She believed that they would never have a close, or even particularly friendly relationship, but continued to hope that they could put the hostility behind them at least for the children's benefit. Charles, by the end of the third interview, said that he felt better about Mary than he thought he had. At the time of the first follow up interview, the relationship had thawed sufficiently to allow some easier, brief social exchanges.

Type 4. Relationship characterised by motifs of control and defence

This relationship was characterised by an intensification of the inflexibility, unresolved anger, and continuity of a dysfunctional pre-separation relationship found in the previous type, but with a heightened emphasis on the exercise and centrality of coercion and control as major factors. This characterisation is intended to indicate the dominance of systemic factors in the relationship; where the (male) need for control, possibly exerted through violence and domination resulted in both partners acting defensively in different ways against the other, and the partner who was perceived and perceived herself as the weaker, felt embattled.

In the relationship informing this type distrust was endemic, and each partner was very critical of the other. The parent who was seen, because of his reliance on physical force, as more powerful interpreted the boundaries between himself and his ex-partner as fluid. He abrogated to himself the role of policeman of the agreement, thus provoking his partner to attempt to create more rigid boundaries between them in an attempt to minimize his attempts to dominate the separated relationship and to restrain his attempts to exercise power. Parenting became a highly competitive exercise, where Keith's conviction that he made the better parent placed Maree continually on the defensive. There were major and irreconcilable value differences between them. In this sort of relationship, the sharing of significant information and joint action to establish boundaries for the child were virtually impossible. The establishment of ground rules about the parental relationship, although of some help, did not sufficiently diminish Keith's psychological, and potential physical dominance. This type of relationship illustrated extremely clearly the interweaving of gendered concepts and power relations in a way which placed the woman in a vulnerable position, and in which her capacity to parent was continually under challenge. Under such situations openness and trust were impossible.

The right to continue to intrude, to check up on, to make it clear that he was the dominant partner in the relationship was grounded by Keith in a rigidly gendered view of the world, where women were 'happier' being 'meek and mild', 'sweet' and 'the little wife', unable by size and nature to control the anarchic male. Such 'natural' inability then became augmented by a moral inferiority, i.e., leaving the marriage for another man. Further instances of inferiority and frailty were provided through Maree's link with the feminist movement because it became another instance of an inability to withstand

pernicious influences. There was a certain heavy-handed logic about the position. Inadequacy legitimated control.

The parents' accounts offered radically different interpretations of significant events. Points of consensus were few, there were few expressions of concern about the other, and events were recounted in such a way as to place the partner in a disadvantageous light. But Maree's account, rather more than Keith's, noted the climate of distrust and animosity as distressing and certainly harmful to the younger two children. Although the extreme hostility present after the separation had diminished, it was still a significant force and the power play of the relationship, which lay beyond the hostility, had not been resolved. There were, however, moments (literally) when the two spoke well of one another. Keith praised Maree's 'analytical ability' to isolate the meanings of situations and to bring home to him the importance of not criticising her in front of the children:

And . . . you know, M. of all people . . . was, said something which is *so valid* and it was one of the things that, that . . . helped to repress this, this . . . bad, revengeful sort of . . . um . . . attitude and she said - how the hell it came up I haven't a clue when she said it but, and it was at some stage when there wasn't this lovey dovey that there is now . . . umm . . . she said, "You know, if you . . .". She said, "I never run you down to the children". And I checked and she didn't . . . and I don't know . . . whether I bad-mouthed her too much in front of the kids. I . . .

AO: Suspect you might have done a bit more than you care to remember.

KB: I suspect Dead right. I suspect that that would be fairly accurate. (. . .) but she, M. said, "You know, if you . . . for a child to deny one of its parents . . . then literally it denies half of itself. And it is *dreadful* to expect a child to cut itself off from . . . one of its parents". And she said, "This is something that . . ." she had experienced with her own situation . . . They both split up . . . and remarried and umm . . . ahh, her mother . . . a toughie . . . and umm . . . I think that M. knew a lot more about it than I did . . . for obvious reasons. She'd been there . . . and you know, it's, it's something that probably was the . . . was a very, very worthwhile thing for somebody to say . . . and the fact that she said it, that I remembered it, that I took notice of it, means that, you know, that it must be, that it must have been important. And probably I wanted that to be so anyway. You know, I . . . deep down you don't want to turn your kids against . . . against their (3rd Interview).

Over the years, the couple had come to have more frequent contact, although descriptions of such events differed. Keith, who emphasised their occasional outings, placed them in a context of Maree's continuing dependence on him. Maree, however, emphasised the functional nature, describing the contact as about Sam or another child. They had been to school functions, and "meet the teacher" evenings together. They had been able to discuss which high school Sam should attend, (in contrast to the decision making about Hugh's future which had been conducted competitively) and Maree believed that her advice over how to approach that decision had prevailed. At times of major family crisis (one son's serious car accident; another's court appearance on a drugs charge) they had stood together. Keith agreed, however, that the 'friendly' relationship which he claimed was conducted on treacherous and difficult ground. Substantive discussion was impossible. In answer to whether he and Maree could talk about concerns each might have about Hugh, Keith said:

KB: No. We can't.

AO: Although you're the best of friends?

KB: Can't talk about things like that. Y'see, this is where our marriage . . . was able to break down - the fact that we did very acrimonious with each other and we . . . I think that she is grossly unfair as to some of the things that she says. . . . She, um she will not accept blame for anything. I don't think I've ever heard her say, "That's my fault". . . . Y' know, *mea culpa* is something that she doesn't accept exists . . . and . . . this makes me more reluctant to accept any blame because then I feel that I've got to accept all blame. So, um . . . because, you know, if I'm the one that will, will, will accept any blame, at all and y'know, if she won't accept any, then it must all be my fault. So when it comes to things like that it usually ends up y'know, we can get heated pretty quickly. Not for a long time because we are just *so* careful. Y'know, we - the two of us are ideally suited for the diplomatic corps!

AO: But what you are saying is that this good relationship is centred on this sort of being *enormously* careful not to move into any potentially -

KB: Yeah (2nd Interview).

Keith's descriptions of the adult relationship gave a general sense of a superficial functionality and friendship, in which his attempts to control the way that Maree functioned as an adult and as a parent were only momentarily acknowledged. But alongside the friendship was a fragility which made discussion of substantive issues impossible because both parents were still caught within the marital system.

Maree, although she saw Keith as still emotionally dependent on her, accepted the character of the powerless woman but found working within such a constraint very difficult. Unsurprisingly, her account did not support a reading of their relationship as friendly. Instead, she noted various ways in which Keith attempted to control the relationship, such as deliberately not telling her of a son's suicide attempt and blaming her if Sam got into trouble. But at the same time she was reluctant to say that the shared parenting was not viable, a reluctance which contributed to internal contradictions in her text. For example, she described the parenting arrangement as good because it allowed Sam to have two *equal* parents, but at the same time acknowledged that the equality did not exist, and that she had to resort to placatory behaviour:

MB: so I keep him informed about the kids all the time and that is the main contact that we have. Because I want him to keep *me* informed you know if he -

AO: So for you the advantages of keeping in contact is that (1) you sort out stuff about Sam, but (2) if you keep him informed about the other children when they contact you, then it places an obligation on him to keep you informed (. . .) . . . but do you feel that that close contact also has some disadvantages for you?

MB: No. I don't. . . . It's got advantages because if Keith - you know, Keith gets very jealous of, and if he finds out that I've had any communication - he used to try keeping them away from me ah because he wanted to turn all the children against me, and ah, if, y, y'know, if he finds out that, that causes jealousy and I think that it still does, even now.

AO: So you are still caught up, you are still living out your marriage?

MB: Yeah. I suppose so.

This point was confirmed later in the interview:

AO: Do you think that Keith sees you as equal now? (. . .)

MB: Actually he still tries to tell me what to do. He still thinks he owns me. (. . .) And do you know, he comes in here and he stands over there - in fact I said to him, "The Lord has work for me today"?

Sam: Gee, that was asking for trouble!

MB: (*Rising tones*) And he comes into my house *MY HOUSE* as if he *OWNS ME STILL!*

AO: Well, how do you cope with that?

MB: But I'm still scared. He scared me because of the mood that he was in.

AO: Just this weekend?

MB: Just this weekend! I can *tell* when Keith is in a bad mood and when he's in a bad mood he scares me. And it doesn't matter whether I am in my own house or out on the street. Could be with anybody. He still can manage to do that to me.

AO: And then your own sense of being equal dissolves rather rapidly?

MB: *Yeah. Right.* Because here's this man who gets really angry and really physical Mmm (. .)
Yeah. I'm still scared of him at times (2nd Interview).

In these circumstances, where parental closeness was momentarily possible but could not sustain pressure, shared parenting enabled a dysfunctional marital system, marked by a severe imbalance of power, to continue. The relationship was a competitive one, where generosity to the other was fragmentary and infrequent and all acts performed by the other were open to scrutiny and (mis)interpretation. The question here was not just whether information about a child could or could not be shared, but rather how that information was shared and to what use it was put. As is apparent from a comparison of experiences of the parents in the study, information can be used to exclude or to try to ensure inclusion, to establish superiority, or to maintain equality. Depending on the way in which it is used, information is a means of control.

In this typology, the way in which power is gendered, which is rarely addressed in the research studies and disguised as continuing interpersonal hostility, becomes most obvious. Yet Ahrons' & Rodgers' (1987) failure to make reference to the power imbalances which are most explicit within the type attributes problematic behaviour to the individual psyche, so narrowing the scope of the analysis. Recognising that relationships are affected by power based on physical force extends the reference beyond mere interpersonal hostility where each partner is implicitly granted the same degree of power, and beyond the individual situation, to the wider social praxis in which issues of gender and dominance are given expression. Acknowledging that power is distributed unequally in interpersonal relationships exposes the interaction between individual behaviour and the macro system in which behaviour supportive of male dominance is given legitimisation. For change to occur further questioning of the ideological, gendered nature of the definition of power is necessary. The necessity for change lies not merely within the individual, but within the social context and social meanings which affect individual expression.

Power and the post separation relationship

The issue of power pervades the shared parenting relationship as it does all relationships. Understanding more fully the nature and role of power in shared parenting depends upon a broader definition of power than that which has been conventionally used in studies of this subject. Kranichfeld's (1987) article is useful as a confirmation and extension of the work on power quoted in Chapters Two and Six. She is rightly critical of much of the previous work on family power, believing that 'researchers have continued to assume that family power is generated by acquiring skills, resources, and status *outside* the family, rather than by acquiring skills for relating to others *within* the family' (p. 42); she argues that 'family power exists because of one's relationship with the family system, rather than merely because of one's personal characteristics'; and she suggests that power

has to be seen as 'a capacity, one that may be used to the detriment of others or may be used to promote the well-being of others' (p. 43). The point that she makes, which parallels Duffy's (1986) is that women are supposed to lack power because they lack access to the types of power held by men. What has been insufficiently noted has been the 'fundamental and pervasive nature' of power held by women (p. 45) i.e., their capacity to

shape whole generations of families Women's power may have low visibility from a nonfamily perspective, but women are the lynchpins of family cohesion and socialization, and this is a position of power (p. 48).

She then argues that this power is used extensively to maintain connectedness, which is intergenerational and horizontal. Her argument is analogous to Gilligan's (1986). In a discussion of the psychological notion of attachment, Gilligan notes the prevalent tendency in Western thought to conceive of the self as autonomous, and in contemporary psychology to attempt to reduce complexities to simple unities which ignore the notion of reciprocity. Furthermore, girls have been assigned to an inferior moral position because of their perceived inability to detach during adolescence. Instead, Gilligan argues, they have recognised dependency as part of the human condition. The responses she obtained from the girls she interviewed

convey the perception that attachments arise from the human capacity to move others and to be moved by them. Being dependent, then, no longer means being helpless, powerless, and without control; rather it signifies a conviction that one is able to have an effect on others, as well as the recognition that the interdependence of attachment empowers both the self and the other, not one at the other's expense (p. 249).

Dependence, in her terms, is an 'active construction', not a 'failure of individualism'.

Such reconceptualisations and redefinitions of power are important because they challenge much commonsense knowledge about the nature of power and the powerlessness of women. Furthermore, the inadequacy of the model of families that is used clinically and sociologically, where the parents in intact families are placed as equal and complementary (Minuchin, 1974), becomes apparent. The power which Kranichfeld and Gilligan believe women hold within the family system is denied by this model, which also implies, inaccurately, women's equality in the macro sphere. The concept of power that I want to advance is threefold. It incorporates the concept of power defined by Kranichfeld, and the re-writing of dependence as connectedness or interdependence by Gilligan; and does not represent power as a totality. Power is fissured. Power is possessed here, but not there. Power is undercut by a 'plurality of resistances' which themselves can simultaneously 'play the role of adversary, target, support . . .' (Eco quoting Foucault, 1979, p. 251). Power is challenged by 'progressive adjustment through slow, marginal shifts, in a centerless universe where all is margin . . .' (p. 255). Women derive power from being attentive to connectedness and generational responsibility, but that same power is at once lauded and marginalised by the social context of women's lives in which the

ideology of motherhood ostensibly reinforces such values but in which autonomy is the preferred value.

Recent promotion of the benefits of paternal as distinct from maternal care as an argument in favour of shared parenting seems to emphasise the maintenance of connections and the interdependence of family members⁹. What the texts that I have analysed indicate is that although the importance of connections and continuity as a reason for shared parenting are present in different degrees in all but one of the accounts, there are gender differences. The women make connectedness and caring central to and explicit in their discussions of the value of shared parenting. Although Anna's account emphasised most clearly the double nature of connectedness, the other women and Lawrence among the men also defined connectedness as consisting of vertical, intergenerational connections, as well as the horizontal connection with the partner. When the men talk about connectedness, there is more attention to the vertical lines, but in general there is either less overall discussion of its significance or they have, as in Martin's case, followed a lead provided by the partner. But what does need to be emphasised is that a valuing of connectedness is present in the male texts, and is often seen as important. The gender line is a fluid one. Connectedness in both its dimensions was present more in the accounts of the men who fell into the first two relationship types and was present in the latter two, to a lesser degree, in relation to the vertical links only.

Thinking about power in these terms highlights certain critical features in the management of the shared parenting arrangement. Generally speaking, these features are more clearly associated with the approach taken by the women. Emphasis upon connectedness reveals that the women tend, more than the men, to maintain an overview of the arrangement. Three of the women worry more than their partners do about communication patterns between the children and their fathers - whether issues that need to be talked about are; and whether things really are going all right. They talk more of the needs of the children, as distinct from their own needs. Charles, for example, dwelt on the relationship difficulties with Mary mostly as they affected him; Mary addressed the children's perspective first and in some detail. The women have tended to think through the implications of shared parenting more, because adopting this arrangement *did* involve a renunciation of some power and of control over the children, and they implied that they have, as women, an additional responsibility which went beyond the father's. Although agreeing that Luke was now involved in previously unprecedented ways in the children's care in a manner which she mostly valued, Isa placed her 'monitoring' of him not in a context of distrust but more in terms of this other dimension of power:

⁹ It has, however, been suggested that one of the reasons for an increase of interest in parenting among men is that men have found themselves in competition with women outside the home, and have accordingly moved back to compete in the home (McKee and O'Brien, 1982).

And that's evidenced by the fact that when the clothes come home, come back to me, when the children's clothes come back, they are pretty well *always* clean . . . if there's an occasion - I always find myself going, as he might too - through the clothes, and I'll pull out out a pile if they are dirty or something . . . that's a kind of pattern of the clothes when they are - it's not checking. It's just to ensure -

AO: That he'd done it?

IM: Not that he'd done it, but that the clothes that come back are able to be worn. You know? So it is very seldom that I have to do, very seldom that I, that there is a pile of washing. Very seldom (2nd Interview).

Where one parent is more the full-time parent, then the issue of how connectedness is maintained and what it actually means becomes more prominent. It is one of the ironies that Anna who most emphasised connectedness had to move away from Wellington because of house prices, so that physical distance eventually contributed towards some degree of psychological disconnectedness. Where the parents have had difficulty in separating, the questions about closeness become more complex, because there is the problem of determining what aspects of connectedness are to be given priority, by whom, and for what reasons. Michelle's account highlighted another of the shared parenting paradoxes in that her understanding of Kay's needs, which did include contact with her father, necessitated ending the arrangement. This decision obviously conflicted with one aspect of the principle of connectedness. Having gradually, over a number of years, come to a conclusion that moving between parents was destabilising for Kay, she felt that she had to 'defy' Lawrence. During the course of the first three interviews she moved from a position where she decided against telling him that she 'would not let it {the shared parenting} resume' on his return, to telling him. Her ability to reach the decision to stop the arrangement and to tell him that this was what she intended involved the attainment of much more positive self-esteem, a belief in the validity of her action, the confronting of her fears about Lawrence's vulnerabilities, and the acknowledgement that she would be cutting some of the links between Kay and her father. Yet she also needed to act to end a situation that was out of control. She described herself as acting powerfully:

I felt very powerful and liberated (. . .). That I could say, "To hell with the reaction. Um, um . . . To hell with trying to balance Lawrence's needs and Kay's needs. It's time for me to simply think . . . of Kay's needs . . . and I can't go on being sandwiched between them". That's something that I have done to myself . . . you know. I see his despair and I find it very difficult not to respond to that. (. . .) {Things have} happened for me over the last few months that have enabled me to get to the position where I can say, "Look, I am sorry that that is the way it is for you . . . but I simply . . . can't . . . afford to . . . concentrate on that. I have to concentrate on this here, which is my daughter . . . and what's happening to her in the process". And yes. It has taken me a very long time to do that (2nd Interview).

Depending on one's position, such decisions can be affirmed as recognising the reality and the destructiveness for the child of continuing the shared parenting, or criticised as uncaring, arbitrary and negating of the other. Lawrence continued to want to believe in the possibility of a compromise (although he agreed that he partly viewed her decision as 'wise'), and much of his account stressed his awareness of the difference in power between himself and Michelle.

Ohh, th, this is something, I think which . . . umm . . . something which I find actually quite difficult in dealing with, with Michelle . . . umm . . . and I, I, I don't think of it in a sort of, take a dim view of it, but umm . . . yeah . . . I, I feel that . . . I feel that . . . ahh, I am a second class par, parent . . . in relation to Kay. That is, I feel that at least Michelle . . . feels herself to be the primary parent. (. . .) It is the fact that someone in my position is always under challenge (2nd Interview).

Although he acknowledged several areas in which Michelle had the greater power, one important reason may have been that unlike him, she was finally prepared to give the greater significance to Kay, not the adult relationship.

In other instances though, as Maree's account showed, the maintenance of connectedness is at some personal cost. Recognising that things would work 'smoothly, y'know, so long as I play Keith's game', Maree said:

I want things to be smooth for Sam's sake because I don't *want* him in the middle . . . he, he would be if Keith gets hostile towards me - well, then y'know, Sam is gonna get the brunt of it . . . and then y'know, I don't know what's gonna happen (3rd Interview).

Although she had, in some respects, to act in an accommodating fashion because of her fear of Keith's physical force, it was also clear that she asserted herself to set guidelines with Keith that would function for Sam's benefit, i.e., that arrangements had to be made between the parents, not between one parent and Sam, and that information had to be exchanged, actions in which she felt that Keith made little reciprocal effort. If she were not taking the steps that she did to ensure the observation of some boundaries, she felt that there would be 'chaos'. Despite this, her overall sense was that she was 'mostly not' in control. Her efforts to control the situation were directed towards trying to minimize the hostility between herself and Keith in order to mitigate difficulties that might arise for Sam because of the problems between the adults. Although she found the shared parenting relationship oppressive, these efforts or 'marginal shifts' nonetheless challenged Keith's portrayal of himself as dominant. His efforts to control were instead expressed in authoritarian prohibitions which ultimately he could not enforce. Maree was to behave in certain ways, and Sam was to remain aloof from his prodigal brother, even when living in the same house.

Power is about connectedness. It is also about control and acting assertively, and it was clear that at different points one partner had more control than another, or used power to exclude and to place boundaries. Within the first type of adult relationship, where power is not a significant issue between the partners, issues of control are not contentious, although Martin considered himself less powerful, and Anna asserted there were ways in which he could extend his power.

Within the second type of adult relationship, the exercising of power was more evident at points of tension within the relationship, and became explicit when one parent felt threatened. Liz's moving in with Ross presented Fay with a major change, in which not only values which she had seen as stable and shared appeared to become fluid, but also the person she had thought she had known well was inexplicably changing. She

reacted to the changes by drawing tight boundaries around her relationship with Tessa and with Ross. Ross was asked to explain himself and his altered viewpoint:

the thing that got me really cross about that in the early stages was that *my* knowledge of Ross before he had settled in with Liz - I am not blaming this on Liz, but it was being in a house with teenage girls really that did this - was that Ross had always grumbled and moaned and maintained a position on painted ladies until he settled in that situation and suddenly it seemed not to matter any more. And it was influencing our child. So I rang him, or talked to him from time to time and said, "How come you seem not to maintain the same position on painting nails and having lipstick and Barbie dolls . . . ?" (1st Interview).

Tessa was also given clear instructions on what was family:

earlier in the piece I can remember saying repeatedly to Tessa, "Well, Liz Smythe may say that, but she's not your mother". Umm, oh, I can't remember any examples, but, "Liz says this" and "Liz says that". I say, "Well, that's Liz Smythe saying that. Fair enough. But I am your mother and I am saying such and such". And I *really* felt I had to impress upon her that I had attitudes because I was her mother . . . and Liz had attitudes that she had because she was living with her and was very close to her and was fond of her and had been a mother to others, but there was a fundamental difference (. . .) it's my business with Ross. . . . Because Ross and I are bringing up Tessa, not Ross - not me and Liz (2nd Interview).

As the relationships between the adults deteriorated further, so control, especially through threats, financial pressure, and the maintenance of distance became more overt. But even in these relationships, power cannot be seen to be held just by one person. Because of the past and potential violence implicit in the Black's relationship, and because of the explosiveness with which Keith often spoke, it was easy to designate him as overwhelmingly dominant, thus accepting his view of himself, and to ignore Maree's power because it seemed so much more precarious and limited. But it did exist, and Keith did not hold a monopoly. Maree did leave the marriage, and she was able to achieve a shared parenting relationship, even though that had its real problems. What also needs to be noted in the context of this family's history is that attempts to effect complete control led to a loss of control and to alienation. There are ecological and environmental parallels here, where male attempts to control Nature (female) have resulted in major environmental disasters. Another parallel, in a differently cosmic vein, is with *King Lear*, where Lear, who believed implicitly in the legitimacy of his control over his family, is finally left bereft and isolated, as Keith was for eighteen months following the episode of violence with Sam.

When women who had felt threatened in some way by their ex-partner spoke of these occasions, they referred to them in terms of a diminution of trust, of personal diminishment, and of an anxiety that future dealings might well become more difficult. In contrast, the masculine reaction to a perceived threatening situation was more to resort to threats about legal action¹⁰. Thus Luke, for whom the experience of sharing parenting included an exploration of the more feminine side of himself, talked momentarily in a rather diffuse, bullying (and erroneous) way about how he would use custody threats to

¹⁰ It could be suggested that a male strategy in these circumstances is to go outside the relationship for support from 'male' institutions.

coerce Isa to take the approach to Social Welfare that he wanted; while Charles applied for a custody order, and Keith continued after the court hearing to threaten further legal action in a manner designed to prove that he was still in control.

In addition to my analysis of power, which questions the adequacy of investing all power in the parent who appears more powerful, or who acts in a more controlling fashion, and which emphasises the sustaining of interdependence and connectedness as a powerful action, I suggest that there are two further ways that power can be used in a relationship. One aspect, which is discussed in the following chapter, relates to the allocation between the parents of the financial costs of caring for the children. The other relates to the power of interpersonal perceptions as means to constrain a relationship or to permit it to move on. As Harvey et al. (1982) note, a close relationship with another allows myriad and often conflicting interpretations about that person to be formed. What attributes are called upon to form the notion of the other depends on the stage of the relationship. When an emotional distance makes emendation of attributes difficult, or once the relationship has dissolved, then the attribution 'may take the form of justifications regarding one's own course of action or blaming the other' (p. 109). As the writers go on to note:

Insofar as the relationship exists in the mind of the participant, it continues to exist cognitively although practical circumstances have reduced or eliminated contact. Relationships are as much symbolic events and images of the involved parties as they are interactional episodes or histories. We may put time or space or other people between ourselves and formerly significant others, *but we maintain the relationship in our minds* (Harvey et. al, 1982, p. 119: my italics).

The way, then, that the other is perceived, the extent to which alternate notions and images are allowed to enter that perception, and the way that that perception colours experience is itself powerful, and at times coercive. Where one person knows or thinks that she/he is seen by the ex-partner in negative terms, then the possibility of a defensive rather than a more open reaction has already been set in motion; while the partner, especially as perceptions become more fixed, finds it generally easy enough to find reasons for sustaining, not altering, that perception. The holding of a strongly negative view of the other person can be a very controlling, powerful act because it constrains and complicates communication, and can place individuals in double binds. If they do try and work something out, then the form of the interaction will doubtless confirm the other's impressions; if they don't, then the result will be the same. Alternatively, the more a perception of the other is positive or is able to avoid emphasising negative features, then the greater the freedom which can exist between the couple. Neither is forced back into defensive behaviour, and because neither feels that they are constantly having to defend their integrity and character, communication is easier.

In relation to the typologies of relationship, it was apparent that those in Type 1 felt secure in their knowledge of the other's positive evaluation. Not needing to defend themselves, an open approach and a discussion of concerns was possible. In contrast to

those in Type 1 there is, amongst those in Type 2, a more noticeable ambivalence. Not surprisingly, at times of crisis or tension a less balanced and more negative view of the other's attributes prevailed, and it was assumed that the partner would also think badly of oneself. This perception hindered communication, and partially broke down trust and a sense of personal security. In the last two types, perceptual power had become much more controlling, character much more rigidly defined and both partners constrained. For the women in these relational typologies, the constraint lay in the need to struggle against the expectation of rebuttal, and the imposition of limits on what could be discussed. For the men, the constraint was that the negative perception of the other created barriers where discussion was seen as pointless because of the limitations of the other and/or because it was the natural male responsibility to retain control. In this context, issues of power and control are more than the manifestations of individual family systems. They are also part of a pervasive social and ideological system where conventional, dominant definitions of power have supported particular values - autonomy, individuation - and certain manifestations of power - control, physicality. Such definitions have suppressed alternative values - connectedness - and alternative manifestations - the centreless nature of power - whose wider public acceptance would result in women being able to see themselves as active and powerful, rather than powerless.

Implications for parenting

The model of the adult relationship in the joint custody literature is schematic and inadequate, in that it rests primarily on a number of prescriptive assumptions about how this relationship ought to function. What I have sought to present is an alternative to this prescriptiveness by teasing out the strands of these relationships and to reach an appreciation of what it means in practice to be a parent in such a situation.

(1) In all two-parent situations, parenting ideally implies mutuality, respect for the other as an individual and as a parent, reciprocity and a relatively well balanced power relationship. It involves the sharing of information, partly as a symbolic and inclusive gesture, partly to ensure support and help in rearing the child. I have purposefully used the word 'ideally' because thinking about the ways that the parents in this study managed their relationship has raised a series of questions about the nature of parenting in intact families and the wider applicability of the typologies that I have developed. One significant difference between shared parenting and intact families is that in the former the child moves between - between homes, between parents. Information accessible to the parent with whom the child currently resides is potentially much more difficult for the other to acquire than for a parent in an intact family unless there are open lines of communication. Lack of knowledge simply complicates the parenting task, and could be detrimental for the child. It is not, however, enough at the time of separation simply to determine that there should be meetings between the parents and to establish rules for the handing on of information. For the lines of communication to be open *and* emotionally accessible *and* usable for both parents, then the presence of the above-mentioned qualities in the parental

relationship become necessary. What the different types of relationship show is that the task of shared parenting becomes more draining, less supported and more open to attack as one progresses through the types. What also emerges is that shared parenting has two interrelated objectives - the maintenance of the relationship of each parent with the children, and the maintenance of a facilitative adult relationship. In these families where shared parenting has been least stressful, both objectives were reasonably successfully met. Where there were higher levels of stress, then the first objective became the major focus of the agreement.

(2) If shared parenting is to provide a facilitative relationship for the adults as well as for the children - and my belief is that the needs of the adults-as-parents cannot be ignored in a shared parenting family any more than in an intact one - then it is likely that some reworking of the couple system will be necessary. Although the first, third and fourth types of separated relationship involve least change to the system, it is the latter two which are of concern in a shared parenting situation because of the way in which the parenting tasks become more difficult to carry out. The greater the rigidity - whether it be in terms of the negative perception of the ex-partner, the ideological commitment to an intact family, and/or the way in which gender issues are understood - and the more power has been used for the purposes of control within the marital system, then greater the difficulty which will be experienced in changing the system.

(3) There is a very close relationship between the judicial concept of the child's best interests and the nature of the parental relationship. Once again the system, not the moral principle alone, has to be addressed. Because the child is the least powerful member of the system, it is important to build in a means of taking care of her/his interests. But the child's needs cannot be held separate from the family system. A systemic understanding makes possible the recognition of the way in which the psychological principles of continuing contact and the 'best interests' argument on which shared parenting is based conflict at times in practice. In the Black's case, for example, the intention was for both parents to act parentally, and to share responsibility as the best way of meeting Sam's needs. But because the Blacks were unable to rework their marital system that principle conflicted with another, well recognised principle in divorce literature, i.e., that children do not do well in families where the parental tension is maintained at a high level. In addressing one principle, the dynamics of the other are ignored.

(4) The two men who felt peripheral as parents were the two who were least involved on a daily basis with their children. Both were emphatic that participation in the dailiness of children's existence is significant in the creation of knowledge of that child, and in being able to make well grounded decisions. That detailed knowledge only comes from close involvement is a point echoed by other fathers who realised the difference only after taking an equal share of the parenting. What this suggests is that substantially unequal time allocations have different outcomes in terms of paternal satisfaction. If there is a policy or belief that fathers need to be encouraged to share parenting responsibilities, then

merely endorsing all arrangements in which the father has relatively little time with the child as 'shared' perpetuates the conventional divisions of parenting responsibilities. Fathers are not asked, let alone expected (in the way that women are) to accept the real and immediate limitations on private life, careers and financial power which result from caring for children, and minimal paternal involvement is accepted because that is the norm. On the other hand, labelling any agreed time allocations 'shared' may create false expectations which subsequently are realised to be incompatible with the structure of the arrangement. I would *not* want this to be seen as an argument for the desirability of universal fifty/fifty shared parenting arrangements. But parents, if they are to make adequate assessments of the potentials of different custody arrangements, need to know more about the likely consequences of establishing one sort of arrangement rather than another.

(5) The way in which the separation and the establishment of the shared parenting are carried out also help or hinder the shared parental relationship. Mutuality of the decision to separate, the minimizing of hostility and, in some families a planned, gradual approach to sharing appear significant. A gradual approach allows some trust to be re-established. It also gives men with less practical parenting experience time to develop skills, and their ex-partners time both to adapt to relinquishing control, and to develop some confidence in their partner's ability to look after the children.

Summary

As with all interpersonal relationships, the shared parenting relationship is complex, delicate, and changes over time. The ability to trust and to assume that the other means well is clearly significant in diminishing power plays and in assisting communication about the children or the workings of the arrangement. The four types of relationship that I have suggested form a pattern where, as the relationship becomes progressively more difficult, so the presence of positive qualities and emotions are displaced by more negative ones, power issues become more sharply focussed and their expression becomes more gendered. The more intrusive the negative factors become, the more fraught the relationship for adults and children.

The relationship, because of its paradoxical nature, does have tensions peculiar to it which need to be noted - the need to continue a relationship at the time that separation from that relationship is being attempted; the difficulty of changing perceptions about the person with whom there is little contact; the need to continue to make an effort in a relationship which is no longer meaningful; and the need in the majority of instances to change or modify the previous pattern of relations between the adults.

Finally, power as an element which can nourish or complicate and frustrate relationships has to be noted. A broad conception of power, including ideas of connectedness and interdependence as well as authority and control, makes possible a more subtle appreciation of this element in these relationships. The way that power is used by adults in shared parenting arrangements is a further indication of their ability to carry out this form of parenting.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Introduction

In the American research studies, the cost of shared parenting and the allocation of costs between parents receives minimal attention. Whether the fact that the families participating in these studies were middle class, and were not seen by the researchers as having financial problems, or whether concentration on the psychological well-being of the participants precluded a more extensive discussion of the financial issues, it is evident that much of the literature tends to emphasise the intra- and inter-personal factors at the expense of the structural issues¹.

I was able to locate only one study which is explicitly concerned with the actual cost of joint custody. Patterson (1984) draws attention to the issue of economies of scale and points to the well-known fact that two households are more expensive to run than one. Accordingly, she suggests that economic facts need to be given careful consideration when parents are contemplating joint custody. The national budgets on which she drew to make an assessment of the cost of joint custody assume a non-working mother and do not make allowances for the increased cost of older children. A joint custody family, however, is more likely to have a working mother who will also have to meet added expenditure on transport, work-related costs and child-care, thus substantially increasing outgoings. Patterson writes:

We are unaccustomed to thinking in terms of the "real" costs of joint custody, such as household work, child care, and parenting services. Few people can either afford or find replacement services to sustain households at the level before the divorce (p. 76).

Other writers have commented briefly on the issues. Salm (1984, a) thought there might be financial problems associated with joint custody. Bowman (1983) noted that parents in her study developed their own ways of sharing expenses, which reflected differences in parental income and the amount of time spent with the child. Luepnitz (1981) observed that while joint custody meant that the women in her study did not have to return to court to get unpaid child support, in relation to their ex-partners they were financially disadvantaged and had to rely on parental help. Over fifty percent of the joint custody mothers had to seek work for the first time, and had more difficulty than did men in obtaining access to credit. The parents in the study done by Irving, Benjamin & Trocme (1984) shared costs in different ways. Forty one percent shared costs equally, thirty eight percent shared costs on a seventy five/twenty five percent basis with the husband taking the higher proportion, and in thirteen percent of the families, one parent took all financial responsibility (figures rounded). However, none of these writers comment on the

¹ See Meyer (1987, p. 401) who argues that, 'The current popular turn inwards on both psychological and social levels has supported a focus on personal feelings' with the nett result that structural issues are too frequently ignored by those in the helping professions'.

respondents' views about the allocation of financial responsibilities. Nor do they connect structural and gendered issues of financial inequality with the costs of joint custody.

Much more recently, however, Bruch (1988, p. 115) writes that joint custody has

posed new questions about child support. How, for example, is child support to be allocated between two parents who share significantly in the child's physical care after divorce? What happens if a parent defaults on the contemplated time-sharing arrangement? How are travel costs to be allocated when the parents' homes are far removed from one another?

Funds are sometimes placed in a joint account from which payments are made for certain major child support expenses (. . .) that might not otherwise be fairly shared between the parents because of their time-sharing plan. Courts have also recognized that maintaining a child at comparable standards of living in both parents' households requires that support payments be made to the parent with the lesser earning capacity, even in cases where the wealthier parent has physical custody for an equal period of time.

Over the last few years there has been wider recognition of women's financial disadvantage, relative to men's, after the breakdown of a marriage (Brohpy & Smart, 1981; Cartwright, 1986; Johnston & Johnston, 1985; MacDonald, 1986; Seal, 1979; Scutt & Graham, 1983; Weitzman, 1985), although the coining of the phrase, 'feminization of poverty', has the effect as Cass (1987) pointed out, of implying a new development rather than the reworking of an old theme. In addition to a financial inequality experienced at the time of marital dissolution, most women also face inequalities in the workforce (Crompton & Mann, 1986), where women in full-time work earn less than men do. In New Zealand, women earn approximately seventy six percent of the male wage (the Equal Opportunity Act (1972) notwithstanding) and three times less overtime (New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy, Vol. 2, 1988; Novitz, 1987)². Women are also disadvantaged in relation to part-time work (Allen & Barker, 1976; Barron & Norris, 1976; Clark, 1986; Shipley, 1981). Clark, in her recent study of part-time work in New Zealand, notes that it is a 'female phenomenon' (p. 3), and quotes Shipley to the effect that '*participation rates* are highest among divorced and separated women' (p. 7). She also notes that much part-time work is lower paid, lower skilled, has low status, and that women in such employment are least protected. In the light of this now well-recorded structural inequality, fairness in apportioning child-care costs between partners after separation needs to take into account women's restricted ability to participate on equal terms with men in the workforce.

The New Zealand Matrimonial Property Act (1976) placed the division of matrimonial property on an equal footing, part of the philosophy behind the act being that women deserved financial recognition for their domestic contribution during the marriage. While at the time the principle of equal division of assets represented a considerable step forward in relation to fairness and women's rights, increased awareness of the continuing structural inequalities which particularly affect women has meant that the adequacy of the principle is now under question. Weitzman (1985) argues that gender neutral legislation is

² See Appendix 2 for tables drawn from 1986 Census data which point to a gross disparity between the earnings of men and women.

discriminatory because of structural discrimination against women. In the United States women are entitled to receive an equal amount of the marital property at the time of the dissolution of the marriage. But because many women continue to assume the major care of dependents, Weitzman describes the outcome of divorce as very different for men and women. In contrast to the women, men's careers are not hampered by dependents, their living costs are much reduced and their overall financial position considerably improved as a result of divorce. Whereas the divorced women and their children in Weitzman's study suffered a reduction of seventy three percent in their living standard, the living standard of the men rose by forty two percent. Weitzman argues, therefore, that equal division of assets fails to take account of the differential financial outcome of divorce for men and women. Instead, the division of matrimonial property should reflect the inequalities with which women in particular have to content. She advocates the inclusion of career assets as part of matrimonial property and suggests that property division should be based on principles of equitability, not equality. This would mean that assessments to determine the level of contribution of each parent towards the costs of the children should reflect the partners' different abilities to command work and their different earning capacity.

The families' financial arrangements

The questions that I asked about the financial arrangements of the families were not designed to provide precise, quantifiable accounts of expenditure, which would make it possible to assess relative degrees of wealth. I was interested in a more subjective approach. How did the parents divide up the costs of sharing the children? What issues had affected their practice? Did they feel that their arrangement was fair? Two points, however, need to be noted. The first is that I felt very uncomfortable asking for details about expenditure and financial arrangements from two of the men. One had never been happy with the arrangement. The other had felt angered by the financial outcome for some years and, in both instances, I was aware of aspects in their accounts which did not 'make sense' but felt inhibited about asking for more detailed information. The second is that two of the women who had expressed some dissatisfaction with their arrangements asked, on reviewing their accounts, for these sections to be omitted or discussed only in general terms. They did not want to upset or alienate their ex-partners.

The amount of detail given in response to my questions varied greatly. One couple hardly discussed the issue. In some other families, it was discussed at length, and in others, the financial issues of the separation and the on-going costs of raising the children informed many parts of the account. As might be expected, emotions about property division and how costs had been shared ranged from equanimity, to slight feelings of annoyance that it had not, perhaps, been quite fair, to considerable anger because of the perceived greed and financial intransigence of the other. Some of the families were able to reach agreement easily about how to meet expenditures, but for others, the same issues presented major difficulties. Although the distribution of costs could have provided an occasion for power plays between the couples, it happened in only two instances to any

major extent and in those families was commented on as such by these women who had felt they had borne the brunt of the situation. In only one of the two families was the use of finance as a weapon by the male partner believed to be continuing and the mother described the on-going conflict around money as extremely destructive for the child. One other couple, who eventually ceased shared parenting, did not mention money as a major issue, but the man subsequently implied, without ever stating directly, that his preparedness to be financially generous had been exploited by his ex-partner.

Several of the families commented spontaneously that they saw a shared parenting arrangement as primarily a middle class arrangement because of the costs involved. In particular, housing costs were mentioned as a constraint for many families who might consider shared parenting because of the need for each parent to have an adequate base to which children could come. Few of the parents in my study had bought their homes before the major hike in house prices. Anna, for example, had to leave Wellington to move into a house that her partner could afford. Keith and Maree mentioned the crippling mortgage costs they had had to face, and Isa had only been able to finance her way into her house because of a loan from the Housing Corporation, and because she had received considerable help from her own family and from Luke. Finding adequate rented accommodation, because of high rental costs and low subsidy (then) to which she was entitled on the Domestic Purposes Benefit, had also been a major problem for Michelle who felt that the difficulties with housing which she experienced as a consequence of her poverty had meant that she had remained financially very dependent on Lawrence, and that the financial dependency had not helped the clarification of their emotional relationship. As was noted in Chapter Five, two of the women felt that they had been pressured by their ex-partners into agreeing to sell the marital home and that the price obtained had not reflected the then current market values, thus impairing their ability to establish a separate home.

Establishing a shared parenting arrangement had immediate repercussions for three of the women in relation to work. At the point where the marriage or relationship broke down, only Maree, Mary and Fay were working full-time outside the home - not a typical situation. Both Jane and Isa realised that they would have to work full nor nearly full-time in order to support themselves and the children, an experience which Isa at least found was not all that it was reported to be:

The other thing is, that I didn't, the thing that I didn't expect is that . . . working, you know, . . . the kind of *toll* that, you know, working pretty well full-time, in the work force takes in terms of energy, kind of creative energy and organisation - ahh - how much *time* it takes up. in, in one's life, organising your day around, you know, someone else buying your time, your mind, your body, I mean I didn't . . . (2nd Interview).

Jane, who had been at home for ten years, worked part-time as a radiologist, for which she had trained before marriage, but then found it very difficult to get full-time work as a researcher, especially since she was concerned to retain some flexibility of working hours because of the children's needs. She was very conscious that skills which she had

developed while at home were accorded no value in the market place. Patty, who had worked intermittently since her return to New Zealand, also started looking for a career. One of the factors in her career choice was being available for Jim after school, so that she could look after him each afternoon, and thereby eliminate the need for Stephen to change his working hours, a decision which clearly restricted the career options open to her. Both Michelle and Anna went on the Domestic Purposes Benefit and found themselves in very constrained financial circumstances, despite help from ex-husbands. Michelle described this experience as 'quite traumatic' and one which accentuated her sense of powerlessness. In the following quotation, she described her powerlessness as having developed out of a series of interlocking social expectations about the roles of men and women which were no longer valid once she was separated. Her acceptance as a young woman of the convention that women are financially dependent on men contributed to her failure to recognise the need to plan for financial independence which, after the separation, left her with few employment options. Her flexibility in relation to employment was further hampered by the double bind of high childcare costs and the level of salary that she would be able to command, since she lacked experience and recognised work skills, so that the Domestic Purposes Benefit appeared as the only 'unpleasant' means of support:

Well, I find it very difficult to separate quite where the sense of powerlessness was coming from. Um, I know that it was certainly, that the structure certainly contributed largely, but I also . . . felt that, um . . . um . . . that there must have been a fair amount of my own dependency for me . . . to have allowed me to get into that total state of powerlessness. That I, for some reason or another felt, felt . . . inadequate in the world with a small child. And, um, I remember it was a terrible panic for me in that first year of us being separated . . . and ahh . . . I'm sure that over that year it kept me hanging on . . . pretty close to Lawrence. Because I was actually terrified to be . . . on my own with Kay and I . . . I can't help feeling that that was - it, it happened to me. I remember it shocked me. I didn't know how to deal with it. Because I thought I had been pretty independent, um, sort of a person before I had actually, um, settled with somebody and had a child. (. . .) I remember feeling . . . really sick that . . . I had been reduced to that sort of state by . . . what, I, I wouldn't like to put the blame on anything . . . I . . . it still . . . floors me slightly to think (. . .) There were an awful lot of things that I couldn't do with a child . . . I couldn't go out and earn a decent income . . . with a child. In the way I saw it, I couldn't because, um, if I had, maybe if I had had a well-paid job before I met Lawrence and had the child I might have had something, but I didn't and the options seemed to be incredibly narrow. Um . . . as a result . . . um, those were the sorts of things that had never occurred to me before I had Kay. um . . . but certainly the choice when I separated with her seemed to be either to go onto the DPB and do some sort of training or to . . . get some sort of job and spend most of it on child care. And, um . . . now they were two fairly unpleasant sort of alternatives. I guess only having those alternatives is a pretty powerless feeling (3rd Interview).

By the time that I interviewed them, all the women had been able to find full-time employment or were self-supporting, and most of them were in professional occupations. That they were in full-time employment defines these women as atypical New Zealand women. But none were in senior positions, and certainly six of them earned less, and sometimes considerably less, than their ex-partners. One spoke of the costly consumer items that her ex-partner was able to afford, was anxious at times that these might become a reason later on for a choice by the children to live with the father, and also wondered if her relative poverty and lack of electronic equipment inhibited invitations to school friends to come home. Maree was still collecting Family Support, the income guarantee paid to

lower income families. Isa had lost her entitlement to Family Support when Peter moved in to live with her.

While the men had certainly had major changes in their domestic situations, they were not confronted with finding work. The fact that nearly all were able to continue in work meant that in this aspect of their lives they had some continuity, in contrast to the women who had to adapt to major changes domestically as well as find work. Only two of the men, Luke and Keith, spoke of considerable alteration in their financial circumstances. Keith had been hit by soaring interest rates, and also found at one stage that he could not afford to meet his insurance premiums. Luke's situation was different, in that he had given up work to be with the children, and was some conflict between his desire to earn more and retain close contact with the children. He was the only person to mention superannuation as a cost which had to be given some thought.

I can get by on a minimal amount but I must also plan for my old age. It's not fair to rely on the kids. I've got to earn, since you can't rely on super{annuation} being still available or enough. Taking out insurance involves more outgoings. There is a constant balancing act between money and child orientation (1st Interview).

He was also the only man to have had recent close contact with the Department of Social Welfare and believed that the Department was basically unprepared to accept his decision to stay home with the children.

The common aspect of all the financial arrangements was that each parent met daily costs and outgoings of the children during the time they were with her/him. Beyond that, the apportioning of other cost varied. The way the agreements worked at the time of interviewing was not always how they had worked. For example, in one family the mother felt that the father was now meeting his share of the costs, but that for some time after the separation, money had been withheld, resulting in her meeting the major expenditures. In two families the Family Benefit was pooled in a joint account which could be drawn on by either parent. In five families, the mothers continued to receive Family Benefit and one father in this group said he could not see why he should pay anything since his ex-partner was getting the Benefit. Charles had also been trying for some time, with Mary's agreement, to get half the Benefit paid to him. This was eventually arranged, but the difficulty experienced in trying to do this suggested some inflexibility on the part of the Department of Social Welfare. Luke also had difficulties getting onto the Domestic Purposes Benefit, since to do so he needed to hold half of the benefit which had been capitalised earlier.

The agreements

Equal division of costs

Of the two families who shared out costs equally, the Thomson/Jones used the Family Benefit paid into a joint account to purchase clothes and took turns at meeting other regular expenditure incurred for after-school activities. Substantial extra costs were

checked out with the other parent before the account was utilised. Neither parent felt that financial matters presented any difficulty.

The second family, the Ashby/Bradleys, initially used a joint bank account, into which the family benefit was paid and kept accounts of other expenditure, such as child care costs which were shared out at the end of the month so that each paid half. Any holidays that were taken with the children were paid for by the parent who went with the children, because they were having all the fun. But there was also a feeling, at the time of the first three interviews that this arrangement could well be temporary. Dave said,

Well, as Jane and I are talking more easily it isn't really . . a problem at the moment. This is the sort of thing . . that . . could easily be important 'cos of course each of you is spending your joint money too. In a way. Well, it's organised so it's in a way. Rushing out and spending your - the other person's money without discussing it. And it may be on essentials or it may just be . . because you're feeling guilty about something. Oh, I'm not entirely clear on that one yet (1st Interview).

He also mentioned what he saw as the difficulties of the arrangement, and whether it should take into account the 'relative prosperity' of each partner. This was difficult to talk about with Jane:

I mean this is the difficult point, really But at the time of our legal arrangement that was what was arranged - that we would share. So it's quite simple really. Except that this business of every time you buy something you are spending the other person's money without talking to them about it (. . .) I tend to be cautious in that I . . . feel . . . that I have to talk about it . . . but umm . . . Jane doesn't. She just spends it . . . umm . . .

AO: It sounds a little bit irritating for you, Dave.

DB: Well, it could be. I, it's a little bit . . . it's also because it's not a subject that, that is . . . is . . . very easily opened you know. . . . Jane's likely to find it irritating to mention it . . . (. . .) It tends to raise (*said slowly*) the whole question of who's better off . . . in life . . and who's suffered from having children an', you know all -

AO: So it's not just a simple question? It's a symbolic question?

DB: (*laughing*) Yes. It's not just a matter of, "Did you spend", you know, "\$25.00 yesterday or was it \$24.60"? You know? It's, "What's happened to me? Look what you've done to me" (1st Interview).

Jane, however, felt that the financial issues were not a hassle, although she did feel that issues of equitability were important. In their case, the fact that they were not impoverished by the separation was a help in ensuring an easy financial arrangement. At the time of the second follow-up, there was less apportioning out of costs, partly because they realised they were spending about the same amount on items other than day to day costs which Dave was meeting since the children were mostly with him for the year, and because Jane was not able to get a full-time job. Dave was not sure whether they would have to look at costs more closely in 1989, when Jane had the children with her full-time because of these changes in her financial position.

A 'topping up' arrangement

Under this type of arrangement, in which I have placed three of the families, the men contributed an extra amount to cover expenses. In two instances, the men were paying for some time a "liable parent" contribution of (then) \$25.00 per week to the Department of Social Welfare, but thought that this was inadequate, and made additional

payments in kind (clothing, shoes, and equipment for the children. Lawrence also paid for the books for Michelle's courses and doctor's bills as well) to avoid reduction of the mothers' benefits. As both women became financially more independent, the amount was reduced by common consent. Lawrence decided that it would be best to contribute to Michelle's rent, which would enable him to feel that he was supporting Kay without making Michelle dependent on him.

I said that I thought that one of the things that was making Michelle unhappy was that she was depressed (. . .) living in grotty surroundings and it wasn't improving, you know, her self-image . . . and we came to the conclusion that Michelle did not have the money to live in anything *other* than grotty surroundings . . . ahh, and I said, "Well, you would have . . . ahh, if . . . I gave you the money. Look, I'll do this. Go and find yourself a *decent* flat and I will pay Kay's share of the rent," and if I remember rightly what happened was that she [found a place] (. . .) and she said, "But you can't possibly pay half of it. That is too much", and it was sort of done that way. I am paying half of it . . . and . . . there isn't an argument . . . (2nd Interview).

In the third family, the Cooper/Pearsons, Stephen contributed \$20.00 per week which he thought (without being certain) was to cover the additional costs incurred by Patty because of after school activities and clothing. All three of the men felt that it was appropriate to make the extra contribution, and also relied on the women to ask if they felt that they needed anything more while at the same time recognising that the women did not find it easy to ask for extra assistance.

Mostly, money was not regarded as a problem. As Lawrence said:

It hasn't been a source of argument . . . ever . . . and I take it, because Michelle is direct

AO: That she would have said?

LB: I take great comfort that I would have heard . . . umm . . . I don't think that she has . . . (2nd Interview).

But there were times when awareness of financial inequality created tensions. Although Michelle hinted that occasionally she had felt that money had been used as a means to secure compliance, more often her sense of powerlessness was related to structural inequalities. Nonetheless, as the person on the receiving end, she was aware of her financial dependence on Lawrence and resented the fact, as did Anna who felt strongly at times about the difference between her salary and Martin's, a difference which she could never hope to equal³.

Balancing out the finances

Parents in this group intended that costs should be met more or less equally but, unlike those in the first group, they did not run a strict accounting system. In both the families who operated this system, money had been an issue in the past but was much less so at the time of the three interviews. Luke and Isa saw their arrangement as a logical extension of the non-legal approach they had taken to the separation, where preparedness to compromise and to co-operate was basic to the agreement. They operated a system

³ See p. 89.

where each took turns at meeting major expenditures. Isa felt that she had a responsibility to trust that Luke would make an equal contribution, felt sure (most of the time) that he did, and emphasised his substantial contributions. She believed (a point which Luke confirmed: 'She's more sensitive to things like that'), that she thought ahead more and bought sale-priced clothes which she knew would be needed soon. In the other family, there had been a history of financial difficulties, disagreements and distrust, although at the time of the interviews there was common agreement that costs were more equally shared. Each parent bought clothing for one child, and extras for the other when they felt they could afford them.

An arrangement regarded as inequitable and unfair

Only one couple continued to argue about over expenditure. Both accused the other of bad faith and each major expenditure had to be negotiated, with the expectation that there would be difficulties. Both parents felt financially disadvantaged in relation to one another, and Keith was dismissive of any ideas of equity, although he supposed that Maree did not earn anywhere near the amount that he did. Maree felt strongly that money was used as a weapon, a process in which at times Sam was unfortunately involved, since he had in the past taunted her for her lack of money and told her that she should never have left his father, but had more recently started to apologise for needing anything. Keith thought it unfair that Maree should continue to collect the Family Benefit and the Family Support payments, *and* the \$3.00 per week that he paid throughout the year while he looked after Sam for six months of the year but received no extra financial help. The way in which the \$3.00 per week had been arrived at was commented on by both. Keith said,

It was finally agreed that she would have all the family benefit, y'know, for the full 12 months, all the time but umm y'know, whether he was here or not - that she would buy his clothes and I would pay, I would also pay maintenance for - all the time, which is not very much, but a certain sum per annum towards clothes etc. (1st Interview).

Maree's account was somewhat different:

MB: Keith and I came to a decision because he said to me, "You can seeing as you get the Family Benefit and I don't get anything", he says, "you can buy all of Sam's clothes and pay for all his school fees and school books and anything that he's got to have besides food". And ah, anyway, I said I couldn't do that on \$6.00 per week and he said, um, "Well, I'll help you out". And I said, "OK", and he said "How much do you want"? And I was hoping the counsellor and the court would work that out because we left it open when we were with the counsellor.

AO: So you never went back to your lawyer?

MB: He wasn't a lot of use and also, um, it was costing too much (. . . .) And I only found out a couple of months ago that I could have had legal aid! I was completely ignorant and the lawyers weren't any help at all.

AO: So there was no clear financial arrangement?

MB: No. And there still isn't. And that, that's where I find it hard. Although Keith did tell me - we came to this arrangement, Keith and I. Keith said, "I'll give you so much and how much do you want"? And I said to him, at that stage I said to him, "Well, if you give me \$75.00 at the beginning of the year, before Sam starts school to help me buying clothes and things like that and \$75.00 at the winter" and, um, he said OK and we sort of settled on that, and um . . . then . . . um . . . he told me that the Court had demanded that he pay \$500.00 to me every 6 months but because we already had this agreement - well, Keith said he wasn't going to pay it (. . .) and he says to me (*adopts an aggressive tone*), "So, if you want your \$75.00 every 6 months, you had better ring the Family Court and tell them that we've

come to another agreement so that they don't put pressure on me". So I did that. I wanted to please Keith so that he wasn't hostile with me, because, y'know, he had been hostile with me for years and ah, so y'know, that's why I agreed to, ah, y'know.

AO: And so you cancelled it all, without actually consulting anybody at that stage?

MB: No. And I was quite happy, y'know, with \$75 every 6 months. But it's getting so - it's getting a bit out of hand now (2nd Interview).

Implications

Several points emerge from the analysis:

(1) At the time that the financial agreements were made none of the couples had considered issues of equity and it may have been that the four couples where the costs of the children were shared out more or less on a fifty/fifty basis assumed that such a division was fair. An advantage of deciding on an equal apportioning of costs is that it avoids conflict and the necessity of trying to evaluate what should be taken into consideration in assessing levels of payment. The effect, however, is that where parental earnings are unequal, the women who earn less than their ex-partners are in effect subsidising the men, whose salaries and earning potential are often higher. By the time I came to interview them, three of the women felt that income discrepancies should be taken into account. When asked about what advice she would give parents thinking about shared parenting, Mary said:

what I would really want them to do . . you know, any couple who were contemplating this and they were right at the end of the marriage but they didn't know what lay ahead, because they were still 90% married to each other in their heads. That's the world, you know. You haven't come out of it . . enough, and I think I would *really persuade them*, you know, to the *best* of my *ability* that they find some kind of counsellor . . or whatever . . umm, to help them work out the practical . . . arrangements . . . face the consequences, anticipate, umm . . . you know, the emotions, umm . . . in advance . . . and umm . . .

AO: And financially? (. . .)

MB: . . . I am a well paid woman . . and most . . . women are, yes, not as well-paid as I am . . . and I feel that, ah, to do it pretty equally, umm, if one parent . . has a lot more . . . mind you, it might be that they would have a lot more outgoings too . . umm . . .

AO: That presumably would have to be balanced?

MB: Yes. They would have to *agree*, umm . . . well, just realise that there is an income discrepancy . . . and try and work out in advance how they were going to . . . get round it . . . (1st Interview).

Although I believe that her point about taking account of real discrepancies in income is valid it is interesting that she spoke with considerable tentativeness. Her concern was that ~~an insistence by one partner (more likely to be the women because of the structural and gender issues associated with employment) on achieving an equitable financial arrangement might lead to a deterioration in the parental relationship and thus disadvantage the children.~~

(2) Three of the men made payments to the women who incurred extra costs because they assumed a fuller responsibility for the child/ren. In the course of the discussion with two of the women in this group it became clear that the financial arrangements were not inflation proofed (the amount paid to one had not increased for several years) and nor did they take into account the increased costs of clothing, food and equipment incurred by an older child. The fact that an adequate reviewing arrangement had

not been agreed on may have contributed to the women's reluctance to ask for extra financial assistance.

(3) It would be easy to assert that the relationship ought to be regarded as a hardnosed financial one, in which relational niceties have no place. However, although the two women who were expected to ask if they needed more, had excellent relations with their ex-spouses, they did not feel easy about making requests, and it became clear that financial matters touched upon other areas of feeling. Martin said a trifle complacently:

MN: I'm a bit tight with money actually Always have been. Probably just a family trait. Certainly a trait of mine. Umm . . . and Anna is a person who has actually never been demanding of money. Extraordinary really because I think . . . that she actually got by, generally got by on little as, with as little as she can. I think that it is also partly a guilt thing, as well. I think that she felt, that she realised as well, because of what I felt about family life, and because I enjoyed family life (. . .) that there was a certain amount of guilt in Anna when she did move, and, and so I think . . .

AO: So this involved . . . managing on as little as possible?

MN: And I think that because of that - managing on as little as possible was always a thing with her.

AO: And it fitted in with your tightness?

MN: And it fitted in with my tightness (*laughing*) (1st Interview).

Anna, on the other hand, felt slightly resentful that she had, as she put it, 'protected' Martin because she felt that there was a (small) element of exploitation in Martin's explanations about the costs of buying out her interest in the house:

I don't think that Martin has ever been in a position where it hurts him financially. I think that I have always . . . attempted to act as a buffer. I never spent without asking. I always, you know, I always *protected* him. And I feel that there is a part of me that goes on protecting him (. . .) *I don't want to do it* because it is not good for me . . . but I think, you know, that there is a residual . . . that finds it hard *not* to feel responsible . . . (1st Interview).

In other words, although it should ideally be possible to get these things out in the open, the couples with the easiest relations found this difficult to do, because of a feeling of not wanting to rock the boat. This was itself a measure of the difficulties the other, less amicable couples faced.

(4) Despite the ambivalence and uncertainty which financial issues introduced into the relationships, it is clear that the majority of families were able to manage their affairs with relative equanimity. But equally, it should not be assumed that this meant that money had not been used at times as part of a power play. Several of the women felt that money had been used in the past as a punitive or controlling mechanism, and this was felt still to be the case in one instance at the time of the interviews. In contrast to the women's emphasis on unequal power, men implied (in those situations where money had been or still was an issue) that the women, in expecting extra financial assistance, were acting greedily. In other words, whereas the women emphasised structural inequality, the men spoke of the issue in moral terms, so denying the existence or significance of structural inequalities. Where the adult relationship was perceived to be difficult, there was the greater likelihood that money would become a contentious issue and be used by the male as a means of control.

(5) Power is linked to resources and to resource allocation as much work on the subject has pointed out. How resources are allocated, and what access individuals have to those resources reflect wider social structures. Unequal access to money and to work after separation is an obvious means by which the gendered nature of social structures place many women in a less advantageous and less powerful position than many men.

THE CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS

Introduction

New Zealand law states explicitly that all custody arrangements should give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child. Currently the principle of 'best interests' is interpreted by those working in the area of divorce and separation to mean the children's easy, unconstrained access to both parents. Shared parenting obviously derives much of its perceived value from the belief that the notion of 'sharing' custody removes parental conflict, thus facilitating interaction between parents and their children. However, the account of the parental decision making processes in Chapter Five has indicated that the assessment of the child's best interests is not a disinterested, objective exercise, but a intensely personal, intricate, and ideologically informed process. The act of labelling a familial arrangement as 'best' carries the implicit connotation that it is in fact 'best', and tends therefore to deny or submerge the difficulties and ambiguities associated with all interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the decision of what is 'best' is necessarily made without the advantage of experience, without the family having actually participated in the arrangement to evaluate how satisfactory it is for them.

Talking with the children about their experiences in shared parenting families was an important part of the research study, both because the arrangement is made on their behalf for their ostensible benefit and because, although they form an integral part of the family system, they occupy the least powerful position. It is, however, a reflection of the process of shared parenting that while the shared parenting is seen professionally as being in the best interests of the child, this chapter, where I have focussed primarily on the children's views about the arrangement forms one of the smaller chapters; and that the bulk of the adults' accounts of their experiences of shared parenting dealt with their concerns and situations in which the children were only indirectly implicated. The structure of the adult accounts, then, indicates the extent to which it is impossible to separate out children's needs from adult perceptions and capacities. What is constantly being dealt with is not an unsullied concept, but one which is necessarily muddled by adult practicalities and psychological possibilities. The responsibility for creating a viable arrangement which meets the children's needs lies with the adults. What becomes possible depends on them, on their ability to rework relationships, and to provide financial security so that, by an act of inversion, the adult relationship in all its manifestations becomes the primary focus of a shared parenting arrangement. This is certainly not intended to imply that the children's interests are unimportant. It is intended to stress that simple principles disguise and distort complex processes, and that it becomes all the more necessary to think through the basis of understanding and acceptance of those principles, to examine whether the accepted verities can withstand pressure, and to become more sensitized to what the adoption of any

particular custody arrangement might involve.

The children, like their parents, did not unreservedly endorse shared parenting. A positive, and at times enthusiastic response that the arrangement was 'great' from some of the children was undercut and thrown into question by other comments, and in only one child's account (Jim's) was there little evidence of internal inconsistencies. I would not be able to write as positively as Luepnitz (1986) has, that the children were pleased and comfortable with the arrangement. My data indicates a qualified endorsement. It should also be noted that the children omitted reference to stressful situations in the past which their parents described, and they do not refer much to aspects of the arrangement that their parents were conscious might be difficult for them to handle. Obviously, in view of their ages the children could not be expected to comment on the arrangement in the detailed, wide-ranging fashion of their parents. But what they said is at times very perceptive, and gave evidence of considerable feeling about the point which they were addressing. There were, however, factors which complicated their ability to respond and which were constraining for me as interviewer, which affected the general ambience of the interview and therefore the nature of the information I was able to obtain.

Methodological issues

In an article on children's friendships, Ginsberg, Gottman, & Parker (1986) write that observational research is rarely done in studies of children's friendships. Most researchers in this area ask the child about interactive patterns with their friends, a type of question which children have difficulty in answering because what they do together is in fact difficult to report. While acknowledging the validity of that comment in the context of my interviews with the children, the problem that I encountered early on was that observation would not give me the needed information, and I did need to ask the children what they made of the arrangement. Yet the act of asking was not a simple social process. I had to contend with my own anxieties and my awareness of the children's anxiety or reluctance to participate. Several of the children were clearly anxious about being asked about their situation, and in Kay's case, Michelle and I discussed whether, because of her vulnerability (historical, and also immediately connected with Lawrence's impending departure), she should be interviewed at all. The anxiety of these children stemmed, it seemed to me, from a number of interrelated factors. I thought it likely that some children picked up the parental anxiety that the children could conclude from the questioning that the arrangement was open to doubt or, alternatively, that the children might say something which the parents might find difficult to handle. In some of the families such matters were not normally discussed, and so raising the issues involved transgressing family boundaries, which was difficult for parents as well as children since they had to move beyond familiar modes of conversation. As a consequence, the situation was, Kay thought, 'embarrassing', because I was an unknown quantity, or as Jim said, 'strange. I did not know that people came . . . and interviewed people like this . . and . . about this sort of arrangement'.

Some of the children made it very clear that they were reluctant to take part. Sometimes the lure of a TV programme or activities with friends were very understandably seen as a more desirable diversion, and at other times the children were anxious that they would not know what to say, or that they would not be able to say anything. I made a point of both asking for their help and leaving it up to them whether they took part, since I felt that they had the right to refuse and I could see little point in entering into a battle over participation. Rachel and Kay finally decided that they could if someone else was present - Anna in Rachel's case, and a school friend who was staying the night, in Kay's. I tried, on various occasions, to move away from only verbal interactions, by asking for drawings of families, in the hope that they would have provided a way into talking about what the child had highlighted as significant, and would have given some indication of the child's feelings. However, most children refused point blank to do this, so I did not persist.

The purpose of the questions was to get some indication of the children understanding of the arrangement, how they felt about it, and the difficulties and advantages that they felt living in this way offered. The factor which I had not thought through prior to interviewing was the length of time that a number of the children had been living in a shared parenting arrangement, and their age at the time of separation. Most of the children had been quite small when the parents separated, and because they had been living in this type of arrangement for some time, there was a taken-for-grantedness about it. Not only did most not have clear recollections about what family life had been like when their parents were living together, thus precluding an easy comparison but this factor contributed to the unremarkableness of the arrangement. The nature of routine is that it is unremarked, unfocussed, and correspondingly difficult to talk about. As Ross commented about Tessa, 'It was just part and parcel of her . . . her, umm, - she never asked questions about it. It was just part and parcel of her life style'. Cornelia pointed out that she and Simon had been moving for so long that to do so was natural, 'like tying up shoe laces'. Because the arrangement was routine, the younger children in particular did not elaborate comments to any extent. I found myself constantly asking questions and feeling that the discussion did not flow because there was often only minimal development of each point.

In most of the families, because of the children's age at the time of the separation and because parents generally regarded the decision about custody as their own, the children had not been consulted about the establishment of the arrangement, and nearly all the parents were clear that for the time being they were still responsible for any alterations. Discussions had not been initiated with the children in most families about the way that the shared parenting was working, just as most intact families do not discuss the process of their life together. In the Black, Cooper/Pearson, and Merrick/Richards families, however, there had been some consultation with the children. In the first two instances, the children were seen as playing a substantial role in the evolution of the idea. Sam's statements that he wanted to live with both parents had, over time, come to be given at some points a slightly punitive edge, something akin to making beds and lying on them. Maree in

particular tended to see Sam as having primary responsibility for the maintenance of the arrangement. He had to make sure it worked because it was what he wanted. In the Cooper/Pearson family the same element occurred momentarily in the context of Jim's forgetfulness but the emphasis was more on the importance of the adults taking his wishes into account. Patty saw Jim as being the most affected by the arrangement and therefore believed he had the right to have most say about any changes, 'cos it's his life . . . ultimately . . . that it would affect the most. It is his *time* it would affect'. By contrast, Isa and Luke, in their counselling sessions, had asked for the children's opinions about the idea, and later how they felt it was working for them, while retaining the responsibility for any decision to stop or carry on. Awareness of the potential destructiveness of parental hostility and recognition of the children's desire to be fair to each parent had in the past led Mary to encourage the children to raise any concerns or feelings they might have about the arrangement with her, even if what they had to say was unfavourable to her personally:

I think little things that I might have said quite some time ago, but I've always tried to - if there was ever the suggestion that they did not want to hurt or offend . . I think - I haven't said it for a while now, but earlier, I think . . I tried to make it . . pretty clear that they must not worry about offending . . me . . they must say . . whatever is on their minds. Whether . . it seemed unfavourable to me or not (2nd Interview).

However, anxiety about offending was still a current issue for Cornelia and Simon. On the one occasion that Simon could recall when Cornelia had, by trying to get her parents to stop arguing, indicated how she had been feeling about the fighting, both children agreed that their parents had not liked her saying anything.

I returned copies of the children's transcripts to the older children (Cornelia and Simon suggested this) and talked to them about how they had felt about participation in the research. Jim, Cornelia and Simon said that taking part had helped sort out what they felt about the arrangement and had thus been very helpful. Sam said the same at the end of the first three interviews but, at the follow up interview which took place after the fight with his father and the termination of the agreement, he denied his earlier statements and said that all his comments about appreciation of the shared parenting were lies.

The children's perception of the arrangement

The children who found it easier to talk about the value of shared parenting were those who knew a number of other children whose parents were separated and whose custodial arrangements meant that those children saw little of their fathers. In contrast to their friends who lived in sole custody situations, the children in the study saw their family situation as advantageous, and because they saw it as better than those of their friends, not socially unacceptable. Out of all the children in the study, Kay appeared to be least conscious of other children's family patterns, and at one point became quite distressed when her friend who was taking part in the discussion suggested that she was the only child to come from a separated family. In response to a question whether she knew any other children whose parents were separated, the following exchange occurred:

Kay: I just don't know (who else is in a separated family).

Friend: Everyone in the school is the same as me (i.e., parents live together). Except Kay.

Kay: That's wrong!

Friend: Well, in the class, I mean.

Kay: That's wrong! I don't think that it would be only me with parents divorced!

Whereas she was the most uncertain about the living arrangements of school friends and acquaintances, Diana, Isac, Mark and Louise were all able to name about seven friends each whose parents were separated, and knew whether they lived primarily with mothers with intermittent contact with their fathers, or spent weekends with their fathers.

Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) note the feeling of shame experienced by children about their parents' separation and/or divorce because such happenings are perceived by the children as deviant from the majority culture. In an article about children's concepts of family, Pederson & Gilby (1986) note that in their study children's cognitive understanding of what constituted family did not seem to be affected by experiences within their own families, and that intensive tutoring in school about alternative family concepts and roles did not seem to markedly affect concept development. The authors note that this finding deviated from other research where concept development is found to be affected by experience, and suggest that their study may not have concentrated sufficiently on affect as part of family life. With this proviso in mind they go on to suggest that, because of children's tendency to stereotype, they need extra help and support in broadening perspectives, especially when the reality is so different from the ideal. The purpose of my study was not to explore concept acquisition and development. It became clear, though, that the more information children in the study had about other family situations, the more positively they viewed their own and the less they felt in some way either disadvantaged or abnormal. While this was particularly true when the children were able to compare their circumstances with those of children in solo parent families, simply having some awareness of different family structures helped to throw doubt upon the ubiquity and, therefore, ultimate superiority, of the intact family.

All of the children mentioned that the arrangement meant that contact with both parents was able to be maintained. Although younger children were not able to say much more than that the value of the contact lay simply in the fact that this was desirable 'because he's our dad', the four older children were able to comment more extensively on the aspects of the contact that they valued. However, they too thought that contact with both was necessary simply because parents were parents. But in the context of talking about why they valued the contact, children emphasised different aspects. The Noble children dwelt more on the fact that they did not see Martin as much as they would like, that they missed him, and that his visits were good because he was then around the house and available, although this did not mean that they spent time only with him on his visits. Jim emphasised two aspects of shared parenting that he saw as important. The first was that valuing the contact with both parents partly depended on the fact that they did not

fight, and that, unlike a friend, he was not triangulated or caught between his parents by parental hostility, which would, he thought, complicate matters.

Jim: They are friends so I can easily commute between the two.

AO: So them being friendly is important? (Yes) In what ways?

Jim: Well it means - if they weren't friendly, they prob'ly - they might be, umm, fighting over custody or something. I've got a friend, umm . . . the husband and wife - the ex-husband and ex-wife - both fighting and trying to gain custody . . . over the child.

The second was that shared parenting in a non-hostile atmosphere allowed him easy access to each parent. Being simply able to see Stephen and spend time with him was important, and he said that he would miss his father more if they lived, with little access to each other, in the same city, than if his father was living some distance away.

In contrast to Jim, Cornelia and Simon felt less positive about the arrangement. Their comments ranged from an assessment that it was 'OK' to feeling that it was a 'bit of a pain' because of 'having to cart things back and forth and long trips in between a bit of nuisance really', to feeling that the arrangement was 'part of life, really' and 'supposing' that 'it is pretty good the way we see them. Half and half'; and they concluded that they would recommend it to other families. 'Well, I reckon it's better this way because even if they don't talk very well, other families do. . . . It's fairer on everyone'. Diana's account also reflected some of the ambiguity with which she viewed the arrangement. She granted some benefits to the location of Isa's house, but what was clearly significant was that staying with her mother removed her at nightfall from the very important peer group:

Oh, I, I don't like it {where Isa lives} much better than umm . . . round Dad's, because this place - I don't know anyone . . . and ahh . . . it's quite good, going and walking through the Gardens . . . and I spend most of the time except for night time with my friends.

Some of the children saw the arrangement as 'fair' to both parents and to themselves and this seemed to appeal to a sense of natural justice. But other factors entered into this assessment. For Sam there was relief that he was no longer the middleman, that he no longer had to feel the need to juggle his time between his parents. His account is interesting in the way that it bypasses the power issues between his parents and focusses on him as the decision-maker:

Well, first of all I decided that I wasn't seeing enough of my father. I saw him once a week and could spend just a little bit of time with him, and that didn't seem enough and ah Dad talked it over with me. If he went to, sort of, a little bit of trouble of, ah, buying a whole house of his own, would I live with him, be prepared to live with him, and, um, I said, 'Yes' because I had been living with Mum all that time and then after, when I decided that I wasn't seeing enough of Mum we all decided that we'd try and share it out.

Half of the children also mentioned that such an arrangement stopped them from missing the parent who would otherwise be the non-custodial parent. Isac and Diana attributed some of the fairness to the fact that their father would have been lonely without them. Isac said, 'It's good that we are going to both because then we see both our parents

and everything, and they don't get lonely'. Louise, too, was particularly concerned about the loneliness of whichever parent it was with whom she was not currently staying, in a way that indicated, it seemed to me, her own sadness at the family separation. She spent quite a lot of time making gifts for that parent - cards giving her/him the reassuring message that she still loved him/her. At one point in the interview, she talked about her sadness at her mother's absence and the way in which she tried to retain aspects of the old family system through phone calls. At the time of their interview, the children were spending an extra week at Dave's to allow Jane time for swotting for university exams. Mark had just commented that Jane came down each day, or took them to school:

Louise: I don't think I see her very much To my . . .

AO: To your way of thinking? (Yes). Do you miss that, Louise? Do you miss seeing her?

Louise: Well, when I get grumpy with Dad then I actually like to have other people to talk to and play with afterwards. [I have to talk with him] so it's not really much use.

AO: So when you get grumpy with Dad, then you wish that Jane were here to talk to?

Louise: Yeah . . . and then I just go ring her up.

AO: So you ring her a lot?

Louise: Well see, when I ring her up it seems to me like she's at home with me, and so I do ring her up to talk to me.

AO: So when you feel a bit lonely, then you can ring her up and talk.

Louise: Yes. Because I know both phone numbers off by heart. It's just good knowing them by heart. (. . .) I ring her all the time. (. . .) Daddy makes me very cross. I ring up Mum and I tell her and she says to me to tell him off, so I do (*Sighs heavily*) . . . it's just useful when, um, when they are close together because when you are feeling like it you can . . . go up there.

AO: So you sometimes pop up to see Jane although you're down here with Dave?

Louise: Sometimes I ring her up . . . she, she asks if I want to come up to see her because she always does that when I phone . . . Mostly I don't go up there.

Kay was also intensely concerned about Lawrence's loneliness as his departure became more imminent. Michelle spoke of a time when Kay returned from her father and Michelle had interpreted her difficult behaviour as related to Lawrence's departure. She was also concerned because she thought that Kay (as she herself had previously) was feeling that she had to take a lot of responsibility for Lawrence:

MB: She came back from Lawrence's about a week ago and she was very screwed up and very angry and we had this wonderful confrontation, and I said to her, "Look". I was furious with her. She was so rotten. And I said to her, "This is not the way I want us to behave together. Come and have a cup of tea on the back porch". So we sat and she began to cry and cry. She said that this was wrong and that was wrong at school, and I said to her, "Are you anxious about Daddy going"?, and she just . . . broke her heart, and said it was like a death and that she didn't know . . . how . . . it was like him dying and she was scared that she would forget him and . . . she was angry with me, because I wasn't with him, because I wasn't with him, or, you know, that he was on his own, and she didn't know how he would cope with it, and she was angry with me because I had her, and it was tremendous. It was like the most enormous relief of feelings (1st Interview).

Children mentioned more practical aspects of the arrangement which appealed to them. The advantages included having five Christmasses (Diana), the avoidance of boredom (Simon, Mark and Louise), the advantages of having two different houses (Tessa, Mark and Louise) and of not always having to do the same chores (Tessa). The Noble children, although saying on the one hand that coming to Wellington to stay with

Martin was disruptive and somewhat threatening, since Wellington was so much larger than their town, nonetheless felt that doing so gave them the opportunity to keep up with old friends, and that Wellington stopped being strange after a time, and became a more interesting place.

Unlike the children in Steinman's study (1983), twenty-five percent of whom had felt some confusion about moving, this was not an issue for these children. Simon and Cornelia, though, saw the arrangement as disruptive because their transfers operated on a more complex system than in other houses because of Charles' hours of work. Simon said:

Well, I reckon the plan could be a bit better, like seeing Dad for 3 days, Mum for 4 . . . Dad for 4 days, Mum for 3 days. Because if we keep on going the way we are, it's a bit too topsy turvey . . . but Dad's work mucks it up. The late nights. That's the pain.

Only Simon and Louise thought that the moving sometimes made it difficult for friends to contact them (friends rang the wrong house first) and several other children mentioned that the moving disrupted friendships to some extent. Mark and Louise (children in the family which had begun to share the parenting most recently) mentioned that they had had to get used to living in another house. Cornelia said that she sometimes found that she was in the wrong house, depending on the sort of help that she needed for homework, and that this was a bit of a nuisance since, in this family neither child liked to contact the 'absent' parent. Tessa sometimes missed the physical contact she had from her mother when she was with Ross. Sam recognised his mother's more straitened financial circumstances as a bit inhibiting. Jim would, on balance, have preferred to live in one home but, since this was not possible, he thought that the moving was not really an issue, did not feel dislocated by the daily transfers, thought that a weekly transfer would be strange, and would have 'hated' to live with just one parent. Diana also expressed herself strongly on the issue of living with one parent:

AO: So what you are saying, Isac is that Alan {his friend} doesn't see much of his Dad? (Mmm). What would you feel like if you only saw your Dad every second weekend?

Diana: If, if it was arranged like that, do you know what I would do at the start? If I didn't start liking it, and I had to do it, I wouldn't. I'd just . . . go with my Dad . . . 'cos I like staying there {with her father} better than up here! (*Gives Isa a very provocative look. Isa chuckles.*)

Packing

Frequent packing was generally agreed to be an unpleasant by-product of the shared parenting, with the children well aware that forgetfulness caused tension between family members, while Diana thought that Isa, who packed for her as a contribution towards reducing demands on the children, often packed the wrong clothes. The following quotation gives the children's perceptions of the situations that arose when things were left behind, and a flavour of the family processes:

AO: So does it feel that you are living out of a suitcase a lot because each week you have to pack up your things and make sure that things get down from one place to the other?

Diana: No. Usually I want to pack my clothes, but Mum goes and packs them.

IM: If she wanted to and did, she could! But . . .

Diana: But I want to pack my clothes. But I did leave it up to Mum, I think.

AO: So they get everything ready? (Yeah) Do things get left behind?

Isac: Yeah. Sometimes.

Diana: Yeah. Sometimes we might just leave our socks, or nighties, or toys and something, but we can easily get it.

AO: So, it, you do - do you ever end up leaving a raincoat and it pours with rain the next day - does that happen at all?

Isac: Yeah. Sometimes.

AO: So how do you manage with that? What happens then? Do Mum and Dad get irritated?

Diana: It's not confusing or anything.

Isac: Sometimes Mum (Diana: Gets mad) drives us there and we pick up our coats and go.

Diana: Well, she's mad!

AO: Does Dad get mad?

Diana: Yeah. . . They are mad people (*Laughter*).

AO: But do you reckon that that happens a lot, Isa?

IM: Doesn't happen a lot, does it?

Diana: It used to. With Isac's . . . raincoat.

IM: With the raincoat . . . it, it's, if in fact that does actually happen, then between us, either Luke or I, you know, make contact with each other, and say, "Well, can you pick it up or . . ."

AO: It sounds terribly rational (. . .) but, do you in fact feel irritated with the other for not ensuring . . . that it's got back? Like, Diana was saying that you got cross and it sounds like that would be fairly understandable.

IM: Yeah, it's not a maj - it's not a disaster. It's just like - it's an inconvenience . . .

Diana: They usually . . . like, Mum gets mad with us, but she can't get mad with Dad (*IM. laughs*).

AO: What does Dad do?

Diana: Oh, she doesn't talk to him about it but . . . she gets mad, umm, by talking to us . . . she tells us (*IM. makes disowning noises*) that she's mad with him (*IM. laughs*).

IM: I wouldn't interpret it like that! Umm, I ask, I may go, "I asked Dad to make sure there were, the raincoats-"

Diana: He doesn't pack our things.

IM: You do?

Likewise, Michelle said that she could easily collect what had been left at Lawrence's, but Kay said that she swore about it. Cornelia, though, had now got used to the packing:

Cornelia: I can remember - keep on forgetting things all the time . . . and leaving them at one place and needing them to be in the other place . . . so it was a bit . . . difficult, and kind of . . . you know, have to be one step ahead all the time, and plan what you were going to wear.

AO: And do you still have that feeling of always having to be one step ahead?

Cornelia: Oh yeah. But I manage OK. Just sort of . . . cart things around.

Changes to the arrangement

Sam, Cornelia, Simon and Jim also addressed, in different ways, the crucial issue about the role that the older child might play in determining the shape of the arrangements, and the difficulties that this might provoke. The situation in the future for Jim seemed fairly uncomplicated. He had already talked generally with Patty, and very recently with Stephen, about how long he wished to continue moving. When I interviewed him Jim thought that he would go on moving daily until he went to university, at which stage he would spend alternate weeks of the vacations with each parent. Although both parents had feelings about being the parent with whom Jim might chose not to live at some stage, the point is that the issue was able to be addressed and Jim was able to feel, as he was moving

towards adolescence, that he was being given some control over how long the arrangement lasted.

In the other two families the situation was seen as more constrained. Sam thought a decision to stop moving (and in particular to live with his mother) would create considerable conflict, so that the only way of terminating the arrangement would be to leave Wellington. Cornelia, rather more than Simon, was beginning to feel that she would like to be included in a review, since she was nearly sixteen. Both she and Simon indicated that what they wanted was a more flexible system rather than the termination of the agreement:

Cornelia: but I wouldn't mind . . . I dunno . . . something sort of not so much a timetable . . . so that we could decide whoever we want to go with . . .

and later Simon said that they would probably go 'just the same though. Not the same times, but the same amounts of time . . . '.

The other issue which Cornelia, Simon and Sam raised in particular, and which is addressed exhaustively in the literature on divorce, is the discomfort and stress which children feel when their parents are in obvious conflict. All of the families had times when the parents were in disagreement (Louise for example, castigated Jane for speaking rudely to Dave and said she always knew when Jane was talking to Dave because of her tone of voice) but in the two more conflicted families, the children made it clear that they disliked the antagonism and wished that their parents could resolve their disagreements. Although Sam said that he took sides, Simon and Cornelia felt that it was not their role to be 'messengers', and that they did not want to take sides since 'it is not really fair and you hear one side of the story and don't hear the other one'. It is possible that some of their lukewarmness about the desirability of the arrangement developed out of their dislike of having to so compartmentalise their lives and to be guarded in what could be said, because of the continuing parental hostility.

Within the overall contexts of the children's and the adults' comments, several issues emerged which are well identified in the literature on separation. An increased level of stress on children and parents is a well recognised separation phenomenon, which is expected to last for at least two years. Most parents commented on the levels of stress which they had experienced after the separation, and it was apparent that shared parenting did not in some way enable the families to avoid the initial difficulties of separation, and that the process of redefinition of family boundaries, relationships and responsibilities had to be worked through irrespective of the mode of custody. Neither did shared parenting automatically remove some of the children's concerns about the well-being of one parent, nor in some instances, their sense of loss.

The second significant point bears directly on the issue of 'best interests' and the importance of the nature of the parental relationship in determining how that issue is met. In two of the families the children spoke of their dislike of the continuing parental conflict

and their experience of stress and pain as a result of their parents' disagreement and difficulty in meeting easily with each other. Obviously, such conflict can continue in a custody/access situation, and also be painful and constraining for the children. It may be, however, that shared parenting (when children are spending an equal or almost equal time with each parent) makes them very aware of the problems and means that they have to deal more frequently having to manage the hostility and anger. In the third family, where the parents had remained for years unable to resolve their relationship, Kay had gone to extreme lengths to hold them together, to the extent of threatening at one point that she would die if they were not reconciled. Living in such a situation, for all that she had access to both parents, could hardly be described as being in her best interests. While shared parenting may have fuelled her fantasies of reconciliation the generally amorphous nature of the concept as it is still employed by many helping professionals and their lack of understanding about boundaries did not help her parents to move earlier towards a more complete separation and a fuller assessment of the wisdom of their choice of custody. As I have already commented, the ideology surrounding shared parenting and the ease with which the arrangement has been accepted as having universal validity made a more determined and earlier challenging of the efficacy of the idea for this family very difficult.

The third point that I wish to make concerns the fantasy of reconciliation and the importance of a distinction between fantasy and belief. Fantasies are, after all, part of most peoples' experiences, where part of the fantasy is the recognition of its impossibility. Concern has been expressed that shared parenting would encourage a child to persist in the fantasy of parental reconciliation. Such persistence, with the exception of Kay, did not appear to occur. Although over half of the children expressed a wish that their parents would reunite, even when the separation was well established, they realised that it was impossible and accepted it.

The final point concerns the differential response by children to the separation¹. This was remarked on by three of the mothers who connected the nature of the response to the different ways their children approached the world. Two of the children found change or unexpected situations difficult to deal with, thus placing on the parents of one child a recognised extra responsibility to maintain continuity in the arrangement, and on the other a responsibility to help her work out anxiety- coping strategies.

Summary

¹ Wallerstein & Kelly (1980, pp. 53 - 54) comment on a wide range of factors which affect the outcome of separation and divorce for children. These are: '1) the extent to which the parents had been able to resolve and put aside their conflicts and angers and make use of the relief from the conflict [of] divorce; 2) the course of the custodial parent's handling of the child and the resumption or improvement of parenting within the home; 3) the extent to which the child did not feel rejected in the relationship with the non-custodial . . . parent, and the extent to which this relationship . . . kept pace with the child's growth; 4) the range of personality assets and deficits which the child brought to the divorce, including the child's history within the predivorce family and the capacity to make use of his or her resources within the present, particularly intelligence, and capacity for fantasy, social maturity, and the ability to turn to peers and adults; 5) the availability to the child of a supportive human network; 6) the absence of continuing anger and depression in the child; and 7) the age and sex of the child'.

For the children the most significant factor about shared parenting was that it allowed them to spend time in an ordinary, routine fashion with both parents. Children recognised this as more explicitly advantageous when they were more knowledgeable about the family structures of friends who had less contact with one parent, generally the father. The regular contact with both parents did not prevent the children missing the parent with whom they were currently not living, and particularly feeling concerns about their father's loneliness. The benefit of the on-going parental contact was qualified when the parental relationship was more stressed, and also by the recognition of the inherent structural disadvantages of the scheme, although discontinuities acquired their own patterns over time. Packing was seen by members of most families as difficult because it focussed on the transience imposed by the arrangement, and generated ill-feeling over forgotten items. It was least problematic when there was daily contact with each parent, either through parental visits or because of the schedule, or when the move occurred infrequently. While younger children were not given any choice in the form of the arrangement, and did not (with the exception possibly of Diana) expect to be involved in a review or to have a greater say in its operation, older children did want to be consulted and were also sensitive that choosing to stay with one parent, rather than continue to move between homes could easily be interpreted as a preference of one parent.

PROCESS AND CHANGE

Introduction

The proposition that process and change are fundamental constituents of human experience has informed my analysis of the texts of the interviews throughout this discussion, demonstrating that these experiences must be taken into account in research design. My intention in spacing the interviews over eight to ten weeks and carrying out two follow-up interviews (the first six months after the end of the three interviews with each parent, and the second in August, 1988) was to allow observation of the processes of shared parenting over time and the changes in family experience and parental perceptions. The families' changing situations are explored in the first three sections of the chapter. The first section deals with the parents' assessment of the issues which need to be taken into account by those intending to share parenting and discusses their evaluation of the arrangement's viability. The second section explores the issues parents believed they would have to address in the future and the third details the actual changes in the families between the two follow-up interviews.

The last two sections of the chapter extend the analysis into more personal, but nonetheless significant and political, arenas of process and change, documenting two unexpected consequences which emerged from my research. The first of these takes up the issue of changes in identity which the respondents reported as a consequence of sharing parenting, and how those changes drew attention to embedded strands of ideology and gender. In the second I discuss the significance of the therapeutic effect of the interviews in light of the changes that took place in a previously inflexible relationship, and draw out the implications for social work practice.

The parents' evaluation of shared parenting

A major concern of the American researchers into joint custody has been with outcome, and with the evaluation of the arrangement's 'success'. Although the purpose of such evaluations is obvious enough from a social policy perspective, they are fraught with difficulties, partly because scales of measurement tend to be closed (when is a family event finished?) and overlaid with cultural and class prescriptiveness. Furthermore, pronouncing an arrangement 'successful' is a political act. If shared parenting is deemed by researchers to be 'successful' such labelling tends to obscure its inherent tensions and difficulties. The inference then too easily follows, especially when that value judgement feeds into dominant ideological postures about the nature of families, that such an arrangement is therefore the 'best' and that it should be widely utilized. The point was made emphatically by several respondents, whether they viewed their arrangements positively or not, that the fact that the arrangement works for some and has some very real advantages should not lead to the general conclusion that the same arrangement will be of equal benefit to all. They stated very clearly that what may well appear to be an easy and flowing arrangement was only achieved with a great deal of effort and commitment, yet the intensity of effort

was not immediately obvious to an outsider.

My interest, then, did not lie in an evaluation of the 'success' of shared parenting but in developing an appreciation of the issues confronting families using this mode of custody in which the parents' evaluation of the arrangement was an important element. At this stage, I was specifically interested in their assessment of how they felt the arrangement worked for them as a family, and the changes to their situation which they had encountered. This orientation raised several points. The first and most obvious is that evaluation of an event cannot be separated from aspects of process. What is said at any one point will be coloured by the current experience of the respondent and by current events in the family. For example, in the first interview Mary spoke of the diminution of her concern about the agreement and her appreciation of its positive aspects. She spoke of her growing confidence as a parent, the lessening of tension around transitions and verbal exchanges between herself and Charles, and her sense that she had been able to develop a good relationship with the children despite the fragmentary nature of her time with them. She was aware of the cyclical nature of children's needs in relation to contact with a parent which the arrangement was able to satisfy:

you know, at one period, when Charles toots, they may be dashing off *far more eagerly*, umm . . . to go off with him, you know, and come back, walk back to me not looking so eager. Umm . . . you know at other times one or both may sort of, you know, fiddle around and fiddle around and slouch off to the car to Charles and come back very happy . . . to see, well to be back here. But this *comes and goes* (1st Interview).

But in the following interviews, after the argument with Charles, and even though she retained her belief that shared parenting was a more viable mode of custody than single parenthood, her doubts were more pervasive, more visible, undercutting and qualifying the positive assertions. From the other side, Charles who spoke of his 'dislike' of the arrangement could also say that it was '*probably* worth a try' (my italics) because he rather grudgingly conceded that it did allow the children contact with both parents.

Secondly, what is seen as 'working' has different implications for different people, and depends on what is currently being emphasised as important. Maree described the arrangement as successful at some stages of the interviews when her comments were more ideologically structured in relation to the potential achievement of equality as a result of shared parenting, but was less certain about its success when she reflected further on how much real equality she had achieved in her relationship with Keith.

Thirdly, the issue of commitment to a particular idea or mode of living obviously affects the evaluation of its viability. The greater the commitment, the more the assertion of value is likely to override the points of discomfort, so that there is a tension between what is desired and what is actually the case that goes unremarked by the speaker.

The questions which interested me were, as I have said, not to do with success, but with the changes parents observed as they looked back over the course of the arrangement, and the nature of the advice that they would give to other parents

contemplating shared parenting. The comments that they made have the character of an overview, where one stands back from the immediacy of experience to establish a longer perspective. The image that lends itself as metaphor for what I am describing is of reaching a plateau in the process of having climbed a long ridge, and of looking back over the route taken. The point of departure is observable, as are some of the more obvious rocky outcrops that had to be negotiated en route, but other hazards, although present, are obscured because of the angle of vision. There is another ridge to one side. It would have been possible to climb that one instead of the route taken, but the difficult sections of that track cannot, from the perspective of the climber, be easily delineated.

In the context of giving an overview, most parents' comments about the viability of the arrangement were positive and most thought the decisions they had made had been the right ones, notwithstanding the difficulties which they had encountered. There was a general conviction that what they had been able to achieve was, as Ross said, a turning 'of a negative thing into a positive, really'. Some of the changes which the families experienced have been noted in the divorce literature. For example, most parents spoke of the gradual easing of the psychological stress that the children were under at the time of the separation. Behavioural problems diminished as parents re-established themselves as separate from each other. The importance of the child's understanding of the parents as separate was underlined by Michelle:

I have - I think that in the past I have had lots of concerns about what we have done to her . . . umm . . . *now* I feel much easier about her and I think over - particularly over the last few months it's become . . . much more secure and so on, and um . . . I am really pleased about it She's come a long way from where she was last year at this time

AO: So that your sense . . . is again that you are able to offer something which is fairly secure and also give her the space and room to, to stand herself and to move out again?

MS: I think . . . that that probably has a lot to do with it, um . . . I guess that that has a lot to do with her age too, but I certainly think that it has a lot to do with me separating myself much more completely from Lawrence. I think before I did she was just . . . running between our two places like some . . . little . . . umm . . . oh, she - it really used to break my heart, but I feel that for a long time she *desperately* tried to hold us together when we weren't properly separated . . . and tried to carry our relationship . . . in some ways and I think that if that had carried on any longer it would have been - well, it was destructive at the time, but . . . umm . . . I certainly think . . . umm, the more obvious separation and the more obvious settling down was good for her. (. . .). Kay would say, "But I like the way we live", and Lawrence would say, " But I like the way we live and so does Kay". I could see that she was actually going mad trying to . . . um . . . trying to hold the whole thing together and feeling that that was her job (3rd Interview).

Several parents felt that over time easier and more constructive parenting became possible, from which both children and adults benefitted. This was in part a recognition of the timeliness of the separation. Anna felt that Rachel, who 'had lived through so many years with me being depressed and unhappy torn . . . ', was able to benefit from the parenting she was now able to offer since Anna felt less divided and was able to give more energy and commitment to her parenting. Luke (and other parents) emphasised a gradually increasing sense of comfort (in which the increasing maturity of the children played its own part) between himself and the children in contrast to his earlier doubts about his capacity to sustain the arrangement:

they get better and better. The last few weeks have been good. The two weeks in Australia - it was . . . they were a turning point, I'd say. Well, not a turning point . . . oh, a curve. (. . .) We were, like, together, and yeah . . . I . . . I . . . really feel happy about it. I really do feel, like *really* comfortable about the situation, and um, of course, you know, there'll . . . they will have their own doubts, you know. But . . . ahh . . . it seems to get better . . . the older they get. (. . .) They become . . . just more loving, more understanding . . . more . . . less child/father, and more friends as well. I mean, I am still Dad. That's very important, umm . . . we can sit down and talk, and, and we are people, you know. That's very satisfying (2nd Interview).

Stephen and others commented that the arrangement became more complex as new partners came into the family and relationships had to be re-worked. Charles said that, although the stress over the separation and early period of shared parenting had diminished, there was now another potentially difficult situation to be dealt with, i.e., the fact that he was physically located at some distance from Cornelia's friends, which made her increasingly reluctant to spend time at the weekends at his home. Although the arrangement had been one which she had wanted to establish, Isa had felt at one stage that the arrangement might in some way turn out to be a trap which would result in her losing the children. Over time, this sense of threat had diminished and, although she missed the children when they were with Luke, the time without them was also valuable both for her to extend and develop interests outside of the home, and in increasing her sense of commitment to parenting. Fay believed that although there had been times when she would have preferred not to have a shared custody arrangement, shared parenting did allow both her and Ross to have very positive times with Tessa.

The Nobles noted that over time there had been a gradual increase in independence from the ex-spouse. For Martin and Anna, this slow movement towards a greater separateness came as something of a surprise:

MN: when we first separated I tended to see things as just being in that on-going relationship for, with, well, all round. The whole family together . . . being as strong as possible. But I don't think that I felt, or thought at that stage that, that, with, especially with time that we would actually gain more independence from each other. And umm . . . you know, that our friendship wouldn't actually be as important to maintain as it was then. I don't think that I did think that way . . . (1st Interview).

As he reviewed the arrangement, Luke thought that a major change with which he had had to contend was a limiting of his freedom of action and a narrowing of his parameters, which paradoxically resulted in his feeling freer and happier.

AO: You had to make a conscious decision to re-involve yourself with the kids?

LR: Yeah. Yeah. Very much so. And I knew that it would create an incredible turmoil. (. . .) I just re-directed my life. It was, it was a major decision, and, ah, it was, I had to redirect myself and funnily enough, whether it's in the stars or whatever, things have gone incredibly well . . . since . . . Umm, I, I, I just - making that decision and *limiting*, ahh, limiting that decision, limiting my life -style . . . it actually made me freer.

AO: In what ways?

LR: (. . .) maybe I feel happier. Umm, it was like a burden (. . .) well, it, it's like having too many alternatives and not knowing which one to take so you lo - you narrow your options . . . and ahh . . . and, and . . . you make the right decision. And . . . all the same . . . the burden - that was a great feeling. Still is.

AO: (. . .) it doesn't seem like it's as though the conflict has completely terminated although there have been these benefits.

LR: Right. True. It hasn't. Well, life is just a lot of decisions, really, isn't it? Nothing changes (*laughing*). You've gotta keep on making decisions as opportunities arise. (. . .) Well, I have parameters. Well, my parameters are a bit narrower than most. That's all (2nd Interview).

Parents also commented extensively on what had to be taken into consideration by other parents if they were thinking of establishing a shared parenting arrangement. Comments about the way that the adults' relationship needed to work occurred most frequently. The ability to trust and to maintain a good working relationship was mentioned specifically by nearly half the parents and implied by most of the others. Such a relationship involved maintaining significant contact, good communication, an openness of spirit and 'gentleness' towards each other, and the avoidance of situations where, as a consequence of parental difficulties, the children's loyalties were divided. Two parents emphasised the importance of a sound organisation in which the child had a recognised role. The fact that the arrangement, originally between two parents, came to affect others in reconstituted relationships was noted by John:

He is always here. It's just some nights that he's not. So there is never really a period without him. So he, he lives here. He's got his own room. So . . . he actually is living in, in 2 places so . . . both . . . Stephen and Patty have to have . . . compliance of partners (Follow-up).

Whereas John's comments relate more to the individual situation, Liz placed the issue of reconstitution in a wider context. She had come to feel that the notion that shared parenting was only between two people (i.e., the parents) was a societal fiction:

Tessa's life is affected in relation to me, Ross, Fay, Linda and Paul. It is not about an arrangement between two people at all (Follow-up).

She went on to instance a situation where a friend's part in bringing up a child had been, she felt unfairly, completely ignored. 'No-one asked her what she thought. It is just because she is not a parent. Because you are the parent, then no-one else has a say'. On the other hand, Keith felt that reconstitution would be likely to jeopardise the arrangement because the new partner would be bound to act selfishly.

There were also a number of more general points made. Two parents expressed concern again about the financial cost of the arrangement, and felt that difficulties would arise unless finances were thought out carefully. Both Ross and Charles made further comments about the way that shared parenting was too easily idealized. Shared parenting did not offer a clear cut solution and anyone undertaking it needed to think through the implications carefully, and be aware that it, as with other modes of custody, had its peculiar problems. Mary and Luke spoke of the difficulties likely to be encountered at the outset and of the importance, therefore, of remaining determined about the value of the principle itself. Jane was concerned about the fact that many people thought of the child from the separated family as damaged and disadvantaged by the separation, while the stress arising from unresolved issues in intact families often ignored. She felt that the

general public needed to revise its view of children as harmed irrevocably by a separation; and that there was often a point in a relationship where to stay in it meant that all positive feeling about the other was lost and co-operation became significantly more difficult. It was important, she thought, to make the break before animosity set in. Isa focussed on the importance of adaptability to change, not just in terms of adapting to the weekly transitions, but to the fact that the arrangement must remain sensitive to the changing needs of family members.

Future Issues

In discussing what lay in the future, the parents raised a *single* issue. They were all concerned about the termination of the arrangement. They believed that at some point the children would want to stop moving between homes. The subject was discussed in relation to the child's role in such a process and the implications of being the parent who was not 'chosen' to be the one with whom the child would live. It would be easy to assume that such concerns are peculiar to shared parenting, and that they indicate an aspect of disjunction between shared parenting and intact families. It may well be, however, that the disjunction is more visible than real, and that the question of how intact families deal with issues about alignment of children with one parent rather than another has simply not been studied.

Recognising that the child might at some stage want to stop moving between homes appeared to bring home to the parents the full implications of the separation which the shared parenting had delayed in some respects. In particular, it raised the issue of the nature of the contact that would be possible with the child if s/he was living primarily in one home, it confronted parents with the extent of freedom of choice they were prepared to allow the child to exercise, and it made them think about how they would respond to a choice to live with the other parent. Dave discussed these points when talking about the implications of Jane's friend's departure from Wellington:

I mean, it is really only a temporary arrangement . . . while the two parents are living in the same town. AO: So if the whole thing then does come under threat (. . .) I mean, where does that leave you? DB: Well, that's where you really face the main . . . the main . . . umm . . . ahh . . . point of the separation. I mean, that's where the separation actually becomes the problem. (. . .) I can't really quite figure out how to face the {issue} (. . .). Basically it comes back to the original split up (. . .) at the point where you decide to split up, you've basically to, to split up the children or . . . split up the children somehow or other. So if shared parenting - it only avoids the issue . . . but sooner or later, the issue comes home to roost . . . and there is no - I don't see any . . . I don't see any solution for it apart from . . . umm . . . a final split of some sort (3rd Interview).

There was a general agreement that the children should be involved in making decisions about the future of the arrangement at adolescence, although adolescence was defined by parents to occur in age from about twelve to sixteen, and as Fay pointed out, it was difficult to forecast what the right time would be:

There must come a time when she . . . chooses . . . not to go to one house at the expense of the other, but that she will be equipped to choose who she wants to be with, and when and why. And we don't know

when that's going to happen so no - not ad infinitum, but as a child that remains the ideal until - I've said, umm - I would see it right through high school years. But that's not . . . to say that . . . I would hold out for that necessarily because you can't tell (2nd Interview).

Ideally, parents felt that they would recognise a point when a child would be ready for active involvement in the future evolution of the arrangement, and that pressure should not be exerted on the child to influence the child's preferences. They described how they saw the children influencing the evolution of the arrangement in a variety of different ways which ranged from a willingness to accept the children's right to decide where they wanted to be, to a recognition of constraints which might well restrict the children's options.

Acceptance of the child's decision

Some thought that the time would come when the child's right to decide about the future of the arrangement was both inevitable and appropriate. Parents who spoke about this mode of decision making did so in light of an assumption that the shared parenting had enabled them to build up a strong relationship with the child which would not be jeopardised by the child's decision to become more firmly based with one parent rather than the other. Charles spoke of the children as rightly being 'more influential' in this matter. Mary said that events must take their own course, that the children should be able to develop a 'healthy self-interest', and that they had as a family 'earned each other now'. If Simon chose Charles then she would see this as a stage in his life where he wanted to be more with his father. Ross, like Fay, thought that it would be right for Tessa to be more involved in the practical operation of the arrangement when she was older, when he believed that it was likely she would want to stop moving and that it was very important for the parent with whom she did not choose to live to accept her choice. Luke believed that his relationship with the children 'could stand a bit of space . . . among us, y'know, the ease is there' and that the bonds established by this time would not be broken. The Cooper/Pearsons had already individually talked about this with Jim and believed he would say when he wanted a change. Although Jane confirmed the children's right to decide when older where they would live and felt that both she and Dave would encourage them to exercise this right, she also had to contend with a nagging doubt about the fairness of asking the children to participate in this decision:

maybe you know, I would go away for a few months and take the kids with me. I don't know. . . . But certainly, that's something, y'know, what to - I mean, I would want to talk it through with the kids and see what they wanted to do although in a way, it's not actually fair . . . to ask kids to make that sort of choice. (. . .) . . . Is it fair at any age to ask children to choose between their parents, even if it is only for a short term thing? And that . . . I mean, Louise here tonight, sort of desperately wanting to make sure that the time she was spending between Dave and I was fair . . . I think, um . . . I can't see that, that sort of . . . feeling of wanting to be fair to us going to disappear just because she happens to be a few years older. And is it fair to actually say to her, " Well, y'know, Louise, I want to go away for 6 months. Do you want to come with me, or stay with Dave?" Isn't that asking her to make a choice? And I mean, ultimately, she's going to feel really terrible because she's actually going to have to say, "Well, I'm rejecting this parent in favour of this one?" (3rd Interview).

Qualified acceptance of the child's decision

Some parents stressed that they would only agree to the changes proposed by the child if they thought that the reasons for the choice were valid. This perspective was advanced by Fay, Keith and Maree. Children should not, in Fay's eyes, be allowed to make choices because they represented easy options, while both Keith and Maree felt that the reasons for making a choice had to be adequate:

MB: I wouldn't like him to say to me, "I've decided to come and stay with you, Mum, because you, you're a sort of a *push over*, or, and I can get away with a lot more", and all this sort of thing (2nd Interview).

Adult constraints on the child's decision

There was also some concern expressed in two instances that the child's freedom to choose might be considerably constrained by one partner. One parent thought that the other might unduly try to influence the children's decision; another believed that the mother would be so devastated by the children's choice to stay with him that there was really no option but for them to eventually live with her. Keith also believed that the choice may be taken out of Sam's hands in light of his (Keith's) belief that he was the better parent:

if I thought that he was *not* getting the . . . care and control - control being the main thing . . . um . . . I would whip back to the court . . . and ask for a hearing. I'd be very, very sure I had chapter and verse . . . and I would drag the other rooster {Maree's ex-defacto} through it. Um . . . I will . . . be - Maree and I were speaking on the phone several times a week . . . and I am . . . quite insistent . . . that he doesn't just - that she does know where he is . . . and that he's somewhere acceptable (2nd Interview).

Maree expressly recognised that the family dynamics may be such that expecting choices to be made by the children could be unrealistic. She thought that the nature of the relationship between her and Keith was likely to make it impossible for Sam to choose to stay with her even if that was what he wanted, and that the only way of ending the arrangement would be for him to move right away from Wellington. She also proposed that the decision should not be regarded as the child's alone. Parents too might eventually want to end the arrangement because of life changes and the problems associated with continuing the arrangement indefinitely.

Other reasons

Factors beyond the child's wishes might also affect the future of the arrangement. Four parents pointed out that the arrangement would have to end if one parent moved away from Wellington, but recognising this possibility did not necessarily solve the problem of where the child would live. Fay was clear that her agreement with Ross included the understanding that the parent who left Wellington would become the absent parent, since she thought that, when formulating the agreement, she and Ross had agreed that Wellington was to be seen as the base. Ross' comments on the same subject suggest that while he agreed that a procedure for decision making ought to be clarified *prior* to the event, no actual conclusion about the course of action had been reached, and he thought that such a decision would be difficult to make fairly:

the whole sort of emotional temperature would be going up and therefore the chance of coming to some more . . . ahh . . . rational, reasoned decision would be that much more difficult (1st Interview).

Isa also described the arrangement as physically constraining, but then suggested that she offset the immediate limitation on relocation by the recognition that shared parenting was a finite arrangement. She said in the first interviews that she was prepared to postpone plans for moving away from Wellington for a few more years.

In contrast to other parents, Anna and Martin felt that any changes to the arrangement in the future might well involve Martin in a more active role, and that, whatever happened, some sort of continuity between the parents would be maintained because of 'our connections as parents and because of the history we have had together'.

It became clear in the course of the discussion that most of the parents entertained the belief (ranging in strength from hope to a strongly asserted conviction that such would be the case) that the child would in fact choose to live with that parent rather than the other. Charles, locating the question of where the children might end up in the competitive framework that he felt still existed between himself and Mary, said, 'My, my expectation is, I suppose, that I won't see less of them (. . .) I think they may . . . opt to spend time with me'. Fay viewed the possibility of Tessa's choosing to live with her father more full-time as painful:

I think . . . that what would make it hard would be not . . . feeling rejected, relatively, like she would prefer to be there. What would make it hard for me is . . . having less . . . of her . . . in my life than I have now, for me . . . losin' me mate, and . . . the, the, the, umm . . . recipient of all my love and . . . that's what I would feel . . . the loss. I would feel loss rather than hurt, I think (. . .) But I think rather than hurt . . . it, it . . . it's that kind of thing that feels like, "This is it. This is the end of our close, close physical time together, and it's gonna have to be much more a spiritual, intellectual . . . closeness, given that she's over there". (. . .) That's what I think I would feel (. . .) Of course it would be a kick in the teeth if Tessa - "I'd rather be with Dad than with you" (. . .) but I have talked about it to Ross in our better, more trusting moments. I have said, you know, "I feel as if she is *all I've got* and I know, I'm not . . . *diminishing* what she means to you . . . but you've got other - you know, you've got a *whole* family structure . . . and she's all I've got, and she's so precious because of that . . ." (3rd Interview).

What comments like this indicated was that, for most of the parents, the possibility of not being 'chosen' was surrounded with very understandable feelings of hurt, rejection, loss and devaluation, of which they were certainly aware, and in anticipation of which some had developed coping strategies - the 'adequate reasons' for the choice, the belief that the child would remain still in very close contact, the different sort of relationship possible with an older child, and the necessity of letting the child go psychologically.

For two of the families, one unexpectedly, the question of an immediate ending to the agreement loomed large by the time of the third interview. In the Butler/Summers family, the question of the future had been in the air for some time because of Lawrence's proposed trip overseas and, as the time for departure approached, Lawrence found himself confronting the question of what sort of explanation about his decision was adequate. How could you tell a child that you were leaving her because of work?, and he felt frightened at the uncertain future of his relationship with Kay. Over the course of my

contact with him he came to recognise that cancelling his trip would be a mistake for himself and for Kay. His dependency on her had to end, there was more to his life than his contact with Kay, and, whatever happened on his return, his relationship with her would be inevitably changed:

I have really felt, I think, I have really felt, more than anything else that I have to try and end this form of dependency. And so, although I do not want to do it . . . and although I am quite certain in my own mind that it is going to be upsetting for Kay, umm . . . I think that it is going to be enormously upsetting for me too . . . I mean, I know that I am absolutely going to hate myself for doing it. I think actually that it is the thing that I have to do, and I think ultimately that it is through this that my relationship with Kay will be different. But I think that it will be - I hesitate to say "healthier" - but at least it will be - I shall be freer of some of the terrible binds of which I am capable of getting drawn into as things are at the moment. But I don't think that it is right or wrong, if you follow me. I don't think there is a cut and dried case (1st Interview).

I think, I think there will be a distancing. I think, I wanted {my counsellor} or someone to tell me there wouldn't be. . . He was, um, you know, I think that he made me realise . . . that there was bound to be a distancing as a result of what I am doing . . . It would be silly to embark on this thing without supposing that that was so . . . Um . . . but it was, as sure as hell, one of the more difficult blessed decisions I've ever had to make I don't know now if I am really right, but at least I am feeling a good deal better about it (3rd Interview).

The Ashby/Bradleys were suddenly confronted with the possible end of the shared parenting if Jane were to move south. Their initial reactions to the situation were very different. Jane canvassed a range of options, from going with the children, leaving them for some time with Dave, commuting herself, to thinking that the children ought to take absolute priority and that she should place her relationship 'on hold' for several years. Dave, while saying that he wanted to keep the children with him, also felt that there were other factors to be taken into account. He thought that Jane's involvement as the primary parent who had invested more of her life in the children gave her a prior claim, and that she would feel more guilty than he would at 'giving up' the children. He fell back on the belief that, wherever they were, they would come to no harm and that whoever did not have the children now would be likely to have them when they were older.

Follow-up interviews: six months later

At the time of the first follow-up interviews, what was immediately obvious was the amount of restructuring and change that had taken, or would soon be taking, place in five out of the eight families. The Ashby/Bradleys were still in the process of trying to clarify what they would do about the children, in light of Jane's decision that she would definitely leave Wellington at the end of the year. Lawrence had gone overseas. Michelle had re-married, gone to the United States to live and then returned to settle some distance from Wellington. The arrangement between the Blacks had broken down, after a violent episode between Sam and his father, over which there were conflicting stories. At the time of the first follow-up Sam was living with his mother and had rejected his father completely, while Hugh, who had been rejected by, and had himself been rejecting of, Keith, had now become the favoured son. The endorsing tones and language which had

been employed to talk of Sam had been transferred to his older brother, while Sam had inherited the anger and rejection previously reserved for Hugh. In terms of physical relocation, Charles had moved into Mary's neighbourhood, and Anna's and Martin's settlement on the house had meant that Anna and Susan had been able to buy a larger house close by the current home, and were about to move.

Changes had occurred in other dimensions of life as well. Parents spoke of changes in the children. Cornelia, Charles and Mary spoke positively of the increased flexibility that the family had gained as a result of Charles' move. Nor was the schedule so rigidly observed. Cornelia now spent about the same amount of time with each parent, although Simon spent more time with his father. Isa noted an improvement in the children's relationship with Peter and a general improvement in family ambience; Patty and Stephen spoke of Jim's acquiring friends, a decrease in his forgetfulness, and the cessation of Stephen's business trips away, so that the arrangement had to be changed less often. Luke, feeling 'surer of my role', did not feel so threatened at the children's unwillingness to spend time with him in preference to their friends. Although Jane at this stage felt that her guilt about not being with the children had gone, and she felt that she 'wanted to see them' rather than feeling it as a moral imperative, she was still concerned about Louise's anxiety over Dave's isolation if the children were to come to live full-time with her. Dave also noted that Louise seemed to be unhappy, but that she would not say what the matter was. He also spoke of a certain inflexibility which he felt had crept into the system because the children opposed any small changes, such as staying with one parent for an extra night. Anna spoke of the way that the girls had for a time made more frequent trips to Wellington to visit Martin after the house settlement, during a period when he had not visited because, she presumed, he was working through for himself what the settlement meant in relationship terms.

Personal changes were also noted. For example, Charles felt that he was 'getting my life back on track' after twenty years. Luke felt that he had now got his base established. Mary said that Charles' moving into the neighbourhood did not represent the threat it once would have been. Anna spoke of carrying less of a burden than she felt she had been in the past and was feeling psychologically more secure, and freer. Martin, in the context of the sale of the family home, which had previously been accorded the considerable symbolic value of signifying togetherness, felt that his marginality to the family had diminished rather than increased, and that the close relationship between himself, Anna and Susan still existed:

It is a kind of tacit agreement between us. Umm . . . in one sense we don't need to talk about it after 4 and a half years . . . our lives have now become so . . . settled . . . separately . . . but still together . . . That is an on-going thing. I mean, my contact is still there, their contact is still there . . . um . . . and the phone still goes. We still share our time together - what time we have - so there is an on-going thing and that is the good thing about it. Gosh, we are lucky.

Jane spoke of feeling that some 'dramatic changes' had taken place in the way that she felt

about herself, the children and her future.

Changes in relationship with ex-partners were spoken of by nearly everyone. Of these, most commented on, significantly, that the change was for the better, that tensions were reduced, and each was more prepared to trust the other. Isa noted optimistically that, 'Everything is resolvable'. Fay noted a diminution of her feelings of resentment towards Ross, and felt that increasingly she was able to regard him as a 'good friend'. Jane and Dave saw much less of each other, but Dave ascribed this to the fact that there were no problems that they needed to discuss - although this statement did not appear to take into account their joint concerns about Louise. Dramatic changes had also taken place in Charles' and Mary's relationship in that for the first time in five years they had been able to share a social occasion - Cornelia's birthday - in a state which, while 'cool', was not unfriendly. Charles described the change that had taken place as follows:

AO: But what made you decide to make the invitation, since there has been this long gap (since they shared a child's birthday)?

CD: Oh - what can I say? Signalling . (What?) Signalling. Yes.

AO: Yeah. What does that mean?

CD: Markets signal and leaders of world powers signal to one another. They don't specifically state anything. (. . .) They make a sign. I made a sign. Signing, shall we say, um . . . "I've moved down here and we are now fairly close neighbours . . um, let's try and keep it as civil as we can"

The major exception to the achievement of improved relationships were the Blacks. Maree had set a divorce in motion which had come through in December, and she now realised that, 'I didn't *have* to have anything to do with Keith anymore If I saw him in the street, I would say "Hullo", but keep on walking'. Since the ending of the shared parenting she had had virtually no contact with him.

The Blacks' situation also draws attention to another issue of shared parenting. Out of their four children, two left home either before or shortly after the separation. Sam eventually moved between homes but Hugh, after a difficult time with his father, moved back to live with his mother. Although an older child is recognised legally to have the right to make the decision about where he/she lives, it was apparent that this decision was viewed with great bitterness. It seems that parental conflict appears to increase the difficulty of allowing one child to make a different arrangement from his/her siblings¹.

Three parents specifically re-affirmed their belief in the validity of the arrangement. Isa's reaffirmation was in the context of feeling that, if she were to have another child with Peter, the issues of continuous responsibility would have to be very carefully assessed. Dave thought that such arrangements ought to be considered more carefully for intact, and not only separated, families. He thought that the achievement by each partner of financial and social separateness and independence while retaining points of togetherness had a lot to say for itself. Mary felt that the principle of a fifty/fifty arrangement ought to be implicit in separation agreements as far as possible, that such agreements would go some way

¹ See "Sue's account" for a similar difficulty, in Opie & Morris (1986, pp. 48 - 50).

towards breaking down rigid role distinctions; and that the increased psychological and financial resources available to parents in a shared parenting arrangement made it very much in the children's interests. But at the same time she spoke again of her sadness at the children's absence:

Well, I notice little things like the days without the children - like they are still quite bleak in ways. I mean, I cope, but deep down I know they are often quite bleak . . . I find I do little things like, you know, my odd pets at work - I'll spoil them (*laughs*) (. . .) When the kids aren't here, or when I have come out of a weekend without the children . . . Yes. I am looking - yeah. It's got to go somewhere else. Yes. I've got to - yes. I am looking for an outlet.

Four families noted a change in their financial arrangements. The Nobles' house settlement allowed Anna to feel freer and more independent, and more able to make a financial contribution to her relationship with Susan. Luke had got the Domestic Purposes Benefit. Once Sam was living with her full-time, Maree got her lawyer to write to Keith to inform him he had to increase his maintenance payments for Sam. Dave said that he and Jane's were acting more independently in meeting the financial responsibilities towards the children, since this avoided the issue of either being seen to 'approve' the other's expenditure, although there was still some sharing of costs.

The second follow-up: August, 1988

I telephoned thirteen of the parents to ask what had happened since I had spoken with them at the first follow-up, and wrote to Jane². Once again my dominant impression was of events and people having moved on. Children were growing up. Jim, Rachel and Simon had gone to high school and, in Jim's case, both parents, who had been worried about the transition specifically remarked how well it had gone. Mark would be starting high school next year but in Invercargill, and Diana would also be leaving primary school. Sam, had failed School Certificate, perhaps not surprisingly given the difficult events of the previous year, but was at this time living with his brother because his mother had moved too far away for him to get to work easily. He had an apprenticeship, and was taking School Certificate subjects at night school.

Some parents spoke positively of changes in their own lives. Maree had moved into a relationship which she felt was working very well, and in which for the first time, there was no sense of competition for her attention and time between the children and the new partner. At the same time, she made it clear that the contact between her and Keith which she had maintained for the children's sake was, now that they had all left home, terminated completely except for the very occasional family gathering like twenty-first birthday parties. Luke was back in the work force, managing a small factory. He and Isa were planning to marry their respective partners, and Isa and Peter would be leaving New

² I had interviewed the Ashby/Bradleys, Blacks, Thomson/Jones and Merrick/Richards in April, 1987; the Todd/Davises and Nobles in October, 1987; and the Pearson/Coopers in December, 1987. I received letters in relation to the follow up from the Butler/Summers in June, 1988.

Zealand at the beginning of 1989 to work overseas. The shared parenting was to operate on a year about basis for the next two years, but with an extra degree of flexibility built in so that, should Diana be really resistant to the idea of leaving New Zealand, she would stay on with Luke and his partner, Judith. Jane's move south was a move which in the long term she did not regret. Having time without the children to establish her new relationship had been very valuable, but the absence of the children had been very painful, and staying with the decision, that they should remain with Dave for 1988, especially after they had visited her, had been very difficult. She had found a two day a week job, and was looking forward to having the children with her and her partner again at the start of 1989. However, she wrote:

How we will make the decision about 1990 (about where the children are to remain) fills me with terror. I don't know how we are going to do it without asking the kids themselves. How will I know where the children are happiest and how will Dave when neither of us have seen the children in the other environment?

Michelle wrote of feeling very happy in her new marriage, and in the way in which Kay was now well settled, despite all the major changes of the last year. She felt that the experience of shared parenting, while very 'destructive', had nonetheless helped her to develop a much stronger sense of self and confirmed the importance of not 'settling for what I didn't want'. Because of the way that her career was developing she was for the first time completely financially independent of Lawrence.

Keith, having had no contact with Sam for about eighteen months, except for a very strained time at Christmas in 1987, had just had Sam staying with him for ten days and was hoping that this would mean the easy resumption of their relationship, and possibly Sam's return to live with his father. Malcolm, to whom Keith had attributed the responsibility for introducing the idea of shared parenting in the first place, was again seen as having brought him and Sam back into contact.

Other parents, such as Patty and Stephen, spoke not so much of changes but of a valued continuity in their relationship with their ex-partner, and with her/his partner. The Nobles felt that the issue of independence from each other was no longer relevant and that the relationship between the three adults was a strong and lasting one. Both Dave and Jane felt that their relationship had improved. Fay specifically mentioned the improvement in her relationship with Liz. She affirmed and Ross and Liz mentioned the same points that she could now openly regard Liz as a friend, that the three adults were now operating as a mutually supportive, extended family unit and that her own touchiness and suspicion were things of the past. As a consequence the arrangement had become 'naturally flexible', so that nights could be easily be exchanged if need be. Isa and Luke also felt that their relationship had become much easier, and they were both able to accept the involvement of each other's partners. Isa made a point of mentioning how supportive Luke had been over a problem with Diana and how much she (Isa) had welcomed his comments, which had helped to clarify the situation. Like Fay, she felt that they had all become more adaptable,

that the situation was much more flexible, and that her distrust of Luke was now gone. Fay emphasised the importance of time as the most significant factor in change. The same point was made by Luke and Isa who also stressed the need for openness and for working to develop trust. Isa described how she and Luke resolved major issues as having a series of steps (analogous to those Dave described³): suggesting an idea; thinking about it, and giving it time to jell, with the knowledge that it will be opened up for discussion again; raising questions, doubts, and possibilities with each other; allowing more time for thought, and then deciding. She again described the shared parenting arrangement as involving losses and gains, and thought that Luke was now feeling that he had gained more than he had lost. This was in contrast to his earlier position where he was more conscious of what he had given up and less certain of what he had received in return.

Dave, who had been looking after the children since the beginning of 1988, was facing a major reorganisation of his time with the children. The eight months that they had been with him had helped to establish a much greater degree of continuity, and others too had commented that the children were more settled. Sending them to live with Jane would be, he thought, 'quite a shock' for him and, although he thought it likely that they would then stay in Invercargill because further changes would be too disruptive to the children's personal lives and to schooling, he was not sure what his own plans would be. He and Jane had talked less because of the physical distance between them. He was not sure how much the children missed Jane, having never asked them directly, and thought that the only time when they had been stressed was when Jane had been proposing a renegotiation of the original plan, i.e., that they stay with him for the year.

Lawrence had returned to New Zealand relieved that Kay was not going after all to be living overseas (although she would not be living in Wellington, and he would generally see her only at school holidays) and hoping that the 'warfare' between himself and Michelle would die down. He was upset and angry, and felt that he had been unfairly held solely responsible for Kay's difficulties. He no longer regarded himself as a 'joint parent' since he no longer had a close, caring relationship with either his child or his ex-spouse and, although he wanted a smoother relationship between himself and Michelle, he thought it would be difficult for them both to avoid over-reacting to the other. Part of his evaluation of where he now stood involved a reassessment of earlier comments. While he thought that his relationship with Kay had been overly possessive in some respects, he now insisted firmly that there were strong and valuable aspects which had been overlooked. He had also concluded that one of the major problems had been that neither he or Michelle had ever defined with sufficient precision what they meant by 'shared parenting'. Each had, he felt, operated on quite different rules, and their refusal or inability to openly confront the differences and the different expectations created by them, had contributed to the conflict and to the perception that the other was behaving dishonestly.

³ See p. 203.

The most significant conclusion to emerge from the second follow up is that the adult relationships took a great deal of time to improve, or specifically to become much more flexible, and open. When the first three interviews took place most parents were still experiencing a significant lack of trust, and unease about the other, despite the fact that most endorsed the principles of shared parenting, were determined to make the arrangement work, and had been sharing parenting for between three to six years. The negative feelings disappeared over the following twelve to eighteen months, as two of the relationships moved towards a 'modified intimacy' in place of the more distant friendliness, and others strengthened their ties or moved to a less conflictual position. But this means that it took somewhere between *five to seven years* for parents to feel that they had moved beyond the emotional entanglement of the separation and were able to establish new and different relationships with each other.

This finding has two implications. The first confirms the fact that a close relationship stretches far beyond its physical and/or legal termination. Parents, therefore, who plan a shared parenting arrangement which is clearly more than disguised custody/access, will need tolerance and forbearance and will need to monitor their relationships with each other consciously for a very long time. The second is that the relationships moved on over the period of the research, in the context of the families participating in extensive discussions about their arrangements. The way that nearly all of the adult respondents (and some of the children) spoke about the significance of the opportunity to talk through what had happened, and the value of this discussion in helping to re-shape and redefine their perceptions and feelings, suggests that the research activity as well as the passing of time contributed to the changes. It is possible, that without the intervention of the research, the relationships would have taken even longer to become easier, more accommodating and more flexible.

Identity and gender

Changes in identity as a consequence of participation in shared parenting arrangements reflect the way that inherent in gender determinations are ideological constructs, which structure normative beliefs about relationships⁴. Sharing the parenting appeared to involve nearly all parents in some modification of identity, which resulted, in particular, in the movement away from a more rigidly gendered identity. This development was not unilateral and straightforward but involved ambiguity and uncertainty as respondents moved across ideological boundaries.

During the analysis of the texts it became apparent that the subject of a developing

⁴ For a discussion of the ideologies of motherhood see Wearing (1984), who understands the power of ideological representation to lie in the claim to a 'self sufficient whole', and writes that: 'Ideologies can affect 'reality' by imposing rules and limitations on actual living men so that, although they reflect only a portion of human reality, they can be part of actual experience. They offer a way of seeing the world and living which is at once illusory and efficacious, fictitious and real' (p. 17). See also McKinley (1983) who defined the three ideological positions governing motherhood open to the women she studied as traditional, new conventional and unconventional.

identity, which did not rely on a single point of definition, was more central to most of the women's accounts than to those of the men. As part of the process of tracking where they had come from, these women discussed the assumptions they had held about mothering more extensively than the men did about fathering. The language that they used indicated a perception of motherhood as central to one's being, and as highly desirable, 'natural and inevitable'. Mothering meant that women were 'bound into your child's life', having primary responsibility for the children. It required self-sacrifice, gentleness and understanding. Women 'fine-tuned' arrangements, were conscious of detail, and were knowledgeable about children. Yet such positions were also perceived as highly conflictual, especially by some women⁵. Jane in particular spoke of the disjunctions she experienced between her assumptions about, and the reality of, motherhood:

I suppose prior to Mark, I saw mothers as being totally selfless, making willing sacrifices and getting wonderful rewards. I mean . . . I was totally unrealistic. I had no close friends with children around and I had no idea about what I was letting myself in for (. . .). Very soon after having Mark, the reality of full-time motherhood struck.

The family moved to Wellington, and her sense of alienation increased:

I had to go to Playcentre because there were no places in the 2 kindergartens. It was *dreadful*. There were all these very dedicated, devoted mothers there. All it did was to increase my sense of guilt. I felt that I was the odd ball out because I was not enjoying every minute of it. It was *really terrible*. I was trying to rebel against it, but there was nothing to say that my feelings were normal. Even after I started my degree, I would look at other women and wonder if I was real (Follow-up).

The women found the ideology of the devoted mother with its implications of selflessness, dedication to the children and subordination of self to be unsustainable. Feminism offered an alternative ideology which drew attention to the significance of self beyond the role of mother and studying at university helped several to develop a sense of competence and an increased self-esteem, thus facilitating a process whereby centering oneself solely in the child/ren came more and more under question. Sharing the parenting both extended and confirmed the women's sense of an identity which sought to incorporate wider experiences than just motherhood into their lives. As part of this process of redefinition, several spoke of their desire to achieve a more balanced existence in which parenting, working and the development of personal interests all had their place. Yet the achievement of such a position was not without its tensions. Most of them spoke of their guilt feelings about not being a 'proper' mother, and of the difficulties of balancing their needs against the children's - what Anna called 'the issue of self and selflessness' - which constituted the more difficult aspects of redefinition with which they had to contend. Nor was the relinquishing of the responsibilities of the primary caretaker easy, regardless of the extent to which they defined themselves as feminists:

⁵ Harper & Richards (1979/1986) note in their study *Mothers and Working Mothers* that the conflicts inherent in current ideologies surrounding women's role as mothers make it difficult for women to feel that whatever course of action they adopt is socially acceptable.

AO: So you are still carrying a residue of your old . . . intact mother /family role, but increasingly Dave's moving in and taking some of that? (Yeah) What does that feel like?

JA: It actually feels *quite natural* . . . umm . . . y'know, given that he, I mean he does now have the responsibility for the children half the time. It does sort of feel quite natural. *I don't know how I would feel about him actually . . . buying . . . a lot of the clothes for the children.* (my italics)

AO: Why do you think that?

JA: Dunno. Mightn't like them (*laughs*).

AO: But he has to like yours?

JA: Yeah. I know. It's absolutely pathetic. I don't know, Anne. I mean, maybe, maybe I would find that just a little bit . . . sort of . . . threatening, sort of closing me out . . . sort of him just taking a bit much responsibility. I don't know (. . .) I think it's a sense of . . . that it's my motherly duty . . . and somehow if I'm not doing it, then I'm neglecting the children and -

AO: It doesn't seem right for it to be a fatherly duty?

JA: Yeah. I mean, I know it's crazy I mean I can sit back and rationalise it and say it's crazy but (. . .) it's, it's all those really silly, critical, guilt - all those silly hangups, those sort of things that you think of yourself and that you should do as a mother . . . and the things that my mother used to do for me. It's all sort of tied up (1st Interview).

Another significant point of gender difference manifested itself in the opinions of five of the women that they were affected by the public perception of solo mothers as incompetent. Awareness of the negative public image fed into personal doubts about their ability to cope. Only Isa spoke of single mothers as strong, competent and able, and of the way that her personal knowledge of women who were managing well as solo mothers was a source of strength for her for at the time of the separation. In contrast to the women only two of the men, Dave and Luke, felt that their lack of experience in day to day fathering raised an issue about competency. Martin touched upon the subject in the context of Anna's being the more knowledgeable and therefore better parent. Ross and Stephen saw competency as an irrelevant issue for them, because they had been, as were indeed the mothers, involved with the child's day to day routines. Lawrence discussed not so much his competency as a parent, which he assumed, but more the implications and effects of his dependency on Kay. Where more of the women, then, tended to assume that they would experience difficulties, a number of the men either did not make this assumption, or, if they did, they did not talk about it.

The women, in talking about their concerns and anxieties about parenting, were more likely to portray themselves negatively as they moved across the ideological boundaries. The situation appeared somewhat different, and differently contradictory, for the men. On the one hand, although male ideologies in relation to parenting are unstable, and the extent of change in identity and behaviour represented by what Lewis & O'Brien (1987, p. 2) call the 'new father image' is uncertain, men receive endorsement and credibility from feminist discourse which values the concept of the nurturant male. On the other hand, though, the two men whose participation in child-rearing was more intensive, and paralleled the position of many women, found that the social endorsement they received was constrained⁶. Ross's and Luke's perception that the reasons for their

⁶ Harper (1980) suggests that the housefathers in her study often found themselves being regarded ambiguously because of the role they had adopted.

decisions were not generally understood, especially by men, implies that men who are intensively involved in raising children may be seen as threatening by other men because their behaviour challenges the ideology of the father as distant and as the breadwinner - an ideology which allows more freedom from child-care responsibilities than does the nurturant father ideology⁷.

The termination of the marriage or relationship was also spoken about by several women as a crucial element in the development of an improved self-esteem and the recovery of a submerged sense of self. Michelle said,

I think, um . . . the whole process of coming towards an independence of my own . . . which is, um, removed me from under . . . as it were. Umm, I don't have to depend on him for anything, um, and that's actually enabled me to be, um . . . far more direct . . . in how I see things and what I think is . . . a good or a bad or whatever (3rd Interview).

Mary also recognised with hindsight the importance of the ending of the relationship:

I feel that I have *probably* been . . . a better model to my children than, umm, the way *I myself* was in the marriage had the marriage carried on (. . .) they would have seen less of the adult in me (. . .) But I still feel that, umm, you know, that *vis a vis* my ex-husband that he played more of a . . . parent . . . adult role . . . and I was still a bit of a . . . umm . . . fliberty gibbet. I was (. . .), he was more the source of wisdom, and knowledge, and um, you know, judgment and whatnot . . . ahh . . . whereas *I* was more the, you know, a slight - quite a lot *sillier*. (. . .) And I know the way we were married, ahh . . . you know, for all my feminist principles and what not, it was still very much Charles who . . . did all the expenditure - *everything* like this that was very much that way . . . and umm . . . I think that it would have been quite easy to continue (2nd Interview).

The identity that most of the women saw themselves as having moved towards was one in which they felt that they had gained in self-esteem, strength, independence, and capability. Yet there were also moments of contradiction. Maree still held to an image of women as the weak and soft members of families despite her own considerable tenacity. Anna was very aware of the security emanating from the immediate identity that she acquired as a result of becoming a mother. ('This is who *I am*. This gives meaning to *me*. I am this and this and this in this context'). The security offered by this role, was, however, limited. At some point the children would leave and she believed, as did other women, that she needed to develop a greater competence in other roles:

I really want to take my place as an adult in the world (. . .) but there is another part of me that really wants to say "To hell with being responsible", and retreat (. . .) because it is all so scary . . . and I might fail (3rd Interview).

These doubts notwithstanding her words, together with those of the other women, describe their sense of who they had become which attested to feelings of power,

⁷ Luke at one point suggested that men are not 'capable' of understanding his actions, because they were: 'A bit frightened of it {his parenting involvement}, I think. (Why?) Why are they frightened of it? Because it is fear of the unknown . . . and it's a matter of stepping into that breach before you realise that it's not that bloody scary at all. It's their own . . . um, psychic . . . fear. . . It's just fear of not knowing' (3rd Interview).

competence, strength, equality, stability, and security. Intermingled with these were feelings at times of doubt and uncertainty, but the overall impression was that, from the period of crisis and change, they had achieved personal growth and a richness of identity which now extended beyond the family and was no longer dependent on one role. Patty made this clear:

certainly, when I was younger, I think I would have been horrified to think that I would have ended up as a divorced person because-

TG: You'd been brainwashed the other way.

PP: Marriage was happy and if you weren't in a happy marriage, you were stumped!

TG: Marriage was happy and the house never needed painting! (3rd Interview).

What is immediately striking is how differently the men talk about their changing sense of identity. In contrast to the women, most of the men who were sharing parenting did not have to relinquish part of a significant role. Whereas more of the women faced major changes on the domestic *and* work fronts, the men generally faced major changes only in relation to the domestic environment. In other words, movement into shared parenting involved the men in an expansion of identity while for the women, it involved the management of a partial loss of identity in one area, and an expansion in another⁸. Nor was the subject as prominent as it was in the women's texts. In two or three instances, the issue of a changing identity was only touched upon briefly. One respondent was unsure how much he had changed at all since he was eighteen, and two others simply said that they felt that they had gained in maturity and sensitivity because of their parenting experiences⁹. Other men, however, talked in more detail about the implications of such realignments. It was interesting that Luke, who spoke extensively of changes in identity, was the man who currently was adopting a life-style more akin to that of many women and that both he and Ross (who had also adopted a life-style at considerable variance from many men) identified themselves more closely with women and with feminism than did the other men. It is possible that the male lack of discursiveness on identity changes is itself the result of gender - i.e., that women have more readily available to them an ideology which endorses the development of competence and a strong sense of self across a number of different areas of life, whereas the dominant ideological prescription for the male role and performance still locates achievement in the more restricted areas of work and career. But be that as it may, none of the men spoke as extensively as did the women about their

⁸ My belief is that for the women, motherhood was a central part of their identity around which other aspects of identity had to be managed. Fatherhood did not, for most of the men, form such a central aspect of self-definition. See Harper (1980) who makes the same point and quotes Russell to the effect that a man who defines himself in terms of fatherhood is likely to be perceived as less masculine.

⁹ A common theme in research on fatherhood is that sustained contact with children does develop greater sensitivity to needs of children. For example, see Harper, (1980); Keshet & Rosenthal, (1978); Lewis & Salt, (1986). Parke (1981) argues that paternal participation in child-rearing in intact families results in a better marital and parental relationship. Russell's (1983) research into shared parenting in intact families, however, indicates that fathers in shared parenting intact families range from those who are uninterested and unavailable to their children, to those who interact extensively with them.

sense of themselves and their personal development in the context of the life changes they had experienced.

The descriptions that the men offered of their early perception of fatherhood and what they themselves had experienced from their own fathers were, as were the women's initial perceptions about mothering, based on highly gender-specific and functional roles. The men's fathers were spoken of as avoiding responsibility for their children, uncommitted, the absent breadwinner, tough, and competitive. Occasionally descriptions of softness and delight in culture crept in, but it was only in Ross's account of his father that this intermingling of gendered attributes was unqualifiably valued. Keith at times talked of his delight in cuddling the children when they were small, but his tone implied that such behaviour was not quite acceptable.

Yet the men like the women, were involved in an exploration of the different dimensions of identity and gender which shared parenting provoked. Ross, holding to his Marxist and feminist reading of society, remained critical of the disjunctions that rigid gender roles created. Although he said that his business partners *accepted* his reasons for taking a less active part in the work in order to spend a regular two days a week looking after Paul, whether they *understood* why he did it was doubtful and his behaviour was questioned by colleagues:

it was David in the union. He was saying, "That's another one, isn't it"? "Yes". He said, "You've had another one, haven't you"? I said, "Yes". "How old's that one"? (. . .) It was like the whole thing had stood still, you know (. . .) Here was another one (*laughing*). He couldn't quite figure out how I was still walking around with a baby under my arm! (3rd Interview).

Keith, who recognised that one way of reacting to the separation would have been to have gone further into alcoholism and/or substance abuse, thought the separation and the shared parenting had in fact given him the opportunity to explore, more than had been possible in the marriage, his interests in music, art and books, and to become much more 'disciplined' and responsible. In discussing the alternative courses of action that he saw open to him, he described at some point making a conscious decision to regard the process of the separation and what it subsequently entailed as a learning one:

there, there are so many things that do change, and if you do let them be a . . . a learning process, if you *do* take the positive aspects from it and say, "Right! What's gonna come out of this bloody heap is gonna be *gold*. It's not gonna be *crap*. You know, I'm not gonna be drossed off. I'm gonna be . . . I'm gonna be the goods" (3rd Interview).

The texts of three men, Lawrence, Luke and Dave, all of whom were more vocal about the ways that shared parenting had destabilised their sense of self, are all the more interesting because each account in different ways crossed gender lines explicitly and, as a result, each became involved in an exploration, and valuing, of aspects of the female world. Lawrence proposed a direct link between the fact of his professional standing and the lack of a need to compete as giving him the time to spend with Kay that he did not have

while his first family were growing up. Yet this centering on her, for a variety of reasons brought with it an intense dependency on her to give meaning to his life:

Kay had become almost, if I can put it this way . . . almost too heavily relied upon by me. You know what I mean? . . . (. . .) And in fact Kay was a good deal more than just a daughter. And I don't mean more than that, that she was, she had become, well, she was - she was company. She's very good company, I suppose, for a child . . . She was sort of, justification, if you like, for the whole of the . . . really very great period of upheaval in my middle life . . . from the time that I left my wife onwards. She seemed to come out of it. She was also a future for me in a way, which, um, nothing else is quite a future (once you are older). Over 56, the future is a bit limited, and um, all this sounds very ungrateful in terms of my first family. But nonetheless . . . I say these things quite genuinely. Kay did represent for me a stake in the future (. . .) when she {went to Australia} it was a *really, really, absolutely* - I can't really explain it other than in terms that it was really like the death of the closest person one could have . . . um . . . I found it quite alarming . . . umm, it is not because I am ashamed of feelings or ashamed of . . . grieving or things of this kind, but . . . I *really* . . . it's um, I suppose that it takes things like that to make one realise just the extent of one's - well, what? One's dependence, I suppose (1st Interview).

His decision to take up work elsewhere for a period was partly recognition of the problems of his dependence for both Kay and himself, and his belief that he needed to reorient his life to include more of significance than just his daughter. In other words, he was experiencing at the time what the women explicitly wished to avoid, an identity too closely bound to the child.

The period of assuming half time care of the children was also not without its conflicts for Luke. Becoming more involved meant confronting his tendency to be lazy, to take the easy way out, to perpetuate the intergenerational, distant father/child relationship. His comments about his change of direction made it clear that the experience was destabilising at various times, his sense of his own adequacy as a parent came under threat, and he had to content with his own doubts, and awareness of going beyond socially normative behaviour¹⁰, during which time he felt that he had come to value 'women's work' much more. His experiences and doubts parallel those of many women and, like them, he was aware of the constraints over employment that his position created.

The changes about which Dave spoke ('a whole heap of things that I'm just learning, not only in relation to the children, but also in relation to myself') were to do with his sense of personal growth in relation to assuming domestic responsibilities. Shared parenting enabled him to learn about himself, separate from his partner, to re-assert the validity of his own viewpoint and confirm his patience and specific abilities with the children that he believed the marital relationship had obscured:

You know, I struggle on doing these things in my own time. A little bit like (. . .) tramping. I mean, given the mountain and the freedom to walk at your own pace . . . you'll climb it But if there are only 2 of you and the other person goes a lot faster than you . . . walks differently, you'll probably lose any interest in tramping . . . You know, you are puffed out before morning tea time. You don't understand what it is all about. You can't see the pleasure of it, and you think that maybe you'd rather not do tramping. (. . .) I mean, now , if I've . . . made the dinner or do something . . . that is satisfying to me

¹⁰ Having got the Domestic Purposes Benefit, he was quite irritated to receive a note from the Department of Social Welfare advising him that he must advise the Department if '*his husband*' was to return (my italics).

because I've done it and it's under my control In the presence of a superior person . . . as it were, there is no satisfaction at all. You just feel humbled all the time (3rd Interview).

Yet what is interesting about subsequent comments was that although he made it clear that he had enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to exercise the feminine in him, to act supportively with the children rather than, as he supposed many fathers might, to act competitively with them¹¹, this change was also unstable. He felt that he could, given a change of circumstances, slip back easily into a more traditional paternal role, and he made it clear that some of the effort that he had put into assuming new responsibilities echoed what has been seen as the masculine desire for control. He did 'not want get caught out in a situation of not being able to handle things'.

What emerged from the texts, then, is that both women and men were confronted with convergent and conflicting ideologies about parenting roles, which affected their perception of identity, and that participation in shared parenting demanded changes in the way individuals saw themselves. Gender affected the direction taken by personal growth, but it is also important to note that within each gender there was no common position to which all members of that gender adhered with equal strength or conviction. In some instances a radical position in one area of the relationship was highlighted by more conventional beliefs and behaviour in others. What became clear was that the women's sense of identity was extended, and confirmation received, by their becoming 'more than' mothers, although mothering was still a central part of their sense of themselves. The process went in the opposite direction for the men, in that their identity was challenged through the process of accepting a much more involved role with their children..

At the beginning of this chapter, I labelled this section and the subsequent one as possessing not only personal but also political significance. My exploration of the identity and gender issues that arose for the parents as a consequence of shared parenting indicates that the arrangement is not gender neutral and that, because of the current social structure, it is likely to place women in a position where they have to make more major reorientations of their identity and, consequently, other areas of their lives than do men. Saying this is not to decry or to qualify the reorientations that the men confronted, but to emphasise that the changes for the women encompass more aspects of living. The women in this study, although at times ambivalent, viewed those changes as more positive than negative. But this did not mean that they were easily accomplished and it *ought* not to mean, taking into account the way which different ideologies are embraced by institutions when it suits

¹¹ He said, 'Some people are more active and some people are passive . . . Most men . . look at what they can make other things do . . . and sort of push them into shape, and they tend to take that attitude to the children as well . . . yeah . . and make them do this and make them do that. So they wouldn't necessarily . . get benefit out of looking after them . . . though I think that children do like having that role - someone pushing them around. Also someone else, umm . . bending a bit with them. Which has traditionally been the father and the mother . . and really . . . and what I'm doing is more like being the mother (. . .) But really you have to say, well, I'm not really fulfilling the normal father's role . . but just . . all I'm doing is fulfilling the mother's . . type role (3rd Interview).

them, that all women would necessarily welcome these changes or that shared parenting has universal validity.

I also want to return to the issue of competency and incompetency, and to reiterate that five of the women specifically mentioned the pervasive social assumptions about the inadequate solo mother as personally destructive and disabling. That such knowledge is still current says far more about the persistence of misogynist thinking and sexist models than it does about the capacity of individual women. I would suggest that the fact that the ability of most of the men to take up a day-to-day parenting role in which some had had singularly little experience without any public questioning of their capacity to do so cannot be read either as an affirmation of competence or as proof of male insensitivity to the issue. Rather, it reflects a widespread willingness to endorse male efforts at competence, and a too easy assumption of women's incompetence which is not borne out by the more recent studies of women's adjustment to separation and divorce (Blechman, 1982; Brown, 1976; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

A more abstract way of thinking about the questions raised above would be in relation to empowerment. Just as structurally and psychologically insensitive models of women's reaction to separation and divorce continue to disempower women, so to can counselling models disempower parents. Certainly, the principle behind the counselling made available to families through the Family Courts is that of self-actualisation; as much as possible parents should arrive at their own decisions and that these should not be imposed on them. It is also, however, recognised that there will be some families chronically unable to move beyond the relational battles, who will consume in relation to their number a disproportionate amount of resources. This means that the decision is much more likely to be imposed by professionals. At present, there is no New Zealand research evaluating the consequences of Court-imposed decisions. There may be, however, alternative ways of working with some of these more entrenched families which have not yet been explored in any detail, and it is to one such way that I now turn.

Process Issues

Although I have discussed the therapeutic value of the interviews from a methodological point of view, I want to return to this issue by way of looking further at the process, and what implications it might hold for social work practice. I will use for exemplary purposes only two texts, Mary's, and Charles'. I have taken their texts for two reasons. The first is that both found their relationship extremely difficult for a number of years, so that the change at the time of the first follow-up, while perhaps appearing small quantitatively, is significant qualitatively. I will be using Mary's as the primary text because she illustrates the issues in greater detail, and I want to place this reading in an overall context of an earlier section of this chapter, the fact that the parents generally spoke of an improvement in their relationship over the six month period following the first set of interviews and, at the second follow-up, that improvement had been maintained and often extended. It is also, I believe, useful at this point to re-emphasize the most significant

differences between the interview process in the interviews that I was conducting and the processes of a family or marital interview. The interviews that I was carrying out were discursive rather than intentionally therapeutic, where obviously there was no suggestion that participation in the research necessitated a public definition of the family as problematic. Parents presented their experiences, in which they recognised problematic areas, not to get help themselves, but to give help - in the first place specifically to me as the researcher and, subsequently, to the wider public through the medium of the thesis. The relationship between us, although it was not a straightforward one, was more horizontal, than hierarchical.

The second major difference was that there was no implicit or explicit suggestion that the intention of the interviews was to produce change. This is of course completely at variance with family interviews in counselling, where the entire structure of the interview is intended to focus on change, what is preventing change occurring, and how positive change can be made visible and sustainable¹². Instead, the intention was to produce as full an understanding as possible of how the various situations had evolved, what parents thought and felt about it, and how they saw the future development of their shared parenting. In the process of asking for their accounts, I was very aware of therapeutic boundaries, and took considerable care to avoid crossing them. What transpired, and the frequency with which it did so was completely unexpected, was that the interviews were so clearly regarded as having had considerable therapeutic value. This finding was unexpected and serendipitous. Above all, the respondents found that participating in the research gave them the opportunity to talk over the past. Giving a history of the relationship was in itself beneficial. In response to a question about what had made it possible for him to assert, at the end of the third interview, that 'I find, despite the recent blowup, that I am somewhat more charitably disposed to Mary', Charles responded:

Well . . . I suppose until - talking to someone else about it instead of just mulling it over . . for yourself, when it tends to get a bit convoluted and twisted as a result Oh, I suppose that something of her . . . well, something of her position . . emerges . . . I suppose it really does. I don't know what she thinks. But, um, rather that . . . some sort of sense of empathy, I suppose.

AO: In the process of talking about what had happened for you, that, that made you a bit more aware of what was going on for her? (Mmm) Mmm. . . Did that surprise you that that happened?

CD: Well . . . it comes and goes a bit anyhow. . . . Sometimes I feel fairly charitably disposed towards her. Sometimes I feel . . .I don't.

Given the constraints under which their relationship had operated over the years, it would be surprising if his reply did not include simultaneously experienced change and stasis.

Mary gave a more detailed account of her understanding of how the changes occurred. What she noted was that the speaking of the account in the first instance meant

¹² See, for example, the work by Haley, (1977, 1980); Minuchin, (1974); and Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch (1974). Michael White, a family therapist in South Australia, has developed a distinct school of therapy which concentrates on the highlighting of change, and the means by which positive change can be reinforced.

that she achieved some distance from her story, and that the subsequent reading of her text both gave it an immediacy, and also emphasised that that 'present' encapsulated in the text was now the past. Reading the text was

probably like hearing yourself or something on a tape recorder, ah, . . . and thinking, "That voice isn't mine" . . . Yes, and also it, it's something that you never *ever, ever* think about except at this time which was rather intense, and then . . . y'know, it's all so personal . . . and . . . acute, so that when you start reading it strikes a nerve Yeah. It really does strike a nerve.

AO: And the nerve is?

MT: Well for me, I think that this was somewhere where I had been very emotionally involved and that minute you are not . . . and it is a reminder of your past. Probably like seeing an old home movie or something like that. (. . .) just . . . watching the patterns of somebody thoughts and reactions . . . I just thought, "What an odd creature!" Y'know? Yes, and I remember thinking at times, "That dilly woman I could shake her" (*laughter*) Yeah, gives me a detached sort of um . . . feeling but at other times it was all very clearly coming through the (. . .). But I still find it quite moving.

The interviews gave her a hitherto inexperienced angle on their situation. Previously, she hadn't known what she had thought, and she now had had time and opportunity to think events through more. The interviews were a 'relief':

Well, I think probably just to express things . . . you know, and to, um, in a very non-hostile and non-judgmental sort of climate . . . and um . . . it gave us that time we needed to recap. We probably bottle things up a bit . . .

She went on to talk about the reduction of her feelings of fragility, a process that had been going on for some time prior to the interviews but which the interviews confirmed:

I believe this, this must have something to do with that. Um . . . I felt at the time that it got rid of quite a . . . a weight . . . that had been hanging there We didn't want to know about it anymore . . . y'know, we had to . . . sort of bring it out it must have been something to do with it. I know at the time I said to a couple of people at work . . . y'know, what was going on, and that I felt . . . very good about it and that it gave time . . . just to think things through or reassess . . . and, ah . . . yeah (. . .) and also to see where you had been in the course of looking back.

AO: So there was a chart, a charting of the process?

MT: And that you have passed through all these stages and um . . . got through them all, and they were no more.

The changes that she specifically identified were that she had come to feel herself to be on a more equal footing with Charles and that their relationship, while remaining distant, was likely to be a more trusting one. The process of reviewing the arrangement had also allowed her to confirm to herself her capability as a parent, both now and also in the sense that she felt that she would be able to let the children go, and not be emotionally dependent on them as she might have been had the shared parenting arrangement not been in place. And, as was noted above, for the first time in over five years, the parents had joined to celebrate Cornelia's birthday as a family.

At the second follow up, the relationship was still described by each as 'distant', Charles characteristically describing it more distant than Mary, but without the hostility of the previous years. Some fairly minimal social contact was being maintained and although

the arrangement had reverted for some months to a more rigidly defined one (Charles had had to move out of the area again because of housing, requiring the children to move between parents on definite days), he felt 'relaxed' about the way that things would develop. He also noted that Cornelia and Simon appreciated the reduction in hostility. Mary spoke more strongly of the 'feeling of maturity' that she now felt in relation to the arrangement, the 'absence of hassles', the ending of the 'little needling things', and of the way that when Cornelia had been difficult, she and Charles had been able to act together 'swiftly'. She thought that the past, which had been a time coloured by interparental stress, was now gone, and that while they were not 'friendly' (as in 'close'), they were much more easy going and detached from each other. And at the end of my conversation with her she emphasised again the value of the interviewing in helping them move on.

To return again to my distinction between a therapeutic milieu and a research interview, it seems to me that process in this context can be thought about in at least two different ways. In the former setting, the process to which frequent reference is made is the process of the interview itself, i.e., the way that the family conducts itself and handles its transactions is seen as the substance of change. The process, however, that I was observing was of a different nature. It was a longer historical process, which is itself embedded in techniques of family therapy such as the development of the family genealogy¹³. It is also recognised as central in other therapies or growth experiences such as Playback Theatre and psychodrama, both of which create an interesting interaction between elements of oral and filmic cultures. It may be that social workers or therapists, responding to the metalevels of Western capitalist culture, too easily overlook the significance of the telling of the client's story as itself therapeutic because of agency pressures to assess and to produce change, although the processual nature of interviews is paradoxically acknowledged through the spacing of encounters.

Obviously no method of therapy has universal applicability. However, given that separation does involve a reviewing, it may well be appropriate for parents who have reached an impasse and who have sought counselling not to be interviewed as a couple, but to be interviewed as individuals who are themselves seeking an understanding of the directions they have taken. In the light of the value that the respondents gave to my returning of the transcripts as a means of reviewing and cementing change, transcripts of interviews could be made and parents and older children encouraged to keep diaries in order to be aware of the otherwise too easily forgotten changes they have made¹⁴.

Summary

¹³ For instance, Margaret Topham, who was one of the first teachers of family therapy in Australia, emphasised in workshops in Sydney in the early 1970's the importance of getting a historical account of how each family came to constitute itself. See also Satir (1967) on whose work much of Topham's was based.

¹⁴ Such a suggestion is in line with White's emphasis on letter writing to families as a means of review and cementation of therapeutic experiences.

The focus of this chapter has been on process and change, in which change has been defined as endemic to the human condition. The first three sections of this chapter addressed areas of process in shared parenting arrangements, and changes that had taken place in the families over time. The first avoided the American tendency to define the arrangement as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' because of its moral and cultural prescriptiveness, and focussed instead on the parents' evaluation of shared parenting. The second indicated the need for arrangements to be seen as open to change and the importance for parents who undertake this form of custody of recognising the older child's right to be involved in the assessment of the arrangement and recognising that at some point the child is likely to want to settle for one physical home. The third discussed the changes that parents related in the course of the two follow ups.

The last two sections discussed areas of change that are both personal and political. For most of these parents, shared parenting involved a redefinition of identity in which the changes that women and men discussed involved the dissolution of rigid gendered identities, but where each gender had a different direction of gaze. Finally, the therapeutic experience of extensive and discursive interviews was discussed, and attention directed to the need for a closer evaluation of the meaning of process within social work interviews.

REVIEW AND PROSPECT

The view of shared parenting that I have offered throughout the thesis is that it is complex, gendered, often contradictory, and processual, embracing personal experience and ideology, in which the past history of the parental relationship and current circumstances affect the ease with which the arrangement is able to be managed. In the first section of this chapter, which bears upon policy formation, the profile that I have developed in relation to the viability of shared parenting focuses, therefore, more on systemic considerations than it does on personal qualities. It highlights the value of a systemic and critical reading of the principle of 'the best interests of the child', and the significance of the adult relationship in relation to the daily experience of shared parenting families. In the second section, I will discuss the value of deconstructive qualitative research. There are, of course, obvious points of overlap between the two sections, where the manner of reading and analysis affects the perspective that I offer on shared parenting.

Shared parenting and social policy

Although I have written above that the purpose of the study was not to evaluate the general applicability of the arrangement, but rather to explore in some detail the everyday experience of families who had lived in this type of relational structure for differing lengths of time, the question of the viability of shared parenting as a custodial arrangement cannot be ignored. However, the language with which this issue is discussed is critical. The American literature adopts the criteria of success or failure, terms which are abrupt and arbitrary. Alternatively, comparative terms are employed by which one arrangement is seen as 'better' than another, and in which family structures receive their ideological stamps of approval (and shared parenting ranks higher than solo parenting because it more closely parallels the intact family, in which are embedded liberal-humanist assumptions of parental equality, love and shelter). Instead, I have focussed in my evaluative comments on what facilitates and complicates the arrangement.

This language recognises that all relationships have points of ease and tension, makes immediate reference to systemic issues, and refers beyond those issues to ones of gender and power. It recognises that an assessment of a family situation can never be final and incorporates potentially competing definitions of experience. Furthermore, the ascription of success can be interpreted too facilely and result in blindness to the points of tension and problems inherent in any relational structure, thus presenting the observer/policy maker with too bland a picture from which assumptions of universal benefit can too easily be deduced. Equally, in assessing what shared parenting has meant for the participants in the study, the interrelatedness of issues could not be ignored, in contrast to the more usual manner of assessment where advantages and disadvantages of an arrangement or policy are spoken of as separate from one another. Understanding of the intensity, albeit diminishing over time, of feelings of pain and loss experienced by most of the parents (and especially the women) has to be read together with the freedom from

parental responsibilities and the stronger and/or different sense of identity to which shared parenting gave rise. The consequence of shared parenting was that it guaranteed the children continuing contact with both parents, and required the maintenance of an on-going parental relationship, even if it was often unsatisfactory, and not necessarily easily managed. It gave time out to parents which was especially useful at times of psychological stress, but was destabilising. The time without the children was also important when new relationships were being established, and other interests being developed. Equally, the time with the children became all the more important because of their absences and the awareness of the lack of knowledge about 'the other half of their lives'. The nature of the arrangement meant that both parents were involved in some redefinition of identity and role, which was inherently stressful but was finally considered valuable. Routines were established to minimize disruption, yet the transitions between homes had their peculiar stresses for the children and parents.

The assessment, then, that I would advance of shared parenting dispenses with the notion that it is better or worse than other modes of custody. Its greatest strength, especially where a fifty/fifty arrangement has been instituted, lies in the access children have to both parents and in the encouragement it offers to parents to sustain major parenting roles. Yet these advantages cannot be taken independently. Certain conditions facilitate shared parenting arrangements: commitment by both parents to the idea; non-violent and non-abusive relationships prior to, and after, the separation; a separation which was managed without great animosity; a parental relationship which is more rather than less comfortable, and where a relatively equal balance of power between the partners exists; the recognition by each parent of the value of the other's contribution and, correspondingly, a more positive than negative evaluation of the other parent; the ability to share sensitive (and not so sensitive) information; the desire to trust the other, and to feel some confidence in the ability of a previously less involved partner to care adequately for the child; the ability to develop a separate life, yet retain links with the previous partner; the preparedness of each parent to redefine roles and identity; the financial and emotional capacity of parents to maintain two homes relatively close to one another.

Best interests of the child and the parental relationship

In reviewing the study, two closely connected points, both of which receive prominence but little analysis in the American research, stand out with particular clarity: the best interests of the child and the nature of the parental relationship. My research confirms the importance that both play in the arrangement, and extends the analysis offered by the American writers.

The concept of the 'best interests of the child' is a further reflection of the binary and hierarchical thought processes of Western culture, in which has been intermingled a persistent confusion between an ideal, that the child's interests are paramount, and the reality, that it is often difficult to separate the child's interests from parental interests. My analysis of 'best interests' suggests that, as with other value judgments, it is ideologically

structured and culturally determined. Parental assessments of what is in a child's best interests reflect elements such as the current beliefs governing understanding about the ways by which families are constituted, and about the psychological needs of the child. Also, the particular slant that a parent will give to the concept reflects issues deriving from her/his family of origin in addition to beliefs and feelings about the ex-partner. The current and widespread reading of the phrase tends to disguise the fact that the decision that a particular course of action is in the best interests of the child is constituted by a wide range of competing and often conflicting beliefs, whose relationship to each other is often not given serious consideration.

In order that the principle of 'best interests of the child' is more than a convenient catchphrase, whose enunciation suppresses or closes off further enquiry, it is important to separate out the two main psychological principles by which it is currently defined, and which contribute to the endorsement of support for shared parenting. One is that regular, unimpeded contact with both parents is psychologically healthy for children; the second is that children are psychologically disadvantaged when their parents are unable to resolve their interpersonal disputes. These principles should be read as having different points of reference in order to terminate the uneasy competition between them. The former - unimpeded access - could be read as the more idealised of the two, describing the type of living situation that could prevail, *other things being equal*. The second principle - the problems for children of on-going parental conflict - should then provide the backdrop against which the possibility of the establishment of a shared parenting situation could be discussed. It would provide the focus around which parents might think through or discuss with others the difficulties they might expect, and the ways in which the arrangement might be expected to flow more easily.

Advantages of focus on parental system

The advantages of more clearly subordinating the first principle to the second would direct attention specifically to the individual family system and emphasise:

Awareness of the systemic nature of on-going problems. It would help to avoid the very painful situation that the Butler/Summers family experienced, where it appeared that the first principle - unimpeded access - was given priority by a variety of counsellors, despite the manifest problems which the arrangement caused for the child and her parents for years. Obviously I do not intend to suggest that, if parents experience difficulties, they should immediately give up attempts to share parenting but, when those problems persist without resolution, questions about the validity of the arrangement for *this* family at *this* time need to be raised.

Awareness of parental system. It would direct attention specifically to the parental system and to its history, about which parents, if in counselling, would need to be interviewed separately. A long history of violence and conflict, marked gender inequality in the parental relationship, and extreme differences in values over which the parents have been in conflict in the past are clearly not good precursors of an ability to share parenting.

Strong negative perceptions of the other also indicate situations which are likely to be more, rather than less stressful. It was clear from the children's accounts that the more stressed the adult relationship, the less certain they were of the benefits of on-going contact with both parents.

Reorientation of direction of Court reports. It would have the effect, where families are proceeding with custody hearings, of changing the alignment of the psychological reports. Rather than focussing directly on the child, and the child's needs, the report would address the parental abilities to meet those needs in the context of a particular form of custody. The report would thus be grounded in the immediacy of the family situation rather than addressing a more abstract concept.

Practice implications

Clear subordination of the principle of unimpeded access to more practical considerations of individual families' flexibilities and systems, and their consequent capacity to work through stressful situations would highlight the following implications:

No one principle is universally valid. This assumes that in principle no one option is 'best'¹. Awareness of the ideologies which permeate a principle opens it further for inspection and assessment and complicates an easy acceptance of its self-evidence and taken-for-grantedness. It therefore requires counsellors and parents to move beyond simple truisms - shared parenting will be best because it will give children access to both parents - to think further about the systemic implications and application of the principle within a particular family. It assumes that a diversity of family structures are valid, rather than confronting parents with an idealised model of family life to which all arrangements ought to conform.

Shared parenting is not an easy option. Shared parenting should not be regarded as an easy option, nor one to be adopted because parents cannot agree on who should have custody. While the point was reiterated by all parents that shared parenting gave children contact to both parents, and that this was its primary value, it was also recognised that the arrangement has its peculiar stresses for the families involved. For example, there was some unresolvable anxiety about the long-term consequences for the children. Several of the families remarked on the fact that continual moving, although routinized, nonetheless resulted in a level of tension for some children that only became visible when they spent a longer time with one parent. The failure to transfer possessions from one house to the next was a source of fairly constant irritation between the child and parent, and between the parents. Nor was the situation clear cut for the parents. Apart from the management of the parental relationship, community support was in reality ambivalent, despite the ostensible ideological approval of *parental* involvement. Some women felt criticised for 'giving up' mothering; others reported that their actions were viewed as progressive and intelligent.

¹ Court counsellors in Madison, Wisconsin, said that they approached custody disputes with the clearly stated view that the matter could be resolved in more than one way, and would examine the implications of solo parenthood as well as joint custody with each family (Personal communication).

Two of the men were also well aware of the implicit criticism of their choices by their peers and families.

Issues of gender and power are relevant. A critical and thoughtful focus on the parental system which takes seriously issues of gender and of differences in power (either physical, emotional or structural) as real and potentially destabilising elements in a shared parenting situation is important. A policy or orientation towards shared parenting is not gender neutral. For most of the women in the study, shared parenting required a preparedness to move out of the primary care-taking role that most had adopted, accept their ex-partner as an active parent in situations where most had some doubt about that person's parenting experience, sustain enthusiasm and belief in the arrangement in the early stages while often coping with their hesitations, and doubts about their adequacy as a solo parent. Shared parenting also involved most of the women in finding work and managing the implications of recognising that their earlier decision to follow a socially prescribed role had resulted in a lack of recognised work skills and experience in a tight job market at a time of rising unemployment. Financially, nearly all the women were generally at a disadvantage in relation to their ex-partner because of lacking a career and lower wages, yet no couple arranged their finances so that the costs of the children were shared in proportion to earnings, although some of the men subsidised their ex-partners more than others. Where extra money was paid to give additional help to the women, no family had built in periods of review of the amount to take account of inflation. Unlike all but two of the men, both of whom gave up work for a while to look after the children, the women had to manage greater changes in self-perception, identity and role, although the extent of the changes they faced were by no means uniform.

For most of the men, shared parenting involved a significant re-orientation of their domestic lives. Where concerns were raised about the abilities of *their* ex-partners to care for the children, the context was more in relation to an overall negative view of that person. Whereas the women spoke of the significance of life involving more than child care, the men spoke of the way that participation in daily childcare had increased their self-awareness, sensitivity and sense of responsibility. The men sometimes received support from the community, with women being more supportive than other men; but (noticeably) in the two instances where the men had given up their work, there was suspicion about their motivation and a suggestion of doubt about their masculinity.

One of the areas where gender difference was remarkable was in relation to power. On the descriptive plane, I have followed Gilligan (1986) and Kranichfeld (1987) in describing the women as powerful in relation to their desire to establish an arrangement which allowed for the maintenance of connectedness and interrelatedness, an arrangement furthermore, which offered a considerable challenge to the present social structure. Part of the significance of viewing women as powerful in this context is that it demands acknowledgment of the importance of women's actions and concerns, instead of regarding them as either insignificant or as something that can be taken for granted. It calls for a

notion of power as more than physical force, and recognises power as a potentially positive (as well negative) element in a relationship. It also, in line with Foucault's (1976) theoretical framework in which I have placed my reading of power, insists that women are not merely powerless. This is not to say that they are always powerful, or that the nature of their power is necessarily the same as men's; but it does mean that they are not without power to effect change, and it emphasises the fact that power is not the sole possession of either gender. It is seen to exist as a destabilising element to be managed in all relationships, to which both parties have access, although the extent to which they have access may change over time.

Counsellors and others involved with the Family Court have therefore a considerable responsibility to acknowledge gender differences and to think through carefully their understanding of such differences. In particular, it demands awareness of the ideological assumptions that inform assessments, the extent to which they may consistently privilege one gender over the other. Counsellors need to be more aware than they often are of their embedded sexist assumptions, and to more aware of the implications of these assumptions in their work with families. In particular, it is important to become aware of the extent of assumptions about women's incompetency, and inadequacy, gender issues which are daily reinforced through the media.

Consideration of practical issues. Focusing on the adult relationship demands awareness of the practical issues which confront parents on establishing a shared parenting agreement. These include the acquisition by both parents of adequate housing; establishing the forms of the contact with which both feel comfortable; re-working their relationship; clarifying the logistics; and the presentation of the plan to the children. The nature and extent of day to day responsibility assumed by both parents in the past should not be ignored, or taken for granted. It is important to acknowledge as legitimate the concerns raised by women about the abilities of men to move suddenly into the role of primary caregiver when they have had little prior experience of giving children practical and emotional support. Although maternal doubts should not automatically dictate the decision, men should be required to recognise why they contributed little to child-care before the separation, to look at what has changed, to think through their nurturing capacities, and to assess the available support². Concerns about incest or abuse need to be taken seriously by counsellors as part of a recognition that the ideology of the nurturant male is not universally confirmed by men's behaviour.

Recognition of the different psychological implications of shared parenting. Gender affects the nature of psychological experience and it is important that counsellors and policy makers are alert to these differences. Some of these I have noted above, but they are significant and can stand repetition. Shared, fifty/fifty parenting involves both

² Many men, prior to the ending of the adult relationship, have never taken care of their small children completely on their own for even a short period. One counsellor to whom I spoke talked of the need to help develop in these men the ability to remain continually tuned to the child.

genders in changing identities. It involves men in a redefinition of self where more feminine qualities are accessed. It involves women *relinquishing* part of their role as caregiver, and therefore demands of them a realignment of an often central part of their identity. While feminist ideology has given significance to an identity extending beyond the home, some women who have been at home as full-time caregivers may feel very threatened at the partial role loss involved and on the practical side find it difficult to obtain employment at a time of high unemployment. Although the women in the study, as did the men, came to feel positive about the redefinition of role they had undergone, the transition was not always straightforward and involved coming to terms with feelings of redundancy and change. These processes need to be recognised by counsellors as legitimate, and their expression not seen as masking a desire to control the other, nor as manipulative or punitive.

Shared parenting is a dynamic process. It is important for parents to take note of the fact that the arrangement they establish at the time of separation and/or divorce is likely to change over time, both as a result of the children's changing developmental and social needs and because their own lives do not remain static; and furthermore, that as the children grow older, their feelings about the arrangement need to be taken practically into account. Parents who have shared the parenting may therefore, when the child becomes an adolescent, be confronted with her/his desire to live physically only with the other parent. Thus, in this respect, shared parenting postpones but does not cancel the consequences of separation. Recognising the child's right to have a say in the future and therefore, possibly, in the termination of the arrangement may be difficult, especially when parents have persevered with a difficult relationship, where there are still unresolved issues of control and superiority between the parents, and when the child's decision is read as a personal rejection.

The value of a gradual movement into shared parenting. It is also important to note that some of the women's hesitations about shared parenting were reduced over time through practical awareness of the men's caring abilities, thus reducing tension. Yet there is too often a pressure, dictated by the desire to provide some stability as quickly as possible for the children, to decide on custody arrangements and to regard those as final (possibly because lack of longitudinal research has not indicated the extent to which custodial arrangements change), although custody agreements are often made during a period when both parents are under a great deal of stress. Where one parent only is in favour of a shared parenting arrangement, stress is likely to be increased by pressure from counsellors and court personnel that this arrangement will most benefit the child. Where it seems *reasonable* to assume that the parents can work out their difficulties, and because it is not in the child's interests to be in a shared parenting situation when there are still major problems to be dealt with, the establishment of a trial period might be helpful. The situation could be monitored for an agreed period by a social worker or psychologist, and attempts made to clarify and work through some of the difficulties. When situations were

not able to be resolved, it would be apparent that this arrangement would not be valid at this time for this family. It would be important to monitor subsequent disposal of such cases to assess institutional attitudes towards gender. Such a scheme is not appropriate in a situation where there has been allegations of abuse.

The need for a more detailed terminology. Some gender and structural issues are obscured by the failure to develop terminology which would distinguish between different degrees of sharing:

(a) Including a range of very different time allocations within one term, 'shared parenting', suppresses the extent to which women are likely to continue as primary caregivers, with the social and financial inequalities which that role carries. Furthermore, since the ideology informing shared parenting implies equal involvement by the father, the failure to discriminate between different types of sharing arrangements implies overall a level of participation in child-rearing and of nurturing behaviour which may in no way reflect actual paternal behaviour. The lack of differentiation of terminology also complicates the ability to identify real changes in parenting behaviour and helps disguise the disjunction between ideology and practice.

(b) Shared parenting is meant to encourage the father to retain an interest in his children after the separation, and to recognise his on-going right to participate in the decisions about their lives. Yet the lack of terminology permitting types of arrangements to be differentiated does not take into account the relationship between decisions and knowledge and the differences, in this context, between quantitative and qualitative time with a child. Since parenting most of the time does not call for major decisions about schooling, health or religion, but is on a daily basis constituted by the continual, often subtle adjustments and readjustments to the child's needs and development, the fathers in the study emphasised the importance of quantitative time in order to remain in tune with the children. The longer periods during which they were responsible for the children not only gave them confidence in their parenting abilities but also gave them the continuity of knowledge and experience without which making decisions about the children's needs would have been much more difficult.

(c) It could be argued, furthermore, that to allocate substantially less time to one parent in an arrangement which is called 'shared' invites subsequent comparison of the extent to which the parent with the lesser time is *not* sharing as fully as she or he may like, and invite that parent to feel, as did one of the fathers in this situation, that the value of his contribution was continually downplayed. Labelling is an interpretative act. Applying 'shared' to many arrangements which reflect a diversity of parenting arrangements suppresses the diversity of patterns current within a society at any one time. If, instead of placing a variety of parenting arrangements under a single classification, a more various classificatory system were used, such a system would allow a fuller appreciation of the different types of shared parenting arrangements and, furthermore, help to establish

appropriate expectations as to what parents might expect from those different arrangements.

Recognition of the centrality of the parental relationship. The realignment of gaze that I have suggested - away from the idealised principle of 'best interests' to a focus upon the ability of the parental system to operate effectively in a shared parenting situation - places the parental system centrally in relation to the practical workings of the arrangement, and recognises its vulnerability. Because the management of adult relationship is central to the practical ability to sustain the arrangement and because it is very vulnerable to stress, it is vital to move beyond the ascription of individual personal qualities which will make such an arrangement 'successful' - the direction of the American writings - to a fuller appreciation of the tensions and paradoxes of the relationship. Ideally, the arrangement requires trust and closeness. However, such qualities are not easily retained nor developed immediately in the light of the problems thrown up by the history of the relationship and the stress of separation, the prior lack of experience of many men in day to day caring for their children and, subsequently, the difficulties ex-partners, especially in more tense post-separation relationships, experienced in discussing the needs of the children, and sharing relevant information or obtaining a clear idea about the way their ex-partner's parenting skills were developing.

As part of the appreciation of the intricacies and the variety of the post-separation adult relationships, the four relational typologies that I proposed are constituted by fluidity, instability, and contradiction. I have conceived of them as parts of a continuum, where the boundaries between each type merge with the type before and after it, so taking account of the different psychological space occupied by each individual, while reflecting the systemic nature of the couple relationship. The typologies refer implicitly to what I have described as the central question to be addressed in shared parenting, i.e., in what ways can this family system facilitate or frustrate this sort of agreement? insofar as they describe a progressive movement into a more constraining situation. The more constrained the adult relationship, the more the experience of shared parenting is likely to be more stressful for all those involved³.

Part of the significance of developing typologies which are open-ended rather than closed, which note the interpersonal difficulties within relationships which superficially may be labelled as 'good', and which recognise the range of behaviours which separation

³ On a practical level, the sorts of questions that parents might think about, or discuss with counsellors or therapists are: Are they both in support of the idea and for what reasons? Do they both have the same structure in mind? What kinds of contact might they want with each other? How much can they trust the other parent, and what constitutes the areas of distrust? What sort of information about the children is to be exchanged? How comfortable will each be sharing information about the children that could at a later stage be used against them in a court case? What are the structural and/or gender issues within the relationship that could complicate the arrangement? If such a discussion were to take part in the context of counselling, then these issues would need initially to be explored in individual sessions, to avoid situations where one partner, because of differences in power, felt unable to disclose concerns; and the counsellor would need to remain alert to points of omission and significant difference between the accounts.

and divorce can provoke, is that it encourages a movement away from a dominant, prescriptive model of relationships whereby parents are meant to deal firmly with their negative feelings towards the other and make decisions only in the 'child's best interests'. Instead, developing typologies which embrace the internal contradictions of relationships, highlights the inadequacy of much everyday thinking about them and will assist in the development of a richer and fuller appreciation of the complexities of experience, on which grounded social policy can be formulated.

The value of qualitative, deconstructive research

My original methodological decision to tape and transcribe fully all the interviews has enabled me to offer a deconstructive reading of the parental texts which have informed this text. My reading confirms the significance of qualitative research and shows that the distinctiveness of this type of research lies in its ability to produce a knowledge substantially different from that produced by quantitative research. Two particularly important aspects of this difference are the contribution qualitative research can make to an analysis of the ideologies behind the taken-for-granted explanatory categories of both respondent and researcher, and the positing of alternative philosophical and methodological ways of reading or analysing the data to which it gives access.

The significance of textuality

Most importantly, the transcriptions gave access to the textuality of the respondent's language, to its richness, density, recursiveness and contradictoriness. Attending to the way respondents spoke acknowledges that language is more than a neutral or innocent medium of exchange. It created an awareness of the imprecision of speech, the significance of omission, and of the way that positions affirmed at one moment were undermined by the same speaker in contradictory comments. Nor was it possible to conceive of the subject as occupying a stable identity, or as located at a single dominant or unified position. Instead, the subject is seen as fluid and as constituted by competing ideological fields across which her/his thoughts and speech range. Consciousness of the way that the subject constructs him/herself, then, moves qualitative research beyond a case study approach, where its value has typically been seen to lie, and beyond the conservative concern to access the nuance and complexities of individual experience. Instead, it addresses what informs that complexity, and the nature of its construction.

Textual production

Identification of theory and ideology. It is characteristic of post structuralist and deconstructive readings to insist that theoretical and ideological strands should be overtly recognised in any textual analysis. Taping and transcription accessed the respondents' experience more fully than note-taking could have done, and exposed the way that the familiar dichotomies and binary thought processes - successful/unsuccessful, advantages/disadvantages, qualitative/quantitative time - suppress and distort experience, through categorisation and analysis which distracts attention from the interrelatedness of events and perceptions and the manner of their speaking. The ways in which data is

spoken, analysed and categorised cannot be understood as neutral, since often the overall effect of the approach to the data is subtly to confirm the validity of a particular construction of the social world, in which maintenance of relations of dominance are involved. Attention to the speaking voice demands complex coding, where not only what is said is important but where content cannot be the only criteria of interest. The analysis must also take account of the intensity, directness, and extensiveness of comment, and the power with which the matter is addressed. A reading of this nature goes far beyond what could be accessed through a quantitative analysis.

Textual construction. Detailed use of taped and transcribed material challenges the way in which sociological writings are presented. Recognition of the diversity of the respondents' voices makes it impossible to produce a text in which there is a single, dominant, authorial voice, briefly and very occasionally broken with miniscule extracts from the research data to give flavour or human interest to a particular area under discussion. Allowing voices articulating competing ideological positions to enter a text together frustrates the presentation of a final point of social consensus, thus highlighting the fact that there is no ultimate point of reconciliation of diverse viewpoints within a complex society.

The significance of process. The method used underlines the way that process affects the constitution of the data, and reaffirms its significance in the study of dynamic, relational situations. Awareness of process introduces into a text its own subversive elements of fluidity and change, and increases sensitivity to the way that a text is constructed. It involves comprehending the way that a response to a question is implicitly structured by the question, so foreclosing alternative responses which could have stimulated alternative directions of questioning or analysis. It involves understanding how intertextuality and ideology structure a text and why a text can never be regarded as final but is potentially always open for revision, reworking, and reassessment. The researcher must recognise the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the data which s/he is analysing and the importance of creating categories that are themselves reflexive.

My understanding of the function of social science research is that it exists to inform social policy, and that it can only do that through a process of questioning. If, however, it adopts a methodology which merely allows it to reflect back the dominant view which society already entertains of itself, then the social policy that can eventuate from that research is already inadequate and stultified. The critical element of research lies in the adoption of a manner of reading which is 'ludic', in the Barthesian sense of the word, which is stimulating, exciting, provocative, which demands a re-examination of earlier well-established 'truths', and which is flexible and creative.

The redefinition of the researcher/respondent relationship

Other significant issues also emerged from the deconstructive approach. The model of the researcher/subject relationship derived from quantitative social science is one of dominance and subjection, of activity and passivity, which has only been partially thrown

into question by qualitative methods. In contrast to the two types of relationship, unequal or equal, which are assumed by these methods, I have posited a more intricate, interdependent relationship. I have suggested that within the research act participants are imbued with power but that each requires the other in order to exercise that power. Whereas the researcher derives power from status and role and from the 'control' over the direction of the interview, that power is restrained by the response s/he is able to elicit from the respondent, and the nature of the response affects the direction of subsequent questioning. The manner in which power is shared between participants affects the degree to which power becomes an impediment to the research and affects the information that can be obtained.

My particular approach has also allowed me to define the research activity as mutually beneficial. Not only was I able to achieve texts of great richness, interest and variety, but the effect of returning transcripts to my respondents was empowering and facilitative. Since research can become exploitative, the researcher consuming her respondents' time and giving little back, employing a mode of research from which both parties benefit is inherently more satisfactory. There is, however, a further point. Since all analysis and policy formation is dependent on the data on which it is based, and since I would argue that my theoretical and methodological approach is of particular value in the area of studies of relationships, then the question of the extent and direction of sociological training in interviewing arises. In order to conduct detailed interviews sociologists require a training in interviewing skills which aims at developing self-awareness, the ability to interview sensitively and thoughtfully, and would include as part of the significant knowledge base a knowledge of systems theory, theories of relationships, and awareness of boundaries and process.

Future Research

Appropriately, in view of the value I have placed on the importance of questioning further, two significant areas of research emerge from this study, where the approach I have taken would be particularly apposite.

Research into family process

In the course of thinking about the issues which confronted the families in this study, I continually came up against the lack of detailed, longitudinal, qualitative work describing and analysing family life and processes in New Zealand and elsewhere. Consequently, I found myself constantly having to fall back on my years of clinical experience with families, and my experience of living within my own family, as points of reference. Yet the intact family is constantly used as an almost unconscious and certainly ideal point of reference, and the embeddedness of the idealisation is such that its dysfunctional aspects are still obscured, while in non-intact families, dysfunction is taken as normative. In the intact family, it is assumed, parents support and trust one another, yet in situations where the women in intact families are the primary caregivers, there is no material on the nature of that support or the extensiveness of the trust, and their

development or lack of development over time. Nor is there information on the patterns of relationship between partners, nor between children and parents, nor on intergenerational relationships. The 'New Zealand family', in its daily life still largely an unknown, ideal, homogeneous entity, easily appropriated by different ideological groups, needs detailed and thorough research.

Process and 'difficult' cases

Although what are known as 'difficult' or 'bulky' cases (Colby, 1987) constitute only five percent of the work of the Family Courts, they nonetheless absorb an inordinate amount of time and resources. In order to reduce the costs of such cases, Colby suggests that a procedure based on the personal characteristics of the clients should be worked out for rapidly identifying such cases so they could then be dealt with at the judicial level without recourse to counselling. Such a move would recognise, she says, that these adults have little faith in their ability to influence events positively and are therefore not predisposed to counselling help or able to use it when offered. Such families would then no longer block the system. While this may be true, the evidence which is offered for such assertions is slight and her focus of attention appears to be on cost-cutting, completion of a case from the Court's viewpoint, and an emphasis on the desirability and validity of mediation, itself a process which assumes rationality, equality of partnership and an ability to clearly delineate between different needs.

My proposal, then, of a pilot study of an alternative mode of working with families where the decisions about custody are caught up in on-going parental battles assumes that no one model of service is going to have universal validity. Rather than characterising individuals who fail to utilize services in the manner professionals deem correct or who do not seem to respond to a certain type of therapeutic intervention, as in some way deviant, it may also be advisable to question the manner of service delivery. The manner of working which I am suggesting would involve the conscious decision that in some instances it would be more appropriate, as a principle of case management, to spend longer over the decision making rather than assuming that it is in anyone's interests to hasten through a decision which will then prove difficult for the parents to implement. It would explicitly build in recognition of the therapeutic elements of process described in Chapters Three and Eleven, through the spacing of several interviews with each parent about their past and current relationship with their ex-partner and their ideas about custody, and the completion of transcripts of parental accounts and their handing over to those parents as part of their oral history. At that point, the direction of the interviews would become more familiarly therapeutic and concerned with change, in that the clients would be expected to respond to their transcript, to talk to the person in it and to explore relevant therapeutic and practical issues.

Obviously such a model of service is unlikely to meet the needs of all entrenched clients. But its strengths lie in the recognition that, at the time of separation, parents may

not yet be ready to face issues of custody; that it may help locate families where violence, abuse, or extreme imbalances of power are or have been an issue, rendering forms of custody such as shared parenting inappropriate; that it may encourage the establishment of more flexible modes of service; and the provision of professional help for some adults who would otherwise find it is very difficult to obtain help for themselves outside of psychiatric institutions⁴.

Recommendations

1. That shared parenting be regarded as one possible mode of custody, but not necessarily the 'best'. In particular, it should not be regarded as the way to resolve difficult custodial situations and it should be explicitly noted that a marital or relational history including extreme gender imbalance, violence, substance abuse, and consistently negative views of the other are not conducive to a manageable arrangement.
2. That attention be given to developing more detailed terminology which would more explicitly define the different types of shared parenting, and which would assist in clarifying the responsibilities of each parent in the different arrangements. Arrangements where parents sought either fifty/fifty responsibilities or allocations of time close to that could be described as, for instance, *shared equal time*. Where the allocation of time was clearly unequal between parents, then the terminology should reflect that.
3. That arrangements involving one parent having substantially less time with the child should still confer legal responsibility on that parent, and greater attention should be paid to defining how that legal responsibility can be used positively.
4. That the Family Courts produce pamphlets which would define the alternative custodial possibilities, and possible versions of a shared parenting arrangement. The pamphlets would also give information on the implications of choosing one custody arrangement rather than another and, with reference to shared parenting arrangements, would set out the implications of the different time allocations. The significance of the parents' relationship to each other, the practical issues each family would have to negotiate and clarify, and the points of stress for the children and parents would be addressed.
5. That the Family Courts ensure that their staff, counsellors, judges and counsel for the child are aware of the problems inherent in shared parenting arrangements.
6. That the Family Courts consider the establishment of a pilot project as outlined above, to assess its viability for some clientele and, assuming its capacity to help some families, to establish the personal and systemic characteristics of clients for whom this mode of service would be valid.

⁴ Personal communication from Dr. Gay Maxwell who is conducting research for the New Zealand Justice Department on the operation of the Family Courts.

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION ON THE FAMILIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR SHARED PARENTING ARRANGEMENTS

ASHBY / BRADLEY:

Dates of Interviews:

<i>Jane Ashby</i>	<i>Dave Bradley</i>
July, 1986 (Pre-interview)	
24 9. 86	30.10. 86
11.11. 86	7. 11. 86
26.11. 86	3. 12. 86
<i>Follow ups:</i> 9. 4. 87	14. 4. 87
August, 1988	
<i>Hours of contact:</i> 17 hours	18 hours
<i>Parental Occupations :</i> Researcher	Management Consultant
<i>Ages:</i> ¹ 36	38
<i>Children:</i> Mark 10	
Louise 7	

Frequency of moving: Weekly.

Date of separation: Late 1984.

Reconstitution: Neither Jane or Dave had moved into other shared living arrangements at times of 1st four interviews. In 1988, the 50/50 sharing arrangement terminated when Jane moved south to join her new partner.

Nature of arrangement: Couple determined at outset to manage their situation amicably and to avoid custody disputes and to share the parenting. Their accounts of how they had gone about developing the arrangement showed a high level of congruity.

Phases of development of arrangement: Phase 1: Jane went to friends for 3 weeks. Dave and children stayed in the family home, and Jane visited the children each day.

Phase 2: Jane moved into a flat. Children moved between homes, but there was no fixed schedule although in principle the parents saw a 50/50 arrangement as one they wanted to work towards. The family home remained the major base for all family members. Jane went and stayed when Dave was out of town on business and the children returned there every day after school, even when living with Jane. Jane continued her daily contact with children and experienced a high level of guilt and uncertainty about her right to decide on the separation.

Phase 3: May 1986. Jane moved into her own house close to the family home. A definite 50/50 arrangement was established at that point, with the children moving homes on

¹ All ages given are ages at the time of the first interview.

Monday afternoons. At the time of the first 3 interviews, Jane had very regular (most days) contact with children either by phone or calling in when they were with Dave. She was starting to feel by this stage that this contact was taking place less because of her own feelings of guilt and more because she valued the contact with the children.

Phase 4: January, 1988. Jane moved south. The children stayed with Dave for the year, and visited Jane at holiday times.

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: Just prior to the 3rd interview Jane learnt that the man with whom she was developing a relationship would be leaving Wellington. This event threw into sharp relief the question of the permanency of the shared parenting, and issues surrounding the concept of the best interest of the child.

Follow up: a) *April, 1987:* The question of the future of the arrangement and where the children would live was still uncertain. Over the 6 month period, Jane had moved through a variety of stages, from thinking that she would go without the children, to looking at the possibility of staying, and managing her relationship as an infrequent commuting one until the children were older, to finally deciding to leave at the end of 1987, although with or without the children was still uncertain.

Dave's response was to feel if the children went with Jane, then they were likely to want to live with him when they were older. In other words he was not anxious about losing contact. At the time, he appeared to think that the ultimate right to make the decision about the children lay with Jane because of her earlier primary parenting role.

b) *August, 1988 :* Dave reported very positively on the continuous time with the children. He felt that they were more settled, that there was a greater feeling of continuity, and he was aware that their going to live with Jane was going to be quite a shock for him. He felt that the children had not been too stressed by Jane's absence, but had been stressed over periods when the arrangement was uncertain, and that at one stage it had been important to make a firm commitment to their remaining with him for the year. There had not been extensive discussions between him and Jane because of distance, and because Jane was upset at being absent from the children. It seemed likely that the children would remain with Jane, because of major schooling changes which it would not be appropriate to put them through again, but both parents reported that no final plans could be made until everyone had had a chance to see how things went.

BLACKS:

Dates of Interviews:

	<i>Keith</i>	<i>Maree</i>
	17. 9. 86 Pre-interview	17. 9. 86
2. 10. 86	24. 9. 86	
	1. 10. 86	9. 10. 86
	17.10. 86	16. 10. 86

1. 4. 87 ²	
<i>Follow Ups:</i> 23 . 4. 87	6. 4. 87
August, 1988	
<i>Total hours of contact:</i> 17 & 1/2 hours	11 & 1/2 hours
<i>Parental occupations:</i> Printer	Clerical worker
<i>Ages:</i> 45	42
<i>Child:</i> Sam 14. Three older children, Malcom, John & Hugh, had not been involved in the arrangement.	
<i>Frequency of moving:</i> Every 3 months, in addition to which Sam spent one night a week with the parent with whom he was not currently living.	
<i>Date of separation:</i> Late 1981.	
<i>Reconstitution:</i> At the time of the first 3 interviews neither parent was in a reconstituted relationship, although Maree had very recently broken up with the man for whom she had left the marriage, and Keith had had a number of girl friends.	
<i>Nature of arrangement:</i> The parents maintained some contact, and although Keith at times described Maree as a friend, their accounts showed considerable divergence in most areas discussed and pointed to a high level on on-going conflict which had remained unresolved during the separation. Although the shared parenting functioned on a day to day level there was a pervasive sense of distrust and doubt about the other parent. Specific points of disagreement centred on finance, the question of who was the better parent and, explicitly for Maree, the issue of power. The arrangement ended abruptly after Keith's violence to Sam.	
<i>Phases of development of arrangement: Phase 1:</i> Maree left the marriage and initially had custody of the two younger boys. Keith had weekend access to Sam. Hugh refused contact with his father.	
<i>Phase 2:</i> End of 1983. Maree had to sell family home, was under considerable financial pressures and had no adequate alternative accommodation. She asked Keith to take Sam to ease the pressure temporarily. Maree said she did not see Sam for a year, except for a 3 week period when he returned to her while Keith was in hospital. Keith took him back without consultation.	
<i>Phase 3:</i> Counselling to attempt resolve custody issue. According to Maree, Sam was beginning to show signs of strain.	
<i>Phase 4:</i> Oct. 1984: Keith reluctantly agreed to share custody, but then came to think that it was a good arrangement.	
<i>Phase 5:</i> March, 1987: Termination of agreement due to violence.	
<i>Significant events during 1st 3 interviews:</i> Sam moved back to his mother's between the 2nd and 3rd interview with Keith. The move produced a dramatic change in the nature of	

² This date, when I returned the transcript is included because I spent over 1 hour talking with Keith about the way that the arrangement had terminated.

the account that had been given in the first interview, in that many more doubts about Maree's capability as a parent were expressed, while Keith appeared depressed and sad about his son's departure.

Follow Ups: a) April, 1987: (i) December, 1986 - Maree applied for and obtained divorce.

(ii) The shared parenting arrangement had terminated in March following a violent row between Sam and Keith about drug use. At that time Sam had had no contact with his father since the night of the fight.

b) August, 1988 : Contact with Sam had literally only just recommenced after 18 months during which father and son had had minimal contact with each other. Malcom appeared (again) to have been one of the main instigators getting them back together and Sam, who had been living with Hugh, had moved back to Keith's for 10 days while Keith's boarder was away. Keith thought that Sam would like to move back permanently.

With the boys having left home, Maree ended her contact with Keith, except at the very occasional family gathering. She had formed a new relationship, where for the first time, there had been no competitiveness for her between the boys and her partner, and where all were reported as enjoying each others' company.

THOMSON/ JONES:

Dates of Interviews:

<i>Fay Jones</i>	<i>Ross Thomson</i>
28.10. 86 Pre Interview	28.10. 86
4. 11. 86	12.11. 86
23.11. 86	19.11. 86
9.12. 86	2.12. 86
<i>Follow Ups:</i> 9. 6. 87	26. 5. 87
August, 1988	
<i>Hours of contact:</i> 12 & 1/2 hours	16 & 1/2 hours
<i>Parental Ooccupations:</i> Public Servant.	Self - employed plumber
<i>Ages:</i> 35	36
<i>Child:</i> Tessa 8	

Separation: Separated December, 1981.

Reconstitution: Ross was living with Liz Smythe, a relationship that had begun several years ago. They had a small baby. Liz's teenage child was still living with her and Ross.

Nature of Arrangement: Both Fay and Ross brough a very high level of personal and ideological commitment to shared parenting, which was seen as a logical extension of their lives prior to the separation. Nonetheless, both parents experienced strain around the maintenance of their relationship and around the question of different standards.

Development of arrangement: Both parents had participated equally in child care arrangements since Tessa's birth. Shared parenting seemed a logical conclusion. They

began the arrangement almost immediately after the separation, once Ross had changed jobs to allow him to be available in the early mornings.

Phase 1: Tessa changed houses every 3 days until she was 5. As a pre-schooler she was attending a day care centre, and the parents kept in touch with her progress both through the staff of the Centre, and by daily phone calls to each other.

Phase 2: Tessa's transition to school led to a decrease in the frequency of her moving from every 3 days to once a week.

Phase 3: Reconstitution: i) Ross's relationship with Liz introduced a further element into his and Fay's relationship, and the question of Liz's role had to be dealt with. Fay's response was to emphasise the biological parenting role, and to wish to exclude Liz from significant decision-making about Tessa.

ii) Fay believed that Paul's birth made her and Ross's relationship easier.

Significant Events during 1st 3 Interviews: None.

Follow Up: a) *April 1987:* The shared parenting had continued without interruption, and Fay especially reported that her relationship with Ross had become much easier.

b) *August, 1988:* All three adults reported that the arrangement was going well, and that there had been no crises of any sort. Fay and Liz emphasised the continuing improvement in their relationship, the ease which was now present in that, and the way that the arrangement had become much more mutually supportive. Fay spoke of the way she felt that they had all now reached a 'natural flexibility'.

MERRICK/ RICHARDS

Dates of Interviews:

Isa Merrick

June, 1986 Pre-interview

10. 11. 86

23. 11. 86

4. 12. 86

Follow ups: 4. 4. 86

August, 1988

Hours of contact: 18 hours

Parental occupations: Public Servant

Ages 34

Ages of children: Diana 11

Isac 7

Frequency of moving: Weekly.

Date of separation: Mid - late 1983.

Luke Richards

June, 1986

13.11. 86

18.11. 86

15. 12. 86

9. 4. 86

16 hours

Fisherman

35

Reconstitution: Isa had formed a new relationship about 9 months after the separation. Peter Watt had been living with her and the children for nearly 2 years at the point of my contact.

Nature of the arrangement: Gradual development of arrangement. Critical aspect in the early stages was Luke's decision to give priority to family commitments and to arrange his working life accordingly. Although both parents had some distinct feelings of wariness and reserve towards each other, both were committed to sharing parenting. For Isa, part of the reason for the ability to work the agreement had been the presence of her family and support networks.

Phases of development of arrangement: Phase 1: At time of separation, Luke stayed with friends for about 4 - 6 weeks. He was still working full-time fishing and had children for occasional weekends when in port. Isa and children stayed on at the old address.

Phase 2: Luke moved to to another suburb in April, 1983.

- i) Over a 6 month period there was an easing into some more sharing of children.
- ii) They went to counselling. Luke was fishing out of two ports further up the coasts until July, 1985.

Phase 3 : Isa saw need to establish her financial and physical independence if she was going to take a full 50% responsibility for the children.

- i) Bought and moved into her own house, thus freeing up the old family home as a base for Luke.
- ii) Isa moved into full-time work.

Phase 4: Reconstitution: Met Peter in January, 1984.

Phase 5: Luke bought current house early 1986 thus making it possible for the family to be geographically close and preserve important social networks.

Phase 6: Luke gave up job since incompatible with children's needs. was attempting to get DPB at the end of 1986,

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: Over this period, there was a gradual build-up of hostility and distrust in relation to financial issues, which also began to invade other aspects of the agreement.

Follow up: April, 1987: At this time the hostility had evaporated and both felt that their relationship had become easier and that they were working in together better. Luke was on the DPB.

August, 1988: Both parents reported very positively on the way that the shared parenting was going, and on the ease that now existed in their own relationship. Both families are also facing changes. Isa and Luke were marrying their current partners, who had become very much included in the shared parenting. Isa and Peter were to leave New Zealand at the end of 1988 to live overseas for 2 years. The plan was that the children would spend one year with Luke and Judith, and the next with Isa and Peter. Luke and Isa both mentioned the importance of all involved being able to speak openly about concerns,

and to be flexible. Luke had moved off the DPB, and was managing a small manufacturing company.

BUTLER/SUMMERS

Dates of interviews:

<i>Michelle Summers</i>	<i>Lawrence Butler</i>
22. 4. 87 Pre interview	22. 4. 87
4. 5. 87	1. 5. 87
4. 6. 87	28. 5. 87
16. 6. 87	11. 6. 87
<i>Follow up:</i> June, 1988 (by letter)	June, 1988 (by letter)
<i>Hours of Contact:</i> 12	19
<i>Parental Occupations:</i> Graphic designer	Researcher
<i>Ages:</i> 40	58
<i>Child:</i> Kay, 7	

Frequency of moving: Kay spent 5 out of 14 nights with her father between January - June, 1987. There were a series of other arrangements prior to this one.

Date of separation: 1982.

Reconstitution: At time of interviews neither parent had moved into a new relationship. Between June and December, 1987, Michelle remarried and left the country.

Nature of the arrangement: Both parents wished to establish an arrangement which would ensure that Kay had some contact with both of them, but the achievement of a stable arrangement proved extremely difficult, and was exacerbated by Kay's attempts to hold her parents together.

Phases of the arrangement: Phase 1: After the separation, Michelle moved out with Kay, who then became very distressed each time she was left for any period of time with her father. This was a period of constant meetings, returnings and general distress at events. Following a psychological assessment of Kay towards the end of this period, there was a gradual increase in the amount of time Kay spent with Lawrence.

Phase 2: Both parents took a firmer line and were able to reduce the frequency of their own contact, and Kay appeared to be more settled. General feeling of reduction in strain. Michelle moved next door to Lawrence, partly because a suitable flat was available and accomodation was always a problem and then returned to live with him with him. The relationship gradually deteriorated again. Michelle saw that the relationship could not work and that she would have to move.

Phase 3: Kay again became very difficult. Michelle told Lawrence that her's was to be the primary home, and that he could visit frequently. The parental relationship deterioratated further.

Phase 4: Michelle decided to move permanently to Melbourne. Prior to her departure in September, 1986, there was a high level of tension and anger. Lawrence contemplated legal action. It was agreed finally that Kay would visit her father at holidays.

Phase 5: October, 1987. Michelle returned from Australia. Because of her difficulty in getting adequate accomodation, Kay lived for about a month with her father, and Michelle was prepared for him to become the primary caretaker. However, she believed that Kay's behaviour was again deteriorating, and she found a more adequate flat with financial help from Lawrence. Kay returned to live with her mother, but visited her father frequently.

Phase 6: January, 1987. The current arrangement was instituted.

Phase 7: June, 1987. Lawrence's leaving New Zealand for a year terminated the physical shared arrangement.

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: The period was dominated by Lawrence's imminent departure from New Zealand for a year, and his gradual recognition that the arrangement would not be reinstated on his return.

Follow up: June 1988: Michelle had remarried, left New Zealand with Kay in the latter part of 1987, but then returned to live in a different city. Kay was to visit her father at holidays. Lawrence's and Michelle's relationship had worsened, with Lawrence feeling that he had been deceived, and misled; Michelle, that the previous patterns, and interlockings had been very unhealthy, and that they had to be finally stopped. Michelle felt that Kay had coped with the changes very well, and was now happily settled; Lawrence was less sure.

PEARSON/COOPER

Dates of interviews:

Patty Pearson

1. 4. 87 Pre Interview

15. 4. 87

30. 4. 87

15. 5. 87

Follow ups: 20.12. 87

August, 1988

Hours of contact: 17

Parental occupations: Social Worker

Ages: 32

Child: Jim 12

Frequency of moving: Nightly, but the arrangements were altered depending on adult and child commitments.

Date of separation: Early 1979.

Stephen Cooper

1. 4. 87

26. 4. 87

13. 5. 87

14. 12. 87

16

Personnel Consultant

35

Reconstitution: At time of interviews both parents were in relationships lasting over several years.

Nature of arrangement: The arrangement between the parents was characterised by flexibility, their positive evaluation of each other and the sense that they and their partners have made strenuous efforts to put the child's needs first. As he has grown older, Jim has had to take most of the responsibility for managing the moving.

Phases of the development of the arrangement: Phase 1: Patty returned from overseas after her marriage with Stephen had ended. She and Jim went to live in a provincial town. Stephen came back to New Zealand on a visit in October, 1979.

Phase 2: Reconstitution: Patty returned to Wellington, where she formed a new relationship with Tom Gray. There were difficulties and Patty, who was unemployed was also depressed. The relationship broke up for 2 years.

Phase 3: Stephen returned to Wellington, and moved in with Jim and Patty because of accomodation problems. Jim's 'blossoming', and his assertion that he wanted to see both parents each day led to the setting up of the shared parenting, where Jim moved between houses each day.

Phase 4 : 2nd reconstitution: Patty and Tom's relationship was renewed.

Phase 5: Reconstitution: Stephen began a relationship with John Green in 1985.

Phase 6: Both parents bought houses close to one another partly to facilitate the working of the sharing parenting.

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: There were no stress events that I was aware of during this time.

Follow up: December, 1987: i) The frequency with which the adults changed nights had diminished with Stephen in a new job that demanded less travelling.

ii) Patty's concern about Jim's lack of friends had lessened since had had made several good friends.

August, 1988: Both parents and Jim felt that things were going well, that there were no major problems, and felt conscious of how lucky they were that the arrangement is working well. Patty and Stephen mentioned on point where there had been some difficulty with Jim, where they had acted together to prevent re-occurrences, and there had been no difficulty in formulating a joint policy.

DAVIS/TODD

Dates of Interviews:

Mary Todd

9. 2. 87 Pre interview

23. 2. 87

10. 3. 87

24. 3. 87

Charles Davis

9 2. 87

4. 3. 87

4. 3. 87

25. 3. 87

<i>Follow ups:</i> 17. 9. 87	24. 9. 87
August, 1988	
<i>Hours of Contact:</i> 16	14
<i>Occupations:</i> Teacher	Civil Engineer
<i>Age:</i> 44	47
<i>Children:</i> Cornelia 15	
Simon 13	

Separation: Separated early 1980.

Reconstitution: Neither parent was currently in another relationship, although both had been so. Mary's relationship with her partner had terminated just prior to the interviews.

Frequency of Moving: The children spent 2 set days each week with each parent, and 3 days alternately with each parent. e.g., Mondays and Tuesdays with mother, Wednesdays and Thursdays with father, and Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays were spent in alternate weeks with each parent.

Nature of the arrangement: The current arrangement was arrived at over a two year period during which Mary initially had greater physical responsibility for the children. The development of the shared parenting agreement was complicated by the considerable degree of hostility between the parents which culminated in a custody case in May 1982, and dragged on to the end of 1984. There had been minimal contact between the parents over the last 5 years. At the time of interviewing they lived at some distance from each other which complicated the ease with which Cornelia in particular was able to keep contact with friends.

Phases in development of arrangement: Phase 1: Birdnesting arrangement for weekends for about 6 months. Neither parent felt that this was satisfactory.

Phase 2: Children lived with Mary, and visited Charles for the weekend. This arrangement essentially lasted until mid year, 1984, with Charles assuming gradually more physical responsibility for the children. There were also a series of disruptions:

Phase 3 : Early 1982 : Mary moved into new relationship.

Phase 4: May, 1982: Charles bought Mary out of the family home. She then had to buy a small and run-down house some distance away from where Charles lived.

Phase 5 : Court case initiated by Charles. This was seen by both parents as introducing a very high level of stress into all their lives.

Phase 6: Mid 1983. Charles' new partner started living with him. This relationship lasted until mid 1985.

Phase 7: Early 1984: Case was heard, and the court affirmed that the couple should continue with the joint custody arrangement.

Phase 8: Full 50/50 sharing of responsibility for children established.

Phase 9: Mid 1987: Charles sold his house, and moved into Mary's neighbourhood to facilitate the arrangement for the children. Later he had to move again while building his own house.

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: Mary experienced Charles' failure to alert her to a change in the schedule as a major crisis, which led to a further deterioration in their relationship. This was in fact seen as the first crisis for some time, although both parents spoke of on-going petty hostilities which both deplored but appeared powerless to change.

Follow up: October, 1987: Charles had moved into the same neighbourhood, and there had been the occasional friendly gesture from one to the other.

August, 1988: The still distant but now less tense, more easy-going parental relationship had continued. Mary emphasised the absence of hassles and her feeling that they had 'matured' into the arrangement; Charles, his sense that he was relaxed about the way that things would develop over the next few years. He also mentioned the children's approval of the less stressed adult relationship.

NOBLES

Dates of Interviews:

Anna

Martin

25. 2. 87

18. 2. 87 Pre Interview

13. 3. 87

27. 2. 87

24. 5. 87

25. 4. 87

13. 3. 87: I spent from Friday p.m. to Sat. pm. with the family during which time Martin was also there for the weekend.

Follow ups: 15.10. 87

22.10. 87

August, 1988

Hours of contact:

Parental occupations: Self-employed
business woman

Film producer

Age: 41

43

Children: Rachel 12

Joanne 9

Frequency of moving: The children live primarily with Anna, but Martin stayed weekends about once a month. During summer, Rachel and Joanne visited him for about every 6 weeks for the weekend. They visited less frequently in winter because of sport commitments. Summer vacations were often spent all together.

Date of separation: April, 1983

Reconstitution: Anna left the marriage to move into a relationship with Susan Gardner, who also had two children, Ella and Katherine. This relationship has continued. Martin

had one other serious relationship with another man, but at the time of the interviews was living alone.

Nature of the arrangement: The separation was seen not so much as a separation, but a living singly, and both parents (Anna in particular) have sought to emphasise their on-going bonds and joint concern and care for the children. Anna and Martin have maintained close consultation between about the children's welfare over the four years of their separation. There was a high level of co-operation between the parents, and between them and Susan; and a high level of congruity in their accounts.

Development of the arrangement: Phase 1: Early 1983: Anna, Susan, her partner, and their children started to live together. There was a period of considerable stress especially for the first 6 months in terms of adjusting to the changes and different styles of living, and the social consequences for all 6 as a result of Anna and Susan having come out as lesbian.

Phase 2: Anna left Susan and returned home to Martin for a week.

Phase 3: During the first interviews both Anna and Martin talked of the need to settle their affairs more, with the recognition that this might involve some further distancing from each other. A financial settlement in particular was seen as necessary, both to allow Anna some greater independence. Martin saw the settlement as symbolic of the reality of the separation, and of his right to move into a new relationship.

Significant events during 1st 3 interviews: The most significant was the felt need of both to move towards greater separatedness, but this might be seen as an evolutionary move, the groundwork for which had been laid gradually since the ending of the marriage.

Follow up: October, 1987: Over the intervening 6 months Anna and Martin had reached a financial agreement, and Martin had bought Anna out of the family home, thus on the symbolic level signalling that they would not live together again as a married couple; and on the practical, ensuring that Anna, with money of her own was able to finance a move with Susan into a larger home more suited to their family needs.

August, 1988: Very little had changed over the last 10 months. Both Anna and Martin spoke very positively of the importance to each of the continuing relationship and friendship between all three adults, and of the way that the issue of independence had diminished once the property settlement had been effected. The children were doing well.

APPENDIX 2

20

1996 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings, Series C, Report 1

TABLE 11

POPULATION RESIDENT IN NEW ZEALAND AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER,
TOTAL INCOME BY WORK STATUS, EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND SEX

Total Income and Sex	Employment Status							Work Status			
	Employer of Others in Own Business	Self Employed and Not Employing Others	Wage or Salary Earner	Unpaid worker in family Business	Unemployed and Seeking Work	Not Specified	Total	Full-time in Labour Force (1)	Part-time in Labour Force (2)	Not Working	Total
\$2,500 or less(3)											
Male	4,020	8,133	17,076	2,055	15,543	996	47,823	31,575	16,248	55,779	103,602
Female	1,893	5,919	40,491	8,211	29,040	1,568	87,087	20,198	58,889	194,157	281,247
\$2,501 - \$5,000											
Male	1,098	3,552	10,698	324	7,374	375	23,421	17,582	5,859	15,135	38,558
Female	1,260	4,230	44,228	1,583	8,217	909	60,495	20,250	40,248	38,577	99,072
\$5,001 - \$7,500											
Male	2,387	8,774	23,316	633	9,402	771	43,283	35,931	7,332	83,439	128,705
Female	2,385	5,316	60,945	1,428	8,187	1,314	79,566	38,048	41,520	161,370	240,938
\$7,501 - \$10,000											
Male	3,888	10,059	44,010	471	4,869	885	64,182	57,051	7,131	35,451	99,830
Female	2,886	5,289	74,818	984	6,141	1,239	91,155	61,353	29,802	79,106	170,364
\$10,001 - \$15,000											
Male	11,502	23,673	142,538	651	5,871	2,328	186,564	172,128	14,438	38,732	223,296
Female	5,682	7,905	138,495	972	4,481	1,698	159,213	131,670	27,540	54,114	213,324
\$15,001 - \$20,000											
Male	12,158	20,286	157,517	215	1,461	1,998	193,830	183,978	9,852	14,937	208,770
Female	3,678	3,931	95,978	399	654	903	105,438	97,350	8,091	13,095	118,538
\$20,001 - \$25,000											
Male	10,965	13,485	120,501	174	543	1,560	147,225	141,591	5,637	7,092	154,317
Female	2,424	2,094	40,587	207	180	510	46,002	42,463	3,534	5,463	51,463
\$25,001 - \$30,000											
Male	8,835	8,208	77,220	72	281	1,233	95,832	92,730	3,105	3,372	99,207
Female	1,659	1,104	14,352	87	60	284	17,529	15,945	1,584	2,370	19,899
\$30,001 - \$40,000											
Male	10,629	6,912	55,881	81	174	1,050	74,730	72,810	1,920	2,523	77,253
Female	1,485	933	5,559	87	30	180	8,271	7,302	969	1,944	10,212
\$40,001 and over											
Male	18,161	5,799	21,687	69	84	1,116	44,916	43,521	1,395	1,659	46,575
Female	1,332	753	1,110	126	21	135	3,477	2,856	621	1,239	4,722
Ndt. Specified											
Male	1,254	1,775	8,654	158	2,508	822	13,260	11,288	1,974	23,376	38,639
Female	558	711	5,840	591	3,600	642	11,739	7,605	4,137	39,972	51,711
Total											
Male	82,875	188,654	877,193	5,064	48,183	13,116	1,235,816	1,180,168	74,888	279,581	1,214,547
Female	23,233	58,888	521,987	14,655	68,588	9,447	688,981	455,848	214,941	591,587	1,281,491

(1) Persons working 30 or more hours, plus persons unemployed and seeking full-time work.

(2) Persons working 1-29 hours, plus persons unemployed and seeking part-time work.

(3) Includes nil or loss.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

How chose shared parenting?

What do you call this arrangement?

Availability of information prior to choice, and from whom/what source?

Date of beginning of agreement.

Initiation by one partner, and implication.

Extended family/friends support for idea.

Support of community, friends once arrangement started.

The attractiveness and unattractiveness of the arrangement? (Inc. values/personal identity).

Concerns/issues at outset -

- i) Positives and negatives seen at that time.
- ii) Positives and negatives seen now.
- iii) What help to believe that arrangement would work for all family members?

Practical Issues

Objectives

What attempting to meet through shared parenting

- i) What think would involve practically?
- i) What found did involve?
- iii) What trying to achieve/provide?

Everyday experience:

Description of way arrangement functions now, inc; practical day to day routines plus:

- i) transition times.
- ii) Divisions of responsibilities for specified areas.
- iii) Management of celebrations (birthdays, Xmas etc.).
- iv) Contact with school.

Problems - emotional and practical that arose at inception and action taken.

Subsequent problems and modes of handling (ex-partner & children).

Degree of contact with ex-partner, and experiences.

Changes in relationship with ex-partner over time.

Financial arrangements and changes (if any) over time.

The children (Parental perception).

Discussion about arrangement with the children - how talk about plans, and reasons given. Involvement of children in decision and subsequent decisions about arrangement.

Children's initial and subsequent reaction and mode of handling - what like when started moving?

Issues which evolved and mode of handling?

Parental assessment of child stress - signs, reactions, explanations.

Continuities and planned changes.

Children's participation in continuation of agreement when older.

Personal issues

Changes in life style as result of arrangement:

- i) Way this form of child care alters relationship with other adults, if it does.
- ii) Way thought about maternal and paternal roles prior to and subsequent to this arrangement.
- iii) Changes in relationship to child as consequence of arrangement.
- iv) What value and dislike about involvement with child?
- v) Differences in way act as parent now - assess strengths and weakness of self as parent.
- vi) Experience of transition, and the period on own.
- vii) Anxieties and concerns now about shared parenting.
- viii) Issues that face as consequence of arrangement in coming years.

Personal changes

- i) What found out about self as result of arrangement?
- ii) Changes in values, ranking of priorities, before/after sharing parenting.

Day--to day-contact with ex-partner:

- i) Who initiates?
- ii) What does contact occur around?
- iii) Degree of satisfaction with contact.
- iv) Nature of difficult areas, if any.
- v) Changes over time to relationship.
- vi) Perception of ex-partner.

Process questions

Meaning and nature of parenthood - why want to be involved?

Changes in definition of role as parent.

Personal issues around choice of shared parenting

Changes in self (e.g., way respond etc. to children) over time.

Hopes, expectations for children.

What like to be on own, as distinct from in relationship when difficulties with children occur?

Changes over time of perception of arrangement.

Would you recommend this arrangement to others?

i) Why

ii) What, for own experience would you think others might need to know about this mode of custody?

iii) Would you recommend this style of custody to other families?

iv) What are the issues which you think the research needs to highlight?

Participation in research:

i) Why decide to take part?

ii) What has experience been like? - valuable, helpful, unhelpful and why?

Children's perception of arrangement

Current age.

Age when shared parenting started.

Recollection (if possible) of how arrangement explained to them, and by whom.

Recollection of what like when start moving.

Knowledge of children in similar arrangement.

Peer group reaction to own family arrangement.

Aspects of arrangement that like/don't like - ask specifically about how feel about the moving and the frequency of changeover.

Who talk to if unhappy about some aspect of the arrangement?

What happens on day of changeover - who packs, who transports? What is it like leaving one parent and going to the other one?

If telling a friend of your arrangement, how would you describe it to her/him?

Would you recommend this arrangement to a friend?

Awareness of differences between homes prior to, and post, separation.

APPENDIX 4**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

This is to state that I voluntarily agree to participate in a programme of research that is being being conducted by Anne Opie, Ph.D. student at Victoria University, Wellington.

- I understand that the primary purpose of the research is to study the evolution of the concept and practice of shared parenting after divorce or separation among some families.
- I understand that my identity will not be known.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue my participation at any time without giving notice and without negative consequences.
- I understand that I am participating in this research with the full understanding that it is for the possible advance of knowledge.

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ AND I UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.
THEREFORE I FULLY AND VOLUNTARILY CONSENT AND AGREE TO
PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (PLEASE PRINT): _____

SIGNATURE: _____

WITNESS' SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

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