

**Women, Mothers and Citizens: Lone Mothers' Narratives in the
Context of New Zealand Welfare Reform**

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Abstract

As in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, ‘lone mothers’ in New Zealand occupy contested subject positions. On the one hand, lone parenting is understood as the outcome of broader changes in family life and gender relations, and in particular, the emergence of new forms of intimacy as people seek relationships to sustain individual identity projects. On the other hand, in the context of neo-liberal welfare discourses, lone mothers are constructed as a problematic Other, categorically different to ‘ordinary’ women, mothers and citizens. In New Zealand, welfare reform discourses have constructed women who parent alone as ‘particular types of people’, and subjected lone mothers to welfare reforms that have had real material effects in their everyday lives.

The construction of lone mothers as Other is not only a product of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. Rather, the ways in which women who parent alone are ‘made up’ as particular types of people is historically specific. This thesis situates current discourses around lone mothering in New Zealand in the context of a hierarchy of maternal legitimacy that has produced historically specific subjects through a number of traditional, modern and late modern subjectification discourses.

Discourses have effects, both materially and in terms of the subjectivity and experience of the people ‘made up’. This thesis offers an analysis of the narratives of twenty-one lone mothers in the context of New Zealand welfare reform. In particular, the ways in which women who parent alone make sense of becoming lone mothers, of being ‘different’ in negotiating the social identity of mother, and of the materiality of the experience of parenting alone are examined.

The thesis argues that when narrating experience, women who parent alone enact particular narratives in the form of validation stories. Validation stories are drawn from an amalgam of discourses that both construct lone mothers as particular types of people and shape the material conditions of lone mothers’ lives. In enacting validation stories, women who parent alone negotiate these discourses, producing narratives to make sense of their experience and position themselves as ordinary women, mothers and citizens. In

this sense, validation stories are narratives that ameliorate the oppressive effects of welfare reform discourses that relentlessly shape lone mothers' lives. The thesis concludes that although validation stories make the lives of lone mothers more 'liveable', sociological theorising around changes in family life must critique claims of individualization as a benign tendency of late modernity, and attend empirically to the ways in which persistent gendered inequalities in family life are both discursively legitimated and reproduced, and continue, for example, to discriminate against lone mothers.

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“What blood does not provide, narrative can”
(Langellier & Peterson, 1993; 50)

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Chapter One

Freeing the Slave Women?

[Historian Neil Smith and community advisor Peter Harwood] describe as ‘the freeing of the slaves’ the extraordinary breakdown of families in Auckland at the moment, a breakdown that means that according to unofficial Social Welfare Department estimates there will be 60,000 children in Greater Auckland living with solo parents on social welfare benefits by 1978, or something above 10 percent of the total projected population ... Says Neil Smith: ‘the slave women are coming out for it’s economically possible for them to do so’ (McLauchlan, 1976; 41 - 42).

Women have paid a heavy economic price for the new freedom to form and dissolve personal relationships (Kiernan, Land & Lewis, 1998; 97).

Introduction

In 1973, the New Zealand government introduced the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). For the first time in New Zealand history, all lone mothers were entitled to a statutory income-tested benefit, irrespective of their route into lone motherhood. In the context of the then gendered breadwinner-caregiver welfare state, the DPB positioned all lone mothers as the same as other mothers (that is, as the best caregivers for their children) and all women as mothers as different to men (as breadwinners) (Nolan, 2000). Equivalent benefits were also being implemented in other liberal welfare states¹. For example, in response to the ‘problem’ of unsupported mothers and the inadequacy of the then existing welfare provisions, the Lone Parents Pension (LPP) was introduced in Australia in 1973 (Walter, 2002; 362), as was the One-Parent Benefit in Britain in 1977 (Song, 1996; 383). The introduction of such benefits in liberal welfare states thus enacted an explicit citizenship right for women as mothers. In New Zealand, for the first time in the history of state welfarism, the DPB enabled women as citizens the freedom to establish autonomous households *as mothers*, and in this sense, differentiated lone mothers from other mothers who remained ‘dependent’ on male breadwinners.

¹ For a definition, see the section ‘Thesis Terms’ later in this chapter.

However, such ‘freedom’ proved to be short-lived. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, liberal welfare states undertook extensive programmes of neo-liberal economic and social policy reform in response to the international fiscal crisis that began in the late 1970s. While New Zealand had once been held up as a ‘model welfare state’, its ‘reforms’ during this period saw it held up internationally as a model of ‘structural adjustment’ (Kelsey, 1993). New Zealand embraced neo-liberalism more rapidly and thoroughly than many other liberal welfare states (Larner, 1996; Else, 1992a). For example, in 1991, the then New Zealand Minister of Finance, Ruth Richardson, introduced what was ironically to become known as ‘The Mother of All Budgets’, initiating “the most far-reaching changes to the ideal, nature and scope of the [New Zealand] welfare state since its inception” (Peters, 1997; 1). Economic growth was to be achieved through a twinning of labour market and state welfare reforms. Trade Unions, national wage awards and universal minimum employment conditions (for example, overtime rates) were disestablished and replaced by ‘bargaining agents’, and individual² contracts. Welfare entitlements were immediately reduced. For example, the rate of the DPB was cut substantially (ranging from 9 to 16 percent of individual recipients’ total entitlements), the Family Benefit (a modest universal child allowance) was abolished, and the annual inflation adjustment of welfare benefits was abandoned (Kelsey, 1993; 83). In addition, public housing was moved to a ‘market model’ requiring tenants to pay ‘market rents’, and a range of ‘user-charges’ for what had been publicly funded health and education services were introduced (Stephens & Bradshaw, 1995). These changes had an immediate impact in the lives of many New Zealanders, and because of the range and scope of the changes, especially on the lives of lone mothers (Jackman, 1992; Dalziel, 1992; Stephens, 1999).

Over the past thirty years, as in other societies with a history of liberal welfarism, the number of lone mothers as a proportion of all mothers in New Zealand has increased. However, as Edwards and Duncan (1996; 128) note:

Paradoxically, as lone mothers have become numerically more important and have been incorporated into the dominant norms for motherhood, discourses around motherhood have become heavily politicized ... Dominant discourses impose definitions of what lone mothers are and what they should do, and also have very

² Or, at the employers discretion, collective site-based contracts.

practical consequences in influencing policies and hence the provision of resources.

In New Zealand since the early 1990s, the ‘fact’ that many lone mothers have high rates of “benefit dependence”, low rates of participation in paid work compared to married women, and are over represented in low income households (Levine, Wyn & Asiasiga, 1993; Goodger, 2001) has been used to legitimate further welfare reform. Rather than understood as an outcome of the gendered nature of liberal welfarism and neo-liberalism, such ‘facts’ have also been used more broadly to link global economic stagnation to the ‘burden’ of state welfarism, to the ‘social costs’ of ‘overly generous’ welfare provisions, and to individual moral flaws in the characters of welfare recipients (Spencer, 1998).

Fraser (1989) notes that all “late capitalist” societies were affected by the international fiscal crisis in the late 1970s, and that this crisis coincided with a “second long term, structural tendency: the feminization of poverty” (Fraser, 1989; 144). The feminization of poverty is complex, and can in part be understood as an outcome of changes in the political economy, changes in the experience of and meanings around family life, and broader changes in gender relations. For example, in addition to changes in the political economy as a consequence of neo-liberalism, family life in many liberal welfare states has also changed. This change has also coincided with other changes, for example, in the nature and meaning of paid work, and the ways in which relationships between women and men, both in the private world of ‘the family’, and the public world of ‘civil society’ are experienced and understood. As Beck-Gernsheim (2002a; viii) has noted, in late modern societies³ “fewer and fewer people live in the kind of family that used to be considered ‘normal’ in the 1950s - that is, a unit involving an officially sanctioned lifelong bond between an economically active husband and an economically inactive wife and the children they have together”. In part, the commodification of heterosexual desire heralded by the ‘sexual revolution’ foreshadowed a more general uncoupling of marriage from sex, and the uncoupling of reproduction from marriage (Hawkes, 1999). However, also important were new ideas about the social equality of women and men as

³ For a definition, see ‘Thesis Terms’.

individuals, and a supposed loosening of the grip of gender norms on the formation of adult biographies.

This thesis explores, in part, the impact of some of these changes on the lives of a group of New Zealand women parenting alone in the late 1990s. While this is very much a local account of changes in the experiences of and meanings around family life, it sits within a broader international context characterised by three separate but interrelated nodes of social change: post-Fordist changes in organisation and experience of paid work, neo-liberal changes in the political economy, and changes in cultural ideas about ‘equality’ of women and men. Although the second node is explored in more depth than the others in this thesis, it is important to note that these nodes have combined to produce new experiences of social life where the traditional and gendered “certainties of modernity” (for example ‘a job’ and ‘a family’ in perpetuity) have become more fragmented, precarious and contingent (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a).

Lone Mothers in the Context of Welfare Reform

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, ‘welfare reform’ has been characterised by neo-liberal policies that seek to limit government spending and encourage individual ‘self reliance’. For lone mothers, the impact of limiting government spending might include cuts to benefit levels, limitations on access to welfare benefits, and the more general effects of funding cuts to publicly funded services such as health and education. Policies ‘encouraging’ self reliance have typically been in the form of ‘welfare to work’ programmes. In New Zealand in the early 1990s the rate of benefit paid to lone mothers was cut, and in the mid 1990s, a ‘welfare to work’ programme was implemented (Baker & Tippin, 2002). Such policies illustrate a fundamental shift in the discursive construction of New Zealand lone mothers from “citizen-mothers” to “citizen-workers” (Copas, 2001: Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001). Importantly, such a shift was not unique to New Zealand. For example, in the United States of America (USA), welfare reforms implemented in the mid 1990s in effect required “all mothers, or at least all poor mothers, to work and [the reforms] ended a sixty year commitment to federal public assistance for single mothers” (Little, 1999; 189). In Britain, cuts to benefits paid to lone parents in the 1990s were combined with a

‘welfare to work’ approach to family policy. Although in Britain lone mothers were not compelled to participate in paid work in all instances, lone mothers were expected to attend work-focused interviews (with ‘case managers’) designed to encourage “people of working age to work where they are capable of doing so” (Dean, 2001; 271). In Australia, to retain eligibility for welfare payments, sole parents with school age children are now required to attend an annual work-focused interview, and sole parents of children aged between 13 and 15 “are obligated to undertake part-time paid work, community work, study or training for an average of six hours a week for six months” (Walter, 2002; 363). As these examples show, the premise that informed liberal welfare policies of the 1970s, that is, that lone mothers are primarily caregivers, has been eroded (Walter, 2002).

In this thesis I argue that the legitimacy of welfare reform in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, has been secured through the cultural authority of discourses constructing lone mothers (and other welfare recipients) as ‘particular types of people’ (Hacking, 1986). For example, in the USA the political use of ‘family values’ rhetoric renewed the stigmatisation of single mothers and positioned single mothers as a despised group deserving of the discrimination they experienced (Young, 1994). Similarly, the welfare poor were constructed as dependent and passive pariahs, lacking in both initiative and morality (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001). In the 1980s, the stereotype of the ‘welfare queen’ exploiting the welfare system had emerged. By the 1990s, women welfare recipients were constructed as “lazy, disinterested in education and promiscuous” and “neglectful mothers” (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001; 230-236). Citing research by Fiske, Xu, Cuddy and Glick (1999), Bullock et al (2001) note that welfare recipients were amongst the “most hated” groups in US society during this period. Welfare recipients were the only group (out of 17 groups including, for example, feminists, rich people, migrant workers, and housewives) that were both disliked and disrespected, and perceived as lacking both competence and warmth (Bullock et al, 2001; 230).

I argue that this idea that lone mothers are particular types of people acts discursively to individualise the structural inequalities characteristic of late modern societies. In New

Zealand during the 1990s, the construction of lone mothers as particular types of people was articulated through dominant welfare reform discourses. These discourses coincided with discourses around changes in family life and gender relations to produce as a peculiarly local subject, the 'solo mum'. Rather than parenting alone symbolising the 'freeing of the slave women', the increasing numbers of women parenting alone throughout the 1970s and 1980s had become symbolic of a much more general social malaise. As one commentator noted:

As a civilised society we must of course continue to support the Wairoa single mother of five and her unfortunate children, if only out of self-interest to try and break the cycle ... But I also want to see an end to it. I'm damned if I'm going to go on paying while the underclass go on indiscriminately rooting (Roger, 1998; 4).⁴

Not all lone mothers in New Zealand are welfare recipients. However, until recently New Zealand lone mothers have had comparatively low rates of participation in paid work, unsurprising given the original intent of the DPB (Baker, 1997). Nevertheless, the welfare reform discourses of the 1990s succeeded in establishing a new discursive differentiation between different types of mothers: 'self reliant' and either married and / or in paid work, or those single and in paid work; or 'dependent', 'solo' and in receipt of the DPB. I argue that what I call a new 'hierarchy of maternal legitimacy' was made possible because of the dominance of welfare reform discourses, themselves made more potent because of the ways traditional (or 'modernist') discourses around femininity, motherhood and citizenship were transformed and absorbed into the 'common-sense' vocabularies of welfare reform.

It is important to note that this thesis focuses on the personal experience narratives of twenty-one Pakeha women⁵. The approach I have taken reflects the climate in which social research is undertaken in New Zealand, and the growing critique of the

⁴ Clare Morrison, who generously shared with me her 1998 Sociology of the Family honours essay 'Good or bad – ideologies shaping motherhood', drew my attention to Roger's comment.

⁵ Ethical approval for this thesis was granted on the basis of my intention to interview Pakeha women. This was an ethical and instrumental decision on my part which also ensured the scope of the research was contained and that the size of the project was manageable. I did not actively exclude Maori women, but told participants that I was a Pakeha researcher. I assume from the participants' stories that all were Pakeha, a term I use to refer to non-Maori women who may describe themselves variously as European, Kiwi, New Zealander and so on. Thus, Pakeha is my preferred term.

relationship between colonization and the production of ‘scientific knowledge’ (Smith, 1999). However, as Solinger (1992) has noted in reference to motherhood in the USA, motherhood is constructed through racialised discourses and “race specific meanings are attached to the breaching of social rules governing sexuality and maternity” (Solinger, 1992; 18; see also Neubeck & Cazenave, 2002). While this thesis explores Pakeha women’s experiences of parenting alone, these should not be considered out of the context of the ways in which racialised and racist narratives around femininity, motherhood and citizenship have persisted in New Zealand, and continue to shape the everyday lives of Maori women.

A central theme in this thesis is the idea that discourses have material effects. Indeed discourses sediment into the “material base in established social institutions and practices” (Weedon, 1987; 100). Discourses about lone mothers are powerful. They contradict and interrupt the cultural norms constituting ‘good’ motherhood and ‘responsible’ citizenship, and produce various Other subject positions. As such, the material effects of these discourses can be seen in the ways in which lone mothers are both ‘positioned’ (or ‘spoken of’) as subjects in society, and the ways women who parent alone subjectively and materially experience being ‘lone mothers’. Some of the participants in this research were in receipt of the DPB, others were not. However, as the family is a favoured site for implementing social policy (Phoenix, 1996), and welfare reform discourses were a major source of cultural knowledge about lone mothers, the participants inevitably negotiated these discourses in their narratives.

Thesis Terms

Throughout this thesis, I generally use the terms ‘women who parent alone’ or ‘lone mothers’ as a collective noun, and ‘lone parenting’ as the verb. Early on in the research process I was struck by the historical fluidity of descriptions of mothering categories, and the ways in which categories such as ‘fallen women’, ‘deserted wives’, ‘lone parents’, ‘single mothers’, and ‘solo mothers’ are constructed. I have chosen the terms “women who parent alone” and “lone mothers” as I consider these are the terms least likely to offend the greatest number of participants.

Throughout this thesis I use the following terms to refer to ‘types of societies’ and ‘cultural logics’ that are both analytical, and serve as heuristic periodisation devices: ‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘modernity’ and ‘late modern’. While recognising that these terms are problematic in both definition and application, I use them in order to reinforce both the historical specificity and the historical continuities of contemporary social life, particularly in relation to the experiences of the participants in this research. I use the term ‘traditional’ to refer to the early modern period, and the transitional moment between feudal and capitalist, or agrarian and industrial societies. In New Zealand, I approximate the traditional period from the moment of colonial settlement and expansion until around about the end of the 1920s. I use the term ‘modern’ to refer to the period from around about 1930 until the early 1970s. During this period, the ‘modern’ New Zealand welfare state was established and elaborated, national identity stories consolidated, and New Zealand became an urban society with a modern mixed economy. Together, these periods collectively constitute ‘modernity’: that is, New Zealand society was secular rather than religious, capitalist rather than feudal, industrial rather than pre-industrial, mobile rather than static, comparatively individualistic, politically democratic, and a “mass society” with mass access to basic goods and social rights (McLennan, Ryan & Spoonley, 2000; 18). I refer to the period from about 1980s onwards as ‘late modern’.

I also use the terms ‘welfarism’ and ‘liberal welfarism’ to refer to regimes of social policy within liberal democracies characterised by State involvement in planned economic and social development, including the provision of publicly funded social services. In this sense, these terms are very much ‘conceptual umbrellas’ covering a broad church of nation-states and welfare regimes. For example, I identify New Zealand, Australia, USA and Britain as late modern societies with histories of liberal welfarism⁶. The similarities between these countries occur only at the broadest level, and as many comparative social policy analyses have established, the ideological and material differences in relation to the actual provision of welfare ‘services’ are

⁶ It is unusual to classify the welfare traditions of New Zealand and the USA as similar. However, some similarities do exist at a meta level. I consider that claims to the New Zealand tradition of ‘social democracy’ to be somewhat over drawn, given that the ‘universalism’ of provision was often partial, especially in relation to, for example, married women’s access to cash benefits. Similarly, the USA did once enjoy a welfarist tradition (in relation to cash benefits), evidenced for example, by Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’. Sawyer (1996) contrasts post war ‘social liberalism’ with post 1970s ‘market’ or ‘neo-liberalism’ to broadly capture the ‘shift to the right’ that has occurred in many late modern societies.

substantial (Hobson, Lewis & Birte, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Nevertheless, these countries have all undertaken similar neo-liberal welfare reform programmes, targeting similar groups, and using similar discursive strategies to secure political legitimacy for the range and scope of welfare reforms (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999; O'Connor, 1993).

'Welfare reform' is a shorthand term used frequently throughout this thesis as the thesis focuses on the discourses (and effects) of neo-liberal welfare reform. 'Neo-liberalism' refers to the set of political ideas that regained ascendancy in the late twentieth century emphasising the 'free market' as a naturally occurring site for the exchange of goods and services by 'rational actors'. In contrast to liberal welfarism, fundamental to neo-liberalism is the notion that the main purpose of the State is to uphold the freedom of 'economic man' to contract (Sawer, 1996; 118). Boston (1999; 4) poetically describes contrasting principles of liberal welfarism and neo-liberalism: while for liberal welfarists the 'State is a blessing', for neo-liberals, the 'State is a curse', and minimising the 'interference' of the State in the market is a major goal of neo-liberal welfare reform.

Thesis Overview

In this section I outline the structure of the thesis including an outline of the remainder of Chapter One. This includes a description of selected demographic changes in the composition of New Zealand family households, and the relationship between family type and family well-being.

In Chapter Two, 'A Bit of A Life': Individualization and Welfare Reform', I outline the sociological theory of individualization and relate the conditions of late modernity to the political economy of neo-liberalism. I then review the empirical literature on lone mothers' experiences of welfare reform in a number of societies with a history of liberal welfarism. This chapter concludes with a discussion about three key themes that emerge from this literature. Finally, I discuss the potential of theories of individualization to

complement and interrogate the existing literature on the experience of welfare reform from the perspective of welfare recipients.

In Chapter Three, 'Constructing Lone Mothers as Other', I outline the theoretical principles of social constructionism and briefly describe some of the key literature around the social construction of motherhood. I then present an analysis of changing discourses in New Zealand that have constructed women who parent alone as particular types of people, with specific reference to three historical moments. This chapter concludes with an analysis of how women who parent alone were 'spoken of' in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses in the 1990s, focusing particularly on the Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility, a government consultation document delivered to all New Zealand households in 1998.

In Chapter Four, 'Researching Women's Lives', I discuss the methodological principles that informed the research, and describe the research method and my experiences in carrying out the research. This chapter ends with a brief section in which I reflect on my experience of 'researching women's lives', and the challenges of carrying out research with women who parent alone while at the same time trying to minimise the subjectification of lone mothers as particular types of people.

The theoretical and methodological principles of narrative analysis are described in Chapter Five, 'Narrating Experience'. In this chapter I introduce the concept of 'validation stories' as a particular narrative form enacted by lone mothers in making sense of their experiences in the context of New Zealand welfare reform. This chapter also includes a brief biographical summary of each of the participants, and a section foreshadowing the subsequent three 'data chapters'.

The participants' narratives are presented and analysed in Chapter Six 'Becoming a Lone Mother', Chapter Seven 'Being Different' and Chapter Eight 'The Materiality of Experience'. In each of these chapters, the ways in which validation stories enable lone mothers to make sense of their experiences of parenting alone are discussed. Each chapter illustrates how, in making sense of their experience, the participants enacted

validation stories as mothers that ameliorated some of the most oppressive discourses that construct lone mothers as Other, and how validation stories enabled the successful positioning of the participants as ordinary women, mothers and citizens.

In the final chapter, Chapter Nine ‘The Price of Freedom?’, I return to the individualising tendencies of late modernity. In this concluding chapter I argue that neo-liberal welfare policies discriminate against women who parent alone, as neo-liberalism inevitably constructs women who parent alone as particular types of people. This systematic discrimination should be understood in the context of continuing modernist gender relations, where inequality is born by women but absorbed into biographies as women negotiate dominant discourses that position them as Other.

Changes in New Zealand Family Households 1971 - 2001

Changing demographic trends illustrate how family composition, living arrangements, and the social well-being of different family groups vary over time. Since the 1970s, monitoring the compositional change in New Zealand families and households, the living arrangements of New Zealanders, and the well-being of New Zealand families⁷ has been investigated by many New Zealander researchers including Davey (1998) Maxwell (1989) and Vosburgh (1978). In this section, I outline a number of changes in family and social life in New Zealand from approximately 1970 to 2000⁸ that have had particular impact on women. Some of these changes are summarised in Table 1 – Major Differences for Women in the Family Over the Last Thirty Years. Although the changes described draw specifically on changes in New Zealand⁹, similar changes over a similar time period have occurred in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism (Baker, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Fox Harding, 1996). The section concludes with a brief discussion linking changes in family well-being to broader changes in the global political economy as a consequence of the ascendancy of neo liberalism.

⁷ Typically on the basis of the New Zealand five-yearly census data.

⁸ New Zealand has five-yearly censuses. The last census was 2001 and where possible, either 2001 census figures or the latest available figures from Statistics New Zealand publications have been used.

⁹ The demographic and statistical data drawn upon in this chapter refer to general population trends. New Zealand demographers have noted that Maori and non-Maori population dynamics differ, in part because of the delayed Maori demographic transition (see Pool, 1991).

The material in this section includes a description of changes in marriage and divorce patterns, fertility patterns, the social practice of adoption, the participation of women in paid work, and the material differences between different family types. However, it is important to note that these changes, together with changing ideas about, for example, the social roles of women and men have a combined effect. Thus, rather than the increase in the number of women parenting alone being itself a discrete example of social change, this increase can be more precisely understood as an outcome of a number of demographic and social changes.

New Zealand Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

Changes in marriage patterns have seen later and fewer marriages, although the decline in the rates of legal marriage¹⁰ sits alongside a rise in cohabitation (Baker, 2001; 16-18). In New Zealand, the general marriage rate (marriages per 1,000 unmarried people aged 16 and over) peaked in 1971 at 45.5, but by 1996 had fallen to 17.1 (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 38). While an increasing number of those not legally married cohabit, there are fewer people today who are either married or cohabiting than there were married in the past (Davey, 1998; 116).

Age-specific first marriage rates show that women are now older when they first marry. In 1971, the highest rates for age-specific first marriage were for the age group 20 – 24 years. By 1996, the highest rates for age-specific first marriage were for the age group 25 - 29 years, and women aged 30 – 34 were more likely to enter a first marriage than 20 – 24 year olds (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 38). In 1971, six percent of women aged 30-34 had never married. By 2001, the rate of ‘never married’ women in this age group had risen to approximately one third (see Table 1), with most of this increase occurring after 1976 (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 37). These changes in part account

¹⁰ In this thesis, I use the term ‘marriage’ to refer to ‘legal marriage’. Cohabitation refers to marriage- like relationships, which are sometimes described in the demographic literature as ‘informal’ or ‘*de facto*’ marriages.

Table 1: Major Differences for Women in the Family Over the Last Thirty Years*

	1971	1991	2001
Percentage never-married			
Age 30-34	6	19	33.5
Age 35-39	5	10	20.8
Percentage married ¹	65	50	44.9
Median age of first-time brides	22	25*	29.3
Divorce rate ²	5.1	12.3*	12.3
Remarriages as percentage of all marriages ³	11	24*	33 (approx)
Average number of birth per woman	3.2	2.1*	1.9
Median age of first birth to married women ⁴	23	27*	31
Percentage married women in full-time labour force ⁵	26	46	57.7 ⁶
Percentage of households that are sole-parent ⁷	5	9	9.4
<i>Percentage of families with children that are one-parent families</i>	-	26	31
Proportion of households that are two-parent	41	33	42.1
<i>Percentage of families with children that are two-parent families</i>	-	74	69

* This table is based on a table entitled 'Major differences for women in the family over the last twenty years' published in 'All About Women in New Zealand' (Statistics New Zealand, 1993; 39). Italicised categories were not included in the original table (source: Statistics New Zealand, 1998; Statistics New Zealand, 2001a; Statistics New Zealand, 2001b; Statistics New Zealand, 2002a; Statistics New Zealand, 2002b; O'Brien, 2003). Notes, with the exception of this and notes 6 & 7, appeared in the original table.

Notes:

* 1992 figures used for non-census data

¹ Percentage of women aged 15 and over

² Decrees absolute and dissolution orders granted per existing 1,000 estimated marriages

³ Remarriages for women per 1,000 marriages

⁴ Relates to births of current union only

⁵ The definition of full-time labour force used here is that used in the census up until 1986, ie twenty or more hours per week

⁶ 1996 figure

⁷ Data for households containing one family only and no other people

for the rise in women's median age at first marriage, from 22 years in 1971, to 29.3 years in 2001 (see Table 1).

Although the rate of legal marriage has declined, people continue to form marriage-like relationships. Over the last thirty years there has been an increase in the number of women living in cohabiting arrangements. Between 1986 and 1996, the proportion of partnered women cohabiting nearly doubled from 4.6 percent to 9.1 percent (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 40), increasing by 46 percent between 1991 and 1996 (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). Cohabitation is strongly age-graded. In 1996, about one in four women aged 15 to 44 years who were living in partnerships were not 'legally married' (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 8) and 62 percent of partnered women aged 20 – 24 were not 'legally married' (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 9). The percentage of couples cohabiting is also considerably higher among couples without children (Baker, 2001; 16).

Over the last thirty years the divorce rate has increased¹¹, rising from 3.2 in 1961, to 11.9 in 1981. The divorce rate peaked at 17.1 in 1982 as a consequence of legislative changes when the Family Proceedings Act (1980) ¹² replaced the previous fault-based divorce legislation with 'no fault' dissolution on the single ground of 'irreconcilable marriage breakdown', evidenced by two years living apart (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 7). In the 1990s, the divorce rate fluctuated between 12 and 12.8, before dropping to 12.3 in 2001 (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 10). New Zealand's divorce rate is similar to that of Australia, Canada and Britain, and all of these countries' rates are about half that of the United States (McPherson, 1995; 3).

One quarter of divorces in New Zealand are to couples married less than five years. In 1999 nearly two out of five divorces were for marriages of less than ten years duration, and half of all divorces were for marriages that had lasted less than 12.8 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c). In 1999, divorce was most common for women aged between 25 to 29 years with a divorce rate of 23.6, compared with rates of 23.1 for women aged 20

¹¹ Measured as the number of divorces per existing estimated 1,000 marriages.

¹² This Act was passed in 1981. Dissolution of marriage is the legal term, but I use the term divorce throughout this thesis.

– 24, and 21.3 for women aged 30 – 40 (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 10). McPherson (1995; 3) notes:

Divorce cannot be considered as an isolated entity: it must be set in the context of the other marital categories of which it is but one of several transitional states. Divorce cannot occur without marriage, and remarriage is most commonly a consequence of divorce.

In 1996, nearly 12 percent of all married women were in remarriages and just over a quarter of all women marrying that year were remarrying. Eighty seven and a half percent of these women were divorced rather than widowed (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 39). In contrast, in 1966, slightly fewer than 10 percent of marriages were remarriages, and 59 percent of women remarrying were divorced (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 39).

It has been argued that reporting divorce statistics expressed as a divorce rate exaggerates the incidence of marriage break up, given that for “about two-thirds of couples, death, not divorce, will end their marriage” (Statistics New Zealand, 2001c; 10). Nevertheless, divorce is much more common than it was three decades ago, and although the rate appears to have peaked and stabilised, legal marriage appears considerably less ‘permanent’ and universal than it once was.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of divorces involving children decreased (from 64 percent in 1981, to 51 percent in 1995). However, the proportion of divorces involving children aged under five years old increased (from eight percent in 1980, to 14 percent in 1993) (Davey, 1998; 119). There is no official count of ‘what happens to children when their parents divorce’, but given the high proportion of women who are lone parents, the common pattern is that most children reside with their mothers following the end of their parents’ marriage.

Falling Fertility

As in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, the fertility rate in New Zealand has been falling since the early twentieth century, and particularly since the late 1960s, with the exception of the ‘baby boom’ following the end of World War Two (Baker, 2001; 18). Over 1.1 million New Zealand baby-boomers were born

between 1945 and 1964, with the fertility rate peaking in 1961 at 4.31, before trending downwards from the early 1960s onwards (Department of Internal Affairs, 1990; 139). In 1978 the fertility rate fell below ‘replacement level’, and in 1983 fell to a then “all-time low of 1.92 births per woman” (Department of Internal Affairs, 1990; 140). Rates temporarily rose above replacement level in 1989 and 1990 (a result of the ‘baby echo’), although the current fertility rate is again below replacement levels at about 1.9 births per woman, despite a substantial increase in the number of women of childbearing age (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b).

The median age of women having children has increased. In 1961, at the peak of the baby boom, the fertility rate was in the context of early and near universal marriage, and early childbearing (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). In 1971, the median age of first birth to married women was 23 years. In 2001, the median age of first birth to married women was 33 years (see Table 1). Over the last decade, the fertility rates for women in all age groups under thirty have declined, while those for women over thirty have increased (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). The largest increases in fertility rates were for women aged 40 years and over, although in numerical terms, the age group 30-34 was the most common for childbearing (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b).

Cohort analysis shows that on average, New Zealand women are now having children about five years later than women childbearing in the 1970s. For women born in 1966 (and aged 35 in 2001), the median age of first birth was 28.3 years, compared to 25.3 years for women born in 1952 (aged 35 in 1987) (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b). Completion of childbearing has also been correspondingly delayed. Women born in 1966 completed three quarters of childbearing by age 32.6, whereas women born in 1952 completed three quarters of childbearing by age 29.5, an increase of 3.1 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b).

While overall the fertility rate has fallen, the proportion of ex-nuptial births has increased. In 1966, twelve percent of all births were ex-nuptial (Statistics New Zealand, 1997; 115). In 2001, forty-four percent of all births were ex-nuptial (O’Brien, 2003). Pool and Johnstone (1996; 42) note that ex-nuptial fertility has “gone through a massive transition”. Historically, ex-nuptial fertility has been associated with young ‘fallen

women', and more recently, 'teenage mothers'¹³. However, over the last thirty years mothers giving birth ex-nuptially have become older. In 1976, forty-two percent of ex-nuptial births were to women aged 15 – 19 years. In 1991, this figure had dropped to 21 percent, and in 2001 to 14.5 percent. In contrast, only 30 percent of ex-nuptial births were to women aged 25 – 49 years in 1976. By 1991, this figure had risen to 42 percent, and in 2001, to 56 percent (O'Brien, 2003). While "ex-nuptial childbearing is very much a feature of the middle reproductive years" (Pool & Johnstone, 1996; 43) many of these births are to women in marriage-like relationships (Davey; 1998; 12).

Adoption

Along with an increase in the number of ex-nuptial births, there has been a decline in the number of children placed for adoption. Following the Second World War the practice of 'closed stranger adoption'¹⁴ became routine for some groups of unmarried women giving birth (Griffith, 1998; 26). Closed stranger adoption peaked in 1970, when adoptees made up more than six percent of all births and approximately 4,000 adoption orders were made (Griffith, 1998; 23). Adoption is now much less common in New Zealand. Less than one percent of newborns become adoptees (Smith, 2003), and the practice of closed stranger adoption is now rare.

Lone Parenting

The rise in the number of lone parent households in New Zealand can be understood as an outcome of a number of changes in family formation, including for example, the decline in marriage, the increase in cohabitation, the rise in divorce, the decline in fertility, the increase and changing patterns of ex-nuptial birth, and the virtual disappearance of closed stranger adoption. Although two-parent families remain the most common family type in New Zealand, the increase in the number of one-parent

¹³ The 2002 the proportion of births to women under 20 was very low, and much lower than it was 30 years ago. The major difference today is that these young women do not marry during pregnancy like young women in the 1950s and 1960s did.

¹⁴ The practice of 'closed adoption' is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. 'Closed stranger adoption' included birthmothers not seeing their child once they had given birth, and the practice of issuing new 'birth certificates' in the names of the adoptive parents.

families has been a feature of demographic change for the past thirty years¹⁵. Considerable growth in one-parent families occurred between 1981 and 1991, with much less change between 1991 and 1996. In 1996, seventy-eight percent of children under one year of age lived in a two-parent family, 21 percent lived with a lone mother, and one percent with a lone father (Davey, 1998; 15). Of children aged between five and nineteen years, 17 percent lived in a one-parent household, 69 percent in a two-parent household, and 14 percent in a multiple family household (Davey; 1998; 39).

Lone parenting is gendered. Women head most lone parent households. In 1996, eighty-five percent of lone parents were women, “a figure which had changed little over the preceding decade” (Statistics New Zealand, 1999; 45). Ten percent of women in New Zealand were lone mothers in March 2001, although this figure varies by ethnicity. For example, 21 percent of Maori women, 16 percent of Pacific women, and nine percent of ‘European’ women were lone mothers in 2001 (Statistics New Zealand, 2001b). Lone mothers are most likely to be aged between 25 and 39. In 1996, slightly less than 17 percent of women aged under 25 years were lone mothers, and only 2.6 percent of women aged between 15 and 19 were lone mothers. Around 14 percent of women aged 25-29, and 14.5 percent of women aged 30-34 and 35-39 were lone mothers in 1996. In all age groups, women are more likely to be lone parents than men (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 45).

The ways in which women become lone parents vary, especially by age. In 1996 just over 46 percent of all lone mothers had never married, but the majority of lone mothers aged 30 and over had been previously married. While nearly 99 percent of lone mothers aged under 20, and 91 percent of lone mothers aged 20-24 had never married (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 45), it remains unclear how many women never legally married may have been cohabiting prior to becoming lone parents.

Like marriage, lone parenting is not a fixed state. In New Zealand, most official statistics collect ‘snapshot’ data, and little is known about the experience of mothering,

¹⁵ It is important to note that the increase in the number of lone parent households has not been ‘steady over time’. The number of lone parent households is shaped by wider population dynamics. Thus, the decline in the number of lone parents in the mid 1990s is most likely an effect of New Zealand’s ageing population (see Davey; 1998).

or how lone mothering might fit within a woman's life course. While snapshot data is useful for broad comparisons over time, it gives little indication of the actual number of women who experience parenting alone, and the frequency and durations of transitions between different family types.

Women and Paid and Unpaid Work

Not only have patterns of family formation changed, but who does what within families has also changed. Lewis (2001; 17) notes that in late twentieth century Britain, the division of labour in two-parent families has shifted and the one-and-a-half breadwinner family model has replaced the traditional breadwinner-caregiver family model idealised in the middle of the twentieth century. Women in Britain in two-parent families are now more likely to work part-time than their mothers, and use a variety of childcare arrangements in doing so. As in Britain, the participation rates of married women in paid work in New Zealand increased in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. However, New Zealand women still have a "two phase work cycle ... they are most likely to participate in the labour force before they have children and then again after all their children are in school" (Baker, 2001; 22). Whereas in the past, women's age-specific participation rates in paid work were left skewed, reflecting women working before the birth of their children, they are now 'M' shaped. This new pattern reflects:

The increasing participation rates of young women, followed by the temporary withdrawal of many women of prime childbearing ages and increasing rates again as their children reached school age and they were able to return to the labour force (Davies & Jackson, 1993; 42-43).

At the same time, changes in the division of unpaid work within two-parent family households in New Zealand appear to have been much less dramatic than married women's uptake of paid work (Baker, 2001; 169; Statistics New Zealand, 2001b). The 'M' shaped pattern of married women's participation in paid work illustrates the dominance of the idea that the role of women as mothers is primary over the role of women as paid workers, and the impact of other cultural and structural barriers to New Zealand mothers' participation in the labour force. Nevertheless, as the value of men's wages have been declining in New Zealand since the 1980s, a new 'one and a half model' breadwinner model has emerged in many two-parent families.

Baker (2001; 165) notes that within OECD nations, there are “two broad approaches to women as mothers and as workers”. These approaches are either continuing to focus on the male-breadwinner family and make “only a gesture towards the needs of employed mothers”, or supporting women as mother-workers¹⁶. New Zealand (along with Australia and Britain) fits within the first approach. Like other countries characterised by the persistence of the male breadwinner - female caregiver family model, three major structural barriers to full-time participation persist: “the shortage and high cost of child-care services, the inadequacy of statutory maternity benefits¹⁷ and persistent cultural attitudes that children are somehow damaged by group child care” (Baker, 2001; 166).

Despite structural barriers, the increasing participation of New Zealand women in paid work has been identified as one of the most significant employment trends of the second half of the twentieth century (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 83; Davies & Jackson, 1993; 25). In 1986, women comprised 41.7 percent of the paid labour force, 45.7 percent in 1996, and in March 2001, women comprised 47 percent. In 2001, sixty-four percent of women in paid work worked full-time (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 83; Statistics New Zealand, 2001b). The number of women in part-time work has increased by 55 percent since 1991. In 2001, almost half of women in part-time paid work reported they combined paid work with looking after their children. Similarly, 32 percent of women working full-time also reported looking after children in the same household (Statistics New Zealand, 2001b).

Women with children have lower participation rates in paid work than men with children. The biggest difference in these participation rates is where children are aged under one, and aged between one to four (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 86). However, women’s participation in the labour market increases as their children age. In 1996, just over 36 percent of women with a youngest child aged under one year participated in paid work, compared to 78 percent of women with children aged 13 -17. Between 1986 and 1996, the participation rates of women with children aged under one year rose by nearly eight percent, and for women with children aged one to four, rose by nearly 11

¹⁶ Baker (2001; 165-166) notes that the second approach comprises two further categories: those nations that provided publicly funded benefits and services to support mother-workers (for example, Sweden and Denmark), and those that have not (for example, the United States).

¹⁷ Statutory provision for 12 weeks paid parental leave for wage and salary earners was enacted in 2002.

percent. Thus, when having children, women are now increasingly more likely to remain in the labour force, or return to it more quickly than previously (Statistics New Zealand, 1998; 86).

Combining part-time paid work and looking after children is both gendered, and age-related. Thirty-five percent of women in part-time work (compared to 27 percent of men) reported looking after a child in the same household in the four weeks prior to the 2001 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2001b). The biggest differences in rates of part-time work between men and women are in the years 30-45¹⁸. At the same time, the biggest difference in median annual income between men and women is the 35-39 years age group, with women receiving on average, \$17,300 less income per year than men.

Participation rates in paid work also vary between all women and mothers, and between mothers in two parent families and one parent families. Mothers have lower rates of participation in paid work than all women, and lone mothers have lower rates of participation in paid work than partnered mothers. Since the late 1990s, the rate of full-time participation in paid work has increased for both partnered and lone mothers, and the rate of part-time work has declined (Goodger, 2001; 192). In New Zealand, mothers are more likely to be employed if they live with a partner (Baker, 2001; 151). Nevertheless, in 2001, nearly 45 percent of lone mothers were in paid work, a 50 percent increase since 1992 (Goodger, 2001; 192). The gap between the employment rates of partnered and lone mothers decreased from 30 percent to 19 percent between 1992 and 2001¹⁹. Like other mothers, the participation rate of lone mothers in paid work varies according to age of the youngest child. In 2001, 65 percent of lone mothers with a youngest child aged 14 or over were in paid work, compared to 18 percent of those with a child aged three or under (Goodger, 2001; 194).

The impact of these differences in participation rates in paid work is reflected in recent research on the material well-being of New Zealand families (Ball & Wilson, 2002; Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002a; Krishnan, Jensen & Rochford, 2002b). In New

¹⁸ In the age group 35-39 years, seventy-one percent of women and 55 percent of men working part-time reported looking after a child in the four weeks prior to the census (Statistics New Zealand, 2001b).

¹⁹ This in part reflects the ageing of the child population of the cohort of women in receipt of the DPB during this decade (see Goodger, 2001; 196).

Zealand, family type and family material well-being are closely tied. This is in part because of the comparatively high numbers of lone parents, particularly women lone parents, reliant on the DPB as their primary source of family income. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the proportion of women lone parents in receipt of the DPB increased, before dropping through the mid-1990s. For example, in 1976 sixty percent of lone parents were in receipt of the DPB, in 1991, ninety-three percent of lone parents were in receipt of the DPB, and in 1996, eighty-six percent of lone parents were in receipt of the DPB (Goodger, 1998; 122). As Ball & Wilson (2002; 106) note, New Zealand researchers have identified many reasons why women lone parents are reliant on the DPB as their primary source of income including barriers to paid work such as lack of affordable childcare, the lower average educational qualifications of DPB recipients and the lower wages earned by women. Alternatively, Else (1997) has argued that many lone mothers, especially those with pre-school aged children, are acting like other mothers of small children. That is, most mothers are 'dependent' on sources of income other than their own, especially while their children are young.

Individualising explanations for the comparatively low participation rates of lone mothers in paid work have been marshalled to support arguments for welfare reform (see Chapter Three). However, as Hill (2000) illustrates, under the conditions of neo-liberalism the relationship between market-sourced and welfare-sourced income is complex. Hill (2000) highlights patterns of class, 'race' and gender inequalities in the New Zealand labour market, and how pay rates stalled in New Zealand during the period of neo-liberal welfare reforms in the 1990s. During this period, successive governments adopted low wage economic strategies to attract international investment in New Zealand, and a key component of this strategy was cuts to welfare spending.

Hill (2000) notes that the neo-liberal low wage economic strategies of the 1990s benefited income earners in the upper deciles, while the share of total earnings going to the bottom 80 percent of incomes declined (Hill, 2000; 13). Between the 1981 and 1991 censuses, male wages fell, while women's wages were static. Thus, the increased participation of women in the labour market can also be interpreted as partnered women "taking on the 'double burden' to maintain real incomes in two parent families", and that women's pursuit of "independent lives and independent earnings has been facilitated by the depression of the overall labour bill" (Hill, 2000; 15). For lone

mothers, securing sufficient family income from the market place alone has become increasingly precarious. While not all lone mothers are in receipt of the DPB, 1993 data recording why women in receipt of the DPB exited the benefit is interesting. Seventeen percent were no longer entitled to the benefit because they found paid work, 12 percent transferred to other benefits, 11 percent lost eligibility due to the age of their child or their child leaving their care, and 43 percent changed their marital status or re-partnered, thus also losing their benefit entitlement (Davey; 1998; 121)²⁰.

Hill (2000) notes that over the past thirty years, the number of women earning higher incomes has increased. However, for lower earning women there has been no improvement in relation to men's earnings. Hill (2000) reports a Statistics New Zealand analysis that found in 1996, women in full-time paid work earned 79 percent of men's average weekly full-time earnings. Once these earnings were standardised (by Statistics New Zealand) for differences in hours worked, age, qualifications, ethnicity and occupation, Statistics New Zealand found that six percent of the 21 percent disparity could be 'attributed' to these variables. While a gendered pay gap of 15 percent remained unexplained by Statistics New Zealand, Hill (2000; 21) argues it persists because of the discriminatory effects of both horizontal and vertical segmentation. When comparing New Zealand women and men with the same qualifications, men earn more. Women remain concentrated in clerical and service jobs, where the median incomes are much lower than in the occupational categories where men dominate (Hill, 2000; 23). Women who parent alone are, of course, not immune to the ways in which social relations produce inequalities in the labour market, and are arguably more vulnerable when welfare reforms venerate paid work and make invisible both care work and the complexities of combining care and paid work in a low wage economy. Accounts that compare the participation rates of partnered mothers and lone mothers insufficiently account for these complexities, and implicitly reduce such differences in participation rates to invented individual differences between partnered mothers and lone mothers as different types of people.

²⁰ Similarly, Chalmers (1999; 15) found in an 'exit study' of Australian lone mothers in receipt of the lone mothers pension, 46% of the women re-partnered, while 19% became ineligible because they reached the income threshold.

Family Living Standards

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, the rise in the number of households headed by lone mothers has coincided with the feminization of poverty (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). This connection between poverty and lone motherhood is not new in New Zealand (Husbands, 1994; Tennant, 1989). However, with the increase in numbers of lone mothers in the late twentieth century the connection has become more visible. Poverty is not unique to households headed by lone mothers, nor does being a lone mother necessarily result in poverty. Nevertheless, recent research on the living standards of New Zealanders shows the very real material differences between one-parent and two-parent families (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; Krishnan, Jensen & Rochford, 2002). Based on a seven-level ELSI²¹ scale with scores of living standards²² ranging from ‘very restricted’ (level 1) and ‘restricted’ (level 2), through to ‘very good’ (level 7), researchers found that, in general, the scores for New Zealand families with dependent children were “skewed toward the higher living standards category” (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; 109). Nevertheless:

Twenty-eight percent of sole-parent families had scores that placed them in the bottom two categories of the scale, and a further 23 percent had scores that placed them in the third ‘somewhat restricted’ category. Only 7 percent of two-parent families had scores that placed them in the bottom two categories, and 11 percent in the ‘somewhat restricted’ category. At the other end of the scale, only 10 percent of sole-parent families had scores that placed them in the ‘good’ or ‘very good’ living standards categories. This compares with 38 percent of two-parent families (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; 110).

Krishnan, Jensen and Ballantyne (2002; 51) note that “sole-parent families with dependant children” had the lowest average living standards out of all families types (including single person, and couple only families). In relation to all family types:

Sole-parents with dependent children were at least four times less likely than any other family type to have a living standard score that placed them in the upper (levels 6 and 7) range, twice as likely as any other family to have an ELSI score that placed in the ‘restricted’ (level 2) category, and at least four times more

²¹ Economic Living Standards Index (ELSI) is based on a living standards assessment tool that measures consumption rather than income, and includes some self-rating questions around satisfaction with standard of living (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; 13-17).

²² The ELSI does not measure ‘poverty’ per se, but the distribution of the full range of living standards across household types. For a discussion on child poverty in New Zealand see Krishnan, Jensen & Rochford, 2002.

likely to have a score placing them in the very 'restricted' (level 1) category (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; 51).

The differences in the living standards between one and two-parent families are, for the most part, because of differences in source of income between these family types. Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne (2002; 112) note that there is little difference in the living standards of one and two-parent families who receive their primary income from benefits. In the late 1990s, nearly 70 percent of one-parent families received income from this source, whereas 95 percent of two-parent families received income from market sources. Thus, as the researchers note, the lower overall living standards of one-parent families is "not so much the fact of sole parenthood, but that this is so strongly associated with the receipt of income-tested benefits" (Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002; 112).

However, change in local patterns of family formation and family well-being should be understood alongside wider global changes around the social organisation of work, and changes in social policy discourses around the relationship between the individual, the family and the State. The impact of contemporary forms of globalisation on work, and contemporary forms of individualisation on family and intimate life are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. Writing from a European political-economy perspective, Hobson, Lewis and Birte (2002; 5) argue that globalisation²³ has transformed both the historic labour contract at the centre of the modern liberal welfare state, and the historic gender contract upon which the labour contract was premised. While the labour contract between capital and labour was based on full and stable male employment, the gender contract was articulated as a similarly stable breadwinner-caregiver ideal family, with women responsible for unpaid care work. The impact of globalisation on the late twentieth century labour market has seen the implosion of the traditional labour contract. Labour deregulation, structural unemployment and labour insecurity emerged as necessarily definitive features of competitive post-Fordist and neo-liberal late modern economies. In this context, the social costs of liberal welfarism (managing the risks typical of industrial economies) borne by individual nation-states became increasingly understood as barriers to international competitiveness.

²³ Defined by Hobson, Lewis and Birte (2002) as the international movement of goods, capital and labour.

The collapse of the traditional labour contract, change in patterns of family formation and the decline of the breadwinner-caregiver family ideal, and changes in the traditional patterning of social provisions of welfare states had gendered effects. New forms of flexible work and changes in welfarism have therefore become particularly problematic for women²⁴. As Hobson et al (2002; 5) note:

[Women's] leverage on the labour market has always been weak relative to men and [women's] complicated relationship to unpaid care work as well as paid employment makes them especially vulnerable to reductions in social provision, both as workers and as clients.

Nevertheless, the impact of contemporary globalisation on women's lives in neo-liberal welfare states is by no means even. While in New Zealand opportunities for women's labour have expanded, much of this work is feminised, insecure, and poorly paid (Hill, 2000). At the same time, neo-liberalism has produced a new type of 'welfare' contract. Hobson et al (2002; 7) argue that the most important change is in the assumptions underlying welfare provision, and the ways in which governments provide social assistance. Here, in late modern neo-liberal economies, the emphasis has shifted from public to private provision, from centralised redistribution on the basis of need to market allocation, from universality to targeting, from tax based to user-pays regimes, from central planning to decentralisation, and from collective claims of social rights or entitlements to the individual demonstration of responsibility (Boston, 1999).

While these are broad tendencies, different nations-states do respond differently to the forces of globalisation, and different welfare regimes express different logics, including different relationships between the market, the family and the State (Hobson et al, 2002; 11, Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001; Boston, 1999). Thus, differences in the living standards of New Zealand families receiving income from 'the market' and families receiving income from 'the State' in the form of welfare benefits can be explained as a structural outcome of various discourses informing the policy orientations of New Zealand's neo-liberal 'welfare' state. However, in historically liberal welfare states (such as New Zealand) family policy also continues to be shaped by the historical commitment to a particular family form, that of a two-parent family, and a specific model of the way the family 'functions' – that of the 'breadwinner-caregiver model'

²⁴ Callister (1998) notes the loss of men's traditional economic power as an outcome of labour market restructuring in New Zealand, especially amongst 'prime age' men. See also Hill (2000).

(Bryson, 1992). New Zealand welfarism has always been a form of 'liberal welfarism': assistance to families was largely in the form of means-tested benefits and modest universal transfers, entitlement rules have always been strict and claiming entitlements has often been associated with stigma. Similarly working-age people who have typically received their primary source of income from State welfare benefits share similar levels of wealth, and are generally less wealthy than people participating in the paid labour market (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999). As in other late modern societies with this history of liberal welfarism, the shift in New Zealand to neo-liberal social and economic policies in the 1980s and 1990s intensified many of these general characteristics of liberal welfarism (Bryson, 1992).

Conclusion

This chapter situates the research that is presented in this thesis in its broader context. Key thesis terms and a thesis outline have been included. Changes in New Zealand family households over the past thirty years have also been identified. The increase in the number of women parenting alone has been identified as an outcome of a range of demographic and social changes in New Zealand during this period. The shift in New Zealand's political economy from liberal welfarist to neo-liberal has also been situated within a broader international context, and the links between family type and differences in family well-being within this context have been identified.

The latter sections of this chapter have drawn heavily on statistical description of changes in New Zealand family households. However, as noted in the beginning of this chapter, the increase in the number of women parenting alone in late modern societies has become politicised under the conditions of neo-liberalism. Rather than the increase in the number of lone mothers being understood as illustrative of the 'freeing of the slave women', and as representative of the freedom of women to form autonomous households economically independent from men, the increase has been constructed as a symbol of social disintegration. Importantly, as Lewis (2001; 11) notes:

Much of the debate about the family in the late twentieth century has been in fact a struggle over the meaning of statistics ... with little attempt to refer to the admittedly limited research on the changes that have actually taken place inside family relationships, or to investigate them further.

In the following chapter I explore literature relating to theories of individualization as a tendency of late modernity, and the contribution of this theoretical approach for ‘making sense’ of changes in contemporary family life. I then present a review of literature around the *experience* of women parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform.

Chapter Two

Individualization and Welfare Reform

We now inhabit ... a risk society in which we must negotiate a more precarious relationship with the labour market and look to the state to do little more than facilitate the management of individual risk (Dean, 2001; 268).

Introduction

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, women who parent alone occupy contested subject positions. On the one hand, the increase in the number of women parenting alone is seen as an outcome of a number of broader social changes impacting on the structure of family households. On the other, lone mothers 'dependent on welfare' have become problematic mothers and citizens. As noted in Chapter One, the post-Fordist and neo-liberal character of late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism has exacerbated the precarious connections between the material well-being of lone mothers' households and the autonomy and financial independence of women. Similarly, in the last thirty years, dominant constructions of lone mothers have changed. In the 1970s lone mothers were constructed as like other mothers, and their rights as citizen-mothers recognised through the provision of benefits such as the DPB. By the 1990s, lone mothers in receipt of the DPB were constructed as different to other mothers and failing in their responsibilities as citizen-workers²⁵.

In this chapter I outline the sociological concept of individualization, a process that has also been identified as a characteristic of late modernity. My focus here incorporates the ideas of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. I argue that although individualization is a process linked to late modernity, it has equal utility for describing the impact of neo-liberalism on the organisation of individual biographies. Individualization is then briefly discussed in the context of claims that new relational forms characterise intimate relationships in late modernity, and that these new relational

²⁵ This discursive shift in New Zealand is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, 'Constructing Lone Mothers as Others'.

forms have been made possible because women and men have become ‘more equal’ (Giddens, 1992). However, I argue that although intimate relationships may have become more contingent in late modernity, adult biographies remain structured by gender. In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, parenting alone is gendered. Despite other changes in family households in the past 30 years, the proportion of women parenting alone compared to men has remained remarkably stable. With this in mind I review selected literature around the experiences of women parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform, and identify three broad themes that emerge from the research literature: the social identity of mother; the stigma of parenting alone; and the materiality of parenting alone.

Individualization and Family Life in Late Modern Societies

Rather than simply attributing the increase in the number of women parenting alone to one or a combination of demographic changes impacting on the structure of family households, some sociologists have argued that changes in family structures are the outcome of changes in the meanings people bring to their experience of family life. In particular, these changing meanings stem from fundamental changes in the nature of contemporary society, including the rise of individualism. Indeed, many commentators have argued that individualism is a key feature of contemporary social life (see Lewis, 2001; 5-22), although the motif of individualism as transformative (either positively or negatively) for social institutions and social structures has persisted since sociology emerged as an enlightenment science (Lewis, 2001).

Lewis (2001) for example, notes that individualism and a belief in the rights of the individual to experience ‘personal fulfilment’ were popularised in western societies in the 1970s. Since that time, and sitting alongside the rise of individualism, has been a rise in individual-focused sociological analyses of family life (Cheal, 1991). As Cheal (1991; 132) notes, this individual focus may be “because structural changes in society [such as the ascendancy of neo-liberalism] have made relations between autonomous individuals the principal basis for everyday social life”.

As an example, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim and Ulrich Beck argue that changes in patterns of family formation and the experience of and meanings around adult intimacy are an outcome of the structural process of individualization (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Beck, 2002a; 2002b; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 2002b; 1995). This theoretical approach to individualization has been particularly useful in the development of this thesis, and especially in relation to critiquing claims that new relational forms of intimacy characterise late modernity have potential to radically democratise social life (Giddens, 1992).

Beck-Gernsheim and Beck argue that individualization is the outcome of two inevitable modernizing processes. Firstly, contemporary social life has become more precarious and contingent *for individuals*, as the social relations, bonds, values and beliefs characteristic of modern²⁶ society have lost their meaning. In late modern societies individualization is evidenced by the disintegration of the social categories of modernity as, for example, class, the family, and the neighbourhood are rapidly ‘de-traditionalised’. However, simultaneous with the processes of de-traditionalisation, individualization requires *an individual* through which the residual institutions of the modern period (the labour market, the welfare system, the miscellaneous bureaucracies of State) can be enacted. Thus, individualization demands an individual biography into which the entitlements, demands, regulations of late modernity can be pressed. Combined, these processes compel individuals to “lead a life of one’s own” as individuals, and as individuals, to “seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions” of late modern society. As such, individuals are becoming the “basic unit of social life for the first time in history” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; xxii).

In late modernity “the daily struggle for a life of one’s own has become a collective experience of the western world” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 22). Late modernity is characterised by the end of traditional certainties previously embedded in the identity formation institutions of modernity. For example, both the experience of paid employment and family life have become much less continuous, more contingent, and the identities extruded through the traditional institutional organisation of these modes

²⁶ Both Beck-Gernsheim and Beck describe ‘modern’ society as ‘traditional’ society, arguing that in fact many pre-industrial traditional social practices and institutions were carried forward after the modernising period. To avoid confusion, I use the term modern here in preference to ‘traditional’ and refer to the middle decades of the twentieth century.

no longer hold. The “standard biographies” of modernity have been eclipsed by the “elective biographies” of late modernity²⁷ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a). However, elective biographies require that actors live individual, de-traditionalised lives, ‘responsible’ for their own life trajectories.

Thus, the late modern self piecing together an elective biography is a hyper-active self; inventive, resourceful, and “condemned” to the activity of constant individualised identity formation as the structural processes of individualization press upon each individual relentlessly. Similarly, in the “self-culture” of late modernity a life of one’s own becomes a “risky venture” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b; 48). That is, “a normal life story becomes a (seemingly) elective life, a risk biography, in the sense that everything (or nearly everything) is a matter for decision” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b; 48) and, as “*homo optionis*”, individuals are constantly required to make decisions:

Life, death, gender, corporeality, identity, religion, marriage, parenthood, social ties – all are becoming decidable down to the small print; once fragmented into options, everything must be decided (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 48).

In late modernity, the *homo optionis* self is responsible not only for their own individual identity formation, but also for storying the vagaries and uncertainties encountered as “personal misfortunes and unanticipated events” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 24). Thus, the processes of individualization de-collectivise experience. Under such conditions, the cultural logic of late modernity in effect turns Mills’ (1987/1959) sociological dictum on its head: ‘public issues’ become ‘personal troubles’ as the burden of risk from structural inequalities and social divisions are injected into individual biographies through individualized discourses of choice, blame and personal responsibility. Thus, life events (for example, unemployment, or divorce) previously understood as “structural outcomes”, or “systematically generalised fate” break up “into millions of pieces ... ‘individualized’ out of existence” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b; 50).

²⁷ Beck also describes late modernity as ‘risk society’. I continue the use of the term late modern here to designate a period, rather than to offer any inherent analysis of the features of late modernity like the concept ‘risk society’ offers. See Beck (1992) and Beck (1999).

In many respects, this account of individualization as a relentless modernising process, producing the ‘new’ conditions of late modernity under which, as individuals, we are simultaneously compelled and restrained from action, mirrors in part, the rhetoric and logic of neo-liberalism. Larner (1998) notes that neo-liberalism can be understood in three ways: as a policy framework; as an ideology; and as a governmentality. As a policy framework, neo-liberalism rests upon five ‘values’: “the individual, freedom of choice, market security, laissez faire, and minimal government” (Larner, 1998; 6). As an ideology, neo-liberalism is not only a set of ideas, and power is not simply exerted by the State, but rather, hegemonic relations are achieved “through a process of contestation and struggle” (Larner, 1998; 9). Finally, as a governmentality, neo-liberalism constitutes new political technologies and objects of government, that is, new ‘individuals’ are extruded who ‘govern themselves’ through the technologies of neo-liberalism²⁸. Thus, similarly with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s imagery of homo optionis, while the policies of neo-liberalism may promise less government, “it does not follow that there is less governance” (Larner, 1998; 12). Rather, as individuals are inevitably subjectified by neo-liberal discourses, as subjects they must govern themselves as ‘active’, ‘responsible’, self reliant’ individuals.

While the processes of individualization produce hyper-active individuals, it is important to note that these individuals are not ‘free’ in the liberal-humanist sense. Although individualization may “free individuals from the bounds of tradition”, individuals are always “within society” and acting within a “density of regulations” and “the more subtle norms constructed by mass media, advertising and consumption” (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 43). While traditional guidelines for action have faded, contemporary social institutions such as the (fragmented) labour market and the (residual) welfare state act upon (or discursively ‘govern’) individuals, inducing individuals to action while at the same time, constraining individual choice.

If the late modern self is an individuated self, and ‘governed’ as an active self piecing together an individuated biography, what are the consequences for ‘modern’ family forms, and the experience of and meanings that people bring to family life? Beck-

²⁸ I found the work of Rose (1993) particularly useful in explaining transitions in forms of governmentality, and the ways in which selves as ‘an effect’ are extruded discursively in ‘advanced’ liberal democracies.

Gernsheim and Beck argue that under the conditions of late modernity, personal relationships take on new significance as ‘traditional’ patterns of family life become increasingly fragile (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a). As the bonds of traditional marriage have become more diluted, the attraction of a close personal relationship grows (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 32). In late modernity, the source of personal stability is no longer ‘the family’ defined by traditional ties and obligations. Rather, marriage becomes “an institution specialising in the maintenance of individuals” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 51). Thus, “the family lives on” but as a de-traditionalised, post-familial form (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 18) that is no longer a “community of need” held together through gendered patterns of mutual obligation, but as an “elective relationship”:

[A]n association of individual persons, who each bring to it their own interests, experiences and plans, and who are each subjected to different controls, risks and constraints (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002b; 97).

In late modern societies then, people continue to live within the bounds of ‘family’. However, these relationships are comparatively impermanent and contingent, as contemporary family life focuses on the contradictory individual needs for both intimacy, and freedom from the traditions of ongoing mutual obligations.

The “Pure Relationship” and the Promise of Equality

In a similar vein, Giddens (1992; 62) argues that “the separating and divorcing society of today” is an effect of the emergence of a new form of intimacy, itself a product of the inherent dynamism of modernity²⁹. At the heart of the late modern “generic restructuring of intimacy” (Giddens, 1992; 58) is a highly reflexive self. This is because, in general, the institutional reflexivity characteristic of late-modernity entails the constant examination and reformation of social practices “in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constantly altering their character” (Giddens, 1990; 38). Under such conditions, the self has become a continuous reflexive

²⁹ The dynamism of modernity is a product of three historically specific features of modern institutions (Giddens, 1990; 17-45). The separation and reintegration of time and space in modernity has made possible new forms of social organisation not necessarily mediated by place. The ‘disembedding’ or ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts has occurred through abstract systems of exchange, expertise and trust. Finally, the ‘institutional reflexivity’ of modernity means that knowledge is constantly reviewed in the light of new knowledge, simultaneously “undermining the certainty of knowledge” (Giddens, 1991; 20) and constituting a much more ‘reflexive self’ expected to ‘use’ knowledge to continuously make ‘life style’ choices which “define who the individual is” (Giddens, 1992; 76).

project, requiring an ongoing individual reconstruction of one's past in order to project a coherent (self) narrative towards the future (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens (1992) argues that under such conditions of late modernity, "confluent love" has come to replace "romantic love", the latter a form of emotional tie that hitherto characterised family life in modern societies. During the mid-twentieth century, the ideals of romantic love required gendered actors "each defined as an antithesis" to draw closer together within the institutional boundaries of traditional marriage and a lifelong trajectory of conjugal 'one-ness' (Giddens, 1992; 61). However, in the past thirty years, romantic love has been displaced, particularly under pressure from "female sexual emancipation" (Giddens, 1992; 61). The gender order enacted through romantic love and expressed through traditional marital and familial ties has become fragmented. While romantic love provided a "life trajectory, oriented to an anticipated yet malleable future" through a shared history and life-long marital partnership, in late modernity the "joining together" of confluent love is necessarily temporary (Giddens, 1992; 44-45).

Confluent love is qualitatively different to romantic love. Confluent love is contingent, terminable, and "jars with the 'for-ever, the one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex" (Giddens, 1992; 61). In this sense, confluent love is an expression of the ontological individualism of a reflexive self. Confluent love engages actors as individuals, constituted through their discrete lifestyles and interests. Rather than seeking the perfect partner, confluent love is tied to the quest for the pure relationship, a relationship "for me", "at this time". Thus, the pure relationship is a distinctively late modern relational form:

entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another, and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay in it (Giddens, 1992; 58).

For Giddens (1992) the reflexive project of self portends radical possibilities for the democratisation of personal life. The breaking down of the traditional familial roles (prescribed through the ideals of romantic love) means that women and men are more free to 'choose' the ways in which they might 'do' relationships over their life spans, and that women and men have become 'more equal'. Giddens (1992) argues that in late modernity, the biographies of men and women have become more similar, especially in

relation to paid work and sexual expression. For example, the biographical trajectory of sexual experience is now less gendered, and no longer tied to marriage through romantic love as the 'plastic sexuality' characteristic of late modernity which has separated sexual experience from traditional institutional obligations for sexual partners. Women and men are now reflexive, active, *individual* sexual agents, and the "achievement of reciprocal sexual pleasure [is] a key element in whether the relationship is sustained or dissolved" (Giddens, 1992; 62). Similarly, as a consequence of this becoming 'more equal', the traditional gendered social divisions both between both women and men, and between different 'types' of women have broken down:

Confluent love develops as an ideal in a society where almost everyone has the chance to become sexually accomplished; and it presumes the disappearance of the schism between 'respectable' women and those who in some way lie outside the pale of orthodox social life (Giddens, 1992; 63).

In this thesis, I take issue with Giddens' claims that the divisions between men and women, and between 'types' of women have broken down under the conditions of late modernity. As Smart and Neale (1999; 12) note, Giddens "unfortunately gives the impression that confluent love and the pure relationship is available to all men and women who are able to free themselves from the normative constraints of the romantic love complex". Giddens not only fails to attend to the ways in which access to material resources shape the experience of confluent love and the 'freedom' to exercise reflexive lifestyle 'choices', but also the ways in which many adults continue to experience intimacy in the context of the *gendered* materiality of both biological and social reproduction. As noted earlier in this thesis, in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, lone parenting remains gendered. Lone mothers lives may be shaped by new contingencies around relationship forms and patterns of obligation that characterise late modernity, but their biographies as mothers remain gendered. Similarly, the social meanings around women parenting alone remain powerful in their effects. Under the conditions of neo-liberalism characteristic of the political economy of late modernity, lone mothering remains tightly connected to persistent patterns of social inequality, and especially to the feminization of poverty legitimated by neo-liberal policy, ideologies and forms of governmentality.

Jamieson (1998) uses the term 'disclosing intimacy' to describe the idea that a fundamental transformation in intimate relationships has occurred, characterised by

individuals sharing their thoughts and feelings as ‘equal’ social actors. Jamieson (1999; 1998) critiques claims that the contemporary experience of personal relationships can be understood as an outcome of intensified individualism, noting that this claim mirrors a long running theme in sociological theories of family life (Jamieson, 1999; 479). Rather, Jamieson argues that the idea of disclosing intimacy (and specifically the notion of the pure relationship) inaccurately portrays contemporary personal life as autonomous individuals intently ‘disclosing self’ to each other, divorced from the persistent social inequalities and divisions that structure everyday social relations (Jamieson, 1999; 486-487).

In particular, Jamieson (1999) argues that claims around the ascendancy of ‘disclosing intimacy’ are empirically fragile, and rather than engaging with the substantial body of empirical work tracing changes in contemporary intimate and family life (see Jamieson, 1998), draw upon representations of cultural assumptions that such a change has occurred (Jamieson, 1999; 479). Giddens is criticised for “failing to distinguish the experiences of lived lives from views of how they should be lived” (Jamieson, 1999; 479). In particular, Jamieson argues that the individualism at the centre of ‘disclosing intimacy’ shifts the analytical focus from the ways in which wider social relations are played out in one’s personal life, and the ways in which structural inequalities continue to shape the lives of individuals is elided. Thus, argues Jamieson, focusing on the idea that the relational character of heterosexual relationships is changing obscures the persistent and institutionalised inequalities that structure those relationships (Jamieson, 1999; 481).

Finally, Jamieson (1999) argues that the rhetoric of disclosing intimacy constitutes another repertoire through which social actors can make sense of their conventional relationships. Here, argues Jamieson, the everyday practicalities of social reproduction and the unequal material circumstances in which this is likely to occur are masked by the rhetoric of ‘equality’ and self-sustaining revelations at the heart of the idea of disclosing intimacy. As Jamieson notes, there is a considerable body of sociological research that shows the multiple ways in which social actors construct personal accounts

that in effect disguise the ongoing experience of inequality, rather than radically transform it (Jamieson, 1999; 482)³⁰.

As noted, the idea that the practices and meanings around intimacy have shifted in late modernity as a consequence of individualization and the rise of new forms of individualism has some implications when considering the experience of women parenting alone. Theoretically, at least, the rise of confluent love and the pure relationship suggests that different family forms have equal 'legitimacy', and that lone parenting is one expression of 'choice' within a smorgasbord of familial and intimate biographies. For lone mothers then, parenting alone might be a transitional moment between contingent relationship experiences, or a lifestyle choice in itself. However, the rise of confluent love does not adequately explain why couples (as well as individual women) continue to have children, and the differential impact of children on gendered adult biographies. While intimate relationships between adults may have become more contingent in the last thirty years, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have shifted and intensified 'responsibility' for the care of children as parenting has become increasingly understood as a 'lifestyle choice'. Importantly, while men and women may have become 'more equal', in New Zealand this 'equality' has not been reflected in patterns of parenting after parental relationships end. While women may be able to make more active 'choices' around becoming mothers and the timing of motherhood within their maternal biographies, mother-child familial relationships appear to have remained somewhat more permanent than adult intimate relationships.

Most importantly then, the rise of confluent love and the personal quest for the pure relationship does not explain the persistence of lone parenting as an indefatigable gendered phenomenon. In New Zealand, as in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, the proportion of women parenting alone has remained much more static than other indicators of familial change. Similarly, theoretical claims in favour of the democratisation of personal life seem exaggerated in the context of the material effects of ending relationships on the lives of women with children³¹. As noted in

³⁰ See also, Jamieson, 1998; 158-175.

³¹For example, in Britain, separation is associated with a substantial decline in income for mothers and children, and less change in the fathers' income (Jarvis & Jenkins, 1998; 116).

Chapter One, in late modern societies this is most likely to be a residual effect of the ways in which the breadwinner-caregiver model of family life continues to shape women's employment opportunities both structurally and personally. In addition, the impact of neo-liberal welfare reforms have severely constrained the citizenship right of mothers *as mothers* to maintain autonomous households.

In outlining the impact of the processes of individualization on individual biographies, Beck-Gernsheim (2002c) argues that women in late modern societies piece together "a bit of a life". In other words, traces of the traditional familial obligations that characterised modern gender relations remain, constraining women as *homo optionis*. In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, lone motherhood is a site where such constraints are played out biographically. This is illustrated in the next section as I review literature exploring how women who parent alone make sense of their experiences in the context of neo-liberal welfare reforms.

Lone Mothers and Welfare Reform

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, welfare reform discourses often use the term lone mother as coterminous with 'beneficiary' (Bock, 2000). Indeed, in such societies many lone mothers do rely on welfare benefits as a primary income source. As noted earlier in this thesis, this reflects the ways in which the breadwinner-caregiver family model continues to structure the lives of women and mothers in late modern societies. Nevertheless, under the conditions of neo-liberalism, lone mothers have increasingly been constructed through discourses of dependency (Fraser & Gordon, 1994), as members of an emerging underclass (Gans, 1995) and as types of people who have become social problems because of the 'generosity' of the post-war welfare state (Edwards & Duncan, 1997)³². The 'collapse of the family' (that is, the decline in the number of breadwinner-caregiver families) and the increase in the number of families in receipt of welfare benefits has been explained through a number of claims. These include the emergence of a 'culture of dependency' that has simultaneously eroded the 'work ethic', disrupted traditional gendered patterns of

³² See, as an example, McLoughlin, 1991.

family obligation, and produced particular types of (welfare dependent) people³³. These discourses have had material effects in the lives of women parenting alone. Neo-liberal welfare reforms that have ‘responded’ to ‘the problem of dependency’ have for example, cut welfare entitlements, privatised services previously provided socially, and implemented welfare to work programmes to move ‘beneficiaries’ from welfare to work (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Little, 1999; Strell, 1999; Walter, 2002). Neo-liberal welfare reforms have not only had material effects in the lives of lone mothers, they have also shaped the ways in which women who parent alone position themselves as women, mothers and citizens (Gardiner, 2000). That is, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses shape individual subjectivity as well as shape the material conditions of lone mothers’ every day lives

In this section I outline a selection of the research literature that has investigated the experiences of women parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform. I draw upon literature from the USA, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Each country has a history of liberal welfarism, and each has undertaken programmes of neo-liberal welfare reforms in the past decade or so. However, it is important to note that there are significant differences between these countries, both in terms of the historical development of the modern welfare state in each country, and each country’s programme of neo liberal welfare reform. Rather than offer a comparative policy analysis³⁴, this chapter focuses instead on the experiences of lone mothers, and the similarities and differences of these experiences as women parenting alone in the context of welfare reform.

Welfare reform in the USA left individual States with “considerable latitude ... to implement reform within federally mandated parameters” (Seccombe, Battle Walters & James, 1999; 1). In the mid 1990s, President Bill Clinton abolished the longstanding welfare programme, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)³⁵, replacing it

³³ See, as an example, Department of Social Welfare, 1998.

³⁴ For a comparative analysis of these policy regimes see Baker & Tippin, 1999; Bradshaw, 1998; O’Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999. For an overview of typologies of welfarism from feminist perspectives see Sainsbury (1996), and Daly & Rake (2003).

³⁵ AFDC had provided women parenting alone with means-tested assistance since 1935, and initially, the purpose of AFDC was to “free mothers from the necessity of wage labor so that they could devote themselves to childrearing” (Little, 1999; 162). Little (1999) notes that by the 1960s, the US federal

with a new programme, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The reforms were in part because AFDC was considered ‘unaffordable’, even though AFDC accounted for approximately one percent of federal spending (Seccombe, James & Battle Walter, 1998; 850). More importantly, the reforms were driven by a set of ideas about the type of people ‘on welfare’, and the effects ‘of welfare’ on both those types of people, and on USA society more generally (O’Connor, 2001; Little, 1999; Seccombe et al, 1999; Seccombe et al, 1998; Gans, 1995).

Clinton’s reforms introduced time limits on benefit entitlement (five years lifetime entitlement in blocks of no longer than two years), the enactment of welfare to work targets (25 percent of recipients to be employed by the end of 1997, 50 percent by the end of 2002), and ‘family caps’ (no additional entitlement for children born after the recipient first claims a benefit) (Seccombe et al, 1999)³⁶. These three key federal requirements mirrored constructions of welfare recipients as “lazy, unmotivated, of cheating the system or having additional children simply to increase the amount of their benefit check” (Seccombe et al, 1998; 850) and proceeded despite evidence that sixty percent of AFDC recipients did not stay on welfare for more than two years (Gans, 1995; 70), that nearly half of all recipients were working (Gans, 1995; 70), and that women AFDC recipients had lower fertility rates than women not in receipt of AFDC (Rank, 1992; 289).

The ways in which women in receipt of welfare make sense of their experience in the context of welfare reform has been explored by a number of researchers. In 1995 researchers interviewed 47 women who were approached while queuing for food stamps at a State aid agency (Seccombe et al, 1999; Seccombe et al, 1998). Through a phenomenological thematic analysis using a constant comparative method, the researchers explored the women’s experience of stigma as welfare recipients (Seccombe

government began encouraging states to implement programs to encourage women AFDC recipients into paid work. In 1988, the federal Family Support Act was passed, encouraging states to offer vocational training, education and job search activities along with the requirement that States’ “place ever larger percentages of those receiving AFDC into wage labor” (Little, 1999; 162).

³⁶ The effects of these reforms, for example time limits on benefits, as linked to the rise of the working poor in the USA, are now being reported. See Ehrenreich (2001).

et al, 1998), and the women's explanatory frameworks in accounting for the experience of poverty in the USA (Seccombe et al, 1999).

The participants in Seccombe et al's research (1999, 1998) were from different ethnic backgrounds and from a range of ages. Some were employed in part-time or full-time paid work, most were in subsidized housing, most had high school diplomas or higher qualifications, but all qualified for AFDC (Seccombe et al, 1998). All wanted "substantial reform" and all talked of "life on welfare" as "depressing", "rough", "difficult", "a trap" and so on. When questioned about the three key components of the then proposed federal reforms, most opposed time limits, most supported work requirements, and most opposed family caps. Time limits were seen as arbitrary, with most of the women accounting for their use of AFDC as an outcome of either structural constraints (for example, lack of childcare, or non-enforcement of child support entitlements) or fate (for example, poor health, or fleeing an abuser). Support for work requirements were generally conditional on the women's children being of school age, that childcare be affordable, and that jobs were paid above the minimum wage. Some women also saw paid work as better for self esteem, as being a good role model for their children, and a way to get new skills. Two thirds of the women opposed family caps because of its 'faulty logic', while one third supported it, claiming that women have children to get more welfare money. As Seccombe et al (1998) note however, several women acknowledged that they had never actually met anyone who had done this, but they were nonetheless convinced it happened.

The women's responses in relation to the then proposed family caps policy exemplify how some women in receipt of welfare not only experience stigma, but also reject the stigmatising characteristics of dominant stereotypes in relation to their own experience while 'passing the stigma on'. Seccombe et al (1999; 862) explain this as a consequence of the "hegemony of the individualistic perspective" in American culture that constitutes poverty as a personal problem rather than as an outcome of structured inequalities. All the women reported overwhelmingly that they had experienced stigma as a result of being welfare recipients. When asked why they were 'on welfare', most gave structural (an outcome of racism or sexism, an outcome of no jobs and no childcare) and 'fatalistic' accounts (an outcome of bad luck with health or relationships) for their own experience. However, when asked about other women welfare recipients,

individualistic or ‘culture of poverty’ explanations were more likely to be invoked: other women did not deserve welfare, other women had more children for more money, other women assumed that welfare would take care of them. Thus, Seccombe et al (1999) argue that individualism provides an important explanatory resource for women lone parents to make sense of their own experience in the context of welfare reform discourses. Similarly, while drawing upon structural and fatalistic explanations provides some ‘resistance’ to individualism, they nevertheless are not sites of organised resistance for women welfare recipients, nor do they challenge the legitimacy of stratification structures in societies with neo-liberal welfare regimes.

Davis & Hagen (1996) convened three focus groups with AFDC recipients in 1994 to explore the experience of stigma of women in receipt of welfare payments. None of the women “liked being on welfare” (Davis & Hagen, 1996; 326) especially because of the intrusiveness of welfare practices (Davis & Hagen, 1996; 333), and most differentiated themselves either morally or behaviourally from other welfare recipients (Davis & Hagen, 1996; 327-329). As with the women in the Seccombe study (Seccombe et al, 1999) the women accounted for their own experience of welfare receipt through recourse to external factors (Davis & Hagen, 1996; 330). Nevertheless, the experience of stigma of being ‘on welfare’ was ameliorated by their own efforts to improve their lives, and the lives of their children. That is:

[A]lthough these women accepted the commonly held stereotypes of welfare cheats and irresponsible welfare mothers, they did not apply these stereotypes to themselves. Instead, they looked at their own efforts and painted a picture of themselves as women who were working hard to better their lives and those of their children (Davis & Hagen, 1996; 332).

Scarborough (2001) interviewed twenty “white” mothers in the USA, all in receipt of welfare and all completing a community college programme during 1995-1996 when public debate on US welfare reform legislation was vociferous. These women lived in small rural towns, were mainly poorly educated, and most were divorced or separated. Using a grounded theory approach, Scarborough (2001; 263) explored how women welfare recipients “carved out agency amid severe structural constraints”. Using a similar analytical approach, Nicholas & JeanBaptiste (2001) convened two sessions of the same eight-person focus group comprised of women from a range of ages and ethnic backgrounds to explore women’s experiences “on public assistance” (Nicholas &

JeanBaptiste, 2001; 299). Although using different methods, these researchers reported similar findings.

In the context of welfare reform, women welfare recipients reported feelings of shame and experiencing stigma (Nicholas & JeanBaptiste, 2001; 307; Scarbrough, 2001; 270) and that life 'on' welfare was a "last resort" (Scarbrough, 2001; 262). Nevertheless, in both pieces of research women reported the importance of their mothering as a legitimate form of work, and the difficulties they anticipated or encountered in moving 'from welfare to work' (Nicholas & JeanBaptiste, 2001; 303; Scarbrough, 2001; 266). For example, Nicholas & JeanBaptiste (2001; 303) noted that the participants' "want(ed) to obtain full-time employment but realized, that, given their family size, a minimum wage would not be adequate to support their family". As Edin & Lein (1997) have also shown, women welfare recipients know that taking any paid work puts other important resources in jeopardy, especially health insurance for themselves and their children (Scarbrough, 2001; 266). Women welfare recipients recognise "meaningful employment" (Nicholas & JeanBaptiste, 2001; 303) as the route out of poverty, but the decision to participate in paid work "hinged on childcare costs" (Scarbrough, 2001; 266). Similarly, under such circumstances for many women "the responsible action [is] not to work outside the home" (Scarbrough, 2001; 268).

Little (1999) identifies the hegemony of "dependency discourses" in the rhetoric and practices of welfare reform in the USA, and in particular, in the invention of welfare to work programmes. Using Fraser and Gordon's genealogy of dependency (Fraser & Gordon, 1994) as her analytical frame, Little (1999; 163) asks: "in a historical moment when dependency discourse is hegemonic, how do [women in welfare to work programmes] manage to resist?". Little (1999) observed an adult basic education programme designed to improve literacy and to develop a 'work-plan' (a personal strategy for returning to work) attended by non-white women AFDC recipients in the mid 1990s. In observing interactions between the women and staff, Little (1999) identified liberal feminist, gender and civil rights discourses through which the programme participants resisted the institutionalised dependency discourses underlying the programme. For example, the participants in the programme saw their freedom from economic dependence on men as a key to personal independence. Little (1999; 177) notes that the participants compared their family situations to those of women in the

1950s, and articulated their ability to independently provide a home for their children as “a virtue and an accomplishment”. Thus, while dependency discourses constituted “welfare as dependent” and “paid work as independent”, the participants drew upon liberal feminist discourses that constituted “living with a man as dependent” and “welfare *or* paid work as independent” (Little, 1999; 176-179).

Little (1999) demonstrates that although women in the programme talked of their experience of the stigma of being ‘on welfare’, they also used a number of discourses to resist the stigmatising elements of the dependency discourse in the context of their own lives. In particular, the women applied the stigmatising elements of dependency discourse to others, constituting other welfare recipients as the *real* dependents and different to themselves (Little, 1999; 175-176). While this identification of others is achieved through use of the dependency discourses, the women simultaneously positioned themselves as independent through both a liberal feminist discourse (that positioned them as independent women), and gender discourses (that positioned them as legitimate mothers)³⁷.

According to Little (1999; 183) it was gender discourses that offered participants the most radical site of resistance to dependency discourses. Women who entered the programme drew upon gender discourses to position themselves as mothers, and to claim the work of mothering as a legitimate form of work. This self-definition of mother may not occur initially, but often emerges as women claim the social identity of mother to counter the discursive constructions of paid work as the only site of ‘independence’ that surrounded them in terms of the programme’s content. As Little (1999: 183) notes, the use of gender discourses to claim mother as a legitimate social identity resisted dependency discourses constructing all welfare recipients as dependent unless working, and civil rights discourses constructing women as the ‘victims’ of racism. Thus, by using the gender discourses, “non-white” women asserted their right to ‘stay home and

³⁷ Interestingly, in comparison to the programme participants, Little (1991) found that programme staff drew upon dependency discourses in general terms, but also upon both feminist and civil rights discourses in relation to their everyday experiences of their ‘clients’. Staff talked about most clients wanting to work, while at the same time drew upon the dependency discourses to categorise, normalise and exclude clients such as the occasional hardcore “‘welfareholics’ – individuals ‘addicted’ to the system” (Little, 1999; 171). Staff used a civil rights and feminist discourses to motivate clients to “rise above racism” in their own personal lives (Little, 1999; 182). As Little (1999; 183) argues, by drawing upon a combination of civil rights and feminist discourses, staff resisted the pathologising elements of dependency discourses through recognition of the structural effects of racism and sexism in their clients lives.

mother', a right that had historically been denied to this group of women (Little, 1999; 183). Although gender discourses did not negate the dependency discourses or their material effects (for example, in compelling the women to attend the programme), gender discourses did value "care-giving as work [and] actually [gave] poor welfare recipients some space within which to resist the harshest demands of workfare programmes" (Little, 1999; 189).

As in the USA, welfare reform in Britain was secured by constructing welfare recipients as particular types of people. Edwards & Duncan (1996; 115) note that two key welfare reform discourses around lone parenting dominated in Britain in the early 1990s. One set of discourses about lone parents as a moral and social underclass suggested that lone parents needed to be forced to 'be rational' (as welfarism was encouraging irrationality). In this context notions of 'the underclass' were employed in debates about 'the family' in British society. Edwards & Duncan (1997; 33) identify 1993 (and particularly the Conservative Party Conference) as the "high point" of the demonisation of lone mothers, when "lone mothers found themselves vilified by right wing politicians and the popular media as threats to the fabric of the social order (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 23). Again, in the mid 1990s, lone mothers were in the news: in 1996 as central actors in the national debate about British society's moral values, and in 1997, as 'welfare dependents' needing 'sticks or carrots' to move them from welfare to work (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 23). Another set of discourses around the social problems associated with lone parenting suggested that lone parents wanted to be rational, but the structure of welfarism prevented this. The 'New Deal' policies of the mid 1990s exemplify the enactment of this discourse.

Similar to other liberal welfare states, the number of lone parent households rose in the Britain in 1980s and early 1990s, while at the same time the participation rates of lone mothers (compared to married mothers) in paid work declined (Bryson, Ford & White, 1997; 4). By the 1990s, British lone mothers were much more likely not to work compared to most other western European countries³⁸ (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 1). During the same period, one-parent families in Britain were shown to be materially worse off than the poorest categories of two-parent families (Bryson, Ford & White,

³⁸ Most of which did not have a history of liberal welfarism.

1997; 5). This difference in the workforce participation of lone mothers, combined with the over-representation of households headed by lone mothers living in poverty, formed a particular welfare reform discourse in Britain focused on paid work as a practical solution to the problems associated with lone parenting (especially poverty). In this sense, the 'New Deal' policy initiatives of 'New Labour' focused less on the rhetoric of 'lone mothers' *as* social problems, and more on the rhetoric of *the* social problems associated with lone parenting. Increasing the employment rates of lone mothers would not only reduce the cost of welfare spending, but was also considered "the best hope of improving the living standard for lone parent families" (Bryson, Ford & White, 1997; 1). Thus, policy initiatives from the mid 1990s focused on improving participation rates in paid work through for example, "in-work benefits"³⁹, maintenance disregards⁴⁰, and childcare offsets" (Bryson, Ford & White, 1997; 7).

Discourses about welfare reform in the 1990s in Britain had material effects on the lives of women parenting alone in that they were also an important context for 'decision making' by lone mothers about how to live (and make sense of) their lives (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 63). Edwards & Duncan (1996) argue that the erroneous notion of the 'rational economic man' dominated explanations for patterns of lone mothers participation in the labour market (see also Duncan & Edwards, 1999). From this econometric perspective, the relationship between characteristics of lone mothers ('the stimulus') and work ('the response') were studied in order to predict labour market participation (Edwards & Duncan, 1996; 117). Accordingly, from this perspective policy makers need only adjust the stimulus to achieve the required response. In critiquing this approach, Edwards & Duncan (1996; 115) argue that it is based upon a model of "individual economic agents maximis(ing) their personal welfare based on cost-benefit calculations".

³⁹ As in New Zealand, the British government introduced a tax-credit scheme for low income 'working' families called Family Credit (see Bryson, Ford & White, 1997; 6).

⁴⁰ As in New Zealand, the British government reformed child maintenance legislation. In both countries child maintenance payments are debited pound for pound / dollar for dollar against income support payments. However, for mothers in paid work in Britain, 'maintenance disregards' were introduced for calculating Family Credit and Housing Benefits (see Bryson, Ford & White, 1997; 6-7).

Alternatively, based on interviews with 65 lone mothers from four different geographical areas in Britain, Edwards & Duncan (1997; 38) explored “the motivations in lone mothers taking up paid work or not” (see also, Duncan & Edwards, 1999; Edwards & Duncan; 1996). They argue that women lone parents adopt “gendered moral rationalities” that surface in particular social and geographic settings, and that enact in different ways. Lone mothers have particular but heterogeneous understandings about their identity as mothers and lone mothers that are acquired through a repertoire of discourses “constructed, negotiated and sustained socially in particular contexts” (Edwards & Duncan, 1996; 125).

Edwards & Duncan (1997; 38) identify three types of gendered moral rationalities, each possessing different possibilities in terms of orientation to paid work. Gendered moral rationalities are constituted through “gendered and institutional social processes [comprised of] the expectations and beliefs shared by social groups that may produce differentiated notions of rational courses of action” (Edwards & Duncan, 1996; 119). As Duncan & Edwards (1999; 199-121) note, these are abstract ideal types, constructed through analysis of interview transcripts. As second order constructs they “capture the key features of gendered moral rationalities without necessarily displaying all the particularities of cases” (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 120). The three gendered moral rationalities identified are:

1. Primarily mother: within this position, women lone parents give primacy to the moral benefits of physically caring for their children. From this position, it is ‘morally right’ that mothers should meet their children’s need through their care for them, and paid work is *not* morally right.
2. Mother/worker integral: within this position, women lone parents see financial provision through employment as a key part of their moral responsibility for their children. From this position “the children’s needs that mothers ought to meet are for the financial provision and the employment role models” (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 120). Thus part-time and full-time paid work is morally right.
3. Primarily worker: From this position, women who parent alone give primacy to paid work as separate to their identity as mothers, and participation in paid work

is an autonomous moral right. From this perspective, the needs of mothers are at least equal to the needs of children (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 108-143).

Rather than participation in paid work being determined by economic rationality, Duncan & Edwards (1999) argue that it is shaped by complex, socially situated, moral decision making by lone mothers about what is 'good'. For example, different neighbourhoods and social networks provide "different layers of meaning within which lone mothers live their lives and take action" (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 24). In this sense, 'gendered moral rationalities' are conceptually similar to 'discourses' or 'interpretive repertoires' in that they provide a sense making resource drawn upon by social actors understanding and enacting decisions in and about their own lives.

Although the participants were heterogeneous in terms of their social characteristics, the ways in which women drew upon gendered moral rationalities reflected a number of social divisions and local particularities. The participants were grouped into seven social groups, according to class, ethnicity, and location / neighbourhood. As Duncan & Edwards argue, women in these groups drew upon plural and often contradictory gendered moral rationalities (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 127-8). For example, the social class differences between the "Brighton-based White 'estate' working class and White suburban mothers ... were overshadowed by shared, and 'traditional', views about motherhood and paid work as incompatible" (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 128). The Brighton and London based 'alternative' mothers "held less traditional ... views about gender roles [and] were more likely to hold a sense of themselves as having an identity as an individual who can be a worker, separate from their identity as a mother" (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 128). Nevertheless, as Duncan & Edwards (1999; 128) note "this view still conforms to the dominant, dichotomous view of mothering and work as separate activities". Finally, Black mothers views were usually not of an either / or relationship between mothering and paid work. Rather, the Black mothers' groups "demonstrated an ability to hold notions of the two as combined ... [thus] mothers can meet their children's needs by providing for them through employment" (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 128).

The notion of gendered moral rationalities informing the experience of women lone parents has been explored by other researchers⁴¹. For example, Ford (1998) found that the importance of ‘good’ mothering (that is, positioning oneself as ‘primarily mother’) was one factor lone mothers identified as beneficial in their interviews. Other gains included avoidance of difficulties with childcare access and cost, avoidance of children’s poor response to childcare, and an opportunity to adjust to the lone parenting role. However, gains from participating in paid work included a potential to increase net income, and the social benefits of working for both mothers and their children (Ford, 1998; 255).

Standing (1997) examined the ways in which the material experience of parenting alone constrains the choices that lone mothers make in relation to their children’s schooling. Based on a small ethnographic study with 27 lone mothers in North London, Standing (1997) explores how ‘choices’ about children’s schooling are made, noting that the consumer rhetoric of responsibility for ensuring “good enough schooling” falls heavily on lone mothers. However, as Standing (1997; 97) notes, the notion of ‘choice’ is socially embedded. Lone mothers do make choices and are “in a continual process of making decisions about how to live their lives as lone mothers” (Standing, 1997; 97). However, such a notion of choice is very different to the notion of ‘choice’ in the consumer rhetoric employed in neo-liberal discourses of the market. According to Standing (1997; 85) notions of choice in education “emphasise ungendered, unclassed and ‘unraced’ parents as individual consumers of their children’s schooling in the educational marketplace”. Rather, the ‘choice’ of many women lone parents is constrained, rather than free. For example, the participants were constrained by both a lack of time and money. School choices were shaped by such things as transport costs, uniform costs, and the time demands of getting children to and from school (Standing, 1997; 87). Similarly, mother’s choices were informed by ‘local knowledge’ and with recourse to their own experiences of racism and sexism as school students (Standing, 1997; 88).

⁴¹ Strell (2001) has used the concept in relation to Norwegian lone mothers decisions about participation in paid work. Based on qualitative interviews with 27 Norwegian lone mothers, Strell (2001; 1) notes that all of her participants “believed the state and society expected them to be in paid work”. For the most part, these women positioned themselves in the context of the ‘mother/worker integral gendered rationality’, and expressed an obligation to provide their children with a standard of living achieved through combining paid work with parenting.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and a modified life course methodology, McKay & Rowlingson (1998) examined 'why' women in Britain became lone mothers. Beginning with the assumption that lone mothers are a diverse group, and the observation that there is little solidarity between lone mothers, MacKay & Rowlingson (1998) proposed that there were different processes shaping the experience of lone parenthood stemming from one's 'route' in. Initially, 1000 women were interviewed in 1986 about their life history from age 14. Following this, 44 women who were lone parents were selected from the larger sample and completed further in-depth interviews. These women were categorised along two axes: whether they were a single mother (that is, became a lone mother while not in a relationship) or a separating mother (that is, became a lone mother when a relationship ended); and whether they had recently become a lone mother (that is, within the last two years) or whether they had been a lone mother for a long time (that is, for more than two years) (McKay & Rowlingson, 1998; 46).

MacKay & Rowlingson (1998; 47) model a normative 'route' into lone motherhood, consequential to the decisions women make at various stages along it. For example, for single women, this route or "series of choices and constraints" resulting in lone motherhood might comprise of: having sexual intercourse while single; not using or failure in contraceptive use; not having an abortion; not "getting together" with the father; not giving the baby up for adoption. For separated women, the route into lone motherhood is typically through either partner leaving the other. Here, MacKay and Rowlingson (1998; 51) identify a number of 'risks' including: marrying young; having children while young and failure of premarital contraception.

While the routes identified by MacKay & Rowlingson (1998) are linear, and assume that social and family life is a series of timely and rational decisions, they do surface some interesting findings from the qualitative interviews. In sum, they demonstrate that lone motherhood is seen by most women as "less problematic than the available alternatives" (MacKay & Rowlingson, 1998: 53). For never married women, proceeding to become lone mothers was often in the context that motherhood potentially provided a more rewarding role than paid work, that their partners were not seen as acceptable 'breadwinner' husbands, and that "lone motherhood provided direct access to a stable, if very low income ...paid directly to the mother" (MacKay & Rowlingson, 1998: 50). For

these women, the social identity of mother provided some autonomy. For separated women, lone motherhood was “a problem”, but better than the experiences cited as the main causes of relationship breakdown: conflict over gender roles, especially once children are born, and domestic violence. For these women, ‘beginning again’ provided the context for autonomy, often realised through moving into paid work. Thus, for both groups of women, becoming lone mothers was typically the consequence of a ‘better than the alternatives’ ‘choice’.

As in other research on the experience of women parenting alone, MacKay & Rowlingson (1998; 55) noted that the participants in their qualitative sample reported lack of money as their most serious problem, followed by the experience of tension between paid work and care giving⁴². However, MacKay & Rowlingson (1998; 49) argue that the experience of stigma, although reported, is no longer sufficient to discourage women from becoming lone parents. They note:

Our evidence suggests that stigma was still rife but the women did not identify themselves as those who had deliberately got pregnant for social security or council housing – a group most lone mothers we interviewed confidently asserted did exist. They could therefore disassociate themselves from much of the general stigma that existed (MacKay & Rowlingson, 1998; 49).

Phoenix (1991) explored the ways in which young British mothers experienced the attribution or stigmatising stereotypes around young motherhood. Although not all of the 79 participants interviewed (during 1985 and 1986) were ‘lone mothers’, Phoenix (1991; 87-91) illustrates the ways in which ideas about particular types of mothers (in this case young mothers) are used to individualise and stigmatise what are in fact, social and structural effects. For example, Phoenix argues that the association between young motherhood and poverty is often portrayed as causal. Rather, argues Phoenix (1991; 89), poverty is the context rather than consequence of young motherhood. Similarly, young mothers (like other mothers) become pregnant for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, young mothers are aware of the negative images around them, but use a

⁴² Scottish lone mothers also report concern about money as an everyday experience (McKendrick, 1998). Surveying 275 Scottish lone mothers about their ‘quality of life’, McKendrick (1998) found that six out of seven participants were ‘least satisfied’ with issues related to economic matters. McKendrick (1998; 85) also identified economic status as a key division between lone parents. Employed mothers expressed high levels of satisfaction with paid work, while “unemployed” mothers expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with local training and employment opportunities, and childcare provisions. Nevertheless, across both groups of Scottish lone mothers “family life” was reported as the most important aspect of their lives, with 82 percent of participants ranking family life as ‘extremely important’ (McKendrick, 1998; 85).

variety of discursive strategies to maintain positive social identities. For example, Phoenix's participants often described themselves as different to other young mothers, positioning themselves as "exceptional and [other young mothers] as less deserving or worse than themselves" (Phoenix, 1991; 91). Similarly, the participants drew upon "feminist arguments" in explaining their marital status (Phoenix, 1991; 96). Single women drew primarily on arguments about marriage being more beneficial for men than women, and that for women, marriage was likely to lead to a "drudgery" and a "restriction in freedom" (Phoenix, 1991; 95). Although the women did not consider themselves feminists, they did draw upon "feminist arguments that marriage subjects women to an exploitative division of household labour as well as to male domination with the household" (Phoenix, 1991; 97).

Based on interviews with 27 sole mothers in receipt of the Parenting Payment Single ('the pension'), and a genealogical analysis of the State's treatment of and societal attitudes towards sole mothers, Gardiner (2000) explores the subjectivities of 'welfare dependent' Australian sole mothers, and their compliance with and resistance to various comparatively moderate workfare styled policy initiatives in the mid 1990s. Gardiner was interested in the ways in which 'welfare dependent' women resist discourses privileging participation in paid work as a core responsibility of the late twentieth century citizen. Gardiner (2000) explored whether non-participation (that is, as "non-workers") was an expression of the women's immunity to feminist discourses that constitute paid work as central to women's independence; whether feminism was not perceived as an empowering discourse by welfare dependent women; or whether the women's welfare status was an expression of resistance to both traditional patriarchal discourses constituting women as wives and mothers, and feminist discourses constituting women as paid workers (Gardiner, 2000; 14). By tracing the history of Australian welfarism, Gardiner (2000) illustrates how Australia's gendered welfare regime has redefined meanings around women parenting alone. Gardiner (2000) argues that by the 1990s, the State simultaneously recognised the need and value of mothers caring for young children (evidenced through such things as minimal provision for childcare and maternity leave) while simultaneously targeting lone mothers for their 'failure' to demonstrate independence through paid work (Gardiner, 2000; 100).

All of Gardiner's participants expressed their thoughts about 'being on the pension'. Their accounts varied from anger to discontent, shame, guilt, or general unhappiness, although some also expressed gratitude. Gardiner (2000) identifies the discourse of the 'good mother' as important both within wider discourses around mothering and lone mothering, and within her participants' accounts of their experience. According to Gardiner (2000; 122) the 'good mother' discourse is particularly potent in the lives of sole mother pensioners because of the ways in which these mothers are visible to the State as pensioners, and to 'society' as lone mothers. Indeed, the 'good mother' discourse was the most important discursive resource for Gardiner's participants (Gardiner, 2000; 306) as it offered some resistance to dominant media representations of sole mothers in receipt of the pension as a "homogenous group of never married, lazy, unmotivated women" (Gardiner, 2000; 273). Through enacting the 'good mother' discourse, Gardiner's participants constructed subject positions contrary to those that reified lone mothers as inadequate mothers and inadequate citizens.

As in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, women parenting alone in New Zealand in the 1990s did so in the context of welfare discourses that constituted lone mothers as particular types of people, and the welfare system as 'in need of reform'. Welfare reform in relation to lone mothers was driven by both the 'problem' of the number of women 'on' the DPB (Levine, Wyn & Asiasiga, 1993; 1) and political and public concern about cost of the DPB both in fiscal and social terms⁴³. As in comparable nation states, with a history of liberal welfarism, the 'facts' that New Zealand lone mothers had 'high' rates of 'benefit dependence', low rates of paid work compared to married women, and over-representation in low income households (Goodger, 2001; Levine et al, 1993) were used to legitimate the reform agenda. While the experience of women lone parents in New Zealand is particular to local political and economic conditions, there are also important similarities between New Zealand women and women in other liberal welfare states where neo-liberal welfare reform has been a key social policy goal (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001).

As noted earlier in this thesis, in 1991 as part of a platform of neo-liberal social policy reforms, a raft of policy changes that had immediate impact on women parenting alone

⁴³ See McLoughlin, 1995; McLoughlin, 1991.

and in receipt of the DPB were implemented (Dalziel, 1992; Jackman, 1992). In particular, the rate of DPB payment was cut, the Family Benefit (a modest universal child benefit) was abolished, public housing was moved to a market model in effect increasing rents for many tenants, and a range of user-charges in health and education were introduced. Prior to these reforms, the government did no research on the likely effects of these policies (Dann & Du Plessis, 1992; 15) and the cuts themselves signalled the beginning of a longer-term policy programme to reduce the number of people in receipt of the DPB through the incremental introduction of a 'welfare to work' regime.

Dann & Du Plessis (1992) interviewed 21 women and one man who experienced the DPB cuts of 1991, and convened two further group meetings with these participants. Using the metaphor of "quilting" to acknowledge research participants as active (rather than passive) social actors, Dann & Du Plessis (1992; 9) explored the ways in which:

women on welfare benefits patch[ed] together an existence in much the same way that a patchmaker makes a 'crazy' quilt – using all sorts of odd strategies for survival.

Dann & Du Plessis (1992; 66) concluded that people "surviving the cuts" were "normal people in abnormal circumstances" using multiple "patching" and "quilting" strategies to live "so that life has some meaning beyond sheer survival" (Dann & Du Plessis, 1992; 18). As with other research cited in this literature review, the participants described lives of material hardship, and of the experience of stigma of being 'on welfare' (see Dann & Du Plessis, 1992; 55). In a descriptive study of the everyday material experiences of (mainly) women who parent alone, Dann & Du Plessis (1992) illustrate the immediacy of the material effects of welfare reform discourses in the lives of New Zealand women.

Duncan, Kerekere & Malaulau (1996) used six focus groups with women in receipt of the Community Services Card⁴⁴ to investigate the key issues for New Zealand women on low incomes. Their participants included some women parenting alone, but their research was not focused exclusively on the experience of this group. Like Dann & Du Plessis (1992), Duncan et al (1996) describe the material circumstances of poor women

⁴⁴ A controversial card that identifies members of 'target groups' who have 'targeted access' to previously universal services following the reforms. The card is pejoratively referred to as 'the poor card'.

in the context of an agenda for further welfare reform. They note that “all the women felt that money was the critical factor which would give them greater control over their circumstances” (Duncan et al, 1996; 5). Many of the women participating in the focus groups were in receipt of the DPB, and many reported experiencing the stigma associated with the benefit and feeling “put down” because they were not in paid work (Duncan et al, 1996; 10). Although the women reported that they thought being in paid work would have several advantages (including improving their self esteem and being a good role model for their children) (Duncan et al, 1996; 23), they also saw that low pay, lack of childcare, loss of benefits, and unpredictable support for their children from their ex-partners as making paid work a difficult personal option (Duncan et al, 1996; 4-5).

The experience of New Zealand lone mothers in paid work has been explored in more detail by Levine, Wyn & Asiasiga (1993) and Baker & Tippin (2002). Levine et al (1993; 4) explored factors affecting the workforce participation of 95 lone parents (including 14 men) through in-depth interviews in order to “understand the lone parents’ own perspectives of their own circumstances, the choices open to them and the decisions they make”. Baker & Tippin (2002) interviewed 120 ‘work-tested’ women lone parents and reported the ways in which this group experienced both the work-test regime, and their attempt at entry into the labour market. Although published a decade apart, similarities in the findings of both research projects are significant.

Levine et al (1993) offer a descriptive investigation into the workforce participation of lone parents by comparing and contrasting the experience of three groups of lone parents: those in receipt of the DPB (“the beneficiaries”), and two “self supporting” groups; those previously in receipt of the DPB (“the ex-beneficiaries”), and those who had never been in the receipt the DPB (“the non-beneficiaries”). Perhaps because this research was run through the research programme of the then Department of Social Welfare’s Social Policy Agency, the researchers’ primary focus appears to be on identifying the characteristics of the people in these groups with the ‘outcome’ in terms of their benefit status. Nevertheless, the researchers report “great diversity” amongst the sample, but a “most obvious division” between the self-supporting group and the beneficiaries (Levine et al, 1993; 11). Notably, around 75 percent of participants in the self-supporting group had substantial paid work experience before they became lone parents and tended to work in well-paid professional, administrative or white-collar jobs

(Levine et al, 1993; 12). In comparison, participants who were long-term beneficiaries (defined as being in receipt of the DPB for over two years) were more likely to have paid work histories characterised by low-skill or unskilled work. In this group fourteen women had no paid work history at all (Levine et al, 1993; 14). The researchers described a number of barriers to paid work identified by these participants, including lack of childcare, experiences within workplaces, and income. For example, some participants reported having no access to affordable childcare, others reported being confident in their own childcare only, and some prioritised mothering over paid work as the best form of care (Levine, 1993; 19-24). Many of the participants expressed concern about the state of the job market and the shortage of jobs to match their skills, problems with low pay and high paid work costs, problems with the hours and location of jobs, and 25 percent reported discrimination by employers towards women parenting alone (Levine et al, 1993; 29).

Similar to the findings of Levine et al (1993), Baker & Tippin (2002) report various barriers experienced by (work-tested) beneficiaries moving into the paid labour market. In moving into paid work (or in resisting this move), the mothers drew upon various strategies to retain or transform their identities as mothers and workers. For example, some mothers “alter[ed] their [Curriculum Vitae] to look more employable and sometimes to disguise their DPB status by presenting themselves as married and ‘trouble free’” (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 356). Like other research on the experience of women in receipt of welfare, the women reported experiencing the stigma of being ‘on benefits’ (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 375). They reported feeling degraded in interactions with welfare officials, and reported experiencing powerlessness when welfare practices pressed upon their lives (for example, in terms of visiting welfare offices) (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 350). Unsurprisingly, “many beneficiaries repeatedly asserted their desire to get off social benefits and back into paid employment” (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 354).

Experiences such as discrimination by employers, lack of resources (for example, in accessing family-based or market-based childcare), and “strongly-held moral codes about ‘good-mothering’” made moving into paid work a difficult process for some women parenting alone and in receipt of the DPB (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 355 - 357). In a more nuanced and situated analysis than that offered by Levine et al (1993), Baker & Tippin (2002; 357) show how, in practice, work-testing policies are comparatively

flexible in terms of the actual expectations placed on participants. Nevertheless, the inflexibility of the New Zealand labour market, which is increasingly segmented into 'good' and 'bad' jobs, and normative expectations around women's social identity as mothers combine to produce complex barriers to participating in work that are social (rather than personal) in origin. For example, employers were seen to prefer flexible workers (by definition, without family responsibilities) for inflexible jobs. Thus, Baker & Tippin (2002; 357) argue "women are being compelled to move from a relatively flexible welfare system to a more rigid and less accommodating labour market".

Locating welfare reform within a global context, Kingfisher & Goldsmith (2001) compare the experiences of poor lone mothers in the USA and New Zealand using ethnographic data collected in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the USA, and the mid-to-late 1990s in New Zealand. Theorising neo-liberalism as a cultural system that is constructed, contingent, and contestable, these authors explore how women parenting alone and in receipt of welfare benefits talk about that experience, including resistance to the privileged subject positions constructed within neo-liberal discourses that have rhetorically and materially transformed (gendered) mothers into (generic) workers (Kingfisher & Goldsmith; 2001; 719). The authors compare the histories of New Zealand and USA welfare programmes for lone parents, demonstrating that initially at least, New Zealand was placed at the collectivist and the US on the individualist ends of the liberal welfarist spectrum.⁴⁵ Convergence has occurred as a consequence of economic globalisation and its impact on traditional labour contracts (and the breadwinner-caregiver family model) in both countries. In New Zealand, for example, the economic impact of the general dismantling of trade barriers, financial de-regulation and the sale of previously State-owned assets to international interests in the 1980s and 1990s were part of wider shifts in the global political economy towards neo-liberalism (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001; 715).

⁴⁵ In fact, using Esping-Andersen (1990), these authors argue that New Zealand exemplified a social-democratic welfarist regime, and the USA a liberal welfare regime. I dispute this. Both New Zealand and the US developed liberal welfare regimes, but the mythology around New Zealand welfarism is that it was 'collectivist' and 'social democratic'. Within liberal regimes, there are particularistic variations. New Zealand had few universal benefits available to women as wives, workers, or (lone) mothers (with the notable exception of the Family Benefit), although health and education services were collectivised along social democratic lines.

As Kingfisher & Goldsmith (2001; 716) note, welfare reform in both the USA and New Zealand has been articulated through neo-liberal discourses that privileged a particular type of subject. A de-gendered, rational, economically independent citizen eclipsed the traditional gendered subject positions characteristic of breadwinner-caregiver liberal welfarism. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the social identity of mother valued within the breadwinner-caregiver family model became increasingly constructed as irrationally dependent, an effect of the conflation of liberal feminist and neo-liberal discourses constituting a new de-gendered generic worker. Of course, for women lone parents, gender remained definitive. Similarly, while many more women entered the public realm of paid work in these decades, they did *not* do so as equals (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001; 720).

New Zealand women lone parents report different experiences to women lone parents from the USA, in part due to the particularities of welfare reform practices in each country. For example the USA participants talked of the stigma of ‘being on welfare’. These participants talked of wanting to work, but also of how the “welfare system, and more broadly, society at large” prevented them from doing so (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001; 721). However, while they countered the ‘welfare queen’ stereotype in expressing their own work ethic, they attributed laziness to other welfare recipients. In ‘presenting self’ and managing their ‘spoiled identities’⁴⁶ the USA participants surfaced three key themes: that living ‘on welfare’ is an unplanned life event; that one has little control over the circumstances in one’s life; and that while women are punished by welfare rules, ‘men get away with it’. In contrast, the New Zealand participants talked of changes in their experience of welfare administration. They identified a cultural shift within welfare administration from ‘valuing children’ to an emphasis on ‘managing finances’; that welfare receipt had become tied much more to ‘becoming workers’ rather than ‘being mothers’; and finally, were more concerned to legitimate mothering as work, and that the devaluing of mother-work would have flow-on social costs. Despite these differences, both groups of women talked of experiencing a change in the qualitative meanings of motherhood, and articulated motherhood becoming a much more transitory social identity.

⁴⁶ Both these terms were coined by Erving Goffman. His work is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven ‘Being Different’.

So far in this section, the literature reviewed has specifically explored the experience of lone mothers in receipt of welfare payments in the context of welfare reform across a range of different nation-states. There is much research on the experience of lone mothers who are not also welfare recipients. However, some USA researchers focused on the experience of parenting alone by “single mothers by choice” (Bock, 2000; Mannis, 1999). For example, Mannis (1999) interviewed ten white women born between the years 1937 – 1947. Nine of the women had university degrees, and only one earned less than \$25,000 per annum. As Mannis (1999; 7) notes these were women “coming of age” during the 1970s, “a time of great social change for women [especially] the feminist movement ... with its drive for equal rights”. Alternatively, Bock (2000) was a participant-observer for two years in a “Single Mothers By Choice” support group, and interviewed 26 group members. Her interviewees were all “financially independent”, from a range of ages over 25, all were “white”, most were “college educated”, 12 had become mothers through adoption, 10 had become mothers by donor insemination, and most were heterosexual (Bock, 2000; 4).

Using a life-course perspective⁴⁷ as her theoretical framework, Mannis (1999; 2) explored becoming a single mother by choice as “one concrete instance of women’s demonstration of agency”. Through thematic analysis, Mannis (1999; 7) identified similarities in the women’s ‘stories’ which included: a desire to nurture, a desire for an unconditional “love experience”, a sense that their biological and “sociological clocks” (that is, the normative expectation from others that they would have children) were running out, and financial autonomy “as an integrating concept”. The women reported that friends and family generally supported their “choice”, although the practicalities of parenting alone were more difficult than expected. Mannis (1999) concludes that these women were ‘exercising agency’ in the context of changing meanings around family life and the social roles of women. She notes:

While these results may not generalise to teenage mothers or mothers dealing with poverty ... exploding the negative myth that the single mother is young and poor and that she became a mother because of carelessness, poor judgement or the desire for a government stipend may serve to improve the public’s perception of

⁴⁷ Mannis (1999; 2) describes the life course perspective as an approach that analyses the lives of individuals as “self-directed within an ever-changing environment”, and as an approach which recognises that “individuals exert agency by selecting and modifying socializing influences”.

single mothers and hence the support systems available to them (Mannis, 1999; 11).

Here, in Mannis's conclusion is what I consider the weakness of her analytical approach. As Bock (2000) more persuasively argues, 'single mothers by choice' offer a moral hierarchy of single mothers, then lay claim to the highest position on it. By comparing her participants to mythical "young and poor" single mothers, Mannis (1999) draws upon a powerful moral hierarchy informed by the idea that her participants are different to 'other' single mothers.

Bock (2000) uses Goffman's concept of stigma⁴⁸ to examine how 'single mothers by choice' produce 'accounts' as specific narrative forms where one accepts responsibility, but denies the pejorative quality typically associated with their actions. Bock (2000) describes the "legitimacy ladder" of single parenting. At the bottom, is the legitimacy of the child, next is the legitimacy of the mother, and at the top is the legitimacy of the decision to become a mother. By appropriating the term 'single mothers by choice' these women both reproduced the ladder, as well as placed themselves at the top of it.

Bock (2000) identifies how her participants focused on the *legitimacy of their decision* to become single mothers, and that this was an effective strategy for claiming the highest position on the moral hierarchy of single mothers. Bock (2000) identified four "essential personal attributes" that her participants used to legitimate their 'choice': age, both in the sense that the participants were old enough to make such a decision, and that they were running out of time; responsibility, in that the participants reported themselves as responsible and that others also saw them as such; emotional maturity, the participants described themselves as assertive, possessing integrity, and other positively valued emotional and emotional attributes; and financial independence, above all, the most important trait legitimating the participants' choice.

Interestingly, what both Bock (2000) and Mannis (1999) show is the similarities between single mothers by choice and women parenting alone and receiving welfare benefits. As illustrated in this literature review, both groups of women use a range of discursive strategies to position themselves as responsible and legitimate mothers. For

⁴⁸ This concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven 'Being Different'.

example, both single mothers by choice and women in receipt of welfare use a broadly similar ‘feminist discourse’ to make claims for their ‘right’ to a family life independent from men (compare for example, Mannis (1999) as above, and Little (1999) earlier in this review). Both groups of women make claims to the social identity of mother as a legitimate choice. Both groups of women also see themselves as different to the stereotypical lone mother constructed through neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, and both ‘pass the stigma’ to women they see as less ‘legitimate’ and more ‘immoral’ than themselves. Nevertheless, research on single mothers by choice does not report the day-to-day experience of stigma reported by the mothers in receipt of welfare benefits. This perhaps reflects the way in which the social identity of mother is socially embedded, and the degree to which motherhood in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism is mediated by neo-liberal welfare reform discourses constructing women who parent alone as particular types of people.

Themes from the Literature

Three key themes emerge from the literature reviewed in the previous section.

1 The social identity of mother

In reporting experiences of lone mothers in the context of welfare reforms, different researchers noted the ways in which lone mothers make claims about their social identity as mothers. Many of the studies illustrate how for women who parent alone, mothering is positioned as legitimate work. Other social roles ‘fall around’ mothering identities, and the immediacy of materially engaging in the role of mother is evident in many of the research findings reported. Not only do women who parent alone claim mothering as legitimate work, but good mothering is morally defined. That is, in much of the research cited in this review, lone mothers positioned themselves as good mothers and drew upon complex moral explanations in making such claims. Finally, another important commonality across the research reviewed is that motherhood is positively valued as an independent social status. Motherhood is thus a status that infers particular rights on women as mothers, including the right to form autonomous households and the right to be good mothers.

2 The stigma of parenting alone

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, women who parent alone while in receipt of welfare payments experience stigma. Nevertheless, some lone mothers who experience stigma differentiate themselves from stigmatising characteristics while at the same time attributing those characteristics to other lone mothers. For example, lone mothers not in receipt of welfare payments see their experience as different to other lone mothers. While Little (1999) argues that passing the stigma illustrates the hegemony of individualism in the USA, the experience of stigma by lone mothers in the other countries covered in the review suggests that neo-liberalism exacerbates the stigmatisation experienced by lone mothers.

3 The materiality of lone parenting

In almost all the literature reviewed, women who parent alone experience material hardships. Lack of money is the main reason for this, and lack of money is exacerbated by the combination of minimal financial support from the neo-liberal state, and structural barriers limiting the employment opportunities of lone mothers. In several of the research reports from different countries cited in this review, lack of child care, loss of access to important social benefits (such as medical insurance) and low wages were common barriers identified. Nevertheless, this review also illustrates that the relationship between women parenting alone and paid work is complex for women as mothers. Some mothers position themselves as primarily mothers, and for these women, participation in paid work is morally precluded.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined sociological claims about the emergence of new forms of intimacy impacting on patterns of family formation in late modern society, and reviewed literature describing the experiences of lone mothers within the context of neo-liberal welfare reforms. Within this literature the ways in which lone mothers negotiate the contested meanings around the social identity of mother as welfare reform discourses have positioned lone mothers as particular types of people is exemplified. In particular, lone mothers' experience of stigma as welfare recipients, and the impact of

the complex relationship between paid work and welfare receipt have emerged as important themes shaping lone mothers' every day experiences. The similarities of experiences between lone mothers across different late modern societies with broadly similar histories of liberal welfarism are also notable. This suggests that, rather than lone motherhood being a social identity that can be neutrally entered and occupied by mothers as a consequence of a transformation in personal relationships premised on notions of 'more equality' between men and women, family life remains gendered. In late modernity, lone mothers must piece together 'a bit of a life' within this context, and within their biographies make sense of their experiences within the discursive limits of late modernity.

Individualization holds that gender roles in late modernity are increasingly less important. Women and men are becoming 'more equal' as the traditional institutions of modernity fracture. A 'de-gendered' late modern subject is emerging who is remarkably similar to the individualised subject at the heart of neo-liberalism. By placing the literature of individualization up against research describing lone mothers' experiences of welfare reform, this chapter has highlighted the tensions between individualization as a supposedly gender neutral and individual process, and the gendered nature of family life that structures the experience of lone mothers in neo-liberal societies.

In the following chapter, I introduce social constructionism which is the ontological position that informs this thesis. I define social constructionism, briefly identify research on the social construction of motherhood, and present a historical overview of the changing constructs of lone mothers as Other in New Zealand society over the twentieth century.

Chapter Three

Constructing Lone Mothers as Other

Motherhood is constituted as compulsory, normal and natural for women ... [although] not as normal or natural for all women, but only for those who are married or in stable heterosexual relationships, who are not 'too old' or 'too young', and who are in the 'right' economic and social positions (Woollett & Boyle, 2000; 309).

Introduction

In Chapters One and Two I outlined different views relating to the connections between new patterns of and meanings around adult intimacy, changing patterns of family formation, the contemporary experience of and meanings around family life, and the connection between changes in family life and other changes in the political-economy that characterise late modernity. In this chapter I develop my argument to show that while the increase in the number of women parenting alone in the last decades of the twentieth century can in part be understood as an outcome of these much broader social changes, the ways in which lone motherhood is understood and the meanings around lone motherhood are contested.

Duncan & Edwards (1999; 24) note that “it is chiefly in the English speaking world of liberal welfare state regimes that lone motherhood enters debate as a wider political symbol”. In late modern liberal welfare states such as New Zealand, Britain, Australia, and the USA, the political response to the increase in the number of lone parents in the last twenty years has been tempered by neo-liberal welfare reform discourses contesting lone mothers’ claims to the social identity of mother⁴⁹, and privileging paid work as the

⁴⁹ I use the term ‘social identity’ to refer to the expected or anticipated normative attributes of individuals in particular situations. I contrast this with ‘narrative identity’, which I use to refer to ways in which individuals narrate the self. Narrative identity is further discussed in Chapter Five, and in Chapter Seven I contrast my conceptualisation of social and narrative identity with Goffman’s conceptualisation of personal, virtual and actual identity (Goffman, 1965). Byrne (2003) contrasts self-identity with social identity. My use of narrative identity and social identity are very similar to Byrne’s use of self and social identity.

key site of enacting citizenship. In this chapter, I trace how gendered discourses around lone motherhood in New Zealand are historically specific and constitute women who parent alone as “different in nature”⁵⁰ to other mothers, women and citizens. In this section I focus on three ‘seams’ of discourse making up lone mothers as particular types of people at different moments across the twentieth century: the pathological mother discourse; the social problem mother discourse, and the welfare mother discourse. For each discourse I identify how women who parented alone could be ‘spoken of’, and the subject consequently produced. I argue that these discourses inevitably reproduced historically specific hierarchies of maternal legitimacy which not only shaped the ways in which lone mothers could be positioned, but also had (and continue to have) material effects in the lives of women who parent alone.

Social Constructionism

In its broadest sense, ‘social constructionism’ covers a range of different philosophical and methodological perspectives within the social sciences (Glasner, 2000; Hacking 1998; Shakespeare, 1998). Burr (1995; 2-5) notes that while there is no definitive model of social constructionism, a social constructionist approach is characterised by one or more of the following:

- 1 A critical stance towards taken-for-granted or common-sense knowledge
- 2 A historical and cultural specificity
- 3 A critique of knowledge as an outcome of social processes
- 4 A connection between knowledge and social action.

Thus, in sum, a constructionist project is one that:

aim[s] at displaying or analysing actual, historically situated social interactions or causal routes that led to, or were involved in, the coming into being or establishing of some present entity or fact (Hacking, 1999; 5).

Social constructionism is characterised by an anti-essentialist and anti-realist ontological orientation. Social constructionists argue that language is a precondition for thought, that language is a form of social action, and that social action is comprised of the interactions between people (Burr, 1995; 5-8). The basic premise of social constructionism is that no matter how ‘real’ or ‘fixed’ social conditions appear, they are

⁵⁰ I take this term from Reekie (1998; 5). The importance of this idea in relation to the way in which this thesis developed is further discussed in Chapter Four.

inevitably “produced, maintained and changed through interpretive processes” (Maines, 2000; 577). Thus, social constructionists are interested in social interactions (as opposed to ‘real’ social institutions and social structures) and the ways in which the consequential effects of those interactions structure everyday life. Given this:

The aim of social enquiry is moved from questions about the nature of people or society and towards a consideration of how certain phenomena or forms of knowledge are achieved by people in interaction (Burr, 1995; 8).

From a social constructionist perspective language is both constructed (that is, a cultural artefact that is constantly reproduced socially) and constructive (or ‘constitutive’), and through language the same ‘phenomena’ may be constructed in a variety of different ways (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 35). Social actors use a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources to construct accounts of everyday events and experiences, for variety of purposes, and with various consequences. This is not to say that construction is necessarily conscious, or that constructions are produced by a ‘free and autonomous individual’ integrating discrete language signs (such as linking words to clauses, clauses to sentences and so on). Rather, one’s linguistic resources and the possibilities of their use are themselves inscribed with a history of cultural meaning (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 33-34). Similarly, most constructionists would argue that the user of language, ‘the self’ or ‘subject’, is also a construct and “made within the world, not born into it already formed” (Mansfield, 2000; 11). In this sense then, the “biographies of individuals articulate specific historical moments” (Denzin, 1992; 24).

Constructing Motherhood, Constructing Mothers

Several authors have critiqued dominant ideas about motherhood in general, and lone motherhood in particular, to show how common sense and taken-for-granted knowledge about motherhood is socially constructed (McIntosh, 1996; Phoenix, 1996; Smart, 1996; Phoenix & Woollet, 1991). In particular, these critiques show that motherhood is a social, rather than natural enterprise. Social constructionist critiques also illustrate that while dominant views about motherhood have dense discursive histories, the social organisation of motherhood and the meanings that surround both mothering and different ‘types of mothers’ are neither fixed, nor inevitable.

Smart (1996) analyses the emergence of idealised modern motherhood in Britain to show how the idea that motherhood is ‘natural’ constructs ‘types’ of mothers and demarcates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers (Smart, 1996; 39). Noting that motherhood emerged as a modern institution in the late nineteenth century, Smart (1996) argues that the construction and form of modern motherhood was an outcome of two sites of struggle. Middle and upper class mothers organised political campaigns stressing the importance of mother-love for the welfare of the child⁵¹, while philanthropic organisations worked to impose standards of mother-care on unruly working class mothers. Combined, these struggles “constructed an ideology of motherhood that rendered mothers as caring, vital, central actors in the domestic sphere, as well as persons with an identity and source of special knowledge that was essential to good child rearing” (Smart, 1996; 45).

The shift from traditional government *of* families (by the all-powerful sovereign) to modern government *through* families by imposing norms, was made possible by the processes of the modern, centralised State (Donzelot, 1979; 92). The modern State could both ‘create’ normative standards, and apply them more uniformly. Through normalizing discourses, idealised motherhood was made up of norms simultaneously extruding a modern maternal subject (Ross, 1992) and various and multiple “calibrations of good motherhood” through which ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers could be normatively distinguished (Smart, 1996; 46). In this sense, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers became symbiotic and thus:

Examining which behaviours and which qualities fall outside good motherhood sheds light on the complex policing of motherhood, and how, rather than being an unchanging and natural condition, it is a highly contrived and specific condition (Smart, 1996; 48).

Smart (1996; 48) identifies three discursive strategies through which the boundaries of modern ‘good’ and ‘bad’ motherhood in Britain were (and continue to be) constructed and policed: psychological discourses⁵², welfare discourses, and moral/legal discourses⁵³. As the ‘calibrations of good motherhood’ have changed⁵⁴ so to have

⁵¹ For example, women’s access to divorce (and mothers access to children following divorce) on the grounds of wife torture.

⁵² See for example Phoenix & Woollett (1991).

constructions of 'bad' motherhood', producing different categories of mother-subjects. As Smart (1996) shows, the content of discourses constructing motherhood have changed over time, and thus various historically specific 'technologies' of subjectification produce historically specific subjects.

Historically and culturally specific accounts of lone motherhood illustrate how ideas about motherhood change over time, and about how different categories of the mother-subject as Other are socially constructed. For example, several authors have written historical accounts of the legal, social, moral and economic circumstances experienced by 'unmarried mothers' at different historical moments (Little, 1998; Kunzel, 1993; Solinger, 1992; Spenksy, 1992; Luker, 1990). Kunzel (1993; 1) cites from Albert Leffingwell, author of "the first treatise in English language upon the subject of illegitimacy":

Against the background of history, too prominent to escape the observation from which it shrinks, stands a figure, mute, mournful, and indescribably sad. It is a girl holding in her arms the blessing and the burden of motherhood, but in whose face one finds no trace of maternal joy or pride ... Who is this woman ... It is the mother of the illegitimate child. By forbidden paths she has obtained the grace of maternity, but its glory for her is transfigured into a badge of unutterable shame.

Here, the construction of unmarried motherhood is tied to the 'type of person' who, at that moment, is that mother. Similarly, changing constructions of 'unmarried mothers' as particular types of people have had material effects in terms of the possible types of lives unmarried mothers have lived (Carabine, 2001; Little, 1998).

Kunzel (1993) traces changing responses towards (white) unmarried mothers in the USA as social work professionalized from the late nineteenth century. At this time, pregnant and unmarried women could enter special 'homes' run by evangelical women, on the condition that they would keep their child and on expectation that in doing so, they would be morally redeemed. However, by the 1940s, these maternity homes had become the site for 'social work practice'; rather than house "unfortunate 'sisters' to be 'saved', unmarried mothers [had become] 'problem girls' to be 'treated'" (Kunzel, 1993; 1). By the late 1940s, women entered the homes as 'cases', on the expectation

⁵³ See for example Hall (1979) and Smart (1992).

⁵⁴ See for example, Marshall (1991).

that successful treatment would be evidenced by the placement of their child for adoption.

In the 1950s, constructions of unmarried mothers in the USA were not only gendered, but also 'classed' and 'raced'. Unwed black motherhood was not considered a 'social problem' until the 1940s because white America defined black women's sexuality as an expression of racial biology. As Solinger (1992; 17) notes "high rates of black illegitimate pregnancy supported ... white beliefs about the uncontrollable sexuality and promiscuous childbearing of blacks and the sources of these alleged behaviours in biologically determined inferiority". However, by the 1950s black unmarried mothers were constructed as pathological mothers, living out the 'racial script' of patriarchy that was "infecting the black population of the United States" (Solinger, 1992; 8). As Solinger (1992; 153) notes "it took more than a baby to make a white girl or woman into a mother": while unmarried pregnancy was constructed as an outcome of 'race' for black women, unmarried pregnancy was constructed as an outcome of a treatable psychological disturbance for white women. The institutionalisation of adoption in post war USA served to construct white babies as adoptable babies, untarnished by 'inheritable' traits, while the fixed 'black pathology' constructed black babies as immutably tied to their mothers, irrespective of the mother's marital status.

Both Solinger (1992) and Kunzel (1993) argue that changes in the construction of white unmarried mothers (from a moral to a psychological agent) were due to a rise in scientific-welfare and psychological discourses. Discourses that constructed unmarried mothers as 'cases' were also invoked in a broader popularisation of the 'scientisation' of family life, and eugenicist concerns for 'population hygiene'. In the 1920s and 1930s these discourses produced new types of subjects: 'feeble-minded girls' (initially the victims of their 'uncontrolled' sexuality) and later, the 'sex delinquent' (the perpetrator of sexual activity). However, by 1950s maternity homes were increasingly investigated through the new genre of popular women's magazines. Here, 'confessions' of the unmarried mother sat alongside normative representations of family life. Thus, in the USA "popular culture began to compete with families, traditional community leaders, and social service professionals to shape the broader cultural meanings of out-of-wedlock pregnancy" (Kunzel, 1993; 74).

The material potency of psychological and professional social work discourses in constructing unmarried mothers as particular types of subjects is also illustrated in accounts of similar British 'homes' for unmarried mothers in the 1950s (Spensky, 1992). In the post war decades, unmarried mothers in Britain were constructed as pathological mothers: emotionally immature and psychologically incapable of caring for their offspring. During these decades, homes for unmarried mothers flourished where women could be 'treated', and after the birth, could be 'normalised' through placing their children for adoption. As Spensky (1992) notes, the homes played a crucial institutional role in maintaining post war familial legitimacy: children were legitimated through adoption; adoptive married-parents were legitimated in becoming parents; and the birth mother's status as mother was elided, enabling her to pursue legitimacy in a later marriage and subsequent nuptial births.

Kiernan, Land & Lewis (1998) analyse changing social constructions of unmarried mothers in twentieth century Britain, arguing a series of overarching shifts in emphasis from unmarried motherhood as a 'moral problem' by the 1950s, to unmarried mothers as 'social problems' by the 1970s, to unmarried mothers as both social and moral problems in the 1980s and 1990s. These shifts had significant effects in terms of the lives unmarried women could lead. In most liberal welfare states, including Britain, welfare support for unmarried mothers was limited until the 1970s. At the same time, women's access to paid work was constrained by the stigma surrounding illegitimacy, public attitudes to working mothers, the availability of childcare services, the gendered division of labour within the paid workforce, and the low levels of women's wages.

In most liberal welfare states, many of the formal legal distinctions between types of lone mothers for welfare purposes began to disappear in the 1970s. However, Song (1996) notes that the ways in which the construction of 'the problem' of lone mothers in Britain is remarkably specific to Britain in comparison with other European countries. For example, in Germany, young never married mothers are usually in paid work and are not constructed as a 'problem group', and in Nordic countries, lone parent families are not "singled out in relation to 'the [heterosexual nuclear] family'" (Song, 1996; 377). In Britain, where lone mothers are a 'problem', "their 'dependence' upon either a man or the State has been central to the way in which women lone parents have been constructed" (Song, 1996; 378). In common with other countries where the gendered

breadwinner-caregiver tradition of liberal welfarism has produced gendered obligations towards the support of children (men through the financial maintenance of the family, women through the actual caring work), “women with children and without men become a problem category”(Song, 1996; 378).

Song (1996) illustrates how over time, a mix of welfare policies has mediated the material difficulties of parenting alone within liberal welfare regimes. These policies have reflected wider debates about the legitimacy of lone motherhood per se, and the legitimacy of the ‘extra’ material needs lone mothers and their children may have. Under the conditions of neo-liberalism the ongoing discursive struggle over lone mothers as particular types of people, and the relationship between the individual, the family and the State, has material effects in women’s lives (Millar; 1999).

From a constructionist perspective, demographic and other social statistics construct (rather than reflect) reality (Haggerty, 2002). Hacking (1999; 33) notes that the ‘facts’ evident in statistical categories “are not determined by the way the world is ... [f]acts are the consequences of ways in which we represent the world”. Social statistical knowledge, for example, can be critiqued as a site of the construction of documentary reality (Smith, 1974). As Smith (1974; 257) argues “knowledge which claims to transcend history, society and culture is itself a highly specialised socially organized practice”. Thus documentary reality is socially accomplished, and the processes constituting this accomplishment are ‘hidden’ within the aesthetic of the construct (Smith, 1974; 257).

Knowledge in the form of ‘facts’, and especially in the form of quantifiable ‘facts’ about ‘the population’, has been an important modern technology in constructing and demarcating different types of mothers. In particular, official statistics, and the counting practices of the modern State have enabled the objectification and subjectification of, for example, various ‘family types’. As a form of knowledge, official statistics are persuasive representations of reality precisely because they appear as ‘facts’, are widely disseminated, and present a “seemingly disinterested” description of social life (Deacon, 1985; 27). However, as such, official statistics such as population censuses are:

particularly effective in labelling groups and solidifying the boundaries between them. [Official statistics] are, therefore, an ideal political tool in any struggle involving the manipulation of group images (Deacon, 1985; 27).

Foucault (1990) describes the emerging statistical sciences of the nineteenth century as a new form of “power over life” (replacing the traditional sovereign-held power over death), distinctly modern, and characteristic of “a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life” (Foucault, 1990; 139). According to Foucault, this modern ‘power over life’ emerged in two discursive forms: the anatomico-politics of the human body (centred on the body as a bio-physical ‘machine’); and the bio-politics of the species body, the population; “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (Foucault, 1990; 139). Disciplining ‘the body’ and regulating ‘populations’ thus were two emerging discursive poles around which ‘life’ itself was constituted. Thus, statistical measures of the species body are a relatively recent form of *modern* knowledge, and “create[d] new categories into which people had to fall, ... render[ing] rigid new conceptualisations of the human being” (Hacking, 1982; 281). As Anderson (1992; 15-16) notes the technology of statistics was:

particularly appropriate to describe the new arrays of social groups in rapidly growing, industrializing societies, the character and trajectory of social processes in far flung empires, [and] the behaviour and characteristics of newly mobilized political actors in the age of democratic revolutions (Anderson 1992; 15-16).

Feminist social scientists have critiqued social statistics as a modern technology in the construction of particular forms of femininity and motherhood. For example, Deacon (1985; 29) argues that nineteenth century Australian censuses in Victoria and New South Wales “provided a battle ground for two rival conceptions of women as workers”. On the one hand, conventional British census practices had defined women’s work in the home (either as ‘housewives’ or ‘helpmeets’) as productive. On the other, emerging colonial categorisations defined women’s work in the home as unproductive “with the result that women were regarded as naturally dependent on their husbands, who were the sole legitimate breadwinners” (Deacon, 1985; 29-30). By the end of the nineteenth century, it was this later view that prevailed, as “housework and mothering as the exclusive duties of women” became simultaneously culturally prescriptive, and ‘officially’ invisible (Deacon, 1985; 45). Similarly, Anderson (1992) argues that the ten-

yearly American census is a source of information about historically specific “conceptualisations of the relationships between the subgroups of the population – for example, between men and women, free and slave, young and old, master and dependant” (Anderson, 1992; 17). In particular, Anderson (1992) shows how ideas about women’s work have changed over time, and rather than measuring women’s work as an ‘objective practice’, successive censuses in the USA have encoded dominant cultural ideas about the ‘proper work of women’, and various constructions of class and race specific femininities. Finally, Bradbury (2000) illustrates the discursive role of censuses in constituting ‘the normal family’, and the ways in which technologies of counting kept lone mothers invisible in early twentieth century Canada. As Bradbury (2000) notes her motivation for revealing the ways in which the number of lone mothers were disguised in prevailing definitions of family life is not to suggest that all forms of parenting alone are similar across time. Rather, as “so many of today’s single parents face problems of poverty similar to those of in the past, ... it does seem important not only to see how and why past censuses hid the phenomenon but also to attempt some longer term comparisons” (Bradbury, 2000; 212).

Counting people as an activity of the modern State has become increasingly elaborate. Census counts are not the only official documentation of populations. ‘Types of people’ are not only produced as census phenomena, but also in relation to the bureaucratic and administrative interests of the modern State. Throughout the twentieth century, government agencies in modern welfare states counted and reported on both the numbers of particular types of people, and their activities, interests and relationships with the various apparatus of government. In these practices, categories are important not only in cementing types of subjects into administratively recognizable forms, but also for deciding entitlement and desert.

Crow and Hardey (1992; 143) note that the use of terms like ‘one-parent families’ and ‘lone-parent households’ to describe a ‘family type’ is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Crow and Hardey (1992) trace the emergence of such terms in Britain to policy debates and reforms in the early 1970s around the general recognition of lone parents as a category of parents with material interests in common. The emergence of new terminology to replace terms such as ‘broken homes’ (considered imprecise and emotive) and ‘unmarried mothers’ (considered stigmatising) was not unique to Britain.

For example, in Canada, lone parent families were similarly ‘invented’ as a homogenous category in the early 1970s. As Bradbury (2000; 7) notes:

It was not until the publication of material from the 1971 census that the separate categories of single parents were combined into one category ‘the lone-parent family’. In their pie graphs and brief summaries of trends, Statistics Canada thus played a critical role in the creation of another new kind of family – the single-parent family.

Despite the emergence of terms that collectivise lone parents, terms that distinguish different types of parents persist, and again produce specific effects. Here, the role of social statistics may be fundamental to the ‘existence’ of phenomena, but eclipsed by broader political struggles over meaning in relation to femininity, motherhood and citizenship in late modern nation-states. For example, Luker (1990) notes that in the USA in the early 1970s the term “teenage pregnancy” was virtually unknown. In the late 1970s about a dozen articles per year were published on the subject, two dozen per year by the mid 1980s, and by 1990, “there were more than two hundred, including cover stories in both *Time* and *Newsweek*” (Luker, 1990; 81). Luker (1990) identifies the social construction of teenage pregnancy as a social problem in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s as moral panic that served a historically specific set of (conservative) political interests, while at the same time helping the American public “make sense of some very real and rapidly changing conditions in their world” (Luker, 1990; 86). Similarly, Stacey (1996) traces the debate over ‘family values’ in the USA during the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so, Stacey (1996) shows how *ideas* about ‘the family’ were co-opted by conservative politicians to argue that social life in general was endangered by changing patterns of family formation. From the conservative perspective “an intact nuclear unit inhabited by a male breadwinner, his full-time homemaker wife, and their dependent children” was cited as the normative family form, even though “most Americans now consider (this form) to be traditional” (Stacey, 1996; 6). Nevertheless “in the name of the family” conservative politicians succeeded in radically limiting welfare entitlements; in cutting funding to the arts, social research, and public broadcasting; and in limiting young women’s access to contraception (Stacey, 1996; 4).

In many liberal welfare states, constructions of lone mothers changed in the 1980s and 1990s, and discourses problematising lone mothering intensified (Smart, 1996, Phoenix, 1996). McIntosh (1996; 148) argues that this intensification of ‘anxieties’ around lone

motherhood appears to be part of the ‘logic’ of neo-liberalism. Alongside the overt political demonization of lone mothers in Britain, in this period was a counter discourse of ‘the normal family’. As McIntosh (1996; 150) illustrates, “many of the negative stereotypes about lone parents have as their obverse idealized images of married parenthood that feminists have exposed as dangerous fantasies”. The idea that lone mothers are trapped in a ‘culture of dependency’ is mirrored in married mothers’ economic dependence within marriage; the idea that lone mothers are ‘immoral’ is mirrored in married women’s lack of freedom; and the idea that lone parenting is ‘reproducing an underclass’ mirrors the structural ways in which the family reproduces class, including the middle class, and is “essential to forming class divisions and handing them down from generation to generation” (McIntosh, 1996; 155). Thus, discourses around lone motherhood sit against discourses around ‘the family’, and “the social pathology of the lone mother is just as imaginary as the social desirability of the nuclear family” (McIntosh, 1996; 150).

Hacking (1986) discusses the ways in which who and what we understand as particular types of people are made up discursively. Rather than privileging the historical humanist subject as a continuous actor across history, Hacking (1986; 236) argues that “numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with the invention of the categories labelling them”. People are made up through a process Hacking calls dynamic nominalism; a naming or labelling process that links the namer and the named. Hacking (1986; 234) states:

I do not believe there is a general story to be told about making up people. Each category has its own history. If we wish to present a partial framework in which to describe such events, we might think of two vectors. One is the vector of labelling from above, from a community of experts who create a “reality” that some people make their own. Different from this is the vector of autonomous behaviour of a person so labelled, which presses from below, creating a reality every expert must face.⁵⁵

In this approach, what presses from above or below are not ‘humanist subjects’, but subjects themselves produced *socially* through naming processes, who in turn name and respond to naming dynamically. The meanings produced, and the social relations extruded through these processes are of course neither neutral nor benign. Naming

⁵⁵ Hacking (1986; 234) acknowledges that this representation of dynamic nominalism is “too narrow” but nevertheless captures the ideal of the process, and “gesture(s) at an account of how common names and the named could fit so tidily together” (Hacking, 1984; 236).

reflects dominant relations of power encoded in the various discursive practices that produce different types of people. For example, the production of the category ‘lone parent’ or ‘single mother’, including the production of the *idea* of the type of subject who inhabits that category, has a “vector of labelling from above”. Importantly, ‘the community of experts’ *can* name subjects as a particular type of person because of the discursive resources that constitute both themselves as namers, and the objects of their expertise as subjects.

Hacking’s (1986) approach is useful as it draws attention to the historical specificities and discontinuities in discourses ‘making up people’. It is also useful as it links a discursively constituted subject to the materiality of the socially situated subject. As socially situated subjects, women who parent alone make sense of their experiences within the context of discursive webs of meaning. While the methodological implications of Hacking’s approach are explored in more detail in Chapter Four, in the next section of this chapter I examine the ‘vector of labelling from above’, making up women lone parents in New Zealand as particular types of people.

Changing Constructions of New Zealand Lone Mothers as Other

In this section, I outline the changing constructions of Pakeha lone mothers in New Zealand. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the focus on Pakeha women reflects a growing critique of social research as a colonising practice (Smith, 1998). While constructions of, for example, Maori women parenting alone, are likely to have some discursive commonalities with those of Pakeha women, important differences also inevitably exist. Thus, it is important to note that lone mothering in New Zealand is also constructed through racialised and racist discourses (that have particular effects for Maori women) that remain unexplored in this thesis.

Carabine (2001; 273) defines discourses as “variable ways of ‘speaking of’ an issue which cohere or come together to produce the object of which they speak”. Thus, discourses both produce ‘knowledge’ about objects, and in doing so, produce the ‘objects’ themselves. In relation to lone mothers, discourses produce knowledge about lone mothering (what it is, why it happens, and so on) and the object, *the lone mothers*

as subjects. Although discourses are productive, they are never unitary. Rather, discourses are fluid and opportunistic, and “utilize, interact with and are mediated by other dominant discourses” (Carabine, 2001; 269). In this sense then, discourses produce ‘truth’, ‘common sense’ or other claims of culturally authoritative knowledge at particular historical moments. In relation to women parenting alone, there are multiple discourses that construct knowledge about both ‘lone motherhood’ and ‘lone mothers’ as particular types of subjects.

In New Zealand, women who parent alone are understood to share certain ‘characteristics’ by virtue of their membership of that category of persons. For example, in Chapter One households headed by lone mothers were identified as more likely to be poor than any other family household types. As I will illustrate later in this chapter, welfare reform discourses in the 1980s and 1990s have tended to construct these inequalities between family types as an outcome of a flaw in the personality, morality, skills, abilities or other personal characteristics of lone mothers, especially in comparison to mothers in two-parent households. Thus the uneven risk of familial poverty in New Zealand in the 1990s was discursively constituted as springing from the character of a historically specific subject, the ‘solo mother’ made up as a particular type of person through welfare reform discourses. In making up lone mothers as that subject, welfare reform discourses in effect both marginalized the experiences of many lone mothers living as poor women, while at the same time drew upon ‘social scientific’ measures of material differences between family types to ‘legitimate’ further reforms⁵⁶.

In this section, I illustrate three ‘seams’ of discourse that make up lone mothers in New Zealand as particular types of people. The pathological mother discourse is a modernist discourse, drawing upon early twentieth century concerns for infant life and population vitality. While widows and deserted wives were constructed as mothers like other mothers but in unfortunate circumstances, unmarried mothers were constructed as pathologically flawed along with other ‘unnatural’ mothers who failed to give proper care to their children. The social problem mother emerged in the post war period and was made through a ‘modern society discourse’ and the technologies of social science.

⁵⁶While the association between women parenting alone and poverty is neither new, nor unique to New Zealand, it is remarkably persistent. See for example: Bradshaw, (1998), Little (1998), Griffis (1996), Fraser & Gordon (1994), Husbands (1994), Beaglehole (1993), Tennant (1989) and Sutch (1966).

By the 1970s, the category of persons ‘lone mothers’ had solidified who were the ‘victims’ of a social problem (in that they were unsupported mothers). Within the social problem discourse remained residues of the pathological mother, and under the conditions of neo-liberalism these discourses combined into a welfare mother discourse producing the nefarious contemporary lone mother: ‘the solo mum’.

Changing constructions of lone motherhood (and lone mothers) are often attributed to changing normative ideas about ‘motherhood’. However, in this thesis, I argue that women parenting alone are constructed not only as Other mothers, but also as Other women and Other citizens. The materiality of the social arrangements that surround ‘women parenting alone’ is the outcome of the multiple struggles over meaning in the context of normative ideas about maternity, femininity and citizenship, coalescing at different historical moments to construct specific historical subjects. For example, ‘fallen women’, ‘deserted wives’ and ‘lone mothers’ are all different subjects, ‘spoken of’ in different ways as mothers, women and citizens at specific historical moments.

The connections between discourses of motherhood, femininity and citizenship, and changing constructions of lone mothers can be understood in the context of New Zealand’s gendered culture (James & Saville-Smith, 1994). James and Saville-Smith (1994; 11) define gendered culture as “one in which masculinity and femininity structure, express, and make sense of, at a popular level, the conflicts, interests and inequalities which are integral to society”. Thus, the everyday practices and ritualised meanings informing relationships between women and men that structure contemporary New Zealand society have emerged from a particular set of historical conditions. Nevertheless the mobility of ideas around motherhood, femininity, and citizenship as quasi-global modern discourses has also shaped changing constructions of lone mothers. In combination, the particularities of New Zealand’s gendered culture and the ‘universal’ discourses of modernity have constituted a local hierarchy of maternal legitimacy through which lone mothers in New Zealand have (and can) be ‘spoken of’.

The history of women who parent alone sits counterpoint to the increasingly familiar history of Pakeha women (and ‘the family’) in New Zealand.⁵⁷ Historians generally agree that the experience of colonial women, and in particular the physical demands of colonisation, contributed to the development of sharply differentiated gender roles for men and women in the second half of the nineteenth century (Olssen, 1999; Dalziel, 1986; ‘Advocate’, 1930). However, in the context of New Zealand’s gendered culture, Pakeha femininity was shaped by norms of colonial domesticity that by the early twentieth century increasingly reflected bourgeois Victorian notions of ‘family life’, including the articulation of the separate social roles of men and women (Olssen, 1999; Olssen & Levesque, 1978). While Pakeha family life in the early days of the colony was primarily an interdependent productive enterprise, increased Pakeha urbanisation in the early twentieth century redefined ‘the family’ and ‘home’ as the ‘women’s sphere’.

New Zealand historians have also noted the ways in which the hazards of life in late colonial and early twentieth century life were gendered. Although for some Pakeha women settlers, the colonial experience was one of freedom from the constraints of middle class Victorian femininity (Porter, Macdonald & MacDonald, 1996), for others, the dangers of pregnancy and childrearing, and the experience of wife desertion or widowhood meant enduring hardship (Tennant, 1989; Olssen & Levesque, 1978). New Zealand Company propaganda about a new country where “everything betokened prosperity” masked the real and almost immediate poverty and destitution experienced by many of the early settlers (McClure, 1998; 11). As Koopman-Boyden & Scott (1984; 98) note “families were expected to be independent, and shoulder responsibility for the care of dependents”. This principle, codified first in the 1846 Otago Ordinance and later the 1867 Destitute Persons Act, continued to define the role of the State in family life until the late nineteenth century despite the insecure nature of life in the new colony (McClure, 1998; 11)⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ See for example, McClure (1998), Kedgley (1996), Toynbee (1995), Tennant (1989), Dalziel, (1986), Bunkle (1980), Olssen (1980) and ‘Advocate’ (1930).

⁵⁸ For women, destitution as a result of widowhood or desertion was distinctly gendered (Tennant, 1989), and although changes in the legal rights of married women in nineteenth century operated chiefly in the interests of wealthy women, success in securing various Married Women’s Property Acts of the latter half of the nineteenth century have in part been attributed recognition by the state of the specific perils of colonial life, especially wife desertion (Bradbury, 1995; 64). Nevertheless, changes in the legal rights of married women reflected dominant ideas about the family as an institution characterised by obligations between family members, rather than between the family and the State. From the 1860s onwards, the

The modernisation of family life during the early twentieth century saw the extension of scientific knowledge and expertise in defining femininity and motherhood as coterminous. New Zealand historians have identified the relationship between scientific discourses and gendered cultural practices in the early twentieth century as expressed through an emerging ‘Cult of Domesticity’ (James & Saville-Smith, 1994; Olssen, 1981; Olssen & Levesque, 1978) and increasing State interest in family life (Nolan, 2000; Dalley, 1998; McClure, 1998).

As in other modernising societies, political attention in the early twentieth focused on the ‘science’ of population matters (the crisis of the falling birth rate, infant mortality, ‘race hygiene’, and so on) as issues for both ‘the family’ and ‘the State’ to contend⁵⁹. While many of the State’s ‘population concerns’ were enacted through legislation and activities that reflected the changing status of children⁶⁰, and by default, the relationship between the State and the family, the Cult of Domesticity redefined femininity *as* motherhood, constructing a unique role for women in both the family, and ‘modern’ New Zealand society more generally. By the early twentieth century, mothers had become responsible for both the physicality (first their survival, then their health) and morality of their children. The most important role of this modern mother was the production of a healthy child as a national asset within the context of an emerging industrial-settler family comprised of a male breadwinner with a dependent wife-mother and children (Toynbee, 1995).

By the turn of the twentieth century, modernization was producing distinctive feminine subjects, and lone mothers occupied contested subject positions within New Zealand’s gendered culture, positioned within a hierarchy of maternal legitimacy privileging

Married Women’s Properties Acts established New Zealand women at the point of marriage breakdown as *femes soles*, allowing women ownership and control over personal property. As Bradbury (1995; 64) notes, such legislation ensured that “if a woman did manage to support herself, her husband could not come back to take her property – thus rhetorically placing the burden of support on her own shoulders, rather than on public charity”.

⁵⁹ Concern over population matters was not unique to New Zealand, and indeed as a then British colony, mirrors anxieties in Britain. See for example, Lewis (1986).

⁶⁰ For example, the Infant Life Protection Act in 1896, the establishment of ‘Plunket’ in 1907 (see Olssen, 1981), the introduction of school nurses and a regime of school-based physical examinations of children, and in 1925, the establishment of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education.

women as wives and mothers. The precariousness of the colonial experience, combined with the increasing articulation of modern 'femininity as motherhood', meant that women parenting alone could be spoken of as different types of women, that is, as different to other 'modern' mothers, and further differentiated as widows, deserted wives, or 'fallen women'. For example, in 1911, the first Widows Pension was introduced, in effect recognising widows as a "deserving group of women" (McClure, 1998; 31) with additional amounts paid to widows with children. Nevertheless, the rate of benefit was very low, and although widows were expected to earn the bulk of their income from the market, the pension "distinguished widows for their worthiness, and refused to support the 'undeserving', reinforcing the perception that those who had recourse to ... charitable aid were on the fringes of respectable community" (McClure, 1998; 31)⁶¹.

New Zealand's modern welfare state was institutionalised during the late 1930s and 1940s. As in other liberal welfare regimes, the welfarism of the first Labour government was premised on a settlement between capital and labour, and on a settlement between men and women (Hobson, Lewis & Siim, 2002; 5). The breadwinner-caregiver family ideal enshrined in Labour's employment and social security legislation reflected the idea that men and women were different, that the full and stable employment of men would ensure economic security, and that the role of women within the modern family would ensure stable family life. Thus, the modern family was the key institution in achieving social security. Nolan (2000; 193-194) citing the "famous statement" in 1944 of Labour's finance minister, Walter Nash, notes:

[Nash] was a socialist in the sense that he believed 'a major responsibility of government (was) to provide collectively for the economic welfare and security of the individual', but [Nash] was a conservative in that he looked 'upon the family as the foundation of the nation'. It was a vision that assumed that men were the breadwinners and women the homemakers. Labour sought to create the economic conditions that would guarantee to the New Zealand worker that '(he) and his family can have a home and a home life with all that those terms imply'.

⁶¹'Fallen women' were a particularly problematic category of persons. Motherhood and infant survival had become tightly linked by the early twentieth century, and 'foundling homes' had much higher infant mortality rates than infants in their mother's care. Because 'fallen women' needed to work, they often place their children in such homes 'to board'. At the same time, the high mortality in these homes was often attributed to the infant's abandonment by its mother. In addition, Tennant (1992) notes that by the 1920s proprietors of residential maternity homes for unmarried mothers claimed that they saved not one life (the mothers), but two (the mother and the child).

During the Second World War, ‘war conditions’⁶² offered a general explanation for the rise in both illegitimacy and divorce, but the idealisation of the ‘modern’ heterosexual family was central to both wartime propaganda, and post war gender relations (Montgomerie, 1999; May, 1992). While war exposed the gender differences codified within New Zealand’s gendered culture in that “all men were classed as potential soldiers, all women as potential mothers” (Montgomerie, 1999; 185), it was the post war ‘return to normal conditions’ that further exaggerated the idealised breadwinner-caregiver family. As May (1992; 2-3) notes, comparing her mother’s generation born after the Great War, with her generation of ‘baby-boomers’ born following the Second World War:

Our births divided an era of privation, separation and disorder from an era of comparative prosperity, social order and confidence in family life. We were healthier and better educated than any previous generation of New Zealanders. This was made possible by a society which had full employment. Policies and services were designed to support the material well-being of families, and also to uphold the ideal of the nuclear family with a full-time mother and a male breadwinner. There were still problems, but in the main these were seen as private family issues ... [later, in the 1960s] the hidden dysfunctions of the family were categorised as social ills demanding collective responsibility rather than private problems bringing family shame and withdrawal.

May (1992) notes that there was ambivalence around women’s role in the post war reconstruction. On the one hand, women’s expectations were changing and women’s place in the post war society was mediated by improvements in the education of girls. However, post war reconstruction and rehabilitation “focused towards men and assumed that the lives of women would continue as before the war” (May, 1992; 3).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the meanings around women parenting alone continued to differentiate between, for example, widows, deserted wives, unwed mothers, and ‘pregnant girls’. Unlike other mothers, women parenting alone did so without a ‘breadwinner’, and the material effects of the hierarchy of maternal legitimacy were reflected in the differences in welfare assistance. Widows (at the top of the hierarchy) constructed as women whose lives had been disrupted by fate, were entitled to a modest

⁶² As Montgomerie (1992; 203) notes in relation to gender relations, “the war was seen as an extraordinary period, a time of emergency in which normal standards would have to be modified”.

Widow's Pension, as were some deserted wives and divorced women⁶³. For unmarried women, welfare provisions were much more fragile. In the 1960s and early 1970s, almost half of all unmarried mothers were living in de-facto relationships, and like other mothers living with men, their dependence on a male breadwinner assumed. The others, 'unmarried mothers' who either 'kept their babies' or 'placed' them for adoption (a practice that had become routine in post war New Zealand)⁶⁴ had no statutory entitlement to any welfare benefit⁶⁵.

In her history of child welfare in twentieth century New Zealand, Dalley (1998) describes the expansion of State interest in New Zealand family life during the 1950s and 1960s, as period of unprecedented economic prosperity (Dalley, 1998; 175). In 1948, the Child Welfare Branch of the Department of Education had been renamed the Child Welfare Division (CWD), and was the major State agency responsible for the prevention of "wastage in child-life" (Dalley, 1998; 95). By the 1960s, the work of the CWD fell into two main categories: "the treatment of delinquent children", and "protecting the interests and advancing the welfare of children who face life under some handicap" (Dalley, 1998; 216). The births of all illegitimate children⁶⁶ were investigated by the CWD, and child welfare officers were important agents in facilitating the adoption of many of these children following the passage of the 1955 Adoption Act.

Throughout the 1960s, district child welfare officers sent newspaper clippings from throughout New Zealand about illegitimacy and the related work of CWD to its Head Office in Wellington⁶⁷. At this time, it appears that the division was not engaged in any formal social research, although it did calculate and report on the the various administrative duties it undertook, reporting annually to the House of Representatives.

⁶³ Deserted wives and separated or divorced women were required to prove to the Department of Social Security that they were not to blame for their circumstances, and that they commenced maintenance proceedings against their absent husband (Beaglehole, 1993; 24-33).

⁶⁴ For full accounts of adoption practices during the post war decades, see Griffith (1998), Else (1991), Sawyer (1979).

⁶⁵ With the exception of the sickness benefit during the last few months of pregnancy and immediately following the birth of the child.

⁶⁶ Under the 1925 Child Welfare Act, the Branch, and later the Division, was required to investigate all registered illegitimate births. In practice, births to Maori mothers were not routinely investigated until around the 1950s.

⁶⁷ These clipping are held on one of the division's files at National Archives, Wellington.

Expert comments from child welfare officers were often cited in newspaper stories about children and family life, and Lewis Anderson, the Superintendent of Child Welfare, often wrote to newspapers restating the division's role. For example, in a letter to the *New Zealand Truth* in April 1967, Anderson rebutted previously published claims that child welfare officers routinely told unmarried mothers to have their babies adopted:

... I can speak for child welfare officers in denying completely [encouragement to adopt]. Child welfare officers do not tell mothers to have their babies adopted. They are available to explain the advantages and disadvantages of adoption, but they stop short of persuasion. The mother is left to make up her own mind ... Any unmarried mother who makes her child available for adoption does so voluntarily, of her own free will, so far as child welfare is concerned (Anderson, 1967a).

At the same time, popular 'social explanations' were appearing in newspaper reports charting historic increases in the rates of illegitimacy and 'unwed motherhood'. Here, a 'modern society discourse' emerged to compete with the expert psychological view, and to counter the traditional moral explanations that had persisted throughout the previous decades⁶⁸. This modern society discourse invoked a 'new morality' whereby modern society, rather than any individual, was deemed responsible for 'social problems'. Working mothers, lack of maternal supervision, girls maturing at earlier ages, comparatively high levels of teenage affluence, and general teenage boredom were all cited as causes of increasing illegitimacy; but as causes for which 'society' rather than any individual was asked to take responsibility.

The 'modern society discourse' that emerged during the 1960s made possible new ways of talking about 'the problems' experienced by women parenting alone. The problems of 'unsupported mothers' were constituted through this discourse as a collective rather than individual 'problem'. In particular, the 'plight' of unmarried mothers (and illegitimate babies) that was the focus of numerous newspaper reports, editorials and letters to the editor became a matter of public debate. Letters to editors and 'Special Reports' presented unwed mothers as 'deserving cases', although others continued to

⁶⁸ The report of the Mazengarb Inquiry (1954) was distributed to all New Zealand households in 1954. The inquiry had been convened to investigate juvenile delinquency and sexual promiscuity amongst teenagers in the Hutt Valley. In this report, discourses around post war social change and moral decline are central. For example, the committee noted "It is the view of this committee that during the past few decades there have been changes in certain aspects of family life throughout the English-speaking world leading to a decline in morality ... A remedy must be found before this decline leads to the decay of the family itself as the centre and core of national culture and life" (Mazengarb, 1954; 45).

cite the rise in the illegitimacy rate as symptomatic of a general moral decline. Stories featured the hardships faced by these ‘unmarried’ or ‘unwed’ mothers; the ‘homes’ that the ‘pregnant girls’ lived in; their exploitation through various hostess schemes where they worked as home helps in exchange for their keep; and, by the late 1960s the ‘surplus’ of adoptive babies needing maternal care. While in the early 1960s, the ‘unmarried mothers’ who were the focus of these reports rarely actually became mothers (that is, the stories inevitably depicted unmarried mothers as ‘girls’ who would place their child for adoption) by the end of the 1960s, this new problem of too many babies and too few adoptive parents constituted a new category of mothers, ‘unwed mothers’, struggling ‘against the odds’ to bring up their children alone.

Although Anderson continued to reiterate the Division’s view in the press, by the late 1960s, the number of newspaper reports, letters to the editor and editorials around illegitimacy, ‘unwanted babies’ and unwed mothers increased. While the meanings around ‘illegitimacy’ and ‘unwed mothers’ were contested through the ‘modern society discourse’, authors often cited schemes in other countries where ‘unwed mothers’ were supported as mothers. For example, in response to a number of newspaper clippings in 1967 championing support for unmarried mothers overseas, and a paper to the Division from the Presbyterian of Church urging Child Welfare to consider a scheme where “the unmarried mother [be] treated in all ways like other unsupported mothers, and wherever possible the line of demarcation blurred”⁶⁹, Anderson wrote to his Minister:

I suspect that undue pressure is brought to bear on Danish unmarried mothers to keep their children, whereas many illegitimate babies are better off away from their mothers who, after all, have in their ranks, a fair concentration of subnormal, incompetent, unhappy, and under age women. The position in New Zealand ... reflects fairly what the position should be (Anderson, 1967b).

Despite Anderson’s efforts to limit CWD to its then statutory role, it was during the 1960s the State’s historic interest in ‘the child’ began to shift to an interest in ‘the mother’, especially as the unwed mother became a publicly contested subject. Under the Child Welfare Act (1925), all illegitimate births were investigated by social workers, a practice originating from official concerns about infant mortality, especially of ‘illegitimate infants’ in the late nineteenth century. In the post war decades, this investigation of the mother and child provided the institutional site in which the State’s

⁶⁹ Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, (1967).

‘gaze’ transferred from the “monstrous affairs” of infant death, to the “abnormal affairs” of post war unorthodox family life (Donzelot, 1979; 126-29). Despite Anderson’s reluctance to see any change in relation to ‘unwed mothers’, public and political concern over the rising illegitimacy rate (and what should be done about it) led to the establishment in 1969 of the Committee for Research into Illegitimacy led by Jim Robb from Victoria University, and included a number of officials from the Child Welfare Division and other government departments (Dalley, 1998; 218-219). The research section of the newly formed Department of Social Welfare published the report of this committee in 1976 (O’Neill, Hudson, Boven, O’Connell & Donnell; 1976). Interestingly, the report was entitled ‘Ex-nuptial children and their parents – a descriptive study’. ‘Illegitimacy’ as a legal status had been removed by statute in the 1969 Status of Children Act. Nevertheless, the residue of the State’s historic interest in children survived in the report’s title and its cover illustration (see Illustration 1).

New Zealand social research was not only consolidating in government departments and universities in the 1960s. The Society for Research on Women (SROW) was established as a voluntary feminist organisation in 1966 to do social research on “issues that affect and concern women” (SROW, 1991). One of its earliest projects was a four-part longitudinal research study on unmarried mothers (SROW, 1984; SROW, 1979; SROW, 1977)⁷⁰. Although these research reports focused on the ‘plight’ of unmarried mothers, an early assumption by the researchers (that women who choose to keep their babies were emotionally immature as evidenced by their inability to make the rational decision to adopt) was recanted in the final report. Instead, the material experience of “solo mothers” and the “social problems” these women (as mothers) encountered became key findings (SROW, 1984; SROW, 1979).

It is noteworthy that in the early 1970s, an important contest over meaning around women parenting alone was occurring at the level of social science knowledge. In the two reports mentioned above the discursive ‘finger prints’ of the ‘pathological mother’ and ‘social problem mother’. For institutionally based ‘government researchers’ the historical commitment to the life of the child positions the illegitimate child as the subject of their gaze. Thus, support for the child’s mother is secondary to other existing

⁷⁰ See also SROW (1975), SROW (1970).

Illustration 1: Illegitimacy Report Cover Illustration, Social Welfare, 1976

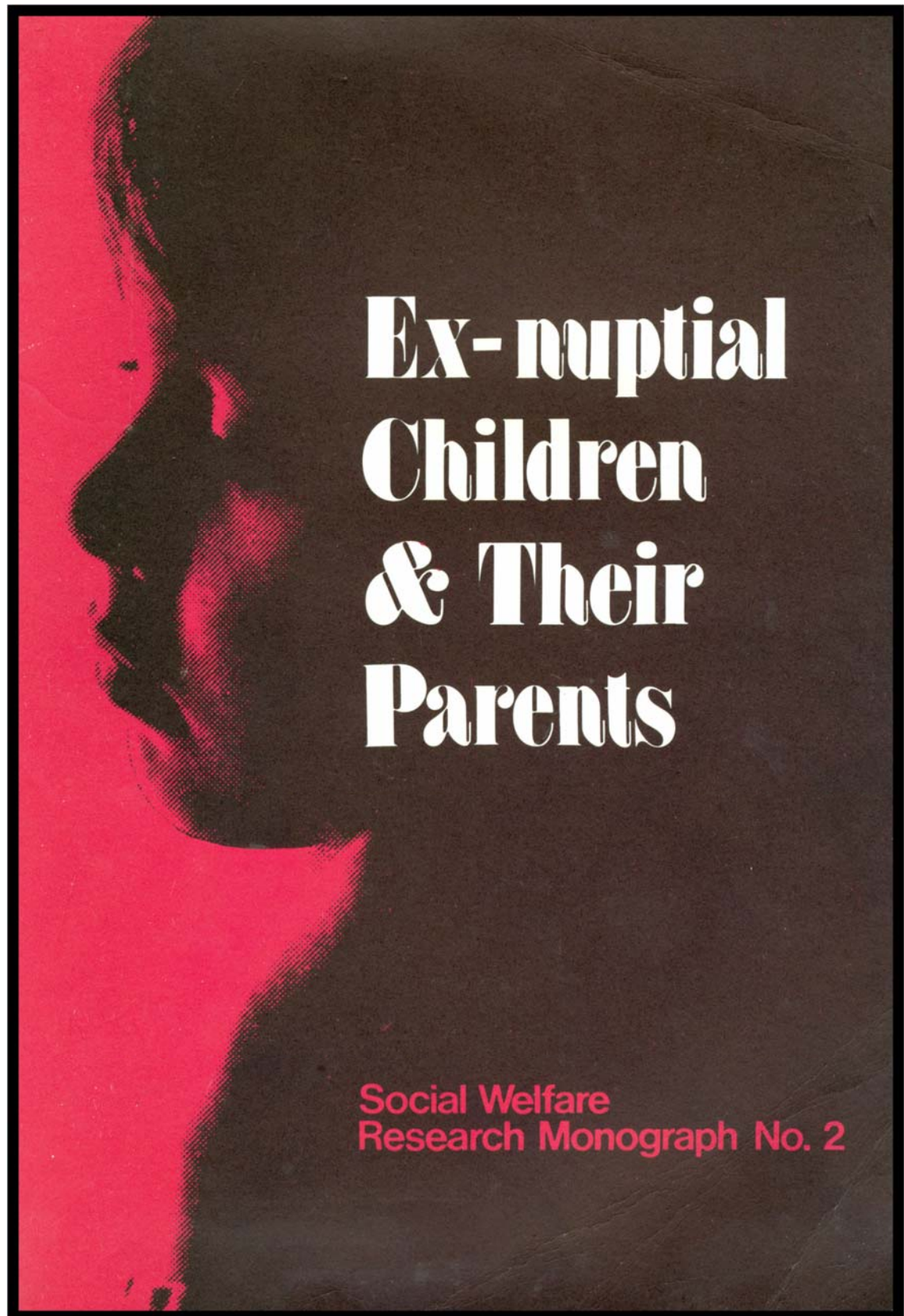
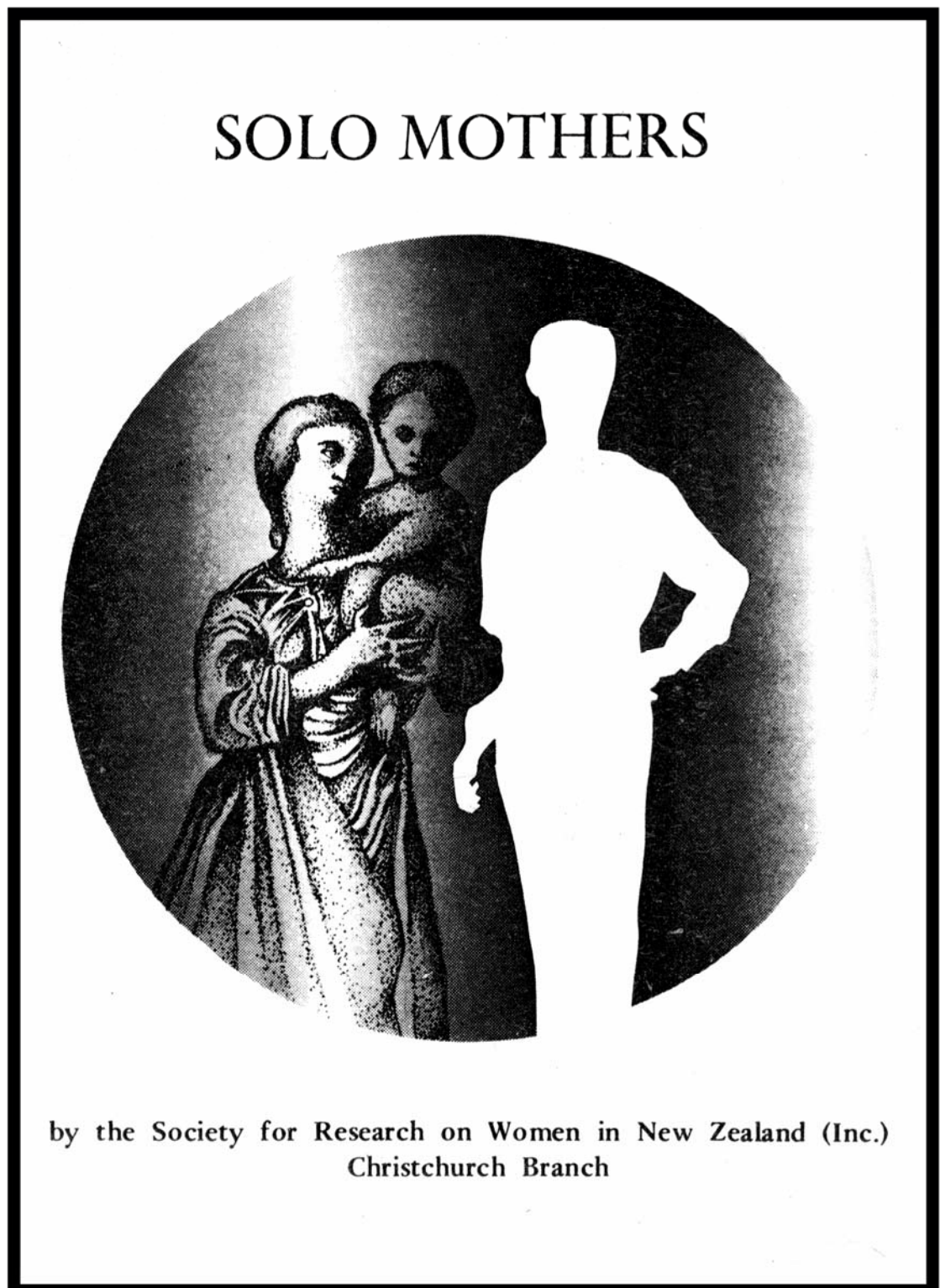


Illustration 2: Solo Mothers Report Illustration, SROW, 1975



institutional possibilities for securing life over death. For the SROW researchers, the mother is the subject of the gaze. In contrast to the DSW report, the SROW report is illustrated with an image of a mother and child accompanied by a silhouette of the missing father (see Illustration 2). The silhouette positions lone mothers as unsupported mothers, both haunted by the lack of a breadwinner but 'leaving space' for new possibilities of support.

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined the importance of social statistics as social technology in making up people. Discourses making up the lone mother as a social problem drew heavily upon statistical knowledge as evidence that the problem existed, and that something should be done. Over the same period that social researchers began investigations into women parenting alone, there were major changes in reporting categories used in the five yearly New Zealand population censuses. Census reports exemplify how social science practices construct "administratively constituted knowledge" as 'knowers' generate categories that, through their construction, appear permanent and unitary (Smith, 1974; 261). As in Britain, stable categories describing parenting alone did not appear in official discourses within New Zealand until the 1970s and 1980s when naming practices produced a 'new' human subject, the lone parent (Crow & Hardey, 1992). As the following brief overview of the reports of New Zealand censuses indicates, just as the contest over meaning intensified in the 'social welfare' response to women parenting alone in these decades, accurately 'representing' the phenomenon became a key theme in census reports mapping changing patterns of family formation. In this sense, the provision of the DPB from 1973 onwards made women's economic predicament as lone mothers a 'public' rather than 'private' issue. Combined with an expanding social scientific interest in knowing the social problem lone mother, counting lone mothers heightened the visibility of the 'problem'.

In New Zealand the collection of 'statistical information' (in itself, integral to the colonising enterprise) began in 1840, modelled on William Farr's Blue Books. These early colonial censuses contained "a good many items ... non-statistical in character"⁷¹ (Wood, 1976; 1-3) but by 1921, most of the non-demographic questions had been removed, when the census became much more focused on "the condition of the people"

⁷¹ Including, for example, details of revenue and expenditure of the 'general government', military expenditure, details of shipping, lands granted and sold, and so on (Wood, 1976; 1-3).

(Wood, 1976; 106). Until the 1960s, the five yearly census reports followed similar formats, with the scope and range of questions reported and the style of reporting changing incrementally over the decades. However, the format of the 1961 census report changed considerably. Presented in volumes each in turn comprised of headlined sections, these reports feature more tables and commentary than previous reports. In the section headed “Dependent children in the average family” (Department of Statistics, 1964; 44) the “number of dependent children” is tabulated against the “marital status of the parent” of which three categories appear: married men, widowers, and widows. Although women as mothers (with the exception of widows) are not ‘spoken of’ as parents, the commentary notes:

The total number of children under 16 years of age enumerated at the 1961 census was 840,443 of whom 821,359 were dependent. Total children therefore exceeded dependent children of married men, widowers and widows by 19,084. A disparity between the two sets of figures is usual. Children outside the range of this inquiry included those whose parents were legally separated, those whose parents were divorced and had not remarried, orphaned children, and ex-nuptial children⁷² (the last two classes excluding cases of adoption) (Department of Statistics, 1964; 44).

In comparison, the report of the 1971 census again adopts a substantially changed format, and includes for the first time photographs of idealised ‘demographic’ tableau. For example, the cover of volume ten, ‘Households, Family and Fertility’ (Department of Statistics, 1975), depicts a family living room occupied by a woman in an easy chair watching four children engaged in various homely activities, against the backdrop of a television set and china cabinet. Ironically, although the male parent is absent, the photograph succeeds in presenting an image of comfortable, hetero-normative family life. Nevertheless, it is within this volume that a new phenomenon appears in a section entitled “One family only (incomplete households)”. The commentary notes:

For the 1971 Census, the classification of incomplete families was extended in order to distinguish between households where family members were only temporarily absent ... and households where the missing parent was no longer a member of the family unit (ie through death, divorce, or legal separation (Department of Statistics, 1975; 8).

Thus, for the first time in New Zealand census reports, widows are ‘counted’ with divorced and separated women. Although the route into a “one family only (incomplete

⁷² The use of the term ‘ex-nuptial’ is unusual here. In his memoir, Wood notes Thus “The truth of the matter is that an official statistician – however hard he tries to be objective, is bound to a very appreciable extent in the direction of his work by the establishment mores of his day” (Wood, 1976; 11).

households)”) clearly remains via a “complete family”, and here, unmarried mothers remain ‘unspoken’, it is in this census report that a new although still unstable lexicon of family life for the newly identified phenomena surfaces. Indeed, in the four paragraphs of commentary summarising the relative characteristics of ‘incomplete households’ (Department of Statistics, 1975; 8-9), the following terms and phases (with frequencies in brackets) are used:

- Heads of one parent families (1)
- One family households (1)
- One parent absent households (1)
- One-parent-only households (1)
- Complete family heads (1)
- Households with an absent parent (1)
- Complete families (ie with both parents present) (1)
- One parent households (3)
- Families where husband and wife were present (1)
- One-complete-family households (1)
- Heads of single parent households who were housewives (1)
- Female heads (1)
- Total heads ... [that] were female (1)
- An actively engaged head (1)
- Two parent families (1)
- Families with a solo parent (1)
- Nuclear conjugal family households
- One family only (incomplete) households.

While in 1971 the newly emerging phenomenon of the one-parent family was an ill-defined subject, by 1981 the category became much more stable. In 1981 the presentation of the census reports again changed markedly. In his introductory comments to the general report, the Government Statistician acknowledges the new format and the intention to “deal with a selection of topical areas rather than attempting to summarise all the material in the Census” (Department of Statistics, 1985; iii). In these topical discussions, the terms ‘one-parent family’ and ‘lone parent’ stabilise as ‘official’ census terms. For example, in the technical notes appended in the 1981 report, it is noted that for census purposes, a ‘family’ is defined as:

Husband and wife ... or a *lone-parent* with ... never married children ... A family is not necessarily the entire biological family, but comprises those members present related by blood, marriage or adoption, who normally live together as a single family unit (Department of Statistics, 1985; 8)⁷³.

Most importantly, in 1981 the technology of ‘multivariate analysis’ is used for the first time, generating new comparisons between ‘one and two-parent families’ according to a number of variables⁷⁴. The ‘results’ are reported in both tables and commentary, and new knowledge emerges, including for example, the comparatively higher average income of two-parent families, the lower participation rates in the paid work by lone mothers, and the “greater dependence of lone mothers on social welfare benefits” (Department of Statistics, 1985; 38)⁷⁵. In conclusion, the report notes:

In summary, the most important differences between one- and two-parent families were found to be economic ones ... [the differences] pointed to the conclusion that, compared with two-parent families, one parent families were economically disadvantaged (Department of Statistics, 1985; 39)

Between 1971 and 1981, the ‘one-parent family’ and ‘lone parent’ stabilised as a countable category comprised mainly of mothers and their children who in 1961 had been ‘outside the range of inquiry’. Thus, it was in the 1970s that women as parents could be ‘spoken of’ in census reports as the idea of the ‘lone parent’ as a unitary subject solidified. As such, women lone parents as a group became historical phenomena.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the amount of social research around the phenomenon of the ‘lone parent’ continued to grow⁷⁶. For example, Statistics New Zealand routinely reported on ‘lone parents’ as a particular type of family, and made comparisons both

⁷³ My emphasis.

⁷⁴ For example, the “age of parent, education level, ethnicity, hours worked, occupations, number of children, age of youngest child, income from social welfare benefits, family income, tenure of dwelling, landlord type, urban area group, number of cars, and the presence of amenities in the dwelling” are all reported (Department of Statistics, 1985; 37).

⁷⁵ Commentary within the report on the 1981 multivariate analysis progressed into a paragraph on ‘lone fathers’, possibly the first use of this term rather than ‘widowers’ in census reports.

⁷⁶ Similarly, university based researchers routinely reported on the circumstances and experiences of women lone parents and their children, adopting the categories of families and persons that had solidified through administrative processes in the early 1970s (see for example, Christchurch Child Development Study, 1983; Davey, 1998; Fergusson, 1998).

between family types, and between ‘sub-groups’ within the category lone parent (see for example, Statistics New Zealand, 1998). Similarly, it was during these decades that ‘lone parents’ became examinable as a group that differences between ‘types’ of lone parents could again be articulated. For example, in the 1990s, *all* lone parents were to increasingly come under the gaze of social policy researchers based within government agencies. Here, researchers compared those lone parents who were, for example, in receipt of government benefits and those who were not⁷⁷.

As noted previously in this thesis, the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was introduced in 1973 and paid on the basis of need rather than maternal status as a statutory income-tested benefit (Nolan, 2000)⁷⁸. The DPB reflected the idea that all lone mothers had something in common as unsupported mothers, “special economic needs” that needed to be met in order that these women could fulfil their maternal role (Beaglehole 1993; 30). Although the benefit reflected the breadwinner-caregiver idealisation of family life by defining women’s citizenship entitlements through their relationship (or lack of relationship) to men (Saville-Smith, 1987), it did give *all* lone mothers some economic autonomy. Within the context of New Zealand’s gendered culture, it is hardly surprising then that the benefit was almost immediately controversial. The number of women ‘on the benefit’ rose throughout the 1970s, and the then Minister of Social Welfare was concerned it was ‘encouraging women to leave their husbands’ (Kedgley, 1996). In the 1980s, when the neo-liberal ‘New Zealand experiment’ led to high levels of structural unemployment it was claimed that young women were getting pregnant ‘to go on the benefit’ (Bedggood, 2000). By the late 1980s, the DPB was a central symbol in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. In the early 1990s, when a newly elected right wing government implemented a social policy agenda designed to cut public spending and encourage ‘individual responsibility’, women parenting alone as ‘solo mums’ had become coterminous with ‘the excesses of welfarism’.

⁷⁷ See for example, Levine et al (1993), Rochford (1993), Rochford et al (1992).

⁷⁸ The rate of the DPB in August 1973 was the same as the Widows Benefit – \$36.50 for a woman with one dependant child. In comparison, minimum weekly wages this time ranged from \$75 for a grocer’s assistant and \$95 for a carpenter (Beaglehole, 1993; 31). In 1973, widows remained outside of this newly administratively defined group called ‘single parents’ entitled to the new benefit.

Haggerty (2002; 99) notes, “surveillance often brings to mind hidden cameras and microphones, [but] the State’s extensive quantitative infrastructure is a key dimension in the contemporary dynamics of surveillance”. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a surge of social research in New Zealand that had as its focus the subject called the ‘lone parent’. Lone parents were examined as a group, their characteristics identified, and through this interrogation differences between lone parents emerged. This differentiation in part drew on older moral categories, including, for example, the routes into lone parenthood. ‘Teenage mothers’ were once again different to ‘widows’, who were again different to mothers on the DPB, who were very different to women in paid work. For example, the Department of Social Welfare (renamed the Social Policy Agency in the early 1990s) produced reports entitled ‘A Profile of Lone Parents from the 1986 census’ (Rochford, Pawakapan, Martin & Norris, 1992) and ‘A Profile of Lone Parents from the 1991 census’ (Rochford, 1993).

In these reports all lone parents come under the gaze of the researcher, even though the Department of Social Welfare’s administrative interest is their ‘clients’, or ‘beneficiaries’. What research like this made possible were comparisons between lone mothers as welfare mothers and the construction of a normative citizen (that is, not ‘on welfare’). This research constructed a particular type of lone mother through the welfare mother discourse that in effect drew upon both pathological and social problems constructed to assert a hierarchy of maternal legitimacy. At the bottom of that hierarchy is the ‘solo mother’. The solo mother is a particular type of lone parent who although unnamed in this administratively constituted knowledge, is visible through it. The solo mother is the benefit bludger⁷⁹, the young mother, the deliberately single mother, the difficult ex-wife, who as an individual lacks the moral dimensions required of the neo-liberal citizen. In the 1990s, this officially unnamed but ever present ‘solo mother’ was central in discussions around the New Zealand experience of the ‘crisis of welfarism’.

⁷⁹ Orsman (1999; 13) traces the use of the term ‘bludger’ to describe “a person who avoids responsibility or (figuratively) lives on the back of the deserving people, a loafer and an idler” to 1908, and that from 1983, its figurative use transferred to “an offensive term for an unemployed person living on a State benefit and regarded as a scrounging loafer”. Usage of the form “dole bludging” as “an offensive term for living as a State Beneficiary” is traced to 1988. Importantly, in all cases cited by Orsman (1999; 13), the bludger is clearly male.

The Government had support for the 1991 reforms from other political parties like the emerging right wing ACT⁸⁰ party, and consortiums of business interests like the New Zealand Business Roundtable. This latter group used a number of tactics to privilege their anti-welfarist interests. They imported international ‘experts’ on the deleterious effects of welfare on individuals and society, and funded ‘research’ through organisations like the Institute of Economic Affairs (Peters, 1997; 13-14). Collectively, these anti-welfarists argued that the government needed to reduce spending, particularly on welfare. Their argument drew upon populist notions about both the type of people on welfare, and claims about what welfarism does to people. For example, Allan Gibbs, a prominent businessman, told a conference marking the International Year of the Family (1994) that:

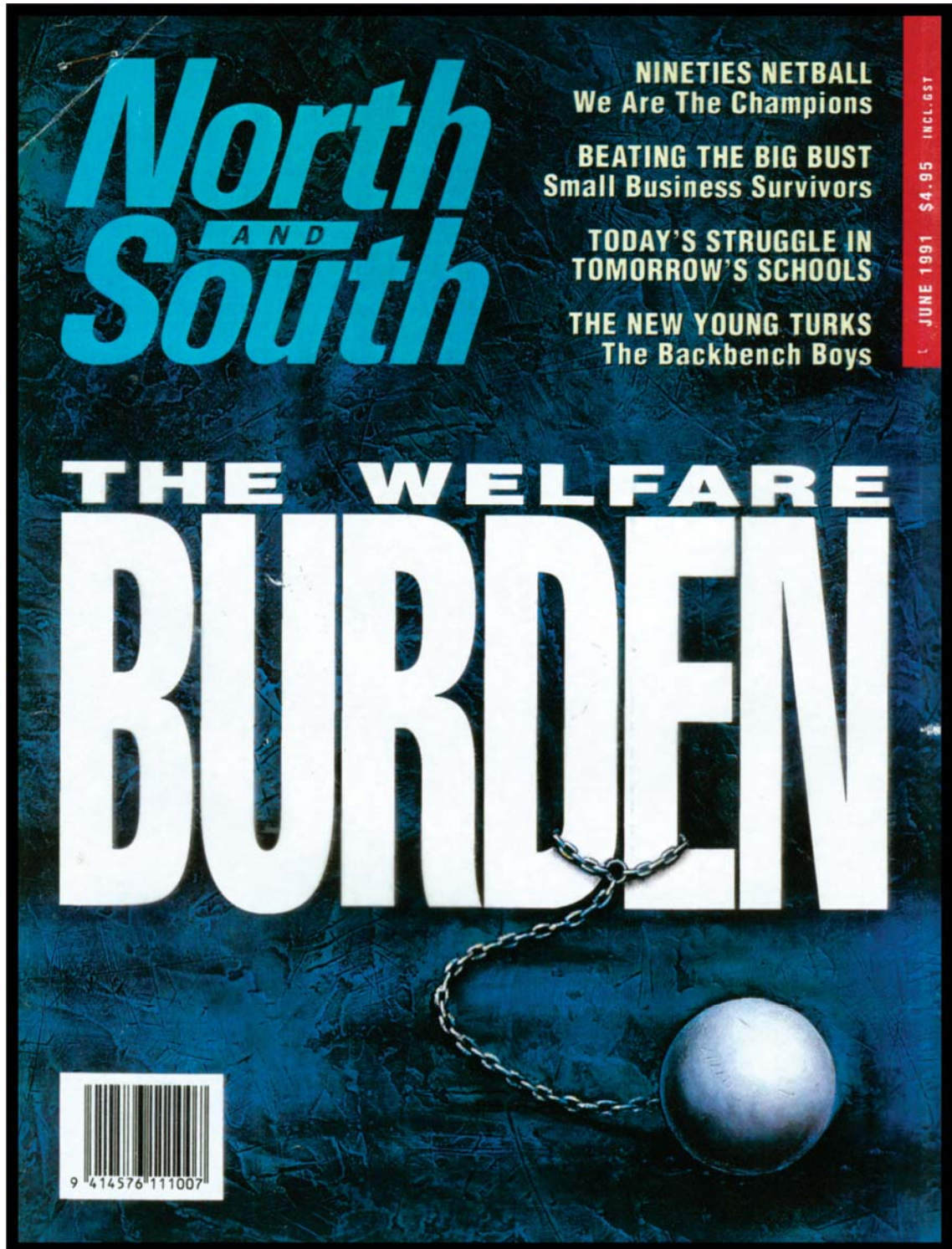
[We] have swapped husbands for benefits. Today all the symptoms of poor families are the result of that huge social change. It is nothing to do with economics (Gibbs, in Wilson, 1995; 14).

The emphasis on the ‘moral consequences of welfarism’ as necessitating a need for radical social policy reform was also reflected in constructions of welfarism (including the types of people ‘on welfare’) as ‘the problem’ in the popular press. In June 1991, the New Zealand magazine, ‘North and South’, featured as its cover story, an article entitled ‘The Welfare Burden – the path to despair’ (McLoughlin, 1991) (see Illustration 3). The cover image could be interpreted in a number of ways. Throughout the article, welfarism is constructed as a weight carried by the taxpayer, while beneficiaries are constructed as personally dragging the ‘ball and chain’. The image also builds on the neo-liberal idea that welfarism is a moral weight that government must address. And somewhat perversely, the ball and chain image also links welfarism with criminality.

The article creates an immediate and powerful image of the ‘shocking’ welfare crisis confronting New Zealand. Phrases such as “New Zealand is poised on the edge of the Third World and might very well fall in” (McLoughlin, 1991; 42) and “Virtually everything we have done since the early 1970s is wrong” (McLoughlin, 1991; 42) mirror the policy imperative of “we’re left with little option but to trim the size of the government” (McLoughlin, 1991; 43). “Welfare culture” which “has helped to feed

⁸⁰ Association of Citizens and Taxpayers, a political party established by Roger Douglas on a platform of neo-liberal social reform.

Illustration 3: 'North & South' Cover Illustration, 1991



certain trends in benefits out of all proportion” (McLoughlin, 1991; 50) is identified as a key problem. The cause and effect of the problem are both embodied in beneficiaries themselves, and enacted through the practices of welfare.

The article not only focuses on the ‘horror story’ of the rising dependence on, and cost of, welfare benefits but also the rising costs of other government social spending. In this context, the article divides New Zealand into two types of people - those ‘on benefits’ who are getting more than they deserve, and those not who are about to get what they don’t deserve. This second group is of course, the middle class reader of the article, and the discursive accentuation of the *idea* of competing interests makes clear to that reader what the *real* welfare crisis is. That is, it is individualised as if the reader is carrying ‘the rest’ as their personal ball and chain, while at the same time, having to pay for their own social services. On the last page, it is noted of the then forthcoming budget:

(The budget) is expected to preview further and bigger reforms ... particularly to the health, education and social welfare systems. The middle classes can expect to be told that they’re going to pay a lot more in future, while still paying the taxes they thought paid for their hospital care, their children’s schooling and other services (McLoughlin, 1991; 53).

By the mid-late 1990s ‘welfare reform’ had become a matter of public concern, driven by criticisms around rising poverty and the marginalisation of the poor by government policy. Criticism of the Coalition Government’s general approach to welfare made headline news through actions like ‘the Hikoi of Hope’, a protest walk from both the north and south of the country converging on Wellington organised by the Anglican Church in 1998. In the middle class press, stories about the damaging effects of welfarism continued to feature⁸¹, although concern about the similarities with the direction of the Government’s continuing reforms and nineteenth century models of charitable aid were also being reported⁸². Despite increasing public concern, the Government continued to pursue its policy reform agenda. By this time, public relations consultants working for various government departments were managing more and more policy information. In a sense, this expansion of public relations as the mode for

⁸¹See for example, McLoughlin (1995).

⁸²See for example, Bain (1997).

informing the public of policy reform was a major shift in what had become an increasingly overt campaign to legitimate an increasingly unpopular policy regime.

In the government funded public relations campaigns, the institutional language associated with welfarism was targeted. For example, government departments and state agencies were renamed. The benefit section of the Department of Social Welfare had been re-branded in the early 1990s as 'Income Support', and then in 1998 became 'Work and Income New Zealand'. Government policy units hosted conferences like the 'Beyond Dependency' conference (subtitled 'from welfare to work') in 1997⁸³ which championed on 'the Wisconsin model' of welfare reform. Locally made documentaries about welfare abuse⁸⁴ were screened on prime time television, as were advertising campaigns to encourage tax payers to 'Dob in Your Neighbour' to 'Reduce Benefit Fraud'⁸⁵. Finally, in February 1998 the Coalition Government released as a 'discussion document', a draft of a Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility (Department of Social Welfare, 1998)⁸⁶.

In perhaps the most extreme articulation of the morality that informed neo-liberalism in New Zealand, it is in the Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility (1998) that the solo mother sits at centre. The goal of the Code was to make "people's responsibilities clearer", that is, those "bringing up children or ... receiving income support" (Department of Social Welfare, 1998; 3). In sum, the Code exemplifies how neo-liberal discourses produce and make visible particular subjects, especially 'beneficiaries' and particularly the solo mum. Although never named, she is the beneficiary at the heart of the problems of welfarism.

As noted earlier in this chapter, discourses have material effects. However, the veracity of construction of the solo mum as a particular type of person has been contested. For example, there have been several critical analyses of the impact on women of the shift

⁸³ An issue of the Social Policy Journal in 1997 commemorated the conference.

⁸⁴ 'Time Bomb', a two part 'documentary' about welfare and the types of people 'on it', featured on New Zealand's government owned television channel in prime time in New Zealand in 1997.

⁸⁵ In late 1997 and 1998.

⁸⁶ For an interesting range of different perspectives on the Code as policy 'experiment', see Davey (2000).

in policy regimes from welfarism to neo-liberalism in New Zealand. For example, Anne Else (1997) has argued that social policies centred on increasing the participation rates of lone parents in paid work are “having it both ways”. On the one hand, these policies argue that women are the same, and like any other ‘citizen’ can earn on behalf of their family members. On the other hand these policies are arguing that women are different and therefore responsible for unpaid caring work. Thus, Else draws attention to how women, and particularly women who parent alone, are expected to resolve the contradictions between neo-liberal discourses where the only valued work is paid work, and patriarchal discourses where the unpaid work of women remains invisible.

In a similar vein, Copas (2001) has argued, “the centrality of paid employment as *the* organising principle in human life” in free market discourses both de-legitimises unpaid work and disguises the complex working lives of many women combining different forms of work (Copas, 2001; 202-203). In tracking the rise of the (degendered) ‘active citizen’ of neo-liberalism and the disappearance of the (gendered) ‘social citizen’ of welfarism, Copas shows how New Zealand policy discourses constituted women as the ‘citizen-mother’ during welfarist policy regimes, and as (degendered) ‘active citizen-workers’ in contemporary neo-liberal regimes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined social constructionism and discussed how the social construction of motherhood has produced historically and culturally specific maternal subjects. As such, social constructionism has been shown to make problematic common-sense and taken for granted knowledge about the social world, and situates our knowledge of that world as an outcome of social processes. I also introduced Hacking’s (1986) notion of dynamic nominalism; a concept that connects the processes of labelling with the experience of being so labelled.

In this chapter I have examined how lone mothers in New Zealand have been constructed as Other mothers through ‘the vector of labelling from above’. In particular, I have focused on constructions of the pathological mother, the problem mother, and finally the welfare mother named under the conditions of neo-liberalism as the ‘solo mum’. Earlier in this chapter I noted the opportunistic nature of discourses. In tracing

changing constructions of lone mothers I have shown how discourses sediment and resurface in making up women who parent alone as particular types of people, and how changing hierarchies of maternal legitimacy have made visible different subjects at different historical moments. In the next chapter, I begin to explore ‘the vector of labelling from below’. Here I provide an account of the research processes that were undertaken in order to explore how New Zealand women who parent alone in the context of welfare reform make sense of their experience.

Chapter Four

Researching Women's Lives

How do stories get produced: what brings people to the brink of tellings? How do people come to construct their particular stories (and possess them as their own)? Further, what might silence them, and what might bring people to the emotional brink of revealing all? ... And why do they tell this particular kind of story rather than another - where does the story they tell come from? (Plummer, 1995; 24-25)

Introduction

'Doing research' seems inevitably a messy business (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994; 46). This chapter provides an account of the research processes undertaken for this thesis. The chapter begins by situating the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the research, with a particular focus on narrative and the sociology of stories (Plummer, 1995). The research process is then described. Plummer (1983; 116) summarises the stages of research as "preparing, gathering, storing, analysing and presenting", while noting that the research process is not linear, and these stages overlap (Plummer, 1983; 86). While this chapter is in part organised according to Plummer's stages, it is important to note that a number of small but nevertheless significant changes occurred during the research process. These changes are described before the chapter concludes with some reflections on my experiences 'researching women's lives'.

Knowledge and Experience

In this section I outline a shift in the epistemological perspective that informs this thesis to a position akin to what Denzin (1992) calls "critical interactionism" (and discussed later in this section). This shift saw me rethink how I came to analyse the participants' accounts. In short, I changed my analytical approach from a thematic analysis (of experience) to a narrative analysis of the 'stories' the participants told to make sense of their experience. From this perspective, the standing of interview transcripts was transformed. They no longer recorded descriptions of 'experience'. Rather, I came to

read the transcripts as historically specific narratives cognisant of a methodological approach Plummer (1995) terms ‘the sociology of stories’.

When I began the research I wanted to produce an account that I hoped would be ‘useful’ for lone mothers, and especially one that would stand up against the ways which lone mothers were constantly negatively portrayed in the both scholarly and popular literature as problem women, bad mothers and irresponsible citizens. However, in my beginning attempts to write up the interviews I had completed, I found I kept reproducing a style of descriptive (and as I came to realise, realist) research *about* lone mothers that I knew would be of little use for transforming gendered “injustice or subordination” (Ramazanoglu, 2002; 147). As I read more about epistemology and the philosophy of social science, I came to see why my approach was inherently descriptive (unless I changed direction) and how that approach would inevitably reproduce the idea that lone mothers are a category of people bound together as group allegedly sharing ‘something in common’ as ‘particular types of people’.

Descriptive empirical accounts are helpful⁸⁷; they can identify trends and indicate changes and continuities over time. However, they also build upon the idea that lone mothers *really are* particular types of people (different to, for example, mothers in two parent families). As different people, lone mothers in turn become objects of knowledge because of both their ‘social characteristics’ (family size and form, income, education, health and so on) and their apparent ontological Otherness. Thus as objects, lone mothers are constructed as fundamentally different ‘in nature’ to other ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’ women, mothers and citizens. By the time I got to analysing the interview transcripts, I had begun to think much more critically about how this ‘commonality’ is constructed. In particular, I became much more interested in the ways in which ideas about ‘the lone mother’ shaped the ways in which lone mothers storied their lives. By adopting a constructionist ontological view, I could move beyond ‘description’ of what experiences lone parents share and explore “the extent to which official categorisations shape self understanding” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; 27). In particular, I became interested in how, as subjects so categorically constructed, lone mothers *made sense* of

⁸⁷ For example, the SROW research on ‘Solo Mothers’ (SROW, 1970) discussed in the previous chapter is credited as being instrumental in securing the DPB as a statutory non-discretionary benefit for all lone mothers in 1973.

their experience⁸⁸. Thus, my focus shifted from the ‘experience’ itself, to sense making as a practical everyday activity enacted interactionally, within a specific historical and social context.

In changing my epistemological orientation, I found the work of Reekie (1998) especially of value. In a post-structural analysis of the ‘problem’ of illegitimacy, Reekie (1998) describes how modernist research constructs subjects as ‘natural’ objects. Reekie’s analysis focuses exclusively on illegitimacy, but there are important parallels in relation to lone mothers. For example, Reekie illustrates how collectively, the practices of social science with an “ineradicable lineage as a moral science” (Reekie, 1998; 9) continues to construct illegitimate birth and legitimate birth as two different types of events in nature (Reekie, 1998; 5-10). Reekie’s (1998; 5) observation of the “enormous amount of scholarly effort ... devoted to explaining, correcting, critiquing, revising, debating, supplementing, solving and elaborating the non-marital births question” mirrors the ‘enormous amount of scholarly effort’ around lone mothers. And, as Reekie (1998; 5) argues in relation to legitimate and illegitimate births, most of this research rests on “one critical taken-for-granted notion”. That is, that there is an actual, measurable distinction between the two subjects (the legitimate/illegitimate, or the lone mother/mother) that while *apparently* in nature, is discursively produced (Reekie, 1998; 5-6).

Reekie (1998) notes that as theory, post-structuralism undermines notions of reality that inform many of the practices of descriptive social research. Similarly, I realised that re-examining the interview transcripts from a critical interactionist perspective would enable me to consider how particular social identities as subject positions are extruded as part of the cultural process of making and maintaining ideas about lone mothers as constituting a category as a group of (similar) particular types of people. Rather than consider the lone mother/mother distinction as a ‘real’ demarcation between women, by consciously adopting a constructionist ontological position I could analyse the

⁸⁸ I also found the work of Kathryn Backett (1982) extremely helpful for clarifying my focus on meaning-making. I read her interactionist account of the ways in which ‘new’ mothers and fathers negotiate their parenting roles as an honours student, and returned to it several times at the beginning stages of this research. Although I read widely in the post-structuralist literature, I kept returning to Backett’s work and her methodological insistence on social ‘roles’ (or identities) as the outcome of negotiated symbolic interactions.

demarcation as “a human artefact created for a particular purpose or purposes, to serve certain political or administrative ends” (Reekie, 1998; 7).

There is however, one important difference between Reekie’s (1998) investigation of illegitimacy and this thesis. Post-structural historical methods like those used by Reekie (1998) do not have at their centre the accounts of ‘speaking subjects’, but rather, disembodied ‘texts’. While the women who participated in this research ‘produced texts’, they did so in response to a “calling out” (Althusser, 1971; 176). In advertising for participants I had in effect hailed “women lone parents” to participate as interview subjects in research “about lone parenting”. However, my overriding impression was that the participants in this research responded to the “calling out” in order to tell me that they were not *that* subject.

Women who parent alone do so in the context of powerful and contradictory discourses that constitute lone parenting as gendered. These discourses not only prescribe the meanings of lone mothering at specific historical moments, but they also produce the various subject positions that constitute ‘lone mothers’. Whereas post-structural approaches (especially those influenced by Foucauldian conceptions of discourse, subjectivity, and power/knowledge) reduce subjects to ‘effects of discourse’, interactionist approaches give a degree of agency to the producer of the account, or storyteller. From an interactionist perspective, the women who participated in this research told stories that made coherent both ‘their lives’ and ‘their selves’ *as lone mothers* while at the same time positioning themselves as Other to that particular type of person. Thus their accounts were not only biographically constitutive, but also an illustrative site for enacting discursively the experience of everyday gender relations.

Beginning with Herbert Blumer’s three assertions⁸⁹ linking ‘reality’ to the capacity for shared meaning, Denzin (1992) traces a history of symbolic interactionism to argue the potential of a more politically oriented contemporary form. In short, Denzin argues that critical approaches to discourse make possible a “politics of interactionism” linking culture (the “taken-for-granted and problematic webs of significance and meanings

⁸⁹ That is, that humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have for them; that the meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction; and that meanings are modified through interpretive processes by self-reflexive individuals symbolically interacting with each other.

human beings produce and act upon when they do things together” (Denzin, 1992; 73-74) with subjectivity. From Denzin’s (1992) perspective, interactionally enacted discourses both solidify as and draw upon the ‘sediments’ of shared culture and thus simultaneously shape the ways subjects are formed and subject positions come to be occupied.

Denzin’s argument draws upon a critical conception of discourse that is broadly influenced by Foucauldian approaches. This critical conception of discourse focuses on ‘what can be said’ and with what effect (McHoul & Grace, 1993; 31; Barrett, 1992; 204; Denzin, 1992). From this perspective, discourse and knowledge are intimately linked. That is:

[I]n any given historical period we can write, speak or think about a given social object or practice [lone parents, for example] only in certain specific ways and not others. ‘A discourse’ would then be *whatever* constrains – but also enables – writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits (McHoul & Grace, 1993; 31).

Critical approaches to discourse necessarily make problematic humanist notions of the subject⁹⁰, challenging the assumption that all individuals possess a unique ‘human essence’, and rejecting the conception of the subject as a free and autonomous individual who uses language to describe an external world. Post-structural approaches then, necessarily position the subject as an ‘effect’ of discourse. Thus, it is discourses of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ that prescribe ‘subject positions’. Post-structural approaches influenced by Foucault tie discourse with subjectivity, embedded within power relations. That is, power circulates and is exercised “net like” with “individuals (circulating) between its threads” (Foucault, 1980; 98). As such individuals are not only the “inert or consenting target” of power, but also “the elements of its articulation” (Foucault, 1980; 98). The subject then, is the “primary workroom of power” (McHoul & Grace, 1993; 10).

⁹⁰ Mansfield (2000) notes that theories of subjectivity that have dominated the second half of the twentieth century fall broadly into two camps: those that attempt to define ‘the truth’ of the subject, to define the subject’s ‘nature’ or structure; and secondly, those that “see any definition of subjectivity as the product of culture and power” (Mansfield, 2000; 51). Neither of these broad approaches assumes the romanticised ‘individual’ of the Enlightenment. In relation to ‘the truth’, this first individual is mirage of language’s symbolic order. In the latter, this individual is a ruse constituted through power relations. It is this ‘individual’ that represents Foucault’s approach to the subject and subjectivity.

I reject this approach to subjectivity that strips from the subject *all* agency. I found Jackson (2001) particularly helpful for thinking through the problem of a subject inert in the face of power/knowledge. Jackson (2001) highlights several problems with post-structural approaches to subjectivity in relation to agency and political action. In particular, she criticises post-modernist or ‘words’ feminism as ignorant of the micro-sociological tradition, and of accepting the common misunderstanding that micro-sociology has no way of articulating any critical link between subjectivity and ideology. She argues that (feminist) post-structuralists have misunderstood the micro-sociological ‘I’, and that importantly, within the interactionist tradition there is no pre-social or pre-discursive self, but rather:

an “I” that is only ever the fleeting mobilisation of a socially constituted self. There is no self outside the social; it exists and comes into being only in relation to the social “other”. This self is not a fixed structure but is always “in process” by virtue of its constant reflexivity ... Such a perspective allows us to think of subjectivity as a product of individual, socially located biographies (Jackson, 2001; 288).

I found Jackson’s (2001) pragmatic⁹¹ conceptualisation of the self especially useful for thinking about the ‘speaking subject’ in late modernity. As noted, a major problem of post-structuralism is that the theorisation of self as discursively *determined* effectively negates all agency and thus can not account for the multiple ways in which individuals come to inhabit different subject positions, as we produce different accounts of ‘our selves’ and ‘our lives’ in the form of individual biographies. However, theorising the self as a social self (that is, a reflexive self produced through interactions with others) retains an appreciation that self is constituted, but it is constituted socially *through* discourse, rather than simply *by* discourse. In other words, from a critical interactionist perspective, for discourse to produce subjects as ‘an effect’, it must be enacted socially.

In Chapter Three I introduced Hacking’s (1986) notion of dynamic nominalism as a process through which “numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with invention of the categories labelling them” (Hacking, 1986; 236). In Chapter Three I explored the ‘vector of labelling from above’ in terms of changing constructs of types of people made up as lone mothers. However, dynamic

⁹¹ I also found Nancy Fraser’s work on pragmatism and discourse especially useful (Fraser, 1997). Fraser also locates language as a social practice in social context, situating discourses as contingent, plural, but most importantly social, and therefore “allowing us to focus on power and inequality” (Fraser, 1997; 38).

nominalism also attends to the ways in which those made up contribute to the naming process. Some discourses that construct categories of particular types of people are extraordinarily powerful within the everyday noise of social life. For example, discourses about lone mothers are highly consequential for women who parent alone to the extent that meanings generated are “incorporated into the ongoing cultural and social structural arrangements of society” (Maines, 2000; 578). These discourses not only have material effects in the everyday lives of women who parent alone, but also are drawn upon by women who *are* lone parents (as constituted subjects) to make sense of their experience. In other words, women who parent alone are both *subject to* and *subjected by* discourses that construct ‘lone mothers’, and draw upon these discourses to make sense of their ‘experiences’ through narrative.

I found Plummer’s (1995) prescription for ‘a sociology of stories’ particularly useful for bringing together the threads of a constructionist ontology and an interactionist epistemology. Plummer (1995) follows the micro-sociological interactionist tradition in arguing that through narrative, as *homo narrans*, people tell stories that do not so much reflect our lives but “play an active role in their construction” (Plummer, 1995; 12). Plummer argues:

[P]eople [do not] simply ‘tell’ their ... stories to reveal the ‘truth’ of their ... lives; instead they turn themselves into *socially organised biographical objects*. They construct, even invent ... tales of the ... self, which may or may not bear a relationship to a truth ... (Plummer, 1995; 6).

Plummer (1995) argues that the “production and consumption” of stories are social processes that occur as practical everyday activities in which meanings are both produced and consumed to make sense of the social world. Thus, stories are joint actions, produced in local contexts within the bounds of a wider negotiated social world (Plummer, 1995; 24). For Plummer, stories are told and heard within “a stream of power” that shapes and defines at what moments in history the voices of the story teller are “credible or incredible” (Plummer, 1995; 26-27). Taking this methodological perspective, I came to see that the ways the participants storied their lives was constituted by both their selves and their ‘experience’ in relation to wider discourses that constitute lone mothers as particular types of people.

Preparing, Gathering, Storing, Analysing, Presenting

According to Plummer (1983; 86) preparing includes “choosing an appropriate problem, locating a broad theoretical orientation, choosing ... research strategies”, organising funding and staffing arrangements, “pondering the kind of subject that is required ... and clarifying the logistics of the interview[s], the mode of storing data and the final form of presentation” (Plummer, 1983; 86).

In terms of this research, I prepared a proposal outlining my intention to interview lone mothers about their experiences. In the proposal, I noted that in New Zealand, “the parenting experience of women lone parents” had been largely ignored, and that the purpose of my research was to “explore [that] experience”. In particular, I planned to situate this experience in the context of the then widespread public concern around issues related to the increasing numbers of lone mothers, and the number of mothers in receipt of the DPB. I outlined my intention to interview lone mothers about their parenting experience in order to both ‘fill a gap’ identified in the literature (that is, that the experience of women lone parents was largely missing), and to set this experience at counterpoint to what I considered to be misogynous misinformation fuelling public debate around issues of ‘welfare dependence’ and ‘welfare reform’.

My chosen research method was the semi-structured interview. In my proposal⁹², I identified this method and described how I planned to tape and transcribe each interview. I also described how I would return transcripts to participants for checking, and store transcripts and research materials. The ethical principles of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent that underpinned the research process were also outlined.

In mid 1998 I began to recruit participants. I sent press releases to community newspapers in a selected geographical region that included rural and urban communities

⁹² This research was carried out under the regulations and practices governing ethical research at Victoria University of Wellington. Ethical approval was gained before the research commenced, and the participants’ confidentiality and anonymity has been preserved throughout the research process. Participants have always retained the right to withdraw from the research and have their transcripts destroyed. None have done so.

(the press release and an example of a subsequent story is appended, see Appendices I and II). Another recruitment strategy was to write to community groups and organisations and ask them to display a poster about the research that included my contact details (see Appendix III). I wrote to medical centres, local Plunket groups⁹³, local libraries, women's centres and community centres. Some women also expressed interest in participating after hearing about the research informally. Although I had not planned for a 'snowball' sample, these women were sent the same information packs (described below) that were sent to all potential participants.

Not all women who contacted me agreed to be interviewed. Some women responding to the newspaper stories rang to tell me specific things, but did not want to be interviewed. One woman wanted recorded how much she "hate[d] Jenny Shipley"⁹⁴. Another rang to say how she was sure that her children were "doing well at school" despite the widespread press coverage at the time linking poor school achievement with lone mothering. Another rang to tell me that she had been a "solo mum", and that her children had grown up and both "gone on to university".

Recruiting participants was a staged process. Interested women were asked to contact me by telephone on a call-free number, arranged especially for the research. I wanted to make sure that women who may not have had easy access to a telephone could still contact me at no charge to themselves⁹⁵.

When interested women telephoned me, I told them about myself (that I was a thesis student and interested in the experience of women lone parents) and about the research (I wanted to talk with women who parented alone about their experience, and that each interview would probably last for about one hour). I then asked if they would be interested in participating. Those who declined were thanked for calling, and no personal information about these callers was collected. Women who were interested

⁹³ A New Zealand child and maternal health agency that provides health services to parents (usually mothers) and young children.

⁹⁴The then New Zealand Prime Minister who previously, as the Minister of Social Welfare, had been instrumental in implementing the 'benefit cuts' of the early 1990s, and was a chief proponent of the Code of Social and Family Responsibility.

⁹⁵I continued with this call-free number until about twelve months after the interviews were completed. At this stage, I wrote to all the interview participants and told them of my new contact telephone number.

were then posted an information pack. This contained a written note detailing some aspects of the research, and a participants' consent form. The covering letter asked the women to read the material, and if they still wanted to participate, to telephone me again and arrange an interview time. The information pack, including the covering letter is appended (see Appendix IV).

In total, forty-two women who inquired about the research were sent information packs. Of these, twenty-two interviews were arranged, and twenty-one were completed. The source of recruitment, the number of initial responses, and the number of final interviews is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Recruitment Origin of Research Participants

	Libraries	Women's Centres	Plunket Groups	Medical Centres	Other	Press Releases	Total
Inquiries	4	2	0	4	3	29	42
Interviews	3	2	0	3	1	13	22

Brief biographical sketches of the participants are included in Chapter Five. In summary, the twenty-one participants ranged in age from twenty-four to forty-six years. Combined, they were the mothers of (at least) forty-seven surviving children (one participant had one child who had died of cot death). Two participants had grandchildren living in their homes. In one instance the participant had guardianship of her grandchild while in the other the grandchild and its mother lived with the participant. At least two participants had been birth mothers to adopted children. Another had an adult child who had not lived with her since around that child's sixth birthday. One of participants shared custody of one of her children. Excluding children placed for adoption, deceased children, and 'non-custodial' grandchildren, six of the participants had one child, seven had two children, five had three children, and three had four children.

Gathering processes are those “concerned with the actual processes of gaining ... materials” (Plummer, 1983; 86) and the arrangements for recording these materials. The in-depth interview was the gathering process used in this research.

Women who were interested in being interviewed contacted me and we arranged interview times. Nineteen interviews were completed in the homes of participants, and two were completed in the participants’ workplaces. One interview was not completed⁹⁶. In general, the interviews followed a similar pattern. I would arrive at the participant’s home at an agreed time, introduce myself, and spend a few minutes engaged in the rituals of building rapport with a stranger. Typically this would involve responding to inquiries about my drive to the meeting place, offers of a cup of tea, and ‘small talk’ about the participant’s neighbourhood, street, home or work.

In the first two interviews completed, I relied heavily on a list of prepared ‘starter’ questions (see Appendix V). This list was not intended as an interview schedule. However, initially I was concerned that I would become very nervous interviewing, and that I would forget to ask ‘important questions’. In the first two interviews I used these starter questions a lot. At the end of each of those interviews I replayed the tapes and was concerned at how my questioning was ‘cutting across’ the women’s accounts. In particular, I seemed to ‘miss’ opportunities within the interviews by retreating to the starter questions. When I look at those transcripts now, I still feel slightly embarrassed at the rigidity of my interviewing style, and the effect it had on the flow of the interview. In my research diary I have notes about both my interviewing technique, and my impressions that, remarkably, the participants had still shared with me plenty of ‘rich data’. In retrospect I remain amazed that these early interviews were so full, even though as Reissman (1993; 54) wryly notes:

Because the impulse to narrate is so natural, and apparently universal, it is almost inevitable that [open-ended] questions will produce narrative accounts, providing interviewing practices do not get in the way.

Several important events transformed the research process, but the importance of those events was not always immediately clear at the time. In retrospect, the third interview

⁹⁶ Soon after I arrived at the participant’s home, it became clear that the participant was unwell. The interview did not continue, and due to the participant’s health, was not rescheduled.

was the beginning of a fundamental change in my research approach. The third interview was with a participant who had been working on a family life history project. She had volunteered as a participant because she wanted someone to tape and transcribe the story of her life, just as she had done for her family members. Immediately the interview began, she began telling me 'the story of her life'. When I listened to the recording of that interview, I realised that her account was much 'richer' than the first two people who I had 'interviewed', although all three covered similar ground. I certainly made fewer interruptions as an interviewer, and the participant told me in great detail about her experience of parenting alone in the context of her story about her 'self', and her 'life'. Perhaps my 'luckiest break' as a researcher was that this participant had experience in organising her life story in a particular way. She talked of having been in an addiction recovery programme, and in retrospect I now identify in her story a narrative structure similar to the one used in such programmes (Denzin, 1992; 85-90). Central to her narrative was temporal order. Her account was not rigidly linear or evolutionary, but in talking about her life as a connected series of events, her experience of lone parenting was situated in time and place. Although at this stage of the research process I knew very little about 'narrative' or 'narrative analysis', I changed my interview technique for the following interviews. In the subsequent interviews, I began with a question like "tell me about you – how did you get here?". At the end of each interview, I checked that the substance of the starter questions had been covered, and if not, asked a few final questions.

Storing processes are the "rendering hard" (Plummer, 1983; 86) of qualitative materials. In particular, storing involves "transcription, coding and filing" (Plummer, 1983; 86). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a copy of the transcript returned to the participant for checking. Audio-tapes of the interviews were retained until the data analysis was completed, and then either returned to participants or 'wiped'.

Transcription techniques vary. In this research, I transcribed in full the complete recorded interview, but with a focus on the utterances rather than the silences. Thus, I transcribed what was said (but not how it was said), and made no annotations of, for example, emphasis or pause. Copies of transcripts were sent to participants, and at this stage included transcribed non-verbal utterances (ums, ers, and so on). At this point, two participants contacted me with minor amendments to transcribing errors.

Throughout the transcribing process I made notes in a research diary. Here, I recorded 'my experience' of interviewing, my thoughts when re-hearing the interviews during transcription, and analytical notes related to the material I was transcribing. Keeping a research diary while interviewing and transcribing was an important part of the analytical process. It also alerted me to the ways in which interviewing, transcribing, and analysis are inseparable elements in the research process, and how doing research blurs the boundaries of the each.

In the early stages of the research, I worked on the assumption that I could record 'experience', and write about 'the experiences' of a 'particular group' by using the interview method. I had argued in the research proposal that little was known about the experience of parenting alone, and that the existing research about women lone parents did not give voice to these experiences.

While interviewing, I came to appreciate the problems of 'researching experience'. In summary, researching experience assumes that 'research subjects' are sensory conduits who can inform the researcher of an external social reality existing outside of that subject (Mulinari & Sandell, 1999; 287). In other words, 'subjects' experience 'reality' and transmit the 'facts' of that reality to the researcher. Hence, the relationship between 'the researched' and 'the researcher' is one facilitating the transmission of 'authentic' knowledge from the experienced subject to the interested and inquiring researcher.

However, while interviewing women about their experience, it became evident that my assumption that social reality can be described was both ontologically and epistemologically problematic. As noted earlier in this chapter, my ontological problem lay in my conception of 'the subject' (women lone parents), and the epistemological problem lay in conception of how I might acquire knowledge about the subject's 'experience'. Combined, these problems required me to act: to make some explicit decisions about knowledge production (that is, the relationship between ideas, experience and reality) and this fundamentally changed the focus of my inquiry. I therefore made the decision to reorient my research, and rather to "explore the experience of women who parent alone", to explore how women who parent alone make sense of their own experience. This change required me to rethink my analytical

approach, and most importantly, rethink how I was ‘reading’ the data. I found Ramaznaoglu (2002) instructive at this point. She notes:

[Y]ou cannot neutrally unpack your data to discover direct evidence of unproblematic reality ... your findings are open to multiple readings, and so can be interpreted in different ways, with different strategies for representation, selection and interpretation, and so different consequences ... Just as data are not lying around waiting to be collected, so meanings are not lying in your data waiting to be found. Data do not speak for themselves. You have to do the work of deciding what you take your data to mean (Ramazanoglu, 2002; 160).

Plummer (1983; 86) summarises the complexities of analysis as “making good service of the data”. On completing transcribing, I had over 500 pages of interview transcripts, representing interviews with twenty-one women who parented alone. Before reorienting towards reading the transcripts as stories, but after the ‘collection’ and ‘storage’ of the transcripts had been completed, I had dabbled with a little thematic analysis. At this stage I was at what Potter & Wetherall (1987) call “intermission”, a point where researchers are usually surrounded by “literally hundreds of thousands of words waiting to be transformed into exciting research findings”. To combat the feeling of panic this might bring, Potter and Wetherall advise that researchers might “find it reassuring to begin with some coding” (Potter & Wetherall, 1987; 166). Initially I took the advice to code literally, but I found coding actually exacerbated the unresolved problems in my methodological approach. For example, I began a tentative ‘thematic analysis’, attempting to locate themes within and across the transcripts. Here, I became increasingly uncertain. The transcripts were fragmenting into smaller extracts that seemed to ‘lose’ meaning, rather than coalesce around any emergent theme. In sum, I was surrounded by ever smaller and increasingly decontextualised extracts organised around themes I had imposed to bring order to the fragments. Thematic coding was reducing the transcripts to ‘draft’ status. As a consequence of conceptual imperialism (Middleton, 1993; 70) I was dislocating the interview transcripts from both their producers, and the context of their production.

Finally, I began to *really* see (that is, understand) the transcripts as stories. These were not stories mirroring a ‘what really happened to the participants’, nor were they fictional accounts. Rather, the transcripts were stories produced by socially situated actors within the context of a ‘research interview’ with a ‘researcher’ (who was a stranger), at a particular historical moment when welfare reform discourses were particularly ‘pressing

upon' lone mothers lives, both in terms of the subject positions available to 'lone mothers', and the material experience of parenting alone.

As noted, re-reading the interview transcripts as narratives, rather than as descriptions of an experience, required me to rethink my analytical approach. In short, reorienting to a narrative analysis required me to think about the transcripts as stories: as accounts that were not simply reflections of the participants' lives, but rather as "social actions embedded in social worlds" (Plummer, 1995; 17). In order for me to 'make sense' of the stories the women told, I needed to 're-experience' them as narratives. As Clegg (1993; 31) notes:

The first step in orienting to the narratives of everyday life ... is to listen to what people say. Not necessarily to re-tell it in exactly those terms but to enquire how it would be possible for them to say that. What kinds of assumptions in what types of possible world produce those accounts?

Earlier in this chapter, I described the way participants were recruited for this research and noted that these participants responded to a 'calling out' for 'women lone parents' to participate in research about 'lone parenting'. As I began to read the interview transcripts as narratives, I realised that most of the women contacted me as 'lone parents' (thus, they had 'recognised' the call) but told stories about *not* being the type of person whom our 'public stories' construct as the lone mothers. Thus, as biographically organised subjects, the participants made sense of those wider stories that circulate in everyday life by constructing stories of a maternal self through a socially organised 'maternal biography'. In short, maternal biographies are the personal experience narratives that women lone parents enact narratively that both constitute themselves as subjects, while simultaneously producing accounts that make sense of the experience of parenting alone within the context of the discourses (that is, "the stream of power") that shape how that experience can be spoken (Plummer, 1995; 26).

In conceptualising the personal experience narratives of women who parent alone as maternal biographies, my focus is not only the life stories of the individual participants, but also the changing discourses of motherhood, femininity and citizenship that lone mothers enact narratively to make sense of their lives. Their stories lay bare the changing meanings around motherhood, femininity and citizenship in New Zealand over the last thirty years and the ways in which welfare reform discourses in late

modern societies have ‘made up’ lone mothers as particular types of people. Through narrative, these changes are ‘translated’ and coalesce into a coherent account of a person’s ‘life’, and as maternal biographies make sense of ‘experience’ in the context of the discursive resources available (see Clegg, 1993; 5). That is:

[A]ll stories emerge as a practical activity: as we go about our daily rounds we piece together fragments from the toolkit of culture that ultimately cohere into ‘our stories’ (Clegg, 1993; 36).

In outlining his methodology for a sociology of stories, Plummer (1995) identifies a number of general questions that I kept in mind while rereading the interview transcripts as narratives. These questions focus on the social processes involved in “story production and consumption”, the “social roles that stories play” (Plummer, 1995; 24-26), and the ways in which “social and historical conditions ... facilitate the making and hearing of stories” (Plummer, 1995; 45). As such, Plummer argues that a sociology of stories moves beyond the mechanistic practices of some forms of narrative analysis because it focuses on the “the link between stories and the wider world” (Plummer, 1995; 24). Thus, a sociology of stories asks *sociological* questions. For example, what gives voice to a story at a particular historical moment? What are the contextual conditions for a story to be told and received? What interpretive communities enable the telling and the hearing? (Plummer, 1995; 24-26). It was these questions that informed the development of the concept of ‘validation stories’ discussed in Chapter Five, and the ways I finally (although forever provisionally) ‘made sense of’ and ‘wrote up’ the participants’ narratives in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

The processes of presenting research relate to the “the ways in which the material is finally written up and presented to an audience” (Plummer, 1983; 86). All participants ‘approved’ their transcripts, although a number commented on how their speech appeared with the inclusion of the non-verbal utterances. Standing (1998; 190) notes that transcribing spoken voice produces a text that “looks wrong” and when placed within academic writing reinforces hierarchies of the researcher over the researched, the written over the spoken, and academic (and objective) over personal (and subjective) representation. Thus, just as researchers ‘tidy up’ our written work, I have ‘tidied up’ any extracts from the transcripts used throughout the thesis. For the most part I have removed non-verbal utterances to improve ‘readability’ where I have considered such utterances to have no effect on the participants’ intended meaning. When using extracts

from the interview transcripts in this thesis, the following transcription marks have been used: a series of three dots, that is ... indicate that words or a short phrase have been omitted; a series of three dots with square brackets, that is, [...] indicate a more substantial omission generally of about a sentence in length.

Reflecting on the Research Experience

Ramazanoglu (2002; 158) suggests “taking reflexivity personally means reflecting critically on the consequences of your presence in the research process”. In this section, I briefly reflect on my experience of the research process. Kelly, Burton & Regan (1994; 46) note that feminists have been critical of “hygienic research; the censoring out of the mess, confusion and complexity of doing research, so that the accounts bear little or no relation to the real events”. My focus here is my experience in collecting and organising the interview material and the “mess, confusion and complexity” of transforming that material into ‘a thesis’. As Standing (1998; 186) notes, writing up research is a stage in the research process over which researchers have “power and control”.

Researching women’s lives presents a number of challenges for feminist researchers. For example, feminists working in the social sciences have argued that differences in social power between ‘the researched’ and ‘the researcher’, and differences between women more generally present challenges for conducting ethical research (Kirkman, 2001; 54). In particular, the connection between the researcher’s biography and research design, processes and content, is now widely accepted as inevitably influential, and (inevitably) requires researchers to identify that influence and reflect upon it (Kirkman, 2001; 54).

Although when recruiting participants I did not identify myself as a lone mother, in all interviews this was at some time ‘revealed’. Typically, in the ‘small talk’ before the interviews began, the participants would ask me if I had any children, or sometimes more directly, if I was a lone mother. I think because I was a lone mother, and had experience of parenting alone, many of the participants were very forthcoming in their stories about their lives. I found many of the interviews emotionally traumatic, as did

some of the participants. Some participants talked of events and experiences they said they had never talked about before, and often participants would cry. I don't attribute the intensity of some of these interviews to simply my being a lone mother. Rather, I see it as part of the situated experiences women who parent alone encountered as lone mothers within the context of welfare reform. Many of the participants were living lives of considerable hardship, and many of them were distressed by the vilification of 'solo mothers' in the New Zealand media at that time.

Perhaps the most challenging issue for me as a researcher was that I became very aware that many of the participants were talking to me because *they wanted change*. It is important to note here that the process of welfare reform in New Zealand excluded lone mothers from the debate. As Young (1999) notes of the same occurrence in the USA reforms, excluding people from social politics by constructing and positioning them as 'a problem' to be 'solved' is *unethical*. Indeed, as Young (1999; 113) comments:

If [lone mothers] had been included in the welfare reform debate ... it would have been more difficult for some of the things claimed in the debate about the laziness and irresponsibility of poor people to carry weight. The punitive and disciplinary aspects of the current reforms that are premised on such disrespect for fellow citizens would have been less likely to hold the center of the legislation if the people most affected had been publicly acknowledged as party to the discussion and decision and not simply subject to it.

In my experience, doing research 'on lone mothers' in the context of 'welfare reform' presented an ongoing dilemma between making available a place from which the women could speak, and objectifying the participants as 'lone mothers', that is, as particular types of people. This dilemma became even more difficult as the analytical focus of my research shifted.

While I was interviewing, it became clear to me that many of the participants actually had confidence in a generic thing called 'research' as something that might make visible 'objective' and 'irrefutable proof' about the untenable conditions of their lives. However, as a researcher, I 'knew' that it was unlikely that this research would ever be 'read' as 'evidence' for change by those who are capable of making such changes. Similarly, as the research progressed, I also became increasingly aware of how social research had been an important technology in constructing lone mothers as Others, and a particularly powerful source of knowledge that objectified lone mothers as particular

types of people in New Zealand in the 1990s. While much of this research was positioned culturally as ‘science’, I suspected that my research could be seen as ‘tainted’ by both my political interests as a feminist, and my experiences as a lone mother. I spent a lot of time thinking about ‘what to do’ with the women’s stories before I began the writing up process. This is because I did want to be able to demonstrate ‘the experience of lone mothers’, but I did not want make the participants *‘that subject’*. Cotterill and Letherby (1993; 72) argue that this “inevitable objectification of the researched” remains problematic, and illustrates the unequal power held by the researcher in relation to the researched. In making the decision to reread the interview transcripts as ‘stories’, I remained conscious that some of the participants might consider reducing their ‘real experience’ to stories as a disrespectful act.

In relation to welfare reform in Britain, Burns (2000) discusses similar dilemmas for feminists seeking change between positioning ‘the experience of lone mothers’ and ‘the construction of lone mothers’ in political activism. Burns (2000) discusses the 1997 campaign to ‘Save the Lone Parents Benefit’ that sought to challenge the level of the then impending benefit cuts. Throughout the campaign, opposition to the cuts focused on the inevitable exacerbation of poverty amongst households headed by lone mothers. As part of the campaign, lone mothers would speak, for example on national television, about their lived experience. Generally, arguments about and accounts of poverty “were powerfully made”. However, “negative constructions of the ‘single mother’ in broader discourses of the underclass and dominant ideologies of family, motherhood and reproduction remained intact” (Burns, 2000; 374).

Burns (2000) neatly summarises an ongoing dilemma for feminist researchers. Should we agitate for immediate change while reproducing cultural ideas about some women ‘as particular types of people’, or should we trade off immediate political activism to secure longer-term changes in the ways in which women are ‘made up’? Maynard (1994) is helpful here. She argues that even if we feel that our research has little impact of the lives of the women included in it, it may still be important for “the category of persons they are taken to represent” (Maynard, 1994; 17). Indeed, research can empower the researched and the researcher: it can make visible a social issue through articulating one’s lived experience; it can have a “therapeutic” effect as a consequence

of reflecting and re-evaluating one's experience; and finally, it may empower through the "generally subversive outcome these two consequences combined may generate" (Maynard; 1994; 17).

Although the interviews for this thesis were undertaken several years ago, each year I have written to the participants and given them a 'research update'. Some participants I have lost touch with: their letters have been returned as they have moved house. Some participants have contacted me and sent me their changed addresses. One or two have also written to me and kept me up-to-date about "what has happened to them". Even though I have always worked with the transcripts complete with pseudonyms, the 'reality' of all these women's lives as very real people who talked about their experiences has remained with me throughout the process of analysing their stories, and writing up this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the epistemological and methodological perspectives that informed this research, linking a critical interactionism with narrative and the sociology of stories. I described the research process, noting changes that occurred in my approach to interviewing and to the process of analysis. I concluded the chapter with a discussion reflecting on my experience researching women lives, and the dilemmas I encountered in changing my methodological orientation towards narrative analysis.

In the next chapter I explore in more detail the epistemological and methodological connections between 'experience' and 'narrative'. I introduce the concepts of maternal biographies and validation stories, and provide a brief biographical sketch of each of the participants.

Chapter Five

Narrating Experience

Stories and story telling are ubiquitous and ... most if not all societal activities could not take place without narratives (Maines, 1993; 20).

Women who parent alone occupy contested subject positions within late modern societies where neo-liberal welfare reform discourses dominate. At the same time that women and men have become supposedly more equal, New Zealand women with children living independently from men have been constructed through the identity category of 'solo mother' as particular types of people. In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, neo-liberal welfare reforms have typically included policies and programmes targeting women who parent alone as 'those types of people', seeking to transform them from primarily mothers in receipt of the welfare benefits that had enabled them to be 'mothers at home' (like other mothers), to become primarily workers (like other citizens). As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the hierarchy of maternal legitimacy has shifted. Whereas in the past the subject position of women who parented alone was contested through discourses of motherhood, in late modern societies the subject position of women who parent alone is contested through neo-liberal discourses of citizenship.

The late modern shift in the hierarchy of maternal legitimacy is far from benign. The subjective and material effects of parenting alone give rise to maternal biographies where sense-making is characterised by a particular narrative form: the validation story. In this chapter I argue that understanding lone mothers' personal experience narratives as validation stories has a number of advantages over other symbolic interactionist approaches that have, for example, used the concept of status passage and image restoration as a way of interpreting individual accounts.

Within the context of neo-liberal welfare reforms, working mothers who parent alone are much less visible in discourses around the problems of welfarism and welfare

dependency. Rather, the primary 'subject' of these 'problems' is women in receipt of welfare benefits. As argued in Chapter Three, the definitive beneficiaries in New Zealand in the 1990s were women 'on' the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), the 'solo mums'. Again, as noted Chapter Three, these women became the focus of much of the 'targeting' of neo-liberal social policies throughout the 1990s. Their incomes were cut, and their access to a miscellany of publicly funded services was constrained or denied. Indeed, the success of claims of the 1960s and 1970s that lone mothers were deserving of State support, as citizen-mothers, were seriously undermined.

In contrast, in late modern societies women who parent alone who are citizen-workers can expect to be 'rewarded' in a number of ways. Firstly, market earned income is constructed as more independent and self-sufficient and therefore morally superior to income derived from welfare benefits. Secondly, market earned income is constructed as better for the children of lone parents. For example, as Little (1999) noted in her study of women parenting alone in the USA during a period of neo-liberal welfare reform, mothers earning market incomes were constructed as providing their children with superior role models. Thirdly, in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, market earned income is likely to be higher than the minimal incomes available through welfare programmes. Thus market earned income is constructed as the 'solution' to the problem of women's poverty that is so closely tied with women parenting alone, and increasing the participation of women lone parents in paid work has become an important policy goal.

Despite the moral distinctions between women parenting alone in receipt of the DPB, and women parenting alone in receipt of market income, many women lone parents make sense of their lives by negotiating the meanings offered to them in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, regardless of their source of income. However, while neo-liberal welfare reform discourses are dominant, they are not the only source of meaning. In the following chapters, I illustrate that while neo-liberal welfare reform discourses do have sufficient potency to require a particular form of story telling by women lone parents, 'modern' discourses around femininity and motherhood are also important. As noted in the previous chapter, this research is based on interviews with 21 women parenting alone who had responded to newspaper and other forms of public advertisements. While women lone parents were hailed as participants (Althusser, 1971)

my overwhelming and lasting impression from meeting and talking with these women was that they contacted me to tell me they were not *that* subject. This is not to say that the participants had not been or were in some way immune from the interpellation of discourses that constitute the social world. Rather, their response to ‘the hail’ illustrates the ways in which women who parent alone position themselves narratively within a multiplicity of available discursive resources.

Personal Experience and Maternal Biographies

In this thesis I describe the participants’ stories as maternal biographies. This is not to exclude the possibility that the participants might construct or have experiences shaped by other social identities. Rather, I have chosen the term maternal biographies to emphasise how these women’s lives are shaped by *changes* within their biographies in terms of their maternal identities. As I will illustrate in the following chapters, women who parent alone make claims to the social identity of ‘mother’ as ordinary women, mothers and citizens, while at the same time their lives as ‘lone mothers’ are quite extraordinary. Although neo-liberal discourses both demand and are predicated upon the existence of active, atomised, self-reliant, de-gendered citizens, being a ‘mother’ continues to both define the social identity of women who parent alone, and shape the materiality of their everyday existence.

In her research on Australian lone mother subjectivities, Gardiner (2000; 288-289) argues that the subject position of ‘mother’ was principally important in her participants’ accounts of their experience, and inseparable from other subject positions they inhabited. As Gardiner notes, “many [participants] could not separate subjectivity in being a mother from subjectivity in being a woman, or a worker, or most other positions they take up in their lives”. Similarly, the participants in this research spoke to me primarily as mothers, and specifically in the discursive context of the ways in which ‘lone mothers’ were then ‘spoken of’ during a period of neo-liberal welfare reform.

Like all biographies, maternal biographies are retrospective and made up of many life stories re-evaluated and spoken in the present. For most of the participants in this research, their lives as mothers spanned a period of rapid social change in terms of

family life and the position of women in society (see Chapter One). For the participants, these wider social changes have become elements of personal experience narrated through their individual maternal biographies.

It is important to note that maternal biographies are not simply a list of the events of one's life, in sequence, signalling 'real' changes and shifts in the participants' social 'roles'. Although the lives of women who become mothers (and lone mothers) do change in very material ways, the ways in which these changes are experienced and made sense of, are shaped by discourses, as are the subject positions available to women as particular 'types' of mothers within those discourses. In this sense, different subject positions across one's life course offer different "conceptual repertoires", and different locations for those inhabiting or taking up various positions comprised of the "rights" discursively accorded to those positions (Davies & Harre, 1990; 46). Making sense of these changes is achieved narratively. Specifically, maternal biographies illustrate the ways in which, as *homo narrans*, women who parent alone emplot their lives, transforming a sequence of events into a story with episodes, where the relationship between events is explained, and new or changed social identities are negotiated (Somers & Gibson, 1994; 60). As stories, such episodes and identities are narratively constructed from a range of discursive possibilities, and in particular, the "images, metaphors, storylines and concepts [...] are made relevant within the particular discursive practices in which [women who parent alone] are positioned" (Davies & Harre, 1990; 46).

In the following three chapters, I outline and discuss the maternal biographies of women parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. Each chapter explores how women who parent alone narrate particular episodes of *change* within their maternal biographies. In Chapter Six, I analyse how the participants story the experience of becoming women who parent alone. In Chapter Seven, I analyse how the participants story the change in their social identities as a consequence of being 'lone mothers'. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I analyse how women story the experience of the material changes in their lives consequential to becoming women who parent alone. In Chapter Nine, the concluding chapter, I draw together these validation stories and consider them as stories told within a particular stream of power (Plummer, 1995). In this chapter I argue that the validation stories told by the participants problematise

claims that individualism is reshaping personal relationships in contemporary societies as a consequence of men and women becoming 'more equal'. To the contrary, the participants' validation stories illustrate the ways in which biographical solutions to wider structural inequalities characterise contemporary gender relations. In particular, I argue that neo-liberal welfare reform discourses elide the experience of gender inequality, while at the same time shaping the life stories of women who parent alone by individualising the experience of inequality as a consequence of personal biography.

Personal Experience as Validation Stories

My overwhelming and lasting impression from meeting and talking with the participants in this research was that they participated in order to tell me they were not that subject whom I had 'hailed': 'women lone parents'. Rather, in storying their personal experiences as maternal biographies, the participants constructed social identities that discursively positioned themselves as ordinary women, mothers and citizens in extraordinary circumstances. In this thesis, I conceptualise these stories as validation stories. Before examining in more detail the validation stories told by the participants to make sense of their experience as women parenting alone, I will briefly outline the concept of the 'validation story' and discuss the importance of validation stories as a narrative form that makes sense of 'experience', and produces socially situated identities.

Sociologists and social psychologists have attended to the ways in which people who experience change within their biographies both make sense of and respond to that change. In developing the concept of validation stories, I drew upon two approaches that were useful, but limited, when I attempted to make sense of the participants' maternal biographies. These concepts were status passage (Vaughan, 1993; Weenick, 1993) and apologia (Benoit, 1995).

Vaughan (1993) uses the concept of status passage to describe the process of "uncoupling". Based on interviews with 103 people who had recently separated, divorced or contemplated leaving a relationship, Vaughan (1993) coined the term uncoupling as a metaphor for the process of identity transition when relationships end. According to Vaughan (1993; 5), when relationships end the people involved must

“disentangle not only their belongings but their identities”. As a status passage, uncoupling requires a shift (or transition) from one status (or identity) to another. While the identity of coupled individuals is shaped by the experience of being coupled, through ‘uncoupling’ each individual negotiates a new ‘uncoupled’ identity.

Like Vaughan (1993), Weenick (1993) uses the concept of status passage to identify “vocabularies of self” used by recently separated people to both account for their experience of separation, and to constitute new post-separation identities⁹⁷. As such, vocabularies of self function to link separation as a biographical event with both the symbolic meanings embroidered onto the separation experience by the separated, and the inevitable construction of new social identities the separated come to occupy. As Weenick (1993; 18) argues, the rhetorical properties of the vocabularies she identifies “extend beyond presentations of the self”. When people separate, they engage in creating new selves as the old become obsolete. Thus, “talk about the self” and the “process of becoming separated” are “intricately intertwined” (Weenick, 1993; 18).

In becoming lone mothers, women who parent alone are required to negotiate new social identities. Although the concept of status transition opened up possibilities for exploring shifts from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ self, I found the concept limited in relation to women parenting alone. In particular, the concept offers little explanation as to why people undergoing identity transitions construct specific identities and vocabularies of self. In making preliminary comparisons of the participants’ maternal biographies, it seemed that becoming a lone parent within the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses is not a neutral identity transition, but a transition inscribed with wider meanings around femininity, motherhood and citizenship. For many women, becoming a lone mother required a status transition that not only accommodated an often unexpected biographical event that predicates the consolidation of a new ‘self’, but also storied a transition to an identity category whose members are constructed as socially tainted or flawed by virtue of their membership of that category. Rather than producing a new self to consolidate a new identity, participants in this research storied their identities *beyond* the transitional moment, in effect positioning their narrative identity as

⁹⁷ Weenick (1993) identifies four such vocabularies: the restoration vocabulary articulating a revival of the ‘old self’; the possible selves vocabulary articulating new opportunities; the self awareness vocabulary articulating a new understanding of self; and a confirmation vocabulary, consolidating the old self with the new version.

an ongoing site to assert the 'self' and to make sense of their experience. In this sense, 'validation stories' seemed a more useful concept to analyse how women make sense of the experience of becoming lone mothers by continuously negotiating an identity category different to other mothers, in order to validate their own experience of both becoming and *being* a woman who parents alone.

Conventional approaches to image restoration were also useful in conceptualising 'validation stories'. Theories of image restoration have distinguished between 'excuses' and 'justifications' as the two basic accounting strategies in image restoration rhetoric, and a number of typologies of image restoration have been developed (Orbuch, 1997; Benoit, 1995). Image restoration theories in general, and particularly theories of apologia, emphasise two key ideas. Firstly, that people are motivated to produce accounts about themselves and their experience that minimise unfavourable outcomes. For example, Orbuch (1997; 456) defines accounts as "verbal statements made by one social actor or another to explain behaviours that are unanticipated or deviant". Secondly, that the accounts available for image restoration are both limited and finite, and "originate not within the individual but within the social setting and the audience at hand" (Orbuch, 1997; 463). In this sense, 'accounts' and 'narrative' have some similarities; both emphasise 'the story' as a social product, both locate stories as culturally and historically situated, and both relate stories to context and audience (Orbuch, 1997; 476). However, conventional approaches to accounts differ from narrative in one important way. While accounts emphasise the conscious use of language by a ready-formed self to achieve desired effects, from a narrative perspective, people *constantly* narrate, constituting the self as an effect of emplotting temporally ordered events into an ongoing biographical narrative.

Although approaches to image restoration differ from narrative approaches, I did find the notion of apologia as specific vocabularies of motive useful when thinking about the participants' stories. This is because when I began to read the participants' transcripts, I was struck by the similar 'excuses' and 'justifications' the participants drew upon in constructing the 'becoming a lone mother' episodes of their maternal biographies. Although typically typologies of apologia have been used to analyse situations where there is a formal attack on the character of the speaker, and typically when the speaker is a person holding public office (Benoit, 1995; 13), I was interested in the applicability

of apologia in relation to the stories told by women parenting alone. Given that neo-liberal constructions of lone mothers have produced a highly visible identity category of the solo mum, I was interested in whether this identity category would shape the way in which the participants' positioned themselves narratively⁹⁸.

Analysing the personal experience narratives of women who parent as validation stories has a number of advantages over concepts such as status passages, or concepts used in conventional approaches to image restoration. Validation stories are constructed by social actors within a social context that shapes the telling of the story and the social effect any given telling may have. Importantly, validation stories give voice to speakers who in the usual order of things, have little opportunity to articulate their experience. Whereas theories of image restoration have typically focused on public figures under public attack with access to the 'public' salons of discourse, identifying validation stories within the maternal biographies of women who parent alone gives voice to women whose 'categorical identities' have been constructed through exaggerated public accounts of their difference.

Women never are 'lone mothers'. Rather, women *become* lone mothers *because...* . In the participants' maternal biographies, becoming a lone mother, and the day to day experiences of being a lone mother were key life events made sense of through narrative, rather than simply 'accounted for' to manage one's image. In looking at the transcripts I did not see the stories the participants told as strategic acts by individuals consciously deploying accounts for the purpose of image restoration, or as fictions invented to obscure real or underlying unpleasant 'truths'. Rather, through validation stories, enacted narratively as episodes within their maternal biographies, the participants storied not only 'what had happened to them' but also 'why', and the material consequences of those happenings for the person they became. Thus, validation stories enable women who parent alone to articulate the often unexpected changes within their biographies, including their particular 'passage' into and experience of a contested identity category. At the same time validation stories enable women who

⁹⁸ In developing the concept of validation stories, I also considered Goffman's theory of stigma (Goffman, 1965). Many of the participants talked of the 'experience of stigma' as contemporaneous with parenting alone. While Goffman's notion of stigma did not directly inform my conceptualisation of validation stories, storying the experience of stigma is an important validation story open to women who parent alone. This is further discussed in the following chapter, Chapter Six.

parent alone to position themselves as ordinary women, mothers, and citizens in extraordinary circumstances.

Biographical Summaries

As outlined in Chapter Three, the construction of women who parent alone as particular types of subjects is historically specific. Following New Zealand's introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1973, expert knowledge constituting women who parent alone as 'lone mothers', has sedimented into popular or common sense knowledge about women who parent alone, constructing 'solo mums' as particular types of people. Research about lone mothers has focused on the lone mothers as a category of women who act in similar ways, and share similar experiences within the social world. While the administrative interests of social policy regimes have dominated much of this research, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses made possible an articulation of 'solo mums' within popular discourses as particularly visible subjects. In both instances, the voices of women who parent alone have remained peculiarly absent, even though the experience of parenting alone has become a much more common occurrence within the life-course of many women.

Below is a brief description that gives some background to the circumstances of each of the participants in this research. These descriptions have been included so that readers of the following data chapters will have some general reference in which to situate the extracts of the participants' narratives. The information included in these summaries is dated as at the time of the interview. Names of participants have been changed, and where I consider it necessary to protect the participants' confidentiality, equivalent occupations and similar place names have been substituted.

Anna (39) cares for her son Jonathon (6). Anna has recently started working full-time and works in a local office. Jonathon was born in Australia after Anna had "a two month relationship". Anna returned to New Zealand when Jonathon was a baby and received the DPB for five years while she cared for him at home. She has recently searched for and found Jonathon's father, and hopes that one day Jonathon and his father will have some contact. Jonathon's father returned to New Zealand several years

ago, and now makes “spasmodic” Child Support⁹⁹ payments. Anna lives in her own home.

Brenda (37) cares for her daughter Vicky (17) and son Donald (8). Brenda and her ex-husband, Damon, met when Brenda was 17. They lived together “for years”, and married just after Donald was born. The marriage ended about six years ago. Brenda has been in paid work most of her adult life, mainly in factories and often as a part-time worker. At the moment, Brenda is receiving the DPB but is “looking for work”. Vicky lived with her father for two years when she was about 14, but returned to live with Brenda after Damon “threw her out”. Vicky and Donald see their father about every second weekend, and as far as Brenda knows, Damon pays Child Support. Brenda lives in her own home.

Carlene (36) cares for her son Thomas (9). Carlene was “with a man for quite a while and fell pregnant”. This relationship ended before Carlene knew she was pregnant. When Thomas was born, Carlene took maternity leave and during this time received the DPB. Carlene returned to full-time paid work when Thomas was about two. Carlene and Thomas have no contact with Thomas’s father. Thomas’s father does not pay maintenance. Carlene lives in her own home.

Colleen (45) cares for her son Gordon (13) in her own home. Colleen met Gordon’s father at a party, and after spending a few days together never met again. Colleen took unpaid leave from her job when Gordon was born and received the DPB for a few years before going back to paid work when Gordon was about three years old. Gordon has never met his father, and his father has never supported Colleen or Gordon financially.

Denise (45) cares for her four children, Catherine (20), Tyron (19) and twins Melanie and Michael (16). Denise was married to Samuel for 17 years until the marriage ended 6 years ago. Samuel left, and within months, moved to Australia. The children have lived with Denise for the past six years. At different times they have each been to Australia to visit their father for a brief period. Denise started doing paid work when her children

⁹⁹ Child Support refers to payments made by non-custodial parents under the 1991 Child Support Act. Although applicants for the DPB must take action under the Child Support Act, custodial parents not in receipt of a welfare benefit may either pursue Child Support under the provisions of the Act, or agree to a ‘private’ maintenance arrangement. Child Support is initiated by the custodial parent, not by the State.

were at school and continued this when Samuel left. Denise now combines several part-time jobs as a nanny, nurse-aid, and home help. Samuel pays Denise the equivalent of Child Support as a private arrangement. Denise lives in her own home.

Diane (44) cares for her daughter Annabel (14). Diane was married to Peter for 14 years but the marriage ended after eight years when Peter began another relationship. At that time, all three of Diane's daughters lived with her, although Katherine (20) and Ellen (17) have since left home to go to university. Diane lives in the family home, and Peter has continued to live in the same area. Diane has always had custody of the girls and Peter has always had "easy access", an arrangement that has "never been difficult". Peter has always supported the girls financially. When the marriage first ended, Diane received the DPB for a few years, but returned to full-time work as a nurse at the local health centre a few years ago.

Donna (42) cares for her son Keith (17) and daughter Kimberly (16). Donna has been divorced for ten years. She lives in her own home. When the marriage ended, Donna sold her small business and trained as a teacher. Donna has been teaching full-time for eight years. Following the divorce, Donna's children had regular contact with their father. Over time contact has become less frequent, and although their father lives locally the children now rarely see him. When Donna first separated she was involved in a long court dispute over Child Support payments. Although Donna won the case, the children's father no longer pays any Child Support or maintenance. Donna commented that this was "easier".

Eve (45) cares for her children Andrew (17) and Bettina (13). She separated from her husband, Martin, ten years ago after being married for ten years. After Eve and Martin separated, Martin returned to his hometown in Wales. Martin does not pay Child Support, and has infrequent letter and phone contact with the children. In the past ten years, Eve has trained as a teacher, and taught for a few years. During her training and in some periods between working full-time, Eve was in receipt of the DPB. Eve now works part-time at a local office and receives the DPB. Eve lives in her own home.

Faye (45) cares for her three children, Rachel (10), Jordan (9) and Craig (7). Faye has parented alone for five years. After the marriage ended, Faye returned to New Zealand

from England where her ex-husband still lives. Faye works full-time and lives in her own home. Faye's children have infrequent contact with their father, although they occasionally write to him and he sometimes sends birthday and Christmas cards. Faye's ex-husband does not pay Child Support or pay any maintenance towards the care of the children.

Geraldine (28) cares for her children Clarke (6) and Judith (3). Geraldine was married to Kevin for eight years. About a year ago, Kevin left "with another woman who was a friend of ours". Shortly after the marriage ended Kevin wanted their son, Clarke, to live with him. Geraldine agreed, although the arrangement fell through when Kevin's new relationship ended. Geraldine works part-time some weekends, and receives the DPB. Kevin pays Child Support and sees the children most weekends. Geraldine and Kevin sold the family home when they separated and Geraldine now lives in a rented home with the children.

Hayley (33) cares for her daughter Miranda (3). Hayley lived with Miranda's father, Steven, until Miranda was about one year old. When Hayley and Steven separated, they shared the care of Miranda until Miranda was about two and half. Hayley now has custody, but Steven or his family have contact with Miranda every second weekend. Hayley lives in a house she recently bought and works part-time as a designer for the local newspaper.

Heather (35) lives with her "new partner" and her daughters Penny (19), Suzie (13), and Penny's daughter Katrina (6 months) in a home owned by Heather and her partner. Although Heather has been with her partner for three years, she wanted to talk about her past experiences as a lone parent. Penny was born when Heather was 16, and Heather parented alone for several years at that time. The father had no contact with Penny until Penny was a teenager. Heather then lived with Suzie's father for seven years. When this relationship ended, Heather again parented alone for some years. Heather now works full-time in a local shop.

Irenie (24) cares for her sons Brian (2) and Thomas (10 months). Irenie met Bruce when she was fourteen and had a relationship with him for nine years. They started living together at sixteen, but have been living apart for about a year. Irenie is in the

process of “going for full custody”. Bruce drinks a lot and has been violent to Irenie. Irenie lives in her own home and receives the DPB.

Jacky (36) cares for her son Robert (3). Jacky and her husband Pete were married for twelve years and separated several times before Robert was born. Jacky stayed in the house she and Pete were renting after she asked Pete to move out about 18 months ago. Jacky works part-time, and also receives the DPB. Currently, Jacky and Pete are trying to finalise their matrimonial property settlement but this has become increasingly acrimonious. Jacky encourages Pete to see Robert regularly, and insists that Pete keep to an agreed visiting schedule. As far as Jacky knows, Pete makes Child Support payments.

Karen (35) cares for her three children, daughters Taylor (12) and Bailey (10), and son Jonathon. Karen has been “a solely single parent with no support or [Brian] not coming home ... for about eighteen months”, although she and Brian often lived apart during the last five years. Brian has little contact with the children, although they sometimes speak with him on the phone. When the marriage first ended, Karen moved to another town and received the DPB for a few months. She then returned to the Wellington area. She lives in a rented house and has a part-time job as a nurse at the local health centre.

Karla (43) cares for twins Rachel and Ben (15). Karla has been “married twice and divorced twice [and] had more than one continuous period of sole parenting”. Both of Karla’s ex-husbands were violent. Karla’s oldest son, Samuel (20) lived with his father from the age of seven, first in New Zealand then in Australia. The twins have not seen their father since he left for Australia with their older brother, and Karla has never received any financial support for the twins from him. Karla’s second marriage ended five years ago. Throughout her children’s lives, Karla has either worked full-time as a nurse, or received the DPB. She is now receiving compensation for a permanent work-related injury. As a teenager, Karla had a child who was placed for adoption. Karla lives in her own home.

Margaret (46) cares for her son Karl (18) and her grandson Tim (2) in a rented house. Margaret’s two adult daughters have left home, and her youngest son, Cody (8), lives some of the time with his father. Margaret had a child when she was seventeen who was

placed for adoption. Her four older children were born while she was married to Keith. When her marriage ended 15 years ago, Keith moved to Australia. Margaret is not sure if he pays Child Support. He has had very little contact with the children. Although Margaret does not live with the father of her youngest son, they are in “a relationship”, and share the parenting of Cody. Margaret has spent most of her adult life looking after her children, and more recently, her grandson who is legally in her custody. Margaret works part-time at the local community centre and is a part-time university student.

Moira (38) cares for her daughters Annabel (15), Nadine (12) and Elisabeth (8). She was married to Ken for eighteen years before separating about a year ago. Ken left Moira and began a relationship with one of Moira’s workmates. Moira lives in the family home which she bought when the matrimonial property was divided. Moira gave up her job when Ken left to avoid contact with Ken’s new partner. She now works as a nurse at a local medical centre. Moira and Ken are in the middle of court proceedings over Child Support payments. Ken has little contact with his daughters. He is currently refusing to see them and is also refusing to pay Child Support as directed by the Family Court.

Pamela (42) cares for her four children, Julian (12), Paulo (9), Simone (6) and Damien (3). Pamela has been separated from her husband Claude for about a year, although there had been a number of separations and reconciliations previously. Claude grew up in Spain, where he has been living since Pamela and Claude separated. Pamela receives the DPB and now lives in a rented house. The children occasionally talk with Claude on the phone, but he does not pay Child Support or any other maintenance.

Teresa (31) cares for her daughter Hayley (5). After a ten-year relationship, Teresa’s marriage ended two years ago. Teresa lives in a rented home. She works part-time at a local health food shop during school hours, and also receives the DPB. Hayley has some contact with her father, although this is becoming less frequent because he often makes changes to agreed visiting arrangements. Hayley usually sees her father every second weekend.

Tina (34) lives with her sons Michael (11) and Alex (9) in a rented home. Tina married Wayne when she was nineteen. The marriage lasted for seven years when Wayne left to

live with another person. Tina had a brief relationship after the marriage ended, but her new partner was violent and Tina left him. Tina has received the DPB for most of the time she has parented alone. She has also done some part-time work. However, she has recently left work because of a back injury. As far as Tina knows, Wayne pays Child Support, but he does not contact or visit the children.

Conclusion

Multiple discourses compete within the maternal biographies constructed by the participants in this research, constituting complex and contradictory accounts of experience and meaning. In interpreting these accounts, I was aware of the fragility of both the story as told, and my reading of it. While the participants' accounts were "one production among an infinite sense of possibilities" (Hollway, 1989; 41), their veracity lay in my reading of the verisimilitude of the participants' stories in wanting to 'set the record straight' (Standing, 1998). Many of the women who participated in this research positioned themselves as ordinary mothers, women and citizens, whether or not they were in receipt of a welfare benefit. Thus, while their maternal biographies accommodated resistance and counter discourses carving out unexpected subject positions in relation to welfare reform discourse constructing lone mothers as particular types of people, it is important to note that the power of welfare reform discourses to produce material effects, and the biographical resistance of individual subjects to construct particular identity claims, were by no means equivalent.

Examining the maternal biographies of women parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform is not a genealogical inquiry in relation to a problematicized subject, the lone mother. Rather, as maternal biographies, these accounts open up opportunities for a critical analysis of 'the problems' that shape the everyday experiences of women who parent alone. Women are not 'born' lone mothers, they become lone mothers. In inserting this experience into their maternal biography, they construct discursively constituted subject positions that are plural, complex, and historically specific.

As Fraser (1997; 380) notes "one is not always a woman to the same degree". Social identities change over time, and are drawn together from "the fund of interpretive

possibilities available to agents in specific societies” (Fraser, 1997; 380). Thus, identities are fluid, complex, plural and shift over time. However, identity is not simply a ‘personal narrative’. Self-identity, the formation of social groups, and patterns of structural inequality are the outcomes of social processes. Taking the pragmatic view that language is a social practice in social context, Fraser (1997) argues that the concept of discourse links the study of language to the study of society. That is:

[T]he pragmatics approach has many of the features one needs in order to understand the complexity of social identities, the formation of social groups, the securing and contesting of cultural hegemony, and the possibility and actuality of political practice (Fraser, 1997; 386).

In the following three chapters I present a narrative analysis of the participants’ stories. These chapters draw upon the themes that have been explored so far in this thesis. In Chapter Six, *Becoming a Lone Mother*, I explore the narratives the participants enacted in describing their experience of becoming lone mothers. These narratives are set against dominant constructions of femininity that tie women’s biographies to marriage and children. In Chapter Seven, *Being Different*, I explore the narratives enacted by the participants in negotiating their social identities as mothers. These narratives are set against constructions of normative motherhood that position women who parent alone as Other. In Chapter Eight, *The Materiality of Experience*, I explore the participants’ narrative accounts of securing their family income. These narratives are set against neo-liberal constructions of citizenship that valorise ‘self-sufficient’ individuals and make invisible the care work of mothers. In all three chapters, the participants’ stories show how women who parent alone piece together ‘a bit of life’ in a late modern society under the conditions of neo-liberalism. Just how ‘equal’ (compared to other ‘individuals’) the participants are is a point I return to in the final chapter, Chapter Nine, *The Price of Freedom?*

Chapter Six

Becoming a Lone Mother

We are forever telling ourselves we became what we are by leaving behind what we were (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; 12).

Introduction

This chapter explores the narratives used by the participants to describe their experience of becoming women who parent alone. The focus is on the participants' 'becoming narratives', that is, the stories of becoming women lone parents within the wider context of the participants' maternal biographies.

Becoming a lone parent is for many women a contradictory experience. This is because on the one hand motherhood is constructed as a 'normal' experience within the biographies of most women, situated within the context of a heterosexual marriage or marriage-like relationship. Typically, becoming a mother in this context is celebrated as an achievement of a status valued as an expression of 'normal' adult femininity. Becoming a mother is tied to a gendered social identity which is qualitatively and experientially 'different' to that of other women who are not mothers (Wager, 2000) and of men and fathers (Marsiglio, 1995). Although the content of the "calibrated rules of motherhood" change over time (Smart, 1996), 'good mothers' are policed by both normative ideals of motherhood, and by constructions of those mothers who 'fall' outside the norm (Smart, 1996; 47; Burns, 2000). In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, mothers most visible in their dereliction of good motherhood are 'lone mothers'. Thus, rather than negotiating a social identity within the context of heterosexual marriage, becoming a lone mother requires women to negotiate a social identity inscribed with multiple discourses making up women who parent alone as not only different to other mothers, but also as different to other ('normal') women.

In this chapter, I argue that within the context of their individual maternal biographies, the participants in this research made sense of their experience of becoming lone mothers by drawing upon this particular narrative form. Validation stories articulate moments of biographical change, and repair the disjuncture between the anticipated arrangement of a woman's biography according to dominant narratives and social conventions linking motherhood to marriage, and the construction of lone mothers as particular types of subjects. Through validation stories, the participants' experience of becoming a lone mother is shaped by the norms of the 'modern feminine biography', and mediated by dominant neo-liberal constructs of 'solo mothers'. As such, validation stories not only repair the disjuncture between the anticipated and actual biographies of the narrator, they emplot the "unexpected twists ... that draw attention to differences from the conventional story" (Riessman, 1993; 30).

For many women, becoming a 'lone mother' shifts one from membership of a 'normal' identity category ('woman', 'wife', 'mother') to an identity category contested within neo-liberal discourses ('lone mother'). Making sense of this shift in identity is complicated for women who parent alone. Neo-liberal welfare reform discourses privilege the rational, autonomous, independent subject. While the experiences of women who parent alone are shaped by the presence of and embedded in relationships with others, particularly as mothers, 'becoming a lone mother' requires women to negotiate an identity transformation *as women* whose lives have become 'unconventional' in contrast to anticipated feminine biographical norms. For example, in the following extract, Tina begins her story by outlining 'what happened to her' as she became a 'lone mother':

Well, it's *a pretty long in-depth story*, but I'm going to be thirty-four this year, I've two sons, eleven and nine, I ended up in Paraparaumu after many years of going all around New Zealand looking for a place to live. *I'll tell you a sort of story about it, and then you'll be able to get the picture.* I got married, lived in Whangarei with my husband, he transferred down to Taupo, we lived there for four years, he was in the police, then we were transferred down to here after that four years, he got out of the police, went and ran a night club, subsequently started having affairs, decided that he didn't want marriage anymore so opted out. I went back to Whangarei because that's where my parents' base was and I felt like I needed support, so went back up there, lasted about three years, met a guy, thought I loved him, took off to live in Thames of all places, didn't work out, major mistake, knew as soon as I left Whangarei that it was a mistake. You know how you've got to listen to your gut but ... *you can't see that at the beginning.* And then went to Raglan and lived there for a while, and decided to move on back

down here because I was sort of doing a runner from this particular guy, so ended up back down here. The children's father lived down here then so I thought that it was quite a good idea to come back in case he wanted to have a relationship with his kids, but unfortunately that didn't work out either, so I am here until possibly next year, then I'm moving to Dunedin¹⁰⁰.

In Tina's "sort of story", her experience of becoming a lone mother is mediated by both the absence of the presence of children, and the presence *then* absence of men. It is not an actual 'lone-ness' that is central to the identity category of 'lone mothers', but rather the presence of children as Tina's story illustrates. Tina's lone-ness is literal specifically in relation to the 'presence then absence' of men. It is this 'unexpected twist' that Tina (and other women who parent alone) negotiates as she stories her experience of becoming a lone mother. In Tina's story, positioning herself as an ordinary woman (married, with children) in extraordinary circumstances (no longer married, further 'failed' relationship, still 'with children') validates Tina's experience of "end[ing] up back down here" (still Tina) as a *woman* parenting alone.

Making Sense of Experience: Validation Stories as Contingency Narratives

Becoming a lone mother is a 'shifting experience' (Crow & Hardey, 1992; 146). As such, the moment at which circumstances translate into 'being' a lone mother is a subjective experience rather than an objective event. For example, some participants talked of 'being like' a lone mother while in a relationship, others talked of becoming a lone parent at a specific moment of realisation while pregnant, and several spoke of continuing to live in the same houses with their ex-partners as lone mothers after their relationships ended. All but one of the participants lived alone with their children as the only occupants of their homes, and thus had 'objectively' become lone mothers at some time previously. One participant had been living with a partner for several years at the time of the interview, but identified as a 'lone mother' because of her previous experience of parenting alone.

In Chapter Five, I described validation stories as a narrative form that articulate moments of biographical change, repairing the disjuncture between the anticipated arrangement of a woman's biography according to dominant discourses and social

¹⁰⁰ My emphasis.

conventions linking motherhood to marriage, and the construction of lone mothers as particular types of subjects. Using the following process, I have identified three main validation stories used by the participants in this research to make sense of their experience of becoming lone mothers. First, I identified in each of the interview transcripts the 'becoming narratives'. These were stories that the women told about how they came to be in their current circumstances at the time of the interview. On the basis of the becoming narratives, I identified four main 'routes' into lone motherhood. From a narrative perspective these routes can be understood as plots. As plots, they situate the experience of becoming a lone mother as a series of temporally ordered events. Within the becoming narratives, the temporal events emplotted signify changes in the status or situation of the participant. Thus, becoming narratives articulated the shift in each participant's status from not being a lone mother, to being a lone mother.

The plots described by the participants were as follows. The 'I left him' plot described events where the participant became a lone mother consequential to instigating the end of a relationship. While very few of the participants actually physically left the homes they shared with ex-partners, this plot includes instances where the participants asked their partners leave. The 'I left him' plot required the participants to narrate the shift from being part of a couple, to being a lone mother, as a result of a decision made by the participant. The 'He left me' plot described events where the participant became a lone parent consequential to their partner instigating the end of the relationship. In this circumstance, participants were required to narrate becoming a lone mother as a consequence of a decision by another. The 'Single mother' plot described events where the participant became a lone parent as a consequence to giving birth as a single (unpartnered) woman. For these participants, becoming a lone mother was contemporaneous with becoming a mother. Finally, some participants described becoming a lone parent in ways in which it was not possible to identify the temporal order or narrative significance of the events that constituted their becoming. These I have labelled the 'Ambiguous' plot.

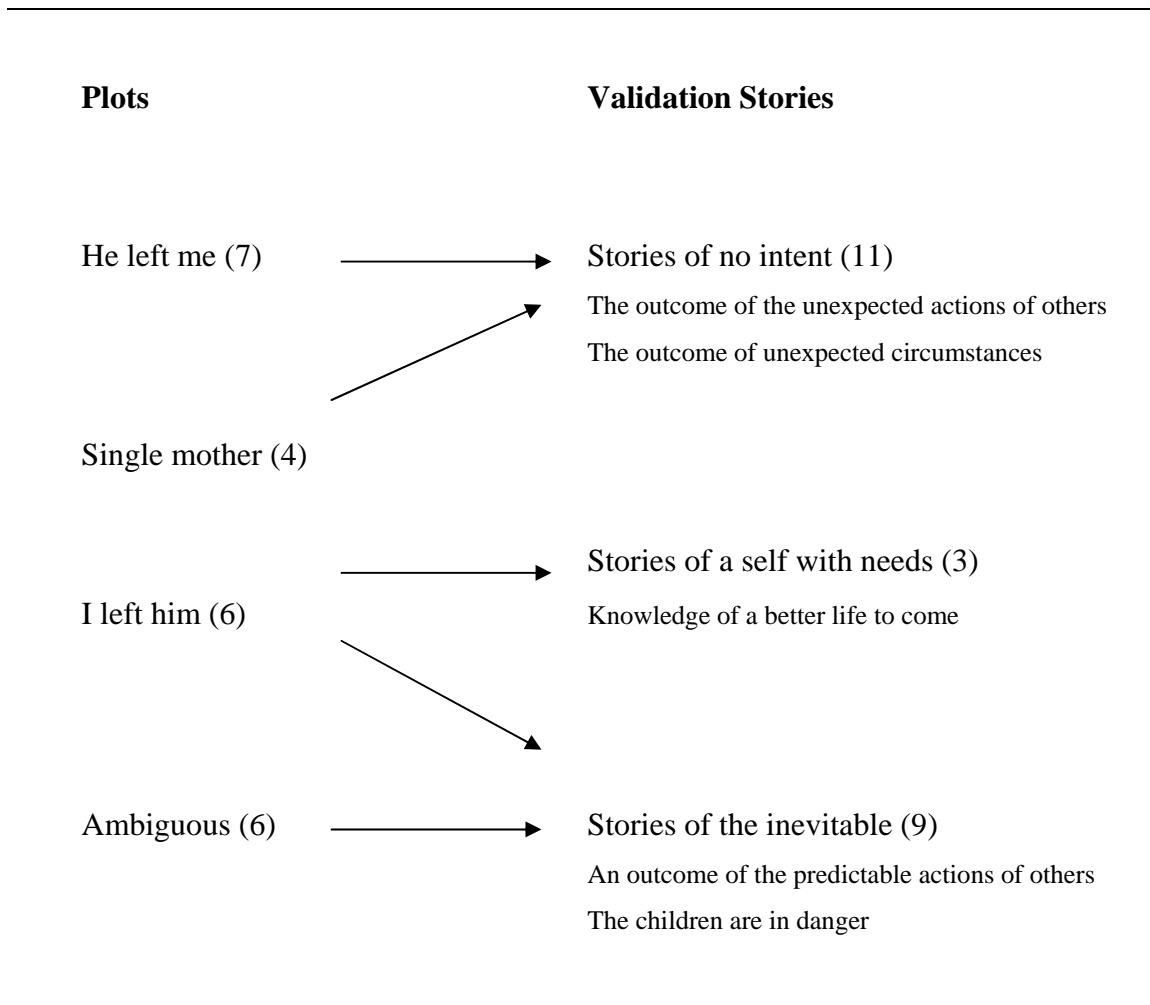
While the plots described above linked events temporally, it was the stories that the participants told that gave their plots meaning, and around which the participants' wider maternal biographies cohered. As Polkinghorne (1988) notes, there exist at any moment a cultural store of plot lines that can be used to configure events into stories. This

emplotment occurs “through an intermixing of the various elements of the cultural repertoire of sedimented stories and innovations” (Polkinghorne, 1988; 20). The ‘sedimented stories and innovations’ which emplotted the experience of becoming a lone mother within the participants’ becoming narratives articulated changes within the participants’ biography, but also achieved particular social effects. As validation stories, the becoming narratives repaired the disjuncture between the norms of the expected and the experience of actual biographical trajectory, and thus were an important site for negotiating discourses that constitute ‘solo mothers’ as particular types of women. That is, for women parenting alone, becoming narratives offer women subject positions that constitute their experience as legitimate as women, and contradict dominant neo-liberal discourses that construct lone mothers as problem women, mothers and citizens. As validation stories, becoming narratives operate as contingency narratives, and link the particularities of the individual experience of becoming a lone mother to the generalities of the circumstances of that experience.

Within the becoming narratives, three key stories were emplotted. ‘Stories of no intent’ articulated becoming a lone mother as contingent upon either the unexpected actions of others, or the outcome of unexpected circumstances. ‘Stories of a self with needs’ articulated becoming a lone mother as a consequence of acting in response to one’s personal needs to secure one a ‘better life’. Finally, ‘stories of the inevitable’ articulated becoming a lone mother as contingent upon either the predictable (and therefore inevitable) actions of others, including the danger posed by these actions for both women and children.

It is important to note that while three key validation stories have been identified within the becoming narratives, participants generally did not draw upon one of these stories to the exclusion of the others. The number of participants drawing upon each of these stories as their dominant story is noted in Figure 1 (below). Generally, the participants’ narratives can be characterised as more complex than this typology suggests, and although in many instances one story dominated, most narratives were comprised of multiple, fluid and contradictory narrative elements.

Figure 1: Plots and Validation Stories in Becoming a Lone Mother



The number of participants articulating each plot is also noted in Figure 1. Although I would have expected to be able to identify ‘what happened’ by talking with the participants, in six interviews this was not the case. This was not because the participants were being obtuse, or because of failure on my part as an interviewer to ‘find out the facts’. To the contrary, all the participants whose plots were ambiguous are women who described a shift in status from not being a lone mother to being a lone mother, defined by the presence then the absence of their children’s fathers. Thus, for these women, change did occur. However, within their becoming narratives, this change was not attributed either to their own actions, or the actions of their partners in instigating that change.

Figure 1 illustrates the connections between plot and story. For example, the narratives of the participants who storied either the ‘He left me’ plot or the ‘Single mother’ plot, emplotted ‘stories of no intent’ as the dominant story line. The narratives of participants whose plots were ambiguous emplotted ‘stories of the inevitable’ as the dominant story line. The narratives of participants who storied the ‘I left him’ plot emplotted either ‘stories of a self with needs’ or ‘stories of the inevitable’ as the dominant story line. In each instance, the number in brackets indicates the number of participants who narrated each plot and story¹⁰¹. The numbers illustrate the tight connection between plot and story. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while particular plots ‘compel’ particular ‘stories’, the participants often drew upon aspects of two or all three of these stories. What is illustrated in this diagram is the dominant (but not exclusive) story emplotted.

Most interviews began with the participants responding to a general question about how they came to be in their current situation. At this point, most participants talked in detail about their experience of becoming a lone mother. Some participants had very well developed stories around their becoming experience, while others were much more vague. These participants tended to disclose more details about their becoming experiences as their interviews progressed. When I read through the transcripts sometime later, I was struck by the similarities between many of the women’s stories. In particular, within each validation story, similar tropes and phrases were used by the participants.

Stories of No Intent

Stories of no intent can be characterised as stories that, on the face of it, draw upon discourses of ‘traditional’ gender relations where biographies reflect the gendered nature of social power within which “he is the actor, she is acted upon” (Gergen, 1992; 131). Becoming narratives that exemplify stories of no intent were most likely to be told by women whose maternal biographies had been shaped by either the ‘He left me’ or the ‘Single mother’ plot. Both these plots, told through ‘stories of no intent’, have a long history in feminine biographies that construct femininity as essentially ‘innocent’

¹⁰¹ The numbers here tally 23, although 21 women participated in this research. Some participants told more than one becoming story. Two participants described two very different becoming stories and these have been counted and analysed separately.

and echo the “old, old story” of feminine ‘passivity’ (Broder, 1994). In some respects the contemporary He left me plot overlaps with Victorian melodramas of lone motherhood as a consequence of seduction and abandonment, of feminine purity corrupted by masculine depravity, and of ‘girls’ “more sinned against than sinners”, who “loved not wisely but too well” (Kunzel, 1993; 19-21). Nevertheless, for some participants becoming a lone mother was the outcome of the actions of others over which they had no control. Interestingly, although the He left me plot and Solo mother plot construct subjects who occupy opposite moral positions within the context of the contemporary hierarchy of maternal legitimacy, stories of no intent make possible legitimate subject positions for women emplotting *either* becoming experience.

For participants who became lone mothers because ‘he left’, becoming a lone mother was an experience contingent upon the unexpected end of their marriage attributed to the actions of others. Stories of no intent are characterised by the emphasis on the shock of the unexpected at counterpoint to the narrator’s ‘innocence’. Thus, stories of no intent position the speaker as ‘blameless’ in the sense that they have been ‘acted upon’, and consolidate around a story in which ‘he did something to her’. As Moira’s story illustrates:

Where do I start? I’ve been separated for thirteen months now ... it wasn’t a happy separation, Ken had an affair with someone that I work with and I found out, sort of almost by accident ... It was an absolute shock to my little system, and what’s worse is the woman he is now living with, his new partner, was a really good friend of mine ... I just felt so betrayed by both of them ... she and I were really close friends ... then to find out they were doing that behind my back was just devastating.

Moira did not anticipate becoming a lone mother. Moira’s “sort of almost by accident” finding out and her shock add emphasis to the experience of something that happened to her. Becoming a lone mother was not an intended event in Moira’s maternal biography, but rather an episode as a consequence of the unexpected actions of others.

Like Moira, Diane’s experience of becoming a lone mother was unexpected. “I never expected that it would ever happen to me. I had no idea at all ... it was something that just came out of the blue”. Diane narrates becoming a lone mother as an experience contingent upon the unanticipated end of her marriage. At the time, Diane did not

realise that her ex-husband was having an affair, and with hindsight accounts for this as her own naiveté:

I guess their relationship started then, unbeknown to me. I was a bit naive and thinking they were just, you know, good friends. Then the sexual side of things started to take off, and that's when I found it difficult, when he admitted what was happening. He actually left for a period of about three or four months, and I said 'well you go and sort yourself out'. We were still working together, but he had left the house.

In positioning herself as “naive”, Diane's ‘innocence’ (in that she was acted upon) contrasts to her ex-husband's unexpected actions in ending the marriage. For Diane, becoming a lone mother was not because of any intent on her own part. Her ‘no intent’ at the moment of becoming positions Diane as an ordinary woman that something has happened to.

The relative passivity of the participants subject to the unexpected actions of others is common in the stories of no intent told by women articulating the He left me plot. This relative passivity places stress on the actions of others in the lives of these participants, who all experienced something over which they had little or no control. As such these stories often describe in more detail the actions of others as contiguous for the experience of the participant. Tina's story, included earlier in this chapter, exemplifies this. In Tina's becoming story, the actors are the men who through their presence then absence shape the narration of Tina's maternal biography. In Tina's story, and other stories of no intent, this relative passivity of women illustrates not so much that women actually are passive or subjects acted upon, but rather how women's biographies are shaped by relationships to others, and in particular, relationships with their children.

In adulthood, normative expectations around the feminine biography position women in relation to men, and mothers in relation to children. For example, in stories of no intent the participants positioned themselves in relation to biographical trajectory of their partners. Diane, for example, worked in a family business with her ex-husband. When he began having an affair, he left the family home but continued to work from there each day while “he sorted himself out”. At the same time, Diane's biography remained shaped by her ongoing social identity as a mother. She stayed in the family home, continuing to care for the three children and to participate in the business. While her

biography is shaped by continuity in her relationship with her children, it is also shaped by continuity in accommodating the biographical changes of her ex-husband:

We had to continue working together in the business for another two years, which I guess was an easier transition ... it seemed easier to keep it like that, the finances stayed the same ... until we finally divorced ... I think that was easier on the children, we stayed in the same house. I think in a way for the girls it seemed easy for them because he was still around, he was there after school when they came home, and he ... saw them at weekends. He just wasn't living in the house.

Stories of no intent, where women become lone mothers as a result of the unexpected actions of others, are characterised by the temporal significance of the moment where women 'find out'. This finding out, rather than for example, the moment that their partner leaves, is an important event where the 'innocence' of the teller is established. For example, in Denise's story, finding out was "the beginning of the end":

[M]y husband ... went to a night course at the college, and got involved with a tutor ... I was coming home and I saw his car at her place, and I thought, 'that's strange, he doesn't need to be there now, what's he doing?' And so I stopped and called in because I had to talk to him about something, and it came out that night that well, he rather liked her. And that was really the beginning of the end. She was a married woman, but in the long run she wasn't prepared to leave her family ... and so she stayed with her husband, and Samuel left [...] I thought we might have been able to get back together, but he's very single-minded, and when he makes up his mind about something, that's it ... So, in the long run, he went, and two years later he divorced me. I don't believe in divorce ... I believe that marriage is forever [...] I think that there are some cases where you've definitely got to get out, you know, with violence or alcoholism, or things like that, but I think where you've just got sick of each other, that can be resolved.

Denise's story illustrates that irrespective of her beliefs, the actions of her ex-husband are the reason why she became a lone mother. For Denise, something over which she had little control happened *to* her, transforming her maternal biography and unexpectedly becoming a lone mother. In narrating a story of no intent, Denise, and the other participants making sense of their experience in the context of the He left me plot, position themselves as ordinary women in extraordinary circumstances.

Although stories of no intent position the women as relatively passive, in that it is the unexpected actions of others that transform their maternal biographies, participants who drew upon this story were not passive subjects, inert and simply 'acted upon'. In transforming the events of their becoming into a biographical episode through stories of no intent, the participants act to both make sense of their experience, and to position

themselves as ordinary women living ordinary lives, albeit in extraordinary circumstances beyond their control. For these participants, storying their becoming a lone mother as an unintentional biographical transformation distinguishes them from, for example, the 'intentional' lone mothers that inhabit neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. Nevertheless, for these participants, one's life story did not stop at the moment of becoming. Although becoming a lone parent may have been unintended, it was also a transition that offered new possibilities. For example, Geraldine describes how she became a lone mother through a story of no intent. However, the events that transformed her maternal biography also provide a platform for Geraldine to assert a new self:

We'd been married for eight years ... We had a fairly good marriage, we had Clarke fairly early on in our marriage and we both worked really hard. I got pregnant with Judith, and ... I decided to ... be a stay-home mum because I'd been a working mum ... we went through a couple of turbulent years ... Unfortunately we had other people involved in our marriage, I won't get into that too much ... We moved up here in March of this year ... [and] my husband turned round and said that he didn't love me anymore, and he didn't know what he wanted. Consequently he stayed with us for a few weeks, but we didn't speak. I tried to get us counselling ... and I tried everything I could to figure out why, knowing that we hadn't had a perfect marriage ... [What] I've since found out, which I really knew anyway, was that he was with another woman who was a friend of ours, and as it turned out he moved in with her, and now that's all fallen apart. So yeah, I became a solo mum certainly not by choice, but I'm glad I am ... I'd like our family back, but I'm doing a really good job and I know it. I just think 'well good on me'. This is this new attitude I've developed over about the last month, but yeah, so that's how I became a solo mum.

Of all the becoming stories, stories of no intent told in the context of the He left me plot were the most homogenous both in terms of the events that constituted the plot, and in terms of the particular tropes used by the participants. For women emplotting He left me, stories of no intent offered access to an 'acceptable' experience of becoming a lone mother, an experience that occurred as a consequence of the unexpected actions of others. However, stories of no intent were also told by participants whose becoming stories followed the 'Single mother plot'. This plot generally involved single women 'finding out' they were pregnant after a brief relationship had ended. More than the other plots, the Single mother plot reflects how traditional gendered discourses of femininity, and modernist discourses of gendered social roles combined to construct women who parent alone as 'problem girls': young, unmarried and deliberately becoming mothers in order to live a life 'on welfare'. As noted in Chapter Three, this

construct of the 'solo mother' is remarkably persistent, despite evidence to the contrary. For example, as Shirley, Koopman-Boyden, Pool & St John (1997; 229) note:

The situation in New Zealand ... does not fit closely with the popular image of seemingly profligate child bearing and isolated teenage sole parents. Firstly ... adolescent fertility has declined radically since the baby boom. Secondly, using the most widely cited, yet imprecise statistic, the proportion of babies 'born out of wedlock', ex-nuptial child bearing has most definitely increased. But ... this is more and more being concentrated at exactly those ages that at which the rest of childbearing is taking place for Pakeha, at 25+ years: the peak rates for this and all childbearing are in fact at 25-29 years.

Most participants who storied the Single mother plot told stories of no intent that positioned them as women whose lives were very different to those of 'problem girls'. Of the four women who storied becoming lone mothers through the Single mother plot, two of the women became mothers in their late twenties, and one in her thirties. The exception, Heather, described her first experience of becoming a lone mother at the age of sixteen, more than twenty years ago¹⁰². Heather had left school at "sort of fifteenish ... and as naive as they come", and was working in a local factory, a job she got through a family contact:

I was fifteen then, treated like an adult, getting paid like an adult, getting the respect of an adult and sort of thought ... this is quite good ... Before I had left school I had met Penny's father, and had sort of seen him off and on, not in any major capacity. And then when I got my job I thought well, you know, I'm this big sort of woman now so I can do these womanly things and have a relationship ... And then basically it was, just got carried away one night, decided to have a few drinks, and boom, there you are.

Even though 'what happened to Heather' is quite different to what happened to the women whose maternal biographies were shaped by the He left me plot, there are some important similarities with both the telling of their stories, and what this form of telling achieves. Heather also positions her 'becoming self' as naive. Coupled with her youth, her naiveté suggests a lack of intent that positions Heather as different to the caricatures of problem girls that were central to modern constructions of the solo mother that became exaggerated in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses in the 1990s. While in a sense Heather was exactly 'that girl': a pregnant teenager who after the birth of her

¹⁰² Since then, Heather has had long-term relationships, and despite living with her current partner for several years, Heather wanted to participate in the research after reading an article about it in her local community newspaper.

daughter ‘went on the DPB’, she resists that subject position by enacting a story of no intent.

Like many of the other participants, Heather’s maternal biography is complex and spans a period of rapid social change in terms of both the meanings around women parenting alone (including changing ideas and practices around support for women parenting alone as a consequence of neo-liberal welfare reforms), and the increase in the number of women experiencing parenting alone. Heather tells of her mother insisting that Heather marry her boyfriend. However, Heather did not want to get married, and her boyfriend “just disappeared”. At antenatal classes, Heather met other women, and here her story illustrates how history and biography collide:

I didn’t even know of any other girls my age who were pregnant ... [I]t was probably not until I actually went to any ante-natal classes that I actually met people around my own age that were pregnant and going to keep their babies, and it was only then that there were girls that, it was sort of hushed but you know – ‘She’s not taking the baby home’, and all this sort of thing. But nobody actually went forward and said, you know, how are you going to deal with all of this? Are you going to be all right? It was ‘Let’s not talk about this’.

As noted in Chapter Three, “not taking the baby home” was a routine post-war response to the rising rates of unmarried pregnancy. In the 1950s and 1960s, the number of babies ‘placed’ for adoption rose, reaching historic proportions. For example, in 1963, 57% of ‘unmarried mothers’ “gave up [their children] for adoption by strangers” (Kedgely, 1996; 78), and by 1970, six percent of all births became ‘adoptees’ (Smith, 2003). The introduction of the DPB in 1973 was the first time that a statutory (non-discretionary) benefit was available for unmarried mothers, and during the 1970s and 1980s, routine closed stranger adoption declined as the proportion of unmarried mothers ‘keeping their babies’ increased¹⁰³. While there are various explanations for the decline in adoption (for example, see Griffith, 1998; 13-16; Shawyer, 1979), the changing meanings and practices around adoption echo in the maternal biographies of several of the participants in this research. For example, some participants were themselves adopted, and others spoke of being birth mothers to children born while the women were in their teens. For these women, becoming ‘birth mothers’ were episodes within

¹⁰³ As Kedgely (1995; 79) notes, the practice of adoption has not disappeared in New Zealand, although routine stranger-adoption has certainly declined. For example, by 1989, there were only 191 stranger-adoptions in New Zealand, and although adoption practices are still governed by the 1955 Adoption Act, most adoptions are now ‘open’.

their maternal biographies that were also told through stories with no intent. However, being unmarried and pregnant at that historical moment did not give these women access to the Single mother plot, or the experience of becoming a lone mother¹⁰⁴.

Carlene became a lone mother following the birth of her son when she was in her late twenties. Like the other participants who emplotted the Single mother plot, the moment of finding out she was pregnant is the point within her narrative where the order of events and the meaning of those events coalesced to offer a particular subject position. In Carlene's story, it is the moment of realising that she is pregnant that is central to her story of no intent:

We'd just broken up, and I'd been so sick. I've got to have had the morning sickness and I literally dragged my feet around for a couple of months thinking I didn't know what was wrong with me. So I moved out to my girlfriend's ... and I was at work one day and I was having all these tests and everything, and I didn't know what was wrong with me, never crossed my mind, never not once. I can't believe it, I'm not usually so naive, and the nurse rang me from the doctors and she said 'congratulations, you're pregnant'. I didn't even know I'd had a pregnancy test! They must have taken bloods or whatever and sent it all away and tick, tick, tick on the boxes, and of course I just about died of fright. I said 'positive!' All the girls in the office go 'you know what that means'. So anyway, [the nurse said] 'oh, maybe I've got your results mixed up, you'd better come round and check them.' So I had to go around to the doctor's surgery and do another sample, but I couldn't, I'd seized up, I was in shock, I had to go home for two hours and drink heaps of water before I could even let out a trickle so they could do this test again...

Carlene considered adoption. This she attributes in part to the lack of support she had from other family members, including her parents, grandparents and her aunt: "They told me I was useless, they told me I was inadequate, I'd never cope, I'd never manage, I'd never do this I'd never do that ...". While pregnant, Carlene visited the Department of Social Welfare to discuss the adoption process:

[I] went through everything at Social Welfare, did the family, did the forms, had the interview with the counsellor, you name it, I did it. All the while thinking 'I'm not doing this'. I felt as though I was on another planet, like I was doing it because they had managed to convince me that I was useless and all this sort of stuff ... I

¹⁰⁴ Rather than becoming 'lone mothers' in their teens, stories of no intent made possible access to the dominant post-war 'modern' feminine biography. In 'giving up' their children, these women had an opportunity to be renegotiating their legitimacy as women. Adoption made their 'transgression' invisible, and these women could later redeem themselves through marriage and motherhood, 'in that order' (see Else, 1992b). Indeed, all the participants who had babies that had been placed for adoption later married, *then* had more children.

got this counsellor at Social Welfare one day. It was his first day back at work [after] he'd had a stroke, and he limped into the office and he burst into tears when he heard my story, and he said 'you won't give up your baby', and I said 'why?' and he goes, 'because you're not the type ... what's to say that if you adopt your baby out and then you give it to some people and one of them dies or their marriage breaks up in two years and your child's being raised by a single parent, so why shouldn't you bring it up as a single parent'. And I thought 'how profound' ... I ended up having him ...

Carlene's story is one of no intent. She did not intend to become a lone mother, and her becoming was the outcome of circumstances over which she had no control. Both finding out she was pregnant, and discussing then rejecting adoption were moments that unexpectedly transformed Carlene's maternal biography. However, after the birth of her son, Carlene still felt pressure from family members to consider adoption even though her parents and her grandmother both became quickly attached to her baby. In retrospect, she makes sense of these moments by connecting her experience with her recent discovery about her mother's adoption experiences:

I found out about sixteen months ago I had an older adopted sister which explains so much about my parents' attitude, and my mother's, and I never knew anything about that, which explains a lot of the things about how they felt about me and the pregnancy and the letters that I got from my aunty and my father and all that sort of stuff. So that explained a fair bit when I found that out.

The other participants who emplotted the Single mother plot did not consider adoption, but like Carlene, becoming a lone mother was not an anticipated event within their maternal biographies. Like Carlene, in both Colleen's and Anna's stories, pregnancy was unintended:

I [didn't] plan to have him, but when I found out I was pregnant, I was 32 I think when I conceived him, and I thought I was actually getting quite old, and I had this feeling that I might never meet a man that I could live with and that I would never have children, and I think I thought that well, I don't have to miss out on having a baby as well (Colleen).

I had a two-month relationship with a guy in Australia, and I got pregnant. We didn't stay together for a variety of reasons but when I got pregnant [...] I decided that I would go ahead and have the child ... I'd been working for fifteen years and I was financially secure, and I thought ... 'I'm strong enough, I can cope', you know, 'this is no problem' ... (Anna).

Similar to stories of no intent told by women emplotting the He left me plot, stories of no intent position single mothers as 'passive' in relation to the circumstance of 'finding

out' they were pregnant. However, once again this relative passivity is only momentary. Rather than preclude action, stories of no intent precede opportunities for action to 'make the best of circumstances', positioning these women simultaneously as women who something has happened to, but also as moral agents actively making decisions about their own (and their children's) lives. For example, in Anna's becoming narrative, she tells of how being a lone mother was much harder than she anticipated when she decided to have the child:

People would say, 'oh god, you're brave' ... I would think ... 'what's so hard about being a mother ... if you want to have children why shouldn't you go and have them' ... I think I was a bit naive really. I mean I'm still glad that I had this child, I wanted a child, it's just that the relationship wasn't right and I felt pressure to kind of stay in the relationship, or, not have a child.

In Anna's story, her lack of intent (in becoming pregnant) sits beside an 'active' decision to become a lone mother. Although describing herself as naive in retrospect about the actual experience of being a lone mother, Anna positions herself as an ordinary woman making the most of the extraordinary circumstances in which she found herself. For Anna, a story of no intent provides a sense making resource that gives her biography coherence. Although the normative biographical expectations around becoming a mother link maternity with heterosexual marriage (or marriage like relationships), Anna and the other 'older' participants who enacted the Single mother plot presented themselves as competent and ethical 'mainstream mothers'. These participants linked their becoming experience with the same personal attributes identified by Bock (2000) in her research on 'single mothers by choice'. By positioning themselves as comparatively mature, comparatively responsible, comparatively emotionally mature, and comparatively financially autonomous at the point in which they 'found out' they were pregnant, these participants differentiated themselves from the 'problems girls' who occupy neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. Rather than repairing a disjuncture between normative femininity (that privileges marriage as the herald of adulthood for women) and becoming a lone mother, the stories of no intent used by participants storying the Single mother plot construct a late-modern version of femininity emptied of expectations around marriage as a precursor to womanhood. Rather, for these women, the adult biography is characterised by individual adult independence. Becoming a lone mother as an independent adult repairs the disjuncture

between the normative feminine biography, and the actual events of these participants' lives.

In summary, stories of no intent have some similarities across different plots. For both groups of participants, the unexpected transformations of their maternal biographies suggest that they were women that things happened to. Stories of no intent give coherence to biographies that have been interrupted, but within the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, compel explanation. For women who became lone mothers because He left, stories of no intent provide some repair to the interruption in the trajectory of the anticipated feminine biography, in which 'he did something to her'. For women who became lone mothers as Single mothers, stories of no intent provide different narrative opportunities for repair by emphasising their becoming as the unexpected outcome of circumstances. Stories of no intent told by women emplotting either the He left me or the Single Mother plot are characterised by a similar emphasis on the shock of the unexpected at counterpoint to the narrator's relative 'innocence' and 'naiveté'. Thus, stories of no intent position the speaker not only as 'blameless', but as 'acted upon'. In this sense these stories are necessarily deployed to make sense of experiences when women's biographies are transformed by people and circumstances beyond their control. When anticipated trajectories are altered by the unexpected actions of others, or unexpected circumstances, stories of no intent, as contingency narratives, offer subject positions through which women can position themselves as ordinary women, in extraordinary circumstances.

Stories of a Self with Needs

Becoming narratives that exemplify stories of a self with needs were most likely to be told by women whose maternal biographies had been shaped by the 'I left him' plot. For these participants, becoming a lone mother was storied as a consequence of their actions, following decisions they had made about both the quality of their relationships, and the possibilities for experiencing a 'better life' by ending them. All the participants who narrated this story had been previously married (or in marriage-like relationships) to the fathers of their children. Becoming a lone mother was thus a transformation in their maternal biographies that simultaneously changed their 'marital status', and

changed the co-residential relationship between their children and their children's fathers.

Stories of a self with needs differ from the other stories told by the participants in that they more overtly position the teller as an active subject self-consciously making decisions about one's future life in relation to one's past experience. For these participants, stories of a self with needs are characterised by a narrative of purposefulness in this aspect of their biographical trajectories. In this sense, these stories contradict both the 'old, old story' and the modern norms of femininity in which to be a woman is defined by the presence of a man. Given this self-conscious positioning of the self, this story is more closely suggestive of the reflexive self that Giddens (1992) argues pursues the pure relationship as a form of intimacy specific to late modernity. As noted in Chapter One, the pure relationship is different to both traditional and modern relationship forms of lifelong heterosexual marriage, particularly as the constraints of biological sex upon biographical norms have loosened. From this perspective, relationships are entered into for what they offer to the (de-gendered) individual's identity project. However, as Giddens (1992) notes, there is a contradiction in the pure relationship. In order for individuals to 'gain' from the relationship, a commitment from both individuals to 'the relationship' is necessary. At the same time, the pure relationship is temporary, lasting as long as required or useful as a setting (or context) against which an individual biography is constructed.

To generate commitment and develop a shared history, an individual must give of herself to the other ... [so] that the relationship can be sustained. Yet, a present day relationship is not, as marriage once was, a 'natural condition' whose durability can be taken for granted...It is a feature of the pure relationship that it can be terminated, more or less at will, by either party at any particular point. For a relationship to stand a chance of lasting, commitment is necessary; yet anyone who commits herself without reservation risks great hurt in the future, should the relationship become dissolved (Giddens, 1992; 137).

In Chapter Two I noted the similarities between the reflexive self of late modernity and the normative subject constructed through neo-liberal welfare reform discourses as the 'rational individual actor'. In both instances, these subjects are autonomous, essentially individuated, and although to different degrees, both thinking (either 'reflexively' or 'rationally') authors of their own destinies. Similarly, modernisation theorists focusing on individualization as a phenomenon of late modernity have argued that as

individualism intensifies and the bonds of traditional institutions (including the family¹⁰⁵) weaken, autonomous subjects prevail who piece together biographies that attempt to resolve the wider structural contradictions of late modernity. I return to these claims in the conclusion of this chapter. However, it is important to note that in the context of this bricolage of theoretical claims, one might anticipate that stories of a self with needs would be a common narrative form used by participants. On the contrary, this was the least used story form. Secondly, in stories of a self with needs, the active decision to leave him, although constructed rhetorically as a personal decision, is typically moderated by other 'reasons' to justify the participants' action in ending of the relationship. For example, although the three participants who drew upon this story described themselves as living 'like single parents' within their marital relationships, all three moderated claims about their own needs for enacting change in their lives with claims about the needs of their children.

Margaret's story spans twenty years and several relationships. For most of those years mothering had been her full-time occupation and Margaret had been in receipt of the DPB. Margaret's first marriage had ended after she had asked her husband "not to come back" following a period he had spent working in the South Island. Of this period of her life, Margaret recalls:

[W]hen I think about it now, I think that I was probably single parenting when I was married, because my husband ... [only] did things ... for the kids that suited him which was very, very rarely ... thinking back now I was probably single parenting on my own anyway, as a married woman.

In storying the end of her first marriage, Margaret talked of a moment when she realised that some relationships were qualitatively different to her relationship with her husband. Margaret was having dinner with friends when her male host mentioned he had done "something" for his partner because "he knew she had PMT". Although she could not remember the details of what he actually did, Margaret recalled this story and contrasted the "really caring, loving thing that he was doing" with her ex-husband's lack of interest or care about her and their children. Margaret spoke of how this experience had influenced her, and her desire for a different type of relationship than she was then experiencing as a married woman. Years later, Margaret established a relationship with a man who would become the father of her youngest son. Early in the relationship,

¹⁰⁵ And previously articulated through categorical identity positions.

Margaret's new partner was violent towards her. Now living apart but maintaining a relationship with this man, and sharing the custody of their son, Margaret identifies herself as a lone mother. In talking about how her current 'life arrangements' developed, Margaret drew upon a social change motif to make sense of her experiences. This narrative positions Margaret as a 'modern woman', different to the (traditional) women of her mother's generation:

I think it's like, in my mothers generation you grow up, you get married, you have children, you have duties to your family and ... you don't care about yourself. But I think nowadays women recognize that they need to care for themselves. To care for yourself means obviously you're going to be a better person to care for your children ... Sometimes I do things and I think well, that could probably be considered quite selfish by some people, but it's just stuff that I need to do, and if I don't do it, then what happens? Then I'm going to be worse for the kids because I've stopped doing this ...

Margaret's story of a self with needs draws together her experiences across different relationships within her maternal biography, and gives her biography coherence around the themes of increasing self-knowledge and self-development. For Margaret, becoming a lone mother is contingent upon a life story in which actively 'caring for herself' is more important, than for example, situating herself as a wife or partner in a marriage or marriage-like relationship. In this sense, Margaret's story contains elements similar to Giddens' (1992) construction of the pure relationship, and the reflexive individuals who enact it. Margaret is seeking self-fulfilment, and her current relationship arrangements are accounted for in terms of this quest. However, Margaret is not seeking self-fulfilment as a goal in itself. Although positioning herself as someone who "could probably be considered quite selfish by some people", Margaret links her self with needs narrative to her ongoing responsibilities towards her children.

Brenda also used the self with needs narrative to story her experience of asking her husband to leave. In making sense of her experience of becoming a lone mother, Brenda sets her need for security at counterpoint to the material and emotional insecurity she experienced while living with her ex-husband:

We had been engaged ... for nine years. I sort of think that it [getting married] was more security for me, and not so much for him although I do think some of it was security for him. I think a lot of it had to do with me being secure, and of course when we did get married and we shifted ... I mean, it's not his fault, you know, it's nobody's fault, it's everybody's fault sort of thing ... In that year, in the first year we got married, he had like eight jobs, and I just couldn't take that.

That was just really insecure for me ... I've had this house since 1986 and it basically hasn't changed since the day I bought it ... just done the odd things that I could afford to do myself, and yet my husband couldn't do it. I felt like I was working for nothing ... it was all sort of share and share alike, but I forked out for day-care and I forked out for half the power, half the food, half the rent sort of thing. I did all the sort of half and half things and I felt that he just seemed to be taking a lot from me and not giving a lot back to me and in the end I just said, 'well, I've had enough, I can't take it anymore ... you can leave, think about it' ... Another reason was I just didn't love him anymore ... a lot of it had just died it's really difficult to pinpoint anything in it, but a lot of it was security for me. I mean I can be single and insecure. I didn't need to have a husband and feel insecure as well.

In Brenda's story, her need for security is mediated by a classic 'excuse' to give coherence to her decision to end the relationship. In explaining the end of the relationship, Brenda draws upon romantic discourses that place love at the centre of modern heterosexual relationships. In this sense, as with Margaret's story, Brenda's story also draws upon elements of Giddens' (1992) account of the pure relationship as a terminable relationship: a relationship whose durability, rather than taken for granted, is contingent on each individual's commitment to the relationship. However, in storying the end of her marriage, it is not only that she no longer "love(s) him", but that her commitment was not matched in any material or emotional way by his. In positioning herself as a self with needs, Brenda makes possible the potential for a better (more secure) life without him; a life where becoming a lone mother offers more opportunities to experience the security she desires than she had as a married woman.

Jacky became a lone mother when she asked her partner of nine years to leave, eighteen months after their son was born. Jacky described 'what happened' as follows:

Well, we'd had three miscarriages throughout those nine years ... and then we had a child, and all those stresses that relate to that too, with a few separations, and then he had an operation ... he would have got depression with that, but he wasn't willing to seek counselling and try and make things better. He was just too scared to do things, and he's a shift worker working twelve hours shifts and things like that, so I'm quite used to being on my own anyway. I mean he was only really here a couple of days of the week or nights ... I couldn't stand the pressure anymore of all that was happening, and I went to counselling on my own ... and I just knew I wanted him to go. I couldn't carry him as well as trying to bring up our son at the same time ...

Lesley	So you asked him to go, and he did?
Jacky	After a couple of weeks
Lesley	Why the delay?

Jacky He was just trying to stay and hang on, but he wasn't willing to help himself and I just couldn't carry him. I just didn't love him enough to try and get over this one. We'd separated several times before, before the child had come, but I wasn't going to get into the trap of him leaving - coming back, with a child. We could do that on our own but I wasn't going to do that to Robert.

Jacky, like Brenda, draws upon romantic discourses to explain the finality of her decision that the relationship was over. In becoming a lone mother, Jacky positions herself as a self with needs in that she knew that "she couldn't carry him as well". Jacky describes the moment of realising that while married, her husband had "a lot of control of all the money and things like that". She described how her life then was shaped by husband's actions, and his "work schedule". Jacky talked of how she had left the marriage several times, and how she experienced "mental abuse" by her husband. Sometime before Jacky left her husband, he had a major operation that Jacky thinks may have made him depressed. She tried to 'save' the marriage by suggesting that she and her husband have some relationship counselling. In the event, the counselling was to provide a point of change in Jacky's life:

I ended up going to a counsellor on my own ... he wouldn't go with me [...] I was crying all the time, on Prozac ... I did that because I knew things were going to get tougher, and I'd better get something to chill me out a bit. Of course, after about four months then the doctor says 'well, how long do you want to be on these things for', which I didn't want to be, obviously, they're not good long term, only to help you over a rough patch ... [the doctor] said 'you've got to look at what your problem really is', and that's when I went to a counsellor, and of course, that's what it was, *he* was the problem. Yeah, I was miserable, and if I'm miserable, your child's not going to be happy is it. Yeah, couldn't be better now ... I've got Robert to look after and that's all I need to look after.

In Jacky's story, her life improved as a consequence of her decision to leave her ex-husband. Consistent with Giddens' account of the pure relationship, Jacky's marriage was not 'durable', and 'terminated more or less at [Jacky's] will'. However, in storying her experience as a self with needs, Jacky is not positioning herself as an individual making choices to direct one's biographical trajectory in her own interests alone. Like Margaret, Jacky's 'self interest' is mediated by the presence of children, and her concern for children's interests. Similarly, Jacky's account, like those of the other participants who made sense of their experience through this narrative, positions her life ahead as better in comparison to the poverty of her previous relationship experiences. In this sense, this story positions a kind of self who although reflexive and active in

directing their individual biography, are really a 'surviving' self, a self made possible through the identification of their needs.

Although storied as a self with needs, it is important to stress that participants who used this narrative are not the 'selfish' individuals that some social commentators have identified as unique to, and bad for, contemporary social life¹⁰⁶. As Smart and Neale (1997; 18) illustrated in their analysis of interviews with divorcing parents, participants in this research are similarly "a long way from the stereotype created by current media and political discourses" linking divorce with selfish individualism. As with the parents interviewed by Smart and Neale (1997; 15) the participants who storied a self with needs all "decided ultimately to go, but not without struggling with the principles involved with this conflict of interests". Stories of a self with needs are enacted within the context of participants' sense of responsibility towards their children. Thus, in telling these stories, these participants position themselves as moral agents, legitimately making decisions to not only better their own lives, but also the lives of their children.

Earlier in this section, I suggested that in the context of modernisation theories' claims about the intensification of individualism in late modern societies, it might be anticipated that stories of a self with needs would be a common contingency narrative used by participants. However, few participants used this story exclusively, and as demonstrated above, those who did moderated their own needs in relation to the needs of their children. Given this, it is interesting to note that the three participants who used this story to make sense of their experience of becoming lone mothers were materially very similar to each other, but more importantly, materially very similar to their ex-partners. The participants were what I would describe as 'hard working women'. They had each worked in unskilled or semi-skilled and low paid work before their children were born, and two continued to participate in similar types of paid work after their children were born. They described their ex-partners as working men employed in low or semi-skilled jobs, and in jobs that were not particularly secure. Two points are worthy of note in this regard. For these women, the possibilities for a better life without him were central to storying their own needs. It is possible too, that this better life without him is not available to women in relationships where the social roles of each

¹⁰⁶ See for example, McLoughlin (1995).

individual are characterised by social difference. For example, women in care-giving roles in conventional middle-class, breadwinner-caregiver relationships may have the most to lose materially when they become lone mothers. Alternatively, these participants had little to lose materially in relation to their ex-partners' contributions, and much to gain both materially and emotionally in terms of exerting self-identities unconstrained by unsatisfying relationships.

Stories of a self with needs make possible subject positions where claims about the experience of a relationship are central to the act of leaving it. In this sense, stories of a self with needs offer a legitimate way for women to become lone mothers contingent upon them becoming 'better people', and therefore better able to meet the needs of their children. Interestingly, this story does not seem to be open to all women, and seems more accessible to women living with men whose working lives are typically insecure. The participants who drew upon this story each described the experience of their previous relationships as 'living like a single parent anyway'. Thus, central to this story was the way in which becoming a lone mother was linked to a chance for a better life, a life in which the participants had more control over their day to day activities both as a single person, and as a lone mother.

Stories of the Inevitable

Becoming narratives that exemplify stories of the inevitable were most likely to be told by women whose maternal biographies had been shaped by either the 'I left him' or the 'Ambiguous' plots. For this latter group of participants, it remained unclear what had actually happened, except that their relationship ended. Participants who told stories of the inevitable positioned themselves as becoming lone mothers as a consequence of the inevitable (and predictable) actions of others (usually their ex-partners), or the inevitable and self-evident needs of their children. In contrast to the other stories, stories of the inevitable are characterised by rather more detailed descriptions of 'the relationship' as a prelude to becoming a lone parent. This may be because stories of the inevitable can be understood as 'modern stories' of marital breakdown, in that all participants generally drew upon 'reasons' for becoming lone mothers (for example, the

dangerousness of their ex-partners towards them or their children) that gained increased legitimacy in post war New Zealand.

Although early twentieth century divorce laws made divorce possible for women on grounds of violence or insanity, it was not until the modern (post-war) period that divorce became accessible for many women (Phillips, 1981). Even then, divorce was uncommon until the 1970s, and the various grounds for divorce reflected moral distinctions between the respectable and the unrespectable parties. Writing in 1981, Phillips notes: “If divorce is still not thought of as normal, neither is it thought of as abnormal in the sense of unacceptably deviant, and divorced people are probably less frequently regarded as socially and emotionally corrupted” (Phillips, 1981; 126). For the participants who told stories of the inevitable, divorce, or relationship breakdown, were life events that were difficult to negotiate. This may in part be because, for some of these participants, ‘modern’ notions of marriage as a “‘natural condition’ whose durability can be taken for granted” (Giddens, 1992; 137) remained discursively present. Thus, for these participants, the use of ‘acceptable’ and ‘respectable’ reasons to account for the end of their relationships, were central to their stories. However, the very reasons they used to account for their relationships ending are also ‘reasons’ that are difficult for some women to articulate. For example, many of the participants who told stories of the inevitable had experienced violence. Within New Zealand’s gendered culture, violence against women remains difficult to articulate in ways which are socially credible, and do not either undermine the authority of a woman’s experience, or reduce her experience so that she is judged as the cause.

Teresa’s becoming narrative coheres around a story of the inevitable. Teresa left her husband twice, and talked of a number of changes she made to try and make the marriage work. For example, the family moved to a larger home, and Teresa gave up her job “because he didn’t like me working in a bar because there were men there.” In describing ‘what happened to her’, Teresa talked about the end of her marriage as something that was inevitable by linking general statistics around relationships ending with her own experience. For Teresa, the ‘fact’ that “statistically it takes two years for a marriage to actually dissolve” is an important sense-making resource that validates her decision to leave her husband for the second time.

My daughter is five and a half ... I have been a sole parent ... coming up two years. Prior to that my husband and I were married for eight years, we were together for ten. Yeah, it's coming up to two years that I've actually been on my own. [...] It's funny actually because I was talking to someone the other day that said to me that statistically it takes two years for a marriage to actually dissolve, and in my case that's actually correct. And in my case we actually broke up [previously] ... two years prior. I went back because I was panicking, for lack of a better word. I was trying to make sure I was doing the right thing by my child, so I went back [...] I went back because it was easier on my conscience to do so. I wasn't in an abusive or violent marriage, so it played on my mind that was I doing the right thing by my child. So I went back to make sure that I was, because I didn't feel at the time that I had a valid reason for leaving. I wasn't a beaten wife, or an abused wife, or anything like that, so ... I went back to make sure I was doing the right thing by my daughter.

Contradictorily, Teresa also stated she had no “valid reason for leaving the relationship” and that she wasn't in “an abusive or violent marriage”. In Teresa's narrative, the end of the marriage is storied as inevitable not because of her ex-husband's actions, but because of an external predictability. Teresa's leaving is also set against Teresa's concern for the interests of her daughter. This concern is central to Teresa's decision making. Although leaving the marriage is situated as an action for which she had no legitimate ‘excuse’ in terms of her own needs, in making sure she was doing the right thing for her daughter Teresa positions herself as acting responsibly in the circumstances within which she found herself.

Although becoming a lone mother was inevitable for Teresa, it was inevitable because her marriage would inevitably ‘dissolve’. However, despite her drawing upon ‘statistics’ to establish the certainty that the end of the marriage was unavoidable, the actual transition into becoming a lone mother was difficult. Like the other participants who drew upon stories of the inevitable, becoming a lone mother was a biographical change that took some time to finally ‘achieve’. For some participants, their ‘failed’ relationships had been characterised by experiences of their partners controlling their day to day lives, acts of violence against them, ongoing financial struggle and lack of control over the family finances, or the long-term illnesses of their partners that the participants experienced as dangerous.

Many of the participants in this research spoke of their experiences of becoming lone mothers simultaneously with becoming beneficiaries. Although narratives around

changes in the participants' social identities as mothers are explored in more detail in the following chapter, it is important to note that participants who told stories of the inevitable were often in situations where accessing welfare entitlements ensured the safety of themselves or their children.

Karla's becoming story was also shaped by a story of inevitability. Like many of the other participants, Karla's maternal biography was complex. She married twice, and left both husbands twice "before [she] was able to make it permanent", and the types of relationships that Karla experienced meant her becoming was particularly complicated. However, for Karla, becoming a lone mother was inevitable because of the violence of her ex-husbands, and the impact of their violence on Karla's children. In Karla's story, becoming a lone mother "permanently" was not a decision enacted as a consequence of a reflexive and self-actualising project of self, but rather the outcome of limited choices made within the context of relationships with violent men.

Karla's first marriage to Ken in the early 1980s was shortly after Karla and Ken's first child, Samuel, was born. Karla talked of not really wanting to get married, and of the marriage as a 'choice' made in the absence of other options. As a teenager, Karla had been a birth mother and placed a child for adoption:

I was seventeen when I got pregnant [with the adopted child] ... and I just couldn't bear to go through that experience again ... of all the options, there was abortion which I couldn't do because [Ken] was adamant that he was going to look after both of us, and I couldn't go through the option of adoption because I'd done that already and ... I hadn't recovered from that, and I just couldn't bear the thought of being a solo parent, and so the fourth option was, you know, to actually get married and let this child have two parents, and I just thought well, you know, whatever this marriage turns out to be like, I'll cope with it.

However, Karla told how from the wedding day onwards she knew that the marriage would end:

[L]iterally from the minute we got home from the wedding reception ... I think everything had already been shit but it was like it was real blatant shit from then on. On the wedding night, he called me by his first wife's name ... [W]hen we got home and got into bed ... I waited till he was asleep and I went out into the kitchen and ... looked at this wedding ring, and I actually thought 'well thank god you can get divorced in New Zealand' ... I actually realised right from the wedding night that ... I was already sort of heading towards when I would leave.

Karla's leaving is inevitable in the context of the story she tells. The violent actions of Ken are storied as actions signalling that the marriage would inevitably end. For Karla, Ken's violence was a private experience that she did not share with her family and friends. Within the context of the normative feminine biography shaped by modern notions of romantic love, the experience of violence is a story that breeches the culturally dominant story of heterosexual relationships as an emotional haven from the heartless world of modernity (Lasch, 1977).

Karla talked of how she felt when she finally left Ken. In the end, Karla went to a refuge to escape from Ken's violence. Despite this, Karla still experienced becoming a lone mother as in itself a traumatic event:

It was big shame thing ... that you'd failed, that you were actually a failure as a person. I mean I didn't talk to anyone about what was going on within the marriage because even that was like admitting that I was a failure as a woman, and a failure as a wife, so nobody actually had any idea of what was going on. And I think a lot of people were really shocked when I left because it was like they didn't know that anything had been going on at all. But by the time I did finally leave, I couldn't give a shit about, you know, how people viewed solo parents. To me it ... was the only way I could stay alive...

The inevitability of the end of the relationship as a consequence of Ken's increasingly predictable actions towards her, positions Karla as a woman something has happened to. As with the participants who narrated stories of no intent, Karla's story positions her as 'blameless' in the face of circumstances. However, unlike the participants who narrated stories of no intent, becoming a lone mother was a decision that Karla had to make, and in this sense, a decision in which the timing of her becoming was something over which she had some control. Thus, becoming a lone mother did not 'happen to her'. Rather, circumstances that would inevitably lead her to become a lone mother did. In Karla's story, she negotiates these circumstances to minimise the attribution of fault to her (for 'being in a bad marriage', or for 'causing it').

The inevitably in Karla's story is mirrored in her account of her second marriage.

[A] few years ago I was looking at the parallels and they were just identical [...] I actually had this big bit of paper ... I'd put Ken there and Terry there and divided the page in two and there wasn't a single thing that was different...[except] Ken was alcoholic and Terry was a drug addict [...] Terry ended up being exactly the same as Ken, you know, the same things happened within the marriage, except with him, there ... was less physical violence but there was probably more sexual

violence. And like his drug behaviour just got worse and worse and worse. I mean Ken's behaviour when he was really drunk ... you know, it got as bad as it could get, but Terry's just got really bizarre. Really scary, but that was after we got married ... and he quite severely injured my daughter ... and she was hospitalised, and the police were involved, and CYPs, and that's where all my other stuff starts from ...

In Karla's story, leaving Ken and Terry were very difficult times. After leaving Terry, Karla's children were placed in foster care, and Karla took time out to undertake a live-in "rehab programme" for partners of addicts. Karla talks of this as an important time for "getting herself together" before setting up a home for her children as a lone mother. Throughout Karla's becoming story, her emphasis is on the experience of the relationships she had, rather than her own needs. In narrating a story of inevitability, Karla's story is not about an autonomous social actor exercising choices within the context of a reflexive project of self. Rather, Karla's story is about not having choices, or at best, having few choices, and acting in ways in which the impact of the actions of others on her own safety and the safety of her children are minimised.

Like Karla, Irenie's story of becoming a lone mother centres on her experience of being in a relationship with a violent man. However, unlike most of the other participants in this research, Irenie's maternal biography is shaped by her self-conscious knowledge that she would have children, irrespective of other life events. Irenie was the youngest of the participants, and her relative youth may in part explain this. Unlike most of the other participants, Irenie is a 'hybrid-child' of neo-liberalism and liberal feminism and would have been a preschooler when the Labour Government began the systematic institutional neo-liberal reforms beginning in 1984. It is possible that Irenie's biography was less constrained by modernist norms of femininity, and more firmly situated within the rhetoric of individualism that characterises both neo-liberalism and liberal feminism. In Irenie's story, it was always inevitable that she would have children, and that having children was not a biographical event that necessarily followed marriage:

I knew I was going to have kids. Like when I was getting to twenty ... I just knew I was just destined to have kids, it was like I wanted kids, I loved kids I sort of knew. Like I wasn't into the big marriage thing ... I'm very independent, and I sort of know what I wanted ... Like I aimed to get pregnant and I thought if the dad wasn't around that wasn't no biggie, so yeah, I sort of knew I definitely would have kids, and it wasn't like a factor, you know, that I would be alone type thing...

Although most of the participants told stories of becoming that ameliorated discourses of lone mothers as particular types of women by accounting for the presence then the absence of a man within their maternal biographies, Irenie's story stressed the anticipation of children, rather than the anticipation of a man as symbolic of adulthood. Despite this, Irenie's account of becoming a lone mother also narrates her experiences of her relationship with her children's father. However, the plot that Irenie narrates remains ambiguous. It is unclear, for example, if Irenie and Bruce's relationship is 'over', or if it is still continuing to progress towards what seems to be an inevitable end.

In her becoming narrative, Irenie deploys several rhetorical strategies that act to position herself as an ordinary woman in circumstances that *legitimately* account for the end of the relationship, and for Irenie becoming a lone mother. For example, Irenie talks of her experience of Bruce's violence towards herself and the children, and of Bruce's irresponsibility with the children when under his care. The predictability of Bruce's behaviour (in that he is violent) and the inevitability of the relationship's end are central to this narrative. Nevertheless, while violence by men against women and children have a history of legitimacy in accounting for relationship breakdown, Irenie's account stretches beyond the experience of violence. She stresses, for example, the length of time the relationship endured, and that Bruce "doesn't like children", positioning the relationship with Bruce as of considerable importance within her biography. For Irenie, there remains a contradiction that she is attempting to resolve narratively; on the one hand she was always going to be a mother, irrespective of her relationship status. On the other hand, in storying her becoming a lone mother, Bruce's violence per se is insufficient in her account to legitimate her status as a lone mother, and is suggestive of a discourse of femininity constructing women as responsible for the actions of men whom they 'choose' as fathers for their children:

I was with the dad for nine years. We got together when we were thirteen and a half, and we broke up at the start of the year. [...] we got together pretty young. He had a very bad alcohol problem, so that's basically why we split up, because a lot of the time we had no money, because he would spend it all, and it was a violent relationship too, so that's sort of why we um ended the relationship as well. Like we were happy for a while, and because of the violence and the alcohol, it was all alcohol violent related, that's why we broke up. And he hated babies, so that was another reason. I love children and he doesn't like children. [...] I got pregnant with Brian in 1995 so we moved back in together ... but Bruce drunk a lot, and then he was physically violent, so we stopped living together, and we still remained like together, but not living together. And then in 1996 we had our baby,

and I had to get trespass orders against Bruce when my first son was three months old. So we stopped seeing each other for about three months, and then I couldn't resist so we got back to together and we kept on seeing each other, and then I fell pregnant again ... with my second son and my and Bruce relationship was basically sort of ended. But I tried to make things go for the kids' sake, but then the violence got worse, so I had him up for assault ... because he hit me when I was nine months pregnant - due to have the baby. So we split up and then we got together in January when the baby was born because he had his court case in January so he thought he'd be nice to me, so we got back together, and then um, it went to court, and straight after the court case we finished so [Brian interjects.....] in January, that was when my son was born, and so he was very nice to me up to the court case, and then he sort of blackmailed me at the same time because he sort of said he wouldn't sign my son's birth certificate if I didn't drop the charges. So it went to court and the case got dismissed and then he signed the birth certificate ... We took it up to Births Deaths and Marriages as soon as we did it. Then he went back half an hour later, told the people that we changed our minds, and asked for the birth certificate back. ... He signed it in the end, but now I'm going for full custody of my children so, I've got a big court battle coming up...

Like Irenie, Eve's account of becoming a lone mother draws upon a story of inevitably. Again, similar to Irenie, Eve's story surrounds a plot in which the temporal order and significance of particular events remain ambiguous. That is, while it is clear that Eve's marriage ended, and ended in circumstances that were a predictable outcome of the actions of others, it is not clear who left whom. Eve's ex-husband Martin was on holiday in New Zealand when they met. Eve and Martin had two children, and established a business together when the children were small. Eve tells of the stresses of running a business with small children, and of Martin returning to work to earn more money when the business was struggling. In Eve's account, this was clearly a period of great stress on both Eve and Martin, stress exacerbated by the emergence of Martin's illness. Eve described this time as a "the bad period":

[O]ne day we were driving through town and the wheel fell off [the car], not just the wheel ... the whole axle part. The wheel just fell off the car and it, I can't remember you know, because you don't, but it just seemed like all these things were going wrong [in my life] as well ...

Eve's metaphoric use of 'the wheel falling off' draws together her experience of this period of her biography. In her narrative, this is a time when Martin and Eve are still married, but the inevitability of the end of the relationship is potent. Eve described events shortly after this, that in the end, led to Martin returning to the care of his parents in Wales, but accompanied by their son Andrew, who Martin took along for a short visit to his grandparents:

Martin lost his job, he got fired, and it all just started going down hill really fast from there. He didn't cope with not having a job; he got depressed and went onto anti-depressants. He started to drink. He'd always smoked pot but not a great deal of it and it was then with everything else it was starting to become a more of an issue, mainly because of the money aspect of it, we just didn't have the money for him to go out and buy it, and also that he was relying more and more on that. We'd perhaps be going somewhere and I'd be in the car with kids and he'd say 'hang on a minute', and I knew he was going in to have a quick puff because he couldn't deal with life without it. I don't know how schizophrenia works, so the terminology maybe incorrect, but he developed schizophrenia, and it was becoming really scary living with him. I'd go out to do work at night and like one incident I came home at nine-thirty and ... every single light was on in the house, and all the windows and doors were open, but no one was there. I didn't know where they'd gone, and I couldn't afford to pay anyone else to look after the children at night-time but Martin was unreliable, and it was really scary. I drove around the streets looking for them. He'd taken them to the beach ... He used to get distracted, and you know, like one night, I'd always cook dinner and leave it for them, and one night he fell asleep on the kitchen floor and Bettina had got into the dinner ... and she'd spread it all over the place, which is not dangerous but it's worrying because the potential was there for it to be dangerous. And he'd sit up and talk to four or five o'clock in the morning unable to sleep, and he'd play with guns and knives and stuff like that. He was becoming a person I didn't know, and I didn't know if I could trust him, so it was becoming really, really scary [...] I'd got to the point where I was also on anti-depressants and was still crying most days, was still not coping, I mean, I coped but I felt like I wasn't. Our life was really, really bad for a long, long time and it didn't look like it was going to get better, and I couldn't look after him and the children, and he had to go, you know, I couldn't do anything to help him.

Like the other participants who made sense of their becoming lone mothers through stories of inevitably, Eve's relationship came to an end because of predictable circumstances that were beyond Eve's control. Martin's illness and his marijuana smoking are key 'causes' that Eve identifies as contributors to the breakdown of the marriage within her becoming narrative. However, the end of the relationship is not driven by Eve's 'needs' for a particular form of relationship that might contribute to her identity project. On the contrary, in Eve's story, the relationship ends because of the consequences of those predictable behaviours for Eve and her children. Martin did return to New Zealand with Andrew, but sometime after the agreed time. During this period, Eve describes the stress she felt around the possibility that Andrew may never return. When Martin did return with Andrew, Eve knew that the marriage was over. Martin was still unwell, and the marriage would inevitably 'fail'. In seeing Martin again, Eve described how "it just reinforced how much he'd changed over the years and

how it was like having another child in the family just except a bigger more uncontrollable child”.

Stories of the inevitable are more heterogeneous and contradictory than both stories of no intent, and stories of a self with needs. Participants whose relationships had been characterised by violence were most likely to use this story, although not all participants who had experienced violence in their relationships did so. Participants whose relationships were placed under stress due to actions or behaviours of their partners during the relationship also used this story, although again, not exclusively. However, in both contexts, participants who drew upon this story positioned the safety of themselves and their children as important reasons why the end of their relationships were inevitable, and why they consequently became lone mothers. Similar to participants who drew upon stories of no intent, stories of the inevitable offered participants subject positions where the end of the relationship was a consequence of circumstances over which they had little, or no control. As such, stories of the inevitable often drew upon modern post-war discourses that constitute divorce (or relationship breakdown) as legitimate for women in particular circumstances. Finally, for the participants who drew upon stories of the inevitable, the end of a relationship was often a difficult experience, and typically experienced as a long ‘uncoupling’. This suggests that although this story is modernist in character, it is a complex story for women to articulate. In order to establish their legitimacy in becoming lone mothers, this story in particular, compelled participants to account for their becoming by describing in detail the oppressive circumstances in which they had found themselves.

Conclusion

All the participants in this research *became* lone mothers, but within their individual maternal biographies they began from and became at different points. Byrne (2003) notes that when one’s biography follows the ‘norm’ there is “no story to tell”. For the participants in research there were stories to be told; stories that negotiated experiences that interrupt dominant constructions of the ‘normal’ feminine biography. Despite claims that men and women are becoming ‘more equal’ as the purchase of gender on identity weakens in late modernity, the validation stories enacted by the participants

demonstrate that women who parent alone not only occupy contested subject positions, but must do a considerable sense-making work as ‘that’ subject. As validation stories, the participants’ stories are also contingency narratives that establish the participants as women whose expected biographical trajectories have been interrupted in legitimate ways. Thus their validation stories repair the disjuncture between the constructs of the ‘modern’ (as opposed to late modern) feminine biography where marriage precedes motherhood as the ‘normal’ biographical trajectory for women, and the participants’ actual experience. In narrating the ‘differences from the conventional story’ in relation to their own lives, the participants’ position themselves as ordinary women in extraordinary circumstances. As such, the validation stories used by the participants in their becoming narratives counter dominant neo-liberal discourses that construct lone mothers as particular types of people.

In this chapter I have identified and discussed the ways in which women who parent alone make sense of their experience becoming lone mothers. After identifying the becoming narrative of each participant, four plots or routes into lone motherhood were described. Although these plots illustrate that becoming a lone mother is the outcome of a series of temporally ordered events, it is the validation stories enacted by the participants to narratively repair to disjuncture their experiences and the ‘modern’ norms of femininity that illustrate how the social meanings around gender and the experience of gender relations continues to shape women’s lives.

The validation stories told by participants to make sense of their becoming experience, in general, make problematic claims that in late modernity individualism is reshaping personal relationships as a consequence of men and women becoming ‘more equal’. Rather, the validation stories identified in the participants’ becoming narratives suggest that although intimate relationships between adults may have become more terminable and contingent, there is less evidence to suggest this is democratising personal and social life. In piecing together their maternal biographies, the participants story the vagaries and uncertainties encountered as “personal misfortunes and unanticipated events” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002a; 24). For some participants, becoming a lone mother promised “a better life”, or at least “a new beginning”. Nevertheless, as the following chapters illustrate, the biographical ‘choices’ the participants exercise as lone

mothers are constrained by neo-liberal constructions (including the material effects of those constructions) of lone mothers as particular types of people.

In the next chapter, the experience of being a lone mother is examined. Again, the concept of validation stories is used. In particular, the validation stories enacted by the participants in making claims to the social identity as mother in the context of welfare reform discourses that position lone mothers as Other are explored.

Chapter Seven

Being Different

The special situation of the stigmatised is that society tells him (sic) he is a member of a the wider group, which means he is a normal human being, but that he is also 'different' to some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference. This differentness itself of course derives from society, for ordinarily before a difference can matter much it must be conceptualised collectively by society as a whole (Goffman, 1965; 123).

When I was growing up it was like a sort of an institution that didn't exist, and if it did I didn't know it was happening ... even when I had ... my first child who I gave up for adoption, he was born in 1974, solo parenthood just as far as I could see just did not exist, I mean, it wasn't even an option, it just didn't seem to even exist... (Karla).

Introduction

Women who parent alone occupy contested subject positions within late modern societies. On the one hand, lone parenting is understood as the outcome of changes in family life and gender relations, and the emergence of a new form of intimacy as reflexive individuals seek relationships that contribute to fluid and ongoing identity projects. On the other, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses construct lone mothers as particular types of people, different to other women, mothers and citizens. In Chapter Six, narratives that positioned women who parent alone as ordinary women were explored. In that chapter, three validation stories were identified, each offering the participants contingency narratives linking what happened to them with stories that repaired the disjuncture between the anticipated feminine biography, and the experience of becoming a lone mother. In this chapter, the ways in which women who parent alone negotiate the social identity of mother, *as* lone mothers, are explored. Thus, while the previous chapter focused on validation stories in relation to normative constructions of the feminine biography as structured by heterosexual marriage and the presence of children (in that order), this chapter focuses on how women who parent alone make sense of the experience of being lone mothers through identity claims as mothers. A number of narratives offering the participants subject positions that differentiate and

distinguish themselves from dominant constructions of lone mothers as Other mothers are identified. These narratives can also be conceptualised as validation stories, in that through narrative, the participants both make sense of their experience of parenting alone, and make claims that position themselves as ordinary mothers, making the most of the extraordinary circumstances of their lives.

Although both motherhood and femininity are socially constructed, historically and socially specific norms regulating motherhood are reproduced through dominant discourses that shape the lives of women (Smart, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). As Arendell (2000) notes, 'motherhood' and 'femininity' are intertwined, and women's gender identity is reinforced by the social practices of mothering. Despite the fact that not all women are mothers, and that not all "the relational and logistical work of child rearing" is done by women, "womanhood and motherhood are treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience" (Arendell, 2000; 1192). However, women who are mothers do not experience motherhood equally. As a social practice, mothering is policed by normative constructs of the ordinary mother as necessarily 'the good mother', knowable primarily in contrast to other 'pathological', 'abnormal' or 'bad' mothers.

Constructions of the good mother are implicit rather than explicit (Smart, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). In late modern societies, the relative silence around what constitutes the good mother sits within the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that draw upon constructions of an idealised good mother as a woman who "ensure[s] that independent provision is made for their children in such a way that neither the children nor the mothers themselves come to public attention" (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; 14). However, although motherhood is policed through discourses whereby the ordinary mother is the good mother, known in contrast to mothers who are Other, Jamieson (1998) notes that various and changing theories of good mothering have been articulated through the modern social sciences. For example, Durkheim represented mothering as a biological and evolutionary 'fact', and "the inevitability of women focusing on mothering to the exclusion of public life [as] a cultural reading of nature" (Jamieson, 1998; 46). This sexual division of labour was echoed in Parsonian functionalism, where the separate roles of men (as providers) and women (as carers) was premised on the assumption that the competitive orientation required for participation in the market

place and the affective orientation required for socialising children and stabilising adult personalities were incompatible (Elliot, 1986; 35-38). Similarly, this Parsonian division was (and remains) manifest in liberal breadwinner-caregiver welfare states, where the social identity of mother is tied to the social practices of mothering not only as the domain of women, but a role that excludes (or is secondary to) women's participation in paid work, and the public sphere more generally (Bryson, 1992).

In Chapter Three I argued that constructionist approaches illustrate how the meanings and practices of motherhood are historically specific. For example, in the early twentieth century, a 'good mother' was responsible for the physical and moral 'health' of her children. New Zealand historical research suggests that the primary role of the good mother was the realisation of a healthy child as a national asset within the context of an emerging industrial-settler family comprised of a male breadwinner and a dependent wife-mother and children (Toynbee, 1995; Goodyear, 1995). By the late twentieth century, children were constructed as much more complex individuals requiring intensive emotional and psychological nurture. For example, Hays (1996) discusses how women's lives in the USA have changed as motherhood has 'intensified'. As such, the act of mothering has become more emotionally absorbing, more labour intensive, more 'expert' guided, and more expensive *for mothers*.

As Hays (1996) argues, the "cultural contradiction of motherhood" is that good mothering has become more intensive and elaborate at the same historical moment as other changes in the social roles of women, including for example, women's increasing participation in paid work (Hays, 1996; 50)¹⁰⁷, offer women access to experiences (such as parenting alone) that fundamentally challenge modernist gender relations reified by the traditional sexual division of labour. Similarly, as 'good mothering' has become more intense, Other mothers have become more visible. For example, in New Zealand neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have problematised women who parent alone while in receipt of welfare payments. The visibilisation of these mothers is particularly interesting given that it was only in the 1970s that all women who parented alone became entitled to non-discretionary welfare payments on the basis that they were 'good

¹⁰⁷ Hays' argument that motherhood has intensified (Hays, 1996) sits somewhat contradictorily alongside claims that women and men have become 'more equal'. I address this briefly in the conclusion to this chapter.

mothers', in that like other (good) mothers, their primary orientation was towards the care of their children.

In this chapter, I explore how women who parent alone negotiate the social identity of mother, as lone mothers. In making sense of the experience of parenting alone, the participants in this research drew upon discourses that make up lone mothers as particular types of people. In doing this, the participants drew upon a stock of cultural knowledge to identify and define Other mothers, as well as to distinguish and differentiate themselves from her. I argue that through narratives that position themselves as good mothers, the participants construct validation stories that make sense of their experiences occupying a contested subject position. In the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, being 'different' to other lone mothers while simultaneously 'being' a lone mother produces particular narrative identities. Thus, the participants in this research told me not only how they became lone mothers, but what they did and *did not* become.

Stigmatised Identities and Validation Stories

The focus of this chapter is how women who parent alone make sense of their experiences as ordinary mothers in extraordinary circumstances, by negotiating the social identity of mother, as lone mothers. As noted earlier in this thesis, an overriding impression I had after interviewing the participants was that they had contacted me not only to talk about their experiences parenting alone, but also to tell me that they were not the subject that I had 'hailed'. Indeed, in talking about their lives, and the experience of being a lone mother, many of the participants used terms such as 'stigma' and 'stereotype'.

As noted, in Chapter Three I explored changing discourses making up women who parent alone as particular types of people. In effect, these discourses have discursively constituted 'stereotypes' that I refer to as identity categories. Similarly, in this chapter, Goffman's concept of stigma (Goffman, 1965) can be linked to the ways the participants make sense of motherhood as 'contested subjects'. Indeed, during the interviews it was typically the participants who first used the term 'stigma' to describe

their experience, and generally with some sociological resonance. Giddens (1990) has noted the phenomenon of ‘clever people’ in late modernity reflexively integrating abstract knowledge with experience through what he calls the ‘double hermeneutic’. That is:

The development of sociological knowledge is parasitical upon lay agents’ concepts; on the other hand notions coined in the meta-languages of the social sciences routinely re-enter the universe of actions they were initially formulated to describe (Giddens, 1990; 15).

Goffman’s theorisation of stigma has been particularly useful in thinking through how women who parent alone make sense of their experience as ordinary mothers in extraordinary circumstances. Goffman defines stigma as “an attribute that makes him (sic) different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind” (Goffman, 1965; 3). Women who parent alone are attributed with the social identity of mother, but this “virtual” or anticipated social identity is mediated by their “actual” social identity as lone mothers. For Goffman, it is this discrepancy between the virtual social identity (of mother) and actual social identity (of lone mother) that might “spoil” the identity of the individual, and infer stigma. Of course, the stigmatised are not passive. According to Goffman, stigma management is a general feature of society, and occurs wherever identity norms are present (Goffman, 1965; 130). This is because discrepancies between virtual and actual identities will inevitably occur, and give rise to stigma management by the stigmatised (Goffman, 1965; 138).

Goffman differentiates between social identities (both virtual and actual), and personal identities. For Goffman, the core of one’s personal identity is the ego identity, “the subjective sense of his (sic) own situation and his own continuity and character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of his various social experiences “(Goffman, 1965; 105). In addition, Goffman argues that personal identity is comprised of both the ego identity (the subjective, reflexive, feeling individual) and the unique life events that combine as one’s biography. In this thesis, the term ‘personal identity’ approximates my use of the term ‘narrative identity’. Similarly, Goffman’s term ‘virtual social identity’ referring to the expected or anticipated normative ‘attributes’ of individuals in particular circumstances approximates my use of the term ‘social identity’.

According to Goffman, stigma has a “double perspective”. That is, some stigmas (or the disjuncture between an individual’s virtual and actual social identity) are “discredited”, meaning that the stigmatised individual knows that the stigma is “visible”. On the other hand, “discreditable” stigmas are those where the stigmatised assume that their differentness is not directly knowable (Goffman, 1965; 4). Discredited and discreditable stigmas give rise to different stigma management strategies. Those with discreditable stigmas (for example, being a lone parent in receipt of a welfare benefit) might attempt to “pass” as “normals” (for example, by shopping on days other than ‘benefit days’, an experience described by several of the participants in this research). Goffman argues “because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so, on some occasion, with some intent” (Goffman, 1965; 74).

The distinction between discredited and discreditable stigma was particularly useful in this research. Women who parent alone can be thought of as bearing discreditable stigmas, even though many of the participants described either themselves or other lone mothers as discredited because of having a particular ‘look’. For example, when talking about being a lone mother Brenda said “I don’t always feel different from anybody else, although sometimes I dress the same as a solo parent, scruffy and looking poor”. For Brenda, “a solo parent” bears a discredited stigma; a look that others know. Alternatively, many of the other participants talked of the ways in which disclosure of their social identity as lone mothers changed the ways in which people interacted with them. In this sense, their experiences equated with Goffman’s description of discreditable stigmas. Similarly, the elaborate ways participants deployed strategies to ‘mask’ their identities as lone mothers equated with Goffman’s descriptions of “stigma management”.

Despite the usefulness of Goffman’s approach, and indeed the ways in which the participants described their experience as ‘stigma’, the concept of validation stories remains useful for analysing the ways in which the participants made sense of their experience as ordinary mothers in extraordinary circumstances. Goffman’s approach, although acknowledging that stigma is the product of social interaction, pays limited attention to the complex ways in which social context, social meanings and social identity interact. For example, women who parent alone make sense of their experience in the context of complex and contradictory discourses that not only ‘stigmatise’, but

also offer counter discourses through which the social identity of the good mother can be accessed. Secondly, Goffman's conception of the subjectification of the stigmatised suggests that identities become relatively fixed through interaction, even though "the normals" and the stigmatised are relational identities. However, for women who parent alone, the virtual identity of 'lone mother' is not fixed, and is an identity embroidered with complex and contradictory meanings. Similarly, lone motherhood is an identity category where entry and exit are tied to other situated changes within one's maternal biography. Validation stories illustrate how these relational identities are always produced within complex and contradictory discourses, offering a multiplicity of subject positions that are negotiated and assumed narratively. Finally, Goffman assumes that the stigmatised subjects act intentionally to 'manage' stigma. As noted in Chapter Five, while validation stories may, in effect, 'manage' identity, they are essentially a sense making (rather than obfuscatory) strategy. Through validation stories, individuals can make sense of their own experience not only in terms of 'what happened to them', but also why it happened, and the consequences of what happened for the person they become.

For women who parent alone, being a lone mother is always an experience of a 'different' or changed identity in the context of one's maternal biography. That is, as a lone mother, women experience changes in the ways in which others see them, and indeed, how they see themselves. For example, many participants spoke of their experience of stigma as lone mothers in situations where their social identities as mothers were particularly visible. In such situations, their virtual and actual social identities collided, and the disjuncture between these identities opened moments when specific discourses making up women who parent alone as particular types of people would 'press upon them'. For example, several participants spoke of engaging professional services for their children. As good mothers, the participants were concerned for their children's psychological or emotional development. Thus, as good mothers, they approached these services bearing the virtual social identity of mothers. Colleen was concerned that her son, Gordon, was not sleeping well at night. She contacted a local psychological health service, who initially reassured her that she had "done the right thing" in making contact:

[T]hey were actually really nice, and said ... 'you've done the right thing' [...] 'this is all part of growing up' [...] 'we'll sort it all out for you [...] They weren't

really very good. It was the first session, I mean we never went back, and this guy goes ‘do you think about your father very much?’ [...] and Gordon went ‘no’ ... they brought up his father a couple of times and when we got out, Gordon said to me ‘I’m never going back there, I’m not going to talk to a stranger, I’m not going to have strangers asking me personal questions’, and I thought yeah, fair enough.

This interest in Gordon’s *absent* father illustrates a “paradigmatic shift” in discourses around fatherhood and child development (Smart & Neale, 1999; 36). The ‘tender years doctrine’¹⁰⁸ dominant in the 1950s and 1960s has gradually been eroded by discourses constructing father absence as a ‘social problem’, and an explanation for both ‘abnormal’ child development, as well as wider social breakdown (Lewis, 2002; 131 - 133, Gavanas, 2002; 213 -214). Smart & Neale (1999; 36) note that by the 1980s, the idea that “children suffered by losing contact with the non-custodial parent” had become dominant¹⁰⁹. The relationship between masculinity and father absence has become especially prominent (Hearn, 2002). More importantly, in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, absent fathers have been constructed as irresponsible fathers, primarily because of their “failure to maintain” has been linked to the rise in lone mother households (Lewis, 2002; 128). Although meanings around father absence have a dense discursive history reflecting diverse cultural meanings around fatherhood, these discourses also make visible lone mothers and their children as ‘lacking’. For Colleen, the experience of her son being subjected to the idea that the absence of his father was affecting his well-being was a moment when her virtual identity as a mother was discredited, and her experience shaped by the imputation by others of her actual identity as a lone mother.

Tina had a similar experience to Colleen. Tina’s son had been bullied at school, and Tina was concerned at the ways in which the bullying was affecting his general behaviour and self-esteem. To help her son, Tina took him to a health service agency that appeared to respond to Tina as a different sort of mother from the good mother. Tina suspected the health workers saw her as lacking as a mother because they attempted to ‘treat’ her, rather than her son. Rather than lacking a husband/father, Tina attributed her experience to the health workers’ stereotypes about lone mothers.

¹⁰⁸ That is, that “child welfare is best served by preserving the mother/child bond above other relationships” (Smart & Neale, 1999; 35).

¹⁰⁹ However, as Lewis (2002, 132) notes, the “precise impact of father-presence as opposed to absence has proved difficult to measure”. See also Richards (1999).

However, in ‘discovering’ she was a lone mother, Tina talked of how she became the focus of the psychologist’s inquiry:

Well, they kept going, asking me the same questions, like ‘And how do you feel about your financial situation?’ Well, I feel strongly about my financial situation (laughter), I’m really broke and I would dearly love to be able to just go out there and say ‘hey, we’ll have what ever we want this week’, but it never happens. And so that really got to me after a while, because they kept categorizing me and not seeing my potential in the future. It was ‘how long have you been on your own?’, and ‘you must find that really hard’, and I said ‘well, yes I do’. But then on the other hand, some things I find easier, because I’m not having to channel extra energy into the relationship, I’m actually channelling all my energy into myself and my children. But I found their questioning was really quite pinpointed to the fact that I was a single parent, and they were looking for other signs of perhaps my parenting ability, that I wasn’t doing right with my children because I was on my own.

Tina’s experience illustrates how one’s social identity is shaped by the taken-for-granted everyday cultural ‘knowledge’ that categorises women who parent alone as particular types of people. Although Tina positions herself as a good mother in that she is seeking help for her distressed child, her identity as a mother is eclipsed by her discreditable actual identity as a lone mother.

Interestingly, many of the participants said that although there was a stigma attached to women parenting alone, they had never been treated differently by others because they were lone mothers. This apparent contradiction can be understood by attending to the work that the participants did in managing their actual identities as lone mothers. For some women, this involved elaborate Goffman-like strategies of, for example, passing. Perhaps more subtly, it also involved changes in the ways in which some of the participants lived their lives as self-consciously good mothers. For example, Hayley’s life has been transformed by becoming a mother, and then a lone mother. In particular, Hayley had stopped using drugs, something she had tried to do for years before becoming a mother. As a good mother, Hayley was concerned that her daughter, Miranda, would be an equally ‘good’ child:

[N]ow I’m sort of really straight. I mean like I’ve got a straight job, I’m on the DPB, I’m sort of really big on honesty and things like that [...] I mean honesty to myself ... Like for instance the other day Miranda found a small purse and it had one key in it, and nine dollars or something like that, and normally I would have just said ‘oh that’s, you know, lucky you, what shall we buy?’ but I sort of thought [...] gosh, I’d better be a good example here. So we sort of turned it into a little outing and we trotted down to the Police Station ... and the other day we found

some shoes and we took them down, they were like children's shoes, but it's just sort of like I'm just sort of trying to be an example...

Like Hayley, Carlene's experience of being a lone mother changed how she thought of herself. In Carlene's narrative, the experience of being a lone mother has changed over time. As a 'new mum', Carlene talked of being "very sensitive" to how others saw her, and the experience of personal struggle she had in becoming a lone mother. Carlene made sense of this by contrasting her experience of motherhood with that of her friends, who had "done it all properly". Her narrative illustrates how discourses of femininity and motherhood become tied within maternal biographies, and work to position women who parent alone as Other. However, in acknowledging her 'difference' (and her strategies for managing her sense of being Other) Carlene talked of broader social changes in the ways that lone mothers are viewed. This change mirrors changes in her narrative of self and her increased confidence in claiming the social identity of mother. As a woman who parents alone, Carlene claims the social identity of mother by positioning herself as a "single parent" or "sole parent", and thus a 'good mother' in a changing social world:

I've always done things the wrong way around, not like all my friends, they've all done it all properly [...]they've got married and bought a house and had children, and done this, and you know, bought their children up till they're five or six then go back to work and all this sort of thing, and just done it what I'd call the old fashioned way, not the old fashioned way, but the acceptable way, put it like that

Lesley Do you think what you've done is unacceptable?

Carlene Not now, I did before, yeah. It took me, oh, he was well at school before I stopped going shopping and putting a ring on my wedding ring finger because I was so ashamed, or I thought people were looking at me. Now I couldn't give two hoots, I couldn't give a flying continental really about anything like that, it took me five or six years to get over that sort of feeling of stigma [...] I think [the stigma] was just an ingrained thing, probably from my childhood, that you grow up, you get married and have children, and when I had him there was that crossover. Solo mothers had a very bad reputation then, and I will correct anyone that calls me a solo mother, I'll say 'but I'm a single parent', or 'sole parent'. It was about that time that they were getting a bit of bad press, but it was also about the time that a lot of people were actually realizing, a lot of single parents weren't actually stereotyped from those ten years before and it was about that crossover time, but I still felt very much inadequate...

Carlene's "sort of feeling of stigma" illustrates how women who parent alone inhabit discreditable identities as lone mothers, while at the same time, make sense of their experiences by positioning themselves as Other in relation to dominant constructions of lone mothers as particular types of people. Once 'discredited' and fixed with the identity

of lone mother, women who parent alone experience change in how they are ‘seen’ as mothers. These experiences include how others interact with them as *lone* mothers, but also in how they see themselves as mothers, and the relationship between their mothering experience and broader social change.

Positioning the Self as a Good Mother

In the previous section, I have shown how Goffman’s conceptualisation of stigma was useful for thinking through how the experience of parenting alone is shaped by the disjuncture between the virtual social identity of mother and the actual social identity of lone mother. In this section, I illustrate how women who parent alone make sense of this disjuncture. I argue that they do this narratively, by constructing narrative identities that differ from that of Other lone mothers. Thus, through narrative, the participants distinguish and differentiate themselves from constructs of lone mothers as Other, by constructing narrative identities as ordinary, that is, good mothers. However, within the participants’ narratives there is little agreement around what constitutes a ‘good mother’, except in the broadest sense. That is, good mothers care for their children, and act in their children’s interest. Alternatively, there is much more agreement about who the Other mother is. The participants in this research knew the Other mother as sometimes the pathological mother, sometimes the problem mother, and most often, the welfare mother. In ‘knowing’ these mothers, the participants in this research have constructed narrative identities that position themselves as her Other, and thus claim the social identity of the good mother.

In Chapter Three I identified three ‘seams’ of discourse, that I argued have combined in late modern societies to position lone mothers as Other mothers. One seam is that of the ‘pathological mother’. I described this as an early modernist discourse that was in evidence by the beginning of the twentieth century and consolidated around expanding ‘scientific knowledge’ of maternal and child health. In contrast to the discourses that constructed good mothers as responsible for the physicality and morality of their children, the pathological discourse positioned women who parented alone as morally different to good mothers, while at the same time necessary for infant survival. By the 1960s, a new ‘social problem’ discourse was emerging. This discourse linked the

practices of parenting alone to a wider matrix of social problems, while at the same time constructing women who parented alone as group of women with common needs. The social problem discourse is also a modernist discourse, and consolidates concerns about ‘abnormal’ mothers as Other to ‘normal’ mothers through expanding socio-psychological knowledge. Finally, the ‘welfare mother’ discourse emerged in the 1980s. This is a late modern discourse that echoes the political anxieties of both conservatives and the neo-liberals. By the 1990s, this had become the dominant way in which women who parented alone were made up as particular types of people, and extruded a ‘new’ hierarchy of maternal legitimacy mirroring that of the early twentieth century whereby ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers (including good and bad lone mothers) could be morally differentiated. In Chapter Three, I argued that the ‘welfare mother’ discourse was consolidated through social-administrative inquiry, and contrasted welfare mothers with constructions of citizen-workers in late modernity.

In late modern societies, enacting the good mother discourse is particularly problematic for women who parent alone. This is because as women and mothers, women who parent alone belong to an invented category of people that has been constructed as ‘real’ and ‘different’ to other categories of people, and as such, these constructions have ‘real’ effects. For example, in Chapter Six, I argued that one effect of such constructions is that women who parent alone make sense of their experiences in becoming lone mothers by positioning themselves as ordinary women in extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, in the following chapter (Chapter Eight), I also argue that the material effects of this discursively produced difference shapes their everyday experience as ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, women who parent alone are also mothers *like* other mothers in that their identity and everyday lives are shaped by the presence of children, and the social meanings available for making sense of the relationship between women and children.

Narratives that distinguish and differentiate women who parent alone from Other lone mothers, and position women who parent alone as good mothers can be conceptualised as validation stories. As noted at the beginning of this section, the participants in this research enacted narrative identities positioning themselves as different to three constructions of the lone mother as Other: the pathological mother, the problem mother, and the welfare mother. In interviewing the participants, I asked each how they

described their 'status' as mothers. In response to this (or similarly phrased questions), the participants typically described what they were not. In this sense, the participants 'turned Goffman on his head'. That is, in making claims as good mothers, the participants actual social identity was that of *mother*, and in effect distancing themselves from the virtual identity of lone mother. Thus, through validation stories, the participants negotiated the identity category of 'lone mother' and its incumbent negative constructions by producing narrative identities to distinguish and differentiate themselves from what they are not (that is, Other mothers), and position themselves as what they are, good mothers.

As noted in Chapter Two, women who parent alone both experience stigma, while at the same time see their experience as different to other women lone parents. However, while this is evident in the narratives of the participants in this research, women who parent alone also question and destabilise stereotypical, stigmatising and negative constructions of lone mothers by 'testing' such views against their personal experiences. Notably, women who unexpectedly became lone mothers, and who sometimes spoke of changing their views once they experienced lone mothering themselves more often described having negative attitudes towards lone mothers previously. Similarly, the participants' narratives also illustrate how negotiating the social identity of good mother does not produce fixed identities. Rather, through narrative, wider changes in the meanings of motherhood and changes in the ways in which women who parent alone are 'made up', and elements from each participant's individual maternal biographies are drawn upon to make sense of experience, and to position oneself as a good mother. For example, Geraldine's narrative illustrates the complexity of negotiating categorical identities when women who parent alone talk about both what they are and are not, in relation to who they once were and the mother they have become:

I don't say housewife any more, and I don't like being called 'Mrs White' anymore, things like that, but no, not really. I'm a mum. I usually don't have to say 'solo mother'. If it comes up I just say I'm a single parent or a mum, but solo mother I guess is the most common one that I'd use. Solo isn't really an 'in word' now though is it?

The Pathological Mother as Other

Phoenix (1996; 176) argues that although negative discourses around lone mothers have constituted a discursive formation of ‘old truths’ whereby constructs of lone mothers as Other mothers have an apparent objective reality, there are also counter discourses available that dislodge these truths. According to Phoenix (1996) it is these contrary discourses that have prevented constructs of lone mothers as Other mother continuing to be widely held as regimes of truth. Nevertheless, the old truths around lone mothers as, for example, pathological mothers, problem mothers and welfare mothers do not just disappear, but rather “sediment into common-sense, making contrary themes available in everyday talk” (Phoenix, 1996; 180). Women who parent alone are not immune to discourses that construct lone mothers as Other. Indeed, these discourses sediment into the stories of women who parent alone, as they make sense of their experiences as good mothers in extraordinary circumstances.

As discussed in Chapter Three, constructions of the lone mother as a pathological mother have a discursive history that links early twentieth century discourses of motherhood with infant survival. The construction of lone mothers as pathological mothers is contradictory in that while scientific discourses linked maternal care with infant survival, the reasons why women became lone parents were increasingly pathologised in the early twentieth century. This pathological discourse applied specifically to unmarried mothers¹¹⁰. While mothers were important for child health, not all women were capable of becoming good mothers. Explanations for illegitimate birth, for example, focused on the ‘illegitimate mother’, innately different to ‘legitimate’ or good mothers. This pathologising of unmarried mothers occurred in the context of debate over ‘population issues’, including a general concern over fertility decline, and eugenic concerns around population health. As Other mothers, women who parented alone were constructed as ‘bad mothers’, in that they were lacking in the mothering arts. Official records illustrate this, and particularly the discursive link between women parenting alone as being deficient mothers, and the subsequent deficiencies in their children.

¹¹⁰ As noted in Chapter Three, widows and deserted wives were more likely to be constructed as unfortunate women in unfortunate circumstances.

The residue of discourses constructing unmarried mothers as pathological mothers, that is, mothers who because of their own 'innate' limitations are unable to properly care for their children, is evident in the narratives of the research participants. The pathological mother is particularly 'visible' in terms of both her embodiment, and the embodiment or the behaviour of her children. For example, at the beginning of her interview, Heather talked about both becoming a lone mother, as well as the type of mother she did *not* become:

I have a nineteen year old daughter ... I was alone for five months of the beginning of her life, and then met the father of my second child and was with him for five years before she was even conceived ... [that] relationship ended ... and in between the periods when I was on my own, I preferred 'single parent' or 'sole parent' or 'sole caregiver'. The solo mum thing to the people I knew conjured up too many ideas of slippers and track pants and kids eating baked beans for dinner four nights of five and that sort of stuff. I steered away from it, and I did actually try not to do things on typically 'solo parent days'. Tuesday was pay day and Tuesday was usually shopping day, so I shopped on Wednesdays or Thursday because I couldn't. I just didn't like to throw myself into that thing and be looked upon as the same, and it wasn't sort of snobbery, it was, I don't know, maybe it was fear of realizing what I actually was.

For Heather, as with many of the participants in this research, the mother she did not become was the 'solo mother'. In Chapter Three, I argued that the 'solo mother' was a particularly powerful construction of lone mothers as Other mothers that was enlivened and 'made real' in New Zealand in the 1980s and particularly the 1990s. The construct of the solo mum has much in common with early twentieth century constructions of unmarried mothers as pathological mothers. Solo mothers are constructed as bad mothers, incompetent in the arts of motherhood because of some inherent, individual flaw.

At the time of her interview, Heather had experienced two episodes of parenting alone. When talking about becoming a lone mother for the second time, Heather again invokes discourses constituting 'solo mothers' as mothers with a particularly visible embodiment, and whose 'deficiencies' as mothers are similarly visible in the behaviours of their children:

[H]aving been out of [lone motherhood] for so long and having being so many years that I could proudly walk into the grocery shop, I didn't have to worry about really what the price is, I don't have to say, 'OK, I can't really afford that' ... but I just did the same thing, I didn't shop on days that were standard single parent shopping days. I mean they even had little haunts that they regularly visited, little

cafes and coffee shops and stuff, and you knew they were all single parents which is really awful. And I mean this is really awful of me to say, and I really don't like saying this, but the kids were running around like a bunch of little billy goats, climbing the walls literally. And the mothers were just sitting there, 'natter natter natter' – and I thought I am not ... one of those people: my children are cared for, I watch what they do, they don't wreck other people's property because I'm too busy talking smoking or drinking coffee, and they will never ever do that! And I hated it that I thought that about other single parents when I was a single parent myself...

In her narrative, Heather talks of the ways in which she not only knows the solo mum, but also acts to position herself as different to her. This occurs not only in the 'passing' activities Heather deployed (for example, not shopping on "standard single parent shopping days"), but also the ways in which Heather makes claims to her difference as a 'good mother'. Heather cares for children, takes responsibility for their behaviour, and is engaged in mothering. However, like many of the participants, Heather's 'knowledge' about solo mums is something that is she uncomfortable in expressing.

Both Pamela and Hayley, like Heather, construct other women who parent alone through discourses of particular maternal and child embodiment. For example, in talking about the stereotype of the solo mum, Pamela commented:

I think that a lot of people tend to think of a solo mum as being somebody who's got herself pregnant on purpose, and doesn't have much intelligence, fritters away the money, you know, smokes, drinks, gambles, whatever. Somebody not in control of their life, somebody who might be neglectful of their children.

While Hayley's image of the solo mum is similar to that of Pamela, like Heather, Hayley is similarly uncomfortable in articulating her knowledge of the stereotype. In talking about the terms she might use to describe her parenting status, Hayley commented:

I don't really like 'solo mum' [... because] that's got sort of like connotations of like overweight, greasy haired, pasty skinned woman with snotty nosed children sort of trailing behind, you know what I mean? It sounds awful! I mean I might be slightly overweight or I might not be and that's OK, and I might've greasy hair occasionally and that's OK, but there's that sort of package - that image that comes to mind.

Hayley thought that the "image that comes to mind" was related to the ways in which women who parented alone were being represented in the media at the time of the interview. Several participants, including Hayley, talked of the Code of Social and

Family Responsibility¹¹¹ that had been in the headlines some months prior to their interviews. Hayley, for example, talked of the Code as an attempt by the government to get people “off welfare” and into work. Hayley thought that this was the purpose of the Code, and that the Code itself had reinforced particular stereotypes about women parenting alone and in receipt of the DPB. In recognising the stereotypes, and articulating them, Hayley was able to position herself as ‘different’:

[The stereotype as] you know, perhaps thick girls [who] deliberately go out there and get pregnant or something, you know what I mean ... that we sit at home watching soap operas all day. I didn’t watch any soap operas actually. I hardly ever watch TV [...] I don’t know, I think people resent people getting money for what they think is nothing, you know [...] I mean there’s that sort of stereotype there, but then on the other hand I think single working mothers that do work full-time must have a blimming quite a hard thing ...

In Hayley’s narrative, she positions herself as both a member of the stereotyped group (“we sit at home...”), but at the same time as different to the stereotype. Like some of the other participants, Hayley made sense of her experience being a lone mother by engaging iteratively in contrasting her experience with that of other women. Margaret also reflected on her experience in relation to the experiences of others, and like Hayley, linked dominant constructions of women who parent alone as bad mothers with welfare reform. Margaret had a long history of caring for her children alone, and spoke of how she saw both herself and other women who parented alone, had changed over time. Interestingly, in describing her experiences of being treated ‘differently’ because she was a lone mother, Margaret noted it had not been “overt”, but rather “quite subtle stuff”. In talking about her experience of being ‘different’, Margaret drew attention to her body:

[I’m treated differently] too like because I’m quite overweight and people tend to think I’m stupid. Because I’m fat and a single parent people tend to think ... I’m doubly sort of stupid. ... it’s taken me a long time to realise that ...I’m quite happy with who I am [...but] it was really awful going to places, like to school prize-givings ...on my own, and even though I went and there would be other people there on their own, and I don’t know if they were also like single parents, but like another woman [on their own] I’d always assume that she’d have a husband at home ... I always felt like I was the only one there who, you know, my kids didn’t have a father.

For Margaret, the ‘feeling’ of being different was an ongoing experience. Margaret spoke more readily about being treated as if she really was different than many of the

¹¹¹ As discussed in Chapter Three.

other participants. I think this was because Margaret has been raising her children alone for many years, and for most of that time her main income has been the DPB. Her experience of being a lone mother for such a length of time meant that she had been in many situations where her identity as a lone mother was ‘known’ by others, and she had thought about why people treated her in particular ways as a lone mother. Like some of the other participants, Margaret was very comfortable with being a lone mother, in that she valued lone motherhood as an independent social status. However, in discussing the terms she used to describe her parenting status, she noted:

The terms don’t worry me, but it’s just what other people think about it. Because I know that other people think ‘oh, solo mother’, you know? Sort of see them roll their eyes and that kind of thing [...] I think they think we’re dole bludgers. I mean, there was a time when it was considered immoral and that kind of thing, like you were a slut ... But now days it’s quite common. So I think it’s more of the fact that they’re sort of bludging off the government that people don’t like...

In Margaret’s narrative, discourses that pathologise women who parent alone (‘a slut’) sit alongside discourses that construct women who parent alone as a welfare problem (‘dole bludgers’). It is not that Margaret actually positions lone mothers as these particular types of people, but rather, she draws upon these constructions to make sense of her own experience. Margaret is a ‘good mother’: most of her adult life has been shaped around her caring for her children alone, and she is currently caring for her grandchild. However, Margaret has been ‘treated differently’ because she parents alone. She makes sense of this experience by narrating her identity as a mother in relation to sedimented discourses that position women who parent alone as particular types of people. In addition, Margaret links the constitutive power of this discourse to welfare reform. Margaret is neither ‘the slut’ nor ‘the bludger’, but she knows that her experience being a lone mother has been shaped by both of these discourses.

As noted in Chapter Three, the idea that women who parent alone are sexually Other can be traced to the pathologising discourses of the early twentieth century. In particular, while ‘first fall’ unmarried mothers were constructed as sexually naive at the turn of the century, by the 1920s new concerns around of ‘feeble-mindedness’ had combined with notions of female sexuality to construct unmarried mothers as sexually depraved. These constructions survived through to the 1950s and were particularly evident in discourses around rising rates of ‘illegitimate birth’ in the 1950s and 1960s. The idea that women who parent alone are sexually Other remains sedimented in stories

that construct women who parent alone as particular types of people. For example, as noted above, many of the participants' knowledge about solo mothers included some reference to her 'different' sexuality. For some of the participants who had been children and young women in the 1960s and 1970s, this idea emerged in their narratives but often sat counter to their own experience of parenting alone. For example, in her narrative, Denise resolves the contradiction between the idea that women who parent alone are "loose", and the knowledge that her experience of parenting alone has given her through being that subject, 'the solo mother'. Indeed, like many of the other participants, Denise did not use the term 'solo mother', although her status as a woman parenting alone was known in her community. Denise positioned herself as a mother, just as she had 'always been'. Nevertheless, while she had in the past thought of lone mothers as different to her, her thoughts had changed. Denise noted that solo mothers are seen as "fairly loose", while at the same time knowing that 'they' (and Denise herself) are not:

... I mean but they're not, and I'm not thinking about now ...actually I'm telling you how I used to think really, I don't really think about the single parent now, or other people who are single parents, you know, you 'are' and you just get on with life ...

The Social Problem Mother as Other

In Chapter Three, I argued that a 'social problem discourse' constructing women who parent alone as Other had emerged in New Zealand by the 1960s. As noted, this discourse linked the experience of parenting alone with a wider matrix of 'social problems'. In the 1960s, the post-war 'modern society' discourse made possible new ways of talking about women who parented alone, and began to draw together different 'types' of lone mothers on the basis of common 'social' (including economic) and 'psychological' needs. As noted in Chapter Three, this redefinition of the hierarchy of maternal legitimacy was in part the outcome of new forms of knowledge, including social scientific knowledge about 'normal' and 'abnormal' families, their impact on individual family members, and their impact on society as a whole.

In general, the social problem mother as Other is the 'most muted' discourse within the women's narratives about 'being different'. There is however, one important exception. That is, some of the participants made sense of their own experience by drawing upon

the social problem discourse in relation to ‘absent fathers’. As Jamieson (1998; 45) notes, the notion that “children benefit if both their mothers and fathers are their intimates” emerged as a popular ideal in the late twentieth century. The displacement of the tender years doctrine by discourses ‘equalising’ mothers and fathers as parents have constructed father involvement as good for children, civilising for fathers, and potentially liberating for mothers (Jamieson, 1998; 45).

Scholarly and policy interest in fatherhood has increased considerably, especially during the 1990s (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000; McCann, 1999a). In relation to absent fathers, this interest can be traced to the social problem discourse. In the 1970s for example, researchers highlighted the decline in father-contact after parental relationships ended. Within social problem discourses, explanations for this decline focused on its negative effects: for fathers, children and ‘society’. For example, in a large sample of American households where there had been a change in the parents’ marital status between the years of 1976 and 1981, Furstenberg & Nord (1985) found that 49 percent of the affected children had had no contact with the non-custodial parent in the preceding 12 months. They commented:

Our data suggest that the significance of biological parenthood may be waning in response to an emerging pattern of conjugal succession ... Like marriage, childbearing and childrearing are processes that have become dictated less by constraint and obligation and determined more by voluntary participation... (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; 903 - 904).

Although during the 1960s and 1970s, discourses privileging the importance of the mother-child bond for normal human development were dominant, the idea that children had ‘developmental needs’ around particular types of relationships with both parents was growing in ascendancy. Set against discourses around ‘waning’ paternal obligation, father absence became linked to wider social breakdown. For example poverty in lone mother households was linked to the failure of fathers to provide, and ‘normal’ child development was increasingly linked to contact with both parents. As Smart & Neale (1999, 36) note, by the 1990s:

...non-custodial fathers were constructed as vital to their children’s well-being and as symbolizing stability, order and economic security for a child. Father absence became linked with outcomes such as poor performance in school, poor job prospects, promiscuity in girls and delinquency in boys.

While some researchers have sought to link father absence with “gate-keeping” by mothers (Seery & Crowley, 2000; McCann, 2000) this does not appear to be the case for most of the participants in this research. Rather, the participants ‘made sense’ of father absence through four key narratives. In a few instances, the fathers were positioned as ‘bad men’. For example, Irenie, was in the process of “going for full custody” because her children’s father was violent towards her, and unpredictable when the children were in his care. A few participants constructed narratives that positioned themselves as ‘good parents’, and as capable in meeting the needs of their children without father involvement. In general, these participants had become lone mothers as single women, and the fathers had never established any involvement with their children. However, nearly all of the participants described the father of their children as ‘good fathers’, irrespective of the relationships that the fathers had with their children¹¹². Finally, some participants drew upon discourses of absent fathers by enacting a ‘missing dads’ narrative. In this later group, some of these men were ‘missing’ in that they seemed to be progressively disengaging from the lives of their children, while others were literally missing, in that they had no contact with their children at all.

Discourses around absent fathers as a social problem are of interest in this research because they offer women who parent alone narrative resources that both make sense of their experience parenting alone, and to position themselves as good mothers in extraordinary circumstances. In relation to this research, in almost all instances where there was ongoing father contact, the frequency of this contact had declined over time. Where this was the case, the participants often spoke of their concerns around declining contact, and their frustration in fathers ‘missing out on’ as well as ‘missing from’ their children’s lives. Indeed, some of the participants described the various strategies they used to encourage and maintain contact between their children and the children’s fathers. While these seemed to have little effect on father contact, it illustrates how as ‘good mothers’, discourses around absent fathers infiltrate participants’ biographies shaping the ways in which women both experience, and make sense of the experience of parenting alone.

¹¹² And irrespective of the father’s treatment of the children’s mothers.

Geraldine was very concerned at the level of contact her children were having with their father, Kevin. When their marriage had ended, Kevin had wanted custody of their son Clarke, but the arrangement was abandoned when Kevin's new relationship ended. Geraldine spoke of continuing disagreements between herself and Kevin over his contact with the children. Kevin had recently lost his job, and Geraldine felt that he should be spending more time with the children. During the interview, Geraldine showed me a notebook she was using to keep a record of the Kevin's contact:

I mean in September I wrote down every minute he spent with them and I counted up the hours...I think there was something like eighty seven hours were his in the whole of September and I had six hundred and thirty ...I said to him, eighty seven hours, and I had six hundred odd... that's a huge amount of time to be responsible for two people when I didn't bring them into the world by myself... I get so wild, you know. And I've done it again ... for November, but I haven't added it all up [...] What I did is that I went through and counted up four weeks, so many hours in a week and times it by four, and so I get so many hours in a month, whatever it was, eight hundred and something, I've got it all written down. [...] I'll go and get in a show you what I've done. That's my little notebook of notes ... I started off on the 30th of August and I've written down every little thing, like he was at school for thirty minutes, every little time that he saw them, and I worked 672 hours in four weeks. I had them 585 and he had them 87 [hours]

Lesley OK, and that 672, is that including night time?

Geraldine Yes, but I'm still responsible for them. I get up to Judith probably three times at night whenever she feels like it [...] he's doing nothing, there's no excuse whatsoever, I mean he should be having those kids three or four nights a week really. Someone said to me recently, over the school holidays, if he's not working I should say to him 'there's six weeks in the holidays, you have them three and I'll have them three'. I'm getting a benefit for them but, well the benefit still provides for them not to be here up to three nights a week. I mean, apart from timeout, they need their Dad, particularly Clarke.

In Geraldine's narrative, Geraldine positions herself as a good mother, in that she clearly does most of the caring work for the children. She is also clearly different to constructions of Other (lone) mothers who 'gate-keep' fathers' access to children in that she is acting to ensure her children do have contact with their father. Despite this, the imbalance in the amount of time Geraldine and Kevin spend with the children is something that Geraldine seems to have little control over. While the discourses around father absence focus on fathers, women who parent alone also negotiate these discourses in making sense of their experiences as good mothers in extraordinary circumstances.

Denise's ex-husband Samuel moved to Australia shortly after their marriage ended. Like Geraldine, Denise's narrative illustrates how for many women who parent alone, the "total responsibility for the kids" is not only a lot of work for lone mothers, but work that remains hidden in discourses that construct father absence as a social problem. However, in Denise's narrative, discourses linking absent fathers with children's development are also present. Denise draws upon notions of parenting as a gendered activity, where mothers and fathers offer their children different, but 'equally' important "input". Within father absence discourses, the idea that fathers are essential role models *for their sons* is taken-for-granted (see for example McCann, 2000; McCann, 1999b; Biddolph, 1997) while daughters needs are often elided. Similarly, Denise is primarily concerned about her sons' lack of father contact:

This is [Samuel's] third year over there. Just having the total responsibility of the kids, and teenagers in particular ... it's just a handful ... I just feel a little bit overwhelmed by it all, and well, really their father hasn't taken any, you know, I take the full responsibility. Sometimes it gets a bit overwhelming with all that entails, from just the shopping to the cooking, cleaning, wanting to know what they're up to. As a mother you have to be there for them and you still have to guide them and all that sort of thing. The only thing I think about is that they're only getting my input into their life at the moment, a female's input. You know, they're not getting a males input [...] they need a balance ... my two sons need to know a role model ... In some ways I think respect is missing. And I've said to them 'look, if you don't respect me you won't respect your girlfriend or your wife' ... I look back and I don't believe that my husband really respected me a lot, and I think they've picked up on that.

Like Denise, Pamela was concerned about the impact of an absent father for her sons' development. For example, Pamela spoke of boys "definitely" needing a man as "a positive role model". With her ex-husband living overseas, Pamela described two strategies she was planning to give her sons "good role models". She was planning on encouraging more contact with her children's grandfather so that "he'll be there at the sidelines watching them play soccer and maybe doing some fishing". Similarly, through contacts with her local church she had found a "life guard so to speak ... somebody like a big brother" that she hoped her sons could spend time with. Importantly, both these strategies were in the planning stage for Pamela. Their inclusion in her narrative suggests not only that she felt her planned actions important enough to describe, but also how as a good mother, she was enacting strategies to consciously develop her sons' 'maleness'. Like some of the other mothers of sons amongst the

participants, Pamela had read popular books¹¹³ on the importance of fathers for the development of 'positive' masculine identities. Although her narrative describes actions that she hopes might compensate for the 'missing dad', it also positions her as the 'good mother' acting in the best interests of her children.

As noted earlier in this section, in almost all instances, the participants described the fathers of their children as 'good fathers', irrespective of the relationships that the fathers maintained with their children, including 'missing dads'. In general, the missing Dad narrative was enacted by participants who had previously lived with the fathers of their children. While participants who had become lone mothers as single women typically used 'good parent' narratives to position themselves as 'good mothers', one participant who had become a lone mother as a single woman enacted a 'missing Dad' narrative. When I arrived at Anna's home to interview her, she had already prepared a list of issues she wanted to discuss. Item 2 on that list was "Having a boy". When I asked Anna about what it was like as single parent having a boy, she replied:

For a start you've got no man in the house to help discipline them, and no one to help back you up like when you have an argument. When I have an argument with him, it's him and I at each other, and he's in my face and I'm in his face and there's no third party who I can sort of off load him on to, to diffuse the situation or whatever ...I grew up like in the normal family with a father and a mother and there were three of us ... and if there was an argument with Mum it was like 'wait till your father gets home'. So Dad would walk in and we'd all crawl over Dad ...There's no one to back you up, and it worries me that maybe later when he's a teenager that he'll start getting really stroppy, you know, and I haven't got a man in the house to back me up [...] I've read that book 'Manhood' by Steven Biddolph, and Jesus! What a depressing book. I mean I read that and I thought 'shit, my son is doomed'. My son is doomed to turn out bad or terrible or with a low self-esteem because he doesn't have a decent male role model in his life ...I just felt so sad and helpless about that, because there's nothing I can do about it. Until I met someone who can, you know, fulfil his needs for a father and also my needs for a partner, there's nothing I can do about it, it doesn't matter how good a mother I am, there's nothing I can do [...] I've come to the opinion now that all kids need two parents, and boys definitely need a father now. I've come to the

¹¹³ Several authors have published popular books on fathering in contemporary society. Most begin with an explanation of the problem of 'missing Dads', and the importance of fathering *especially* for boys. These books are widely available, easy to read, and presented in the 'self-help' genre (see for example, Biddolph, 1997; McCann, 2000). The authors tend to position themselves within the context of the contemporary 'men's movement', and argue for new forms of masculinity stressing, for example, emotional competence. They also generally address as a 'problem' lone mothers raising sons. For example, McCann (2000) identifies five 'problems' for lone mothers with sons: establishing appropriate discipline; boys becoming the 'man about the house'; mothers gate-keeping son-father relationships; unconscious sexual bonding between sons and mothers and other problems preventing the development of male sexual identity; and conflict between mothers and sons.

opinion, because it doesn't matter how much you do, it doesn't matter how many soccer games you take them to, or how often you go out there and kick a ball around with them or anything, that doesn't matter, they still need a male at this age now. When they're toddlers they're fine because they're always clinging to Mummy ... but at this age it's just a waste of time, all his school years, this time when he's growing and learning and he hasn't got a male to help, to be with him and guide him through it, it's just a waste of time, and I feel really angry and helpless and upset about it [...] although I felt I had to read [the book], I didn't like reading it because it just sort of reaffirmed what I [thought]... I just thought there's no bloody hope for my son, he's just going to be one of those statistics ... he's just going to be one of those teenagers who goes right off because they haven't got a father to keep them in line, or to take them out and do boy things with them [...] I mean, he's enrolled in Keas [...] so he's getting to do lots of male things with other boys which is fine, you know, and the leaders are quite good and that ... I'm not shying away from getting him into those male things ... I think it's important that he gets into those things, but I just feel that best I can do is get him into those things you know, and hope that he's getting some benefit out of it.

In Anna's narrative, the 'public issue' of the absent father has become a 'personal trouble' that Anna is seeking to resolve. As a good mother, Anna has followed the advice of the books she has read, and has set up activities and contacts so that her son can "do lots of male things". In Anna's narrative, her sense of hopelessness, that, even as a good mother, she cannot meet her son's needs, is mediated by the things she does do in continuing to try and meet those needs.

What is most notable about Anna's story however, is her account of experiences of searching for, and finding, the missing Dad. As noted in Chapter Six, Anna's maternal biography was shaped by becoming a 'solo mother' while living in Australia. Anna's relationship did not work out, and she lost contact with her ex-partner. Anna returned to New Zealand after her son, Jonathon, was born. It was then that she decided that she would like her son to have some contact with his father's family. Anna describes how she searched for information about her son's father:

I started searching for his family details a couple of years ago ... I remembered that he came from New Zealand and I had this bee in my bonnet about wanting to meet his family because I wanted Jonathon to meet his grandparents. So I started. I searched down at the Births Deaths and Marriages Office [...] I just went through the surnames of that family in the [the Register of Births] ...that were born within a couple of years of me ...I didn't do it all at once. I would go every time I was in Lower Hutt, I would go in there for half an hour and just have a quick look through the microfiche files and ... I came up with five people with the same name as him all born around the same time ... so when the school holidays came along Jonathon and I jumped in the car and I drove ...

Anna visited all five ‘possible’ families before finding her son’s grandparents. They knew about Anna, but they gave her little information and were not very helpful in Anna’s search for Jonathon’s father. However, while in the town where the grandparents lived, Anna visited the high school she thought Jonathon’s father probably attended:

I managed to get a photo of him from the high school ... I went there and I looked through the yearbooks and I asked the school secretary for a copy of his report ... she sent it to me a couple of months later [with] the photo, and it was the one and only photo of him, so that was really fantastic because I got hundreds of copies made of the photo ... I actually had a photo to show Jonathon so I felt I’d achieved something. ‘Look, this is your father, this is what he looks like.’ Yeah, it was worth it, the whole exercise was worth it. And then later on, I then started paternity proceedings ...to give Jonathon an identity ...name, birth date of his father, so that later on when he does go looking for him which he probably will do, then the details are there, because when you haven’t married someone no-one in your family knows who the other person is, and I think that’s terrible, you can’t pass that on to your child, I just felt I wouldn’t ... have done my duty if I hadn’t have got those details, got them tied up, tied up you know. And also, I wanted acknowledgement from him that, yes, he is the father, and so I eventually got that because of the paternity order. We went through the DNA tests and everything and it was proven that he was the father [...]it does upset me that he doesn’t want to be a part of Jonathon’s life.

Anna’s search for Jonathon’s father is an epic story that illustrates the contradictions that women who parent alone encounter in making sense of their experience as lone mothers. On the one hand, Anna is clearly a good mother. She has made an extraordinary effort to find her son’s father, and in this sense, her commitment to ‘giving him what a boy needs’ positions her as Other to constructions of lone mothers as problem mothers. On the other hand, in the context of discourses that construct lone mothers as social problem because they lack the father, Anna can never be the good mother unless *she* can give her son a father. In order for Anna alone to ‘solve the problem’ of ‘fatherlessness’, she must both take action, while simultaneously ‘knowing’ that whatever action she takes will not change her son’s actual father-son relationship. However, Anna’s story, and the narratives around ‘missing dads’ enacted by the other participants, does ameliorate discourses around father absence that construct lone mothers as Other mothers, unfairly having (and using) ‘power’ over father-child relationships. Finally, as the narratives in this section show, gendered inequalities in relation to care and responsibility for children persist, and are absorbed into the

biographies of women who parent alone as they negotiate the social identity of the good mother.

The Welfare Mother as Other

In Chapter Three I argued that in the early 1990s, an especially potent discourse constructing lone mothers as particular types of people was effectively ‘called up’ to legitimate a series of unprecedented neo-liberal welfare reforms. As noted earlier in this thesis, these reforms affected both mothers generally, and lone mothers in receipt of the DPB in particular. For example, the modest but universal Family Benefit (typically paid to mothers) was abolished, and access to, and the rate of the payment of the DPB (typically paid to lone mothers), was dramatically cut. Thus, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses not only ‘made up’ lone mothers as a ‘target group’, but also had substantial material effects in the lives of many women who parented alone. During this period, State support for mothering (in the form of income support for both mothers in general, and lone mothers in particular) was increasingly ‘problematized’, while the self-reliance of all individuals (including lone mothers) in the ‘free market’ was increasingly ‘normalised’. As Uttley (2000; 455) commented:

Lone mothers find themselves a highly visible group of beneficiaries in a welfare system to which negative connotations are applied. They sin against the dominant paradigm of economic independence through which the Holy Grail of self-reliance is to be attained. They are again cast as ‘other’ in this environment and are labelled as in need of regulation and control to return them to the norm of paid employment and part-time parenting or financial dependence within another relationship.

As noted in Chapter Three, constructions of lone mothers as ‘welfare mothers’ draw upon a dense discursive history constructing women who parent alone as Other. In the 1990s, residues from discourses constructing lone mothers as pathological mothers and as problem mothers collided with gender-free, hyper-individualistic neo-liberal discourses, and morally conservative ‘family values’ discourses. ‘State welfarism’ was identified as the cause of various social and economic ills, and the definitive beneficiary, the ‘solo mother’, became coterminous with the ‘bludger’.

The participants in this research had exceptional knowledge about the ‘solo mother’. Their social identity as mothers was necessarily negotiated in her shadow. In the

following chapter I explore in more detail the material effects of this in relation to how the participants positioned themselves as ‘good citizens’. However, the welfare mother as Other, and especially constructions of ‘solo mothers’ as particular types of people was also an important discourse that the participants drew upon narratively to position themselves as good mothers, ‘different’ to the Other (solo) welfare mother.

In Teresa’s narrative, becoming a lone mother and her identity as a lone mother are set at counterpoint to Other (welfare) mothers. Teresa positions herself as a good mother both through her ‘story of no intent’, and by contrasting herself from “the lump” of mothers who ‘choose’ to “be that way”.

I went from being a married woman who had a child after she was married to being a sole parent and I think that stigma for me was just the label, it was the label of being a sole parent. It was like when you’re a sole parent, it’s lumped into one, it doesn’t matter if you are married before, or if this is your fourth child unmarried, or whatever, it’s all lumped into the same thing [...] if you asked me for a stereotype I would say benefit bludger. Someone who is, to me, the stereotype is someone who has chosen to be that way, someone who has chosen to be in that category.

The term “bludger” was used by many of the participants to describe how women who parent alone and in receipt of the DPB are labelled. While the participants did not tend to use the term pejoratively, it was a term that symbolically encapsulated the welfare mother, whose ‘pathological’ reliance ‘on the DPB’ most participants differentiated themselves from. Similarly, terms like “on the benefit” were also used, reinforcing neo-liberal constructs of benefit receipt as symbolic of a parasitic-like dependency, rather than as a citizenship entitlement. For example, like other participants, Anna’s description of solo mothers on “DPB day” draws together pathological and welfarist discourses of solo mothers as Other:

I mean, you can pick the single parents, I mean on DPB day they’re all down there at Pak’n’Save, you can pick them a mile off which ones are the single parents, they just have that look about them [...] this stressed out down and out look, shabbily dressed, their kids are running around all over the supermarket aisles misbehaving...

Moirra also talked of ‘knowing’ what solo mothers look like. Like many of the other participants, Moirra was embarrassed when describing how she had thought about lone mothers before she herself became one. It is important to note that in positioning themselves as good mothers, different to the welfare mother as Other (for example), the

participants descriptions were often wryly offered, or exaggerated with some irony. This is because many of the participants had changed their views about lone mothers over time, and especially their views around the supposed ‘generosity’ of the ‘welfare state’. Generally, the participants’ own experiences were inconsistent with welfare discourses making up welfare mothers as Other. In Moira’s narrative, for example, this change in view is acknowledged. However, at the same time, the ‘solo mother’ survives, and remains a different (although more similar) mother to Moira:

... I hate saying this, the primary school that all three of these kids have gone to has a decile rating quite low ... and this area is a really mixed socio-economic area, and I just had this thing that all children of single parents, probably because of the few that I saw, the kids always dressed like they were scruffy, and I can appreciate that now because mine do it now (laughs). But it really used to bug me ... I hate hearing myself saying this, I was one of those disgusting people that used to say, ‘oh my god, look at her, she’s on the DPB and she can still afford her cigarettes’ ... Okay, I’ve said it! I always had that holier than thou attitude, my god have I eaten those words in the last year ... I mean, I always had a line, there were these women [and] guys had beaten them or whatever, and I always thought ‘yeah, you got away from that’. [...] but it was the [other] young ones that used to go out and fall pregnant as a mission in life, that was their aim, was to have a baby and go on the DPB, and never work again in their life...

Some participants positioned themselves as different to Other welfare mothers more implicitly. For example, Donna’s narrative positions her as a good mother and someone who is very different to other “single parents”. Donna had a strong worker identity¹¹⁴, and although she had been in receipt of the DPB when she first separated, she was proud of her financial independence as a woman, and a mother.

I look around me now and I think I’m not typical. When I ran [a welfare agency] half the executive would say ‘you shouldn’t have an opinion on that because you’re actually not the typical single parent, you do so much for yourself, you fight to get ahead, you do all those things’. To me, probably that’s the only thing that I’ve got going for me that any other single parent doesn’t have. It’s my drive to go and get ahead....

In Donna’s narrative, “single parents” (unlike Donna) are positioned as lacking in the moral and psychological attributes necessary to “get ahead”. In effect, Donna’s narrative reduces the gendered inequalities experienced by many women who parent alone to ‘motivational’ inequalities. While this positions Donna as a good mother

¹¹⁴ The notion of ‘worker identity’ and its implications for how women who parent alone position themselves (as ordinary citizens) is taken up in the Chapter 8.

(because she is motivated), it also differentiates Donna from the welfare mother as Other.

Most of the participants had, at some time in their maternal biography, been in receipt of the DPB, and typically becoming a lone mother was contemporaneous with becoming a beneficiary. Thus, not only were the participants' actual social identities as mothers supplanted in this transformation, but their (new) virtual identities as lone mothers were accompanied by institutional processes that accorded them a second (discreditable) virtual identity, that of beneficiary. For many participants, the experience of becoming a beneficiary was linked to their narratives of *being* lone mothers. In this sense, the participants had experienced a "moral career", whereby their changing conceptions of self were the outcome of bearing a particular stigma (as welfare mothers), and sharing "similar learning experiences regarding their plight" (Goffman, 1965; 45). Goffman describes a moral career as a socialisation process where the stigmatised individual not only learns about their stigma, but also about the "consequence of possessing it" (Goffman, 1965; 45). For example, Karen commented:

I don't like to be referred to as a solo mother, it sort of reeks of being on the DPB, and I did go through a stage of being on the DPB and I hated it [...] I went into the Department of Social Welfare and I had to stand in a long queue ... It was just awful, I hated it, I really did [...] You felt like you were having a handout and yet I suppose, that you needed it.

For many women who parent alone, a consequence of becoming a lone mother is "going on the DPB". As Goffman (1965; 48) notes, people who become stigmatized "late in life", know about "the normal and the stigmatized long before (seeing themselves) as deficient". In Tina's narrative, her "embarrassment" in being a lone mother sits within discourses that construct the welfare mother as Other. It is these discourses that Tina must successfully negotiate in order to position herself as a good mother:

I felt really embarrassed because I never intended to be in that position, and the first thing that hit me when Wayne left me, it wasn't the fact that he didn't want me anymore and wanted a divorce, it was the fact that I was a solo mother. Because there's always been such a stigma attached to the solo mother in society, all I could do was feel really embarrassed. I felt when I had to go in there [to the Department of Social Welfare] and have all these forms filled out and answer all these personal questions, I felt scared I suppose in fact that they knew so much about me, and I felt awful having to take money off the government [...] my parents were so anti single parents when I was growing up and I found that a lot of what I thought was their thoughts ... the stigma attached to these single parents had come from the way I was brought up [...] that [single parents] have babies just

to go on the DPB and have money for nothing, and they're on the pig's back and all the rest of it.

As noted earlier in this section, in the early 1990s an especially potent discourse constructing lone mothers as particular types of people legitimated a programme of welfare cuts hitherto unknown in the history of New Zealand's welfare state (Peters, 1997). Neo-liberal welfare reform discourses placed lone mothers at the centre of New Zealand's 'problem' of 'welfare dependence'. In this context, claiming the social identity of mother became increasingly difficult for women who parented alone, and especially for women in receipt of the DPB. Discourses constructing the welfare mother as Other had effects not only in how lone mothers positioned themselves as good mothers, but also in how others saw them. Through welfare reform discourses, women lone parents became especially 'visible', not only in relation to politicians and policy makers who articulated discourses making up women who parent alone as particular types of people, but also 'visible' in the communities in which they lived, and the increasingly self-conscious lives they led. The effects of these discourses were multiple. At a structural level, the incomes of many women who parented alone were cut, and the likelihood that they and their children would experience poverty increased (Allwood, 1998). As stigmatized individuals, women who parented alone also become more 'visible' to others. For example, Anna's description of moving to a new house illustrates how claiming the social identity of mother was mediated by the potency of dominant constructions of welfare mothers as Other:

...at the beginning, these neighbours here [pointing next door], they've been there for three years, for two years they never spoke to me. And then one day the lady bumped into me down in Johnsonville after I'd started working there. And she said 'oh, do you work down here now', and I said 'yeah, I've been working down here for about three months now', and she said, 'oh we wondered why you were never home ... you know I said to my partner, she's never home anymore ...the doors are always locked up'. She said 'oh so you're working now' and I said 'yeah yeah, I've got this really good job and blah blah'. It's like now they say hello to me all the time and I think, 'well I'm still the same person, but you never said hello back to me then, you were total snobs'...

As illustrated throughout this section, discourses that construct welfare mothers as Other shape the ways in which women who parent alone make sense of their experience, and position themselves as good mothers, making the most of the extraordinary circumstances of their lives. Although not all women who parent alone are 'beneficiaries', neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have been an important site where

a contemporary hierarchy of maternal legitimacy has been articulated. In part, this hierarchy differentiates between mothers 'dependent on welfare', and those 'independent from welfare' (but not necessarily 'independent' per se). While in the past, access to welfare symbolised the moral legitimacy of women *as mothers* who parented alone, within neo-liberal welfare discourses, accessing welfare now symbolises the recipients' illegitimacy *as women*. Within the context of neo-liberal welfare discourses, welfare receipt has made visible women who parent alone as problem subjects by virtue of their status as 'beneficiaries'. Neo-liberal discourses have constructed women who parent alone as *female* beneficiaries and not only different to other mothers, but different to other women whose dependency (as mothers) on men is simultaneously both 'normal' and invisible¹¹⁵. It is within this context that women who parent alone enact validation stories that distinguish and differentiate themselves from lone mothers as Other, and position themselves as good mothers.

Conclusion

The only thing I can say about [being a lone mother] is that for having that experience I have now learned to accept other people in the same position, whereas before I would stand back and not really get to know them. Now I just embrace them with open arms and say 'look what you've achieved', and I try and be really positive with other women in my situation because some have had it a lot worse than I have, some haven't, but by the same token we're all there, and we all have to ... appreciate each other for the people we are (Tina).

In this chapter, I have argued that women who parent alone draw upon a number of discourses that construct lone mothers as Other to enact narratives that distinguish and differentiate themselves as good mothers. I also demonstrated that Goffman's concept of stigma was useful for exploring how women who parent alone experience 'membership' of a stigmatised identity category as they negotiate the disjuncture between their virtual identities as mothers, and their actual identities as lone mothers. However, I have also illustrated that through narrative, women who parent alone 'turn Goffman on his head'. That is, through validation stories that position themselves as

¹¹⁵ Not all women are 'dependent' on men, but in New Zealand, as in other liberal welfare states, women with children are more likely to work part-time than women without children. This suggests that a one-and-a-half earner family model is eclipsing the traditional breadwinner-caregiver family model (Lewis, 2001). Thus, women's earning inequality is hidden within contemporary family income dynamics (see Hill, 2000; Else, 1997).

good mothers in extraordinary circumstances, the participants also negotiate the disjuncture between their actual identities as mothers and their virtual identities as lone mothers, in order to claim the social identity of good mother.

In Chapter Two I noted that a common theme in the literature around women's experience of parenting alone in the context of neo-liberal welfare reforms is that lone mothers not only experience stigma, but they also 'pass the stigma on'. While the participants in this research did experience stigma, or at least, make sense of their experience by conceptualising their identities as lone mothers as stigmatised, not all of the participants passed on that stigma. Rather, because constructions of the 'good mother' are implicit rather than explicit, and exist often at silent counterpoint to discourses constructing Other mothers, these explicit discourses make possible narratives that lone mothers can enact to access the social identity of the good mother. While this did involve reproducing negative stereotypes, most participants who 'named' Other mothers did so with embarrassment, irony, or reluctance. For some, this was because in being lone mothers, their experiences of inhabiting a stigmatised identity unexpectedly opened up new possibilities for solidarity with other lone mothers. For example, Moira, who had reluctantly talked of women "on the DPB" as particular types of people now "mixes with so many single women, and I volunteer at the women's centre, and I've completed the learning group¹¹⁶ – I have met so many single mums it's not funny". Similarly, inhabiting a stigmatised identity gave opportunities to counter Othering discourses by testing their validity against one's own experience. Tina, who described lone mothers as "living off the pig's back" subsequently talked of how her "parents have changed their tune somewhat, because they've seen what a struggle it's been for me ... They never ever thought I would be able to do what I've done and raise my children well, because I am a good parent ... and they can see the fruits of my efforts and that I've done it myself. That to me is huge. That makes me feel very strong". Likewise, Karla, who had experienced two violent marriages, noted:

When I did leave Terry and basically never looked back, I didn't actually see myself as being a lesser person ... I think I'd actually been through so much shit and survived so much, that I was really proud of myself for having had the courage to change everything about my life and my parenting ... I've felt proud of myself for being a sole parent ... I don't view myself as in being any way inferior

¹¹⁶ A locally run women-centred educational programme for women whose lives have been affected by male violence.

or a failure or any of those sort of negative things ... I'm really proud to say I'm a sole parent to these children, and also in that everything that I've achieved as a sole parent I've achieved on my own ... I feel like a really strong person for what I've done.

For women who parent alone, negotiating the social identity of mother is a complex and contradictory experience. Being a lone mother in a late-modern society with a history of liberal welfarism makes this particularly so. This is because discourses constructing lone mothers as pathological mothers and problem mothers have combined with neo-liberal welfare reform discourses to make up 'welfare mothers' as Other mothers. As such, the narratives of the participants in this chapter illustrate another 'contradiction of motherhood' that shapes all women's maternal biographies. That is, at the historical moment when the processes of individualization appear to offer women opportunities to establish autonomous women-headed family households, discourses constructing lone mothers as Other are exerting material and discursive limits on those opportunities.

Chapter Eight

The Materiality of Experience

Let me repeat: in the beginning, the work ethic was a highly effective means of filling up the factories hungry for more labour. With labour fast turning into an obstacle to higher productivity, the work ethic still has a role to play, but this time as an effective means to wash clean all the hands and consciences inside the accepted boundaries of society of the guilt of abandoning a larger number of their fellow citizens to permanent redundancy. Purity of hands and consciences is reached by the twin measure of the moral condemnation of the poor and the moral absolution of the rest (Bauman, 1998: 72).

Introduction

In becoming a lone mother, and negotiating the social identity of being a lone mother, women who parent alone produce narratives that ameliorate dominant discursive constructions of lone mothers as problem mothers and problem women. In chapters six and seven, I argued that validation stories construct narrative identities, and position women lone parents as ordinary women and good mothers whose maternal biographies have been shaped by extraordinary circumstances. In this chapter I argue that in narrating the material experience of parenting alone, lone mothers construct validation stories that position themselves as ordinary citizens, managing the extraordinary circumstances of their lives.

Validation stories draw upon the stock of wider stories around femininity and motherhood, and through their enactment offer women subject positions that validate their experience as otherwise contested subjects. The construction of validation stories is particularly interesting given that, as noted in chapter one, in late modern societies like New Zealand, the likelihood that women will experience parenting alone has increased. As Lewis (2001; 4) has noted in the British context:

The 'facts' of family change are real and are hard to exaggerate. In one generation, the numbers marrying have halved, the numbers divorcing have trebled and the proportion of children born outside marriage has quadrupled.

Thus, validation stories are narratives articulated by women who parent alone as they negotiate the contested meanings around such ‘family change’ in late modern societies at an everyday, biographical level.

Living in a Material World

For women, ‘becoming a lone mother’ compels changes not only in one’s identity stories, but also in the mundane, habitual and taken-for-granted activities that constitute the materiality of daily life. Storying the experience of parenting alone occurs through reference to what one’s life has become in the context of changed (or changing) material circumstances. Becoming a lone mother involves ‘real’ changes in terms of the demands of caring for oneself and a child or children, and securing the financial and material resources to achieve this. For example, for previously partnered women, the ‘exit’ of the other parent requires practical changes in both the routine division of labour within the household and the household financial arrangements. All women who become lone parents experience change, although women bring to their lone parenting experience a range of material and discursive resources that structure that experience along the conventional lines of inequality, notably class and ‘race’ (Crow & Hardey, 1992; Phoenix, 1991; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

In discussing the ways in which neo-liberal social policies in New Zealand maintain and reproduce gendered inequalities, Else (1997; 16) notes that neo-liberalism is premised upon “the operation of a gendered division of labour as a basic principle of social organisation”. Women parenting alone confront the ideological and material effects of this gendered division of labour in their everyday lives. As noted in the previous chapter, many women who become lone mothers simultaneously become beneficiaries. Citing Fiona William, Else (1997; 18) notes that “when women are not in receipt of a living wage, then maintenance by a man is a risky and uncertain business and maintenance by the State almost inevitably means poverty”. For women who parent alone, this ‘risky and uncertain business’ is experienced within the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that construct such women as problem ‘citizens’. Neo-liberalism valorises the rational and autonomous actor in the (labour) market. However, the chances of women who parent alone who do participate in paid work of maintaining

an autonomous household are limited (Walter, 2002; Chalmers, 1999). Although these women may fulfil the neo-liberal ideal of 'good citizens', Hill (2000) demonstrates how the New Zealand labour market remains structured by "race and gender relations, which in turn structure lives" (Hills, 2000; 22). For women who parent alone, securing a living wage may be a similarly 'risky and uncertain business'. New Zealand women's average earning as a percentage of men's remained at about 73% throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Hill, 2000). As breadwinners, women lone parents who participate in paid work must not only navigate this systemic gendered disadvantage, but also the widening differences in household incomes between one and two-income households, as two-income households become the norm.

It is important to note that the material changes experienced in becoming and being a lone mother are not restricted to renegotiating matters of 'breadwinning' and 'care-giving'. Participants in this research talked of how, on becoming a lone mother, a range of material changes occurred. For example, some women spoke of changes in friendships. Previously partnered women especially talked of the loss of friends, for example, "from the marriage", but developing new friendships as a lone mother. For some women, becoming a lone mother involved establishing a new household, and sometimes a change in householder status (generally from owner-occupier to tenant). Becoming a lone mother also involved the renegotiation of familial relationships. For single women this was often part of the status transition in becoming a mother; for previously partnered women, relationships with extended family members related to the other parent often changed considerably. Both the single women and previously partnered women spoke of the enormity of responsibility in parenting alone as relentless and inescapable day to day. The sense of overwhelming responsibility at being a mother is not unique to women who parent alone (Backett, 1982; Oakley, 1979). Nevertheless, for women parenting alone, the activities of daily living occur with the self evident and reflexive knowledge of one's sole responsibility for their children's care. Gardiner (2000) notes that "all mothers" experience feelings of intense responsibility for their children. However, lone mothers experience that responsibility in the context of wider discourses around the 'problems' of "broken families and fatherless children", and "as a group, adding to the tax burden of other citizens" (Gardiner, 2000; 148-9).

Despite the numerous material changes that occur as a consequence of becoming and being a lone mother, this chapter focuses on one aspect of materiality; sustaining a family income. Although the ways in which lone mothers sustain their families financially are very material matters, they are also storied as ‘experiences’ and made sense of narratively, through historically specific and socially situated discourses. For example, discourses around ‘motherhood’, ‘work’ and ‘care’ are linked, and combine to produce narrative resources drawn on by women who parent alone to make sense of their experiences. Similarly, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that construct women who parent alone as particular types of people (including the actual policies that are spawned through these discourses) are also a narrative resource.

In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, neo-liberal welfare reform policies that have ‘targeted’ lone mothers have generally been twofold¹¹⁷. On the one hand, benefit entitlements (originally paid to women as mothers) have been cut or eligibility tightened, and welfare-to-work programmes have been introduced to reduce the overall cost of supporting lone mothers by ‘encouraging’ participation in the paid labour market (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Bryson, Ford & White, 1997). On the other, centrally administrated ‘child support’ (child maintenance) programmes have been introduced to ‘make fathers pay’ and to ‘remind’ men of the indelibility of fatherhood (Parker & Patterson, 2003; Smart & Neale, 1999; Lister, 1994). Together, these policy initiatives illustrate the general neo-liberal trend of re-privatising responsibility for the care of children of lone mothers to ‘individuals’, that is, their ‘parents’.

Despite the degendered term, ‘parent’, notions of parental responsibility called up in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses draw heavily on the gendered patterns of responsibility that characterised the modern nuclear and reified breadwinner-caregiver family of liberal welfarism. Although the use of the term ‘parent’ shifts the focus from the separate roles of mothers and fathers, neo-liberal policies targeting lone mothers have reinforced the gendered division between care and maintenance. For example, Lewis (2002; 125) notes that in Britain the historical commitment to the breadwinner-caregiver welfare model is echoed in contemporary policy debates that focus on “the

¹¹⁷ It is important to note that all neo-liberal policies have an effect on women’s lives. For example, neo-liberal housing, health, education, labour market, and public works policies all exacerbated the feminization of poverty in New Zealand (Allwood, 1998).

obligation of fathers to maintain”, and on men as carers “only insofar as it can help secure their obligation to maintain” (Lewis, 2002; 125).

Limiting benefit entitlements (in response to the problem of ‘women’s dependence’) and intensifying child maintenance (in response to the problem of ‘men’s independence’) reflect contradictory normative citizenship demands articulated in the apparently genderless citizenship construct at the heart of neo-liberalism. Limiting benefit entitlements might take a number of forms: time limits of benefits (as in the USA), introducing age restrictions for benefit entitlement (as in New Zealand), direct cuts to benefit rates (as in New Zealand), introducing pre-work training schemes (as in Australia), and so on. Here, ‘types of women’ previously constructed as citizen-mothers have been transformed into citizen-workers, with their citizenship status evidenced by both their participation in paid work, but also the invisibility of their caring work (Copas, 2001; Else, 1997). While limiting benefit entitlements directly impacts on those lone mothers actually in receipt of benefits, neo-liberal welfare reforms are also often legitimated by a rhetorical commitment to giving all citizens ‘signs and signals’ idealising individual responsibility and self reliance as personal qualities acquired and demonstrated through market participation (Peters, 1997). In this sense, changes to benefit regimes (and other neo-liberal policy changes) have discursive purchase in the life stories of women who parent alone in general, irrespective of whether or not these women are in receipt of welfare benefits.

This chapter explores the ways in which women who parent alone make sense of their experience of securing their family income. However, it excludes the contribution of child maintenance payments. This is because, in general, such maintenance payments had little or no effect in the lives of the participants. Nine of the participants were in receipt of the DPB, and thus, Child Support payments made by the fathers of their children were collected by the State, but retained to offset the cost of participants’ benefit entitlements¹¹⁸. A further eight women received no Child Support because their partner did not pay, lived overseas, or in some way remained outside the collection regime. In addition, two participants received Child Support payments, one participant received regular private maintenance payments based on the Child Support formula, and

¹¹⁸ As in Britain, the New Zealand’s Child Support Act (1991) also operates as a revenue collection mechanism (see Lister, 1994).

one was involved in complex court proceedings to establish a level of entitlement for Child Support. Interestingly, three of these participants had been previously married, and had been the primary caregiver in middle-class households each characterised by a gendered breadwinner-caregiver division of labour.

Securing a Family Income

In Chapter Two, I noted that in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, the relationship between parenting alone and paid work is complex. For the participants in this research this certainly appears to be the case. Four participants in this research relied solely on the Domestic Purposes Benefit for income while one participant relied solely on ACC payments¹¹⁹. All other participants had some source of market income, and all spoke about the ways in which their participation in paid work was constrained by their past and current circumstances. Participants who were in paid work and in receipt of the DPB often referred to the benefit income they received euphemistically. For example, Eve spoke of her limited income from part-time work as being “subsidised by the benefit”, Brenda spoke of working part-time and being “supplemented with the benefit”, and although Hayley described her “main job” as parenting, she noted that if people asked about “what I do, I usually say I work part-time ...”.

For women lone parents, securing a family income often involves a great deal of government in one’s life. While neo-liberal market reforms have been described as a ‘rolling back of the State’ (see Kelsey, 1993), the participants’ accounts illustrate how the neo-liberal welfare state has ‘rolled forward’ into the lives of women who parent alone (Higgins, 1998; Standing, 1997; 85). Participants in receipt of the DPB talked of having to continually establish their entitlement with officials, participants in part-time paid work talked of having to continually establish their entitlement for tax rebates and benefit part-payments, and many participants talked knowledgeably of the Child Support Act and of the ways in which the participation of fathers in their children’s lives were mediated by the Act¹²⁰. Nevertheless, reporting the participants’ experiences of the

¹¹⁹ A form of compensation for loss of income due to accidental injury.

¹²⁰ For example, some women spoke of fathers withdrawing from their children’s lives “because they pay Child Support”. However, the ways the fathers of the participants’ children shaped the material experience of parenting alone, although important, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, as

ways in which social policies are administered is not the purpose of this chapter. Rather, it is to examine how women who parent alone make sense of the material experience of parenting alone (with particular reference to securing family income), and how, through validation stories, they position themselves as ordinary citizens in extraordinary circumstances.

As noted earlier in this thesis, an overriding impression I had after interviewing the participants was that, rather than responding to being ‘hailed’ as the subject ‘woman lone parent’, the participants wanted to talk to me about how they were not that subject. Although this thesis takes a constructionist perspective in arguing that women who parent alone are made up as particular types of people, it is the material effects of those ‘making up’ discourses that I am particularly interested in. Thus, somewhat contradictorily, the participants in this research were *in effect* that subject, the woman sole parent. That is, their lives were materially shaped by their responsibility for the care of their children, and the ways in which neo-liberal welfare reforms have ‘responded’ to the circumstances of this group of women. For example, Teresa talked of how she managed the day to day care of her child in combination with working part-time and ‘managing’ her status as a beneficiary. As a lone mother, Teresa’s working life is characterised by juggling not only the combination of care and work, but also the costs of caring and the costs of working. At the time of her interview, Teresa was considering looking for full-time work so that she could escape what she described as an oppressive interference in her life by the Department of Social Welfare. Teresa was ambivalent about the impact that full-time paid work would have on her and her daughter. Nevertheless, she plans to find full-time paid work and to “weather what it brings”.

Mothers, Workers, Citizens

Two discursive poles emerged from the stories of the women who participated in this research, both, in effect, positioning the participants as ordinary citizens managing in extraordinary circumstances. One pole was that of the citizen-worker, characterised by

discussed in the previous chapter, children’s relationships with fathers were increasingly constructed as a ‘social problem’ in the 1980s and 1990s, especially around issues of boys acquiring masculine identities (see for example, Biddulph, 1997) and fathers legal rights (Bertoia & Drakich, 1993). However, as Hearn (2002; 245) notes “fatherhood needs to be understood as an institution, historically constructed as a form of certain men’s power”.

narratives stressing financial independence and participation in paid work as central to one's adult biography. The other was that of the citizen-mother, characterised by stories stressing a specific experience of motherhood as central in one's adult biography. Importantly, the participants' narratives were often composed from discourses from both poles, although in almost all instances, there were stronger narrative tendencies towards one or the other pole. In this sense, the narratives illustrate the relative fragility of the narratively constituted subject as partial, contradictory, and fluid. Finally, while most participants positioned themselves towards the pole of citizen-worker or the pole of citizen-mother, *all* the participants' narratives positioned themselves as good mothers, even though the content of constructions of good mothers varied. Table 3 shows how I categorised the participants in relation to the discursive poles of citizen-workers or citizen-mothers.

Table 3: Participants' Narrative Positions

Citizen-worker		Citizen-mother	
Teresa	Faye	Diane	Irenie
Jacky	Brenda	Margaret	Denise
Carlene	Anna	Geraldine	Hayley
Colleen	Donna	Heather	Tina
Eve	Karen	Pamela	
Karla	Moira		

In Chapter Two, I noted the importance of the social identity of mother as a discursive resource through which women who parent alone make sense of their experience. For example, Gardiner (2000) identified the importance of the good mother discourse for Australian sole parent pensioners in resisting policies encouraging their participation in paid work. For the participants in this research, the good mother discourse was an important resource from which the women could position themselves narratively to counter dominant neo-liberal reform discourses that construct lone mothers not only as inadequate women and mothers, but also inadequate citizens.

Within the context of the participants' narratives of their material experience of parenting alone, a number of generic qualities attributed to the good mother surfaced. Three key characteristics emerged; good mothers spend time with children, meet their children's needs, and are good 'managers'. The participants' commitment to each of these characteristics and their accounts of the ways in which these characteristics might be enacted varied within the participants' individual narratives, although each tended to be present to some degree. As noted in Chapter Seven, these characteristics were also important narrative resources that the participants often used to position themselves as different to the 'solo mother' while at the same time claiming the social identity of mother as a woman parenting alone.

Citizen-workers

Narratives that position women who parent alone as citizen-workers are of particular interest in this research because of the centrality of the redemptive potential of paid work for 'women on welfare' in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. In New Zealand, policies moving women 'off welfare and into work' were a key plank of social policy reforms throughout the 1990s (Baker & Tippin, 1999). Women parenting alone and in receipt of welfare were constructed as 'the problem' in policy discourses, and although these women were to be significantly affected by the outcomes of the welfare reforms, they were excluded from the policy process¹²¹. Rather, constructions of lone mothers as particular types of people were used to legitimate various policy initiatives. For example, in the public consultation document, the Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility (Department of Social Welfare, 1998), the Minister of Social Welfare described the Code as a document to assist in making "people's responsibilities clearer", especially those people "bringing up children or ... receiving income support"¹²², (Department of Social Welfare, 1998; 3). One issue identified in the code was "work obligations and income support". The matching expectation stated:

¹²¹ This exclusion was not unique to New Zealand. In late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, neo-liberal welfare reforms have typically constructed lone mothers as 'the policy problem' (see Burns, 2000; Young, 1999), rather than address the structural inequalities characteristic of neo-liberal market economies.

¹²² Income support was a term deployed (and institutionalised) by the New Zealand government during this period of welfare reform to refer to state-administered benefit entitlements.

People receiving income support will seek full-time or part-time work (where appropriate), or take steps to improve their chances of getting a job (Department of Social Welfare, 1998; 23).

As noted in Chapter Three, the Code was never adopted in New Zealand, but was an important ideological mechanism that attempted to secure ongoing legitimacy for a neo-liberal welfare reform programme (Harrington, n.d). Despite the change of government in the late 1990s, the notion that good citizens are working citizens remains policy orthodoxy. For example, Hon Steve Maharey, the Minister for Social Development, stated in 2001:

The ultimate aim we have for sole parents is that they manage to get into sustained paid employment. For some, this will take less time than others ... The move from a social welfare model to a social development model that this Government is working towards will mean that all beneficiaries, including sole parents, will be effectively supported to develop the shortest path from the benefit to sustained paid employment (Maharey, cited in Mathews, 2001; 1).

As in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, in New Zealand, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have constructed paid work as personally redemptive, and market earned income as morally superior to government transfers. Structural inequalities are thus constructed as ‘failure’, or ‘lack’, on the part of individuals who are poor. Gendered inequalities, such as the connection between the gendered nature of lone parenting and the feminization of poverty are constructed as a consequence of the relationship between paid work and women parenting alone, or more precisely, as a consequence of the disproportionate number of women lone parents whose primary income is welfare income (see for example, Krishnan, Jensen & Ballantyne, 2002). As in other late modern societies with a history of neo-liberalism, lone mothers have been constructed as types of people who share ‘individual deficits’ that are evidenced in the groups’ weak connection to the labour market, and ongoing ‘dependence’ on the State (Burns, 2000; 370). Thus, welfare to work policies and the neo-liberal discourses of welfare reform that constitute them, construct *individual* participation in paid work as an important policy goal to reduce poverty amongst households headed by women (Baker & Tippin, 1999). In other words, such policy approaches imply that women who parent alone who do not participate in paid work, act as such because they ‘lack’ the motivation to work, while those who do, are motivated. The implicit assumption is that the distribution of morality will mirror the distribution

of income. Unmotivated individuals will be ‘trapped’ on benefits or in low income jobs, while those sufficiently motivated will ascend a stairway to income security upon which only the truly ‘moral’ tread.

Some participants resisted neo-liberal constructions of lone mothers as problem citizens by deploying narratives that positioned themselves as citizen-workers. ‘Citizen-workers’ are not a homogenous group, but the narratives of the participants who positioned themselves as citizen-workers had some common characteristics. Most importantly, the participants whose validation stories as lone mothers were located around the citizen-worker pole all had strong worker identities. In particular, these identities were constituted through references to the place of work within their maternal biographies. Citizen-workers typically talked of the work they did before becoming a mother, and the continuing importance of work to their identities after their children were born. For most participants whose narratives positioned them as citizen-workers, work was described as a personal choice made either as a ‘lifestyle preference’ or because they were ‘naturally’ workers. Participants who positioned themselves as citizen-workers also referred to the availability of work, noting that in most instances, they had no trouble finding work ‘when they wanted it’. However, citizen-worker narratives always co-existed with narratives positioning participants as good mothers.

Faye works full-time and has three children. Her ex-partner lives overseas, and he does not contribute financially towards the costs of caring for the children. Like many of the women who position themselves primarily as citizen-workers, Faye’s narrative emphasises that her identity as a worker is very important to her sense of self, and precedes her becoming a lone parent. While Faye was married, she was responsible for earning most of the family income. When her marriage ended and Faye returned to New Zealand, Faye found work quickly. Although combining caring for her children and working full-time is sometimes difficult, Faye explains that working offers her more choices in the future:

I work mainly for social reasons though obviously the money is a critical issue, but the driver is more the need for adult company, and I’m quite often put under pressure for not staying at home with my children and that’s just not an option really. The financial side also, it means that if I did go through the social services route what are our choices in ten years, fifteen years time? We won’t have any.

In her narrative, Faye attributes her decision to participate in paid work primarily to “social reasons”. In doing so, Faye positions herself as a citizen-worker, and as someone who ‘needs’ to work because of the type of person she is. However, she also positions herself as a ‘good mother’. Even though rates of participation in paid work by women have risen in recent decades, there remains a dominant discourse that mothers at home are the best caregivers for children (Leonard, 2001). By describing work as a choice she has made, and linking this choice to the future of her children, Faye positions herself as an ordinary (self-reliant) citizen, working in her own, her children’s, and ultimately, the State’s, best interests.

Although Faye’s experience of working full-time and parenting alone position her as an ordinary citizen, Faye acknowledges that she has a certain amount of flexibility in her paid work that makes the combining of her two roles possible. Faye works in a large public sector organisation as a skilled executive assistant. The ‘flow’ of her work varies, and there is a certain degree of predictability about when her workload will be heavier or lighter. As a skilled worker, Faye has some control over working conditions. Faye identifies this “flexibility” as an important aspect of her work, making it possible for her to combine full-time paid work with parenting alone:

All of the jobs that I’ve had have had a certain amount of flexibility. I also negotiate that I can be flexible in return, so when there’s a need for working out of hours I’m always willing to organize it. In the same way when I’ve got children sick at home, then I’ll go in [if] something urgent is on. I’ll go and collect work, take it home. This particular job I can work from home ... I have good flexible hours here, which means I can leave at three-thirty and then make up the time either at home at night or in the weekend when I come in and do work, because sometimes I have to anyway, so it’s a good two way compromise. The first jobs I had were part-time, so I worked between twenty and thirty hours, and that gave better flexibility ...

Faye lives in her own home, and ‘manages’ on her income. However, like many of the other women working in paid work, the costs of combining working and parenting were often identified as a material experience over which the participant had little control. In Faye’s narrative, citizen-worker status is reinforced by her descriptions of how she lives her life as an ‘active’ citizen, ensuring that her children remain healthy. Similarly, as a citizen-worker, Faye places work per se as its own reward: not only does she incur extra costs by being a worker, but she chooses particular types of job, and in doing so (as a good mother), places her children’s needs above her own:

I also manage [the children's] health extremely well so that they don't get sick very often. I'm very strong on healthy eating and a good balance, and good sleep, and all those things ... and school holidays, there's holiday programmes. They're getting better, though it is an expense. It means holidays I tend to work for the sake of working rather than any of the financial benefits, but that's just a fact of life ... but, I have a choice, I could go into overdrive and be more high powered and have much better paid jobs, but then I'd lose the quality of the time with the children and the flexibility, and to me that's much more important, so a lot of it's just really careful balance, I spend a lot of time balancing ...

Although Faye positions herself as a citizen-worker, the ways in which mothering impacts on Faye's working life (and vice versa) are constant points of reference that resurface in Faye's narrative. For example, Faye talks of how her daughter described Faye in a children's competition. In retelling this episode, Faye narratively positions herself as a good mother, an identity that Faye continuously negotiates throughout her citizen-worker narrative:

... One of the things my oldest daughter said [on the competition form] is 'Mum is always very busy but she always makes time for us', which I thought was very sweet, then she went on ... 'but she forgets to do the housework' (laughter) because that's not a priority. I mean, the people are a priority, the housework will be there tomorrow, and if I had a high powered job it would be in the city, I'd be leaving at seven, I wouldn't be back till seven, whereas this way I leave between eight and quarter past eight and I'm home between three thirty and four and that's quite a big extra time with them. We actually do most of our cuddles in the morning, because I find by the end of the night we're all just too tired and frazzled and, well, out of time ...

In Faye's story, her strong worker identity is moderated, and constrained, by her mother role. Although Faye attributes her ability to combine her roles as full-time worker with parenting alone to the flexibility of her employer, and in part to her willingness to be flexible at work, Faye's flexibility in terms of managing the competing demands upon her as a mother and a worker are also important. Faye's working life is not something she really has choice over. The type of job she does, and when and where she works are constrained by her responsibilities for her children. In this sense, flexibility is a misnomer to account for Faye's experience. Her flexibility is the outcome of juggling the inflexibility of her maternal role, and the inflexibility of the 'need' to work, rather than a product of her work place¹²³.

¹²³ As noted in Chapter Two, Baker & Tippin (2002) demonstrate the contradictory nature of 'flexibility' in relation to women who parent alone and their participation in paid work. They argue that for women lone parents, it is the *inflexibility* of the labour market that most importantly shapes the employment experience.

Even though Faye's narrative positions herself as citizen-worker, throughout her account of combining paid work with parenting, Faye attempts to resolve the contradictions of being both a good mother and a citizen-worker. In combining paid work with mothering, Faye mediates discourses that privilege two parent families as the 'normal' family form by aligning herself with these discourses, while at the same time acknowledging that combining both roles are sometimes difficult for her:

I do get quite a bit of criticism ... with not being at home and not doing this and not doing that. One of the positives I have to counter-balance that is that the teachers describe my children at school as well balanced as any of the children out of a normal family, quote, 'that's got the husband and wife and the mother's at home', quote. I think probably from my point of view what balances that is that I'm lucky in that I have a mixture of the feminine and masculine characteristics so that we can do masculine activities and feminine activities with equal comfort ... While it would be preferable to have two parents ... I think the primary reason from my point of view ... is the adult support ... because I think the more pressure that I'm under as the sole caregiver, the harder it is to provide for the children.

In the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, Faye's narrative contains many of the elements that constitute a 'good citizen'. Faye is independent, self-reliant, and self-governing. Along with a few other participants, Faye's narrative probably closely mirrors the ideal situation which neo-liberal policy makers might wish that all women lone parents should some day be in. Faye earns sufficient income from the market to maintain herself and her children, and as such, differs from the type of person through which the 'problem' of dependence was invented. However, Faye's narrative remains structured by everyday experiences of gendered inequality, elided and absorbed into Faye's maternal biography as she negotiates the contradictions between motherhood, work and citizenship.

Not all citizen-workers were as well placed as Faye in terms of the material situation they occupied as women lone parents. For example, both Brenda's and Jacky's narratives were structured by strong worker identities. However, unlike Faye, neither Brenda nor Jacky earned sufficient market income to move them from 'welfare to work'. This was not because Brenda and Jacky did not want to work, but because of structural barriers constraining their ongoing attempts to combine paid work with parenting alone. The stories of Brenda and Jacky are important to include in this

research because they demonstrate how neo-liberal policies that focus on moving women ‘from welfare to work’ are premised on a quality of work experience (including adequate pay) that is not available to all (Walter, 2002). In other words, the experiences of these participants illustrate how the assumption that an individual’s positive orientation to paid work is sufficient in itself to secure women who parent alone the sort of economic independence valorised in neo-liberal welfare discourses as the fundamental duty of a ‘good citizen’, is flawed.

Both Brenda and Jacky’s narratives are characterised by discourses of self-reliance and independence, and like Faye, are structured by strong worker identities. Before Brenda became a single parent, she worked in a series of unskilled jobs. Her income from this work supported herself, her husband (who also worked) and her two children. Brenda described her work history as follows:

I got a full time job and supported us ... I worked for Mitsubishi from then on in, and I was there for five or six years before they closed down ... Then I went and worked for a guy who worked at Mitsubishi but made a business for himself, and I worked there for two years or three years ... and then that folded, and then I got another job at the same place but a different name ... that job was only part-time casual, sort of ‘on call’ ... whenever there was work for me I’d go in. Then that folded and I haven’t found a job since.

Although Brenda’s narrative positions her as citizen-worker, Brenda’s relationship to the labour market is tenuous. Brenda’s work history illustrates the uncertainty of unskilled and low wage work in late modern societies:

I’ve worked most of my single [parent] life ... I worked full-time for a while ... I was out of work last year and this is my second year out of work, so I’m trying to look for a job [...] I don’t know whether I really want to go back to college or anything, I’m not academically inclined. I’d much rather go out and do a job, rather than go out and learn a job, so I don’t really know what I want to do now.

As noted in Chapter Two, the relationship between women parenting alone and participating in paid work is complex. In their study of single mothers on low incomes in the United States, Edin & Lein (1997) found that the reason why many ‘welfare dependent’ mothers did not work was because of the economic costs of working. Although almost all of the mothers wanted to work, wages were often too low. They noted:

When welfare-reliant mothers thought about welfare and work, the vast majority calculated not only how their prospective wages would compare with their ...

[welfare] benefits but how much they would lose in housing subsidies and other means-tested benefits. They also calculated how much more they would have to spend on child care, medical care, transportation, and suitable work clothing if they were to take a job (Edin & Lein, 1997; 65).

Similarly, in Brenda's narrative, the desire to work is balanced against the cost of working. For example, Brenda's wanting to "do a job, rather than go out and learn a job" offers some resistance to neo-liberal discourses that construct unemployment as an individual experience best addressed through participation in training programmes that 'upskill' workers in order that they may be reintegrated into the workforce (Higgins, 1997). In addition, Brenda's experiences of combining paid work with the care of her children simultaneously position her as a citizen-worker, and a good mother. Again, as Edin & Lein (1997) found with their participants, the concerns that Brenda has for her children's care is another ever-present factor in her navigation between the worlds of work and home:

I asked if I could swap my hours to nine till three ... I mean, who wants to fork out and not be home with their children ... I'd prefer to be home with my kids when they come home from school. I think that's part of society's problem is that parents are not home and this society today has made it really tough for kids to have parent relationships.

Here, Brenda's experience of the 'flexibility' of the labour market is in contrast to Faye's experience because of the lack of value placed on the work that she does.

In Brenda's narrative she reflects on her experience as a low-income mother negotiating conflicting expectations around her identity as a worker, identity as a mother, and status as a beneficiary. She makes sense of the material circumstances of her life by linking her experience to her analysis of 'society's problem'. Similarly, in linking her experience as a low income mother with the difficulties of 'lifting herself out of poverty', Brenda's narrative illustrates how her experience of welfare to work policies compels an explanation that resolves the contradictions and limitations of those policies within her biography. For example, throughout her narrative, Brenda draws attention to the impact of these policies in her everyday life:

You really need a two income family to survive ... To get a job to pay what the benefit's paying me is just beyond me because of my abilities basically. [...] I'd really like to go back to work, just to sort of get out and about [...] It's fine that the Social Welfare say 'well, we'll pay for this and we'll pay for that', you know,

childcare and stuff like that ...[but] you've still got your same old bills with added extras.

Brenda was the only participant to talk directly about how policy changes occurring around the time of her interview were impacting on her experience. Baker & Tippin (2002; 357) argue that the welfare to work policies implemented in New Zealand in the 1990s were relatively flexible in terms of the actual expectations placed on 'beneficiaries'. However, Brenda's experience was that although the policy was "not putting pressure on" her, she felt under pressure:

Well, they're not putting pressure on me. I feel as though I am under pressure even though I've got till my son is fourteen years old before they actually say 'that's it, no more'. I'm in a position where I have to get community work for ... fifteen hours a week ... because my son's at school [...] I have to find it, but they will help ... They'll give you an allowance, a whole twenty dollars per week ... to go towards petrol costs and things like that, but other than that, it's just entirely up to me ... they're trying to find unemployed people work first, before they look at the beneficiaries, but I still feel I'm under pressure to find it, I mean I could ill-afford to lose any of my money from the benefit, so I just go out and look for work.

Despite Brenda's strong worker identity, she distinguishes between herself as a beneficiary, and "unemployed people". Brenda is making sense of her experience of a welfare to work policy where neither to be 'willing' to work, or caring for her children, are sufficient to be a good citizen. As Brenda's experience illustrates, she is required to not only work in a job that does not pay wages¹²⁴, but that she must find, and 'place' herself in that job. Although Brenda positions herself as a citizen-worker, her notions of work and her self-identity as a worker, differ from those notions that are dominant in welfare reform discourses. Rather than work being a moral pre-requisite for the attribution of good citizenship status, Brenda constructs work as an economic activity in which her participation is constrained by a combination of a lack of jobs, the costs of work, and the responsibilities she has as a woman parenting alone.

Like Brenda, Jacky positions herself as a citizen-worker and has strong worker identity. Jacky's participation in paid work is a characteristic of her maternal biography, and in her narrative describes how she worked "on and off" during her nine years of marriage.

¹²⁴ This is, of course, particularly ironic, given that welfare to work programmes imply that 'work' and 'independence' are synonymous in market societies.

Jacky has typically worked part-time and in a wide range of jobs. Like Brenda, most of these jobs have been low paid. However, most have been in the service, rather than industrial, sector. Since her son, Robert, was born, Jacky has continued to work part-time, and positions work as important for both herself, and her son, stating “I’m not a stay at home mother, because that’s boring, and it’s boring for them”. Like most participants with strong worker identities, Jacky is positive about the availability of work:

I’ve never had any problems getting jobs when I’ve wanted them, and that was a good time for him to start going to day-care and things like anyway, and mix with other children, being an only child.

Jacky’s preference for part-time work is similar to that of many New Zealand mothers with preschool aged children. Else (1997) notes that New Zealand mothers in paid work whose children are preschoolers are most likely to be in part-time work. Thus, the primary work commitment of most New Zealand mothers with preschoolers, whether in receipt of the DPB or living with a working spouse, is the care of their children, and their primary income source is *not* earnings from their own employment (Else, 1997; 20). However, in Jacky’s narrative, her participation in paid work is also shaped by her access to childcare for Robert:

He’s only in day-care Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, six hours a day. He’s actually just started kindy, but he’ll be into it full-time, three days a week after the summer break, and I just do my pamphlet runs just a couple of times a week. He comes with me or not, depending on whether I’ve got him. Tuesday’s and Thursday’s I spend the day with him, that’s our days together. ... What else do I do? House cleaning jobs - I do those jobs Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays when he’s at day-care, and I’ve just started selling Tupperware.

In Jacky’s narrative, her identity as a worker, and her identity as mother are intertwined:

You’re in and out, and you’re not stuck ... I used to work at the restaurant and the gym ... four hours a day, but really, doing four hours a day you may as well be working eight hours a day by the time you muck around here ... I’d rather have to work two or three days and then spend a good two days with Robert. It won’t be long till he’s at school anyway.

While Jacky’s working hours are limited in part by the availability of care for Robert and her desire to spend time with him, the types of jobs Jacky does are further shaped by her status as a beneficiary. Although Jacky states she has no trouble finding jobs, it is clear from her narrative that the types of jobs Jacky does are unlikely to earn her a

living wage. For example, her pamphlet run is piecework and poorly paid. Thus, Jacky's primary income is the DPB. However, as Else (1997; 17) notes, the DPB is not the same as a wage. Whereas wage earners might increase their income by undertaking extra work, beneficiaries can only earn a small income before their basic benefit is abated. Importantly, other entitlements such as the accommodation supplement are lost with *any* earned income. As with Brenda, Jacky is required to manage her sources of income in ways which make her life liveable. Whereas Brenda's 'problem' was in maintaining a worker identity in the face of no work, or work that did not pay, Jacky's 'problem' is in maintaining her worker identity as a 'beneficiary'. Of her working arrangements, Jacky states:

I'll never earn enough, eighty dollars gross you're allowed to earn. I couldn't survive without the house cleaning jobs. I couldn't survive just on the benefit with doing nothing else at all ... The Tupperware one, the tax one, they'll know about in time, but I'm learning how to run my own business doing that, learning how to pay my own tax ...

Despite Jacky's strong worker identity, Jacky is reluctant to combine full-time paid work with mothering. However, Jacky positions herself as an ordinary citizen (that is, self reliant and so forth) in that although she is in receipt of the DPB, her categorical 'dependency' is mediated by the ways in which she positions herself as independent, resourceful and entrepreneurial. Despite these qualities however, Jacky's income is low, and rather than lifting her out of 'dependence', her participation in paid work is just enough to "make ends meet". Jacky's resourcefulness is established in her narrative when she talks about how she supplements her income by letting out her garage:

Jacky I let my garage out ... it's not big money ... but it certainly helps, everything does

Lesley Mmm, how much rent do you pay?

Jacky Two-twenty, and I get three-thirty a week from Income Support ... I haven't bought nappies, paid power, food or phone. I couldn't do it [without earning some extra], you'd be miserable. But then there are people out there living like that and moaning about it, but they're not doing anything about it to improve their situation. [...] I just think people lose their motivation, or they think they're in that poverty trap and stay there ... obviously I might be in a poverty trap, but I'm a lot happier than I ever was before. It's only money, you make things stretch anyway, you learn how to do it ... Once he's out of nappies, see, there's another twenty dollars [...] Once the dog's [dead], it will be cheaper ... there's another fifteen dollars a week

Lesley So do you think maybe when Robert's a bit older you might go into [full-time] paid work, or

Jacky Yeah definitely ... well, yes and no ... When he's at school it's still only nine to three. They need someone home for them in the morning and the

afternoon ... depending on the job I get he might be able to go into after school care for a couple of hours a day, but I don't want a latch key kid because that's what I was, you know, cooking the meals for the family when I was twelve... it's not safe, you need to know what's happening and how they are, and more so when they're teenagers ... And I just think that's not what I had him for, to go to work full-time, not at all.

In this narrative, Jacky positions herself as an ordinary citizen. She differentiates herself from others on low incomes and links their situation to an individual lack. However, Jacky's narrative is contradictory here as she attempts both to position herself as different to others, while at the same time representing her experience of combining paid work and mothering, and the everyday self governance that goes hand and hand with living on a low income. Similarly, although Jacky can see some things changing in the future, her future plans for participation in paid work are narrated in the context of the practical demands she expects to encounter as a mother of a school age child. Jacky's concern that Robert should not become a latch key child is also interesting. Although a term coined to describe the practice of children of mothers working in munitions factories during World War Two going "home alone wearing the key to the house around their neck" (Hochschild, 2003), by the 1950s, the latch-key child was a symbol of the failure of mothers to provide proper care for their children. In New Zealand in the 1990s, concern about children 'home alone' became a moral panic. Unsurprisingly, the media usually focused on instances where children of lone mothers were 'home alone', with reportage reinforcing neo-liberal constructions of lone mothers as problem mothers. Jacky's concern that her child not be a latch key child is another point of self-surveillance whereby she responsibly manages 'risk' in her child's life, while at the same time positioning herself as a good mother.

Carlene's narrative about the material experience of being a lone worker also positioned her around the citizen-worker pole. Becoming a lone mother was a particularly transformative experience for Carlene. She had previously lacked self-confidence, but parenting alone was an experience that has given her a new sense of self, and her 'achievements' in raising her son are something she is very proud of. Carlene's narrative positions her as a good mother, and as a woman who has made the most of the circumstances she has come to be in:

I've been told by certain people 'you spend too much time with your child, you shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that' well, I had him to have him, I didn't

have him not to have him ... I brought him up on my own, and his school reports are brilliant, now he does drama, he does cubs, he plays sport, he plays hockey and in-line hockey and soccer and cricket and he's well rounded and I've probably gone over board trying to compensate for the fact that I'm on my own, but every little thing that happened built up that little bit of self respect ...

Even though Carlene's narrative so firmly positions her as a good mother, her narrative also positions her as a citizen-worker. For Carlene, and the other participants I have identified as citizen-workers, the identity of the good mother is always present. For example, in Carlene's account of returning to work after Thomas was born, Carlene's citizen-worker identity is positioned as something that has shaped her biography, although becoming a mother was an experience where this identity was questioned by both herself, and her family:

I knew that whole year [after Thomas was born] I was going back to work, I knew I had a light at the end of my tunnel, I knew I had something going for me that a lot of people weren't so lucky to have, my parents had wanted me to give up work, resign, and I said no, and I fought them on that [...] at the back of my mind I knew that children are going to grow up, you never know what's going to happen. I had not the greatest job in the world but it paid okay, it paid my mortgage, ... jobs were getting tougher to find back then, and I thought if I left work, brought up a child, he was going to go to school one day, then what was I going to do with myself? I'd never find another job, I didn't have the confidence, I'd done the same job since I'd left school and I was still there. In the back of my mind I was just saying 'no, this is not the right thing to do', but going back to work was really difficult ...

In Carlene's story, the contradictions she experienced between being a mother and a worker were resolved through her success in securing good quality care for Thomas. For Carlene, 'quality care' is constructed as the type of care that Thomas might receive from Carlene if she could have been at home with him¹²⁵. Carlene positions Thomas's caregivers as 'good mothers', and in doing so, makes sense of her experience as a working mother as something that has been better for Thomas who "couldn't have his mother but he had the next best thing":

Joanne [the caregiver] had Thomas for three and half years, she had a daughter two months younger than him, and I missed out on that time but at the same time I think if I'd been at home on the benefit and he was at home with me very financially challenged, well, he had a better life with her. He got taken to do shopping and birthday parties and trips and grandparents, and everyone that she knew he knew, and socialized and playgrouped, and dance lessons and music

¹²⁵ Carlene used a home based caregiver or 'childminder'. New Zealand does not have a strong history of institution-based child care, and the idea that group based care 'damages children' persists (Baker, 2001; 166).

lessons and all this sort of kiddie stuff, and he had the most wonderful life, and he had this wonderful little playmate three months younger than him. They went to kindy together, and all this sort of stuff, so really I think ... I made the right choice to let him go to her [...] When he was four and a half [Joanne] went back to work and a friend of mine from school looked after him for the next six months after kindy. Kindy had him in the afternoons, and then up until last year, my neighbours had him the mornings and then they shifted ... Noreen has had him round the corner after school. She's a grandmother, she's got about eight or nine grandchildren and she's a pure mother, a pure mother and grandmother influence [...] I think I have either been extremely choosy, or extremely lucky in my childcare. The people that I have had offer to look after him, and take him on, have been super people. That's the only way that I can describe them. Whether that's luck I don't know, whether by design, that it happened ... I wasn't there, I couldn't be there. It was either have a mother at home struggling, or try and make a life and give him the things I happened to have, and I didn't want to deprive him of things.

Even though Carlene mediates between her position as a good mother and a citizen-worker through the care arrangements she has made for Thomas, her story also illustrates the precariousness of managing care for children in the lives of women who parent alone. In combining her identity as a mother, and her identity as a citizen-worker, Carlene's material experience is shaped by her concern for her son, and the everyday practicalities of orchestrating circumstances to meet his care needs. Even though Carlene does not 'do care' at the times when she is at work, the management of care is an activity with which she must constantly be ready to engage. While Carlene talks of being "extremely lucky" in her childcare, she also talked of the difficulties when she needed to care for Thomas. At the end of Carlene's interview, sometime after we had discussed Carlene's experiences in paid work and how she managed care, I asked Carlene if there was anything else she would like to talk about before the interview ended. Her response displayed a realm of experience that had been more or less unspoken throughout her interview:

The one thing that I would say is really hard about bringing up children on your own is their health. Like he was really sick, he had a lot of problems with throats and ears, and they had a meningitis scare and all that sort of stuff, and that's when single parents need help and there's no help. There's no one there for you at midnight when you're taking the baby down to hospital at midnight in the pouring rain with meningitis and a fever of forty-two. You know, those are the sort of things that drive single parents crazy

Lesley How do you cope when Thomas is sick?

Carlene Well when he was little Joanne would still have him, because he never got anything contagious, it was always ears or throat... when he had his tonsils out I took annual leave, when he had his grommets in, I took annual leave... one time he got a really bad tummy bug, I'd take sick leave, just apply

for it, it just goes off my sick leave, I just have to document it. They all know I'm a single parent and it's never ever been an issue at work. I'm just a parent, just like them, just a parent, just like everyone else. They're marvellous, no problems at all [...] But it's the guilt of taking time off work when you've got a sick child and you know that you're healthy, it's a terrible pull ... you know what you've got to do, and what you want to do, but some people can make you feel very guilty for doing it, not everyone, but there's always a couple at work who will do that ...

Carlene's experience is notable for several reasons. Firstly, children do get sick, but for women who parent alone the practicalities of absorbing children's illness into lives shaped by being the sole and primary caregiver are unspoken in neo-liberal discourses of welfare reform. Work is idealised as an activity in which individuals engage. However, Carlene is not an autonomous individual, and is compelled to use her rights as worker, attributed to her as an individual, to maintain the fiction. While Carlene positions herself as "just a parent, like them ... like everybody else", she is not like all parents in that as a lone mother, she must resolve the contradictory demands placed upon her as a worker and the full and total responsibility of care for her child.

In relation to neo-liberal welfare reform policies, Carlene appears to 'behave' as the good citizen. Her participation in paid work ensures that she is acting as an independent and self-reliant individual, 'free' from the trap of welfare as a consequence of her moral worthiness witnessed by her capacity to be economically 'independent'. However, Carlene is not only acting in her own interests. Her narrative illustrates how the lives of women who parent alone with citizen-worker identities are structured through their everyday engagement and negotiation between the two worlds of paid work and unpaid care. Thus simultaneously, Carlene is not *the* idealised citizen of neo-liberalism. Her experience is shaped by both her social identity as a mother, and the material demands that mothers do care-work. Unlike the genderless (male) citizen of neo-liberalism, Carlene is combining a responsibility of care for others and with the responsible 'rational' self upon which neo-liberal discourses are centred. Carlene is thus resolving biographically wider structural inequalities that characterise contemporary gender relations. Indeed, in Carlene's narrative, these inequalities are absorbed into her maternal biography as she negotiates the material effects of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses in the everyday experiences as a woman who parents alone.

The notion that a particular form of mother identity explains why some women who parent alone have resisted the demands of neo-liberalism and ‘rational’ participation in the labour market is a common theme in the research literature. For example, in Chapter Two, I outlined the notion of gendered moral rationalities, and the ways in which women lone parents adopt different gendered moral rationalities that surface in particular social and geographic settings that are enacted in different ways. In their research with lone mothers in Britain, Duncan & Edwards (1999) identified three gendered moral rationalities, those of primarily mother, mother/worker integral, and primarily worker. The primarily mother rationality was characterised by a moral belief that mothers should meet their children’s needs through their care for them, and that paid work is not morally right; the mother worker integral was characterised by a moral belief that providing for children was part of the mothers moral responsibility; and the primarily worker rationality gave workers primacy as a separate identity, and a moral right of mothers (Duncan & Edwards, 1999; 120). However, unlike the findings of Duncan & Edwards, all the participants in this research positioned themselves as good mothers, and while citizen-mothers identified mother-care as the definitive aspect of their identity as mothers and citizens, citizen-workers also positioned themselves as caring and involved mothers, responsible for their children’s lives.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the ways in which women who parent alone can be ‘classified’, there remain differences between the participants that reflect how gender and class relations combine to shape contemporary maternal biographies. As demonstrated in the previous section, a narrative positioning of self around the citizen-worker pole does not mean that these participants will either be in paid work, or be financially ‘independent citizens’. Rather, narrativising a citizen-worker identity positions participants as ‘ordinary citizens’, and ameliorates the neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that construct lone parents as ‘particular types of people’.

Citizen-mothers

As noted earlier in this chapter, in talking about their everyday experiences of parenting alone, the participants positioned themselves as ordinary citizens in relation to two discursive poles. While the citizen-worker pole was characterised by stories stressing participants’ special relationship to paid work, the citizen-mother pole was characterised

by 'specialness' of the relationship between mothers and children, and the responsibility of mothers to be present in their childrens' lives by spending time with them. As noted earlier, all the participants in this research positioned themselves as good mothers. What distinguishes citizen-mothers is their commitment to the idea that their children lives should be lived in the company of their mothers, and this mother-care is necessary for a 'normal' or 'safe' childhood.

In Chapter Seven, the ways in which the participants negotiated their social identities as mothers as different to the categorical identity of 'solo mum' was examined. As noted in that chapter, the construction of women who parent alone as problematic mothers occurs through three discursive seams. Firstly, 'solo mums' are constructed as deficient in their capacities to be good mothers. This construction is reproduced in research that pathologises the existence of lone mothers (including 'divorced' mothers) as 'other' mothers in relation to the norm of mother as a relational identity in the context of the nuclear, heterosexual family (see for example, Lutenbacher & Hall, 1998). Secondly, solo mums are constructed as 'to blame' or responsible for other 'social problems', such as increases in youth crime, sexual precociousness amongst young women, and various crises of masculine identity. However, such claims linking women parenting alone with social breakdown are typically based on speculative arguments (Richards, 1999; Burghes, 1996) and "a combination of strong assumptions and weak evidence" (Fergusson, 1998). Finally, solo mums are constructed as 'dependent' mothers, suggesting various deficits in the skills or characters of individuals to be 'independent', especially in relation to their 'dependence' on the State (Song, 1996; Fraser & Gordon, 1994). In negotiating such a complex discursive terrain to claim the social identity of mother, women who parent alone position themselves as good mothers, the same as other mothers, but different to 'solo mothers'.

In addition to positioning themselves as 'good mothers', some participants positioned themselves as citizen-mothers. As noted above, citizen-mothers typically drew upon discourses of motherhood that constructed the maternal role as special, and the presence of the mothering in a child's life as necessary to ensure 'normal' development or safety. Some citizen-mothers stressed the special needs of their children in requiring that their mother be at home 'for them'. Citizen-mothers are of particular interest in this research

because of the persistent claims of the link between non-participation in paid work and the feminization of poverty that legitimate neo-liberal welfare reform programmes. That is, there is an assumption that women with strong citizen-mother identities act to exclude themselves from the labour market, and thus, are more likely to be 'trapped' on welfare.

Diane narrates a strong mothering identity, and her maternal biography has been shaped by her strong attachment to the care-giving role in relation to her children. When Diane was married, she was involved in the family business with her ex-husband. However, she was also the parent most engaged in meeting the day to day needs of the children. Diane currently works full-time as a nurse, a profession she trained in before her children were born. Despite this, Diane's relationship to her children is central in the ways in which she describes herself:

My main job is mother to three girls, that's my main job. And then I go to health centre and I work thirty-five hours a week there.

Although Diane works full-time, she positions herself as a citizen-mother in terms of her role in children's lives. When Diane's marriage ended, Diane's three children were living at home. At the time of her interview, her two older children had left home. Diane's narrative illustrates how, over time, identity claims absorb different events within one's biography, and residues of previous selves persist despite the change in circumstances. At face value, Diane's position as a citizen-mother seems inconsistent with her current working arrangements. This is because as Diane's children have grown up, Diane's maternal biography has been shaped by life course changes. Although these are narrated into Diane's biography, they have had limited impact on how she sees herself as a mother:

When we separated in 1992 I went onto the DPB, and I said, another conscious decision was that I wasn't going to find any work until Annabel [the youngest child] was 12 or 13, or ready to go to college. But it happened a bit sooner than that. I got some part-time work at a local place down the road, working nine hours a week; Friday, Saturday Sunday, three hours a day. I did that for eight months, that just kind of got me back into the workforce, [it] was a really good job using my nursing skills ... I could come just partly off the DPB and just partly be paid from down there. And then my current job ... came up ... I applied for it, thinking well if I get it I get it, if I don't I don't. And I got it, which was a bit scary. Annabel was in Form Two I think ... I [had] wanted to be at home; I wanted to be available for her. I wanted to still be able to go and mother help and go on school trips and do that for her that I'd done for the other two, because once they get to

college they don't want you at the school anyway ... perhaps that job at the health centre came a little bit too soon, but Annabel was quite happy coming home. Well she actually went off to other people's places after school, three, four afternoons, and I picked her up on the way home, so she didn't need to come home on her own.

In her narrative, Diane positions herself as a citizen-mother in a number of ways. Diane talks of the ways in which she 'delayed' returning to work so that she could be a mother at home for her children. In identifying an age of her youngest child where work might become a possibility Diane positions herself as a mother (like other mothers) whose working life has been shaped around meeting the needs of her children first. In New Zealand, the participation of women in paid work follows a two phase work cycle pattern: women with children, although participating at higher rates than previously, are more likely to be in part-time work and still have lower participation rates than women without children or women whose children have grown up (Baker, 2001; 164). Like other citizen-mothers where the care of children is a key aspect of one's identity, Diane's participation in paid work is shaped by her commitment to mothering as being present in her children's day to day life. In describing her return to paid work, Diane mediates between her citizen-mother identity and her professional identity to position herself as an ordinary citizen responding to the changing circumstances of her life, although the needs of her children remain central.

Diane talked about the time between her marriage ending and her return to paid work. During this time, Diane was in receipt of the DPB. For Diane, being a 'beneficiary' was a contradictory experience. As a citizen-mother, her entitlement to the benefit enabled some continuity in her role as the primary caregiver of her children. However, she also found it difficult to reconcile her status as a beneficiary with her professional identity as a nurse. Even though Diane had a strong citizen-mother identity, the idea that she should be in paid work resurfaces throughout her narrative:

Lesley	Did you ever come to accept that it was your entitlement?
Diane	Yes I think I did, but not whole-heartedly. I felt that I knew that I had a profession, that I could go back to work and I would be able to go back to work, but when the time was right ... I mean it was wonderful, a real stop gap... it paid the bills and bought the food ... I was grateful for it because I don't think I would have had the confidence at that time to pick myself up and go out and look for a job. So it was a real stop gap measure for me personally to get myself together and grow - which I certainly did, and think about where I was going to go and which direction I was going to go in ... I didn't have to rush and think, you

know ‘oh I’ve got to get money’, ‘I’ve got to get a job’, ‘I have to do that’, so it was a really good thing to be able to have ... It’s wonderful now to be able to work 35 hours a week and have enough money too, coming in to support everybody... it’s a well paid job.

Diane’s narrative illustrates how the material experience of parenting alone changes over time, nudging changes in the ways in which identity narratives might be told. For Diane, being in paid work has not diminished her commitment to the narrative identity of citizen-mother. Returning to paid work is in effect a combination of Diane having a profession to which she could return, and of the biographical shifts that occur across the life course as a mother. As Diane’s children have become more independent, the ‘need’ for her to have time available for her children to meet their needs has diminished.

Although Diane positions herself as an ordinary citizen accommodating the life course changes that are a consequence of her children growing up, it is important to note the degree to which Diane’s maternal biography is shaped by relations of gender and class. Diane’s middle-class marriage had been characterised by a ‘modern’ division of labour where Diane had been primarily responsible for caregiving, and her ex-husband was responsible for breadwinning. After the marriage, Diane and her ex-husband retained similar roles in relation to the children. As a citizen-mother Diane continued to be their primary caregiver, and Diane’s ex-husband paid Child Support, initially to the Department of Social Welfare, but since Diane has been in paid work, to Diane herself. Diane is one of the few participants who received regular child maintenance payments from her children’s father and noted that it had “never been a problem”. As a citizen-mother, parenting alone after her marriage ended was often difficult for Diane and her material position deteriorated considerably. However, her current material security is significantly better than many of the other participants in this research, and demonstrates how the experience of parenting alone is mediated by the resources that individual women bring to it¹²⁶.

Irenie also positions herself as a citizen-mother. Irenie’s children are younger than Diane’s, and are still pre-schoolers. Irenie’s relationship with their father ended because

¹²⁶ Women who parent alone are diverse group. Although women who become lone mothers following divorce are likely to experience a drop in household income, some mothers are better ‘cushioned’ than others. This is because neo-liberal child maintenance policies, for example, reinforce class differences between families by linking maintenance to ‘individual circumstances’.

of his violence towards Irenie, and what Irenie considered as his neglectful behaviour when caring for the children. Before becoming a mother, Irenie worked as a nanny. In her narrative, she links her experience as a nanny to the special relationship between mothers and children that Irenie thinks is important in terms of child development:

I don't agree [with mothers working], I mean, why have them? ... A lot of mums and dads go to work so they can say 'oh yes, I've got two lovely children at home', you know ... When I was nannying, they [the children] just didn't see their mums. Their mums would come home at five o'clock, the kids would have their tea, have a bath and go to bed. The parents didn't spend any time with their kids and they missed out on all those magic moments ... A lot of the nanny kids loved me. A lot of them called me 'Mum' which I always put my foot down and said 'no, I'm your friend, I'm Irenie'. I would never let them call me Mum, but I just thought, why have them, you know, if you want a career. I don't really agree with working actually, ... [except] maybe when the kids are a little bit older

Lesley What age do you think it sort of becomes okay?

Irenie Five

Lesley Mmm, why five?

Irenie (Laughs) I just think it's grounding. I think between the years of one and three they do all their magic moments, they're walking, talking, crawling ... They say one to seven it's the environment that really affects the adult child, so I just think about five. So when mine are five I'll probably go back to work ... but it depends. It depends sort of money wise. I know some people who go back to work, like my friend's a nurse, and she goes and works for the money. She gets six hundred dollars a week as a nurse, and she put her child in day-care, plus she's got really good shifts, like she works four days on, three days off, so she still spends time with the children. But I don't agree with the mums that work eight till five, fifty hours a week, I just think, 'nope'.

Irenie's narrative exemplifies a cultural ambivalence towards childcare that mothers in New Zealand are required to negotiate. For example, in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses, participation in the market place, through paid work, is constructed as not only 'rational', but also as performing one's duties as a citizen. However, as in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, citizenship remains gendered. New Zealand's historical commitment to the breadwinner-caregiver welfare state was built up around a gendered division of labour legitimated by discourses that constructed men and women as different. As mothers, women were constructed as the best caregivers for their children, and the connections between child development and mother-care legitimated through legal, educational and social discourses. Recent 'scandals' around group childcare have reinforced deep cultural suspicions about the safety of children in the care of people who are not their mothers (see Jones, 2001). However, various milestones in children's lives (for

example, beginning primary school, or beginning high school) are proxy symbols of change in the maternal role, and moments when mothers might legitimately renegotiate how they live their lives as mothers. The modernist “moral imperative” that “mothers are the people best equipped to raise their children” (Davies & Welch, 1986; 416) resurfaces in Irenie’s narrative as she positions herself as an ordinary citizen: a mother doing what is best for her children.

I just don’t really agree with like putting them in [family day-care] for two dollars an hour, when how do you know what the [childcare] worker’s like. I don’t give my kids to anyone ... I mean there’s so many stuffed up people in the world, you just wouldn’t want to, like, I would never risk my children with anyone ... One of the parents should be home looking after their child, and if they weren’t in a secure position then they shouldn’t have had the child in the first place, but that’s not in all cases, I know sometimes the wife gets abandoned by the husband.

Irenie’s narrative is interesting here as she draws upon notions of responsibility around who ‘should’ and ‘should not’ have children. The theme of parental responsibility is a powerful one in neo-liberal welfare reform discourses. For example, in the Proposed Code of Social and Family Responsibility, expectations around parental responsibilities included that “Parents should love, care for, support and protect their children” and “Parents will do all that they can to help their children learn from the time they’re born” (Department of Social Welfare, 1998). How these expectations are enacted remains contested in the lives of women parenting alone. For Irenie, positioning herself as a citizen-mother is achieved through her narrative that emphasises the exceptional responsibility she has for her children’s care.

Hayley’s experience of parenting alone illustrates how citizen-worker and citizen-mother narratives are sometimes used conjointly in making sense of the experience of parenting alone. Hayley positions herself as citizen-worker in that her relationship to paid work features strongly in her maternal biography. Hayley is a graphic artist, and works part-time for the local community newspaper. After the birth of her daughter, Hayley returned to work, concerned that any break might affect her skills and make it more difficult to find work in the future. During this time, Hayley’s daughter, Miranda, was cared for by Miranda’s father. However, Hayley’s relationship came to end. Initially, Miranda lived with her father for half the week, and with Hayley the rest of the time. Hayley became increasingly concerned about the quality of care Miranda was experiencing in her father’s care. When Hayley discovered that Miranda had been

present when her father had been smoking marijuana, and that he had driven his car ‘stoned’ with Miranda as a passenger, Hayley sought full custody of Miranda. What began as a ‘court battle’ was quickly resolved when Hayley raised issues through her lawyer about the quality of Miranda’s care experience. Since then, Miranda has lived with Hayley, although she visits her father’s family every second weekend.

When Miranda came to live full-time with Hayley again, Hayley made a number of changes to her work schedule. Similarly, Hayley’s future plans in terms of work are shaped by Miranda’s presence. Hayley’s narrative is very similar to those of the other participants who positioned themselves as citizen-workers in that, like those participants, Hayley’s working life is shaped by her role as a mother. However, unlike the other participants, when Hayley became a mother she and her partner had self-consciously tried to raise Miranda by reworking the traditional gendered division of labour. Ultimately, this attempt failed, as did the initial parenting arrangements agreed between Hayley and her partner when they first separated. Now, like other citizen-mothers, Hayley positions herself as an ordinary citizen in that her maternal relationship with Miranda is characterised by a ‘specialness’ that Miranda did not receive when in the care of her father. At the same time, Hayley’s narrative of her experience of paid work positions her as a citizen-worker whose working life is constantly mediated by her role as a mother, and her status as a beneficiary:

... I get the benefit and because I don’t earn enough, because I only work fifteen hours a week and I don’t earn enough to support me on that ... But they cut it right back because you’re only allowed to earn eighty dollars, and then they start knocking you back seventy cents in the dollar or something like that.

Lesley So do you lose?

Hayley I lose quite a lot. I’m only partly on the benefit really [...]

Lesley What do you do about work if Miranda’s sick?

Hayley Well, that’s a real problem. Luckily I’ve got the computer so I can work a certain amount from home. Fortunately my boss is really flexible, but if the worst comes to the worst, my mother comes up ... to look after her, or like for instance, Monday I took off because I was sick, and I’ve still got an hour to make up, so I will make that up at some stage

Lesley Working at home? Or going in to work?

Hayley Going into work probably, or working from home. But see the thing is at the moment, what I did was I increased Miranda’s hours at pre-school by adding four afternoons a week. And the reason behind that is because I’m doing work experience at the moment for web site design [...] I’m hoping that eventually I’ll be able to get a web site design job, and not even need to be on the DPB and be able to sort manage comfortably doing thirty hours, or thirty two a week [...]

Lesley Do you think your boss treats you in any particular way because you're a parent?

Hayley He's a very conservative Christian guy, and I know that he's very anti solo parents and things like that ... but I mean he's also very anti Maori, Chinese, I mean he's that kind of guy ... But he's also pretty good to me, he's pretty flexible with me, but then, they really need me, you know what I mean. Like in some ways, well, no-one's indispensable, but I'm quite valuable to their company, because even though I've trained their daughter in the [design] techniques, she's not very confident and I end up doing all of the challenging work ... When I went down to a fifteen-hour week [...] it was sort of like 'I'm quite happy to stay on these hours if you don't give me a pay rise' because of if he gives me a pay rise I'll be worse off.

Conclusion

The universalising discourses of modern citizenship mask differences and diversity between citizens (Lister, 1995; Orloff, 1993). For example, liberal breadwinner-caregiver welfare states have historically distributed citizenship entitlements along gendered axes, with men and women experiencing citizenship differently (Bryson, 1992; Du Plessis, 1993). The New Zealand welfare state has been described as one where men have historically been compensated for the loss of income, while women have been compensated for the loss of a man (Saville-Smith, 1987; 201). While men and women share equal political citizenship rights, under the conditions of neo-liberalism the gendered division of labour central to New Zealand's gendered culture persists, and constructs women as dependent caregivers and men as independent breadwinners, with the social rights of citizenship distributed accordingly.

Spencer (1998) argues that in New Zealand, the shift to neo-liberalism and the consolidation of the competitive-contractual model of governance has been accompanied by a new gender regime. Accordingly, this 'new' regime contains elements of both change and continuity in terms of women's relationship to the State, the labour market and the family. Underpinning these relationships is a gender contract that has redefined women's citizenship in New Zealand, with accompanying rights and entitlements. Whereas women's citizenship within the post-war liberal welfarist gender regime was predicated on (although not defined exclusively by) women's roles within the family, the gender regime that informs neo-liberalism predicates women's citizenship on their participation within the labour market.

As in other neo-liberal welfare states, the ‘differences’ between men and women encoded in breadwinner-caregiver welfarism were eclipsed by neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that favoured constructs of a de-gendered citizen constituted as universal citizen-worker. Similarly, the New Zealand welfare reforms of the 1990s extruded a new citizen construct: the independent, self-reliant citizen, who through participation in paid work, demonstrated the moral attributes of the ordinary (neo-liberal) citizen. In talking about the material experiences of parenting alone, the participants in this research positioned themselves as ordinary citizens, ameliorating the dominant neo-liberal discourses that construct women who parent alone as problem citizens, and validated their experiences as contested subjects by positioning themselves as mothers as well as either citizen-workers, or citizen-mothers. This may in part be because the lives of the participants in this research spanned decades of changing and contradictory citizenship discourses, and different constructs of women as citizens competed and co-existed within the participants’ narratives.

Neo-liberalism privileges the degendered self-reliant, independent, ‘rational’ universal human subject as citizen. Privileging this citizen masks the ways in which market participation as the basis of social position (including citizenship rights) are dependent upon unpaid work typically located external to the market. For women, citizenship constituted through such discourses compels engagement with a contemporary version of Wollstonecraft’s dilemma (Pateman, 1989)¹²⁷. In neo-liberal citizenship discourses, this dilemma is a result of positioning women as equal to men as paid workers, but different (or more precisely, unequal) to men as unpaid caregivers. While in liberal breadwinner-caregiver welfare states, this dilemma is elided by according women citizenship rights as mother-citizens, the logic of neo-liberalism offers other possibilities of resolving the dilemma: women can ‘choose’ to conform to male citizenship norms, and become citizen workers ‘like men’. Alternatively, women can ‘choose’ to be unpaid caregivers, a status which neo-liberal citizenship discourses do not value. For women

¹²⁷ Pateman (1989) argues that women’s ‘demands’ that the “ideal of citizenship be extended to them” logically results in a liberal-feminist agenda for a “gender neutral” social world. Simultaneously, many women have also insisted “as did Mary Wollstonecraft, that as women they have specific capacities, talents, need, and concerns, so that the expression of their citizenship will be differentiated from that of men. Their unpaid work ... as mothers [could be seen] as women’s work as citizens” (Pateman, 1989; 196 - 197).

who parent alone, positioning one self as an ordinary citizen surfaces a second dimension of the dilemma: redemption through participation in paid work requires that these women have sufficient material resources to discharge the care of their dependents to others (a requirement 'independent' citizen-workers do not share). Alternatively, to position themselves as citizen-mothers (a position that although devalued by neo-liberal discourses, remains desirable in other discourses), the 'dependency' of lone mothers makes the social identity of mother much more difficult to legitimately access.

In this chapter, I have argued that women who parent alone make sense of their experience by positioning themselves as ordinary citizens in relation to two discursive poles. Citizen-workers narrate a special relationship to paid work, and in this sense emulate the de-gendered citizen of neo-liberalism. Alternatively, citizen-mothers narrate the centrality of the 'specialness' of their relationship with their children, and in this sense echo the gendered citizen of liberal welfarism. As I have demonstrated, some participants narrate their citizenship identity using discourses from both poles, although many tend to favour one or the other on a continuum. Nevertheless, all the participants in this research positioned themselves as good mothers in conjunction with their citizenship narratives. In this sense, constructing narratives around the material experience of parenting alone offers the participants opportunities to construct validation stories. As such, these stories ameliorate the worst aspects of neo-liberal discourses that 'make up' women who parent alone as 'particular types of people'.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have impacted on the material experience of parenting alone through a number of key policy initiatives. Importantly, welfare-to-work programmes have positioned participation in paid work as a pre-requisite for the achievement of the moral status of citizen. Through validation stories that, in effect, position women who parent alone as citizen-mothers and citizen-workers, the participants have been able to make their own moral claims, not only as 'ordinary citizens', but as good mothers. However, it is unlikely that such 'success' in positioning oneself as an ordinary citizen will change the gendered materiality of parenting alone, and the association between lone parenting and the feminization of poverty. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the strong citizen-worker identity is no guarantee of opportunity or equality in the (labour) market, just as

a strong citizen-mother identity is not a precursor to 'welfare dependence'. Just like other citizens, the lives of women who parent alone are structured by class, as well as gender relations. In this context, validation stories illustrate the ways in which biographical solutions to wider structural inequalities elide gender relations within late modern societies, and how, in making sense of their experience, women who parent alone absorb the gendered inequalities that characterise parenting alone in neo-liberal regimes into their life stories.

Chapter Nine

The Price of Freedom?

I mean I hate it when the newspapers say ... “Occupation ... single mother”. They don’t usually describe men like that. I mean half of them are ... absent parents. [The newspapers] don’t say “Absent parent so and so”... (Colleen).

There is no hope that discrimination ... will ever end unless public discourse and government policy recognize that female-headed families are a viable, normal, and permanent family form, rather than something broken and deviant that policy should eradicate. Around one- third of families in the United States are headed by a woman alone; this proportion is about the same world-wide. The single-mother family is not going to fade away (Young, 1994; 90).

Introduction

Lone parenting is gendered. In New Zealand most lone parents are women. Although the proportion of families headed by lone mothers has increased in the past thirty years, the proportion of one-parent families headed by women has remained remarkably stable. In the social world of late modernity, a world characterised by change and instability, this stability in the gendered nature of lone parenting is startling. As Jamieson (1999; 488) notes:

Parenting is rarely a gender-neutral activity and often exacerbates inequalities in divisions of labour, free time, disposable income and other privileges. *Mothers* typically remain much more emotionally and practically involved with their children than fathers (Jamieson, 1999; 488)¹²⁸.

In this thesis I have argued that the increase in the number of women parenting alone over the past thirty years reflects changes in patterns of family structure that are best understood as an outcome of a number of broader changes in social life. Post-Fordist changes in the nature and experience of paid work, neo-liberal changes in the political economy, and changes in cultural ideas about ‘equality’ between men and women have combined to produce new experiences of family life where the certainties of modernity have been eclipsed by the uncertainties of late modernity. For example, the loosening of

¹²⁸ My emphasis.

modernist gender specific norms on individual biographies has seen more married women enter paid work, while at the same time men's relationship to the labour market has become more precarious. Marriage as an institution characterised by the permanence of an idealised mutual obligation has been displaced by relationships characterised by mutual impermanence, and the duration of which are determined by their use for reflexive projects of self. In Chapter Two, individualization as a modernising process was offered as an explanation linking these tendencies. However, individualization per se does not explain the politicisation of the subject 'lone mother' in late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, or the connection between the feminization of poverty and the experience of lone motherhood in such societies.

The very real material differences between lone mothers and other mothers (and between women and men) have been elided by welfare reform discourses that have simultaneously constructed lone mothers as particular types of people. In Chapters One, Two and Three I noted important historical changes in the construction of lone mothers as particular types of people, and the material effects of changing hierarchies of maternal legitimacy in the lives of women who parent alone. In New Zealand the introduction of the DPB in 1973 signalled a recognition of lone mothers (like other mothers) as the best caregivers for their children, while at the same time as different to men as breadwinners. In this sense, the introduction of the DPB was a moment explicitly signalling the citizenship right of women to be 'equal' and 'different', and to form autonomous households with their children. However, as in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, welfare reform discourses have subsequently displaced the citizenship right of mothers to care with a discourse privileging the *individual's* right to participate as an active citizen in the (labour) market. In this sense, neo-liberalism has again positioned all mothers as the same, but also as the same as men. As individual workers (rather than mothers), the equal citizenship rights of women and men are tied to a responsibility to be equally 'independent' from the State. While the introduction of the DPB in 1973 symbolised the "freeing of the slaves" (McLaughlin, 1976; 41) I conclude this thesis by arguing that the ascendancy of neo-liberalism in New Zealand, especially from the 1990s onwards, has produced both material and discursive conditions where women with children have, once again, become enslaved.

The Economic Price of Freedom

As Nyberg (2002; 76) argues, measures of ‘the economic position’ of lone mothers not only describe their material circumstances, but more importantly signal the citizenship rights of *all* women in that particular society. The ‘more equal’ lone mothers are, the more equal cohabiting mothers are in their exit possibilities, should they need or decide to form autonomous households. In this sense, the level of State support for lone mothers (in whatever form) illustrates not only the State’s capacity to enable women to live independently from men, but is an important indicator of the degree to which women have *actually* achieved equal rights as citizens.

Writing in the context of Australian welfare reform, Cass (1995; 40) argues “the libertarian attack on social expenditure and the very idea of the welfare state is a defence of patriarchal rights to maintain women as dependents”. In this thesis I have illustrated that this attack is not simply at the level of ‘welfare entitlements’, but more significantly, at the level of meaning. Women’s hidden economic dependence on men remains both legitimate and invisible in welfare reform discourses, while women’s economic independence from men achieved through State benefits is routinely constructed as dependent. Similarly, in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight I have illustrated how in late modernity, neo-liberal welfare reform discourses reproduce ‘new’ forms of old inequalities that women who parent alone inevitably negotiate in their everyday lives. As Bauman (1995; 50) notes, when the neo-liberal state in effect “confine[s] the provision of services to a means-test ... the community is immediately split into those who give without getting anything in exchange, and those who get without giving”. Importantly, this downsizing of the welfarism has paralleled a downsizing of democracy and the “wilting and shrinking of active citizenship” (Bauman, 1995; 50). In place of active citizenship, the ‘active citizen’ has bloomed. This new citizen is the individuated citizen of late modernity, piecing together “a bit of a life” (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002c) while attempting to resolve persistently ‘modern’ structural inequalities within their resolutely gendered personal biographies.

In Chapter One of this thesis I noted that “sole parent families” in New Zealand are at least four times less likely than any other family type to have a high standard of living,

and twice as likely than other family types to have a low standard of living. In other words, as in other late modern societies with a history of liberal welfarism, New Zealand families headed by lone mothers carry a greater risk and burden of poverty than any other family type. Neo-liberal welfare reform discourses have attributed the connection between poverty and family type to a connection between the type of person in that family and the source of family income. For example, welfare to work programmes have sought to shift women ‘off welfare’ and ‘into work’ by arguing not only that welfare makes women poor, but that poor mothers need particular ‘signals’ and ‘carrots and sticks’ so that as individuals, they will move themselves out of poverty. However, as outlined in Chapter Two, the connections between paid work and lone motherhood are complex. Many lone mothers experience barriers to paid work not experienced by other paid workers, and post-Fordist changes in the labour market as a consequence of globalisation have exacerbated differences between workers in ‘the core’ (or “career jobs”) and workers in peripheral (or “crap”) jobs (Dean, 2001; 281). Thus, in late modern societies, poverty is a gendered phenomenon, unequally borne by lone mothers.

The material consequences of becoming a lone mother under the conditions of neo-liberalism can not be understated. In Britain, two-thirds of lone mothers rely on State benefits “equivalent to half the amount estimated as necessary to achieve modest but adequate living standards” (Ford & Millar, 1998; 13). Similarly, as Taylor-Gooby (2000; 6) notes:

The British Household Panel Survey shows that very nearly half the women who have separated from their partners between the 1991 and 1992 waves of the survey experienced a substantial fall in personal income, about a fifth falling at least four tenths of the way down the income distribution. Less than a fifth of men who had separated experienced income falls and only three percent by four deciles.

In late modern societies women who parent alone can, at best, secure one income and the financial support of the other parent in the form of child maintenance. In my research, the payment of child maintenance was rare, often erratic, and far from a universal experience amongst lone mothers. Under the conditions of neo-liberalism, the old gendered logic of the breadwinner-caregiver division of labour remains. As Joshi (1987), cited in Millar (1999; 259) argued:

The price a man pays for parenthood is generally being expected to support his children and their mother. The price a woman pays is that of continuing economic

handicap and an increased risk of poverty. One of the many advantages of being male is that it is easier to opt out of the obligation to maintain than it is to opt out of the unwritten obligation to care.

In Chapters One, Two and Eight I demonstrated how, if in paid employment, the position of lone mothers within the labour market is mediated by their status as women workers, as well as lone mothers. As the participation rate of married women in the labour force has increased so has the ‘competition’ between lone mothers and mothers in two-income households for paid work that combines well with the unpaid work of mothering. In this sense, the “simultaneous sociological transition” of late modernity has resulted in “a process of individualization that frees women to enter an increasingly precarious labour market, while turning carework into something that must be either subcontracted or borne as an additional burden” (Dean, 2001; 279). As Ford & Millar (1998; 13) note, women from two-income households have, theoretically at least, options around sharing the caring tasks with partners or pooling the costs of caring, and as such, may have considerably more flexibility in relation to paid work than most lone mothers.

The Discursive Constraints on Freedom

New Zealand embraced neo-liberalism more thoroughly and rapidly than other liberal welfare states. As noted in Chapters One and Three, in 1991 the ironically named ‘Mother of All Budgets’ initiated far reaching changes in the nature and scope of the New Zealand welfare state, that in effect further impoverished many lone mothers who were already over-represented in the poorest family-households in the country. These benefit cuts, and further ‘reforms’ in the mid 1990s were legitimated by constructing lone mothers as particular types of people. In Chapter Three I argued that the ‘subject’ that legitimated New Zealand welfare reform was the solo mum; a welfare mother who had become coterminous with the peculiarly antipodean identity, ‘the bludger’. I also argued that this construction of the solo mother was made possible through the epistemological practices of the social sciences. The subjectification of ‘the solo mother’ as a particular type of person was achieved, for example, through censuses and other modernist knowledge practices that positioned lone mothers as Other, and different in nature to other women, mothers and citizens.

In this thesis I have argued that in the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that make up women who parent alone as particular types of people, lone mothers make sense of their experiences through enacting a particular narrative form. While the events of their lives vary, emplotting narratives that function as validation stories not only enable lone mothers to make sense of their experiences as contested subjects in late modernity, but also to position themselves as ordinary women, good mothers, and ordinary citizens making the most of the extraordinary circumstances of their lives. Thus, as lone mothers, women who parent alone are involved in “a hard game of identity and difference” (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000; 78) enacting narratives of self and experience in the context of powerful negative discourses that have both material effects, and shape one’s subjectivity.

In Chapter Six I analysed the participants’ ‘becoming narratives’ and argued that becoming a lone mother was for many women a contradictory experience. In narrating becoming a lone mother through validation stories of no intent, or a self with needs, or of inevitability, women who parent alone are able to repair through narrative the disjuncture between their own experience and persistent modernist norms that construct marriage then motherhood as the anticipated trajectory of the ‘normal’ feminine biography.

In Chapter Seven I analysed the participants’ narratives around ‘being different’ with particular focus on the ways in which lone mothers negotiate the social identity of mother. In that chapter I argued that in positioning themselves as different to the pathological mother, the social problem mother and the welfare mother, women who parent alone construct validation stories that ‘turn Goffman on his head’. Claiming the social identity of mother is primarily achieved by displacing the categorical identity of ‘lone mother’ as a virtual identity, a displacement achieved through establishing their narrative (or actual) identities as good mothers.

The materiality of lone motherhood was explored in Chapter Eight. In that chapter, I argued that women who parent alone make sense of their experience as citizens by positioning themselves in relation to two discursive poles: citizen-mother, and citizen-worker. However, as ordinary citizens in extraordinary circumstances, women who

parent alone also position themselves as good mothers. Within the context of neo-liberal welfare reform discourses that valorise paid work as an individual responsibility, and self-reliance as a fundamental duty of good citizens, the historic welfarist rights of women as citizens undertaking care work have been eroded. By constructing validation stories around the materiality of parenting alone, the participants in this research ameliorate neo-liberal discourses that, in constructing lone mothers as particular types of people, mask the gendered nature of parenting alone, and the material and subjective effects of being a lone mother in their everyday lives.

Telling Stories Within “the Stream of Power”

The stories we tell about our lives do not simply emerge from ourselves as rational subjects observing and describing the reality we may find ourselves in. Stories are social products. As noted in Chapter Four, the “production and consumption of stories” are social processes that occur as everyday practical activities as we go about the business of both making sense of, and making up our world (Plummer, 1995; 24). Stories are inevitably told and heard within a “stream of power” shaping not only what can be told, but what voices will be “credible or incredible” at particular historical moments (Plummer, 1995; 26-27).

Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) argue that the stories we tell about our lives and politics are immutably linked. Firstly, stories are self-formative and stories we tell “are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; 1). As such, validation stories make possible narrative identities that interrupt constructions of lone mothers as particular types of people. Secondly, life stories are socially located and grounded in the linguistic resources culturally available for story telling. Thus, women who parent alone do have stories to tell, but do so within a stream of power that makes up collective identities that disguise the ‘old’ inequalities of modernist gender relations (Fraser, 1997). Finally, there is potential to interrupt and enlarge narrative resources through telling. In this sense, telling life stories is political and story telling has an emancipatory political potential, as through the telling and retelling the previously impossible may become possible (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; 3).

In this thesis, the voices of the participants are both credible and incredible. Their credibility lies in their narratives around the experience of ‘being made up’ and the material and subjective effects of occupying a contested subject position as women who parent alone. Their voices are also *incredible*, not in the sense of unbelievable, but in the sense of the work that women who parent alone must do to not be *that subject*. As ordinary women, mothers, and citizens the participants in this research ‘do a lot of narrative work’ to ameliorate the ways in which they are systematically discriminated against as women, mothers and citizens in the late modern, neo-liberal world. In this sense, their “creative energies ... [are] engaged in coping with ... old inequalities rather than transforming them” (Jamieson, 1999; 491). While the participants ‘resisted’ neo-liberal discourses and positioned themselves as ordinary women, mothers, and citizens, the political economy of neo-liberalism, the post-Fordist constraints on their opportunities as workers, and persistent cultural myths that men and women are ‘more equal’ continuously pressed upon them in material and subjective ways.

While the focus of this thesis has been the stories of women who parent alone, I have also raised issues around the kinds of stories that social researchers tell. While stories *about* lone mothers as particular types of people have been told *by researchers* as the credible stories of neo-liberalism, we must show how these stories are *incredible*. As reflexive social researchers we must question how we construct particular types of people in our stories, and move beyond the unethical subjectification of lone mothers towards an understanding of the lives they are compelled to lead as individuals under the conditions of late modernity. We must ask how the ‘old’ modernist inequalities are disguised in the ‘new’ stories that valorise ‘the (degendered) individual’ and thus not only elide unequal gender relations, but legitimate discrimination against women and against mothers. With this in mind, further research to generate ‘new stories’ might include:

An ethnography of government policy making. It would be useful to better understand how assumptions that discriminate against women come to be regarded as common knowledge that is then reproduced in policy discourses. Importantly, we should investigate the place of the social scientist as the knowledge producer in these processes. Such an investigation might also explore how racism informs policy discourses, a dimension of inequality that has remained unexplored in this thesis.

An investigation comparing the impact of lone mothering on women and men's ability to form autonomous households. In particular, we might explore how wider gendered inequalities are experienced and the particularities of these experiences as they manifest for parents at different moments across their children's lives. Although we know that the combination of care work and paid work is difficult for women, we need a better understanding of how the care work of some supports the paid work of others.

Concluding Comment

Millar (1999; 259) notes that lone mothers will continue to be poor "until women in general are more able to achieve a more substantial degree of equality and independence". In this thesis, I have argued that women who parent alone have been constructed as particular types of people reflecting historically specific hierarchies of maternal legitimacy that have had material effects in lone mothers' lives. In the context of neo-liberal liberal welfare reform discourses, lone mothers are compelled to constantly negotiate the oppressive effects of these discourses to make sense of their experiences parenting alone. Validation stories offer lone mothers narratives that position themselves as ordinary women, mothers and citizens in extraordinary circumstances. Thus, validation stories make the lives of lone mothers more 'liveable', even though the structural inequalities of modernity persist.

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Appendix I: Press Release

PRESS RELEASE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY PAPERS (ie free-to-reader)

A graduate student from Victoria University is looking for women sole parents living in (eg Upper Hutt, Wanganui, etc) to volunteer to be interviewed about their experiences as parents in New Zealand today. Lesley Patterson, a student in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, says that surprisingly little is known about women who parent alone. “We know that more women are parenting alone at some time during their parenting years than ever before, and that women who parent alone often do so on very low incomes, but research on actual parenting experiences has traditionally focused on women in relationships” says Lesley Patterson.

Volunteers can expect an interview to last about two hours, and their identity will remain confidential. “It is very important that women who volunteer know that I am the only person who will know that they have participated, and that no one else will have access to any information about the volunteers” says Lesley Patterson.

If you are a woman sole parent and would like to be interviewed, contact Lesley Patterson, tel 0800 – 272 945

For editorial inquiries about this press release, contact Lesley Patterson, tel 04-801.2794 x8935(w), 04-387.3717

Appendix II: Example of Newspaper Story

Survey seeks solo mums to interview

A Victoria University student hopes to interview a number of [REDACTED] women who are solo parents as part of her doctoral studies.

Lesley Patterson, from the Department of Sociology and Social Policy, says research on parenting has traditionally focused on women in relationships.

She says single parents are invisible in studies about parenting.

"We know little about women sole parents except that more women are parenting alone than ever before, and often do so with very low incomes. It's as if women sole parents don't exist when it comes to the existing research on parenting."

She says there are lots of stereotypes about "solo mums",

none of which is based on research.

"I expect that this research will challenge some of those stereotypes and add an extra and important perspective to the research on parenting."

Ms Patterson is looking for women living in [REDACTED] to talk to her about their experiences of being a sole parent. Volunteers can expect an interview to last about two hours and their identity will remain confidential.

"It is very important that the women who talk to me *know* that their identity will never be disclosed to any other person and that no one will have access to any information that might identify volunteers."

For more information Lesley can be contacted on 3873717 or 0800 272 945.

Appendix III: Recruitment Poster

Are you a single parent?

Would you like to take part in research about what it is like being a single parent in New Zealand today?

I am a student at Victoria University in Wellington and I am interested in the experience of women single parents in New Zealand. I am also a single parent myself.

I am looking for women living in the lower North Island to volunteer to be interviewed. The interview will take an hour or two, and I will meet with you at a time and place that best suits your needs.

Participation is strictly confidential - your identity will not be disclosed to anyone, no one will know that you volunteered, and no one will have access to your interview transcript - except you and me.

Would you like to volunteer?

You can ring me from any phone and there is no charge for the call. You will get me in person, or my answer phone - leave your name, the name of the town you are calling from, and your contact phone number or address, and I will ring you back and / or send you more information about the research so you can see what is involved.

Lesley Patterson
tel 0800 – 272 945

Appendix IV: Participants Information Pack

(Covering letter)

6 Sunglow Ave
Melrose
Wellington

29 July 1998

Dear

Thank you for ringing me about my research on women sole parents. I would very much like to interview you about your parenting experiences.

I have included with this letter some more information about the research, and a consent form. Please read this information and if you would still like to be interviewed, please leave another message on my answer phone (tel 0800 272 945). I will then ring you back and arrange an interview time that suits you. You do not need to send me the Consent Form. I will pick this up from you when we meet for an interview.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Patterson

(Information pack)

WOMEN SOLE PARENTS IN NEW ZEALAND

Information for volunteers

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to explore the parenting experiences of women sole parents in New Zealand today. I am hoping to interview approximately 30 women living in the lower North Island.

This research is being undertaken to fulfil the requirements of a degree in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy. I am being supervised by Dr Claire Toynbee, a senior lecturer in that department. However, Dr Toynbee will not know the identity of any of the volunteers.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

I have been a sole parent for many years, and I am very interested in women's experiences as sole parents. At the moment I work as a teacher, but I spent sometime at home looking after my daughter. If you want to contact me, my details are at the end of this information sheet.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU VOLUNTEER

If you decide you would like to be interviewed, **please phone me** again. We will agree a time that I can come and see you. I can meet with you wherever you feel comfortable - at your house, at a local church, community centre or wherever.

The interview will take up to two hours and I will tape it. It would be great if wherever we meet has a power point handy, and is also reasonably quiet. You may find a quiet place easier for thinking about the questions asked.

The interview itself will be very informal. I will ask you about your experience as a sole parent, but we may end up talking about all sorts of things to do with being a mother, having kids, etc. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to.

After the interview, I will send you a copy of the transcript of the interview tape, then ask you for comments. If you find you have said something in the interview that you don't agree with, or that you don't like, you can let me know and I will change it.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Once the interview has been completed, I will store the tape in a secure place. I will also store transcripts in a secure place to make sure that the identity of volunteers remains confidential. When the research is finished, all tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. However, if you like, I can give the tape of your interview to you.

I will use the transcripts of all the women I talk to as the basis of a research report about women sole parents in New Zealand. This report will be published as a thesis and held at the Victoria University library. I may also give conference papers based on the research. If you want, I can send you copies of conference papers, and a summary of the research report. In all cases, the identity of volunteers will be protected. People reading reports about the research will not be able to identify you.

TO VOLUNTEER

- Read the 'Consent Form' attached - I will ask you to sign this when we meet, as it is important that there is a record of your consent to volunteer
- Ring my answer phone (0800 – 272 945) and leave your name, place you are calling from, and a contact phone number OR address

I will ring you or write to you to arrange our meeting. When I ring you, or when we first meet, we can talk about the Consent Form and any questions that you have about the research.

YOU WANT TO VOLUNTEER - RING LESLEY 0800 – 272 945

CONTACT DETAILS

RESEARCHER: Lesley Patterson
c/- Department of Sociology and Social Policy
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington
tel 0800 272 945
email l.patterson@wnp.ac.nz

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR:
Dr Claire Toynbee
Department of Sociology and Social Policy
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington
tel (04) 472-1000

Appendix V: Starter Questions

Introduction

Preamble: e.g

There are no right answers to the questions I will ask you. It is important you know that you don't have to try and guess what sort of answer I might want because what I want to hear is whatever you can tell me. If I ask you a question and you are not sure about what I am looking for, feel free to ask me to make it clearer.

Family Background

The first thing I would like to know about is you and your children. How many children do you have? How old are they? How long have you lived alone with your children? Tell me about yourself and your children.

Check: number of children
ages of children

How long have you been a single parent? Tell me about when you became a single parent?

Check: when became a single parent (more than once?)
how became a single parent?
was becoming a single parent expected or unexpected?

Being a mother

Preamble: e.g

I am interested in how you think about yourself as a mother, and the sorts of things that are important to you.

In terms of the way that you treat your children do you think you are similar or different to other mothers that you know? Explore

Tell me about your children – how would you describe them?

What do you think are the important things that you do for your children?

I am interested in where mothers get advice about parenting. Have you read any books or magazines or watched any TV programmes about parenting – did they give good advice?

Have you used any advice like this in your own parenting?
Has there been any advice that you disagreed with?

Being a sole parent

I am interested in how people think about women who parent alone. Have you ever had any experiences of people treating you any particular way because you are a single parent? Explore

Is the father of your children involved with them at all?

In what way?

Are you happy with this involvement/not involved?

Do you think that this (involvement / not involved) affects your children – In what ways? Examples?

How did you come to this arrangement?

Do your children keep in contact with your family and the family of their father – (For each group) who do they keep in touch with, who organises the keeping in touch, how often do the children see them, when, where, who else, does this situation suit you?

I am interested in how women who parent their children alone think of themselves as mothers. How do you describe yourself? Explore why.

Would you consider yourself a typical single mother, or did you think you are different to most single mothers? Would you consider yourself a fairly typical mother, or do you think you are different to other mothers?

Do you think your relationship with your children is special or different because you are a single parent? Explore.

Do people talk to you about being a single parent – how does this make you feel?

How would you compare your childhood with your children's – what are the differences and similarities?

Did you ever anticipate that one day you would parent alone? (What anticipation). Since becoming a single parent has the experience been as you anticipated?

All things considered, do you think single mothers are more similar or more different to other mothers? Explore.

Household Income, Work etc

I am going to ask you some very personal questions about your family income. What is your main source of income – benefit, wages, other sources?

(Paid Work)

Do you do any part-time work?

If in any paid work – explore

How do you manage with your children?

What happens if your children are sick?

Do you think your boss treats you in any particular way because you have children?

Because you are a sole parent?

Do you work as much or as little as you would like?

Benefit

(Have you ever been on a benefit as a parent?)

How did your friends and family react to this?

Support from Others

Do you get any support from others to keep your finances going – the father of your children, your family, etc? Explore

Do you get support from other mothers? Explore

Participation

That's the end of the questions. I just wanted to ask you about being interviewed – I am interested in why people volunteer for this sort of research – did you have any specific reasons?

Was there anything else you wanted to talk about that we haven't covered?

Did you want to ask me any questions?