THE NEGOTIATION OF PARENTHOOD:

A PANEL STUDY OF TWENTY TWO MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES

Kathryn Chrisop Beckett

Ph.D.
University of Edinburgh.
1977.
Declaration

This thesis is entirely my own work.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have helped me in many ways during the course of this research project.

I was given a two year postgraduate grant by the Social Science Research Council. At other times I have been helped financially by my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Hayes, and my husband, Dr. Simon Backett. Various kinds of part-time work were given me by members of the Department of Sociology, University of Edinburgh. The Sociology Department also provided me with tape-recorders and typing assistance. All of this basic support relieved an important set of pressures which, so often, result in a student being unable to complete a project.

My supervisors, Dr. Michael Anderson and Mr. Tom McGlew, provided me with intellectual support, and a great deal of "morale-boosting". They gave freely of their time and were always available when I needed help. They assisted in the planning and structuring of my work, and their contributions to the development of this thesis were, at all times, crucial.

My warmest thanks must go to those couples who took part in the various stages of the research. Not only did they give the continued co-operation which was so essential to this project, but they also did this with an interest and enthusiasm which made the fieldwork a stimulating and enjoyable experience. I am also grateful to those people who put me in contact with the couples in the first place.
I should also like to thank my friends and colleagues who have helped with the chores associated with producing a thesis, and who have listened patiently through the years. A special thanks goes to Margaret Liston for typing the final draft.

Finally, my husband, Simon, has supported me in ways too numerous to mention. I am especially grateful for the unquestioning priority which he has attached to the completion of the thesis, and for his sense of humour which, so often, has helped me to put the whole exercise into its proper perspective.
THE NEGOTIATION OF PARENTHOOD
A PANEL STUDY OF TWENTY TWO MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES

ABSTRACT

A panel study of twenty two middle class couples, each with two children, was carried out using a minimally structured methodology. The resulting accounts of parenthood are analysed from the perspective of family life as a mutually constructed social reality. Attention is focused on the exchange of meanings within the nuclear group. Aspects of the form and content of the negotiation of parenthood between spouses are examined.

Underlying assumptions about family behaviour as a learned, shared and life-cyclically oriented reality are found to characterise respondents' accounts. These assumptions provide a broad framework for the family's mutually-held reality but offer considerable scope for variation in everyday practical interpretations. Thus the negotiation of parental behaviour involves continuous exchange of legitimations between spouses. Coping mechanisms are employed to sustain belief in the viability of the mutually-held reality when tensions and dilemmas arise.

It is suggested that images of children are important factors in the development of parental behaviour. These are separated analytically into "abstract" and "grounded". These categorisations refer respectively to the individual's social stock of knowledge and to the ongoing biographical experience of the parent.
Finally, being a mother and being a father are discussed. Interactional and definitional elements in the spouses' construction of these mutually-held realities are highlighted. In particular, it is demonstrated that there exists an implicit assumption of the woman's overall responsibility for the administration of household and children. By contrast the problematical nature of fatherhood relates to sustaining belief in his direct involvement in these spheres.

The thesis has theoretical and empirical implications. The adoption of an interactionist perspective allows examination of the effects of group members on one another's family behaviour. The material also contributes to areas of substantive neglect; notably the indirect power of the mother, the social construction of paternal behaviour, and the effects of children on parenthood.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>Underlying Assumptions about Family Life</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>Negotiation: The Development of Parental Behaviour</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>Coping Mechanisms</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>Making Sense of the Child: Abstract Images of Children</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>Making Sense of My Child: Grounded Images of Children</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight</td>
<td>Being a Mother</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Nine</td>
<td>Being a Father</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Ten</td>
<td>Summary and Implications</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>The Interview Guides</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2</td>
<td>Introductory Letter</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3</td>
<td>The Families</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4</td>
<td>Personal and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Two main themes have permeated the development of this thesis: a concern with certain areas of substantive neglect in family sociology and the attraction of an interactionist approach to studying families. On the substantive level I found myself in agreement with those who criticised the way the woman in the family had been studied, the lack of direct research concerning fatherhood, and the predominance of a one way interactional model for dealing with parent child relationships. In addition, until recently in British sociology, a whole sector of the population had been largely bypassed - the middle class.

On an analytical level, the adoption of an interactionist approach enabled me to focus on the processes involved in the ongoing development of parenthood. Crucial to these processes is the exchange and negotiation of meanings within the nuclear group for, as Aaron Cicourel pointed out:

"Structural arrangements provide boundary conditions by using what the actor takes for granted; typified conceptions that make up the actor's stock of knowledge, ecological settings, common linguistic usage and biophysical conditions. The interaction remains structured by such boundary conditions, but it is also problematic during the course of action." 1

(my underlining)

In this chapter I begin by outlining some of the areas of substantive neglect to which this thesis is addressed. I then examine

the family sociology literature in general which has provided the
background to my study of parenthood. Finally, I discuss various
contributions from the interactionist perspective which have
informed and influenced my own analytical approach.

1. Some neglected areas of family research

(a) Women

One of the many contributions of the feminist writers in
the past decade has been to draw attention to the sexism implicit
in sociology in general and family sociology in particular. For
the radical this is one further instance of the effects of living
in a male dominated society. They see this dominance as so
pervasive that, even though family sociologists probably number
more women in their ranks than other branches of the discipline,
the overall perspective reflected in research, perhaps until the
1970s, could be defined as non-feminist. Carol Erlich, for
example, examined a number of texts in the area of marriage and
the family and showed that the authors generally assumed that
women belong at home.² Ann Oakley looked at the sociology of
deviance, social stratification, power and work and argued that
women are "invisible" in these areas of the discipline. She
concluded that although women are focused upon in family sociology,
they are "entirely encapsulated within the feminine role." By
this she meant that there was "an implicit definition of women
as wives and mothers to the virtual exclusion of any other life-area."³

². Erlich, C. 'The Male Sociologists' Burden: The Place of Women
   in Marriage and Family Texts'. Journal of Marriage and the
   Family, 1971, pp.421-430.
   Bath, 1974, p.17.
Although my work is also concerned with women as mothers, I think it presents their position at this stage of being at home with small children in a more complex fashion than the more usual way which tends to emphasise their powerlessness. In addition, many of the points I make highlight the way in which, despite advances in awareness of the woman's position, various underlying assumptions about family life have a perpetuating conservative effect. Recent feminist writers have, for example, begun to appreciate that beliefs about children can undermine the potential liberation of the mother.

(b) Fathers

Sociologists and psychologists have also commented on the understudied father. In British sociology Colin Bell was one of the first to draw attention to this neglect. He said, "one reason why we are stressing the father is that he is forgotten or recedes into the background in the face of the overwhelming focus on the mother in recent work." His particular concern was to

4. The woman is often treated as at her most powerless when she is confined to the home with small children. See for example Blood, R.O. Jnr. and Wolfe, D.M., *Husbands and Wives*, Free Press, Macmillan Co., 1960, p.42. This view of the distribution of power between spouses was derived from their study of influence over eight decisions, none of which involved the children. The way that they measured power, i.e. by looking at the direct influence over actual decisions, ignored the subtle interactional and contextual elements behind the process. In the present thesis the woman is presented as very powerful at this stage by virtue of her knowledge of and responsibility for, domestic and child-related matters. As an information agent, she exercises continuous covert influence over the development of the man's domestic behaviour and thus indirectly over decision making processes.


counter the traditional emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship and to draw attention to the structural importance of the father-son link as a source of aid in the middle class extended family.

A reviewer of sex role research has, since then, also noted the relative lack of research on men in the family. She cited the work of Leonard Benson as the most comprehensive exception. Benson's considerable achievement in demonstrating that information about fatherhood had in fact been collected was marred by this very determination simply to collate and present data. Consequently he made no comment on the way in which the various data had been generated (that is, frequently incidentally to the main concerns of the researcher, and, in general, not from the men themselves, but their wives). Also, his concern with "results" and "facts" meant that studies of very different depth and calibre were treated together uncritically. His exhaustive review was also undertaken prior to much of the feminist oriented research and suffers badly from an often explicit sexist bias.

9. This is reflected mainly in the way he links the various empirical contributions and in his own comments, for instance, "When the child becomes sick, for example, mother usually handles the case. If it is a tough one, however, father may be called in as a consultant," (Ibid. p.59) and "Women are probably more instrumental in their relations with men than the latter are with women. In the process of growing up women learn to work subtly through men, whereas men rarely practise the fine art of indirectly manipulating women". (Ibid. p.33)
More recently, therefore, yet another researcher can still legitimately claim that fathers themselves have been understudied. Douglas Heath looked at a sample of managers and professionals and examined how they viewed their competence as fathers.\footnote{Heath, D.H. 'Competent Fathers: Their Personalities and Marriages', Human Development, 1976, pp.26-39.}

He found some interesting differences between husbands' and wives' views of competent fatherhood. However, he tended to see their reports as independent and not, as I shall argue is necessary, as part of the mutually created reality of parenthood.

The Rapoports, in their excellent studies, have acknowledged the importance of these interactional factors; and their stress on the study of the "couple" as the unit of analysis has been a major contribution to the understanding of family dynamics.\footnote{Rapoport, R., Rapoport, R.N. and Thiessen, V., 'Couple Symmetry and Enjoyment', Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1974, pp.588-591. They stressed the importance of the 'couple' as the unit of analysis when considering the effect of each spouse's orientations to work and family priorities on the individual enjoyment patterns of the other.}

Until recently, however, their concerns have focused more on the inter-relationship of structural elements inherent in work and family relationships rather than the problematical nature of family roles per se.\footnote{Rapoport, R., Rapoport, R.N., 'Men, Women and Equity', The Family Coordinator, 1975, pp.421-432. This more recent paper considers the problematical nature of family roles, and is discussed further in my concluding chapter.}

Fathers have also been forgotten in psychological research, at least according to Michael Lamb.\footnote{Lamb, M.E., 'Fathers: Forgotten Contributors to Child Development', Human Development, 1975, pp.245-266.} He examined the predominant concern with the mother's role in child development and noted the paradox that "previous research has implied that
The father plays essentially no role in the social development of the infant, while in later childhood he is believed to be a crucial figure in sex role and moral development. Lamb's own argument was that "both mothers and fathers play crucial and qualitatively different roles in the socialisation of the child." He cited some recent research concerning father-infant relationships but found it plagued by conceptual and methodological shortcomings. Most importantly, he concluded that these researchers said little about father-child interaction, since they were looking primarily at the infant's attachment to his/her parents and paid no attention to the contribution of the adult.

Lamb further pointed out that whilst psychoanalytic and identification theorists have looked in detail at the effects of fathers on the later personality development of the child, "much of the evidence we do have on the importance of fathers is derived not from studies of the interaction of fathers and their offspring, but from the extensive literature on the deleterious effects of father absence." (my underlining). To a certain extent, his comment applies also to the sociological literature. He concluded

15. Ibid p.245.
16. Ibid p.254

Biller has reviewed the literature on father absence and concluded that it points to various areas of abnormal child development. Biller, H.B., Father, Child and Sex Role, Heath, Lexington, 1971. More recently, Biller has also reviewed and discussed the various studies of Hoffman, and Mussen and his associates, in particular. These focused on the effects of fathers on sex role and moral identification. Biller, H.B. Paternal Deprivation: Family, School, Sexuality and Society, Heath, Lexington, 1974.
that much of the theoretical speculation about the effects of the father, or of his absence, on personality development lacked a sound empirical base. His major criticism of the whole field was, however, that studies have attempted to determine effects in advance of detailed study of the father-child relationship per se. Here again, then, his conclusion points to the understudied father.

Although, in his suggestions for research, Lamb acknowledged the importance of interactional and structural factors involved in the father role, he tended to adopt a one-way interactional model—that of the effects of parents on children. This observation leads me to the final area of neglect in family sociology: where are the children?

(c) Children

By and large, children have been treated essentially as beings at the receiving end of socialisation processes. Much of the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner has, for example, focused on the effects and results of varying socialisation practices in different classes and cultures. 17 Although this is often highly illuminating in pointing to relationships between wider social processes and family behaviour, it again tends to imply a unidirectional model of parent-child interaction. As R. Bell has pointed out, the parent-effect model assumes a fixed and invariably applied repertoire of socialising behaviour. It

finds difficulty in accounting for variations in, for instance, the behaviour of the same parent towards different same sex children in the family. 16

Raymond Firth has also drawn attention to this neglect of children. He said:

"Ten years ago in an essay on family and kinship in industrial society I pointed out that Bott's study earlier was primarily of marital relations, considering children as objects rather than persons. I went on to argue that each child in a family has a separate role, which may help to condition the roles of the parents; that roles of children have altered considerably even in the last half century; and that this alteration in the child's role is associated with and supported by some changes in the industrial structure."

There is a little evidence concerning the notion of children influencing the parental and marital relationship. Brent Millar has, for instance, considered the effect of the numbers of children in the family on marital satisfaction. 20 He found no correlation, but queried his own measurement techniques. There is also some early work on the meanings of children related to the family behaviour of their parents. In the field of birth control, Heath, Roper and King found that the belief in children as contributors to marital stability was significantly related to ideal family

size and expected family size. \(^{21}\) Luckey and Bain compared sources of marital satisfaction for couples who designated themselves as either "satisfied" or "unsatisfied". \(^{22}\) They found that in the "unsatisfied" group children tended to constitute the main and usually the only source of marital satisfaction. Although these researches are preliminary, they at least indicate that the effects of children, and of beliefs about children, on the other members of the family group are now being considered. It could also be suggested that something of the notion that images of children might affect fertility patterns was implicit in some of the earlier literature in that field. \(^{23}\)

Children have also been considered in more detail where they, or their families, exhibited problematical features and "normal" socialisation processes were disrupted. \(^{24}\) Again, however, most of these studies looked at how the children were affected by the particular problem.

---


24. This area is discussed in more detail in the second part of this chapter, pp.35-36.
One can only conclude, therefore, that the main way in which sociologists have conceptualised the influence of children on family life is as a kind of passive "structural effect"; that is, children alter the dyadic situation of the marital pair. In this thesis children are seen, instead, to have an ongoing active effect on their parents' behaviour.

(d) The influence of structural-functionalism

Thus it would appear that certain aspects of family life have been understudied. In part this seems to derive from the pre-eminence of the structural-functionalist approach to studying families. Indeed, I would suggest that structural-functionalism has influenced both the way family roles have been conceptualised, and the range of empirical topics chosen for study.

Firstly, there has been an over-emphasis on family behaviour as normatively defined. The influence of Talcott Parsons and his associates (whatever Parsons' analytical intentions) seems to have been to smuggle into much of the subsequent structural literature the notion of an instrumental-expressive axis in male-female family roles. Consequently, women at home with small children have, in their "expressive-nurturant" capacity, conventionally been treated as powerless relative to the man. Equally, there has been much more concern with the man in his "instrumental" capacities as family breadwinner or decision maker, as opposed to the "expressive" features of his family behaviour, in this

25. Detailed references are included in the second part of this chapter.
26. The basic arguments were put forward in Parsons, T. and Bales, R.F., Family, Socialisation and Interaction Processes, Free Press, 1955.
case, being a father. Finally, children have been treated less as potentially influential family members than as the end products of their parents' interactions and value systems.

The implicit assumption in most structural-functionalist work seems to have been that family members easily identify and follow clearly defined norms when they take their roles. In fact, it has been found empirically that there are wide variations in how members perceive and interpret such norms. Lyle Larson, reviewing various empirical studies, concluded that "it is apparent that the perceptions of individual family members about any single 'family' norm, value or behaviour may not be the same." It seems potentially profitable, therefore, to view norms rather as extremely broad structural constraints on action. Consequently, actors' perceptions and interpretations of norms become problematical.

Here I find myself in agreement with Edwin Lemert's argument that "our society increasingly shows fluid and open structuring of situations" and that, in effect, "norms become little more than a reference point for action". Secondly, the structural-functionalist approach has influenced not only how family norms and roles have been conceptualised but also the choice of substantive areas to be studied. By definition, interest has been focused on the ways in which factors detached from the immediate familial interactions exert a significant

influence over the form and content of that behaviour. On the one hand, inspired by the seminal contribution of Elizabeth Bott, this was evidenced in the work concerned with the relationship between social networks and conjugal roles. More recently, the emphasis has shifted to the influence of work patterns on family life. On the other hand, deriving from Georg Simmel's work on dyads and triads sociologists have examined the effects of abstract structural properties on the internal dynamics of the family group. They have, for example, looked at the properties of different potential coalitions within the family group, and compared the family with ad hoc groups.

All of these developments have been valuable in adding to our understanding of the boundaries placed on family life by structural constraints, normative pressures and group properties. But, by taking these features to be fixed and determinate, structural functionalists have necessarily ignored the interpretative processes by which members perceive and construct their family roles. Also, except perhaps in the form of a hint, the crucial importance of what could be termed "the ongoing

31. See, for example, Fogarty, M.F., Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R.N., Sex, Career and Family, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971.
socialisation of one another by nuclear family members" has been largely bypassed in the work of those adhering to this perspective.\textsuperscript{35} More recently, however, interactionist oriented researchers have been making good some of these conceptual (and empirical) gaps. Their contributions are considered later in the following section, which examines the literature on which my work on parenthood has been built.\textsuperscript{36}

2. **Background to the Study**

(a) **A Personal Note**

As is the case with most research projects, this study had its original aims modified by practical and conceptual difficulties. Initially I was, (and still am), interested in the way in which having children affects conjugal role behaviour. I had hoped to interview the children as well as their parents; and thus to produce an interactional study of the interpretations of meanings and behaviour of all of the group members. This was fascinating theoretically, but the limitations of a one person Ph.D. project necessitated some considerable modifications in practice. The idea of interviewing the children was, for example, rejected before the fieldwork began. In addition, as will be described in Chapter Two, plans to use direct observation were also abandoned.

Thus I was left with the couples themselves. The influence of phenomenological sociology made me aware that I was obtaining their "accounts" of their family lives. I became increasingly interested in how, as couples, they constructed and negotiated their mutually-held family realities. Although respondents talked

\textsuperscript{35} Or, in the terminology to be adopted in this thesis "the processes of negotiation of each family's mutually-held reality".

\textsuperscript{36} Detailed references are presented with the discussion in the second part of this chapter.
to me about their spousal relationship as well as their parental
to the analysis. In addition, it was easier to make conceptual links between beliefs about children
and parental behaviour. Even more detailed study and analysis would be necessary to make the further links with the other aspects of the couples' lives. In this thesis, therefore, I present an analysis of the development of parental behaviour of twenty two middle class couples. I pay particular attention to the part played in this process by their images of children.

(b) The Literature

In reviewing the literature relevant to this thesis I faced a particular problem. There was no specific body of empirical work which was both substantively and theoretically pertinent. Although, as this section will indicate, data relevant to my work has sometimes been collected, this has usually been implicit in the text, or evident in the quotations presented by previous researchers. Equally, however, the theorists, whose work is discussed in section three, have developed valuable concepts concerning interaction processes, but have given no detailed indications as to how these might be applied empirically to the study of parental behaviour. Thus, my discussion of the literature falls into two sections. To begin with I examine the relevant British and American empirical contributions. In the final section I discuss the main theoretical bases of an interactionist approach to studying families.

In British sociology much of the empirical work on families has been from a structural-functionalist perspective, and has focused on conjugal rather than parental role relationships.
Also, when it has been studied, parental behaviour has been conceptualised in terms of the parent-effect model. In both the American and British literature little attention has been paid to the effects of children on adult behaviour, whether as parents, spouses or individuals. Usually, the presence of children has been taken for granted, and their effects implicitly acknowledged, but seldom explored in their own right. Additionally, most researchers, arguably, have tended to treat their respondents' statements concerning parental behaviour as facts rather than as social constructions. In this thesis I hope to demonstrate the value of taking this latter approach.

To begin with the British research, any student of family behaviour must consider the early contribution of Elizabeth Bott. The fact that attempts to replicate her work have largely failed does not seem to detract from its continued intuitive appeal some twenty years after initial publication. She suggested that there was a direct relationship between the family's social network and the kind of conjugal role behaviour adopted by the spouses. More specifically, she postulated that:

"The more connected the network, the greater the degree of segregation between the roles of husband and wife. The less connected the network, the smaller the degree of segregation between the roles of husband and wife".

However, although Bott's hypothesis is usually reformulated in a similarly bald structuralist manner, she was herself very concerned with the interplay between personality, interactional

38. Ibid p.60.
and sociological factors. It was not fashionable to refer to "actors' meanings" when she wrote. She was, however, well aware of the importance of subjective interpretations, as is shown by this quotation from the penultimate chapter of her book. She strongly qualified her structural hypothesis by saying:

"But the form of the immediate social environment and the norms of familial roles depend in turn on the personal needs and preferences of the members of the family in relation to a very complex combination of situational forces generated by the total social environment. The total social environment permits considerable choice among several potential arrangements of the immediate environment and of norms; the actual choices made by a particular family are shaped not only by situational factors but also by the personal needs of its members." 39

A critical look at aspects of Bott's work will, I think, illustrate some general points about studying families. For example, although she was aware of the subjective and interactional factors these remain largely implicit in the analysis. Also, she took the conjugal role relationship as a static "given". As such, she was not concerned with it as an ongoing entity being continuously negotiated within the family and affected by intra as well as extra-group factors. Related to this, like many researchers, she took the fact that her respondents were parents

It is interesting to note that her structural hypotheses seem to have held up empirically only where close-knit networks serve as ongoing sources of clearly defined normative prescriptions. (See her "Reconsiderations", Ibid pp.251-258.) As one moves from this extreme, the empirical variations increase and the importance of the interpretative work of actors becomes empirically more "obvious".
as a "given". Thus she did not even strictly control for life-cycle stage or numbers of children. The fact that her families all had children under ten years of age, ranging from one to four in number, perhaps masked several very different internal familial contexts. To put it simply, my own research leads me to suggest that perceptions of the various phases of children's development, and the different needs and demands of varying numbers of children, could be further factors which affect spouses' conjugal and network relationships. Bott did discuss this briefly but, I feel, dismissed it with too little consideration.  

Most of those attempting to replicate Bott's work have ignored the basic point that her concepts were intuitive definitions, albeit based on considerable empirical evidence. Thus, they have carried out their research by testing their own operationalisations of these "intuitive definitions". In addition, basic and difficult questions about the meanings attached by actors to being a husband or wife, mother or father, not to mention child, have been submerged in the wealth of tests of "jointness" and "segregation". Study of such meanings might, in fact, provide understandings of the apparent contradictions in the "jointness-segregation" literature. Barbara Harrell Bond, for example, concluded from her survey in Oxford that there was considerable variation in "segregation" and "jointness" in the four areas of housework, child-care, financial organisation and leisure. She

40. Ibid pp.55-56.
41. This was pointed out by Turner, C., 'Conjugal Roles and Social Networks: A Re-examination of an Hypothesis', Human Relations, 1967, pp.121-130.
felt that this could be related to expectations about male and female roles brought by actors to the marriage. Jennifer Platt found many such contradictions in her analysis of the affluent worker family data, and commented:

"The main substantive conclusion is that there is some reason to be sceptical about the undimensionality of jointness-segregation of conjugal roles even after the possibility that couples may show greater jointness in some respect than in others has been taken into account." 

That different assumptions of researchers have led to different findings about Bott's hypothesis was pointed out by D.M. Toomey. He commented that studies which presented negative findings on the hypothesis have relied almost completely on measures of the domestic task performance. Those, however, which gave some support to it either relied on measures of the social-emotional nature of the marital relationship, or used composite measures of the jointness of the marital relationship. He himself found, like Bott, that generalised questions tended to evoke responses which could be classified as "joint" rather than the more specific questions about particular domestic tasks. His conclusion was as follows:


Incidentally, Ann Oakley has commented that Toomey himself incorporated his own evaluations into his measurements. She pointed out that he classified husbands who "rarely" looked after the children as not making a joint response but if they "rarely" did the ironing then this was a joint response. She commented: "It is difficult not to conclude from this that it is Toomey's opinion that men ought to look after their children, whereas they ought not to do the laundry." Oakley, A., 1974, op.cit., p.163.
"It may be that what is especially important in this matter of the jointness of the conjugal role relationship is the general attitude of each spouse towards the marriage relationship and the feelings of mutuality they have towards one another. These feelings of mutuality are likely to be expressed in a sharing of decisions and a general attitude which emphasises the sharing of tasks in the home."45

From the point of view of this thesis his conclusion has an important implication. He seems to be acknowledging that the meanings attached to family life have a relevance which is not reflected by quantifying aspects of behaviour, whether this be sharing household tasks or engaging jointly in leisure pursuits and meeting friends.

Moving away now from the literature concerned with networks and conjugal roles, other British researchers have made points relevant to my work. Hannah Gavron looked at the conjugal and parental roles of some working class and middle class wives in London.46 She demonstrated that both sets of wives experienced tension by being housebound, looking after small children. There were, however, some interesting class differences in their attitudes to their situation.

Throughout Gavron's work, meanings attached to children were regularly presented in quotations and implicitly referred to in the text. I would suggest that a detailed analysis of such meanings might have further elucidated some of her topics under study. She considered, for example, the changed position of children throughout history and commented: "Today, of course, the child is considered to have full legal, social and psychological

value independently of his parents. Indeed, as far as psychological pressures are concerned the tables may be said to have turned."47 Although Gavron saw ideas about children as affecting their treatment on a macro-social level, she did not, however, extrapolate this finding to family interactions. She mentioned, for instance, that many of the working class wives felt that they should be with their children all the time when they were young.48 This image of children's needs seemed to be different from the predominant middle class view and I would suggest, was perhaps a vital factor behind the different patterns of use of surrogate child-care facilities. The end result was that 44% of the working class wives never went out socially compared with a mere 4% amongst the middle class sample.49 Gavron, however, made little of the potential link between images of children and the mothers' general behaviour.

John and Elizabeth Newson have made a detailed cross-class empirical study of child-rearing behaviour in Nottingham.50 A major qualification of their study, however, is that it is based solely on the reports of mothers. As my own study will show, they may because of this miss some vital points when they draw conclusions about the father's role. Hannah Gavron, arguably, fell into a similar trap. Both the Newsons and Gavron "discovered", for example, highly participant fathers. It seems, though, that they both arrived at this conclusion by questionable means. Gavron

47. Ibid, p.30.
48. Ibid, Ch. 9.
49. Ibid, Ch. 12.
simply asked if the father would do various things with and for the children. The Hewsons asked only very general questions which were unlikely to obtain an accurate assessment of the actual quantity of childcare by the father. There was a further questionable aspect of the Hewson's analysis of fathers' participation. They said that, because some fathers simply had no mid-week time for the children,

"We tried to eliminate the possible bias by rating participation not on an absolute basis of actual time spent by the father in caring for the children, but on the basis of the likelihood of his helping when he was at home, however infrequent this might be."

As I shall argue in this thesis, however, the involvement of the father with his children is a problematical issue in the negotiation of parental behaviour. Spouses employ various mechanisms to sustain belief in his involvement; one of which is the assertion of voluntarism. Belief in involvement is also sustained by the use of strategic gestures which need not be regularly demonstrated, and which often have greater subjective than objective significance for the child-care process. The

51. Gavron, E., 1969, op.cit., p.162. She asked: Does he help with the children? Would he for example (a) walk, (b) feed, (c) get up at night, (d) wash nappies, (e) change nappies? If none of these, what will he do? (my underlining).

52. Newson, J., and Newson, E., 1965, op.cit., p.247. They asked: How much does his father have to do with him? Does he (mark each category often (o), sometimes(s) or never(n)) Feed him? Change him? Play with him? Bath him? Get him to sleep? Attend to him in the night? Take him out without you? If there are other children: Does the father do a lot for some other child?

measurement techniques of both Gavron and the Newsoms perhaps
led them actually to document how their respondents, like
mine, sustained a belief in the "involved father". And, of
course, there could well be a wide discrepancy between beliefs
of this kind and the fact of regular, practical participation
by the father in childrearing.

The Newsoms' reports were, thus, essentially accounts of the
wives' childrearing behaviour and, as such, highly illuminating.
They tended, however, to acknowledge, but not examine analytically
the processes involved in the development of this behaviour. For
example, they stated:

"Fundamentally our principle is that the mother
is the expert on her own child. She knows more about
him than anyone else; she knows about him in more
situations than any one else. Much of her knowledge is
available from no other source."\textsuperscript{54}

This quotation reflects the general tone of their work.
Throughout they presented this "knowledge" as their data and
did not examine, except in an occasional reflective sentence,
how it had been socially constructed. There was often much
more in the quotations they presented than they themselves selected
for comment. Thus they described at length the mothers' disciplinary practices, yet scarcely examined the mothers' motives
for administering discipline; these motives, however, were
implicit in the quotations used in the text.\textsuperscript{55} Equally, when
they considered how mothers dealt with their four year olds, it
was evident that much of their respondents' "knowledge" was
derived from making comparative images of children within the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p.26.
\textsuperscript{55} Newson, J., and Newson, E., 1965, \textit{op.cit.} especially Chapter 4.
family. The Newsoms concerned themselves not with this process but rather with its end results.  

More recent studies in British sociology have concentrated again on the conjugal aspects of family behaviour; and particularly on the relationships between work and family organisation in the middle class. Stephen Edgell looked at "spirailists", and how their career successes and failures directly affected their family lives. Faith Robertson compared and contrasted the work patterns and family lives of some Edinburgh hospital doctors and dentists. The Pahls studied managers and their wives and found a subservience of the wives and family life generally to the husbands' careers. All of these studies suggest that despite the adherence to notions of companionship in middle-class marriages, the realities of the lives of busy managers/professionals and their wives may involve considerable role segregation. Such an observation of apparent contradictions between beliefs and practice led Stephen Edgell to suggest a refocusing on actors' meanings; and to maintain that "the question 'what is shared?' should not be asked simply of actual interests and activities but in addition should concern the couples' views on conjugal roles."  

Ann Oakley's work on housewives contained some perceptive speculations about the actualities of conjugal and parental role divisions and some of the myths which have been developed around them. 61 (In my own work I attempt to go further than this and to describe how couples create and sustain myths pertaining to parental role behaviour.) Oakley was concerned to obtain the housewives' own perceptions and definitions of their work situation. She cast doubt on the concept of increased equality of role division and suggested that the husband's help in some areas of housework and childcare simply "freed" the wife to devote more attention to other areas. She concluded that,

"Modern marriage may be characterised by an equality of status and 'mutuality' between husband and wife, but inequality on the domestic task level is not automatically banished. It remains: there are still two marriages, 'his' and 'hers'." 62

These views accord also with those of the American sociologist, Jessie Bernard. 63

A similar emphasis on studying aspects of family life from the viewpoint of the members themselves has characterised recent work by some postgraduate colleagues in Edinburgh. Using an

61. Oakley, A., 1974, op. cit. See especially chapters Eight and Nine. She was subjected to considerable criticism in the review symposium of her work in Sociology, 1975, pp. 515-518. In this Rosemary Firth reached the following conclusions on the basis of her criticisms: "We seriously need more information on what actually happens within the nuclear family and the precise nature of early socialisation taking place there. Close and careful observation of the household, as the smallest social unit of our society, is certainly the place where this work should begin. But we need sound theory as well as accurate facts. We need to look beneath the surface presented by answers to questionnaires."


interactionist approach, Margaret Jarvie studied a sample of clients at a Marriage Guidance Council. Focusing on these "marriages under stress" she attempted to identify some of the interactional elements involved in the marital careers of the actors involved. In particular, various relationships were suggested between the individual's conception of self and his/her orientation to the marital role. She examined, for example, the potentially different reactions to situations of marital stress between those who held a "position-centred" or "person-centred" orientation. Of particular interest for this thesis was her examination of the kinds of interactional strategies adopted by her respondents in response to their perceived marital difficulties.

The work by Barbara Moyes dealt with pregnancy. She took an essentially Goffmanesque approach and concentrated on how her sample of working class women perceived and managed their changing identity throughout the course of pregnancy and early motherhood. Uncertainty about many aspects of this status passage was the pervasive theme of her thesis. She gave detailed description and analysis of the women's reports about embarrassment, body image and sexual identity, and related these to their behaviour in various interactional settings, most importantly the various medical encounters. In addition, her data concerning images of

65. The "Coping Mechanisms" discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis are similar concepts to Jarvie's "interactional strategies" (Ibid. Chapter 8).
the baby and of motherhood contained many observations pertinent
to my own work on the middle class. Unfortunately, unlike
Margaret Jarvie who took the couple as her unit of analysis,
Barbara Moyes had no direct information about the perceptions of
the men concerning this particular stage in their family
lives.

The tendency in most studies has, in fact, been that marriage
and parenthood have been analytically separated despite the fact
that, for the couples concerned, they were empirically intertwined.
Although their focus has again been more on work and family
relationships, the Rapoports have perhaps moved closest to a
detailed analysis of the interrelationships of the total family
group. Their description and analysis of dual career families
was based on qualitative case studies of a small sample.67 Often,
through rich use of quotations, they presented a detailed picture
of their respondents' interpretation of their work and family
lives. Because these couples were not following conventional
patterns, aspects of family life were revealed which, in other
studies, had been taken-for-granted. For example, their ongoing
interpretative and decision making activities, typical of all
families, were highlighted because, in carving a different
pattern, they themselves had to articulate and "selfconsciously"
reach solutions to everyday problems.

In their analysis the Rapoorts frequently implicitly related
variations in the couples' solutions of work and domestic dilemmas

67. Rapoport, R., and Rapoport, R.N., Dual Career Families, Penguin
Books, 1971. In Chapter Ten I examine some of the points from
their most recent book which are relevant to this thesis.
Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R.N. and Strelitz, Z., with Kew, S.
to their images of children. Also, they related the main area of social disapproval which these couples faced to their non-conventional child-care arrangements. Still, however, some basic conventional assumptions about children's needs were implicit in these couples' arrangements. It was, for example, predominantly the wives who organised surrogate child-care and who stayed off work if the children were ill.

An additional conclusion reached by the Rapoorts in the broader survey, of which "dual career families" was a subsection, concerned the effects of children. They claimed that:

"... the mere fact of having children has a very powerful effect on both men and women, though in different ways. For the highly qualified women that we have surveyed, having a child means a drop not only in actual work participation, but in ambition as well - at least in the short run. For men, this family event seems to have the opposite effect."69

For further substantive background to my work I shall now adopt a wider perspective than simply British sociology and consider first the relevant points which have emerged from studies of parenthood. I conclude this section by looking briefly at the empirically based interactionist literature on families.

Studies of "parenting" abound in the American literature, but these are essentially from the parent-effect point of view. The microsocial studies of parental behaviour have, by and large, tried to relate differences in socialisation processes and their effects on children to, for example, family size or social

68. Ibid. See for example, pp.281-282.
69. Ibid, p.20.
Here they refer to the findings reported amongst others in Fogarty, E.P.; Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R.N., 1971, op.cit.
class. Alice Rossi noted that these perspectives led to major omissions. She commented:

"Coupled with the ample clinical evidence of parental rejection and sometimes cruelty to children, it is all the more surprising that there has not been more consistent research attention to the problem of parental satisfaction, as there has long been on marital satisfaction or work satisfaction." 71

One area where internal family dynamics per se have been the focus of interest has been the study of life-cycle changes. Wesley Burr has summarised the important contributions in this area. 72 He noted that researchers have found changes in the role behaviour of adults in the group to be associated with the pre-children, childrearing and "empty-nest" phases. In this literature the work on the "transition to parenthood" seems to be most relevant to my study of the early childrearing stage. Here, at any rate, we find that children are being in some way acknowledged as having some influence on the behaviour of adults in the group. Alice Rossi made an observation which was also related to this point. She suggested that:

"When pregnancy was likely to follow shortly after marriage, the major transition point in a woman's life was marriage itself. This transition point is increasingly the first pregnancy rather than marriage. 73
Following the work of Le Masters, various researchers have looked at the impact of parenthood.\textsuperscript{74} Earlier works (Le Masters and Dyer) suggested that this was a severe crisis for the adults concerned. Hobbs, however, did not find this to be so; and more recently Russell has emphasised the gratifications as well as the negative aspects of becoming parents. Some of the differences might be explained by the fact that the babies studied were of varying ages. Rossi, for example, suggested that parents of very tiny babies (such as those studied by Hobbs) might be still in a euphoric frame of mind.

Most of these researchers have, however, approached this transition from the structural-functionalist perspective that "the family is an integrated social system of roles and statuses and that adding or removing members will force a major reorganisation of that system."\textsuperscript{75} Although the term itself has been criticised, the notion of "crisis", with its connotations of "disruption", has been implicit in the various studies.

Research designs have tended to structure respondents' thoughts in terms of negative outcomes and effects of children.\textsuperscript{76} This has led to the perpetuation of a range of ideas about effects of children which might not necessarily reflect actors' own interpretations. In addition, the effects of having a child


\textsuperscript{75} Russell, C.S., 1974, \textit{op.cit.}, p.294.

\textsuperscript{76} This point was made by Jacoby, A.F., 'Transition to Parenthood: a Reassessment', \textit{Journal of Marriage and the Family}, 1969, pp.720-727.
were studied without acknowledging that actors' attitudes to children per se might influence how they interpreted these effects. 77

As I have mentioned, other sociological studies of parenthood which do not adhere rigidly to the parent-effect model are hard to find. Only in the work of Lois Meek Stolz do some of the crucial interactive issues seem to have been investigated. 78

Her study of influences on parent behaviour was based on several interviews with thirty nine families in the Stanford area. Her approach was essentially qualitative although results were subsequently quantified. Information was provided about the values, and the instrumental and descriptive beliefs of parents. She also looked at the ways in which parental behaviour was influenced by family members, behaviour settings, previous experiences and communication sources.

Her work is valuable because she emphasised a wider range of influences than is usually considered. She summarised these in her concluding discussion by saying:

77. Jane Hubert has argued, for example, that the mother's ideas and beliefs, and her attitude to pregnancy and birth, affect the early relationship between mother and child. I would suggest that these, along with similar interpretations by the husband, are just some of the factors involved in the formation of images of the child, and the couple's subsequent interpretation of his/her "effects". Hubert, J., 'Social Factors in Pregnancy and Childbirth', in Richards, M.P.M. (Ed.), The Integration of a Child into a Social World, Cambridge University Press, 1974.

"... the way a parent brings up a child depends upon many pressures that impinge upon him. Certain of these pressures are an intrinsic part of the personality of the parent. But the fundamental urges, values and beliefs of any parent may become abeyant because of critical elements in the immediate situation - a mother's fatigue, a visitor in the home, a child running out in the street. And they may be modified by conversations with neighbours, or changed drastically by strict directives from a physician, or rendered less dogmatic by exposure to a variety of ideas in magazines or books." 79

However, although influences on parenthood were thus seen to be complex, she did not treat as problematical the way that her respondents themselves perceived these influences. I would argue that the actual effects of the influences described above must be treated as mediated through the interpretative activities of the actors concerned. In addition, each contextual influence she considered might be defined differently by actors depending on their evaluation of how such perceived stimuli related to their images of themselves and their child. For example, a mother's fatigue might be irrelevant if she saw the child as able to fend for itself, or as not dependent on herself for emotional support or intellectual stimulation.

American family sociology has been much more influenced by the interactionist approach than has British. The theoretical and empirical contributions to this approach were reviewed some time ago by Sheldon Stryker. 80 The basis can be seen in Ernest Burgess' view of the family, as "a unity of interacting personalities." 81 Burgess stressed the importance of members'

79. Ibid, p.278.
conceptions of family roles and of looking at how these were
developed through interactions within the group itself.
Willard Waller qualified Burgess' stress on the internal
dynamics of family groups and suggested that the family be
viewed as a "partially closed causal system". He felt that "in
order to understand the relation of the family to society, we
must describe concrete processes of interaction within the
family group and relate them to larger social processes which
are taking place in the greater society." Waller's major
contributions lay in his discussion of what might now be termed
family "careers", most notably his treatment of courtship and
divorce.

These early theorists stimulated empirical work on the
family in three main areas broadly encompassed under the
interactionist label. The first area was concerned essentially
with the negotiation of meanings within the family and has been
strongly influenced by symbolic interactionist theory. The
second was the investigation of communication patterns within
the family group. (Unlike the first group these researchers
have adopted a primarily quantitative approach.) The third
area was concerned with family problems. A highly selective

82. Waller, W., and Hill, R., The Family: A Dynamic Interpretation,
    New York, Dryden, 1951.

83. The range of areas of interests is reflected in the following
    three anthologies. Handel, G. (Ed.) The Psychosocial Interior of
    (Ed.), Family Roles and Interaction, Rand McNally & Co.,
    Chicago, 1966. Winter, W.D. and Ferreiva, A.J. (Eds.),
    Research in Family Interaction, Science and Behaviour Books,
review of these areas will bring out the main themes in them which have influenced this thesis.

Gerald Handel has been a major contributor to the first area of study. In his work on the psychosocial interior of the family he put forward several important concepts. He commented, for example, on the apparent diversity of family behaviour which could be found within any one "sociological grouping" and felt that researchers should therefore focus on the "formative powers" within families. According to Handel:

"Families do not merely reflect the larger culture and social structure; they create meanings and relationships and individualities, not all of them welcomed by the larger society. Families utilise the broader culture in differential ways, sometimes to their own detriment."84

Handel suggested that researchers should deal with families as wholes. They should obtain data from each member of the family since there was no reason to believe that a family was merely the sum of its segmental relationships. Handel and his colleague Robert D. Hess spelt out as follows the approach to studying families which they themselves had used as a framework. They said:

"In studying a family then it is necessary to investigate both the images which the members hold of one another and the ways in which these images are inter-related. It is necessary to understand how the interaction of the members derives from and contributes to this interrelation of images. The implication of this stance is that interaction cannot be fully understood in its own terms, that, instead, it must be viewed in the context of how the participants define one another as relevant objects."85

Harold Fallding followed a similar conceptual line. He suggested a reversal of the structural approach to studying families. The relevant topic of concern, he felt, was not necessarily how far external factors penetrated family life and affected the behaviour of its members. Rather the researcher must see, "... whether expectations arising internally in the family penetrate into the definition of external roles and reinforce them."  

Moving now to the second area, the study of family communication patterns has been influenced by structural-functionalism as well as interactionism. The work of researchers such as Theodore Mills, Fred Strodtbeck and Jay Haley provided a fascinating basis for the study of patterns of family processes. However, their study methods, such as the field or laboratory experiment are subject to all of the usual validity problems involved in generalising about behaviour from experimentally contrived situations. As Haley himself has asked: "Do the necessary limitations which must be put on family communication for measurement purposes distort the typical patterns of the family more than they reveal them?" My own particular interest in the communication processes of families lies less in the mapping of their typical patterns than in how forms of communication are

67. See Ref. 33.
used by family members often to convey meanings not directly relevant to the immediate interactions.

The interactive effects of family members on one another have been brought out particularly well in the third area of interest: studies of families dealing with a "problem". For example, the social construction of parental reality tends to be highlighted when parents' dealings with an "abnormal" child are studied. It can be suggested that this is because actors face special circumstances which they are not equipped to deal with in a "taken-for-granted" manner.

Important themes have been crisis and pathology. Stressed throughout has been the need for flexibility in familial roles; families who weathered crises and difficulties were those who could adapt. Joan Jackson's work on the impact of alcoholism revealed how the intensity of family interaction meant that it was very difficult for a problem in one area not to spread to another. This complexity of interrelated factors was well shown by her description of the gradual breakdown in all respects of the alcoholic's family responsibilities. Their wives tended to put up with virtually intolerable difficulties in their attempts to contain the problem within the group and keep the family together. At each stage of the breakdown, however, there was a need for re-definition of the situation and of family members; role responsibilities were articulated by their absence. The importance of interpretative activity and negotiated definitions was similarly highlighted in the work on families who tried to

incorporate a mentally ill person into their group, continually rationalising his/her behaviour.\(^{90}\)

The work on scapegoating has also shed light on the complexity of patterns of family interaction.\(^{91}\) A certain family member, for example a child, might be victimised because of difficulties between the husband and wife. Once begun this process was cyclical. The child, through responding to their treatment, might cause problems for the parents. This, in turn, could aggravate their previous difficulties which had been initially expressed by the scapegoating.

3. Theoretical Framework: An Interactionist Approach

This thesis is based on an interactionist approach to studying families. Within this framework my approach is, however, eclectic. I have been influenced by concepts derived from both symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociology, even though theorists have defined aspects of these perspectives as involving fundamentally different views of social behaviour.\(^{92}\) Although I am aware of these contradictions, I also realise that those more informed than I have still not resolved many such conceptual difficulties. This I take as a perhaps somewhat lame


\(^{91}\) Vogel, E.F. and Bell, N.W., 'The Emotionally Disturbed Child as the family Scapegoat', in Bell, N.W. and Vogel, E.F. (Eds.), A Modern Introduction to the Family, the Free Press of Glencoe, 1960, pp.362-397.

\(^{92}\) See for example, Freidel, H.P. (Ed), Recent Sociology No. 2, Collier Macmillan Ltd., London, 1970, Introduction. Using Thomas P. Wilson's terminology he saw symbolic interactionism as rooted in the 'normative paradigm' which assumes a stable system of symbols and meanings known and shared by members of a society. Phenomenological sociology in general, and ethnomethodology in particular, are rooted in the "interpretative" paradigm which sees the sense of a social structure as emerging only from the mutual process of defining and redefining the relevant or "meaningful" elements of situations.
justification of my use of various interactionist concepts in a
pragmatic manner. Before outlining the main theoretical points
which have influenced my work, a brief aside is necessary about a
concept which I have found particularly difficult.

(a) The concept of "role" - an aside

The attraction of an interactionist approach to studying
families stemmed from my observation that structural-functionalists
had insufficiently emphasised the relative precariousness and
fluidity inherent in developing family roles. In addition,
whilst they had spelled out the constraints on action and the
basic social skills with which actors approach family life, there
were major omissions concerning members' perceptions and
interpretations of these factors. As Blumer argued:

"... the social action of people is treated as an
outward flow or expression of forces playing on them
rather than acts which are built up by people through
their interpretation of the situations in which they
are placed."

Adopting an interactionist approach required, however, a
formulation of the concept of family roles which stressed their
"creative" rather than "given" nature. Various researchers have
contributed to this task in family sociology. Hess and Handel
stated that family members -

"... are engaged in evolving and mutually adjusting their
images of one another. This mutual adjustment takes
place in interaction, and it is, in part, the aim of
interaction. Since complete consensus is most improbable,
life in a family - as elsewhere - is a process ongoing in a
situation of actual or potential instability. Pattern is
reached, but it can never be complete, since action is always
unfolding and the status of family members is undergoing
change."

93. Blumer, H., 'Society as Symbolic Interaction', in Manis, J.G. & Meltzer,
B.N. (Eds.), Symbolic Interactionism: A Reader in Social
Sheldon Stryker added to this notion the idea that family roles refer essentially to the social relationships within particular family groups. He claimed that "to use the term 'role' is necessarily to refer to an interpersonal relation". Thus, in a two parent family one cannot analyse the behaviour of, for example, the father except with reference to that of the mother and the child. Further, if one accepts Aaron Cicourel's suggestion that "the more spontaneous or intimate the relationship, and hence the interaction, the less 'institutionalised' the behaviour of each", one arrives at an extremely dynamic interpretation of family roles.

On such a basis the meanings of "role" relevant to this thesis on parenthood may be summarised as follows:

(i) Parental role behaviour is relatively fluid.
(ii) The development of parental roles is an ongoing problematical process.
(iii) Parental behaviour is meaningfully generated with reference to other family members.
(iv) The institutional constraints on family behaviour are extremely generalised. Given this, scope for variation is wide.

97. This kind of notion accords with Anselm Strauss's view of "concerns" which are "those bedrock agreements about the most generally accepted goals of the organisation". In his study of psychiatric hospitals these minimal bases of consensus were, for example, "to cure or treat the mentally ill". Strauss, A., *et al.*, *Psychiatric Idologies and Institutions*, Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan Ltd., London, 1964, Chapter One.
Through their negotiating processes members continuously construct, sustain and reformulate working definitions of behaviour perceived as appropriate to their mutually-held family reality.

Therefore, as in these terms parental "roles" are treated as problematical and dynamic, I have chosen throughout the thesis to refer simply to parental "behaviour". The term "role" seems to have rather too definite connotations for my purposes. In fact, using Max Weber for theoretical clarity, what I am really talking about is parental "conduct". However, whilst I accept Weber's definitional precision, I found "conduct" rather too pompous a term in the context of my work.

(b) Theoretical contributions to interactionism

The interactionist approach has its roots in the work of W.I. Thomas, G.H. Mead and Herbert Blumer. Thomas stressed the importance of definitions of the situation for meaningful social action. Sheldon Stryker summarised his argument as follows:

"Persons frequently enter situations in which their behaviour is problematic. Before they can act, they must define the situation, that is, represent it to themselves in symbolic terms. The products of this defining behaviour are termed 'definitions of the situation'."

98. Conduct or "handeln" is the term used to define social action. "Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course." Weber, M., The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation, The Free Press, Collier Macmillan (5th printing), 1968, pp.88 & 89.

Mead saw the development of the social behaviour of the individual and his personality as emerging from, and dependent on ongoing social acts. Conceptions of the self and others were validated through social interaction.

Herbert Blumer has been perhaps the greatest modern proponent of such concepts in sociology. He too saw social action as dependent on human beings' interpretations of meanings. These meanings were social products which were created, affirmed and refined through the defining activities of individuals as they interacted. For Blumer the study of society must be rooted in understanding actors' interpretations of reality. He said:

"People - that is, acting units - do not act toward culture, social structure or the like; they act toward situations. Social organisation enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations."

Recent work in sociology has stressed the problematical nature of the development and acquisition of meanings. It has its basis in the work of Alfred Schutz. His concepts are referred to, where relevant, in the main body of the thesis. I shall, however, briefly mention his main influences on my approach at this point. First of all, Schutz emphasised that man lives in an "intersubjective world of culture", and that, "from the outset, the world of everyday life is a universe of

significance to us, that is, a texture of meaning which we have
to interpret in order to find our bearings within it and come
to terms with it." Subjective interpretation of meaning
is thus a basic feature of everyday life. According to Helmut
Wagner, Schutz showed that, "even the socially most stereotyped ideas
only exist in the minds of individuals who absorb them, interpret
them on the basis of their own life situation, and give them a
personal tinge." 103

Secondly, in order to go about his everyday life man is
continuously engaged in constructing "course of action" types.
These are, however, taken-for-granted and seldom consciously
examined. Thirdly, by contrast, the interpretative activities
of social scientists can be seen as "selfconscious" second order
constructs. Their accounts inevitably deal with the "because"
motives of actors which are developed ex-post factum. These are
qualitatively different from the "in-order-to" motives which are
the actor's subjective projections of the state of affairs to
be brought about by his actions. "In-order-to" motives are
thus realised in action. Following on from these points,
Michael Phillipson paraphrased Schutz's main requirements for
sociology as follows:

"Social action flows from and is sustained through
meaning - that is, from the first order constructs through
which the actor makes sense of his world. As the life-
world comprises such meanings, sociology, if it is to
provide organised knowledge of social reality must come to
terms with the meanings from which social action emerges." 104

103. Wagner, H.R. (Ed.) Alfred Schutz. On Phenomenology and Social
104. Phillipson, M., 'Phenomenological Philosophy and Sociology',
Chapter 6 in Filmer P., et al (1972), New Directions in
Berger and Kellner applied several of the above mentioned concepts to the field of family sociology. Their consideration of marriage and the construction of reality provided some stimulating theoretical points even though the potential empirical application of these was not clarified. Their work provided a valuable framework for my own study of parenthood. It is fitting, therefore, that a brief consideration of their arguments should draw this chapter to a close.

Berger and Kellner were interested in the social processes which construct, maintain and modify "a consistent reality that can be meaningfully experienced by individuals." They suggested that one of the important areas in which such nomos building occurred was marriage. In terms of my respondents' perceptions of their family situations and particularly "unit feeling", it could be suggested that parenthood provides a further benchmark to which the individual can orient his existence. The individual achieves his sense of the world essentially through validating experiences with significant others. Berger and Kellner said that this could be seen as an ongoing "conversation". Perhaps this term evokes too specific images of forms of communication even though they said that such validating processes occurred not "so much by explicit articulation, but precisely by taking the definitions silently

107. See discussion of this in Chapter Three of my thesis.
for granted and conversing about all conceivable matters on this taken-for-granted basis.\footnote{108}

For Berger and Kellner then, the marital state was thus seen as providing a "significant other" of major subjective importance. I would suggest that, for my couples, the other spouse was also of such predominant significance in the everyday validation of parental behaviour. In the context of my respondents' perceptions of their particular situations parenthood only made sense as mutual sets of behaviour.

Berger and Kellner noted that spouses do not have a shared past, even though their pasts may have similar structures. To me this implies that spouses cannot, therefore, take it for granted that they interpret their mutually-held realities in the same way, and that, consequently, they must engage in continuous interpretative negotiations. Similarly, when they experience parenthood, with all its concomitant uncertainties, they must continually construct and reaffirm their views of this existence.

Whether it was historically accurate or not, Berger and Kellner defined the family in our society as more privatised than in the past when it was "firmly embedded in a matrix of wider community relationships."\footnote{109} To them this historical change had increased the amount of effort which each couple had to put into constructing their family world. Societal prescriptions had become more ambiguous and therefore less easily and uniformly interpreted. Nowadays "each family constitutes

\footnote{109. \textit{Ibid}, p.56.}
its own segregated subworld, with its own controls and its own closed conversation."\textsuperscript{110} Whilst the couple might approach marriage (and parenthood) with some taken-for-granted culturally derived preconceptions, "these relatively empty projections now have to be actualised, lived through and filled with experiential content by the protagonists."\textsuperscript{111}

If one accepts their view, then this again supports the idea that the development of parental behaviour is most profitably studied as the result of interpretative activities negotiated within the nuclear group. If this is the \textit{real} reality, then this is where the researcher must direct his/her attention.

To conclude, I derived a guiding framework for my research from a consideration of the contributions to the interactionist approach. Basically this involved treating parenthood not in terms of actors slotting into culturally prescribed roles, but rather as the development of behaviour through the mutual interpretation of family life and the negotiation of subjective meanings.\textsuperscript{112} The main way in which a researcher can try to apprehend such meanings is by focusing the actors' perceptions and interpretations of their mutually-held realities. This thesis is the end product of the analysis of one such attempt. The methodology must therefore be seen as the starting point for the account I subsequently present. It is to this that I turn in Chapter Two.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, p.56.  
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, p.58.  
\textsuperscript{112} Obviously my study is of two parent families and the overall perspective relies on that assumption. A study of the one parent family might unearth similar subjective meanings but with different kinds of validation processes at work.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

1. Outline of the Empirical Study

This thesis is based on a piece of qualitative empirical research which, in its various stages, lasted for approximately two years from mid 1971 to mid 1973. Twenty two middle class couples took part in the fifteen months panel study. Fifteen other couples, however, assisted in the preliminary research stages. Prior to the panel study three minimally structured discussion groups were convened, tape-recorded and analysed. Subsequently, a set of "opening questions" was devised and practice interviews were carried out with five couples. These were also tape-recorded and analysed.

It was decided to recruit a small sample of middle class couples, each with two children, one of whom was aged three years. The majority of respondents were suggested by eight playgroup leaders who also made the initial approaches to the couples concerned. If both husband and wife expressed interest they were then contacted by letter suggesting that I call round to explain about the project. At this stage twenty four couples agreed to take part. After these initial meetings one couple withdrew from the project. Another couple moved from the area following the completion of preliminary interviews.

The remaining twenty two couples took part in a total of five interviews spaced out at approximately three monthly intervals. Two

---

1. Throughout the thesis I use the term 'sample' to describe my respondents as a group. Although I controlled for characteristics such as family size, ages of children and socio-economic status, the sample was not, however, randomly selected in the conventional statistical sense. My reasons for this are explained in this chapter.
of these interviews were with the husbands and wives individually; one was carried out by the couples themselves without my being present; and the final two interviews were with both spouses together. All of the interviews were only minimally structured. They were tape-recorded, and transcription and analysis was ongoing throughout the fieldwork period. Further grounded analysis was completed after finishing the fieldwork.

2. General methodological orientations: a qualitative approach

Blumer has written: "Respect the nature of the empirical world and organise a methodological stance to reflect that respect." 2

Early in the planning of this research project my interest in the meanings which actors attached to family life and their interpretative activities led me to favour the development of a qualitative methodology. I was also unconvinced that structured questioning of respondents allowed the wealth of meanings in this area of behaviour to be tapped. In addition, the use of the "one-off" standardised survey interview technique seemed to me to be inappropriate for obtaining valid data about the highly personalised and often sensitive domain of family life. I felt that even if respondents wished to be as open as possible about their family lives, standardised procedures were not the most satisfactory means of enabling this to happen. These reasons, combined with the limitations of time and resources inevitable in a one person Ph.D. project, led to my decision to carry out a panel study of a small sample of husbands and wives, using a minimally structured interviewing technique. The various stages of the fieldwork will be discussed and evaluated in the main body of this chapter. First, however, I

shall briefly mention some of the important points which led me to favour a qualitative methodology.

Whilst the use of qualitative methods has been regularly cited as a valuable precursor or addition to quantitative work, it is only in the past decade that it has been increasingly advocated as of undeniable value in its own right. Some eminent sociologists, notably Herbert Blumer and C. Wright Mills, have, however, been longstanding critics of the pitfalls and implications of concentrating on the so-called "objective" quantitative methods. The more recent trends, though, have paralleled the development of the various kinds of phenomenological sociology which stress the importance of actors' meanings and the way humans create and structure everyday life. Qualitative research was classically attacked for its possible biases and lack of "objectivity". Recent writers have, however, pointed out that this rests on the false premise that the more formalised sociological methods are "value free".


5. I use this general descriptive term with caution as I am aware of the proliferation of various camps which adhere broadly to this perspective. I am not, however, sufficiently familiar with the particularities of their debates to engage in any detailed analysis of this important branch of Sociology.

Howard Becker has levelled some interesting criticisms against the traditional dominance of quantitative methods in the social sciences. He maintained that one result of this has been the increasing emphasis on "reliable" machine-like techniques and a neglect of concern for the "valid" study of empirical reality. (It can be argued that, in any case, the concurrent maximisation of reliability and validity is problematical.) Becker said that the emphasis on reliability tended to result in problems being transformed into ones which could be dealt with in a machine-like fashion; or, and most typically, in decisions not to tackle those problems which did not lend themselves to such a transformation. Family sociology has been as guilty in this respect as any other branch of the discipline. Bernard Farber pointed out, for example, that "apparently the ubiquitous presence of family groups with somewhat similar composition - parents and children - throughout society facilitates the use of quantitative techniques and simplifies data gathering."
Thus it would seem that, as in other branches of the discipline, family sociologists "over-emphasise the rigorous testing of hypotheses and de-emphasise the discovering of those concepts and hypotheses which are relevant for the substantive area being researched." Qualitative methods appear, at this stage, to offer a means of gathering grounded information about empirically valid concepts, and a way of re-examining some of the basic assumptions implicit in much previous research. To this end Glaser and Strauss have suggested that the research process should be refocussed on the generation rather than the testing of theory. They said that, in this way, "grounded theories can emerge which, instead of forcing data into preconceived 'objective' reality, seek to mobilise as a research tool the categories which the participants themselves use to order their experience." As far as possible qualitative research should treat concepts and variables as problematical, and seek their meanings through getting to know the ways in which they are perceived by the subjects themselves. It has been suggested that, in part, this can be seen as an elevation of Robert Merton's "serendipity pattern." As Severyn Bruyn commented:

"What Merton calls surprising and unanticipated datum in traditional empirical studies is actually insight produced unintentionally through the researcher's unconscious encounter with a process which has become rationalised in the methods of phenomenology and participant observation. The researcher discovers new meanings in his data as he knowingly participates in the processes of social communication which reflect the symbolic life of the people he studies."

Unfortunately, whilst sharpening up one's critical approach to fieldwork, the advocates of qualitative methodology are still themselves at the stage of suggesting possible fieldwork strategies and tactics. Garfinkel tried to reveal underlying assumptions by violating tenets of "acceptable behaviour". Cicourel developed a complex procedure of "controlled indefinite triangulation" which involved feeding back to respondents concepts which they themselves generated earlier in the research. Glaser and Strauss suggested that there should be a systematic choice and concurrent study of several comparison groups. This, they maintained, would build replication into the research and facilitate theory development as the researcher's attention would be quickly drawn to similarities and differences among the groups. Such suggestions were certainly helpful in my fieldwork decisions but basically advice about qualitative methodology, whilst theoretically pleasing, remains vague in its practical tenets.

17. A typically frustrating methodological statement is the following approach suggested by George Feetham. He said that: "... cooperative encounter or cooperative exploration, involves exploring the other's world with his helpful co-operation in a prolonged and extended dialogue involving the systematic probing, exploring and interrogation of the other." Feetham, G., 'Ethnomethodology and Phenomenology', Social Research, 1969, pp.500-520.
Essentially, therefore, my fieldwork proceeded very much on an exploratory basis, guided by a rigorous appreciation of the interactional complexities involved in the research situation. My chief guiding concern was to discover the best ways of enabling respondents to tell me about their family lives in as free and frank a manner as possible. The following discussion of methodology is therefore slanted towards the human relations aspect of doing social research.

3. Background to the Panel Study

Following preliminary reading some basic themes of interest had emerged. In Chapter One I indicated my growing preference for an interactionist approach to studying families even though my theoretical inclinations were, and remain, somewhat eclectic within that broad perspective. I wanted to examine the effects of children on parents since I saw this as an important omission in the conjugal roles literature. At that point I had aims of looking at the complex links between the child, its parents, and their conjugal behaviour. (In fact, as the fieldwork and analysis progressed I increasingly focused on parental behaviour.) My interest was in middle class families since these were, at that stage, much neglected in British sociology. I was also persuaded by the literature on laboratory experiments that families under study behave differently outwith their home environment. I decided therefore that my research should take place in respondents' homes.

18. As discussed in Chapter One, the work by the Rapoports, 1971, op.cit., the Fahls, 1971, op.cit. and Edgell, 1970, 1972, op.cit., has now gone some way towards redressing this imbalance.

19. See, for example, O'Rourke, J., 'Field and Laboratory: The Decision Making Behaviour of Family Groups in two experimental conditions', Sociometry, 1963, pp.422-435.
(a) **Discussion Groups**

These various ideas had obviously, however, been generated simply through reading. Since I was already moving towards a desire to present actors' meanings rather than to test hypotheses, I decided that some early empirical experience was vital. Some discussion groups were therefore convened. The aim was to see if any of my initial interests, primarily the importance of the effects of children, were of relevance to the kinds of families I hoped to study.

At this stage I learned some invaluable methodological lessons. I approached the recruitment of participants with some trepidation having been made aware of potential difficulties by, for example, the reported experiences of Elizabeth Bott. My fears were born out. Two lecturers at adult evening classes in nursing studies and psychology kindly explained my project to their pupils, and asked for volunteers. Although some members expressed an interest, no-one actually came forward out of a potential population of approximately one hundred. Subsequently two friends and one sociology colleague offered to help. They asked some of their neighbours and acquaintances and twelve couples were recruited with the greatest of ease. I was aware of the possible biases involved in using friends as contact agents. In this pilot phase, however, it had been a necessary expedient. Also I had learned that, to recruit the sample proper, I needed 'links' who were less anonymous to the families concerned than had been the lecturers.

---

Two discussion groups of four and five couples respectively were held in friends' houses. One group of four couples was held in a room at the University. I started the evening by introducing myself and the couples to each other, and then gave a brief resume of my work to date and the reasons for convening the groups. I also explained that I wished to tape-record the discussion for the sake of accurate recall but would not do this if anyone objected. One or two couples expressed self-consciousness about being recorded but no-one refused. This was methods lesson number two. There was no reason to be afraid to ask to use a tape-recorder. Subjects accepted that it was the best way of obtaining an accurate record of their words and, in fact, self-consciousness disappeared after about five minutes. I found that some jokes about how different voices sounded on a recorder definitely eased rather than accentuated this self-consciousness.

I found the literature on convening and conducting informal discussion groups to be somewhat sparse. I had, however, come across the work of Carl Rogers and attempted to apply some of his techniques. My aim was to intervene as little as possible in the discussion. If I had to intervene then I simply reformulated and fed back a statement made previously by one of the subjects themselves. In fact the conversation seldom flagged and couples talked at length about various aspects of family life, both in general and personal terms.

---

The discussions were transcribed verbatim and recurrent themes or interesting issues were discussed with my supervisors. Although I had no choice in the matter, I felt that transcription by the researcher herself was intrinsically valuable as it offered an extra opportunity to relive and reflect upon the discussions. These early consultations with supervisors also revealed the importance of my having been physically present at the fieldwork. My replies to their queries and comments often took the form of further explaining a quotation from a subject by supplying more information about the context of the statement, and relevant gestures, expressions or personal details about the individual concerned. I became very aware of the indexicality of statements and the amount of taken-for-granted knowledge of the researcher who has actually carried out the fieldwork. This is part of the feeling well described by Glaser and Strauss when they said:

"The fieldworker knows that he knows, not only because he’s been there in the field and because of his careful verification of hypotheses, but because 'in his bones' he feels the worth of his final analysis. He has, in fact, discovered a substantive theory through inductive as well as deductive effort."  

Out of the analysis and discussions some tentative themes emerged and methodological decisions were taken. Basically I became more interested in the importance of subjects’ definitions of one another in family life, and in the social construction of reality. The discussion groups, I noted, were characterised by a search through conversation for some common ground and reassurance that they were all following similar courses of

action. This applied within the couple situation as well as the group situation. I also observed that this process often involved what seemed to be misplaced agreements or agreements reached on the basis of apparently inadequate information. It was their belief that they "agreed" which was the important factor. It could, however, be suggested that ideas and statements about potential behaviour were being continually evolved on the basis of "objectively" unclear and inadequate information. At certain points, subjects simply decided that they "understood" what their spouse or the other discussants "meant". I also became fascinated by the ways in which subjects dealt with one another's expressed tensions about family life. This perhaps led later to my interest in "coping mechanisms". Other embryonic issues of interest at this point were the social definitions of time and, most importantly, the observation that subjects constantly justified their actions by referring to what children are, want or need. Methodologically I was reassured by the immense amount of information generated by a minimally structured technique. Tape-recording was now viewed as essential. I had gained experience of minimally directive prompting techniques. Finally, I began to appreciate that respondents gave information about themselves at many different levels and that 'deep' material about beliefs and ideas could be revealed indirectly by asking them to talk about definite substantive areas of behaviour.

(b) Practice Interviews

Following the discussion groups I then decided that my interview technique would be as minimally structured as possible. Some general "opening questions" were devised which aimed simply to focus respondents' attention on a broad area of interest. Within this context they would subsequently be allowed considerable flexibility to develop themes which seemed relevant to their own particular situation. To a certain extent this was a more flexible version of the "focused interview". The "focus" was, however, broader than that outlined by Merton and Kendall.

Practice interviews were carried out with five couples, three of whom had taken part in the discussion groups. The other two couples were known to me prior to the research. I was not particularly concerned with "testing" questions as such but rather with seeing whether my "openers" stimulated respondents to talk. The main aim was, however, to practise my interviewing technique. Prior to this research I had only had experience of much more structured interviewing. The couples involved were told that the main purpose of the exercise was to practise interview techniques. Individual and joint interviews were carried out using the same set of 'opening questions'. Time limitations led to the experiment of leaving the tape recorder with two of the couples to carry out their

24. A revised form of these questions provided the basis of interviews 1, 2 and 3 with the sample proper. Details of all of the interview guides are given in Appendix 1.

joint interview alone. This tactic was later incorporated into the panel study proper. On completion of the interviews I explained and discussed with the couples my ideas and intentions for the main body of the research. Their comments were helpful and this further encouraged me to believe that I was looking at themes which were empirically valid and relevant to couples similar to those whom I would be studying.

Following transcription, analysis and discussion of these practice interviews certain cautionary points emerged. Firstly, I was made very aware of the interactional pressures in the interview by respondents trying to "draw me in" to their comments and discover my own views. One respondent, reacting against my unwillingness to interact, remarked that it was very difficult to treat me "just like a loudspeaker on the wall". I was to become more aware of this as the research progressed and I developed various tactics to avoid such adverse reactions. This problem is particularly acute in qualitative research as, by giving up the rigid structuring of the interview situation, the researcher is also relaxing 'control' over the respondent. The subject is being encouraged to 'converse' in what turns out to be a somewhat false one-way conversation. Secondly, I discovered that respondents seemed to expect to have the interview structured for them. They needed constant reassurance that their answers were relevant to my interests. Conventionally, giving specific answers to specific questions presumably provides some such reassurance. As Cicourel has pointed out, though, this by no means indicates that the respondent defines the question in the same way as was
intended by the researcher. The broader the question the more difficult it was for subjects to feel that they were giving "appropriate" answers. By the time I came to the panel study I had therefore appreciated the need to assume a very positive reassurance role. This developed into the tactic of appearing to agree with all of respondents' statements. Difficulties associated with this tactic will be discussed later.

Thirdly, some respondents themselves emphasised that their statements about their family were often very much influenced by the recent context of events. I hoped that by seeing respondents several times throughout the year this kind of bias would be evened out. My early awareness of this, however, led to the opening of subsequent interviews by encouraging respondents to tell me what had been happening recently and since previous interviews. During this part of the interview I was able to gain an impression of the current "mood" in the household.

My field notes at the time also showed the early stages of some later substantive interests.

(i) Respondents emphasised that there were no rigid rules one could lay down about family life.

(ii) I gained an early impression that couples wanted to stress that the wife had the worst of the family bargain and that this was compensated for in various ways.

(iii) "Spending time" with children emerged as a problematical issue.

(iv) Respondents talked a lot about marriage as a joint responsibility.

(v) I noticed that experience with one child was compared with his/her sibling to explain why a piece of parental behaviour had been developed.

4. Setting up the Panel Study

By the time that I came to recruit a sample I had, therefore, already had practical experience of the kind of methodology I favoured and was also developing some empirically grounded ideas. From the point of view of learning how to cope with the fieldwork situation this had been invaluable preparation. The gauche interpersonal mistakes of an inexperienced fieldworker are best experienced in such preparatory stages.

(a) Decisions about the sample

Equipped with some preliminary confidence and having learnt some basic lessons I then set about recruiting the sample proper. I had decided to focus on a small sample of middle class couples, each with two children. I defined socio-economic status in terms of husband and wife's occupation, according to the Registrar General's classification. I also took into account life style factors such as home ownership and area of residence. Accordingly I approached playgroup leaders who worked in potentially appropriate areas. Four contacts lived and worked near three of the new middle class estates just outside Edinburgh. The rest lived and worked in potentially suitable areas within the city. I abandoned

27. I wished to obtain information about sibling interaction and decided that I would be best able to deal with such data if the study was limited to two child families.


29. Details of the personal and S.E.S. characteristics of respondents are presented in Appendix 4.
an initial idea of studying couples with older children whom I could also interview because I felt that this provided an overcomplex challenge for a small project. I decided that each couple should have one child aged about three years. This was chosen as the pivot age for one of the children because, theoretically, they are at that point still the full time responsibility of their parents. Also it seemed that three years was an interesting age in terms of child development. The total dependence of infancy should be over and the child is acquiring a certain amount of independence of his/her parents, often challenging their authority.\textsuperscript{30} The other child could be either older or younger. I was slightly interested in sex-typing at this point and decided that I would hope to get a mix of gender combinations in each sibling group but that this did not need to be controlled.

My most important 'control' was that both husbands and wives should be equally interested in taking part in the study. I did not want to do the kind of 'wives' sociology' of which family research has been accused.\textsuperscript{31} The Rapoorts have, I feel rightly, argued that the couple should be the unit of analysis.\textsuperscript{32} Lyle Larson felt in fact that "The most apparent weakness in family research is the reliance on the response of one family member. The findings ... are often based on college student samples and/or the responses of wives."\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{footnotes}


\textsuperscript{32} Rapoport, R., Rapoport, R.N. and Thiessen, V., 1974, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{33} Larson, L.E., 1974, \textit{op.cit.}

\end{footnotes}
(b) Making contact

My experience in recruiting discussion group participants had impressed on me the value of finding "link" contacts who could vouch in an informal manner for the credentials of the researcher. I noted that it had also been found that membership in a special interest group facilitated respondent involvement. As I already had three acquaintances who were playgroup leaders and who had offered assistance, this seemed a promising source of contacts. These acquaintances both suggested respondents and also introduced me to five other playgroup leaders who were co-operative. I met them all individually and explained my interests in full. They knew many relevant details about the various families who used their services and they filtered out couples who both satisfied my control criteria and whom they thought would be interested in taking part. In all, sixteen couples were recruited through playgroups.

I feel that bias involved in this kind of approach was minimal since from each playgroup, there were in fact only two or three couples who fell into all of the appropriate categories. The bias involved in the playgroup leader's assessment of the couple's potential interest was only to my advantage as this eliminated potentially wasted time dealing with reluctant participants. By and large I feel that the playgroup leaders tended to suggest any families who might be suitable as they wanted to help me, and so few were completely appropriate. Also, they occasionally suggested a couple and added a qualification.

that one of the partners was, for example, rather reticent or a little difficult to "get on with".

The remaining eight couples were recruited through other "link" contacts. Two of these were early members of the panel study and one was the acquaintance of a colleague. This was made necessary by the pressures to complete the sample. The use of a different "link" seemed at that stage to be of minor importance in comparison to proceeding with the research. All of these eight couples in fact either currently sent their children to playgroups or had concrete plans to do so in the near future. An illustration of the fact that essentially similar couples were recruited through both kinds of "links" is that a set of next-door-neighbours was suggested to me. One of these families had been recruited through a playgroup leader and the other, completely independently, through a different "link".

In total this part of the sample recruitment stretched over a four month period. Whilst I was making contact with "link" people the next phase of recruitment was being undertaken. Each "link" was asked to mention to potential participants that an acquaintance was looking for couples to take part in a Ph.D. project about families. Although the "link" knew a lot about the research she had agreed to say very little, except that it was about family relationships but would in no way be of any embarrassment. Whichever spouse was first contacted had to

35. Fear of having to talk about very intimate details has been suggested as one reason for subjects being reluctant to take part in family research. This is perhaps why many researchers have focused on the ostensibly less sensitive areas such as kinship. This point was made by Adams, B., *Kinship in an Urban Setting*, Chicago, Markham, 1968, p.10.
talk the matter over with his/her spouse and the "link" stressed that both must be interested as several interviews would be involved. Self selection is often cited as a possible source of bias. By definition, however, a panel study requires co-operative subjects who will stay for the duration of the research. I felt that such willingness to co-operate was so basic that it was only sensible to acknowledge this and incorporate it as a form of "control" into the research design.

When names of interested couples were reported back to me I then contacted them myself by letter, enclosing a reply paid envelope. I introduced myself to them and explained that X ("link") had told me that they were interested in hearing more about my project. I asked if I might visit them for this purpose. Thus, by this stage, each couple had now had two opportunities to say "no" - once to the "link" and again to my letter. They were deliberately given a further opportunity to refuse at the end of my first visit to their homes. This was, I think, invaluable groundwork in establishing successful involvement. No couple was in any way unduly pressured to take part and, having made their voluntary commitment, all respondents completed the whole panel study. In fact, all twenty four couples who were contacted by letter agreed to see me. Only one couple dropped

36. This letter is reproduced in Appendix 2.
out at this stage,\textsuperscript{37} and, unfortunately, one other couple moved from the area after preliminary interviews.

(c) Meeting the respondents for the first time

The initial visits to couples' homes to tell them about the project provided a further cautionary lesson. I remember vividly the first evening of making these visits. I confidently arranged four visits, thinking that, as they all lived near to one another, I could spend about half an hour with each couple and thus accomplish a reasonable evening's work. In fact, however, I began the visits at 7:00 p.m. and finally arrived home, exhausted, at about 1:00 a.m. I had become progressively later for each pre-arranged meeting as the evening wore on! I had been received with great friendliness in each household and had been pressed to accept drinks and coffees. In such a

\textsuperscript{37} Lewis Dexter has pointed out that "refusals will be cut down if one tries to understand why prospective respondents are uncomfortable about promising an interview." Dexter, L.A., Elite and Specialized Interviewing, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, pp.32-33. A brief resume of my one case of refusal seems therefore to be appropriate.

As, on my initial visit this couple had seemed interested and friendly, I was somewhat puzzled when the wife subsequently phoned to cancel the first interview. Her stated reasons made me realise that this partly a case where my deliberate vagueness about the project had led them to believe that I was interested in studying the children rather than the family as a whole. They had become reluctant to be involved when they realised that I was also focusing on the husband and wife.

Another reason for their withdrawal was later suggested to me by a couple who lived nearby and who in fact took part in the project. When all of the interviews were completed and we were chatting about research in general this couple told me about the various adverse reactions they had received from people to whom they had mentioned their involvement in such a project. One reaction had been that one should not tell a stranger details about one's home life. Another reaction, however, which I was able to deduce came from the couple who had withdrawn, was that they regarded it to be a form of complacent self indulgence to sit and talk about one's family life. I think that this latter reason for non-participation may be more important than has been appreciated by other researchers. During the project itself, for example, this suggestion was reinforced by respondents frequently remarking on the boringness and "smugness" of their conversation about their families.
situation it is very difficult to abruptly curtail the visit after exactly half an hour. In a different way I was feeling the normal interactive pressures also experienced during the practice interviews. I rapidly appreciated that I personally was unable to deal with friendly, interested people in any sort of detached, "objective" manner. I am therefore completely in agreement with Maurice Stein's comment that "deep rapport has its perils, but to treat the norm of impersonality as sacred, even if it impairs the informants' co-operation, would seem to be an inexcusable form of scientific ritualism".  

Although all respondents were understanding and co-operative about my wishing at that stage to give as few details as possible about my research interests, they were, nevertheless, interested in talking to me about other subjects. I had decided previously that I should, in any case, be completely open about my own personal circumstances, i.e. that I was intending to get married the following year. Although I did not go into the great personal details which have been advocated by Fred Blum, I would agree with him that the giving of some such information,

"... seems a much smaller risk than the bias which intrudes into the interviews from conscious or unconscious reactions to the interviewer and to the questions asked. It is naive to assume that biases due to the personality of the interviewer is somehow stereotyped and responded to accordingly. And each question evokes a certain emotional reaction which affects the interviewee's answers."  


39. This topic is dealt with in detail in Blum, F.H., 'Getting Individuals to give Information to the Outsider', Journal of Social Issues, 1952, pp.35-42.
During the first visit I mentioned the following points.

(i) I explained that I was doing a Ph.D. in sociology of the family and that they would be assisting with the fieldwork.

(ii) I described my work to date, mentioning the discussion groups and practice interviews.

(iii) I talked a little about sociology of the family, explaining that I had chosen ordinary middle class families as these had been little studied. I pointed out that one could either interview a lot of families once or a few families several times and that I had chosen to do the latter because I felt it was the best way of getting valid information.

(iv) I told them that I was interested in the everyday interactions of the family. My interest was primarily in the husband/wife relationship and I was not simply focusing on the children. I explained that other studies had looked at people's relationships with their kin and how various jobs affected family life; but that I was looking at the internal relationships of the group. I stressed that I was not testing hypotheses but wanted simply to obtain as much information as possible, no matter how mundane, about their everyday lives and the things which were relevant and important to them.

(v) I apologised for my vagueness about my specific study interest, and explained that this was simply an attempt to avoid either biasing what they said or making them
too self conscious. They all accepted this as being perfectly reasonable.

(vi) I told them why they had been contacted through the various "link" persons. I said that I wanted to talk to them informally in their homes, using a taperecorder, several times during the next year. This, I said, was partly to try to incorporate some form of time perspective into the study.

(vii) I said that I hoped that they would become fairly involved in the study and that I hoped to feed back information and ask for comments and elaboration as the fieldwork progressed. There would, I made clear, be both individual and joint interviews. Confidentiality was stressed.

(viii) At this stage I also said that I might ask them to take part in a diary study. I asked if I might be able to call sometimes during a weekend. Finally, I said I might spend an afternoon in their home just sitting and observing.

Thus, from the outset, I tried to be as open as possible about the research. It seemed that this was adequate information to set subjects' minds at ease and no-one at any point pressed me to divulge any information which I indicated that I wished to keep secret until the end. The promise of an explanation at the end of the fieldwork appeared to be satisfactory. They were interested in the personal information I gave them and, for example, asked what were my future job intentions and what my boyfriend did for a living. A frequent comment was that they hoped the research would not "put me off marriage".
As the thesis was essentially an exercise in developing empirically grounded ideas, some of my interests and fieldwork turned out to be different from my initial presentation to subjects. In a way, therefore, I had inadvertently deceived them. Certainly, none of the three tactics in point (viii) were implemented and I also became more interested in parental rather than conjugal relationships. Also I in fact fed back very little information about how my ideas were developing, although I did occasionally ask them for further information about their own previous statements. In addition, I was often indirectly gathering information about how, as a couple, they faced and dealt with situations when, to them, I was simply asking for innocuous details about the division of labour.

The ethics of deceiving subjects in any way have been the subject of some debate. I am inclined to agree with Julius Roth that all research is to some degree secret. He pointed out that researchers seldom know everything that they are interested in at the start of a project and, in any case, "full disclosure" can be biasing. He said that often, in fact, no matter how much subjects are told, they will not understand the terms of the research in the same way as the investigator does. "The terms have different connotations to them, their experiential contexts differ and their conceptions of the goals of the study are likely to be different." Thus, although I thought I had explained the project carefully, some respondents continued to ask how it had anything to do with social work and others could not see the point in studying 'ordinary' as opposed to 'problem' families.

5. **The Panel Study**

(a) **Outline of the Interview Programme**

In total five interviews were carried out with respondents over a period of fifteen months. The first two interviews were conducted with the husband and wife individually, using the same basic set of 'opening questions'. There were usually a few weeks between these two interviews and the first person interviewed was asked not to tell the other anything which had been discussed. I am certain that this condition was scrupulously observed and, in fact, the secrecy element obviously provided some entertainment for the couples.

The third interview followed the same experimental procedure as was described in the earlier section on practice interviews (3.(b)). I left a tape-recorder with each couple and asked them to discuss the issues with one another. The questionnaire was essentially the same as in the first two interviews. My aim was to see how they described their family lives in each other's presence and without my being actually there. The success of these interviews was extremely varied since some couples talked at great length whilst others spent only about ten minutes on the exercise.

The final two interviews were conducted jointly. Each was used to obtain accounts of events since the previous meeting and to clarify points from other interviews. The fourth interview focused primarily on obtaining detailed accounts of the family's previous weekend and previous evening. The fifth interview examined their images of children. During part of the final interview spouses were asked to write down their responses to various questions about the children. These were then pooled and discussed.
(b) **Carrying out interviews: reactions and interactions**

Interviewing and being interviewed are learned techniques. My main aim was to create an atmosphere which would help respondents to talk freely and in an informal manner. My decision always to see them in their homes was one way of promoting relaxation. I was more successful at this as I became able better to cope with the minimally structured interview situation. By the middle of the preliminary interviews I hardly needed to refer to my 'prompts' and 'opening' questions. I had also become accustomed to the high degree of concentration required to pick up points and feed them back as the interview progressed. Prior to each interview I either re-read transcripts or listened to the recordings of earlier meetings. I therefore had considerable information about each family freshly in my mind. This undoubtedly encouraged 'rapport' as it was obvious that I valued and had absorbed their previous statements. Several respondents made specific comments to this effect.

Paradoxically, the more relaxed I became and the more 'rapport' increased, the more skilled I became at dissembling and avoiding giving my own views when asked. Thus, whilst being able to lessen my overt control of the structure of the interview, I was at the same time increasingly in control of the situation in a more subtly directive fashion.

Lewis Dexter has pointed out that a good interviewer should be able to respond to the shifting of gears and subjects by interviewees. To a certain extent, therefore, the interviewer has to relax overt control of the situation.42 I would agree

---

that this is vital if one is interested in actors' meanings. It is also easier to do this in a panel study where one knows that missed information in one interview can be picked up on the next visit. William Foote Whyte's famous comment also applies to this minimally structured method. He said:

"As I sat and listened I learned the answers to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting information solely on an interviewing basis. I did not abandon questioning altogether of course. I simply learned to judge how and when to question."43

The development and use of a range of "neutral topics" had been of great assistance in the process of my becoming more relaxed about carrying out interviews. I consciously used various personalised topics which were not directly related to the family situation but which alleviated the one-sidedness of the total evening's "conversation". Such topics were, for example, holidays, leisure activities or the never ending saga of renovating my recently acquired and much dilapidated basement flat. I also asked respondents advice about topics such as choosing a restaurant for my own wedding party. Interestingly my continuous problems with tape recorders filled another conversational gap. I usually chatted about the various disasters whilst setting up the machine. This was definitely a tension-reducing tactic as respondents seemed to relax when I related some of my own "human" disasters.

My own nervousness about the interviews also altered. At first it was a generalised "fear of the unknown" and worry about

---

managing the interview situation. Later it focused on specific fears of particularly problematical respondents. By and large these were the more critical or the more reserved individuals. I also felt increasingly apprehensive of those interviews where my previously mentioned tactic of agreeing with everything the respondent said was resulting in my being totally false to my own views. It is impossible to avoid such feelings of guilt when one is putting forward a 'front' which totally contradicts one's true reactions. This is obviously more acute in the panel study as opposed to the "one off" survey interviews.

Parallel with my increased confidence in the interview situation the respondents also seemed to change. Even those who were especially nervous at first became visibly more relaxed. Others simply became more informal as the study progressed. Perhaps one indication of this was that a few respondents forgot that I was coming for the fourth and fifth interviews, whereas no-one forgot the preliminary arrangements. I was made just as welcome, however, when I arrived "unexpectedly" on these occasions. Several respondents voluntarily offered the observation that they had put on 'a front' at the first meetings. During the fourth interview with the Davies', for example, they were arguing about their division of labour. Judy laughingly pointed out how different this was from her first interview and mocked her own comments about her "wonderful husband who could do no wrong."

44. Pseudonyms are used for all respondents. A list of the names given to all of the family members is presented in Appendix 3. I suggest that the reader consults this list whilst reading the thesis. This will enable him/her to distinguish between parents and their respective children when only Christian names are given in the text.
Respondents also became accustomed to the broadness of my opening questions, and appeared to become increasingly confident that they were giving me the kind of information which I needed for my research. I think that I made my whole approach seem flexible to them. I was, for example, willing to come and interview them at any time convenient to themselves. If, as occasionally happened, they phoned to cancel an interview, I stressed that this caused me no problems whatsoever. I tried, therefore, to cultivate an overall appearance of openness to their ideas and their arrangements.

At the end of the study most respondents spontaneously said that they had enjoyed taking part. Several also commented that I was easy to talk to. The importance of how the field-worker's personality appears to the subject is undoubtedly important. Hopefully my interviewing technique made me appear non-judgmental and one respondent said that she and other acquaintances also involved in the study had found it easy to have me around (sic). She said that I should not underestimate the importance of the fact that these people liked me. None of them, she said, suffered fools gladly (sic) or had time to waste just for the sake of being polite. Had they not wished to continue their involvement in the study they would not have hesitated to say so. I think that the importance of such basic reactions is perhaps underestimated in reports of "successful" fieldwork. Another comment from William Foote Whyte again seems very true and pertinent to this particular study. He said:
"Whether it was a good thing to write a book about Cornerville depended entirely on people's opinions of me personally. If I was alright, then my project was alright; if I was no good, then no amount of explanation could convince them."

(c) Interviewing techniques - description and assessment

Methodological accounts seldom indicate that the way one actually goes about the process of interviewing is very much influenced by one's personality, and by the topic and subjects being studied. Techniques which might elicit 'good data' for one interviewer in a specific situation might be totally unsuccessful for another. Suggestions about techniques have been put forward by various researchers. Howard Becker has described how being "semi-cynical" with his medical students allowed him to get at their ideals and their cynicism. S.F. Nadel found it useful to adopt a slightly bullying approach. He introduced contentious issues and challenged the standpoints claimed by respondents. Lewis Dexter, when carrying out specialised interviews with politicians, deliberately tried to establish neutrality. He adopted the interviewee's own value-loaded phraseologies and appeared to adopt their orientation. I found that my awareness that I had to continue to keep respondents involved in the panel study had some effect on my

interviewing techniques. In addition I am, by nature, fairly non argumentative and tend to accommodate to, rather than disrupt, social situations. In the first interviews these two personal constraints were to the fore and I was very much the neutral interviewer, as described by Dexter. Even so, some of the respondents reacted against these preliminary interviews. One became very irate after the jointly recorded interview and several found it difficult and frustrating to know how to reply to my broad opening questions. The irate respondent was troubled by my giving them the same questions to discuss again and telephoned me to find out why I had done this. I explained that I simply wanted them to discuss the issues with one another and that I was not trying to "trip them up" in any way. The respondents who did not like the questions themselves explained that they wished to tell me as much as possible and were not sure that they were actually giving "satisfactory" replies. At times, though, I had to structure the frame of reference for some of these respondents. If they became "stuck" on one of the retrospective questions I usually prompted by using a construct with which other respondents had oriented themselves to the topic. Asking them to remember where they were living or working at the time were two such prompts. As all of these respondents continued to co-operate (one husband almost certainly under considerable pressure from his wife!) I hope that my reassurances proved adequate. In the majority of cases I found that if I was sufficiently patient and encouraging, respondents found their own way into the questions. I learned that it is the

exceptional respondent who is able instantly to address him/herself to a question and talk effortlessly. If the interviewer is able to indicate that he/she does not expect "instant brilliance" and has plenty of time to wait then the respondent becomes more relaxed and less selfconscious about his/her replies.

After transcription and analysis of these preliminary interviews further points emerged in discussions with my supervisors. To begin with, I developed doubts about the appropriateness of attempting direct observation of families. Reasons for this were both methodological and theoretical. Firstly, I felt that if I were concerned just to check that couples actually did what they said they did, then my presence was, in itself, an impossible bias. Only by being present very frequently could such bias be minimised and this was not feasible in terms of my research schedule. Blood found that it took several visits before subjects seemed to forget about the researcher. He concluded that, in part, this was due to a fundamental reluctance to have a researcher in their homes at regular intervals for several weeks. Of equal importance methodologically, however, he also noted the fact that family activities were often taking place concurrently all over the house. This made direct observation virtually impossible for the lone researcher! Secondly, I was increasingly interested in actors' accounting and interpretative activities. I wanted to find out more about the understandings of their own family reality which were created and sustained within the group.

If their observed behaviour did not square with their beliefs then I was interested, not in merely documenting this particular 'fact', but in finding out how this was or was not resolved in the negotiation of each family's version of reality.

Finally, I realised that I was sufficiently at ease in a minimally structured interview to be able to register 'inconsistencies' when subjects were talking and to feed these back at relevant points during the interview. This seemed a sort of validity check and would, I hoped, be especially fruitful in a joint husband/wife interview.

Also at this time my supervisors suggested that I should change tactics and try to uncover problematical issues by challenging respondents' accounts. Rather than accepting and agreeing with their versions of reality, I should pick them up on various points and ask why they thought they usually behaved in that way. In the fourth interview, therefore, we went into great detail about everything that had occurred the previous evening and the previous weekend. If respondents did not consider these to have been "typical", this was first explored and then they were also encouraged to talk about the most recent "typical" evening. Unlike Harold Garfinkel I did find that people were able to account for aspects of behaviour which were "taken-for-granted". I am, however, fully aware that accounts of the same item would vary in different situations and to different listeners.\(^5\)

\(^5\) According to Garfinkel, "The member of the society uses background expectancies as a scheme of interpretation... Demonstrably he is responsive to this background while at the same time he is at a loss to tell us specifically of what the expectancies consist. When we ask him about them he has little or nothing to say." Garfinkel, H., *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1967, p.1.
Like Garfinkel, however, I experienced reactions against my challenges. For example, when I asked why his wife always carried out a particular task, one husband retorted sharply, "What's all this about, are you a women's libber or something?"!

At other times I obviously chanced on some basic disagreement between the spouses. One couple, for example, had a heated argument about why the husband never put out the milk bottles! My most serious difficulties occurred when I felt ill at ease using this technique. I soon realised that constantly questioning minute items of behaviour made me (a) appear rather stupid, and (b) occasionally provoked some hostility or boredom. Both of these reactions might have alienated respondents from the study.

After I became aware of this during the first two or three interviews I subsequently modified my tactics. First of all I explained before the interview that I would be going into great detail and asked them to be patient. I stressed again that my concern was with all of the most apparently mundane features of their everyday life. If I questioned things further it was with the aim of finding out as much as they were able to tell me.

Secondly, during the interview itself I felt more comfortable if I presented the challenges by saying, for example, "I think I understand why you do that but could you tell me a little more in case I'm mistaken". This worked very well, especially if I had actually been mistaken and subsequently told respondents how my interpretations had in fact differed. I think that this feedback helped them to understand what I was doing and certainly facilitated "rapport". We all therefore felt that I was getting at "the truth"! Similar tactics were therefore adopted in the final interview which focused on parental rather than conjugal attitudes.
Finally, another rarely mentioned part of interviewing tactics concerns what to do before and after one is "formally" interviewing. I found this fairly easy as the actual interviews were in some ways simply an extension of the informal interactions which began as soon as I entered the house. As I have mentioned, I often talked about my recurrent problems concerning either my flat or tape-recorders! Often the children were just going to bed and I talked to them or let them hear their voices on the recorder. Usually I was mentally accumulating data as soon as I arrived and frequently asked respondents to elaborate upon earlier remarks after I had set up and switched on the machine. After the recording was over I always had coffee or drinks with the couples. I did not find that respondents were very much different "on" or "off" the record, especially once they became at ease with being taped. The main difference was that we tended to talk about non family-specific matters such as jobs, holidays, hobbies or current affairs. When I returned home after an interview I always made a note of any relevant comments during this time. Again I continued to adopt the tactic of agreeing with their general views as a way of at least standardising the bias of their perceptions of me. This undoubtedly accentuated some of my personal dilemmas as I shall discuss in my concluding remarks.

(d) The Analysis

Although I was only present at eighty-eight interviews, there were, with the joint sessions, a hundred and ten in total to be transcribed. The fieldwork period was especially demanding as I was transcribing and analysing material during the day, and often preparing for and conducting interviews in the evening. I discovered early on that if I did more than three evenings of
fieldwork per week then my interest diminished and my interviewing became poorer. Although I think they exaggerated slightly, I think that the enormity of the task of transcription can be gauged by the conclusion of Bucher et al that transcription and checking over of material takes nine hours for every one hour of interview time.52 Most of my interviews provided two or three hours of material! I was still transcribing the fourth interviews whilst conducting the fifth and had a considerable backlog to deal with at the end of the study.

My analytical technique was simple and largely inductive. The themes which I noticed seemed to be those issues which were either most stressed or most recurrent in respondents' accounts. After each set of interviews I drew up lists of themes and ideas, made sure by cross checking that these were representative of the sample trends, and considered the cases which seemed to differ. At this stage I always had discussions with my supervisors and, further to this, I narrowed down some of the interests. I then went back to the transcripts and went through them in detail, extracting stretches of conversation from each couple which supported the themes. Interesting "red herrings" had to be dropped if there was insufficient support. As I explained earlier, emerging issues provided some of the framework of the later interviews.

At the end of each final interview I had lengthy discussions with the respondents themselves. I told them what I had been

interested in and how my ideas had developed. Their reactions were encouraging. They agreed with most of my tentative points and any criticisms were illuminating.

Thus the groundwork of the analysis was accomplished by the end of the fieldwork period. I then had to deal with transcription and analysis of the final set of interviews. Subsequent work has been concerned with refining and re-examining themes, always with constant reference to the transcript evidence. The ordering and categorising of themes was a difficult process, again greatly helped by comments from supervisors and colleagues.

6. Conclusions

(a) Evaluation of a minimally structured qualitative methodology

Dean et al have made a realistic assessment of the limitations and advantages of unstructured methods. By and large they saw their inherent flexibility as a considerable aid to obtaining valid data. They saw one problem in the potential bias of personality or theory. I suggested earlier that this criticism could be equally applied to more structured methods. They also pointed out that the data is not readily quantifiable, again a charge which seems somewhat irrelevant to my own theoretical concerns. Of greater relevance I found their point that the gathering of elaborate detail makes the fieldworker conscious of the uniqueness of each situation, and inhibits his/her attempts to define variables and specify relations among them. I certainly found this to be a problem and this was one reason why my analysis phase was so protracted. Here I think the lone

fieldworker is at a disadvantage. My ability to "stand back" from the data was greatly facilitated by discussions with supervisors. I think, however, that constant interchanges between colleagues who are equally immersed in the same fieldwork would provide one solution to this problem.

One difficulty which Dean et al did not mention is the presentation of qualitative material. The reader of a quantitatively based account is given constant "proof" in the form of endless tables. Extensive quotation is the sole "proof" which a qualitative researcher can and must offer. This, however, can at times be tedious for the reader. In part this is because the reader is having to cope with "raw data" and is not presented with summaries in table form. I have tried not to give in too much to another pressure, which is to select out the more lively or entertaining quotations. A simply expressed statement is nonetheless valid for its mundaneness.

Howard Becker has distinguished three tests for checking the validity of items of evidence. In reply to the first test "credibility of informants", I would submit that, whilst my respondents may very well have wished to present a 'good front', they had no reason to lie. They understood the confidentiality tenet; I never gossiped or attributed statements directly to other respondents; and I never violated any individual statements which had been presented to me as a confidence. I think that they trusted me and, in fact, seemed to become less concerned about "impressing" me in any way. In any case it is rather difficult to sustain a "front" for an entire evening of fairly intense

---

conversation. It is even harder to sustain this over several
well spaced out interviews.

As regards Becker's third test, "the observer-informant
group equation", I was not incognito and therefore my own "front"
must have had some effects. As I have discussed, however, I did
at least attempt to standardise some of the cues which I was
"giving off". I feel happiest with my performance regarding
Becker's second test, "volunteered versus directed statements".
I found that respondents very often spontaneously brought up and
discussed items which I had intended to raise later. I always,
however, redirected their attention to the items later as I had
planned. Frequently respondents then found they had little to
say as they felt they had already "told me about it". This
was particularly the case with the material which I collected
concerning images of children.

Dean and Whyte have also addressed themselves to the problem
of truth. They discussed how "truth" might be affected by
ulterior motives, bars to spontaneity, ingratiations and idio-
syncracies of the situation. I can only claim to have been well
aware of these potential problems, and to have taken them into
account during my analysis. The fact that I had complete
verbatim transcripts aided this evaluation process. Although I
did not consciously set out to avoid "ingratiations" I think my
neutrality, agreement with their views and the generality of the
"opening questions" must have mitigated against respondents
realising what answers I "really wanted". Certainly, as the
study progressed and they felt more at ease, several respondents

55. Dean, J.P., and Whyte, W.F., 'How do you know if the informant
is telling the truth?', reprinted in Dexter, L.A., 1970, op.cit.,
p.119-131.
made comments about my views or feelings, many of which were completely wrong. In addition when, at the end of the study, I asked respondents what they thought I had been interested in, only two were completely accurate. These two realised I was looking at how their children affected their family behaviour. Most gave a much less specific response about "family interactions".

I would agree with Dean and Whyte's point about the researcher not equating truth with consistency. My respondents seemed conscious of wishing to give consistent views. They often expressed concern that they might be saying completely different things in one interview compared with previous ones. If anything, my interest focused not on consistency but in seeing how they legitimated any inconsistencies which they remembered from their previous statements.

(b) Some Problems of Managing a Panel Study

In this chapter I have tried to emphasise the importance of the human relations aspects of doing fieldwork. It is fitting, therefore, that I should conclude with some personal observations of the interactional difficulties of a panel study.

I think that there has been something of an over-emphasis of the no doubt true fact that people like to be studied and to talk about themselves. This may very well be a sufficient motivation for participation in a "one-off" interview, but does not necessarily apply to the greater demands of a panel study. I found that I could not take my respondents' interest for granted. Perhaps because they were often well educated people and not particularly overawed by being studied, they tended to expect to find the interviews stimulating and interesting. In fact I sometimes went into details which they did not find to be as
intrinsically fascinating as I did myself. I felt very aware, therefore, of some ill-defined obligation that they should not be bored. The time invested in pre and post interview conversation was, I hope, one factor which kept their interest.

The fact that most respondents told me spontaneously that they had enjoyed my visits I took to be, in part, a polite convention. I think that I made each visit a time which was not dreaded. I think, however, that because a fieldworker is, owing to her alternative goals, getting so much out of the interviews and therefore enjoying it, she must not assume that the respondents feel the same way. I know that at times my respondents argued or became depressed during an interview, and certainly the sessions were fairly hard work. The researcher must, in turn, work hard during the interview, as lapsed concentration can only be seen as an insult to the people who are giving their time.

Another aspect of the fieldwork for which my reading had not really prepared me was the difficulties of coping with personal reactions to respondents. These again are accentuated by the knowledge that one will be seeing them several times. I have mentioned my guilt at giving reactions which belied my true feelings about an issue. I also felt uncomfortable about in fact not liking some of the respondents. Fieldwork seems even more exploitative when one is using people who think you sincerely like them when in fact you do not. In part I think I resolved such selfish personal dilemmas by emphasising in my mind the particular individuals' attractive qualities and trying to minimise those aspects against which I was reacting.
I was also unprepared for the attempts of some respondents to make me into a real friend. This was especially disturbing if it was someone with whom I knew I had little in common but they thought I empathised with their interests because I had agreed enthusiastically with their views. A further problem was that there were three groups of couples in the sample who were acquainted with one another. Had I wished to "make friends" with some of the couples after the study was over I should have again felt very guilty that this might offend those others with whom I did not wish to continue meeting. On reflection I feel that I coped badly with this by deciding that I could not face these complications. I have tried to keep the couples informed of my progress but have not made any informal contacts since the study was completed.

To conclude, I shall present a lengthy quotation which I feel is particularly apposite to my own fieldwork. Fred Davis said:-

"In field situations in which the sociologist (or anthropologist) openly represents himself to his subjects for what he is (i.e., a person whose interest in them is professional rather than personal) he unavoidably, and properly I would hold, invites unto himself the classic dilemma of compromising involvement in the lives of others. Filling him with gossip, advice, invitations to dinner and solicitations of opinion, they devilishly make it evident that, whereas he might regard himself as the "tabula rasa" incarnate upon whom the mysteries of the group are to be writ, they can only see him as someone less detached and less sublime. There then follows for many a fieldworker the unsettling recognition that, within very broad limits, it is precisely when his subjects palpably relate to him in his "out-of-research role" self (or "presentation, depending on one's disassociative bent) that the "raison d'être" for his "in-role" self is most nearly realized; they are more themselves, they tell and "give away" more, they supply connections and
insights which he would otherwise have never grasped. (One is tempted to conceive of this moral paradox as the sociologist's original sin, although happily the benign interpositions of area sampling, pre-coded questionnaires and paid interviewers now spare more and more of us from suffering its pangs.)"56

---

CHAPTER THREE

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FAMILY LIFE

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the main underlying assumptions around which respondents explicitly or implicitly developed their everyday family behaviour. I focus especially on parental behaviour but treat this as necessarily to be seen within the wider familial context. Throughout the thesis the development of family behaviour is described as a particularistic exercise characterised by an ongoing exchange of subjective meanings. It is possible, nevertheless, to abstract from respondents' accounts, certain precepts which can be seen as providing a taken-for-granted objectified set of meanings. These I have called underlying assumptions. They can be seen as analogous to the second level of legitimations described by Berger and Luckmann; and were often, in fact, presented in the form of proverbs and maxims.¹

In describing these underlying assumptions I see the development of parental behaviour as derived from the individual's interpretations of both his/her social stock of knowledge and his/her biographical experience. This is carried out primarily in, and is most dependent on, the intersubjective world of each particular nuclear family. By taking this kind of approach I am implicitly rejecting a strictly ethnomethodological perspective which denies the existence of any kind of social structure outwith the accounting and describing processes

of members of society.\textsuperscript{2} I accept Claus Mueller's qualification of the purely linguistic and interpretative approach, which was paraphrased by Dreitzel as follows:

"The construction of realities may be more influenced by power relations, socialisation processes and class structures than by the creative interpretation of the actors engaged in interaction."\textsuperscript{3}

Mueller was in many respects simply echoing the ideas of Alfred Schutz whose phenomenological philosophy inspired the initial critical activities of ethnomethodologists. Schutz described human beings as living in an "intersubjective world of culture".\textsuperscript{4} My own approach, therefore, is on two levels. Although I stress the problematical nature of the development of parental behaviour, and the importance of seeing this as a socially constructed reality, I also accept that behaviour is developed in the context of socially derived meanings. These taken-for-granted meanings are, in my terminology, the underlying assumptions. Parental behaviour is, in part, the practical interpretation of these assumptions. They are also frequently referred to in the legitimating processes.\textsuperscript{5}

Parental behaviour is developed in the context of many choices and uncertainties. An important way in which these respondents located themselves in this problematical world was by establishing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} For detailed discussion of this point see Dreitzel, H.P., \textit{op.cit.} 1970, p.XV.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Blumer said that humans engage in social interaction with reference to 'objects'. These are "anything that can be indicated or referred to". He divided 'objects' into three categories (i) physical, (ii) social and (iii) abstract. My underlying assumptions would appear to fall mainly into his third category.
\end{itemize}

and sustaining belief in the underlying assumptions. Following Schutz, these assumptions provided a generalised set of objectified "recipe knowledge." This knowledge suggested the outline forms of behaviour, leaving the interpretation of its specific content up to the members of each particular family. The underlying assumptions had fluctuating relevances for each family member and the relevances varied through time.

In this chapter I describe the underlying assumptions by outlining their general forms and giving specific illustrations. An important point is that the forms are sufficiently generalised and flexible to allow considerable variation in their practical interpretation, both within and between families. This point is important because it suggests one way in which, despite their distinctive biographies, individuals within a family can sustain belief in its mutually constructed reality. Berger and Kellner said, specifically,

6. Recipe knowledge is defined in full in the first paragraph of Chapter 5.
7. According to Schutz, relevances are both personal (volitional) and social (imposed). Helmut Wagner saw Schutz's concepts of relevance as influenced by W.I. Thomas's notion of the 'definition of the situation'. Wagner said: "Following Thomas he (Schutz) used it both in order to describe an individual's idiosyncratic attempts at orienting himself in untypical situations and his acceptance of the culturally pre-established definition of typical situations. On the other hand, Schutz's theory of relevance provides a set of motivational underpinnings for Thomas's dictum." Wagner, H.R. (Ed.), 1970, op.cit., p.25.
8. The term "biography" is also borrowed from Schutz. He said: "To say that this definition of the situation is biographically determined is to say that it has its history; it is the sedimentation of all man's previous experiences, organised in the habitual possessions of his stock of knowledge at hand, and as such his unique possession, given to him and him alone." Natanson, M. (Ed.), 1967, op.cit., p.9.
about marriage and the construction of reality:

"Each partner's definitions of reality must be continually correlated with the definitions of the other."9

Accepting this theoretical point, I would suggest that the use of underlying assumptions provides an empirical illustration of how this "correlating" process is actually carried out.

It is important to bear in mind that "underlying assumptions" are analytical abstractions which I constructed as a means of describing the general beliefs about family life presented by respondents. This has two related implications. Firstly, the abstractions involve rather precise categorisations which do not actually exist in the everyday implementation of the beliefs. As David Silverman has pointed out:

"While the sociologist must begin from the first order constructs of the participants themselves, his work necessarily involves a distortion of their experience as he seeks to idealize and formalize, to talk about the typical where there is ultimately a number of unique cases."10

In many instances, therefore, when I have described a concept in, for example, the chapter entitled "Underlying Assumptions", this same concept may also be utilised empirically as a "legitimation" or a "coping mechanism". An example of this is the discussion of "belief in fairness".11 Thus the categorisations are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, but essentially a presentation device.

Secondly, the analytical abstractions are, in fact, considerably removed from the pragmatic use of these beliefs as recipe knowledge.

11. This is introduced on p.125 of the present chapter.
in everyday life. The assumptions were first objectified by respondents using them as legitimations in their accounts to me of family life. They were then further objectified by my process of selection and systematisation in order to present this account. Schutz commented that all everyday knowledge is incoherent, only partially clear and not at all free from contradictions. The two steps involved in creating the analytical abstractions have inevitably resulted in the false attribution of a certain clarity and coherence to the beliefs, although many of the contradictions remain.

2. Family life as a learning situation ("trial and error")

(a) Marriage

"There's no-one who could tell you beforehand this is your first step, this is your second step, you've got to learn it all yourself". (I)13 (Martin Chapman)

This was a very typical statement which reflected the belief held by respondents that marriage and parenthood were learning situations. The major impression given was that modern middle class family life lacked clear and precise behavioural and attitudinal prescriptions. In some of my early questions, which aimed to gain information indirectly about ideas behind

13. I indicate from which interview a quotation is taken by the following abbreviations:
   (I) - preliminary interviews with each spouse individually.
   (Jt) - joint interview with both spouses, without my being present.
   (V/E) - fourth interview with both spouses together.
   (F) - fifth interview with both spouses together.
conjugal behaviour, I asked respondents how they had viewed marriage before they were married and what they would now tell other people to expect. The overwhelming response was to state that they personally had had few or no preconceptions, and often had not even thought about what being married would entail, except in the most general terms. They had seen it simply as a process of working things out together (sic).

Madeleine Harris, for example, replied:

"... very hard to put in general ways I suppose, because in the end it's personalities that conflict at some point and are complementary at other points. You just work out your individual marriage really I suppose within a social situation of certain accepted norms which you either reject or accept as you become aware of them."  (I)

Many respondents felt that, in fact, it was wrong to do anything other than enter marriage with a completely open mind. Even if they were now able to articulate the problems and difficulties involved in family life, they usually felt that each individual should learn about these through his/her own experience rather than be told about them beforehand. If a respondent did put forward some definite views, these were usually extremely generalised such as "make sure you've got plenty money", or were centred on the love relationship. Judy Davies said:

"... to begin with, you know, I felt that I really wanted to get to know my husband, know all his sort of feelings and what have you. This you'll experience yourself as you go on in married life, you'll find that you're thinking as one, sort of thing."  (I)

Occasionally a respondent said that he/she had been asked for advice by someone about to be married. Again, he/she had either replied very generally or, if they knew the person well, in terms of personality adaptations. Mary Duncan said she had simply reassured a young man that he should not worry about his
impending financial obligations. Ian Johnson had told a friend that after marriage he would have to be prepared to sacrifice some of the freedom which he was known to value.

Thus, although respondents now "knew" about their own marriages, they usually felt that it was inappropriate or even irrelevant to pass on this knowledge, except in the most general terms. To a certain extent this emphasis on learning through personal experience had as its correlate the view that each family was unique. The frequent rejection of my questions "What would you now tell a young man/woman to expect from marriage?" was typically expressed by Andrew Jeffreys as follows: "Depends on the conditions and the situation and the person, I just can't answer that." (I) Alan Hemingway reacted even more forcefully when he said:

"Oh my goodness, you see, that's a generalised question. Em, you can't tell a young man that, because what HE would get out of marriage I would think would be vastly different to what I'VE got out of it. If you said to me what were the aspects of MY marriage that I considered the most important, or the ones that I'VE enjoyed most as it were, I could answer THAT. But I wouldn't necessarily say to a young chap that these were the things to expect from marriage because he's so different to me." (I)14

Several respondents also felt that each family situation was unique in its particular temporal context. This was usually expressed by the stated inability to take their parents' marriages as any kind of direct model (to accept or reject). They described, for example, the "different" context of

14. I adopt the following convention when presenting quotations: words or phrases which were emphasised by respondents are given in block capital letters; words or phrases to which I wish to draw attention are underlined.
establishing a marriage during the war years, or spoke of their parents' attitudes as reflecting the kinds of values prevalent at that particular time. Louise Wilson illustrated this kind of qualification when she remarked:

"But every marriage must be different I would have thought. And I mean it must depend on the particular couple and the time when they get married and this sort of thing. I mean marriage now of two career people in the 1970's is entirely different from even twenty years ago or even five years ago, and I think this is something that is peculiar to each marriage." (I)

This underlying assumption that each family had its own distinct subcultural reality was frequently used by respondents as a legitimation or a coping mechanism. The assertion that "it's different for everybody" apparently provided an extremely subjectively satisfactory means of sustaining belief in the particular reality being created. On an analytical level, however, such an assumption seems to sustain the kind of situation which John E. Mayer described as "pluralistic ignorance". He observed in his own work the preponderance of "instances in which individuals have vague rather than erroneous conceptions of each other's family life." 15

(b) Parenthood

Parenthood and childrearing were also seen as skills learned essentially through direct experience with one's own family. Here, however, the degree of uncertainty was perceived as

---

15. This argument is presented in full in Mayer, J.E., The Disclosure of Marital Problems, Institute of Welfare Research, New York, Community Services of New York, 1966, pp.4-8. Note also that Barbara Moyes saw similar processes as leading to barriers on knowledge being passed on to women concerning the facts of pregnancy. Moyes, B.A., 1976, op.cit., Chapter 4.
considerably increased since, as Margaret Barber pointed out: "You choose your husband but you cannot choose your child." (I) Just as respondents felt that there was no real preparation for marriage, as only by living with the person could one discover what it was really like, so they also felt that there could be no realistic prior preparation for parenthood.

One might expect the middle class to be likely to make extensive use of the greater than ever facilities in the way of literature or classes about parenthood and childrearing. In fact, few of the respondents had done so with any seriousness. This applied especially to the husbands, and Andrew Jeffrey's remarks were typical; he said:

"As far as I'm concerned a lot of it's been intuitive rather than taking some nondescript person's advice out of a magazine. Because I think your reactions have got a great deal to do with the whole system rather than the imposition of an idea that you don't understand anyway. I think it's got to be a bit more from inside than from outside. I mean I haven't read anything about it." (F)

Another respondent echoed this view from a slightly different angle, implying that preconceptions about childrearing were, in any case, often rendered irrelevant by factors of context or personality. Shirley Jackson claimed:

"... well WE had strong principles, well I had, don't know about you (to husband), VERY strong principles of things that we WERE and we were NOT going to do when we had children. But children come along and they're PEOPLE and it just doesn't work, you know always. You know, you gradually see one principle being either swayed or going completely by the board and then another one because things that you THINK are going to work with children, they don't." (F)

Moreover, even if respondents had bothered to seek out prior knowledge through parenthood classes or childrearing
literature, they often saw this as largely irrelevant once the baby actually arrived. Marjorie Russell said:

"I think I read all the standard texts when I was expecting Kathleen and then promptly forgot about them. Maybe some of it rubbed off but, er, I tend to go back to the old adage of bringing them up in the way that it feels natural to YOU to bring them up. You read the books but then don't go by the book, it's impossible! If you tried to go by every book you'd be a mental wreck, trying to decide what to do. I don't think you should DECIDE what to do; I think you should just DO something anyway." (I)

Interestingly, her husband, David, must have seen Marjorie's reading as so irrelevant that he had forgotten all about it. He said in a later joint interview:

"Neither of us, er, neither Marjorie nor I have sort of studied child psychology, we don't read any books about the upbringing of the kids or anything like that. Whether we should or not I don't know. I think you've got enough to do to bring them up without studying HOW you do it you know. (laughs)"

Equally, even practical prior experience of dealing with children was often discounted on the basis that being a parent in one's own home situation was felt to be entirely different. Margaret Barber commented:

"... the year I left school I went as an au pair girl to a French family who had five children, and I'd say that was an EXCELLENT training for marriage. But again, O.K. I learned about children, but I couldn't appreciate it from a PARENT'S point of view." (I)

Shirley Jackson, an ex-teacher, remarked:

"Mind you, it's awfully difficult, I mean I've seen a lot of knocks and quite a lot of bumps as far as children go, but it's difficult when it's your own child; you're emotionally involved with your own children. You know, I can stay VERY calm in somebody else's emergency but I'm not so calm in my own emergency." (W/E)

For all of the respondents, therefore, the emphasis was always on "trial and error", and on trying to work out the
appropriate situation for each particular family. In many ways these parents could be seen as operating in a situation where uncertainty prevailed for perhaps two reasons. Learning about appropriate behaviour through some sort of unquestioning process of osmosis in the family of origin was increasingly irrelevant to them. Equally, respondents did not seem to accord any particular efficacy to alternative methods of teaching oneself by making use of formal educational facilities.

It was, however, recognised that this emphasis on learning through experience could have many drawbacks. The majority of respondents felt that they had, through inexperience, made various kinds of mistakes with their first baby which had resulted in problems either for the child or for themselves. Also, many mentioned that the sheer tension of learning as one went along was passed on to the baby and might well have been the reason for some of the difficulties. Martin Chapman said:

"Oh when Anne was a baby she wasn't as contented as what Judy is, nothing like it, and I think that is really our own, to a certain extent our own fault because we were inexperienced at the time and em, I think looking back on it, I would say that HALF the trouble with Anne was that, er, when she wanted to be fed we were frightened to feed her, whereas now we've got the knowledge of how to bring up a baby and what the baby's crying for etc., but we induced a lot of the stresses on ourselves through Anne by our own inexperience." (I)

Alan Hemingway, another husband, who was having sleep problems with his two daughters, said about childrearing:

"But em, I DO worry about mistakes that we're making unconsciously; em, I don't KNOW that we're making mistakes. And a remark that I've made to Dianne, you know, more than once, that for all we've been breeding the human race for goodness knows how long, the problems that we face now are, em, have been experienced thousands of millions of times, but there is no way that I can benefit directly from that experience." (I)
This discussion of marriage and parenthood as learning situations points to an important omission in the body of work dealing with "transition to parenthood". Although contributors have made valuable points about the anomic characteristics of the transition, they have paid insufficient attention to the subjective meaning of factors involved in this "anomie". For example, an important factor stressed by both Le Masters and Alice Rossi was the paucity of preparation for being a parent. Albeit retrospectively, my respondents tended to devalue any set ideas or objective preparation for the parental role. Preparation was, by and large, seen as at best irrelevant and occasionally as a distinct hindrance. Maureen Rankin gave a good illustration of this kind of view when she was explaining to me why she was so critical of Dr. Spock. She said of his advice:

16. See Chapter One footnotes 73-76.
19. Helena Lopata also observed that some kinds of preparations could be a hindrance. Discussing the life cycle of the social role of Housewife, she said: "One of the characteristics of the role of the housewife is the fact that competence acquired in the previous stage of the role may not actually help the new mother. A housekeeping schedule, for example, may be dysfunctional to, or made ineffective by, the demands of a new born baby in a society which stresses its needs above those of adults." (my underlining)

"Well, I wouldn't say it doesn't work, em, it probably works with 80% of kiddies but it doesn't work with ours. It DOESN'T work, because we certainly gave it a try and instead of little problems improving they definitely got worse. So we adopted other means." (I) (my underlining)

Flexibility and learning were thus seen as the keys to success!

Before the first baby arrived many respondents went through the procedures provided by the medical profession to "prepare" people for parenthood. They attended the ante natal classes and read the relevant leaflets. Most husbands were also "involved" where appropriate. After the baby arrived, however, many respondents described how they still felt unprepared for the plethora of everyday decisions about what the child wanted. It was the actual practical experience either of making decisions which they defined as "correct", or else the retrospective "understanding" of wrong decisions, which made them feel prepared for the second child.

(c) Images of Children

Already one of the most important themes of this thesis has been implicit in much of the preliminary discussion. Learning about marriage and parenthood involved ongoing definitions of what was perceived as real and relevant to each particular family. In addition, as I shall discuss in detail later these respondents adhered to a basic belief that parents should try to understand their children.20 Thus, in my analysis, I treat parenthood as an especially problematical situation in which respondents faced a continuous challenge of "making sense" of their child and its world. I would suggest that the problematical nature of the development of parental behaviour derived in part from the fact that

20. See Chapter Six.
explanations of the child were frequently untestable, since too many uncontrollable and unknown factors were involved. The main practical way in which respondents therefore "made sense" of their children was by developing typified images. These constituted subjectively satisfactory bases for action. This was a dynamic negotiated process in the course of which parental behaviour was being developed.

There were two main analytical levels on which respondents constructed images of their child. These I have called "abstract" and "grounded". Simplistically, abstract images can be seen as interpretations primarily of the social stock of knowledge, whereas grounded images were developed out of the ongoing biographical experience. Again, however, this analytical distinction does not operate in everyday life, since those abstract images which the individual perceived as relevant fluctuated according to his/her current definition of his/her biographical situation. In this way, for example, images of the differences between children and adults, and of the place of the child in the family group, typically alter as mutual biographical situations change. My presentation of respondents' images of children must therefore be seen in the context of their perceptions of their current family lives.

Images of children provided meanings around which parental behaviour was developed. They were constantly referred to in respondents' accounts. It seemed, therefore, that they were frequently used as legitimations in the everyday negotiating

21. Abstract and grounded images are described in full in Chapters Six and Seven respectively.
22. See pp.113-121 of the present chapter.
processes of spouses. A vital aspect of this was the subtle position of influence held by the mother over the father's image formation. This stemmed in part from the underlying assumptions about parenthood as learning. Direct experience and grounded knowledge were thus accorded considerable importance. Empirically this was often illustrated when a husband qualified a statement about his child by attributing it directly to his wife. Also, the husband frequently maintained that his statements about a child would be far less detailed than were his wife's since she saw much more of the child and its world. Analytically this can be seen as one of the many implicit acknowledgments by respondents of the importance of context and situation in the formation of subjectively satisfactory images. All of these important points will be expanded in later chapters.

I shall briefly summarise the main images of children at this stage as these are also referred to in the following two chapters. The discussion of abstract images deals with respondents' generalised beliefs and ideas about their child. The vagueness of the concepts meant that there was considerable variation in respondents' practical interpretations of them in everyday life. Three main areas of abstract images were referred to most frequently. Firstly, respondents put forward ideas about children and childhood. They differentiated between children and adults in various ways which had considerable implications for the development of parental behaviour. They also held

23. This point will be dealt with in detail in Chapters Eight and Nine.
images which differentiated their own child from children in general. Such images isolated some of the special features of being a parent.

Secondly, they referred to ideas about children's needs and wants. These I have termed "images of the child's psychology, personality and physiology." Here respondents drew considerably on their social stocks of knowledge. Their practical interpretations of these images and the choice of relevant image were, however, continuously affected by their perceptions of the particular child concerned. Although he was taking for granted the definitional processes involved, D.R. Peterson illuminated one aspect of this complex interaction between belief and practice when he stated:

"It is often just as reasonable to assume that personality tendencies on the part of children appearing very early on in life and possibly of constitutional origin, have engendered modification of parental attitudes. The parents of a stable, predictable child can afford to be democratic. ... the parents of an erratic, difficult, peculiar child may become apparently inconsistent out of sheer desperation."24

Thirdly, respondents developed current and projected images about the place of the child in their individual and mutual lives. Simplistically, the current images could be seen as affecting everyday decisions about the importance of different demands of family members. The projected images comprised ideas about the future character of the child, the parents' future relationship with the child, and the child as a future member of society independently of his/her parents. All of

these projections had implications for current parental behaviour.

The discussion of grounded images illustrates the ways in which respondents used their personal experience of family life, and their interpretations of particular contexts and situations to make sense of the child. Again, respondents tended to refer to similar areas of experience, similar forms, whilst specific adaptations and contents varied. Grounded images have been separated into comparative and contextual images.

The section entitled "comparative images of children" deals with the meanings attached to the structural fact that each couple in the sample had two children. Here there are many practical implications of the underlying assumption that parenthood was a learning situation. Respondents were very aware of the ways in which having two children affected their dealings with each individual child. They also formed many explicit images concerning the relationship between the two children themselves. Analytically, respondents' accounts showed that such images were often very self consciously used as bases for action or as legitimations. Respondents also 'made sense' of their child by developing contextual images. The process of 'understanding' their child involved locating him/her and his/her behaviour in various social, temporal and genealogical contexts. This was perhaps the most dynamic area of image formation.

3. Family behaviour as life cyclically-oriented ("it's just a stage")

(a) General

Underlying assumptions about the family life cycle were another important reference point for respondents. In their accounts they constantly interpreted and legitimated current
and intended behaviour by reference to time, temporal changes, and their meanings. In this section I discuss first the kinds of assumptions which were largely implicit in the accounts. I then present respondents' perceptions of their current position in the family life cycle. These can be seen as the explicit meanings which they attached to the objective characteristics of their current family set-up. Thus I shall be dealing with some of the interests to which Hess and Handel attached importance when they said:

"The relationships which develop among the various members of a family do not follow the intrinsic lines of age and sex. They are shaped as well by underlying family themes and images which impart meanings to sex, age and other personal characteristics."²⁵ (my underlining)

In addition to the images mentioned by Hess and Handel another important component of assumptions about family life as cyclical was the social definition of time. The importance of considering meanings attached to time and temporal change was particularly well shown in respondents' accounts of parenthood. Their qualitative distinction between "spending" and "passing" time with children was one example. Another was the way in which the amount of time which each spouse spent with the child was perceived as affecting the kind of parental behaviour each developed. These specific points are discussed and expanded in Chapters Eight and Nine. The general point about the importance of the meanings attached to time is, however, fundamental to this section.

There were various levels on which assumptions about the family life cycle were implicit in respondents' accounts. On an abstract level this was reflected in their construction of beliefs about permanence and temporariness in relation to people and circumstances. On a more grounded level respondents continuously attributed social and psychological meanings to the life cycles of individual family members. This was shown particularly in their images of age changes in children. Such grounded images of the ages at which, for example, children could "understand" were crucial in the development of parental discipline. The best illustrations, however, of this area of underlying assumptions were the frequent use of the concepts of stage and phase.

As with the other underlying assumptions, the important characteristics of the life cycle beliefs were their vagueness and flexibility. This allowed considerable scope for specific personal accommodations. One illustration was the way respondents "made sense" of their child's behaviour by locating it in one of the stages of child development, as they perceived it. Their accounts of such stages or phases showed considerable variation both in the age of child being discussed and the kind of "stage-related" behaviour being described. This also provided a good example of the way in which interpretative acts drew on both the perceived social stock of knowledge (here the popular infiltration of psychology) and the individual biography (here, experiences with one's own child).

(b) Perceptions of the family life-cycle

(i) Permanence and Temporariness

Implicit in respondents' accounts was the assumption that, whereas the spouses would probably live with each other for
life, the child's full time presence was relatively temporary. Respondents varied in their attitudes towards the permanence per se of marriage. At the time of the fieldwork, however, it seemed that all were assuming that, unless things went wrong, they would be spending the rest of their lives together. Many respondents claimed that such an assumption had affected their attitudes towards their married life. Specific examples of this varied. For some respondents it had meant that they had tolerated temporary hardships because, as a couple, they would progress towards a 'better' situation in the future. Many spoke, for example, about giving up good clothes, good cars or good holidays when they married, in order to save for a house and furniture. For others it had meant that they had had to find some way of coming to terms with personal differences. One husband, for example, felt that he was gradually succeeding in accepting his wife's lackadaisical attitude towards time. Four wives spoke of their different adaptations to their husbands' time consuming hobbies of rugby, gardening and D.I.Y., respectively. An excellent summary of the general perception that belief in the permanence of the relationship affected behavioural adaptations came from Madeleine Harris. She said:

"... somehow the permanence of the situation is an influence in committing yourself to each other. I mean, there are many points where we could easily have come apart if we hadn't felt it was permanent and we were just going to work it out. And without this feeling of, 'well we MEAN this to be permanent', we probably wouldn't have bothered to work it out. It was too hard, it was too painful and meant too much soulsearching and too much change for yourself." (I)

In contrast to this assumption of spousal permanence was the image of the child as a transient being, a full time visitor to the spousal relationship for probably only about twenty or so
years of its total existence. This image had implications for the spousal relationship in that respondents talked about the dangers of becoming over-involved with the children to the neglect of each other and their own personal development. It also had considerable implications for the parent/child relationship in that, even at this early stage, respondents were very aware of potential future difficulties associated with giving the child "freedom" and "letting go". The Rankins illustrated their awareness of the parent-child relationship as follows. They saw the whole process of the child growing up and becoming independent as involving the parents in continually having to gauge how much trust and freedom they could safely give the child. Talking about their elder child, Lynne, Maureen Rankin said:

"It's always a worry just how much more freedom I should give her at this age, you know, am I giving her enough? I don't feel that she's got too much because she's proved to be trustworthy in as much freedom as I've given her, she's never let me down YET, but that's not to say that she never will." (laughs)

Derek: "And you can't keep too stiff a control otherwise at the age of fourteen or fifteen they're going to rebel aren't they? But is IS difficult". (F)

A further illustration of this point came from the Coulsons in their final interview:

Barry: "I reckon em ---- you know, I will allow the boys a certain amount of freedom over the years, progressively increase it, and just HOPE that the way we've brought them up will keep them on the straight and narrow. Also the understanding ultimately they're gonna go their own way earlier than we did most probably, em, that regardless of what trouble they get into or what their problem is, they can always come back here."

Jean: "Yes, I was going to say that I think if you have the right sort of relationship with your children right from the start, that they're always gonna WANT to come back to you." (F)
Further implications of the image of the child as only a temporary full time visitor to the parents' lives will be discussed in a later chapter. Here it is important simply to note that respondents were operating with different underlying assumptions concerning the place of the spousal and parental relationship in their total life span.

(ii) Stage or Phase

The concept of stage or phase was used by respondents in three main ways: as a benchmark for their present existence, as a legitimation of many items of family behaviour, and as a coping mechanism for tensions and dilemmas. In this section I shall be dealing with the first usage. At the level of an underlying assumption, the concept of family life as a series of stages had two related aspects. Firstly, it implied an acknowledgment of family life as a dynamic entity. Secondly, it helped the individual meaningfully to locate him/herself and others. The abstract notions of permanence and temporariness can also be seen as part of this process.

Respondents tended to hold some implicit assumptions about the 'right/wrong' age or the 'right/wrong' time for a certain stage. The most frequent examples were associated with individuals being defined as at the 'right' or 'wrong' time in their lives to cope with perceived changes involved first in marriage and then parenthood. Maureen Rankin, who felt that when and Derek had married at the 'right' age, said of him:

26. See the section entitled "Projected Images of Children" in Chapter Six.
"... well, there again he was 26, and that meant he was old enough and he was prepared in that sense. He was old enough and he felt ready to settle down. He'd been reasonably well off until that age; he'd had a good life up to that point; he'd had good holidays, he'd er, he was stable you know, and quite ready to settle down in that sense." (I)

Sometimes an assumption about the 'right' age to embark on a particular stage was expressed indirectly. Some respondents spoke, for example, about being slightly too young or too old when they married or had children. Often these notions about age were implemented on the level of a legitimation. Marjorie Jeffreys, for example, wondered if her problems in controlling the behaviour of her two young sons were connected with her being "older" when she had them. Mary Clark associated the arguments and dissatisfaction of her early married years with her being "too young".

All such statements about being the "right age", "too old" or "too young" involved the attribution of social and psychological meaning to age and stage in the family life cycle. An important way in which respondents evaluated their current stage in the family life cycle was to relate it to their perceived biographical experience. Anna Robson said:

---

27. The importance of underlying assumptions about appropriate behaviour attached to age and stage were also referred to in an article by Jerry S. Cloyd. He cited congruence studies which indicated that: "... group members are better satisfied when the behaviour of specific members "makes sense" in terms of what might be expected of them on the basis of other cues such as age" and suggested that: "The social ease associated with this kind of congruence may be due to the correspondence between actual behaviour, and the implicit expectations aroused by such cues." Cloyd, J.S., 'Small Group as Social Institution', American Sociological Review, 1965, pp.394-402.
"There are times, it's just that, you know, a child's yelling its head off, it's teething and you haven't slept much and your husband and you are bickering and I thought 'well it couldn't always be as bad as this.' But, see if I was twenty-one, I would have wanted out, I'd have felt I was missing something, but the six years before I was married I knew I wasn't missing anything because I'd seen most of it all. I was lucky again, I mean, I'd done all the things I wanted to do apart from going to America and Canada." (I)

Life cyclically oriented concepts were also expressed on a more general level in terms of stage as part of the life span of the individual. Andrew Jeffreys, talking about his wife's feelings of frustration at being at home with small children explained:

"Marjorie feels she's got less time to do what she likes: we both KNOW that it's a comparatively temporary thing. If you're going to have children, even if they are frustrating at times, em, you've gotta put up with them for that length of time, their, well, here's another good cliche, their formative years. (laughs) You know, you've got to sort of bear with it for that length of time until you've become sort of more free again; then you can decide what you would like to do. The thing is, it may be a sort of fifteen year chunk, may sound an awful long time but, you know, after that period of time things gradually get back to where you would like to be." (I)

Obviously, the stages usually discussed were those so far experienced by the respondents, that is, early marriage before children and then married life with small children. Throughout, however, there was also an awareness both that there were several more phases involved in this stage of being parents with children at home, and also that this stage would, at some point, inevitably end. Some aspects of present behaviour were seen as in part desirable in view of anticipated future stages. Respondents felt, for example, that both individual identity and the basic husband/wife relationship should not be overwhelmed by the
This was rooted partly in feelings about what each of them wanted out of their current existence but, for the majority, it was also anticipatory of future stages. Frequently, for example, a cautionary tale was told about people whose lives had been so centred around their children that they had little meaning in life when the children left home. Many respondents, especially the wives at home with small children, felt, therefore, that it was imperative for them to at least try to have some interests independently of the home and children, despite the organisational difficulties this might involve. People also stressed the importance of having time away from the children to enjoy things together. Barbara Johnson, for example, felt that:

"We don't do enough on our own and I feel that you can grow apart if you don't. Perhaps this is something else advice to a young man or woman. Even when the children come along DO reserve some time to yourselves because you can grow apart and it might be too late before you realise."

K.B. "Do you mean doing things with each other or doing things separately?"

Barbara: "No, doing things with each other. Also doing things separately, but doing things with each other, doing things that you did before you had the children because you find, you CAN find, I reckon there's the danger that you find that you've developed like this (made a gesture indicating 'at a tangent') and you've lost the bridges that you HAD across to each other." (I)

These examples illustrate some of the ways in which family life cycle assumptions provided implicit reference points for respondents. They were one way of locating oneself in and attaching meaning to current family existence. Such use of life cycle assumptions supports the arguments put forward by Anselm Strauss. He maintained that a temporal dimension is
inherent in all statuses. My research illustrates the importance to these respondents of assumptions relating age to phase/stage in the family life cycle. Strauss said:

"Legitimation is rendered easier when the claim to a phase conforms traditionally to what is expected at a given age."28

Respondents' accounts were characterised, however, by the attribution of very broad temporal dimensions to the various phases and stages. They operated with essentially flexible interpretations of the specific ages at which individuals would 'be ready' for certain stages. This was applied to their own lives and to their "understandings" of their children. In this way quite considerable variation could be legitimated.29

(iii) The current 'stage'

In this section I shall discuss how respondents perceived the most recent change in their family life cycle, that is, the addition of children to the marriage. The importance of considering respondents' definitions of the situation was stressed by Peter McGuff as follows:

"To fully describe an institution as a locus of group rules, for example, requires some description of how the institution looks to those engaging in the action, because they will be acting according to how it looks to them, and in so doing the institution will be maintained and changed."30

Respondents' perceptions of the effects of children are presented to illustrate aspects of the material, physical and social psychological contexts within which they all saw themselves as

29. This point is elaborated upon in Chapter Five.
operating. The discussion will, however, indicate that images of children played an important part in explaining variations in individual respondents' practical responses to these typically perceived contexts.

All of the respondents stated that, whether or not they had wished it to happen, the children had considerably affected their personal and married lives. Margaret Barber, for example, felt that this was absolutely inevitably and said:

"Maybe we aren't particularly good at coping, but when people tell me that they won't allow children to change their lives, I either think they must be very poor parents in that they must pretty well ignore their children and very self indulgent people, or that they must be stinking rich and pay other people to do what they should be doing, or that they have a horde of Edinburgh grandparents who are all doing it with love." (Jt)

The most obvious immediate change was that all of the women had given up full time employment in order to have the baby, and, even if this was viewed as a temporary necessity, it was seen as having far reaching effects on many aspects of the conjugal relationship. Only two of the wives in the sample, Kathy Hielop and Jean Coulson, had not continued in full time employment immediately after marriage, and this had been with the explicit intention of becoming pregnant as soon as possible. Ian Johnson expressed a commonly mentioned view as follows:

"I think it's all tied up with the children, really, the amount to which she'd be tied up by the marriage; if you don't have children then you keep on leading the sort of life that you did before you were married. But once you've had children I think it makes much more difference to a woman than it does to a man." (I)

Although specific issues varied, there were three main areas of effects which were usually mentioned. These could be categorised as material, physical and social psychological. No doubt there are endless possible additions to any list of effects but
description will be given here simply of the kinds of things which respondents saw as especially relevant to their own lives. The examples given cover all of the effects mentioned by respondents and are intended to provide a background of how people saw their lives after having children. Obviously the fact that, at the time of study, all of the children involved were under six years of age, was a relevant variable to be borne in mind when considering the effects which respondents saw fit to mention.

(iii)(a) Material Effects

The immediate effects of the men becoming the sole earner and the obvious cut in income was, interestingly, talked about more in terms of its social psychological implications, with the purely financial aspects being seldom mentioned. There could be many explanations for this but two would seem to be especially pertinent. Firstly, all of the men were earning salaries sufficient to give a fairly comfortable standard of living; all but one, for example, were in the process of buying their own house, and all but one ran a car. Secondly, a minimum of three years had now passed since the birth of the first child. During this time it seemed that the couples had either adapted financially, or a few of the wives had gone back to part time work. Whatever interpretations might be made, the fact remained that there were very few memories of financial impoverishment or material difficulties which were vivid enough to merit being stressed.

The comments which were made were connected more with changes in attitudes towards money and its earning. A few of the wives, for example, talked about not feeling that the money was their
own, since they had not personally earned it. Most of the wives said that, if they had any spare money, they would now tend to spend it on things for the children, especially clothes, rather than on themselves. About three quarters of the wives, however, talked about giving up their own jobs in terms of this being a temporary personal sacrifice, and made practically no mention of any changes involved materially. Most of the men saw the implications of their becoming the sole earner in terms of its heightening their personal responsibilities, since two and then three other individuals became totally financially dependent on them. Only Ian Johnson really contradicted this overall impression when he talked about how he felt that he was different from other middle class fathers. He said that he did not feel burdened down with responsibilities, had continued to spend money on what might be considered by others to be frivolous items such as leisure equipment and holidays, and had continued to live in rented accommodation. (The Johnsons in fact bought a house towards the end of the study.) A more typical statement was made by Derek Rankin when, during the joint interview, he reflected on the differences after having children. He commented:

"And if I lose my job and have to take less salary well that affects everybody, whereas if we were both working, well, you could afford to do these sort of things." (Jt)

(iii)(b) Physical Effects

Respondents perceived children as imposing considerable physical effects in two main ways. Firstly, the sheer activity of looking after the children was seen as extremely tiring, both physically and mentally, especially if they were also waking through the night. Several of the wives said, for
example, that being at home and looking after children was far harder physically than it had been to work full time before the children were born. About two thirds of the couples had either had in the past, or were currently experiencing, sleep problems of various kinds with the children. They talked about how exhausting this could be, and of the various schemes they had instituted in order that each of them had as much sleep as could be arranged.

Secondly, children were seen as restricting in various ways the physical mobility of the respondents, both individually and jointly. The most obvious effect, mentioned by everyone, was that the couple could not go out together in the evening or at weekends without making arrangements for someone else to take over responsibility for the children. Although a third of the couples had relatives living in the Edinburgh area, none were near enough to be regarded as "instantly available". They all talked about how the physical restriction of not leaving the children alone had resulted in changes in their activities outwith the home.

The use of babysitters in order to be able jointly to leave the children was, in fact, the least regularly implemented response to the mobility limitations. The most regular response was for one spouse to stay in and babysit to allow the other to pursue activities independently, whether these were connected with leisure, or work and household responsibilities.  

---

31. The organisation of surrogate childcare is discussed more fully in Chapters Eight and Nine.
John Clark, for example, said:

"But there's no doubt we have to go our separate ways more than ever we did because there's no doubt we were a couple who did things together a lot, we weren't interested in going our separate ways." (I)

Alternatively, three of the couples simply became more housebound, seldom went out individually or jointly, and carried on the majority of their leisure and other activities outwith the home as a family unit.

The degree to which respondents felt physically limited by the children varied considerably, with ideas about children's needs and wants playing a large part in this process. Even so, many of the most mundane activities requiring physical mobility, such as shopping outings, were seen as considerably restricted by having to organise and transport around two small children.

As Dianne Hemingway said:

"... it's affected our married lives in that you have to cater for four and not just two and because they're small they can't just be carried everywhere with us and, which some people DO. It depends on the children, if they're placid and don't mind being hummed around, but I'm afraid ours, ours protest rather loudly so we tend to really NOT do things because of them." (I) (my underlining)

Even Barbara Johnson, who was one of the respondents perhaps most keen not to let having children alter her life, said:

"It's 100% giving yourself up, you have GOT to put the child first although you may not want to, in fact earlier I said that if it was a question of me or them, the sods came second and I came first. But in fact that isn't true, that is just how I would like it to be, but if you've planned to go out for the day and the child is ill, you can't do anything about it, you stay at home." (I)

(iii)(c) Social Psychological

In this area, the most frequently mentioned effect of children could broadly be described as a restriction on the spontaneity of the couple's behaviour. On a practical level this
was expressed in terms of the much greater need to organise all aspects of life, since they felt the responsibility of ensuring that the children's requirements were catered for adequately. The chief example voiced by almost everyone was that they were now unable to simply decide to do a whole range of things, such as spontaneous trips to see a film or out for a drink, or to visit friends. Also, all of the respondents, to varying degrees, felt restrictions on their ability to say whatever they felt like saying in front of the children. There were obviously a variety of implicit meanings behind this as well as the reasons which were actually articulated by the respondents. Some illustration of this wealth of beliefs and ideas is given by the following quotations, which are representative of the range of statements generally made. Philip Barber, in reply to my question "What things are the same or different now from when you were first married?", explained:

"You're very much more housebound, er, you have very little time even to speak to each other, very much LESS time to speak to each other and this CAN become a problem sometimes, it really CAN. Because as soon as the kids wake up, which is from 7 o'clock in the morning, if not earlier, there are certain subjects that you just can't speak to each other about", and he later went on "you find that this sort of thing goes on in a child's mind and you begin to be very much more careful about ALL your conversations in front of her." (I)

Sylvia Chapman remarked in their joint interview:

"This is where I feel we don't have so much time, you know, I sometimes feel we haven't had any time at all to say hello to each other, I feel sometimes we haven't had time to, you know, communicate in ANY way, em, (Martin: Oh aye, aye, well), so that in that way it's different, em, you know, it's er"

Martin: (laughs) "Although we've been in the house all day, mmm Hmm.‖ (Jt)
Sheila Pringle said:

"Ben and I don't seem to talk as much, as we don't have time. It's not that we don't talk, we just don't have the time for the past two years. And especially for the children, you go to have a conversation and they want something and you break it off and then you forget about it." (I)

Further feelings of restrictions on mutual and self expression were also described by many of the respondents. A few people mentioned restrictions on the spontaneity of their sex lives, but the majority talked about differences in their personal relationship in more general terms. Madeleine Harris, for example, said that the presence of children had meant "a removal of the kind of sort of face en face, just the two of us relationship, which is a kind of maturing, I think." (I)

This change from the claimed intensity of the dyadic situation was often illustrated when respondents talked about differences in their patterns of moods and disagreements. About two thirds of the respondents made statements similar to that of Margaret Barber in her joint interview when she observed:

"I think one of the things it's probably done for us is that, er, any arguments we have now don't last for more than five minutes." (Jt)

Helen Moffat expanded on this kind of change as follows:

"I think you relationship's, well I mean obviously it can't be 100% right, but I think right at the roots it's got to be right because I think children will smell it a mile off. (my underlining) So that I think we do take things or any differences of opinion that we have more seriously and not leave things hanging over. I mean if we DO have a disagreement we try and sort it out, we wouldn't have a sort of muttered squabble going on for about a fortnight or something like that, which is, which you can afford to do when you've got no children." (I)
Madeleine Harris elaborated on her earlier statement when she explained:

"... and so, when there are other parties, even though they be just children forcing you to take a more objective or, you know, just to cool off a bit, or just to cope anyway and keep going you know. That I think is very healthy, you know, and good thing because it gives you a perspective, a wider scope somehow so that you don't look into small things and explode them, you know." (I)

Most people remarked that having children around had had some similar effects on their marital relationship, whether it had meant that the form of their disagreements had altered, or that the scope for conflict had widened. A few claimed, for example, that most of their current arguments were, in fact, about the children. Barbara Johnson made an interesting point about her own experience. She said:

"Well I think of necessity it forced us to understand each other better because things arose which needed discussion. And you might find areas of vigorous disagreement which wouldn't have cropped up unless you'd had children; because I think, even if you've never thought much about kids before you actually HAVE them, there's some kind of residual attitude towards child-rearing." (I)

4. **Family Life as a Shared Reality** ("give and take")

This final area of underlying assumptions deals with respondents' accounts of family life as a mutually created shared reality. The following theoretical statement from Alfred Schutz provides an excellent summary of the complex interactive nature of the development of family behaviour. Schutz stated:
"My constructing the Other as a partial self, as the performer of typical roles or functions has a corollary in the process of self typification which takes place if I enter into interaction with him. I am not involved in such a relationship with my total personality but merely with certain layers of it. In defining the role of the Other I am assuming a role myself. In typifying the Other's behaviour I am typifying my own, which is interrelated with his, transforming myself into a passenger, consumer, taxpayer, reader, bystander, etc."32 (and here, a spouse or parent)

In this section I shall show how respondents themselves perceived and interpreted such interactional constraints.

Throughout their accounts respondents continually expressed an awareness that their behaviour was being developed in the context of the other family members. Here, three main underlying assumptions characterised their descriptions of family life. Firstly, they frequently referred to an awareness of being part of a "family unit". By this they were, at these points, referring to their family of procreation. According to respondents, there was practically no aspect of family life where one could be "unaware" of the other group members.33 Secondly, although reactions to this "unit feeling" varied, all respondents maintained that the needs and wants of the other members had to be seen to be "fairly" accommodated. This

33. I would suggest that Leik's experiments indicated the importance of this kind of "unit feeling" in families, and also the influence on behaviour of feeling part of an ongoing shared reality. Comparing decision making behaviour in stranger and family groups, it was found (a) that sex role differentiations tended to disappear more in the family group interaction; and (b) that instrumentality and emotionality affected consensus and satisfaction differently in the two kinds of groups. Leik, R., "Instrumentality and Emotionality in Family Interaction", Sociometry, 1963, pp.131-146.
underlying assumption of mutually negotiated "fairness" was typically expressed in terms of "give and take" and "coming and going". Thirdly, all of the points discussed so far indicate another assumption stressed by respondents - that family life should involve "open communication".

(a) Unit Feeling

All of the respondents mentioned in various ways the relevance of feeling part of a family unit. They saw this as having both positive beneficial effects as well as detrimental ones. On the positive side, some respondents described a feeling of security or of having become less self centred. Edward Jackson said, for example:

"I mean I've got friends who are still bachelors the same age as I am and these blokes are miserable. They're always having to seek friendship whereas, well I'll tell you maybe what the answer is, if I can put it this way. O.K., we've got Shirley and I, the two kids and the two dogs, now that gives me a one in five chance of getting a friendly welcome when I come home at night. It means you're coming home in fact to an actual environment where, O.K., you're bound to get a welcome, and because of this, it stabilises you." (I)

Other people saw themselves as having become less self centred. Anna Robson, for example, claimed:

"I'm a much nicer person now, I like to think so. I don't think about myself and I think this is the big thing for anyone thinking about marriage, don't think about ME anymore, think about US." (and later) "Your whole life changes, Kathryn, I mean, I've got three people who need me now. It's a nice feeling, you know, I mean, before it was just ME, me, me, me." (I)

Similar feelings were expressed in terms of being unable to indulge in introspection, simply because the time was not available. Louise Wilson felt that:

"... you don't spend as much time worrying about what you should be doing or what you ARE doing or in fact what you would like to be doing." (I)
David Russell felt, though, that this was just one aspect of children having narrowed his perspectives, "because you're so much concerned with thinking about THEIR (children's) future, YOUR future with THEM." (1)

Equally, respondents sometimes found "unit feeling" to be oppressive in that it tended to detract from individuality, privacy and freedom. Both husbands and wives mentioned this but perhaps the women stressed it more because at this point in their lives they were more directly involved with the "unit" than were the men. Both Barbara Johnson and Marjorie Russell said that they felt, at times, that they were completely oppressed by a lack of personal freedom. Barbara said of the mother that:

"... when there are children around, she isn't ever on her own. This is something that I've actually had to fight for a bit, you know, just a bit of time on my own. I think it's just that men don't realise you need it, at least I do." (1)

Marjorie Russell added the further point that, when there were children around it was so much more difficult,

"... to give vent privately to your emotions, you can't let them, not that it happens very often, but when there's one of the local bugs going round and you're feeling low as low and nothing's going right, all you want to do is hide in a corner and bawl or something." (1)

The general impression was perhaps summed up by Madeleine Harris when she said:

"One has to find some way of not depriving them but also of keeping yourself, you know." (1)

Respondents frequently described how they tried to cope with the needs and wants of the individual in the context of the "unit feeling". Marjorie Russell again explained:
"I think probably we are still adjusting to the fact that we are now a unit of four, not a unit of two nor two individuals. I think it's difficult to make it a good unit and also retain some area where you are personal and private together, and separately." (I)

Alan Hemingway put forward the image that children were potentially overpowering, and reassured the importance of the needs of the parents in the face of, as he saw it, the current emphasis on the child. He argued:

"I think that WE have to work hard at giving ourselves as adults a place in this household if you like, because if we DON'T work hard at it, they just take over in terms of attention and they come first. Well I think they come first in MOST families but I don't think that they should to the extent that they appear to everywhere else, and the whole sort of society is geared down to the great sort of God, the child. Well, at this particular stage in life, I think we're in a position to enjoy ourselves most and we've jolly well got to make sure we do." (I)

In this way respondents could be seen to define their own needs, wants and satisfactions within the unit by reference to its other members. Basically, whilst expressing "unit feeling" as some sort of taken-for-granted benchmark, they always balanced this with notions that individuals should neither be allowed to dictate nor have their individuality swamped by the group.

(b) Fairness

Respondents' accounts were also characterised by the assumption that individuals should be treated "fairly" within the group. Each spouse should feel that he/she was making a "fair" contribution to the unit's functioning and was also getting a "fair" share of the rewards. This was frequently expressed in terms of marriage being a "partnership of equals" (sic) which should be run on the basis of "give and take" (sic). Such assumptions were also extended to their views about children.
The assumption that children were entitled to "fair" treatment within the unit was a frequent legitimation of the kind of treatment, and the amount of time and attention, which they were given. Again, "fairness" was negotiated in terms of each particular unit and, as will be described in Chapter Five, various coping mechanisms were developed to sustain belief in its reality.

When talking about this assumption, respondents frequently apologised for speaking in cliches, but insisted that these really did apply. In fact, the avoidance of any specific statements was an integral part of sustaining beliefs in fairness. This meant that a feeling of flexibility could be retained whereby their system could be altered if either of the spouses challenged it and maintained that he/she was not getting a fair deal. Once again the picture was one of respondents holding similar generalised assumptions in common, the actual practical implementations of which were seen as idiosyncratic. Martin Chapman said, by way of advice to a young man getting married:

"I wouldn't try to be too specific because, because you're dealing with individuals and you could be misleading them. I would try to generalise and always tell them to put something into it as well as to get something out of it. And try and remember also that they won't always get their own way, there will be frustrations. They've got to consider each other and each other's feelings as well as their family (children) when they come along." (I)

Such generalised assumptions had important implications on the practical everyday level. The range of behaviour which could be subsumed under the heading of "fairness" and sharing was vast as can be illustrated by the following two quotations. Contrast Patrick Hislop who said to Kathy:
"I saw it (marriage and parenthood) as a partnership of specialists. I'm the specialist at bringing in the goods if you're the specialist at making use of them." (jt)

with the very different framework of "fairness" put forward by Philip Barber. He said:

"We both feel that these things should be shared, er, that everything about family life should be shared as much as possible. A reasonable division of labour in that I, well I don't regard housework, rearing the children and so forth as Margaret's, as the wife's duties, and that mine are to go out and earn the bread. We see this very much as a question of these chores have to be done, and we sort out an arrangement that suits both of us." (I)

The maintenance of belief in this underlying assumption of fairness was an important factor in the negotiation of family behaviour. As will be shown throughout the thesis, various gestures and coping mechanisms were used to maintain this belief, in the face of practical contradictions.

(c) Open Communication

All of these assumptions about give and take, marriage as a partnership, and learning things together, implied another important underlying assumption - open communication. The respondents all stressed that this was important, even if they did this in the context of complaining that their own communication processes were inadequate or impaired. Communication was seen as a process of exchanging both factual information as well as information about ideas, beliefs and feelings. Respondents saw this as important not simply to organise everyday existence but also to retain the closeness of the personal relationship.

Margaret Barber said, for example:

"If you can't talk over your problems I think you're sunk from the beginning, or at least it would have to be a very superficial kind of marriage." (I)
A few of the respondents said that the ability to openly communicate ideas and feelings was so vital to the marital state that if I was not actually studying that angle then I really ought to be! Ben Pringle argued:

"I think this, if you are able to communicate, particularly with your wife, and I don't mean just talking about the latest T.V. programme or talking about things that people usually talk about, er, this isn't communication to me, it's getting an opinion across to somebody and yet being able to accept one back and then knocking it about a bit and arriving at a mutual decision. Not an easy thing to do and I don't quite honestly think that we WERE good at it when we got married, better than most I feel sure, but we're better at it now." (I)

From the perspective adopted in this thesis that marriage is a process of negotiation of a mutually held reality, communication can be seen as a vital means of reaffirming the belief system. If modern middle class marriage does involve members orienting themselves to sets of ill-defined generalised assumptions, with the means of attaining these being varied and uncertain, then communication between the spouses is an essential factor in creating the belief that both are working along lines similar enough to ensure the continued viability of the unit. Empirically, some of the respondents saw proof of a successful process of communication in terms of 'thinking as one'. Judy Davies, who felt this very strongly, explained:

"Well, you often, you know, I often say to him, or I'll be about to say something to him, in the course of conversation and I'll find he'll say 'oh I was just going to say that', so obviously there is, you know, this understanding, and obviously our love has deepened, well this is how I feel, since we got married, otherwise we wouldn't be going along the same sort of line, would we?" (I)

Obviously the extent to which couples claimed to think alike varied, as did the areas on which they claimed accordance. All,
however, made some statement about being increasingly able to anticipate each other's reactions over the years, and that differences of opinion had at least become more tolerated, if not actually lessened. Ian Johnson said:

"There are lots of other things where I'm sure we originally differed and now we don't. And a lot of the things we just don't need to talk about because over the years, em, we haven't said very much, at any one time, but we've said enough over the years to, exactly to know the other person's point of view." (I)

Throughout the thesis many of the taken-for-granted aspects of respondents' communication processes will be illustrated. A major point will be, for example, the importance of the mother's position as an agent of information to the father concerning the child. However, much of this later consideration of communication points to the conclusion that, for a variety of reasons, it was usually at best only partially "open", and even deliberately so. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the strength with which respondents themselves adhered to the importance of openness. This was in many ways the lynch pin of their social construction of family reality.

Summary
In this chapter the underlying assumptions characterising respondents' accounts have been presented. They viewed family life as a learned, shared and life-cyclically oriented reality. Such beliefs, however, provided only a broad framework for the development of parental behaviour. In everyday life considerable variation in the practical implementation of these beliefs was possible. Respondents were therefore engaged in ongoing interpretative activity. Their beliefs had to be constantly re-created, re-affirmed and sustained. This took place in the processes of negotiation of the mutually-
held reality with other family members. It is to these negotiating processes that I turn in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

NEGOTIATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTAL BEHAVIOUR

1. General

This chapter is concerned with describing some important aspects of the development of parental behaviour. I shall treat this as a process of negotiation between spouses. In particular some of the interactional and definitional factors involved will be outlined. These are presented principally from the viewpoint of the adults in the group since my data are derived from their accounts. Throughout, however, the importance of respondents' interpretations of children as participants in this interactive process will be implicit in the discussion.

At this stage the important questions are not "what is done?" and "how often" but how spouses define their social worlds and negotiate these definitions with other family members in order to achieve a subjectively satisfactory construction of "being a parent". The problematical nature of this process arises out of the fact that varieties of behaviour can be claimed as "legitimate" in terms of the broad taken-for-granted underlying assumptions. As David Walsh has stated

"... the social world is also a world of multiple realities, in the sense that members may focus on social situations in different ways and thereby read (account) what are the same situations differently." 2

1. This immediately points to the indexicality of this particular account of parenthood since my respondents were all acting in a two parent family. Indeed, a major facet of their parental behaviour was the underlying assumption that this was a jointly experienced learning situation.

This applies as much to marriage and parenthood as to any other sphere of the 'social world'. In order, therefore, to achieve some sense of acting in the same reality, each couple was engaged in a continuous process of negotiation. In Berger and Kellner's terms they were continually correlating their individual definitions of reality.\(^3\)

The underlying assumptions described in the previous chapter constituted extremely broad sets of meanings. They provided a generalised sense of the mutually-held reality of family life. On an everyday level, however, respondents were engaged in ongoing practical interpretations of these meanings. This process of negotiating parental behaviour was characterised by the use of legitimations and legitimating tactics. These involved explaining behaviour to oneself and others so that it could be seen as compatible with the overall mutually held reality being created.\(^4\) As Alfred Schutz pointed out, negotiation is a process of reassurance that the right prescriptions are being applied.\(^5\) Along with Berger and Luckmann I see the typical purpose of legitimation as integration.\(^6\)

---

4. My use of the term 'legitimations' is akin to Schutz's 'objective category of motives'. He contrasted 'objective' and 'subjective' motives as follows: "...the in-order-to motive refers to the attitude of the actor living in the process of his ongoing action. It is, therefore, an essentially subjective category and is revealed to the observer only if he asks what meaning the actor bestows on his action. The genuine because motive, however, as we have found, is an objective category, accessible to the observer who has to reconstruct from the accomplished act, namely from the state of affairs brought about in the outer world by the actor's action, the attitude of the actor to his action." Natanson, M. (Ed.), 1967, *op.cit.*, p.71.
The negotiation and legitimation of parental behaviour involved extremely complex exchanges of meanings at many different levels. For example, it is important to remember that the subjective meaning attached to a particular activity by a family member might bear little relationship to its actual practical contribution to the administration of family life, as assessed by the researcher. Throughout my fieldwork I was constantly reminded of this very important point. Occasionally respondents themselves defined certain actions as making minimal practical contribution, or as being "an indulgence", but at the same time stressed their importance. During the analysis I realised that one aspect of the subjective importance of such actions was that they sustained belief in the various underlying assumptions which were crucial to the mutual reality being created. I shall give two examples to illustrate this point. Both deal with the reaffirmation of meanings: the first through the practical division of labour, the second through verbal communication.

Firstly, great importance was attached by respondents to the regular voluntary execution of various domestic tasks by the husband. Many of these could be seen, objectively, to be simply "gestures" whose importance was to sustain a belief in the fairness of the mutually shared domestic responsibilities. The kinds of "gestures" varied between families, as did the actual number and range of domestic tasks which the husband carried out. All couples, however, cited certain of the husband's domestic activities which, although often making a minimal practical contribution, could be analysed as of great importance in sustaining the belief in fairness. The most frequent examples were

7. This point will be expanded in Chapter Nine.
8. Underlying assumptions about fairness were discussed in Chapter Three.
that the husband made tea or coffee, or washed the dishes, in the evening. Other more complex examples were that he bathed the children in the evening, or looked after them totally for a short period. As will be discussed later, the exchange of meanings behind these various activities could be seen as of greater significance than the practical effect of the task itself.\footnote{See Chapters Eight and Nine.}

Secondly, most respondents said that they tended to talk a considerable amount about the children to one another. This, they maintained, was not at any particularly self conscious level of "let's discuss the children", but rather it was a taken-for-granted exchange. Respondents themselves often said that this could be viewed as a sort of smug self indulgence about their children's pleasant qualities. On another level they legitimated this behaviour as helping them to be consistent with the children, and to maintain a "united front" (sic). Analytically, however, it can be suggested that this interchange between parents was a vital means both of coping with the uncertainties of their parental situation, and of mutually legitimating and re-enforcing each other's beliefs in the appropriateness of their actions. Talking about the children was much more than an indulgent exchange or even a discussion about how to deal with them. It was inextricably linked with underlying assumptions that children should be understood and that, for consistent parental behaviour, spouses should sustain the belief that the understandings were subjectively satisfactory to them both.\footnote{These basic assumptions were introduced in Chapter Three and will be dealt with in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.} Such communication was not only an integral element in the construction of parental behaviour but it was also a means of sustaining belief in the viability of the unit in the face of all the contradictions and dissatisfactions.
2. **Legitimations**

Legitimations were an integral part of the negotiation of parental behaviour. Respondents used them to justify both previous and intended actions. Many legitimations involved the stating of underlying assumptions previously described. These were the broadest possible common denominations of taken-for-granted meanings. The dynamic of the negotiating processes stemmed at least in part from the vagueness and generality of the assumptions. In addition, the assumptions were frequently incompatible. All of this meant that the practical implementation of these meanings provided great scope for variations in interpretation and strength of adherence. Legitimating behaviour was therefore a continuous element in the everyday decision-making involved in being a parent. This everyday decision-making was, in itself, a means of re-affirming underlying assumptions since, in the process of surveying possible courses of action, individuals and couples often legitimated their intended actions in terms of these generalised meanings. In this way belief in a mutually created reality was being constantly sustained.

In this section I shall first illustrate how legitimations were used in the development of parental behaviour. I shall then discuss the special importance of assumptions about children (images) being used as legitimations. Finally, the ways in which these images of children were used as legitimations will be described. This is treated as an evaluative, selective and interactive process.

(a) **Examples of legitimating behaviour**

All of the couples had made the decision that the woman should stay at home to look after the children, at least in their early years. During their accounts respondents legitimated this decision about parental behaviour both to myself and to one
another. This involved referring to various underlying assumptions and either defining them as being upheld or else rationalising their perceived current infringement. The Robsons, for example, discussed this as follows:

Anna: "I feel at the moment that all my married life seems to have been taken up with small children, although I've only got two. I mean, I've been married what, seven years."

Jim: "Yes, but you've got to remember, em, you'll be possibly married if you're lucky for fifty years, so seven years out of fifty is not a big amount to be mixed up with small children, Anna, when you think about it."

Anna: "Oh I know this, but try telling me this. I mean, I'm here at the moment because the children are small enough to need me here at the moment."

Most respondents, like the Robsons, legitimated this decision in two main ways. They put forward abstract images of children's needs and wants, often, as in this case, stability and security. These were usually supported by assumptions about family life as cyclical. Respondents maintained that, in the context of modern day western society, such a home-bound period was inevitable but temporary. A similar legitimation came from Philip Barber when he said of the "toddler stage":

"Your life's very much centred on the children, and I think that whoever is looking after the children has got to make this kind of sacrifice, that they have to accept, for the period in which the children are up and about, able to move around and yet not sufficiently well able to be, well, not old enough to be off to school for a day to give them a free period, they have to commit themselves. This is the mother's role, the mother has to commit herself to this kind of life."

Another area of parental behaviour which illustrates the use of legitimations was the degree to which children were expected

11. These images are discussed at length in Chapter Six.
to fit in with the parents' lives or vice versa. Unlike the first example, this was an area on which respondents held almost polar views. Here the potential incompatibility of various underlying assumptions was clearly shown. Images of children's needs and wants could easily conflict with assumptions about family life as a shared reality in which individuals should neither dictate nor be swamped. The following quotations are typical and illustrate the different parental decisions made by James Gilchrist and Jim Robson compared with Jean Coulson and Ian Johnson, and the ways in which they legitimated this behaviour. James Gilchrist said:

"When we go visiting, we're back for 7 o'clock because that's the time the kids are washed and in their beds and have their supper. We sort of made that rule up between the two of us and that's it ... we don't, em, we don't spoil their sleep or their health in any way or their routine by enjoying ourselves and letting them suffer."

Jim Robson said:

"I see children that are lumped about every place their parents go. I think this is wrong, they're brought home at all the odd times of night, I think this is wrong."

K.B. "Why do you think it's wrong?"

J.R. "Because I feel that a child needs its own environment when it's time to go to sleep. I find that my children don't settle any place except their own home or a home they know very well, such as their grandparents or something like that. I wouldn't for instance dream of taking my children along to a party and lobbing them into a bedroom and then lobbing them out at 1 o'clock in the morning. I personally don't think this is a good idea, I don't think it gives a child a sense of security."

Jean Coulson put forward a different view, she explained:
"... although we consider our children first obviously, em, at the same time, you know, THEY'VE got to fit into OUR existence rather than you know, US adjust to THEM." (and later) "I think a lot of families, you know, once they've got children they say, 'oh we can't go away now, it's impossible', but if we want to go you know, we pack up the car and off we go you know, we don't want THEM to make a difference from that point of view. I don't think it's good for the child, you know, basically, I mean when Matthew was small you know, we travelled around abroad and took him with us. We'd rather he came with us, em, than leave him behind with somebody else to look after him." (I) 

Ian Johnson said:

"When we lived in London we travelled about quite a lot because a lot of our friends lived out of London. And we'd go away for the weekend or overnight and the kids would just sleep in the back of the car or they'd sleep in a bed at the other end and we could transfer them from one bed to another and they wouldn't wake up, or, if they did, they'd go back to sleep in five minutes ... and they've just accepted this. And I think probably a lot of kids wouldn't do this em, you know, you hear of parents saying to tiptoe out and be very quiet. Well they don't care where they sleep, they'll sleep anywhere." (I) 

These quotations are interesting in many ways. They show how parents developed images of children which legitimated their behaviour. James and Jim defined children as needing their own home environment and fixed routines in order to foster good health and a sense of security. Jean and Ian defined children as being much more adaptable than this, and saw their having a break from home and routine as valuable (i) because it kept the family together (unit feeling), or (ii) because it encouraged children to learn to be flexible (family life as a learning situation). At the same time, however, they also legitimated their behaviour in terms of the needs of all of the members of the group rather than just the children.

The underlying assumptions were essentially very flexible. This was shown by the wide ranges of behaviour which respondents
claimed reflected these beliefs. Assumptions were also used selectively, and were assigned varying priorities when they were used as legitimations. Many respondents, for example, felt that the children's needs and wants restricted their own freedom. This could be seen to violate assumptions about fairness. In this situation they tended, therefore, to implement the assumption that family life was cyclical. They emphasised that they had enjoyed considerable freedom of action before children and would be able to do so again in the future.

Respondents also legitimated their behaviour to the children themselves. Analytically this can be seen as a practical interpretation of their assumptions about family life as a shared and learning situation. It is also connected with their images of the child as a future friend. Respondents frequently described how they made decisions, or acted in certain ways, which favoured one child at the expense of the other. Typically this occurred when the elder child was asked to give way to the perceived special needs or demands of the younger. It was apparent from respondents' accounts that they felt such behaviour on their part had to be legitimated to the elder child, or else alternatives created which sustained belief in fairness. In such circumstances the notion of phase or stage was frequently used as a legitimation. An example came from the Chapmans who, at that time, maintained that they thought they were treating their elder daughter somewhat unfairly. Martin said:

12. See Chapter Six.
"And I, I find myself, er, getting on to her a lot more, I think probably just with the lack of sleep I'm a bit more irritable just now. Just general circumstances that em, I think we're being a bit unfair to the child really, in that respect, we're pulling her up for things that normally we wouldn't have said anything"... "We've even tried to explain to Anne that, em, we aren't getting our sleep, with Judy teething and even Anne herself occasionally says: 'Did I disturb you last night, daddy?'" (F)

(b) Images of children as legitimations

The legitimation to one another of past and intended childrearing activities was an important element in the spouses' negotiation of being parents. Here, images of children were constantly exchanged and discussed. Several couples maintained that they were in agreement about how to bring up the children. However, even those who claimed this overall agreement discussed and debated the management of everyday issues in much the same way as did couples who made no claim to such concordance of views. Discussions took the general form of each spouse legitimating alternative methods of defining and dealing with a situation, often by appealing to different underlying assumptions. Sometimes disagreements on methods were perceived as irreconcilable. Even then, however, these were frequently tolerated, and were incorporated into the mutual repertoire of parental behaviour if each spouse was able to put forward a legitimation which proved subjectively satisfactory to the other. The uncertainties of practical parental behaviour were so great that a respondent was seldom totally confident that his/her methods were in line with their intended meanings. The following quotation, for example, was part of a discussion where one spouse legitimated his appeal for firmer control of the child by putting forward the image that children need well defined limits of behaviour. His
wife challenged this, arguing for a more lax approach based on the underlying assumption that a child's individuality had to be allowed to develop. In reply to Eric's statement that their son had a "mild discipline problem", Carol Burns argued:

"I think it's simply because he's at school and he's growing and learning and you know, managing himself a bit more, you know, he comes home from school now."

Eric: "It's just as he gets older."

Carol: "It's just growing up, and he's bound to be exerting his personality more and more and as he learns more and sees others em, he'll just try it on a bit more you know, just to get his own personality going."

Eric: "Obviously the older he gets, the worse it would get unless it's stamped on, I mean it must do."

Carol: "Yes, but you know, how do you stamp on it without crippling it, you know, without stunting his personality?"

Eric: "Well you see, this is where the problem arises." (P)

This extract was, therefore, part of an exchange where spouses legitimated different approaches to a defined problem. This was part of the process of negotiating parental strategies, and illustrated several assumptions which were often implicit in such discussions. Both spouses were operating with the image of the child as a learning, dynamic entity. They tried to understand his behaviour by placing it in the context of different physical and social environments. They also used projected images of how their own behaviour might affect the child's future personality. Here already then are three fundamental images of children which were common to all respondents, and which will be elaborated upon in later chapters.

13. See Chapter Six.
Thus, legitimations of the child's behaviour as well as their own were further elements involved in negotiating parental behaviour. Here respondents were implementing the most crucial underlying assumption - that being a parent involved understanding the child. Assumptions about phases and stages, were perhaps the most frequently used legitimations in this area. This was often well illustrated when the child behaved in ways which the parents defined as "incomprehensible". One way of legitimating such behaviour, and their response to it, was to explain it as a phase. Many respondents, for example, told me about their children being cheeky to them and calling them all sorts of silly names.

Hannah Gilchrist gave a typical legitimating response as follows:

"I think they all go through the same sort of stages, children, you know, the cheeky mischievous stage is about three years old."  (I)

The use of the notion of stage as a perceived aid to understanding a child's behaviour was nicely illustrated by Madeleine Harris when she was talking about a student who had recently 'au-paired' for them, she said:

"Frances is at an age where she's not a little baby anymore and I think she felt the girl was a bit condescending to her, I don't think the girl knew how to cope with that age you know, because they're not babies and yet they're children, you know, and it's some balance between a bit of grown-upness and still a bit of being very little."  (W/E)  (my underlining)

(c) Legitimating parental behaviour: an evaluative, selective and interactive process

The negotiation of parental behaviour was characterised therefore by the constant use of images of children to legitimate actions. Evaluation of these images was a crucial element in developing courses of action. For example, one way in which respondents constructed understandings of their child was by the definition of
various personality traits. At its simplest, they then had to decide whether a defined trait was good or bad in order to make their response. Patrick Hislop, for instance, said of his younger daughter:

"Anna, on the other hand seems to be much more aggressive (than Julie), has no fear of people, em, is perhaps too aggressive for her own good - which has to be occasionally trod on." (I)

A further illustration of the potential importance for behaviour of the parent's perception and evaluation of various traits came from Carol Burns. She spoke as follows about her reaction against a medical questionnaire which she had been required to answer concerning her son, John. She said:

"You know, you could have just put 'yes' to everything and you could have just put 'no' to everything because, em, well it said 'is he obedient?', well of COURSE he's disobedient, 'is he argumentative?', YES, thank goodness. And yet I'm sure if I'd answered 'yes' to this lot I'd have had a very aggressive child on paper." (I)

The use of images of children as legitimations was also a selective process. In everyday life images were usually drawn upon in an essentially spontaneous and unreflective manner. Legitimations were essentially context bound. In the present

14. See Chapters Six and Seven.
15. The research interview situation was, obviously, simply one context. In fact, the kinds of legitimations presented to me often altered as the fieldwork progressed. Two main reasons for this can be suggested: (a) preliminary images became defunct as I was defined as becoming more knowledgable about their family lives, and (b) as respondents became more familiar with the interview situation and with myself, they became less embarrassed, or more willing to present certain kinds of images - for example, they increasingly put forward more negatively critical images of their child.
context respondents were being encouraged to verbalize their ideas about children for the benefit of a piece of research. Several of them remarked that they would usually reflect in such a self-conscious way only when a problem arose. My impression was that individuals and couples had repertoires of images which were drawn upon for different purposes in different situations, and which were frequently internally inconsistent. When respondents actually described and elaborated upon specific domestic events, their accounts were characterised by an essentially pragmatic and ad hoc use of images. Margaret Barber's comment seemed to reflect this and would probably have been echoed by most of the respondents. She said:

"... one tends to act as one genuinely feels at the time with children, you don't generally have time to reflect what's the right thing to do." (I)

The selection and evaluation of images of children was also an interactive process between spouses. This was a crucial way in which belief was sustained in their mutually held reality of being parents. The vagueness and generality of many of the images of children put these spousal interactions at a premium. They talked to one another about the child in an attempt to develop understandings which would, ideally, be subjectively satisfactory to them both. These mutually held understandings could then be a taken-for-granted base for the parental behaviour of both spouses. In practice, it would seem from respondents' accounts, that it was often disagreements and misunderstandings during such interactions, which undermined their claimed ideal of inter parental consistency. 16. The wide range of possible

---

16. This was perceived as necessary to satisfy certain basic needs of the child. I discuss it further in Chapter Six.
Legitimations, both of the child's behaviour and the parent's response, meant that respondents frequently vacillated and disagreed about which interpretation could be used as a credible view of reality at any particular time. During the course of the interviews respondents often revealed and debated their different images of children. Madeleine Harris, for example, showed how her reaction to certain aspects of the children's behaviour would be different from that of Jeff, simply because she interpreted them differently. She reflected:

"I'm trying to think if we DO have any conscious rules about their behaviour, what we want them to be like - to be honest and not tell lies. I think you're (to Jeff) more CONSCIOUS of that then I am because I don't think children lie, half the time they just make up imaginary tales." (?)

Here Madeleine defined herself as reacting less strictly to situations where both she and Jeff felt that their children had been dishonest. She put forward an alternative abstract image of children to legitimate her response. In this particular instance the Harris's simply accepted one another's different reactions. Often, however, arguments took place when one spouse tried to persuade the other to change his/her parental behaviour by claiming the greater validity (evaluative), or relevance (selective), of a particular image.

3. Some characteristics of legitimations

Legitimating parental behaviour involved continuous choices about the kinds of knowledge which made subjective sense to each respondent.

As Alfred Schutz said,
"Not only what an individual knows differs from what his neighbour knows, but also how both know the 'same' facts. Knowledge has manifold degrees of clarity, distinctness, precision and familiarity."¹⁷

This was shown on a *general* level when, for example, respondents contrasted knowledge perceived as "common-sense", with that of science. It was also illustrated when they legitimated a *particular* piece of behaviour of their child. In this instance, the most frequent choice was between using a taken-for-granted image of the child, such as a perceived personality trait; or gaining further "understanding" by reconstructing the context in which the child was defined as acting.¹⁸

Some of the general choices of kinds of knowledge which were perceived as subjectively satisfactory were discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁹ Most respondents stressed the irrelevance in practice of knowledge or experience *prior* to being a parent; and emphasised the importance of learning through *direct* experience of the situation. One way of explaining the preference for this kind of knowledge was the image that all children are different. Ben Pringle, a father who had read various things about parenthood remarked:

"It's not a knowledgeable subject, you know, I don't think a great deal of knowledge helps you. If there is a science of parenthood, er, I don't think there is, children are so different." (1)

The high degree of subjective satisfaction accorded to knowledge derived from one's "own experience" was also shown by legitimations defined as "common sense". In their accounts respondents constantly indicated that, whilst they were aware that whole ranges of 'scientific'

---

¹⁸. Contextual images are discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.
¹⁹. See for example the section on parenthood as learning, pp. 95-100.
analyses could be applied to being a parent, they preferred to rely on the intuitive experiential brand of knowledge called "common sense." Barry Coulson illustrated this when he talked about their dealings with their children as being different from those of some friends. He explained:

"But we have some friends that, you know, it makes us feel rather, well, as I say, sort of simple, you know, the way they sort of treat their children. It sort of bothered me, and we said 'oh crikey, are we doing the right things?' They treat it all sort of 'oh, how will it affect the child sort of thing?'. I mean, we DON'T, we just do what is normal, am what WE feel is normal and natural." (I)

Respondents were aware that parents had different ideas about which knowledge "made sense" to them. For example, some recounted, with delight, instances where they or their friends had followed "scientific" advice about childrearing, with no successful outcome.

20. The way in which people continually attach legitimacy to different levels of knowledge was also shown by Schwartz and Stanton in their study of the mental hospital. They wrote:

"The most common, most conspicuous and most clearly serious misunderstanding occurred when someone, staff member or patient, ignored the explicit meaning of a statement or action and focused attention on an inferred meaning." ... "Restriction of attention to 'deep' interpretation was not ... confined to dealing with patients; on the contrary, many psychiatrists seemed to pride themselves on ignoring the face value of what their colleagues said to them, focusing instead on what they believed to be 'really going on'. Information was frequently lost ... particularly when a junior staff member protested to a senior about certain aspects of the hospital, the protest was likely to be interpreted as a transference rebellion. This interpretation was rarely made when the younger staff member agreed with the older. Because of these pseudo-deep interpretations, communication sometimes became so complex that the situation could be summarised by the statement 'If you disagree with me, you need to see a psychiatrist.'"

(i.e. the suggested methods had not achieved the desired results). The Rankins, for instance, said that they had only managed to deal with their son's refusal to eat when they stopped taking Dr. Spook's advice and used their own "common sense" instead.

Parental behaviour which was legitimated by "common sense" knowledge was also felt to be subjectively satisfactory partly because being too "scientific" was equated with not being "yourself". Several respondents further maintained that children were especially sensitive to such "falseness". The first part of this quotation from Barbara Johnson was typical. She said:

"I think you can worry too much about whether you're doing the right thing or the wrong thing. I feel that perhaps you just ought to follow your instinct and hope for the best. I think, actually, you can't dissemble anyway, children realise if you're not being true to yourself. And, em, as soon as you try and make out that you are different from what you really are, I reckon you're creating more anxiety than ever, so I hope they just know me as a bad tempered old bitch (laughs) and they'll just have to like it or lump it." (I)

Interestingly, however, certain kinds of "scientific" legitimations of children's behaviour, such as those provided by doctors, were perceived as being extremely satisfactory. Most respondents did not challenge the perhaps more esoteric field of medical science. They felt, however, that their everyday knowledge (common sense) was more pertinent to their own family lives than were the social sciences of psychology or sociology. I would suggest that, in part, this is because medical legitimations usually come with a prescribed and easily administered "solution".

21. This point is illustrated on p.150 of the present chapter.
The choice between different levels of knowledge was also affected by the particular context in which behaviour was seen to take place. Respondents' accounts were characterised by continuous decisions about the most subjectively satisfactory legitimations of the child's behaviour. It seems likely that they had ranges of legitimations which were explored either systematically or randomly in making decisions about everyday parental behaviour. Physical, personality or contextual images were, for example, the bases of three possible kinds of legitimations. Sometimes a great deal of parental behaviour was legitimated in terms of one particular image of a child, which had achieved temporary predominance. This occurred when, for example, a child was defined as "going through a phase" to which distinct characteristics had been attributed. A frequent illustration occurred when mothers legitimated all decisions about going to places with or without their children in terms of his/her "going through a clinging phase".

The subjective satisfaction of a legitimation also varied through time. The overall uncertainty, and the number and complexity of variables involved in making sense of the child, meant that respondents' accounts were simply those sets of legitimations which were satisfactory to them at any one point in time. Occasionally this process was laid bare when respondents "realised" that they had in fact "misunderstood" the child and had developed "wrong" legitimations of his/her behaviour.

Examples of this were given by the Moffats and the Hislops who related similar experiences of forming wrong accounts of their elder daughters. In each case, they had perceived the child as behaving abnormally by becoming tearful and easily upset and claiming physical

---

22. These are discussed in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.
symptoms. They had defined all this as stemming from social psychological factors. The Moffats thought Pamela was worried about school; the Hislops thought Julie was being upset by her very dominant small sister. When doctors eventually diagnosed a tonsil infection for Pamela Moffat and a urinary tract infection for Julie Hislop, both sets of parents subsequently accepted a physical account of the behaviour, and said that they now felt somewhat embarrassed and abashed by their previously inaccurate understandings. This was just one instance of many situations described by respondents where they defined themselves as having "misunderstood" their child at a certain point in time. Subsequently, they had changed to a different "understanding" to which they then attributed a greater legitimacy.

In these ways legitimations were characterised by the selection of different kinds of knowledge, and by the varying satisfaction of the underlying assumptions at different points in time. In addition, the process of legitimating behaviour was pragmatic and tactical in another sense. In creating their mutual reality spouses also developed constellations of meanings which I shall call "explanatory incidents". These were frequently referred to during their accounts and involved a respondent describing an incident in the past which was now used as a legitimation of present behaviour. The use of "explanatory incidents" as legitimating tactics links in with the following point made by Berger and Kellner. They wrote:

"The couple thus constructs not only present reality but reconstructs past reality as well, fabricating a common memory that integrates the recollections of the two individual pasts."23

---

Obviously the incident was being described specifically for the information of an outsider, the researcher, but it was, nevertheless, a tacit reference point for the couples concerned, and had been incorporated into their mutual stock of knowledge. Marjorie Jeffreys, for example, legitimated as follows her continued decision to stay at home with the children rather than go back to work as she would have liked. She said:

"I think the child would eventually get the idea that you were more interested in what happened outside than what happened at home." (I)

She went on to refer to an incident which occurred when she was listening to a series about Professional women going back to work, explaining:

"And one day I switched this on and I was doing some job about the house and Brian was pottering about, he switched it off, and I asked him why he switched it off, 'Because I don't want you to go back to work, Mummy.' And he thought I was listening to that programme because he thought I wanted to go out to work and he didn't want me to go out to work." (I)

Barry Coulson, who never did any cooking, legitimated this as follows:

"But I don't enjoy it em, even if Jean is away I will never cook for myself. Only the bare essentials, you know, I just have no patience with it. I used to cook when I HAD to, if Jean was in bed when we first got married and she'd had a miscarriage, I cooked for six bloody weeks (everyone laughing) ... it drove me insane." W/E

An "explanatory incident" could also be used to support a belief in the feasibility of an item of intended behaviour. An extreme illustration of this was given by Kathy Kislop when she speculated that her husband would help in the house if, in the future, she went out to work. As she had virtually never gone out to work at all since she was married, and as her husband currently made no contribution to the household chores, she legitimated her belief as follows:
"There was three weeks when I did work when we were in the flat (first married) and Patrick was always home before I was at night. And towards the end of the second week he was starting to get the tea ready before I came in, and I think it only gradually dawned on him that these things had to be done." (1)

An "explanatory incident" was often used as a sort of negative form of legitimation. This frequently occurred when respondents were legitimating a strong and fairly inflexible preference for always allocating an activity to one spouse in particular, or for always behaving in a certain way. They reinforced their confidence that this was the best course of action by using an "explanatory incident" to illustrate that the alternatives would be unsuccessful. The most common example was the reference to the 'nappy disasters' which had occurred when the father had attempted that particular chore. Another frequent example was the overspending or purchasing of a wrong item when the husband had done the shopping. Although these examples did not apply to all of the respondents, most of them, at some point, used the tactic of an "explanatory incident" to legitimate, in their particular situation, one spouse's monopoly of a certain activity.

On a wider level an "explanatory incident" was sometimes used to reinforce a decision not to take a particular course of action. A somewhat extreme example came from the Robsoms who only very rarely left the children with someone and went out on their own. Anna Robson explained:

"I'm NOT very lucky with babysitters, well I have neighbours who offer you know, but anytime we DO have a babysitter one of them wakes up yelling. It's just one of those things you know. As I say, when we DO go out it's usually a family treat." (1)

To support this, both she and her husband related independently the incident of one New Year's Eve when they had gone next door to their neighbour's house for a few minutes, only to find on returning, their distraught child screaming in the hall.
This brief consideration of the use of the "explanatory incident" has some interesting wider implications. In many cases it would seem that one experience or incident had been sufficient to concretise a set of beliefs about appropriate behaviour. It was again evident that, in the area of family behaviour, formalised learning techniques, or rational scanning of possible modes of behaviour, were usually regarded as irrelevant, and that personal experience was the prime way of deciding on a course of action. In addition to this, decisions about family behaviour and organisation were made not only on the basis of acceptability, but also of habit. In the area of the division of labour, for example, the person who carried out an activity the most frequently was often eventually regarded as the best for the job, from the point of view both of standard of work, and of economy of time and effort. Routines were quickly developed on the basis of "explanatory incidents", and the belief that the potential inconvenience of trying alternative methods was not worth the bother because the present method had been experienced as, at the very least, acceptable.

That a particular personal experience may have provided objectively inaccurate or inadequate knowledge was irrelevant; the important factor was that the respondent believed in that knowledge. This was particularly evident in the area of childrearing where much behaviour was evolved on the basis of "explanatory incidents" and recollected experience. As I shall discuss later, experiences with and recollections of the first child were very much referred to as an aid to dealing with the second child. Respondents tended to use a sort of working model of what had happened with the first child to legitimate their actions with the second. The progress of the

24. See the section on comparative images in Chapter Seven.
second child was, for example, seen very much in the context of that of the first. This was a constant reference point for the parents, even though several of them also mentioned that it was difficult to remember exact details of the first child's progress. Respondents, for example, frequently disagreed with each other during the course of an interview about what had actually happened at certain times. Thus, putting the situation somewhat baldly and provocatively, a fair amount of the childrearing behaviour of the respondents was constructed by reference to often admittedly hazy and badly recollected experiences, especially those with the first child. These are some examples of respondents telling of this situation. Margaret Barber said:

"It's quite interesting, er, you saying 'how would you describe them?' because you see, if I didn't have medical charts, I would say that Karen was a small, unhappy, delicate looking little baby when she was Mary's age; Mary is round and rosy and contented. And yet, having been to the clinic and having them weighed, I discover that not only has Mary gained less, in spite of being a heavier baby than when she was born, she is now half a pound less than Karen was at this age. And if I didn't have the proof RIGHT in front of me, I would never ever believe anyone, I would say Mary is pounds heavier." (I)

Shirley Jackson disagreed strongly with her husband when he maintained that their second child was now more advanced than the first had been at the same age, she argued:

"Well I don't think so, I think YOU can't remember what Simon was like at fifteen months because I certainly really can't remember, so neither can you. Well I remember thinking at one point, 'gosh, Elaine's doing that much quicker than Simon ever did it!' and I kept a record, a MUCH more informative record about Simon than I've ever kept about Elaine (laughs). And I looked up the record, now I was SURE that Simon had done this particular thing at a much later stage, and I looked up my book and he HADN'T, now that just shows in that very short space of time how you forget. I mean I can remember when he walked, you know, which is quite a MAJOR thing in a child's life, but, you know, little things about how he was sort of fitting pegs into holes n' things, well now I was SURE Elaine was doing it quicker than Simon and, you know, she wasn't. I think this is a mistake that people make." W/E
Summary

In this chapter aspects of the negotiation of the mutually-held reality of parenthood have been discussed. In part this involved the ongoing interpretations in everyday life of the underlying assumptions discussed in Chapter Three. Spouses continually legitimated their past and intended parental behaviour by reference to these assumptions. The use of images of children played a central part in this legitimating activity. This was an evaluative, selective and interactive process. The observation was made that different kinds of knowledge were accorded differing levels of legitimacy.

In my concern to describe these negotiating processes I may, however, have conveyed the sense that they proceeded non-problematically in everyday life. This was far from the case. One family member's legitimations were regularly challenged by the other participants. Also, considerable effort was necessary to sustain even the basic assumption that members actually comprehended one another's actions in a similar fashion. I now turn, therefore, to a discussion of how respondents perceived and dealt with the problematical features of their everyday family lives.
CHAPTER FIVE

COPING MECHANISMS

Introduction

Conflict and misunderstanding were continuous possibilities in the negotiation of parental behaviour. Alfred Schutz indicated that this was a feature of any process of constructing social reality. Speaking of the "recipe knowledge" which provides the meanings at hand in everyday life he said:

"It embraces the most heterogeneous kinds of knowledge in a very incoherent and confused state. Clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures; suppositions and prejudices cross well-proven evidences; motives, means and ends, as well as causes and effects, are strung together without clear understanding of their real connections."1

In this chapter I shall consider how, at the level of everyday behaviour, respondents developed "coping mechanisms" to deal with contradictions, dilemmas and problematical elements involved in their mutual development of parental behaviour.

The preceding chapters must be seen as essential background to the following discussion. I described various underlying assumptions which provided a framework of meanings around which a wide variety of behaviour could be developed. Legitimations then came into operation as that part of the process of negotiating parental behaviour whereby respondents explained and justified their actual or intended conduct. This was often done by referring to the generalised framework of assumptions. The maintenance of their belief systems was seldom, however, as straightforward as this theoretical presentation would

Thomas Scheff saw negotiation as implying the resolution of conflicting interpretations of meanings. It was intrinsic to the concept of negotiation that members involved in defining a phenomenon might disagree over its "true" meaning. Although the underlying assumptions provided a basic outline for agreement, their generality meant that practical interpretation was very much open to negotiation. Also, situations were often too problematical, too changeable, or too much the subject of basic disagreement to accommodate behaviour which could be defined as adequately legitimated. It was here that the coping mechanisms tended to be used to provide a more pragmatic support.

There were two main levels on which coping mechanisms were developed:

(1) In the first part of the chapter I shall describe how they were used to deal with situations involving tensions and dilemmas which respondents perceived as flexible, and open to compromise or change.

(2) Then I shall outline how they were used to deal with differences of opinion which were perceived as too fundamental to be reconciled. Equally, they were applied in situations involving aspects of behaviour which were regarded as unacceptable or incomprehensible, but basically unavoidable or immutable.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. On a descriptive level I shall illustrate some of the problematical elements in this area of family behaviour, as presented in respondents' accounts. Many of these can be seen as stemming in part from the underlying assumptions.

On an analytical level the chapter deals with the various ways in which respondents coped with these problematical elements, thus continually recreating and sustaining the reality of their family lives. Berger and Kellner's comment about marital conversation is widened here to apply to the whole range of verbal and non-verbal spousal interactions. They maintained:

"In the marital conversation a world is not only built but it is also kept in a state of repair and ongoingly refurnished."3

1. **Coping Mechanisms to deal with situations and differences perceived as flexible**

In this section six overlapping kinds of coping mechanism will be described. These are: articulation of the problem, practical compensation, phase or stage, myth, the avoidance of disruptive areas, and the use of tactful deception. They are illustrated principally by reference to problematical elements involved in: (a) the current situation of the woman, (b) mutual involvement with the children, (c) the overall division of labour, and (d) communication.

(a) **The current situation of the woman**

Respondents frequently mentioned problems currently facing the woman at this stage of parenthood. Here, problematical elements were involved in the maintenance of belief in family life as a fairly shared reality. The concept of fairness was perceived as being contradicted by the fact that, after the arrival of children, the woman’s everyday freedoms of choice and action were more restricted than were those of the man. The main coping mechanisms which were brought into effect were verbal articulation of the problem, and practical compensations. These

---

can be seen as pragmatic attempts to alleviate any disruption or dissatisfaction which arose out of the contradictions of the assumption of fairness.

Basically the problem centred on the fact that, at least for a few years, all of the wives in the sample had given up full-time paid employment in order to stay at home and look after the children. Only two of the wives preferred being at home, and saw great freedom in the fact that they felt that they were in control of their own work situation. The majority, however, wanted to return to some form of paid employment as soon as possible, and felt that their lives had been more drastically altered by marrying and having children than had their husbands. This obviously basically challenged the validity of the assumption that marriage and parenthood should be a "fair" partnership.

Here are two quotations to illustrate a frequently expressed view. Helen Moffat said:

"But I really feel men aren't just as much married as women, I don't think it honestly changes their lives completely at all." (I) and later to her husband, "I mean, you've still got your work and if you change your work it's not because you're married." (Jt)

Barbara Johnson, who at that point had just started a new professional career, argued:

"I would say that, to my mind, in a general view, the husband has more rights than the wife, I think the wife is in an inferior position, but it could just be Me being um (Ian: 'Mmm, bolshy!') defensive. I don't think that's the situation in OUR marriage, but I think that is general." (Jt)

Usually these kinds of views were expressed in connection with changes following the birth of children rather than marriage itself. They were always qualified by the mutually held belief that one parent should be at home to look after the children, at
least in their early years, and that, in the context of present day society, this was most conveniently, the mother. Here then was a conflict of beliefs which, at their current stage of the family life cycle, they did not believe could be resolved by changing the situation. It was acknowledged, however, that it would change in the future. Jeff Harris stated neatly the view which was common to all of the respondents when he said about his wife's adaptations to parenthood:

"Well I think the best way to put it is not so much more adaptations but, perhaps has had to em, has been much more constrained in terms of, you know, what choices she can actually undertake. I mean, given the fact that we're committed to the children and want to em, bring them up basically ourselves, you know, there isn't much choice, one of us has got to be home with them." (1)

Here was a situation, then, where respondents perceived that their stated beliefs about fairness were being somewhat contradicted by the exigencies of parenthood. Alternatively, from a theoretical perspective, this could be seen as an incompatibility in practice between those assumptions dealing with children's needs and wants, and those about fairness. No matter how the situation is analysed, the relevant point is that the majority of respondents felt that, in this respect, the woman was getting the worst of the family bargain. A major aspect of this perceived inequality of the conjugal situation was that the man could not only physically leave the problems of home and family each working day, he could also do this mentally. The woman was not only primarily responsible for the physical organisation of home and family, she was also, at this point, much more mentally preoccupied with the home situation. Helen Moffat, for example, explained:
"A lot of women, and when the children are difficult, you feel quite self critical, you know, are we bringing them up the right way? Everybody's the same, I think there's a feeling of guilt, though not all the time." (W/E)

Her husband, George, later commented that he only very occasionally felt like that and said:

"I mean, a man out working all day, em, if he sat and reflected all day, he'd soon have the sack." (W/E)

Many of the respondents suggested in various ways, that, despite the claimed jointness of the whole family enterprise, the fact that the man went out to work each day led to his having a different attitude to home and family problems. The following conversation occurred in the Gilchrists' joint interview:

Hannah: "I expect YOU to listen to my problems (James: 'Oh yee') but YOU don't consider them as important as yours (pause) do you?"

James: "Your house problems?"

Hannah: "Well anything (James: 'Anything?') Anything that's cropped up during the day."

James: "Well no, em, I don't consider them important in comparison to MY problems. (Hannah: 'No') They're not AS important, they're very well may be important to US as a family if we were only involved AS a family, but because I'm involved in my work, em, I relate the problems of the, the HOUSE in relation to my problems at work and they're (Hannah: 'They're secondary to your work really!') well, they're not the same sort of problems. (pause) It's a bigger problem at my work if I can't solve it." (Jt)

Various coping mechanisms were implemented to alleviate any disruption which might arise out of the situation. The most frequently utilised mechanism was simply to verbally acknowledge the perceived inequalities. It seemed that respondents felt that as long as both spouses, and especially the husband, reiterated an awareness of the woman's problems, then the situation was not
so potentially disruptive. These are some illustrations of the ways in which respondents articulated this awareness, both to myself and to each other. Barry Coulson said:

"I think she's lost some of her freedom, freedom of action. She's FAR more tied em to the house and then with children, em, you ARE tied and damned hard, I don't think I would like it if the roles were reversed em, I don't think I'd take it. I don't think, you know, I'm suited to it. (I)

Jim Robson argued:

"All my wife does in the house is, I think, more of a job, is a harder and more arduous job than she probably had at the office before she was married", and later "... to do the same chores day in day out, and this is an intelligent woman by the way, er, with a reasonably high IQ, I think for her to do all those things and say very little about it, to me I think this is great because I couldn't do it Kathryn, I'd be bored to tears doing that sort of thing." (I)

Ray Mitchell talked about his wife's adaptions to marriage as follows:

"I suppose I would say it's committed her to a line which has got far less freedom of action within it than a man." (I) and he later said to his wife in their joint interview "But the big difference comes when children arrive, when you had to stop working em, and then responsibilities sort of multiply, (Alice agreed) and the big difference was to you, not to me, because I kept my job." (Jt)

Similar kinds of statements to these occurred sufficiently frequently during the course of the study for them to be viewed as standard responses to problematical situations, such as when the women was particularly dissatisfied at the end of another busy day of childminding and housework. (Also when an outsider (researcher) asked about the situation of the woman in marriage!) In addition, the women themselves, in their individual interviews, often pointed out that their husbands acknowledged that they would not like to change places with their wives. The husbands were reported to sympathise with their wives' loss of freedom, and to
have said that they would find it boring to be at home permanently. A further way in which the problem was articulated was to put forward images of children as being oppressive to the woman because their demands were so constant.

Although such verbal acknowledgement of the situation was the most constant form of coping mechanism, there were also some more active measures. In many ways, the actions I shall outline accentuate even further the fact that respondents perceived a contradiction in their assumptions of fairness and equality within their current family organisation. Many activities were geared towards making the woman feel that she had equal freedom and that the man was both aware of, and making compensations for, any unfairness in their family bargain.4 The majority of the wives, for example, felt that their previous occupations had been much more intellectually stimulating than the routine of house and children.5 Apparently as some form of compensatory coping mechanism, therefore, the husbands tended to stress the importance of their wives' present activities and were willing to converse about them to their wives, even if these conversations appeared mundane. In addition, they felt a responsibility, by their attitudes and actions, to alleviate what many wives saw as intellectually undemanding routine. Barry Coulson, for example, saw his wife's activities as much less stimulating than his own, but felt the need to compensate in some way for this inequality by making the effort to show interest in her routine. He explained:

4. A similar point to this will be elaborated upon in the section dealing with the division of labour, pp. 174-175.
5. Ann Oakley found that the housewives in her sample used their previous occupations as contexts for evaluating their current situation. Oakley, A., 1974, Op. cit., p. 75.
"Being a husband is being responsible em, you've gotta take a responsible view of marriage I think, em, it's not a game. I feel very strongly this equal partnership although you're fulfilling different roles, one is the housekeeper and one is the bread-winner. But, you know, you've gotta listen to the wife, em, understand that, you know, her life centres around the home which is perhaps NOT as exciting as the office or whatever your particular job is. And that's important to her, and I think you've gotta listen and participate, just as SHE likes to know what your work involves." (I)

From respondents' accounts it seemed that it was also important that the husbands did not appear to devalue their wives, because they were perceived as currently involved in mundane activities. Louise Wilson stressed the importance of the husband's attitude as follows:

"I would like to think of a husband, of MY husband anyway as, as considering my ideas. I would hate, I'm not working at the moment, and I would hate to think that because I'm stuck in the house, that he regards me as someone who just buys the cabbages and this sort of thing." (I)

The subtlety of the coping mechanisms which were necessary to create a feeling of fairness and equality, can perhaps best be illustrated by quotations from one marriage where the exercise was felt to be successful, and another where it was judged a failure. (Here I introduce a concept which becomes central in later chapters: that of the husband's voluntarism.) Firstly Madeleine Harris reflected:

"How's he different from other husbands? I think he's much more willing to just be part of the whole children, life, em you know. That I feel very often our partnership is very much more a partnership, you know, we're much more, living with each other you know, as two people who are equal, you know and not one somehow, you know, has the ascendency over the other, you know." (I)

Secondly, a couple described to me the situation of another couple, also in the sample, where they considered that the husband was not
compensating for his wife's lack of freedom of action. The consequences, they felt, were manifested in the wife's cycle of depression, stemming from her restriction, and in the children's behaviour problems. Louise Wilson explained:

"But I think that the basic reason for this, although we think the husband doesn't control them much, is that I think the husband isn't giving her (his wife) the kind of husbandly support that she needs. I mean, if, if the husband would come home just to let her (his wife) out for a few hours, she would get away, she would forget about it and she would come back with an entirely different attitude." (I)

On a practical level, husbands sometimes took over responsibility for house and children, perhaps for an afternoon or evening. This could also be seen as a coping mechanism which aimed to create a feeling of fairness and equality. In the context of the limited human resources of the nuclear family, the husband in the situation of the families in my sample, had become the focal person whose co-operation was vital for many of the free time and entertainment opportunities of the wife. Martin Chapman talked about his wife's frustrations and his attempts to help, as follows:

"I mean it's fine for me, I can get away to my work and, I mean I've got the communication with people at my work, and to a certain degree I sympathise with Sylvia, but I can't do anything about it. It's just one of those things, you know, I try to give Sylvia as much time in town as I can." (I/2)

From the point of view of a wife who felt that she was getting quite a fair deal out of her marriage, Maureen Rankin said:

"The main thing is that he's quite prepared to take charge and give me the freedom if I want to go, if there's anywhere special that I want to go I know he doesn't mind me going." (I)

6. The qualifications, in practice, of this "responsibility" will be outlined in Chapter Nine.
Obviously, within the sample there was a variation in attitudes towards this particular issue, and a few of the wives were extremely independent of their husbands in their organisation both of personal and family entertainment. There was, however, at the level of compensatory coping mechanisms, a general point which applied to all of the couples. The husbands all had an awareness, expressed in various ways, that they should somehow compensate at a *practical* level for their wife's greater restriction of freedom of action. They put this awareness into practice, in varying degrees, by such things as relieving her of familial duties from time to time, or making sure that some joint outings were organised, or simply encouraging her and co-operating in her arrangements to take up interests outside the home.

In these ways couples developed coping mechanisms to sustain belief in the fairness of their marriages in the face of perceived contradictions. For all of them, becoming parents had meant that the woman was removed from the outside world of work to the confines of home and family. (Throughout, the implicit legitimization of this situation was in terms of the assumption that family life was cyclical and that this was simply characteristic of the present stage.) In this process, however, crucial aspects of the spouses' lives were altered. By and large respondents gave a picture of the man retaining a much more consistent life pattern and having a greater realm of choice and freedom of action since, at this stage, practical responsibility for home and children lay primarily with the woman.  

---

7. The issue of responsibility is crucial. In Chapter Nine I shall illustrate some of the ways in which respondents sustained belief that the husband was "involved" in this responsibility.
practical compensatory actions were two ways in which couples alleviated these perceived unfairnesses of the current situation of the woman.

(b) Mutual involvement with the children

Another area where assumptions about fairness could be challenged was that of childrearing. The issue of sharing "fairly" the mutual reality of being parents was here further complicated by assumptions about children's needs and wants, and the appropriate relationships between parents and children. In this section I shall describe some of the ways in which respondents sustained belief in mutual involvement with the children. This discussion of coping mechanisms introduces some of the important factors which will be considered in detail in Chapters Eight and Nine.

All of the respondents had opted for the mother to devote her energies full time to childrearing, at least for a few years. They therefore took for granted her active involvement in the early stages of the child's life. The dilemma which faced the couples was how to establish and sustain belief in the active involvement of the father, in the face of the much more limited amount of time which he had available for the child. Current medical policies associated with pregnancy and birth enabled respondents to establish belief in the father's involvement with the actual arrival of the child. Fathers are, for example, encouraged to participate in some of the ante natal instruction and also, increasingly, to be present at the birth of the child. Several couples made a point of telling me that the husband had been present at their children's births, thus overtly laying claim to involvement from the very beginning. Subsequently, however,
the father had less time available for the child than did the mother. This created problems for the couples in defining the father as taking an objectively "fair" share in child-related activities.

The importance of mutual involvement with the children was stressed by almost all of the respondents. (Only one wife actually felt that it was unimportant. She maintained that, unlike women, men were not interested in children. Her husband, interestingly, felt that she tried to keep a whole range of domestic matters from him, and he professed a considerable interest in the children. He was, however, only peripherally involved in practical childrearing.) The reasonings behind the stress on father involvement were complex, and varied between respondents. Assumptions about parenthood as a learning situation were relevant here. Respondents put forward beliefs that the father had to be involved with the children in order to form understandings, and so learn, through his own experience, how to deal with them. This was perceived as a basic feature of the father's forming an adequate future relationship with his growing child. Maureen Rankin, for example, said:

"I think fathers should be very involved with the children and I think the time for them to be involved is right from the word 'go'. I think if they're going to get on well with their children, when their children are older, they've got to start right from the beginning and develop a, the relationship at the same time as the mother develops a relationship." (I)

A feeling of mutual involvement with the children was also seen as important for the husband's relationship with his wife. This was illustrated in different ways by the following quotations. Margaret Barber argued:
"I feel, rightly or wrongly, that the husband has to make the move as soon as the children are there, to be right alongside his wife (Philip agrees) because otherwise, I think in some women, the maternal instinct is so strong that if the husband moves away in the early stages, the wife won’t move away from the children to join him. She’ll stay right there beside the children and this could become habitual." (Jt)

Dianne Hemingway felt that:

"If there are children I think it’s very important that he shows them lots of love and plays with them, takes an interest in all their doings. It’s important for the children, it’s also important for the wife if she knows that he’s taking an equal part in their upbringing, not just providing the money." (I)

These then were the kinds of views expressed by the majority of respondents. As will be outlined in Chapter Nine, however, there were many levels on which father involvement could be claimed. These ranged from an administrative interest in the child to a regular practical involvement in everyday childrearing activities. At each level, however, respondents’ accounts showed that they saw frequent disparities between their beliefs in a fair and mutual involvement, and what actually happened. One way in which they sustained belief was simply to articulate the problem and to reassure one another that they were, in fact, adopting the "fairest" solution in the prevailing circumstances. The joint interviews when I was not present, were particularly characterised by the use of this kind of coping mechanism.

Barry Coulson’s comment to Jean was typical. He said:

"It’s a joint effort to bring up children (Jean agrees). And although you carry out most of the tasks, I reckon really, you know, I see my part." (Jt)
The verbal reassurance often took the form of stressing the jointness of emotional, intellectual and decision making responsibilities for the children. For example, Margaret Barber said to Philip in their joint interview:

"You're not out of sympathy with my day time activities with the children and I'm not out of sympathy with your day time activities with work, but that we just both just have to jolly well get on with what we have so that, I suppose you might say that the responsibility of the children in FACT is more with me, but emotionally I would say it's very evenly divided." (Philip agrees) (Jt)

Madeleine Harris felt that Jeff was very much involved and said to him:

"Yes I think that we in general share the whole notion of teaching them, you know, playing with them. I mean, just taking care of both emotional and intellectual and cultural development (Jeff agrees), and everything else. That it's nobody's function to do any one thing in particular." (Jt)

Different coping mechanisms came into effect to sustain belief in a mutual involvement on the level of direct childrearing activities. Although some of the fathers did carry out a considerable number of practical tasks and activities with their children, the simple fact that, for most of them, their return home in the evening usually coincided with the end of the children's short day, meant that their overall direct involvement in this area could in no way be considered equal. Beliefs were sustained by maintaining a generalised practical involvement, by developing specific "father times", and by using notions of phase or stage.

Respondents claimed that the father took an active interest in the children during the time when he could actually be with them. The predominant way in which this generalised practical
involvement was expressed was by playing with the children, or otherwise keeping them occupied. Several respondents felt, however, that the potential involvement of the man in all aspects of looking after the children, even if this was only to a limited extent and sporadic, added to the feeling that it was a shared enterprise. This was also perceived as creating a good relationship with the children. Barbara Johnson for example said:

"If you've got no relationship with the child as it is developing, I don't think you're ever going to understand it. So I feel that men ought to be prepared to muck in with the babies, in all the sordid details. I mean there's nobody better at changing nappies than Ian. But em, I think it creates a relationship which is valuable." (I)

Andrew Davies felt that the extent of his involvement could be shown by the reaction of his eldest boy Robert, he explained:

"He knows that either one or the other can do any of the jobs both in running the home, in doing the meals, or attending to Robert, and he's quite happy that either one of us do it, and I think this is how it should be." He added later: "I always make a point of telling him when I'm off on a Saturday, to remind him that tomorrow Daddy will be home all day. This seems to mean a lot to him, and I think this is how I would want it to be always. I think a direct involvement with your children you know, none of this shunning responsibilities and shouldering it on your wife, on the mother, I think it's, it's unfair." (I)

Respondents also treated the perceived current problematical elements of father involvement as a phase or stage. This coping mechanism involved stating that the father's involvement with the children, compared with that of the mother, would become more overtly fair as the children got older. This was (i) because the children would see less of the mother as they progressed into other social milieux, therefore the overall time gap would narrow, and (ii) because the father was perceived as being
better able to become independently involved in doing things with the children when they were older. This latter rationalisation was put forward by most of the respondents and was an excellent coping mechanism since it obviously dealt with anticipated future developments which could not be disproved at this point in time. It was usually expressed by maintaining that men were not very much interested in "babyish" activities, but that the husband had every intention of taking a greater share later on by, for example, taking the children swimming. In this way the totally fair and equal involvement of the father was perceived as, to a certain extent, impossible during the current stage. Belief in the reality of this underlying assumption was, however, sustained by maintaining that he was equally interested in the children, and did as much as could be expected for them at the moment. Additionally, and most importantly, degrees of objective parental involvement would even out in the future.

(c) The division of labour

Whilst this study is principally concerned with the development of parental behaviour, this must, in part, be seen within the context of the overall division of labour. This is because meanings in one area have implications for behaviour in the other. It appeared, for example, that respondents preferred that the man should spend any limited time actually with the children, rather than becoming involved in specifically household chores. A range of images of children was put forward

---

8. Here projected images of the child played an important part in the negotiation of parental behaviour. For further discussion of such images see Chapter Six.
to support this negotiated activity "preference". In this section I shall focus on the use of myth as a coping mechanism to support belief in a fair division of labour. Examples are drawn from the areas of child-related and general household tasks.

For all of the families the majority of activities connected with looking after the house and children devolved on to the wife during the stage when she was not employed outside the home. This is, therefore, an admittedly limited discussion of the division of labour, since I am not considering the other ranges of domestic tasks such as gardening, car maintenance, or decorating the house. In this I am reflecting the content of respondents' accounts since they were more concerned with husbands' participation with house and children. These then were the tasks involved in the basic routine aspects of everyday living, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing, and dealing with all aspects of childcare. Even among those couples who claimed that the husband took a considerable share of these activities, the wife was still viewed as having the overall responsibility. All respondents expressed ideas about fairness and sharing. Nevertheless, most of them also saw the woman as, at this stage, taking a much greater share of what they defined as the more mundane and generally less rewarding aspects of the total family work load. Obviously, to a certain extent, respondents felt that circumstances made much of this inevitable, and it was legitimated in terms of stage or phase. Coping mechanisms on an everyday level, however, came into operation where the man was seen as available to participate equally, but not actually doing this. Within the sample the degree and nature of the husband's
actual participation in household activities varied. Also, the perception and definition of what constituted a fair share were obviously subjective variables. There seemed, nevertheless, to be a repertoire of coping mechanisms on which respondents tended to draw as a tactic for alleviating tensions which arose in their own particular circumstances.

Paradoxically, one set of such coping mechanisms (i) relied on a belief in the husband's competence whilst another (iii) maintained that he was in certain respects, incompetent. There was also an intermediate set of coping mechanisms (ii) which implied that competence existed, but that it was constantly undermined by a lack of awareness. I refer to these as "myths" since they required either minimal practical proof, or even no substantive proof at all.

(i) Firstly, beliefs that the household division of labour was fairly shared were sustained by reference to the following claims: that husbands had demonstrated ability by carrying out various activities in the past; that they were in fact willing to do things; and that they would be able to cope if the necessity arose. Although all respondents did not necessarily draw on this entire repertoire of coping mechanisms, everybody used at least one of them at various times. These are some illustrations of the ways that these notions were implemented. Firstly, there was the use of the claim that the husband had done things in the past. Andrew Jeffreys said:

"We can share things, even if it's an unequal share we still do the same sort of things. So the proportion may be different but the activities are similar. I mean, I don't think she would say much different, because most of the things that SHE does, I have done." (I) (my underlining)
Maureen Rankin claimed:

"He's helped a fair bit in the house, he's not afraid to lift a hand and help with the dishes, this sort of thing, it's not beneath him, he helps out, and at weekends he'll often fry the breakfast and this sort of thing. When the children were babies he helped out with them. He could do things that I don't suppose he ever imagined he would do (laughs): he's helped out, I mean he HAS changed a nappy, em, not regularly, but I mean he HAS done when the children were babies." (I) (my underlining)

Secondly, the belief that the husband would be agreeable to doing things was obviously an important coping mechanism. Helen Moffett said to George:

"... but I mean, you WOULD, if I asked him he WOULD go and make me a coffee (George: 'Yes'), you WOULD (George: 'Yes, yes')." (W/E)

Kathy Hislop said, talking about what she thought marriage would be like:

"The main thing that we did sort of discuss and agree on was, I felt that I would be in the house all day and would have everything done, and he agreed that if he ever had to, if I ever worked then he would help." (I) (my underlining)

Thirdly, the idea that the husband would be able to do things if the necessity arose was a twofold coping mechanism. This notion not only supported beliefs in a fair division of labour but it could also be seen as a kind of theoretical safety net for the lack of human resources of the nuclear family. Such feelings were evident in the next two statements. Margaret Barber explained:

"As far as I'm concerned, any time that there has been a REAL crisis or a real need, Philip has always, even if there's been something on, found time to cope." (I)

Madeleine Harris described their situation as follows:
"We don't in fact feel now that anybody has to do any sorts of things that the other person should never do. What happens, because of just the way the day falls out mostly, that I do most probably most of the house things and Jeff will certainly do them or help do them if he has time, or if I'm just fed up with them he would do them. He's certainly not averse to cooking a meal or anything else; he can certainly cope, I can and have gone to an Open University conference for a weekend, he can cope quite easily. I don't have to find someone else to come in and do the jobs that I would normally do." (I)

(ii) Secondly, there was an intermediate set of coping mechanisms which still presupposed the husband's willingness and competence but simply asserted that he was somehow not aware of things to be done, this in itself being a basic contradiction of the assumption that family life was a learning situation. Patrick Hislop presented a rather extreme illustration of this kind of attitude when he said:

"I very seldom do anything to help on the domestic scene. I have dried dishes on about three occasions since we got married, em, if I'm asked I'll stand on my head but by and large I don't recognise the things which have to be done." (I)

This attitude was accepted by both of the particular spouses involved but would undoubtedly have been too extreme to have been completely accepted by the rest of the respondents. Nevertheless, to a lesser degree, the notion that the husband did not recognise certain things which had to be done was put forward by almost all of the respondents, both male and female.

Sylvia Chapman argued:

"I think he was quite domesticated but, I don't think they're ever as domesticated as a women. I think they've got to adapt more, em, to running their own home than a girl has. Although it's quite a big step for a girl, I think it's even bigger for a man you know. Like Martin he'll wash the dishes but he'll not wash and dry them, things like this, you know. You can't always be ASKING him to do things, but he just doesn't see them to be done." (I) (my underlining)
Carol Burns gave another illustration; she explained:

"I'm beginning to learn as I go along that he just doesn't see. This is what makes him as he is, em, he just doesn't see trivia. But if I point something in his direction he'll attend to it." (I)

(iii) Finally, there were numerous examples where a spouse claimed a lack of knowledge or skill in a certain activity. This was used to account for situations where one of the spouses seldom or never undertook a particular activity. The most recurrent examples were as follows: it was claimed that the majority of husbands in the sample never changed nappies because they were no good at it; it was claimed that many of the husbands did not dress the children because they were either too slow, or did not know where the clothes were, or which ones should be used; at least three-quarters of the husbands seldom cooked, because, it was claimed, they simply did not know how. Equally, there were various activities, such as digging the garden or mending the car, where it was generally claimed that the wife had inferior knowledge or skill. It did seem, however, that, given that the study focused primarily on the negotiation of everyday internal domestic affairs, the husband tended to approach the situation from the viewpoint of "opting in" whereas at this stage the wife's area of choice was from the viewpoint of "opting out".

Occasionally a respondent "stood back" from this process of maintaining that the division of labour was fairly shared. Arguments usually occurred during interviews if one spouse "blew" the coping mechanisms which were being used to sustain belief in the underlying assumptions of fairness. Anna Robson did this during their fourth interview. Previously
she had constantly stressed her husband's willingness to be involved in their ongoing domestic responsibilities. Now, on a miserable and cold December evening, she proceeded to argue that men had "an easy life" (sic) as regards the household division of labour. Jim protested:

"No, just a minute, it's a joint effort, I set the table." to which Anna replied:

"But you'll find, you'll find a joint effort, Kathryn. Your husband puts out the cutlery while you put out the tablecloth, the condiments, the jam, the goodies. You make the fish fingers, you make the chips, you make the toast (laughs). But THEY put out the cutlery so it's a joint effort." (W/E)

Later she could be seen to acknowledge that the husband's participation was more to sustain a belief in fairness, rather than an objectively fair share, when she said:

"He stands at the other side of the hatch and I pass him through the things to put on the table. That's a joint effort, Kathryn, you don't feel you're being left on a limb to do it all by yourself." (W/E)

This is an early illustration of the precariousness of coping mechanisms. Myths were only sustained by the collaboration of all members of the family. These, along with other coping mechanisms were often open to challenge and were frequently "blown" during the course of the interviews. This "blowing" of coping mechanisms is further discussed at the end of the present chapter. When this occurred the social construction of reality was highlighted.

(d) Communication

As I argued in Chapter Three, an underlying assumption of all of the respondents was that there should be open communication and debate between the spouses. This was viewed as the correct state of affairs even if respondents felt, at that point, that
their own patterns of communication were inadequate. Many respondents also said that they were aiming for a similar kind of relationship with their children, and hoped that in the future the children would always feel that they could approach their parents with any ideas or problems. In practice, however, the underlying assumption of open communication tended to be modified by problems involved in its implementation. Also, other aspects of their belief systems, such as assumptions about give and take, unit feeling, and family life as a learning situation, tended to contradict the notion of open communication. In simple terms, the outcome seemed to be, that in order to cope with the practicalities of everyday life, the accomplishment of routine tasks and the maintenance of harmony were usually given priority over open communication. Most of the respondents, for example, said that, at this stage of their family life, communication between spouses tended to be altered or disrupted by the presence of children. Shirley Jackson explained:

"When you start to talk about something if the children are there you'll be interrupted (Edward: 'That's right, yes.') Quite often you find you don't finish a conversation that you've started, in fact, you do nearly all your discussing n' that when your children go to bed." (Jt)

Philip Barber said:

"That's the major problem at the moment, that communication with each other even on important issues tends to be neglected, because the sheer practical problems of running a family just make it like that." (I)

Various other factors were perceived as altering both the extent and nature of communication. Respondents maintained, for example, that the amount of active communication was altered because one had learned about the ideas and beliefs of the other
spouse, and vice versa. The logical extension of this, which was expressed by most respondents, was the lack of necessity to discuss a wide area of matters because the outcome was predictable. Many people said things similar to this statement by Louise Wilson. She remarked:

"I think that the longer one spends with one person and the more one gets to know them, the less you really have to say and the more they, you can anticipate their reactions to almost everything, and you just sort of get settled in ." (I)

Not only had much been learned about the other spouse but also many activities had been experienced jointly, and this might decrease the need for communication and discussion. Alan Hemingway said:

"We don't really em, we don't TALK about things because everything we do is together and therefore, therefore we're there when everything's done, and therefore there's not much to discuss that we do together, apart from my job or something." (I)

Although there were obviously variations in the degree to which respondents felt that such factors altered the amount of communication, the fact that a mutual feeling of the taken-for-grantedness of a common stock of knowledge had diminished the need for articulation of, and communication about, many issues, became very apparent during the course of the interviews.

The assumed openness of communication was further complicated in practice by the fact that learned information about the other spouse led as much to the avoidance of issues and situations as to their free expression. A very relevant mechanism for coping with the stresses involved in the intimacies of family life was the avoidance of topics known to be controversial or potentially disruptive. Illustration of this point was given by Martin Chapman who claimed:
"Well, I think we have come to the, I think mutual understanding, that we just, we don't discuss topics or anything like that, because ultimately it ends up in a blatant argument because we can never, she always says that I want to get the last word in and I always think I'm right, and I think the same about her." (laughs) (I)

Most of the respondents outlined how the claimed atmosphere of somewhat intense communication in the dyadic situation of early marriage became more muted, and in some ways calculating, as information was amassed through the years. Colin Duncan explained:

"When you're first married, you know, well it would lead to a big fight then but em, you're just finding out then, whereas now you KNOW what's gonna cause friction or what's gonna really please her you know." (I)

The possession of knowledge about the other spouse could also lead to alternative objectives being given priority over the open communication of views. Mary Clark said, for example:

"It's very difficult, although we share a lot, it's often very difficult to know exactly about how I think he feels about something. I'm quite sure he says anything to sort of either pacify me or to make me feel better about the situation." (I)

For these respondents, therefore, the assumption of open communication can be seen as contradicted in practice by two main factors. After children arrived there were increased practical demands, and also their mere presence was often seen as restrictive. A further contradiction stemmed directly from the assumption of family life as a learning situation. Learning about other family members meant getting to know a great deal about what not to say. Not only were various areas avoided, but open communication was also modified by the coping mechanism of "tactful deception." Some examples of this occurred in the initial individual interviews. Occasionally a respondent gave me a
piece of information, or an opinion, about his/her spouse with
the proviso that I should never mention this to the person
concerned. Equally, during their joint interviews, respondents
frequently glossed over some of the more critical views expressed
in the individual sessions. Barbara Johnson, however, felt that
problems could arise from all of these modifications of open
communication. In reply to my question "What things are the
same or different now from when you were first married?", she
said:

"One of the differences maybe is that, we don't
NEED the great long sort of heart to hearts because we
know each other's thoughts on that particular matter.
Although there comes a time when you've misunderstood
the other's thoughts and there can be a lot of difficulties,
a lot of minor irritations, before you actually throw the
whole problem open." (I)

The notion of disrupted or impaired communication patterns
obviously has considerable implications if one is viewing parental
behaviour as achieved by a process of negotiation between family
members. From the accounts given by the respondents, family
behaviour seemed to be evolved on the basis of communication
systems which aimed to uphold the assumption of openness but which,
in practice, were, for various reasons, considerably restricted.
In some ways these restrictions were, as in all areas of social
activity, the inevitable practical outcome of attempts to organise
and rationalise behaviour. In other respects, however, they
simply served to illustrate how 'tactful deception', and the
avoidance of potentially disruptive areas of communication, was
at a premium in the complex emotional interdependencies of family
life. I would suggest, therefore, that, at the same time as
respondents stressed the importance of open communication, their
actual behaviour generally proceeded on the basis of often disrupted
flows of information, inferred cues from other family members, and stocks of knowledge which were felt to be common and were usually taken for granted until problems arose.

2. Coping Mechanisms to deal with problematical issues perceived as inflexible

To a certain extent the problematical issues discussed so far involved tensions and dilemmas the impact of which was at least partially forestalled by an implicit belief that sufficient flexibility existed to cope with them. Frequently, however, respondents gave accounts of situations or characteristics which were felt to be irreconcilable, incomprehensible, and unchangeable. At the time of the study, respondents were continuing to live with these perceived problematical issues. It is relevant, therefore, to consider some of the coping mechanisms which they evolved to try to lessen the associated tensions and dilemmas.

Four coping mechanisms will be described in this section. They are: phase or stage, attribution of permanency, the notion of balance, and disapproved expedients. It was more difficult to select general examples in this area partly because the issues perceived as inflexibly problematical were even more family specific. The first two coping mechanisms will, however, be illustrated with reference to characteristics and behaviour of children and parents, which were perceived by respondents as incomprehensible and/or unchangeable. Each family had its own particular range of these. Examples of the second two coping mechanisms are taken from childrearing dilemmas, specifically disciplining and child management.

(a) Behavioural and personality dilemmas

When certain aspects of the behaviour of family members were seen as irrational or incomprehensible, one of the ways of coping
with any resulting tension was to regard it as a transient situation, that is, as a phase or stage. Between the adult members of the group such difficulties might be articulated, discussed and rationalised. Alternatively, sometimes the issues were ignored, or regarded as too sensitive for this process to take place (in which case 'tactful deception' might be used). Even so, a generally comforting conclusion might still be in terms of phase or stage.

The most frequent examples given by respondents were of the use of this coping mechanism with regard to children's behaviour. Crucial to this thesis is the notion that the task of interpreting and understanding children's behaviour was a fundamental part of the process of developing parental behaviour. The notion of phase could also be used as a sort of generalised coping mechanism, always there to be fallen back on when the need arose. As will be discussed in the next chapter, children were viewed as constantly changing. Although parents tried to comprehend these processes and constructed beliefs that they "knew" what was happening, there were, inevitably, times when the child's behaviour was felt to be incomprehensible or impossible to tolerate or deal with.

Here are some illustrations of how the notion of phase or stage was used as a coping mechanism when respondents encountered situations and behaviour which they felt they could not understand. Carol Burns for example said about Alison's "clinging phase":
"We'll just see how she goes, you know, 2 doors down, my friend's little girl had this a couple of months ago, you know, she wouldn't go to parties where before she went everywhere by herself quite gaily. But now, she's had about a month or so of not moving from the doorstep and she's fine. This is it with children, you wait till you've got yours, you see, one phase passes and you breathe a sigh and another one comes (laughs). It's always a phase, and everybody will say 'never mind, dear, it will pass.' (w/E) and she said in the final interview: "Nothing really bothers me. (laughs) I just accept every next trauma as a phase (laughs), and we'll be out of it and into the next one next month you know. But nothing really bothers me particularly, even this cheekiness I know will go." (F)

Respondents also implemented the notion of phase to cope with any qualms they might be experiencing about the best way of dealing with their child. This was done both in terms of seeing the defined problematical behaviour (i) as a transient episode in the life of that particular child or (ii) as a transient episode which was common to most children. Interestingly, examples of these two approaches were given independently of one another by the Barbers. Talking about their eldest daughter, Karen, Philip Barber said:

"You tend to think you've spoiled your kids in some way, maybe we HAVE with Karen, I think she may be a bit more dependent on us than some of her friends, that's certainly true. Er, one hopes that she'll grow out of it, I think she probably will grow out of it." (I)

Margaret Barber commented:

"Her emotional ups and downs, her waking in the night, etc., I think it is, I think it's common to a lot of her age group, I don't look upon it as a problem that's peculiar to her, or as a problem that's peculiar to us as a family anyway." (I)

Respondents' accounts indicated that the subjective satisfaction of the notion of phase or stage as a coping mechanism increased as their personal experience of children increased. This was especially well shown when respondents identified
current behaviour of their second child as being the same
"phase" which they had already experienced with the first.

Madeleine Harris explained:

"I mean we remember Frances who is, I think
LESS persistent than, than Ian by nature, and
at two years old, we went through a few, well,
incredible times that were just beyond anyone's
understanding. Why any child would fling
themselves on the ground when offered an ice
cream, you know what I mean? (laughs). I mean, it
HAS to be some frustrating thing they're going
through in their own little emotional lives you know,
because it doesn't seem to have any RATIONAL explanation
in experience, so you sort of live with it and see them
through with it, and they DO come out of it at the
other end, so we do just keep that hope alive (laughs).
Ian, he's louder though so it's harder to live
with (laughs)." (F)

This kind of statement was typical and also showed how narrow is
the line between grounded images of the child and abstract images.
Here the initial grounded image of "my child behaved irrationally
at two years" is moving towards an abstract image that "it is
common for children to behave irrationally at two years".

No matter how incomprehensible an item of the child's behaviour
appeared, respondents had still to evolve some kind of response, even
if this was inaction. For example, speaking of the "cheeky phase"
of his three year old son, Michael, Andrew Jeffreys said:

"He is in the peak of his cheeky stage, and when
you are called very sort of odious things you have to
sort of let it brush over. I don't mind being CALLED
things at all because I know that soon or later, if you
don't react to it, they'll forget. This is the stage
where we're getting called all sorts of horrible things
and Marjorie and I seem to agree that it's best to try
and ignore this. Er, it DOES change." (I)

The uncertainties involved in developing parental behaviour
were heightened in such situations where it was felt to be
impossible to reach subjectively satisfactory understandings of
the child. The assumption of family life as a learning situation
was thwarted by encountering the "incomprehensible". The
notion of phase or stage provided one coping mechanism for
alleviating any associated feelings of responsibility or worry.

Respondents also told of tensions stemming from problematical
behaviour and characteristics of the adults in the group. Some
examples have been given in the earlier section on communication. 9
Such tensions obviously involved issues much broader than the
negotiation of parental behaviour. They are relevant to the
present discussion, however, since they will illustrate further
meanings involved in the negotiation processes. Respondents
themselves maintained that some such tensions had in fact been
frequently aggravated or brought to the surface by the exigencies of
parenthood.

The ultimate coping mechanism to deal with certain personal
or interactive dilemmas took the form of regarding them as
stemming from fundamental and immutable characteristics or habits.
This I have called the "attribution of permanency". The exact
nature of these dilemmas was obviously family specific and all
of the respondents talked about their own various past or present
tensions. The coping mechanism of labelling these dilemmas as
permanent and unadaptable was implemented both as an aid to
avoiding potentially disruptive consequences, and as a means of
sustaining beliefs in underlying assumptions and the viability
of their family set-up, despite practical contradictions. Although
issues were mentioned, often jokingly, by all respondents, Ian and
Barbara Johnson were amongst those respondents most able and willing
openly to state such dilemmas. Ian said of Barbara:

9. See page 181 of the present chapter.
“She’s got this uncanny knack of making you feel that whatever she says or does or things is by definition right and you’re WRONG, and you’re silly for thinking anything else. It’s very difficult to live with really. Still, I’m sure I’ve got traits which are just as bad.” (I)

Barbara said to Ian that she saw as a difficulty:

"... the fact that your personality’s so totally different from MINE, you find yourself threatened by MY type of personality and I find myself frustrated by YOUR type of personality" and she concluded: "Well it’s just a conflict of personality, I think. I can’t see how you can change your whole personality to suit another person, even though it IS your spouse. (Ian agrees) I mean there ARE adaptations that one makes but to make a FUNDAMENTAL change is asking (Ian: 'too much') too much of anybody. So I mean that is one problem we’ve had to cope with, and I think we’ll never resolve it, we’ll just have to compromise, find the least painful way out." (Jt)

Although many of the difficulties which were coped with in this way were similarly idiosyncratic, the general point can be further illustrated by two other issues which came up quite frequently. About a third of the couples, for example, told of difficulties associated with differences between themselves in sleeping and waking patterns. Even if, initially, attempts had been made, in their terms, to try to change each other or adapt themselves, such habits and characteristics were eventually labelled as fundamental and unalterable, and routines were developed around them. Another recurrent issue was the amount of patience which each was defined as having with the children. Everyone talked about wanting to have more patience with their children but each couple seemed to have developed working definitions of each other’s relative tolerance and patience levels, and negotiations of parental behaviour progressed in the light of these perceived 'givens'. Barry Coulson said, for example:
"I haven't patience, well not only am I intolerant, I haven't patience with them to en, to give enough time to them for playing and talking and constructing things and en, just generally you know, sort of developing them and I'm AWARE of it." (f)

Also, in this situation, some respondents felt that their own lack of patience was "balanced" out by their spouse's activities. A frequent claim was that husbands had more patience at the end of the day, because they arrived home "new" to the situation. The effectiveness of this coping mechanism of attribution of permanency depended on its being acknowledged by both spouses. In fact, this was one of the prime areas which was challenged when dissatisfactions were being voiced. A simple avowal of disbelief that a particular trait could not be altered was sufficient to negate this particular coping mechanism. It was interesting to note that while, during some interviews, respondents talked about each other's characteristics and habits either jokingly or as a matter of fact, at other times the coping mechanisms lapsed and the same items were put forward as definite sources of tension and resentment.

(b) Childrearing dilemmas

One of the mechanisms employed to cope with situations where respondents saw their behaviour or attitudes as irreconcilably different from those of their spouses was the notion of balance. This sometimes came into operation when respondents felt a situation to be sufficiently disturbing to define it as problematical but, at the same time, wanted to find some positive way of coping with it. Obviously, again, the situations so defined were very much family specific. There was, however, sufficient indication that the area of childrearing activities might throw up these kinds of differences to warrant taking it as a generalised example.
This was especially so in the area of discipline. Although a few of the couples maintained that they were in agreement about methods, the majority gave several instances where one spouse felt unhappy about, or even interfered with, the other's activities. Most of the time such differences were unreflectively presented as a fact of life which caused friction but had to be accepted. When, however, respondents did reflect on the differences, some notion of balance tended to be employed. Carol Burns gave a very good example when she talked about the fairly extreme differences in childrearing methods which she perceived between herself and her husband. She explained:

"In fact, I only said the other day, em, we had guests in and we were talking about children, and I said how I thought Eric was too harsh with them and didn't show them enough love. Because I think it's just his family, to show open love, you hardly see it, it's there, but you rarely see it you know. And this boy was saying, 'well you're probably the other way, you show TOO much love and it's a good counterbalance you know to have, you'll probably get a good mid line there. If you're both sloppy you know you end up spoiling the kids.'" (I)

On a less extreme level, Ben Pringle felt that he should balance out his wife's rather soft-hearted and generous attitude towards their daughters. He said:

"I'm sure she thinks, and she may well be right, that I'm too strict with them, and I AM on occasions, possibly to try and compensate for Sheila's trying to do everything for them. I try and instil a sense of proportion into them that they can't have everything. Either because they're exhausting their mother, or because I just instinctively feel that they shouldn't be given everything." (I)

Finally, the Moffats felt that their disciplinary methods were completely opposed. George saw Helen as far too "soft" and Helen was appalled by George's strictness and his use of physical punishment. George, however, had no qualms about his methods and maintained that, overall, their parental discipline balanced out.
The notion of balance thus came into effect as a coping mechanism when one spouse was in opposition to the other's childrearing behaviour, but was unable to change the situation. Respondents also expressed an awareness that, in their own behaviour, they frequently contradicted, in practice, what they considered to be the correct course of action. Their accounts showed that one way of coping with such qualms was to adopt a pragmatic attitude, and to label such items of behaviour as "disapproved expedients".

Disciplining children was one area where the use of "disapproved expedients" was often described. Respondents related incidents which they prefaced by an expression of guilt or embarrassment. Frequently, such incidents were described as occurring in a certain context which necessitated speedy action. In retrospect the ensuing behaviour was defined as theoretically incorrect but defensible, given the prevailing circumstances.

There were two main kinds of situations which were coped with in this way. Firstly, respondents described everyday occurrences where they felt that the immediate pressures and demands had been so overwhelming that there was no opportunity, at the time, to reflect on appropriate courses of action. Secondly, respondents talked about various items of their parental behaviour of which they basically disapproved, but had adopted as a consequence of giving precedence to other priorities. Labelling these items of behaviour as "disapproved expedients" was a coping mechanism which was perhaps the most frequently implemented, but at the same time was perceived as the least acceptable, both by the user and by other family members. A lengthy but useful
description which brought out very well points mentioned by most of the respondents, was given by Barbara Johnson. We were talking about her feelings that Ian had a better understanding than she of their younger child, and she had just remarked that she often referred problems about Thomas to him when she felt unable to cope. The conversation continued as follows:

K.B. (to Ian): "And does it generally work that you CAN cope with him?"

Ian: "Don't know, suppose so."

Barbara: "The whole situation seems to dissolve doesn't it? (Ian: 'Mm') (pause). Cos usually we're in such a rush that the em, situation is sort of overwhelmed by the next situation you know, like the fact that he hasn't finished all his breakfast. Oh, the scene over breakfast, he took a second helping of cereal and we know, we BOTH knew, that he wouldn't eat it because he never eats ONE helping let alone right the whole way through a second helping, so you MADE him, you tipped most of it back, didn't you? (Ian: 'Yeah') you got very cross with him (Ian: 'Oh I didn't'). Yes you did, you upset him and made him cry, and I booted him up the stairs, I couldn't STAND the crying at that time in the morning." ... "The whole situation didn't, sort of wasn't logically pursued, and it wasn't sort of fully developed, because by that time I, it was nine o'clock and we had to get out of the house, so he was hauled down again, put into his anorak, and bundled off into the car." (F)

Examples of the second kind of situation often came from respondents who were having sleeping problems with their children. About a third of the couples described such problems and their attempts at remedies, many of which they basically disapproved of. None of them claimed that they felt it was the right course of action either for a parent to take a turn in sleeping with the child, or to have the child in the parent's room beyond a certain age. A few, however, had resorted to such actions as a consequence of giving priority to the child's sense of security, or, more simply, a better night's sleep. Other examples came from respondents who felt that they had sacrificed certain of their
basic beliefs in order to create a more harmonious atmosphere.

Shirley Jackson said:

"Mind you, I do something that I thought I would NEVER do, that I think I should say as well. If I'm going into the supermarket I take my children to the sweets counter first and I buy them you know, small things, (Edward: 'But that gives you peace and quiet to do your shopping.') so that I can shop in peace going round the supermarket." (F)

Kathy Hislop illustrated how situations could overwhelm a parent's desire to be fair with the children. She explained:

"I find it difficult to be fair to Julie when Anna's there, because she doesn't assert herself, and I feel she should be getting more attention being the older one. She tends to give in too easily which makes it, well, fair enough, I do as well and feel this isn't fair to her. I haven't found a way round this without actually causing ructions with Anna because of it. And I feel if Julie's prepared to give in, it keeps the peace, although I don't feel it's always the best way. But then at breakfast time, where's the point in causing rows?" (F)

This latter quotation points to the main reason why respondents felt the need to define certain kinds of behaviour as "temporary expedients". Usually they expressed guilt or embarrassment because they felt that a family member had been deliberately treated unfairly. Also, underlying assumptions about understanding children, and being consistent, were violated by the demands of prevailing circumstances. This area of coping mechanisms was particularly tenuous and open to challenges from other family members. One spouse might, at a certain point, accept the contextual rationalisations and go along with the process of labelling the act as a "disapproved expedient". At another time, for example during an argument, the label might be challenged. In such a situation the same act might be redefined and then be used to illustrate that the "offending" spouse was an inconsistent, unfair, or impatient parent.
3. The "Blowing" of Coping Mechanisms

This example leads on to a final point concerning the maintenance of belief systems. It was a continuous process of reaffirmation and reassurance. It was also open to the possibility of challenges from any family member. Coping mechanisms were used to stem those tensions which might result in such challenges. Occasionally, during the fieldwork, the importance of such coping mechanisms was laid bare when respondents violated them. During their joint interview John Clark gave a frank account to Mary of her faults and irritating habits. His refusal to engage in "tactful deception" led to a considerable argument. Mary eventually said, jokingly, that, after all that, she wondered how they had managed to stay together.

Kathy Hislop, in her first interview, had initially used a coping mechanism as an explanation for her husband simply not seeing things which had to be done about the house. She later admitted, however, that when house and children became oppressive, she felt another interpretation to be true. She argued:

"I think he's the same as a lot of other husbands cos the husband on the other side of us was completely undomestic and he wouldn't think to do anything in the house unless he was asked to do it. Which annoys me because I think he should SEE things that need to be done. And it's not until things really get on top of me that I sort of blow up about them. And then he says 'well if you had asked me I would have done it.'" (N.B. husband here invokes another coping mechanism. ) "It's something that's always happened, but it's something that I just won't accept, that, if I ask him to do something he'll do it, but if I don't ask him, he's too lazy to do it." (1)

In everyday life the coping mechanisms were frequently challenged and "blown". This was evident from respondents' accounts, and revealed the precariousness of the reality being created. Berger and Luckmann would relate this analytically to marriage and parenthood being situations of secondary socialisation. They pointed out that:
"The more 'artificial' character of secondary socialisation makes the subjective reality of its internalisations even more vulnerable to challenging definitions of reality; not because they are not taken for granted or are apprehended as less than real in everyday life, but because their reality is less deeply rooted in consciousness and thus more susceptible to displacement."

Respondents' accounts suggested that, what in my analytical terms could be seen as a temporary refusal to acknowledge family life as a shared reality, was a frequent practical result of such challenges. Refusals to communicate or to co-operate were outward signs of this temporary denial. Minor examples of the results of a lapse in coping mechanisms also occurred during the interviews themselves. Occasionally a hurt or angry spouse withdrew from the conversation for a while, or showed distress by a change in demeanour. Sometimes a respondent used the protective atmosphere created by an outsider's presence to issue threats of future non-co-operation or refusal to carry out certain tasks.

Summary

This elaboration of coping mechanisms completes the preliminary analytical discussion of how respondents negotiated and sustained their mutually held parental reality. The coping mechanisms came into effect when beliefs in underlying assumptions were seen to be contradicted in practice. A selection of the most recurrent problematical issues described by respondents has been given. Having considered important aspects of how respondents negotiated meanings behind parental behaviour, I shall now focus further on the meanings themselves. In the next two chapters I shall describe the images of children which played an important part in the development of parental

behaviour. This will be followed by a consideration of specific issues involved in being a mother and being a father, as described by respondents in their accounts.
1. Introduction

Being a parent is a situation involving many uncertainties. Respondents' accounts were characterised by constant attempts to make sense of the many stimuli from the child with which they were faced. Negotiating parental behaviour with one another involved developing, exchanging, and sustaining images of the child and its world which could be used as subjectively satisfactory bases for action. This development of typificatory schemes was at once an abstract and a grounded process. Respondents derived images of children both from their social stock of knowledge and their ongoing biographical experience. There was continuous interplay between these two spheres of knowledge. For presentation purposes, however, I have separated my discussion of images into two chapters. In this chapter I shall consider abstract images, and in the next the more dynamic aspects of image formation will be examined.

The complex web of image formation and continuous decision making involved in developing parental behaviour was ordinarily taken-for-granted. The images appeared to respondents in their everyday lives to be, by and large, spontaneous and unreflective.¹ As David Silverman

---

1. This taken-for-grantedness of everyday life was described by Schutz as follows: "... in everyday life, as I share experiences with my fellow men and pursue the ordinary pragmatic motives in acting upon them, I find the constructs ready made and I take it for granted that I can grasp the motives of my fellow-men and understand their actions adequately for all practical purposes. I am highly unlikely to turn my attention to the various strata of meaning upon which my comprehension of their conduct is based." Broderson, A. (Ed.), 1964, op.cit., p.21.
pointed out:

"Even Weber, whose sociology was based on the analysis of meaningful social action, noted that usually actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning." 2

A main aim of this study was, however, to uncover some of these underlying meanings which usually remained implicit unless, for example, problematical situations required their articulation, or they were drawn upon as legitimations in the negotiations between spouses.

The taken-for-grantedness of image formation was illustrated by some of the respondents who denied that they had formed any clear cut notions about their child; maintaining, for example, that he/she was too young and still developing. This kind of reaction seemed unrelated to any objectively measurable criterion, such as age. One respondent, for instance, felt that there was little to say about a thirteen month old baby, whereas another launched into a detailed description of the personality of one who was one month old! In part respondents were reluctant to define and articulate characteristics which they disliked, as being permanent personality traits. Anna Robson, for instance, saw her two and a half year old daughter as bad mannered and boisterous but told me there was very little to say about her because "her personality's not formed yet." Helen Moffat perhaps gave some indication of one of the reasons behind this occasional reaction against consciously formulating and articulating images of children. She said:

"I think perhaps if you think about your children an awful lot you're in trouble. You know you start thinking and asking what's different about them, I don't think it's a terribly good idea really."

K.B.: "Yes, why not?"

Helen: "Because you DO start totting up their, the pros and cons of their personality. I don't think it's a good idea to do." (I)

All respondents, however, even those who for some reason claimed that they were reluctant or unable to speak definitively about their child's character or personality, always then proceeded to put forward some images which, albeit in a qualified fashion, were, nevertheless, being used as a working model. The data show quite clearly that, no matter how simplistically this was being done, images were continually formed of even the smallest baby. Shirley Jackson gave a good example of this kind of qualified image formation when she talked about Elaine who, at that point, was eight months old:

"Edward and I were just talking about this the other day. We THINK that, we don't KNOW of course because she isn't old enough, but Simon we can talk around, you know, we can sort of REASON with Simon and sort of get him round to our way of thinking. We don't think we'll be able to do the same with Elaine, we don't KNOW, but we think that she's going to be very much em, Simon HAS a mind of his own but you can always you know, make him see your point of view. And if it's the one that you think is right for him, you can always sort of bring him round to that without very much of a scene."

K.B.: "Why do you think Elaine is going to be different?"

Shirley: "Well, we find NOW with her that em she's VERY contented and she's a very placid wee girl until there's something, you know, just not quite right, you know, something which she feels or, and she has a right wee temper, you know." (I)

Equally, in their joint interview, the Jacksons provided an example of parental negotiation of images about a baby.
Shirley: "And Elaine, well she's an average ten month old baby. Her character's developing, hasn't as yet em."

Edward: "But definitely she seems to be very very strong willed."

Shirley: "Yes, but she's also a very amenable wee girl, always been very good." (Edward: 'Oh yes!') The only time we ever have any bother with her is when she's cutting teeth and it's never drastic." (Jt)

Here the Jacksons had already developed a tentative image of their daughter as being of strong-willed character. They were also aware, though, that she was only ten months old and, as such, still "developing". They were therefore reluctant to make very positive statements about her and related some of her determined reactions to the trials of babyhood, such as cutting teeth. This then provides an early example of making sense of the child by vacillating between a personality and a physiological image. Subsequent parental behaviour could be very different depending on which image attained predominance at any one point in time. Only one respondent actually consciously reflected on this process of forming images of children, and her spontaneous comments were very interesting. Margaret Barber explained:

"The other anxiety one could have is whether we have defined them either wrongly or too early and will maintain our definition." (F)

She went on to talk about how she felt that her parents had made this kind of mistake with her sister and herself, perhaps with disadvantageous effect. Later she returned to this point and said:

3. These two sets of images are discussed in detail in section three of the present chapter.
... and I could see that we might make the same kind of mistake: that you say 'Karen's the sensitive one and Mary's the resilient one.' How much this is that Karen communicates her anxieties and things and Mary may very well NOT be the kind of child and so I've written down here you know, I worry sometimes in case Mary isn't making her needs more plain (Philip: 'Yes!') because we tend to RESPOND possibly less to them.

K.B.: "Do you see this definition of the children as being an important factor?"

Margaret: "I think it's an important thing in that it affects your attitude and very often your action towards them, yes. And therefore possibly one should be more careful NOT to define them, you know, to keep on the lookout the whole time possibly." (F)

2. General images of children and childhood

(a) Children should be "understood"

Making sense of the child was, for these respondents, a complex interpretative activity. The major image which seemed to dominate their parental behaviour was of the child as a being to be "understood" by its parents. They put forward this image both in the sense of comprehending and of empathising. "Understanding" the child was perceived as an ongoing challenge and, as such, reflected the underlying assumptions about family life as a cyclical learning situation. This crucial image was important for several reasons. In one sense it defined for respondents the broad outline of being a parent. It also designated for them the main difference between their own and other children. Some examples should help to clarify these important points.

"Understanding" the child was perceived as fundamentally a parental responsibility. At this stage respondents felt that their own "understandings" would have the greatest validity, since
they had the broadest experience of the child. They also felt that other people did not have the same reason to make the effort adequately to understand the child, since he/she was not their "responsibility". (Another basic image.) An example of this was that all respondents generally went to great lengths to resolve and administer any problematical elements associated with their nuclear group before outside help, either practical or theoretical, was sought. By outside help I mean essentially medical or other professional help. Informal exchanges with friends or relatives were seen by respondents as qualitatively different. Such exchanges seemed to be perceived more as gathering wider personal experiences on which to base decisions.

Most respondents described instances when they had tried out various tactics to deal, for example, with children's sleep or behaviour problems. This had often gone on for a long time before outside help was sought. Margaret Barber had not confided Karen's sleep problems to the playgroup leader for many months. The Mitchells persevered with Rachel's hysterical clinginess for over a year before they sought professional advice. Against his wife's wishes, and only when Alan Hemingway felt his work was suffering because of lack of sleep, did he go to the Doctor about Laura's wakefulness. About a third of the respondents actually indicated that to resort to outside advice was somehow an admission of failure to cope with something that they should

---

4. This point is also relevant to my argument about the different levels of validity attached to various kinds of knowledge. (See Chapter Four, p.146-6). In family matters, knowledge acquired through direct personal experience was accorded high validity.
have been able to manage themselves. Thus, albeit on a more mundane level, the respondents in this study tried to contain their difficulties within the group in much the same way as did the other family members in Joan Jackson's study of alcoholics.  

In this way the image of the child as a being to be 'understood' was an important meaning behind parental behaviour. Interestingly, at some points, children proved so problematical that, even though parents did not feel that they had reached a subjectively satisfactory account, they gained some consolation from the fact that they had at least gone through all the processes of understanding, i.e. considered all angles and attempted a variety of solutions. The Barbers, for example, said in their final interview:

Philip: "Well obviously we've had Karen now for over four years so we've had more problems with her (than Mary, er, I think we tended to try and look for a positive solution to it."

Margaret: "Rather than just live on with it."

Philip: "You know, rather than just live on with it, you know, like the bedtime problems, the sleeping problems."

Margaret: "Although I'm not sure that the end result wouldn't be the same, but at least we feel that we're doing something." (P) (my underlining)

A further implication of this image was related to the different meanings attached to one's own and to other children. Respondents obviously varied in the degree of interest expressed in children other than their own. Nevertheless, their accounts indicated that a rather different overall attitude existed. Other

children were taken very much more at "face-value" and less effort was made continuously to interpret their behaviour, that is, "understand" it. The parental bond was perceived not just as a blood tie but also as a continuous responsibility to make sense of that particular child. I would suggest that this interpretation of being a parent is one explanation of why a few respondents, who said that they did not particularly like children in general, had, nevertheless, a great interest in their own. Derek Rankin, for example, said:

"Well I enjoy having children whereas before when I was single I used to hate them. Now, friends of mine who were married and had them, as far as I was concerned, they just got in the way, if anything I was embarrassed to come near them, or if they came near ME what do you say to a Kiddie?" (I)

Ian Johnson, who expressed similar sentiments, expanded as follows on his comment that he and Barbara never talked to other adults about their children because it was boring:

"We don't think our children are boring. We think, well we KNOW that other people find the topic of children boring." ... "we are mutually interested in our own children." (F)

Thus the image of one's own child as a being to be "understood" was an important factor differentiating perceptions of that child from those others outside the nuclear family group. Respondents tended not to take their own child's behaviour at its "face-value". In addition, they were usually reluctant to make any definitive statements about their child which might be construed as harshly critical. Rather, they preferred either to furnish explanations for any problematical elements, or to regard them as a phase or stage. Occasionally a respondent did make a critical statement about a child. Almost every time this occurred either
the other spouse quickly qualified the remark, or the respondent him/herself followed it up with a softer comment or an itemisation of the particular child's good points. The fact that such exchanges occurred frequently during the joint interviews, when I was not present, suggests that this was not simply an "interviewer effect", but was also characteristic of the negotiation processes themselves.

This observation of the special meanings behind parental behaviour had some further implications. Through "understanding" the child the parents developed the belief that they could make the most valid final judgments on the child. Here again we see the great legitimacy attached to personal experience in the family situation. Many interpretations were possible of a child and his/her behaviour, but the nuclear group was the primary definitional unit. This was especially highlighted by three separate situations where respondents knew other families in the sample, defined their children as problematical, and presented alternative images to me. Given that these "interested outsiders" had presented their versions of these children's behaviour to me, it was fascinating to listen concurrently to the parents themselves giving their own interpretations of the particular situations and their meanings. The main point which emerged was that none of the actual parents defined the particular children as having special problems and they put forward whole ranges of legitimations and coping mechanisms to support their views. The Coulsons, for example, saw Karen Barber as a very neurotic child whose elaborate imaginative play was totally odd. Margaret Barber, however, felt that there was nothing to worry about and said:
"Her emotional ups and downs, her waking in the night, etc., I think it is, I think it's common to a lot of her age group, I don't look upon it as a problem that's peculiar to us as a family anyway." (I)

The Robsons saw Brian Jeffreys as a very odd child who was frequently very late for school and was completely defiant of his mother in public situations, such as the School Medical Examination. The Jeffreys felt strongly that, although they perceived their children to be frequently rather awkward, nevertheless, they should not be repressed or constrained, and that any difficult situations usually arose from their own inability to understand and deal with them. They talked as follows about Brian in their joint interview:

Marjorie: "I think Grandad's the only one with any real influence when it comes to it. (Andrew: 'Yes') It's a pity they're so far away." (and later)

Andrew: "There's perhaps some way of reasoning that escapes us, perhaps we're too direct."

Marjorie: "I think perhaps we expect too too much from him, I don't know (Andrew: 'Oh'). And one thing I'm sure; my Dad's got more patience with him than YOU have."

Andrew: "Oh, inevitably, yes." (Jt)

The Wilsons were critical of the general family set up of the Mitchells, seeing Ray as principally to blame for being insufficiently involved. They saw both of the children as inadequately disciplined and spoiled, and said that Rachel Mitchell behaved so badly that she was being excluded from gatherings in the neighbourhood. Alice Mitchell talked about difficulties in getting Rachel to leave her and go to nursery school, but she basically felt that she was a bright extroverted little girl who was just going through a phase. Thus, given that the parents always had the ultimate decision as to which interpretation of
the child was to be implemented, the study indicated a strong tendency for parents to avoid harsh judgments, and to try to keep any potential problems within the family's sphere of influence by seeking out further "understandings".

(b) Children are different from adults

Respondents' accounts also revealed the basic image that a child was different from an adult. Consequently, interactions and patterns of behaviour different from those of the adult world had to be developed. Many illustrations were given both directly and implicitly. The Berbers, for example, had the following conversation in their joint interview:

Margaret: "It's, I mean frankly it's far more of an adjustment having children than getting married (Philip: 'Oh entirely, yes!') because with any luck, when you get married you know what you're marrying and you have been mentally adjusting to it for some time."

Philip: "Also you're dealing with another adult (Margaret: 'Yes') who can come half way to meet you, but with kids they can't." (Jt)

Children were perceived as inexperienced humans. Implicit in respondents' accounts was the image of the child as continuously learning adult definitions and boundaries. Examples were constantly given of children behaving "badly" because they had not yet absorbed these definitions. Parental behaviour was developed around this assumption. Many respondents, for example, had avoided eating in restaurants with the children, or taking them into certain kinds of shops, because they did not behave in an "adult" fashion. Often illustrations were given indirectly when respondents talked about difficulties having arisen because they perhaps expected too much of a child (i.e. where evaluating their child's behaviour in an adult context?). Sylvia Chapman
said, for example, that when Judy was born, she began very much to use three year old Anne as a helper and, because the child apparently understood everything so well, she became very impatient with her if she did things wrongly. At a certain point, however, she realised that she was simply expecting too much of Anne who was "just a child, herself, after all."

Since they could not take it for granted that a child comprehended things to the same extent as an adult, respondents were engaged in the continual interpretative activity of assessing the level of a child's "understanding". Respondents' accounts showed considerable variation in the degree of "adult" behaviour attributed to, and expected of, a child. Sheila Pringle found great pleasure in observing her daughters' "nice" behaviour when she took them out for coffee. To the Jeffreys, whose sons were of equivalent ages, such an activity was unthinkable, since they did not expect their children to respect such adult boundaries of behaviour. As has been shown earlier, especially in the discussions of phase and stage, respondents operated with broad and flexible notions of child development. This was again illustrated in their everyday interpretations of the extent to which children should absorb "adult" definitions of appropriate behaviour.

Further distinctions between children and adults were made indirectly in the preliminary interviews. These occurred when I asked respondents first to describe their children and later to describe their spouses. Whilst everyone was able to talk unselfconsciously and at great length about the children, only about half a dozen people responded in a similar manner about
their spouses. Meanings behind the often embarrassed reaction to the latter question were obviously infinitely complex. No doubt an important factor was simply the research situation itself and suspicion, at this stage, of how I might use such information. Nevertheless, some brief speculative comments about this may add substance to the main point about images of children.

About a third of the respondents who actually remarked that the "describe spouse" question was difficult, said this was because nowadays they never really sat back and thought about their spouse. Alternatively, they said that the spouse had become so much part of their world that it was virtually impossible to put such things into words. Inasmuch as they had been able to talk about their children, very different definitional processes were obviously at work. First of all, children were perceived as constantly changing and developing, whereas spousal characteristics were usually felt to be relatively stable. Although, during the course of the panel study, rates of change and development were perceived as progressing spasmodically, that is, sometimes many things had happened and at other times very few, nevertheless, the Jeffrey's comments in their joint interview were fairly typical.

Marjorie: "They change, don't they, they change from one month to the next, don't they? (Andrew: 'Yes'). Since we've talked about them this last time I'm sure they've changed."

Andrew: "Yes, well, they've BOTH changed since then definitely." (Jt)

A second distinction was that children were seen as much more of an administrative responsibility than was the spouse. Another adult in the group was seen as, by and large, able to fend for
him or herself, whereas children were defined as not able to do this, and therefore as having to be administered. These two quotations illustrate that, no matter how the actual childrearing situation was viewed, the fact remained that the adult saw him or herself as exercising overall administrative responsibility for the child. Barbara Johnson said:

"I think we both agree that a lot of the upbringing of a child is conditioning anyway, em, so er 'jump to it' or else, clonk!" (I)

Ben Pringle argued:

"I think being a PARENT involves providing an atmosphere in which children can grow up with security and stimulation and a complete lack of any inhibition at all, in fact, an atmosphere of freedom and yet, and yet within the confines of growing up in present society." (J)

Here, both of these respondents, whilst advocating different approaches, took it for granted that children could not bring themselves up, and that adults were therefore in administrative control.

A corollary of this image was that parental definitions of the situation tended to be paramount. Whilst the child's innate drives and stated motives might be acknowledged, they were not usually accorded legitimacy in the same way as were those of an adult. Children were, after all, only inexperienced humans. This kind of overall parental power was illustrated in a discussion between Colin and Mary Duncan. Mary argued throughout that children should simply comply with their parents' wishes without question. Colin, on the other hand, had elaborate reasons for feeling that a child's motives must be considered. Even he, however, still saw this as ultimately within the parental sphere of control. Arguing that a child's reasons must be seen within their childlike context, he said:
"But in HIS mind, in a five year old's mind, it's maybe quite logical and sensible (Mary: 'Mmmhm, sometimes.') I mean why should you just go about saying 'don't do this and do that and do this'?

Mary: "There's usually a reason, you know, a REASON."

Colin: "Aye, maybe for YOU (Mary: 'Mmmhm'). But why do you want him to do certain things, just em, YOU don't want him to do them." (P)

Colin's basic feeling, however, that the parent always retained the choice of definition had been established in a previous interview.

Mary: "He HAS to be kept you know, DOWN, and this is where we disagree sometimes, you know."

K.B. (to Colin): "You don't think that keeping him down is the right way to deal with his temperament?"

Colin: "Well no, and neither, neither did the Doctor at the place (Sick Children's Hospital) to which they were referred after Alistair had behave very temperamentally at a School Medical), he said that, he said, 'well don't try and win all the arguments, let him win some of them, but not them all. If you win, I mean, if it's something really important, well, you make sure you win it but, if not, well you've to let him.' He said that he was quite sort of intelligent and this was why he was so bad you know, this is going back to what I think, that if he gives reasons for things, you know, and he said that er, he said that it's very difficult to bring them up you know, because they won't just ACCEPT what you're saying." (W/E)

A third distinction between adults and children was implicit in respondents descriptions of their dealings with their spouses and with their children. By and large the children were dealt with in a much more overtly manipulative manner than were the spouses. Management of children was carried out by open dealings and negotiations between spouses, whereas any attempt to deal similarly with one another would generally have been regarded as unacceptable. This was partly because each spouse was regarded as another adult whose definitions and reasonings, unlike those of the children, were accorded legitimacy. Also, the overt
application of rational management criteria to the spousal situation would have been regarded as a violation of the romantic love concept and as some form of selfish manipulation. Dealings between spouses were therefore much more covert and subtle and, consequently, more difficult to describe.

In this section various abstract images of children and childhood have been described. By and large these were implicit in respondents' accounts. They can be seen as providing the taken-for-granted legitimations behind parental behaviour. In the next section I shall present further abstract images which were more explicitly articulated. Once parenthood per se was taken-for-granted respondents then developed notions about children's needs and wants. These were frequently used as legitimations in the negotiation processes.

3. Children's needs and wants

During their accounts respondents put forward many images of children's needs and wants. When actually talking to respondents it seemed that so many of these images were being generated that it would be impossible to present these in any kind of ordered fashion. Although, at that point, images of children were already starting to be considered as vitally important factors underlying parental behaviour, it was difficult to see them as anything other than diffuse and idiosyncratic sets of meanings. Considering the problem purely empirically this must still be taken to be the case, and, in fact, it might be suggested that this characterises all personal belief systems. Nevertheless, once removed from an intense direct involvement with the respondents, it gradually became apparent that, on a more abstract level, they were addressing themselves to similar forms of images, even if specific content differed. Again, respondents were orienting themselves to
broad assumptions about children, but the actual practical implementa-
tion of these had to be arrived at idiosyncratically by the
members of each nuclear group.

In this section I shall first describe the main psychological
and physiological images of children's needs and wants, as presented
by respondents. Some of the implications of these images will be
given at this stage. Further illustrations are incorporated in the
later chapters. Finally, I discuss instances where the respondents
were unable to develop an appropriate image of a need or want. Such
instances, where aspects of a child's behaviour were defined as
"incomprehensible", highlighted, by indicating its problematical nature,
the social construction of the reality of parenthood.

(a) Psychological images

(i) I have termed "psychological images" the complex of
definitions relating to the perceived mental, emotional, and
personality characteristics and requirements of the child. As
was previously discussed, such images were being formed of the
child from a very early age. Here my distinction between
abstract and grounded images also becomes particularly blurred.
However, by way of a general framework for their parental actions,
respondents usually put forward some broad images of the psycho-
logical make-up of children. They related their behaviour either
explicitly or implicitly to these.

These images frequently dealt with the way that children
were defined as learning or developing. The range of these
beliefs within the sample is illustrated by the following quotations.

6. See Chapters Eight and Nine.
7. See Introduction of the present chapter.
All of these implicitly assume that the child is a "learning" entity, but their differing images of exactly how he/she learns had considerable implications for parental behaviour.

Martin Chapman argued:

"I think you can become too old too quick. It's a gradual, and I think it's wrong to accelerate the natural development of the child anyway. All you should do is guide it and let it develop itself, and just watch the direction it's taking and, em steer it the right way. I mean a child'll develop at its own pace and it'll get there eventually." (W/E)

Nick Wilson gave his views when explaining that he disapproved of modern teaching methods because he believed that there was no such thing as free expression in a child. He maintained that:

"Children imitate, they set their own standards by their parents or by their teachers, em, whichever is the most part of their life." (I)

The Pringles' general image of children was somewhat different from this; Ben said:

"Well I think inhibition is a very bad thing anyway, to suppress anything in a CHILD which must be natural and to a large extent innocent MUST be a bad thing. Natural forthcoming things in children should NEVER be suppressed, because all they're doing is demonstrating their, well, their childishness, their innocence, their natural inquisitiveness, and their adventurousness, or or, even their ANGER, er, suppressed ANGER is almost as bad as anything else." (F)

The somewhat opposed views about children of these last two respondents were frequently expressed during their interviews to legitimate decisions about child management. Ben Pringle took great pleasure in the openness of his daughters, and encouraged them in "free expression" which he tolerated with good humour.

He commented:

"We're both naturally CLOSE to our children in that you can see for yourself, neither of them are inhibited. In fact, they don't even do you the goodness to wait till you've finished a sentence till they're blabbing you know, which I think is a good thing, you know, to have inhibited children is a bad thing. (Sheila: 'Oh it IS yes.') And I'm pleased to say my children aren't." (F)
Nick Wilson, on the other hand, expressed anger when the children failed to "imitate" adult behaviour to his satisfaction. He said he was very intolerant when the children spoiled his garden or woke him up with their singing in the mornings. He felt that the best way to deal with such "bad behaviour" was to smack the children. In addition he felt that it was totally wrong simply to sacrifice oneself to the child's behaviour and, for example, chose not to eat with his daughters because he found their table manners unpleasant.

(ii) A further image related to the definition of children as "learning" beings was that they needed boundaries to be set for them. Children were perceived as not knowing the "adult" boundaries of behaviour. They "needed" to be taught these not only for the peace of mind of their parents but also for their own psychological development. Barbara Johnson illustrated both aspects of this image. Speaking about how she and Ian viewed themselves as being fairly authoritarian with their children she said:

"So in a way, (we're) repressive. (Ian: 'Hmm, it is rather.') But we rationalise it very neatly by saying 'well these kids have got to live with us, so if they don't suit us THEY'VE got to change because WE were here first'." (F)

In an earlier interview she said about Dr. Spock:

"... far too permissive. I don't think you can give children complete freedom. They NEED some kind of, well, they need very STRONG guidance and discipline because otherwise they're completely at a loss." (I)

Even those respondents who maintained that they did not believe in restricting children, still established certain kinds of boundaries. They would, for example, maintain that children needed some behavioural boundaries for their own safety.
Implicit in respondents' accounts was the belief that, without boundaries, children were potentially anarchic and oppressive. This was often expressed in terms of clichés such as "give them an inch and they'll take a mile", or "give a child enough rope and he'll eventually hang himself." Children were perceived as "needing" boundaries otherwise they would make life unbearable for themselves and others. Being a parent was sometimes described as a sort of constant battle against the breakthrough of this anarchy and oppression. Most respondents described instances of their children destroying parents' belongings, disrupting social situations, and defying any kind of rational parental action. Such instances were often put forward to legitimate restrictions which parents attempted to put on their children. Again, however, this vague image allowed for considerable variation in practical interpretation.

(iii) General images of the mental characteristics of children were qualified in practice by personality images of the particular child. In one sense these images were "grounded" in that parents were constantly learning about the child's personality by seeing him/her in different contexts. In another sense these images were "abstract". A child might be defined as having a certain kind of personality or personality characteristic. Some children were, for example, defined as "determined" or "shy" or "adaptable". The parent subsequently developed his/her behaviour towards the child in terms of his/her interpretation of that "abstract" image. Sometimes a particular image provided a subjectively satisfactory level of understanding of the child and therefore reduced the felt need to develop other more grounded understandings. Much parental behaviour was subsequently
legitimated by reference to that particular personality image.

David and Marjorie Russell gave a good illustration of how images of their children's different personalities led to their reacting differently to the same item of behaviour.

David: "Kathleen has to be treated with more sensitivity, she's less easy to understand than Timothy."

Marjorie: "He accepts things as they ARE, Kathleen's, Kathleen doesn't really, she doesn't accept things."

David: "A fit of temper's a fit of temper as far as Timothy's concerned, but em you would tend to think as far as Kathleen's concerned that a fit of temper is a symptom of something which is more, em, which is deeper and underlying. I think you would have to search for causes with Kathleen rather than anything else." (F)

Here the image of children as beings to be "understood" was further qualified by the personality image that one of the siblings was more sensitive than the other.

(iv) Respondents tended to put forward very similar general images of a child's basic emotional needs. Although there was no question specifically directed to this area, people regularly referred to such images when talking about how they felt children should be treated. Three main sets of needs were repeatedly mentioned: love and affection, security and stability, and consistency. Again, of course, although such images could be seen as commonly held underlying assumptions, people varied considerably in how they thought these should be put into practice.

In addition, many coping mechanisms came into operation when respondents felt they might be violating what they perceived to be these basic needs.

Love and affection as a basic need was such a fundamental image that it was generally only referred to in an offhand and totally taken for granted manner. Occasionally, however,
respondents stressed that they felt it important to manifest their love to the child so that he/she should know, without doubt, that the love existed. George and Helen Moffat had the following discussion in their joint interview:

Helen: "I mean I think the most important, the first thing after food a child needs is affection and I don't think, I think everything you do should be with a background of affection and if you don't give a child ..."

George: "Well, it's all affection isn't it?"

Helen: "Yes, well I mean it's all caring. I mean if you don't care about a child you don't try and discipline it. But I mean ... there's got to be an atmosphere of affection. I mean, lots of people clearly love someone else and they don't, they can't express it at all, it's not completely, I mean a baby knows you love it because you feed it, but an older child expects more proof of your affection for it doesn't it. (George: 'Yes'.) I mean it's not an instinctive thing by any means is it?" (George: 'No'.) (Jt)

A further point made by Barry Coulson leads on to the next part of the section. Like several other respondents, he indicated that if the love and affection were shown in the family, then this was a major way of satisfying other emotional needs. He said:

"I think affection is a very important, and for children to see affection and love between the parents is a good thing, it must give him a lot of feeling of security." (I)

If two words dominated the replies of the respondents, these were security and stability. One could hypothesise at length on the reasons for this finding. Classic sociological theories about alienation, anomie, and the psychological effects of accelerated rates of social change, could all be applied. Here, however, the intention is simply to emphasise that respondents saw the satisfying of this perceived basic need as the major challenge facing them as parents. Having identified this objective they
they were far less certain of how it was actually to be achieved. Occasionally this uncertainty was voiced if respondents sensed that they were somehow not succeeding in this aim. Barbara Johnson, for example, made the following observation about her daughter, Nicola:

"She's basically insecure, which I very much regret because, you know, security's the one thing you want to give your child and yet, you try and it still doesn't seem to work." (I)

John Clark said about his elder daughter, Louise:

"... and she's still a bit like this you know, if she wakes up during the night she just lets out a yell, she never er. I don't know why, I mean, we've tried to make her feel secure, (laughs) whether we've failed somewhere I don't know." (I)

Again, respondents usually saw this need as so taken-for-granted that there was no reason to explain it further. When explanations were given they were usually connected with ideas that people needed a secure emotional base on which to grow and develop. It was often implied that, without this feeling of security, the child might find itself in some way handicapped.

Two quotations illustrate some of the meanings behind this image.

Jim Robson argued:

"But I think insecurity, insecurity for a child is a catastrophe; and for an adult too, you MUST feel secure, a child must feel secure and if there isn't this security I think it's a terrible undermining thing for a child both in everyday educational things that, they're not secure, they don't know what's going to happen next." (I)

Nick Wilson gave his view as follows:

"In a situation where you have children is er, the one thing that they (parents) MUST provide is a degree of permanence and steadiness in the home. And I think this is, well I suppose it's just common sense to most people, but I'm SURE that children grow up better when they've got a stable, steady relationship of husband and wife close to them." (I)
The image of security as a basic need was such a vital factor underlying parental behaviour that it was constantly referred to in discussions about childrearing. People operated with such a wide variety of "common-sense" notions about which actions would, or would not, foster this sense of security, that it is impossible to describe them all. Two examples are given, therefore, which deal with areas where respondents particularly felt that their actions might threaten the child's emotional needs. Two areas which were often mentioned as especially sensitive in this respect were discipline and independence from parents. James Gilchrist felt that ill feeling over disciplining should not be allowed to linger. He explained:

"I don't like to put a kid to bed on a bad note because I would think that it would tend to make them feel insecure." (W/E)

Maureen Rankin illustrated the second area when they were talking about their decision to allow the children themselves to decide when they wanted to go to nursery school. She said:

"If you push a child before he's ready then they're suspicious of you and they think that you're trying to get rid of them or something, and you can give them a sense of insecurity if they think you're trying to get rid of them. You're NOT, but they think you are. And I think it's a problem that you don't really need to come up against if you just wait a bit, and em certainly with Lynne, I can't say for everybody, but it paid off to wait just a bit longer until she was ready." (W/E)

Here then is an excellent example of the interplay between abstract and grounded images. This parent was concerned to foster a feeling of security in the child. She tried to satisfy this perceived need by certain specific actions. An ongoing grounded interpretation of the child's reactions was, however, necessary to sustain belief in the adequacy of her parental behaviour.

Throughout the fieldwork it was evident that this kind of belief
was frequently sustained through negotiation between the spouses. As the child's definitions of reality were gradually accorded greater legitimacy, he/she might also be actively included in the negotiation processes.

The final much-mentioned emotional need, which everyone claimed to be trying to satisfy but no-one felt he/she was succeeding, was consistency. This was used as a blanket term to cover all of the ways in which children might be subjected to conflicting treatments. Respondents stressed the importance of each parent behaving in an internally consistent way as well as both parents avoiding contradictions between themselves. Internal consistency meant that the parent not only tried to react in the same way to similar situations but also to try to avoid giving contradictory signals in different areas of behaviour. Everyone tended to feel that this was all extremely difficult to achieve, primarily because one's objectivity could so easily be swamped by personal emotional reactions. Louise Wilson said, for example:

"Some days I would get very annoyed about something which on another day wouldn't worry me. And I try not to do this if I can because I think it's grossly unfair to the child who is too young to understand that people can go through good moods and bad moods. I think that basically a mother has to give the child the sort of security which they need." (I)

The problematical nature of parenthood was here at a premium. Respondents were faced with an immense range of actions and situations in which to be consistent. Various coping mechanisms were developed to sustain belief in this abstract image. Respondents for example, selected certain specific issues on which they tried never to fail. Breaking of promises to children was, for instance, tabooed by most of the parents. The notion of balance
was also employed. Respondents claimed that their perceived failures in one area of childrearing were balanced by consistent behaviour in another. An extreme example was given by Ray Mitchell when Alice was commenting on the potentially harmful effect on their children of the large number of working hours he spent away from the home. He said:

"I don't know whether this is being over-played a bit because you know, I think they would notice, you know if I, if they suddenly stopped seeing me once a year or something. But, you know, it's er, been more or less at this pitch most of the time (Alice: 'Yes') probably just er, a little bit less just over the past three months (Alice: 'But') than before, but I would have thought a child would probably respond far more to a CHANGE in circumstances." (W/E)

Here Ray maintained that time spent with the children was not important per se. In his opinion the vital factor was that he consistently gave them the same, albeit small, amount of time.

(b) Physiological images

The next part of this section, which deals with images of the child's physiological needs, also raises some interesting points about the research process itself. Apart from their considerable references to sleep problems, respondents talked far less frequently than might have been expected about the child's needs, problems, and development in this area. Personal observation of friends and comments from colleagues would suggest that the use of physical images to account for a child's behaviour were implemented very much more often in everyday life than was indicated by the research. The "teeth, tired, tummy" syndrome, for example, would seem to be frequently used as a first-line account. This perhaps means that respondents somehow felt that I wanted more from them than an understanding on that level.
Equally, they might have felt that it was boring or uninteresting to me to hear about their child's bodily functions. Undoubtedly the kinds of understandings employed by parents vary with the particular context. Physiological images were perhaps considered inappropriate when talking to a young unmarried interviewer who was only slightly acquainted with the children concerned. Another reason is also possible, drawing on the arguments being put forward in this thesis. By the time of the fieldwork respondents had been dealing with their own children for at least three years. Perhaps they had amassed such a subjectively satisfactory stock of knowledge about dealing with the child's physical needs that they were quite confident in this respect, and did not see such needs as particularly problematical, or worth mentioning.

This suggestion is strengthened by noting that there were five cases where a physiological understanding was more frequently given. These were of children who had a specific physical ailment: asthma, digestive problems, eczema, febrile convulsions, and a severe scalding. Two examples illustrate the way in which parents drew on physical images in these cases. Margaret Barber said:

"And the main thing I think has affected the difference between them as babies has been their digestion, Mary has an excellent digestive system and Karen, poor child, has a rotten one and this you know, is a large part of a baby's world." (I)

Mary Clark said about Louise:

"She suffers from bronchial asthma which is a problem, and we think half of her problems, not PROBLEMS, but half of her little tantrums and her funny ways are caused by this because when she's WELL, she doesn't have any funny little ways." (I)
It seemed, therefore, that if a child had been diagnosed as in some way physically problematical, then parents would resort to this kind of image to understand the child more so than if he/she was considered basically healthy. The exception to this was if the child's sleeping habits were causing difficulties. This was frequently so oppressive and apparently insoluble to the parents themselves that it was very dominant in their images of the child.

(c) "Incomprehensible" images

There were often instances when respondents were unable to develop subjectively satisfactory images of the child's needs or wants. Thus, although there was an underlying assumption that understanding the child was fundamental to parenthood, it was also felt that, at certain points, this became impossible. Also, whilst respondents claimed that they were concerned to develop and understand each child's personality, they were at the same time trying to develop a degree of felt predictability in his/her behaviour. Most respondents, for example, expressed similar kinds of sentiments to the following from Barbara Johnson. She said about "being a mother":

"It's been a most wonderful experience, you know, at the same time, most interesting experience. I would say fascinating, it's fascinating to study children. And yet it's very difficult too because while you're observing them and also appreciating them, you're also having to live with the little wretches." (I)

8. The following discussion relates more to the category of 'grounded images' but will be discussed here because it is in keeping with many of the preceding empirical examples.
Respondents' accounts showed that they faced the problematical situation of trying to bring up a child who was sufficiently socialised to accept common definitions of reality, but yet retained the individuality on which they placed high value. Some of the problems that this potential contradiction might cause for parental behaviour were indicated by Hannah Gilchrist when she criticised the childrearing activities of a friend. Speaking about his elder daughter, she commented:

"From really a tiny baby, em, she's really been smacked, something which I think is very wrong, but em, he's very loving in another way. I mean they've got to have discipline but they're only children. You've got to let them have their childhood, you can't force them all the time." (F)

Problems involved in developing subjectively satisfactory images of the child's needs and wants were illustrated by respondents describing their reactions to specific items of the child's behaviour. The most recurrent example was their description of "temper tantrums". Respondents were usually totally unable to form understandings of these, and tended to relegate them to the sphere of the "incomprehensible". This, it could be argued, was basically because a "temper tantrum" was a piece of behaviour which was difficult to understand, except in terms of innate drives. These, of course, were essentially what parents were trying to direct by socialisation. When their efforts were challenged in such an overt manner, the simplest solution was to define the behaviour as "incomprehensible" (and therefore unmanageable?).

The importance of the interpretative activity behind parental behaviour was highlighted when responses to "temper tantrums" were described. Respondents related how they had been totally unable
to remedy the situation, or had "lost control" of their own tempers, since they could not understand the child. Subsequently, they expressed considerable feelings of mortification that they had been unable to cope, as the child’s behaviour had seemed so irrational. Reactions varied from defining their own parental behaviour as unsatisfactory, because they could not understand that particular item of behaviour, to simply defining the child as a "difficult personality" whom nobody would be able to understand. In the first situation the coping mechanism of phase or stage was usually employed. In the second situation, described by two respondents, outside help had been sought. In both of these cases the children were then defined as having a "certain kind of personality", in formal psychiatric terms. The parents accepted these definitions and maintained that they were better able to deal with the child since they now "understood" the reasons for the frequent "temper tantrums".

In this section I have outlined some of the abstract images of children’s needs and wants which respondents were using in their everyday decisions about child management. Respondents, however, legitimated their parental behaviour not only in terms of general ideas about children and their needs and wants, but also in terms of their future development into adults. Implicit in this is the underlying assumption that the child will grow and change. Physiological and mental growth is one of the few certain factors to which these parents could orient their behaviour. In the next section I shall present the kinds of projected images which emerged from respondents’ accounts.
4. **Projected Images of Children**

Respondents expressed many images of children which related to the future. These must also be seen as relevant sets of meanings behind their current activities. Such images are closely connected to underlying assumptions about family behaviour as a life-cyclically oriented reality. Some of these projected images were evolved in response to direct, open-ended questions, but many were expressed indirectly in the course of describing everyday activities. Three broad categories of projections will be outlined in this section. They are as follows:

(a) **Images of the future character of the child, and the implications for this of current parental actions and reactions.**

(b) **Images of the parent's future relationship with the child.**

(c) **Images of the child as a future member of society independently of his/her parents.**

(a) **Images of the future character of the child**

In the process of developing parental behaviour, respondents were also operating with images of the kind of person their child would grow up to be. In the final interview their attention was specifically directed towards such future frames of reference. This was, however, to a large extent, the outcome of earlier observations that, during the course of the study, respondents had frequently put forward projected images. An extreme example had, for example, been given by Anna Robson in her first interview. She said:

"I think I'm a typical mother in the respect that if I've watched them together in a group, I look for leadership, for instance in Martin and it's not there at the moment. And yet when he DOES show any tendencies, he's bullying." (I)
Projected character images were sometimes expressed in such specific terms but, most often, they took a much more generalised form. This quotation from Margaret Barber was a fairly typical example, she observed of her elder child:

"When Karen's gone through some of her stranger phases, I've thought, 'what I would REALLY like are two jolly little extroverts who did everything at the right time and who slept fourteen hours a night.' And then I think 'no, because I would hate them to grow up into jolly little ordinary people'" (P)

Respondents also frequently related their current actions to the projected images of their child's character. Sometimes this was simply implied and sometimes it was directly articulated as is illustrated by the following two quotations. Patrick Hislop said:

"She (younger daughter) generally makes her presence pretty forcibly felt and er, I'm quite proud of that, except that I know it's gotta be watched and to that extent Anna gets trod on much more forcibly than Julie (elder daughter) ever had to be trod on." (I)

Madeleine Harris expressed her views as part of a much more integrated philosophy of character formation when she explained:

"I don't WANT to be rigidly disciplinarian. I don't want to make lots of rules, I'd like to be flexible, I'd rather let them have their own way, I DESPERATELY want them to be independent sort of children, you know, I don't want to make them very closely dependent, you know, so I would encourage the things that weren't, you know." (P)

All respondents perceived that this whole process of the effect of their current activities on the future character of their child was delicate and intricate. The uncertainty of the future outcome of their current parental actions was an issue which, in a general way, was referred to by everyone. Some interesting points arise out of the following quotation from Martin Chapman who observed:
"I would say generally speaking that Anne tends to follow rather than be a leader, em, probably due to the way she's been brought up. Because ultimately, recently we've had to be quite strong with her because she's been a wee bit strong willed. And I think this is maybe em, this is where I'm maybe being a bit hesitant in trying to force her to do things because I don't want to curb her completely or else she's going to be just a follower all her life, I want her to be able to lead as well, when the time comes, if it's needed." (I)

This degree of self consciousness about making sense of the child, and trying to be aware of parental actions and the child's reactions, was quite typical, although levels of articulation might vary. The, so to speak, "monitoring" of the child's development was a taken-for-granted part of being a parent, as was a certain amount of self consciousness about future outcome of present actions. (This was the case even if the self consciousness simply resulted in the conclusion that it was impossible to sense the outcome!)

With varying degrees of explicitness, all respondents implemented images of how their present actions might affect their child in the future. Again, in line with arguments elsewhere in the thesis, such projected images tended to be ad hoc and based on "common sense" understandings or personal experiences rather than on any more formalised body of knowledge. Ben Pringle said, for example:

"I mean I TEASE the children, I don't think it's wrong for them. I was teased incessantly as a boy and I don't think it does anyone any harm, in fact it makes them a little more pliable." (I)

Sometimes, projected images meant that respondents decided to abdicate the, as it were, "control" aspect of parental behaviour. They legitimated this by maintaining that, in the long term it was in the child's own interests. Kathy Hislop gave a good illustration of this when she said:
"I tend, on the other hand, if they WANT to do something that I either know they CAN'T do or is a stupid thing to do, to say, IF they're determined to do it, to say 'well go ahead and do it and you'll find out what happens'. And I still do this, obviously it's through laziness in that, em, I'm not prepared to maintain a firm stand and say 'no', but unless it's going to harm them, I feel, well, they'll learn by it." (F)

As the above quotation shows, reasonings behind parental acts were often multiple and interrelated. Equally, projected images were implemented for both the short term and long term. Generally, the reference to the future implications of present actions tended to be somewhat vague. Even if the parent felt quite strongly that one of his/her actions could have relevance for the child's future behaviour, exactly when and how this would be manifested was perceived as, by definition, unforeseeable. General remarks such as the following from Mary Clark were typical. She commented:

"If you say you're going to do something then DON'T, then there'll come a time when they just won't accept anything you say." (F)

(b) Images of the parents' future relationships with the child

Many of the projected images of the child were bound up with ideas about the future relationship between parents and children. As will be discussed further in the following chapters, parental behaviour can be seen as emerging from a process of negotiation between the spouses. Part of this process involved the mutual legitimation of previous and intended actions. Just as this legitimating activity was integral to the spousal relationship, so it was also, albeit more subtly, a vital part of the parent-child relationship. Respondents all hoped that their children would retain some form of contact with them when they become
adult and, presumably, left home. It was recognised, however, that in the twentieth century context, this would be an essentially voluntary act on the part of the offspring. Several respondents went so far as to hope that their child would, in future, regard them as a friend or companion. Others simply hoped that, at the very least, their child would accept their frames of reference and share some of their basic ideas and beliefs. It was thus an aim that, in the future, the child would, to some extent, accept and respect his/her parents and their views. The ability of respondents to legitimate their parental behaviour was therefore also relevant to the parent-child relationship inasmuch as it was hoped that the child would, in future years, be able to understand his/her upbringing and a mutual respect might be achieved.

Respondents all put forward abstract images of the place of the child in their lives. They displayed a polarity of attitudes on this issue. This is best illustrated by some quotations. On the one hand people such as Martin Chapman saw their children as the focal point in their lives. He said:

"We both agree that the children come first, that is a definite MUST. We both agree on that: the children come first, they're our main goal, our main objective is the children and they're our prime function, em, that's our main agreement." (I)

On the other hand, there were some who, like Nick Wilson, felt that:

"I think the most important thing when you have children is that you shouldn't crucify yourself for your kids. And THAT I think is the major difference between OUR attitude and my parents' attitude, I don't know about your parents but MY parents certainly limited THEIR lives to a fantastic extent for the children." (P)

The Russells were perhaps representative of the middle ground of opinion, when they said in their final interview:
David: "Well the children aren't the be all and end all here as far as we're concerned. I think that we, you know, we COULD do things ourselves, em, without the children quite happily; whereas some people tend to live purely in the children and em, even in the grandchildren if you like."

Marjorie: "I think it places an ENORMOUS burden on the children for a start (David: 'It does, yes') when they're the sole focal point of interest for the parents." (F)

The final two quotations in particular were implicitly oriented to the underlying assumption of family life as a "fairly" shared reality. It was also being acknowledged that family life was cyclical and that parents could not take-for-granted a future relationship with their grown up child.

In this way, various projections were based on the fundamental image of the child as only a temporary full time visitor to the parents' lives. The image of the child as a future friend was something that several respondents claimed to be deliberately working towards. The Davies frequently mentioned this and referred to it again during their final interview. Andrew said

"But I think what, em, what we've always said with, with our own family, what we would like to do is grow up WITH them, MORE than what we've seen in our own parents, put it that way."

Judy: "We don't want this gap off, you know, we want our family to come in and say 'look Dad, I've done so n' so' or 'look Dad I would like to go somewhere, are you coming with me?', sort of thing." (F)

Patrick Hislop put forward a similar viewpoint. During his first interview, he said of his two small daughters:

"I see them both as being on fairly friendly terms with adults, myself and Kathy in particular, obviously, but with what I think of as a, as a friendship rather than necessarily a parent relationship. Which is something, this is something obviously that'll either grow or disappear as they get older. But this is something that we want, this is one of the reasons why we wanted the family while we were young; so that we would be more friends to them." (I)
Other respondents, who made no claim to such objectives, still hoped that their children would not diverge too greatly from their own value systems. The Johnsons gave an example of this as follows:

Ian: "I hope that they share, share a lot of our values because they're gonna be living with us whether they or we like it or not for some time. And it would be a lot nicer (Barbara: 'More comfortable!') if they share a lot of our views and our interests." (W/E)

By and large respondents hoped that, through common interests and values, their children would in future, retain a relationship with them when they became adults. On a general level, Louise Wilson articulated a view which would have been echoed by practically every respondent. She said:

"Well I just somehow think that one of the nice things about having a family is not that you should just enjoy your family when they're up to about the age of four. I think it should be a sort of dynamic thing which goes on for the whole of a life-time." (F)

(c) Images of children as future members of society

The final category of projected images involved respondents' ideas about the place of their children in society in the future. All respondents were making everyday decisions about their child-rearing activities with at least some regard to the fact that the child would not always have the parental buffer against the outside world. In line with arguments elsewhere in this chapter, they were, at the very least, aware that whereas they would accept and understand their child and so allow it leeway, others might not share such an attitude.9 Again, this involved both short and long term projected images. The Jeffreys, for example, had the following exchange during their final interview. Marjorie had...

---

9. See Section 2(a) of the present chapter.
just said that she hoped their two boys would be decent citizens and not cruel, and maintained that they were kind at the moment.

Andrew argued:

"Yeah, well that's true to some extent except that if Michael thinks he'll kick our cat, he WILL."

Marjorie: "But he's three."

Andrew: "He's three, well OK, you've got to accept that he's three."

Marjorie: "Well people WILL accept that he's three, but it's when they get a little bit older that people start going on about what traits they've got, isn't it, when he's a bit older." (F)

No matter how highly respondents valued originality and individuality in their child, they also perceived that he/she was going to have to make his/her own way in society, and felt that, as parents, they should be aware of this. Louise Wilson, for example, said that she worried about her elder daughter, Jane, for the following reasons:

"She has inherited ENTIRELY Nick's (husband) complete, well, shyness doesn't worry me, but, um, his independence, to an extent that I think it would be completely undesirable in a woman at a later age, that's all." (and she went on later) "I think that maybe she'll go out on such a limb that she's gonna find it rather difficult to have a totally happy future life with other people, and I think you have to live with other people to a certain extent in your family life." (F)

Other respondents also expressed their perceptions of those specific personality traits of their children which might cause them personal difficulties in the future. Often, however, the projected images of their child in future society were expressed in a much more general way. The following two quotations illustrate quite clearly how parents were making everyday decisions about their child's upbringing which were, at least in part, derived from such projected images. One example was given by
John Clark when, in his first interview, he explained why he was anti Dr. Spock. He said:

"Some of it I think in my opinion is not really for the benefit of the child in the long run. You can't allow children to virtually dictate how the house is to be run, you've got to try to more get the children to fit in with what's there already." (I)

(At this point, I probed as to why he felt it was not for the child's benefit in the long run.) He continued:

"Well it's not good to be giving in to them all the time I think. Because when they do grow up a bit they then find out that they can't get all the things they want, then they'll take it much harder." (I)

In his first interview Jeff Harris talked about his aversion to "way out" schools as follows: He explained:

"And I'm not so sure that very progressive schools are not, you know, bringing up children to fit into a society that doesn't exist. Not that fitting in makes, em, I mean it isn't just so much you know, making the hand fit the glove sort of thing, but rather finding a compromise situation where you don't attempt to create tensions which are unnecessary. And er I feel that sometimes this could happen in a VERY progressive school. A certain amount of discipline doesn't hurt anybody (laughs)." (I)

Here then were two examples of respondents legitimating their current parental behaviour in terms of images of the child in future society. They were quite typical statements. Respondents attached meanings to their parental behaviour both in terms of their immediate relationship with the child, and their ideas about society in general. Hence, several of them felt that "progressive" childrearing was, by and large, disruptive in the home and ultimately disadvantageous to the child him/herself when he/she had to make his/her own way in a non-"progressive" society.

**Conclusion**

Respondents' abstract images of children have been presented in this chapter. I have described their general ideas about children and
childhood, their images of the child's needs and wants and their projected images. Analytically I see these groups of images as being derived principally from the individual's social stocks of knowledge. They are, however, reaffirmed and sustained in the negotiation of parental behaviour between spouses. In the next chapter grounded images of children are considered. These are more particularistic and can be seen as deriving from the individual's ongoing biographical experience, the reality of which is, however, constructed in continuous interpretative exchanges amongst family members.
In this chapter I shall discuss the images of their children which respondents developed in the course of their ongoing parental experience. The abstract images derived largely from the social stock of knowledge and could, in that sense, be developed independently of actually having children. The grounded images were developed essentially from respondents' perceptions of a particular child and its behaviour in many different contexts. The first section of the chapter is concerned with comparative images. These directly reflect the underlying assumption about family life as a shared reality since they deal principally with the meanings attached by respondents to the structural fact that there were two children in the family. The second section is called "contextual images". These emphasise the indexicality of the process of developing parental behaviour. Respondents constructed and legitimated their own behaviour with reference to their interpretations of the various contexts in which the child was perceived as acting.

1. Comparisons

This area of images was concerned with the basic fact that respondents each had two children. People were very conscious of the ways in which having two children affected their dealings with each individual child. They also formed many explicit images about the relationship between the two children themselves. Such ideas were often consciously used either as bases for actions or as legitimations. I shall argue, however, that out of these ideas arose further actions
and images which were much more implicit, and tended to contradict underlying assumptions about fairness in the shared reality of family life.

(a) **First or second born**

There were a range of images of children associated with their being first or second born. These dealt essentially with parents' relationships with the child. At some point all respondents in some way talked about how the second (and presumably subsequent) children were treated differently from the first. This could be seen as stemming from three main interrelated factors which were as follows. Firstly, (i) the parents had experience of one child already and felt more confident in their actions; secondly, (ii) the second child inevitably received less of the parents' attention since another child was already in the family; and thirdly (iii) the second child could never be such a novelty as the first.

(i) As parenthood was viewed as a situation of learning, all respondents talked about how, having experienced the first child, they reacted differently to the second. Basically, they felt, on reflection, that they over-reacted to the first child and fussed over him/her too much. Three-quarters of the couples directly related past and present difficulties with their first child to their own inexperienced parental behaviour. The different images of first and second children were especially highlighted by those respondents whose second child was still a baby at the time of the fieldwork. Before the child could communicate verbally, the interpretative activities of the parent were even more vital. All of the couples who had a baby at this stage made points similar to the following from Judy Davies. She said:
"This is how I've got Ian (second child) onto his three feeds (Andrew: 'Much quicker') quicker because I was frightened to lift Robert (first child) and feed him, in case it threw him off his routine. Well it doesn't really because after all, all of a sudden it just clicked with me, well he's a human being, if he loses sleep at one time he'll make it up the next time and what I feel with Ian is, I've HAD to do this otherwise I wouldn't, I would never have finished." (w/E)

All respondents made similar comments to this in a completely taken-for-granted manner. The social construction of parental behaviour involved, therefore, developing and sustaining the belief that, as parents, they "knew" what they were doing. Respondents' accounts suggest that this was a crucial factor behind the different parental attitudes towards the first and second child.

It seemed, for instance, that the first baby was seen as much more fragile, dependent and difficult to interpret. The second child was perceived differently largely because parents felt more knowledgeable, and were better able to develop subjectively satisfactory reasons for his/her behaviour. Jean Coulson gave a typical version of this situation when she said:

"I think you know, the fault of many parents is that, you know, you over-protect your first child and it's trial and error, em, I don't think you can help that really. I think you're a very clever person that does. And by the time you come round to the second one, em, you tend to relax a bit more and realise that they really are quite strong and capable of getting on on their own." (I) (my underlining)

In this complex process the respondents were not only forming images of the child but also of themselves as parents, and this also affected their behaviour. Several mothers in particular, who had had feeding or sleep problems with their first babies talked of feeling upset and ashamed that they personally were unable to deal with the situation. They concluded, looking back, that at a certain point the difficulties had simply been compounded by
their transmission of feelings of agitation to the child. The
Rankins, both of whose babies they now maintained had had infant
colic, provided considerable insight into the definitional
processes involved in such interactions. Derek explained:

"We didn't get much sympathy from the doctors. They
just er, well obviously with Lynne being the first baby
we didn't get much sympathy, they just thought that she
(Maureen) couldn't cope with them. Other people tend
to think as well, you know, their babies'll sleep but
ours wouldn't sleep. And of course with Lynne we thought
it was us, obviously, Maureen thought it was us. The
second one arrived and he was even worse and we realised
it wasn't, it was THEM, the babies." (I)

Both of the Rankin babies had been problematical in that they
cried a very great deal. With the first child Maureen had had
to resort to the image of the child as having "incomprehensible"
needs and wants. This was perceived by herself and others as a
failure to fulfil the basic tenet of parenthood: that she should
"understand" her child. When their second child behaved in
exactly the same manner, the Rankins developed the much more sub¬
jectively satisfactory physical image: that both of their children
had had severe digestive problems (infant colic). Thus, while they
were both equally tired by the sleeplessness of the second baby as
compared with the first, Maureen was nowhere near the brink of
"nervous breakdown" which she claimed to have reached the first
time.

This example also illustrated the process of negotiation
between spouses and the importance attached to learning about
children through personal experience. The first baby had done
most of its crying when Derek was at work. Maureen maintained
that, consequently, he had not appreciated fully the seriousness
of the problem. She felt that he also thought that the problem
lay in her inability to cope. The second baby, however, cried
all the time that Derek was at home. Maureen defined Derek as then "understanding" the situation. Subsequently they became mutually involved in "finding a solution". This solution, in analytical terms, was the sustaining of the belief that the children had physical ailments.

(ii) Respondents also talked about seeing the second child differently because he/she was not the sole object of parental attention. All respondents had been concerned about the reaction of the first child to the arrival of the second. This led most of them to be very conscious of the first child when dealing with the second and therefore, in some way, to behave differently towards him/her. The majority of the respondents said that they were conscious of potential problems with the first child and described ways in which they had tried to avoid these. Several mothers, for instance, related how they had tried to include the first children in activities centred on the babies. Barbara Johnson had been very aware of this situation and described as follows how she had dealt with it. She explained:

"And I was SO afraid of jealousy arising IN her as a result of her brother coming along, that I more or less, well I think I gave more conscious attention to her, my attention when it was HERs was consciously directed to her. Whereas before obviously the attention she got was a naturally arising one, just by her very presence. But when HE came along I felt that the attention had to be directed TOWARDS Nicola, and I feel that he probably was a bit deprived." (W/E)

Several respondents also felt that it was the best solution all round if the new baby appeared to get less attention so that the elder child did not feel deprived in any way.

In this way, respondents felt that they inevitably perceived the second child differently because their actions and reactions took place within a different socio-psychological context, i.e.
that another child had always to be considered. On a general level, Jeff Harris’s observation would probably have found agreement among the other respondents. He observed:

"Ian being younger, em, for Ian there IS a problem in that he's got to, as it were, carve out his own place. Somehow with Frances being here first she almost had it guaranteed, and Ian hadn't that. And, so the DIFFICULTY is to try to see exactly how best to, as it were, insure him his place." (F)

Perhaps more crucially, however, respondents seemed to feel that the second child was inevitably different directly because his/her family situation was not the same as that of the first child. People identified these perceived differences in a variety of ways. Louise Wilson said:

"The other one is a holy terror but this is a second child syndrome and this arises entirely from the fact that mother has another child to think about and therefore doesn't scream and shout at the younger one or stop them doing what they shouldn't." (I)

Respondents also gave various opinions about whether the different situation affected the development rate of the second child. Interestingly, polar conclusions were sometimes justified by appealing to the same cause. Anna Robson and Kathy Hislop, for example, claimed that their second children had made much more rapid progress in every way than their elder siblings because they had been stimulated by the first children. Derek Rankin on the other hand, felt that Jonathon's slowness in walking and talking was because everyone, and especially his older sister Lynne, was able to sense what he wanted and get it for him. Here again we can see an excellent example of the importance of studying interpretative activity. Respondents all assumed that second children would be affected by the presence of the first. They then used their very different practical interpretations of this structural fact to form understandings of the second child.
Respondents also saw the second child differently inasmuch as he/she was not so much of a novelty. They said that this was not simply a factor of the degree of parental experience, but was also connected with a decrease in the amount of active interest in the minutiae of the child's activities and development. This was reflected by the fact that all of those respondents who claimed to have kept detailed records about their first child, said that they had not done so, or only minimally, with the second. Another example of this arose out of the fact that all respondents had one child of approximately three years. Whereas everyone whose elder child was the three year old was able to describe him/her in considerable detail, this was not always the case if the three year old was the younger. Out of the twelve families who fell into this second category there were five in which one or both parents felt that there was little to say about the younger child, as his/her personality was only just beginning to show. (sic) Of course it might very well be that these five couples found equally little to say when their first child was that age. Observations of the ten couples in the first category, however, made this seem somewhat unlikely. Again, it could simply be a function of those particular five children but this also seems unlikely as the other three year-olds provided much for their parents to describe, no matter how their personalities or development were perceived. It seemed, therefore, that the first child, as an infant, was viewed very much more as an object of interest and discussion than was the second.

Several respondents made explicit or implicit criticisms of this very fact. Some people expressed this by laughing at themselves, in retrospect, for being so absorbed in their first
baby. Others wished that they had been able to put the baby into what they now saw as the proper perspective which they considered they had achieved with the second. About a quarter of the respondents were directly critical of their own behaviour. Mary Clark, Elizabeth Vaughan and Kathy Hislop all felt that they had created difficulties with their first children simply by being so interested in them, and giving them far too much attention. John Clark made the following comment:

"It's quite funny the difference between them. Louise is, whether it's the fact that she was the first one and got too much attention I don't know, but she, she means a lot when she's, when she wants something, instead of coming and asking reasonably for it." (I)

Several respondents commented that they wished that all children could be treated like second children. Implicit in this seemed to be the notion that, although the child should be understood, too great a preoccupation with him/her was, in fact, disadvantageous. This was a further indirect example of the underlying assumption that children needed boundaries.1 Somehow, one of these boundaries was the amount of parental attention they felt was good for the child. The demands of two children were seen as an automatic deterrent against one child having too much attention.

One of the most explicit assessments of the fundamental differences in images of the first and second child came from Ian Johnson. This long quotation is presented in its entirety as it emphasises basic points which were made or implied by most of the respondents. He said:

"It's a bit unfortunate in a way that he's been the second child because you tend to take much more notice at the time, although you always forget it, of the first child and their development. We were always looking at the way Nicola was developing and noting when she said her first word, and when she drew her first pictures, and when she managed to put a shape into a box, this sort of thing; and trying to work out whether this was advanced or retarded or about average. But em, Thomas tends to do these things and you don't notice them. One day you suddenly notice them, and notice that he's been doing them for a long time, and you didn't notice because he's a second child and the novelty's worn off, and well, probably that's just as well for him, people not taking as much notice."

K.B. "Why do you think it's just as well for him?"

Ian: "Well because I think an obsessive interest in the development of the child is a bit unhealthy, em, if you show too much interest in them, it makes them, I don't know why, it makes them too full of their own self importance, makes them feel that they're the important, the focal person of the household." (I)

(b) **Interactions between siblings**

Many images were also formed through parents' perceptions of the interactions between their two children. These were used not only simply to gain further understandings of each individual child but also as guidelines for parental behaviour when dealing with both children together. In this way, people were forming images of the two children by seeing the behaviour of each within the context of the other. They tended to stress the interdependence of the children, and how each perhaps behaved differently if the other was not there. Images of each child were also formed from observations of how they treated and reacted to each other. The Robsons, the Hislops and the Jacksons for example, all felt that the gentle and kind characteristics of their elder children were confirmed by their reactions to their much more dominant and aggressive younger sisters.

Images of the children's personalities and development were also formed by comparing their reactions to situations when they
were together or alone. By this process, Patrick Hislop and Louise Wilson had arrived at rather similar conclusions about their apparently very forceful younger daughters. Patrick Hislop observed to his wife Kathy:

"In the sort of, the older child situation, particularly the strange older child situation, where em Julie, Julie is still the leader. (Kathy agrees.) Anna in the domestic situation is able to take over, and also in the sort of familiar LOCAL surroundings, is able to take over, but when I think they get outside that, Julie is still the boss." (P)

Louise Wilson said:

"On the other hand, she's terribly dependent on both Nick and myself because she has spent a lot more time with us. And er of course she's always got her sister there and on occasions when Jane isn't there she becomes quite shy and very lost." (I)

(c) Implications

These were some of the ways that respondents formed comparative images of their children which were used as bases for their parental behaviour, and as legitimations. Although the points discussed so far were usually explicitly articulated during the interviews, there were certain implications which were far less apparent both to respondents and, at that stage, to myself. These were primarily related to contradictions between the underlying assumption that family life was a situation of learning, and images that each individual child should be understood. The crucial point is that the elder child provided the first major acquaintanceship of the respondents with the bulk of childrearing activities and experiences. This knowledge, once acquired, was rapidly absorbed and taken-for-granted. Consequently, in terms of everyday management, the second child was much less of an unknown quantity and parents had greater confidence in their ability to make sense of him/her.
This would seem to imply that parents developed understandings of the first child much more in his/her own right than they did of the second. This did not mean that the second was any the less valued as an individual personality. Rather, it is suggested that less time and mental effort was devoted to identifying and dealing with his/her everyday needs, since experience with the first child could be drawn upon as a cultural resource. Philip Barber gave an illustration of this kind of process when he said:

"And you don't worry, you've been through all this, the kind of worries over every little detail with the first one. And you've learned, where to draw the line, you know, what's a cry that really needs attention, and how long it can go on before you really need to do something serious about it. You've learned all these things." (I) (my underlining)

This implicit tendency to treat the second child differently was also shown in another way. Respondents frequently explained an item of the second child's behaviour in terms of phases which the first had also gone through. Similar images of phases and stages had perhaps also been implemented when there was only one child. It is suggested, however, that a felt lack of direct experience with the first child meant that this was done much more tentatively, and that then this notion had simply been used as one of a large range of possible explanations. With the second child it seemed that the image of phases and stages was very readily and confidently applied, and, consequently, more varied ways of 'making sense' of the child were not resorted to so frequently. Everyone made remarks such as the following by Andrew Jeffreys to his wife:

"You did say that Michael's sort of a bit of a monster in his own way at the moment, but Brian wasn't very much different three years ago." (Jt)
The vital qualifying point, however, was that respondents were making judgments and reaching decisions on the basis of ill-remembered information. As previously discussed, respondents sometimes discovered that their working model of the first child had been "inaccurate." Such semi-intuitive models were, however, in constant use as basic working formulae to deal with second children. Even when the inadequacies of this process were appreciated, the fact that it provided such great reassurance to parents meant that it continued to operate. This can be illustrated by a conversation between Eric and Carol Burns during their joint interview:

Eric: "Well, I wouldn't have thought he (John, elder child) was as determined as Alison anyway. She shows it more anyway."

Carol: "Well given their age difference anyway (Eric: 'Well, em') and er, they're very determined when they're beginning to realise that they're a person, at two and two and a half they assert themselves tremendously at this age, (Eric: 'Mmm') which is very normal and er, they just see how far they can go. (Eric agrees.) John CERTAINLY had that period and because he's nearly six, he STILL asserts himself, but he can be reasoned with (Eric: 'Mmmhm') you know, it's just different ages but you're er, you know, now you have an OLDER child in the (Eric: 'Oh yes') you can compare."

Eric: "Yes, it's very difficult to tell with the first one."

Carol: "And you can look back."

Eric: "Well you can't really look back cos you don't remember."

Carol: "You can't look back but you do have this comparison before you now, so obviously you can compare." (jt)

A further instance of implicitly different treatment was given when respondents talked frequently about having made mistakes with their first child which they were determined not to make with the

---

2. See discussion of "misunderstandings" in Chapter Four, pp.149-150.
second. Thus, although they stressed that the situation and personality of the child affected their parental behaviour, they had nevertheless, by the second child, developed in practice considerable constraints on their perception of courses of action. No matter how well intentioned their motives, respondents were tacitly assuming a similarity of the needs and wants of the two children by using a consciousness of their perceived errors with the first child to avoid problems with the second. Their beliefs in equal treatment and individuality were thus being implicitly undermined by this acquisition of a taken-for-granted stock of parental knowledge. This observation has fascinating wider implications for decision making situations generally. It seemed that, for these families, personal experience of one particular situation was quite likely to achieve precedence as a decision making resource over any "rational" assessment procedures.3

Images of the second child also led to implicit redefinitions by the respondents both of the first child and of themselves as

3. These points concerning meanings behind parental behaviour have considerable implications for the attempts to simulate family decision making and other behaviour experimentally. 'Rational' attempts to allocate power and responsibility within families have inevitably ignored the indexical nature of an everyday decision. In a seminar at Edinburgh University (1971) Aaron Cicourel pointed out that it was impossible to really comprehend childrearing activities without knowing the particular events which actors perceived as forming the context of an item of parental behaviour. The parent might, for instance, punish a child out of all 'objective' proportion to its actual offence, because of the significance of that offence in the recent history of the child.
parents. What might, for example, have been a tentative assessment of the first child was sometimes reinforced when the second arrived. Sometimes parents had thought that the first child was particularly good or bad in some respect but did not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to reach a firm conclusion. Perceptions of what the second child was like in that respect often led to a firmer definition of the first since a directly experienced relative standard was now available. A simple illustration was that a child who had seemed at the time to be very active and a poor sleeper was often categorically defined as such when the younger sibling exhibited a different pattern of behaviour in that respect. Elizabeth Vaughan provided a further explicit example when she said:

"We often say that having Catherine makes you realise how awkward Jenny is because we used to say, em maybe they're all like this, but now that we have Catherine we know that they're NOT all like that." (I)

Finally, the use of comparative images of children seemed to lead to inherent modifications in ideas about being a parent. An increase in definitional confidence has already been suggested. Respondents described several ways in which their experience with the first child led to great self-confidence in their dealings with the second. The feeling that, by the second child, a stock of taken-for-granted knowledge had been amassed, led to a completely different level of parental self assurance. Barbara Johnson illustrated this when she said about her second child, Thomas:

"He was difficult from the word go, he wouldn't sleep and em, fortunately he was my second child, I think I would have worried myself to death if he'd been my first." (I)
It can also be suggested that being able to compare reactions of two children to their actions, led respondents to a slightly different parental outlook. A fundamental dilemma in the process of making sense of the child was whether or not to attribute causes of perceived problematical behaviour to parental actions, or to the child itself. It seemed that respondents were very quick to blame themselves in retrospect for problems with the first child. My impression was, however, that with the increase in definitional confidence there was a greater tendency to assign causes to the second child itself. A danger inherent in these changes was the potential tendency to take for granted the fundamentals of their parental approach and, with this greater rigidity, to assume that problematical elements required modifications in the child rather than in themselves.

2. Contextual Images

Having suggested that some images of children might imply a tendency to inflexibility in parental outlook, another area will now be considered, which in some ways, acted as a counterbalance.

This further way in which respondents made sense of their children was the formation of contextual images. There is some overlap between the points in this area but for presentation purposes, three main categories have been established. These are called (a) social, (b) temporal and (c) genealogical images. Again the material included in each category reflects the points which were most stressed by the respondents. Future researchers will undoubtedly see images in other groups which will both amplify and contradict my own observations. Presented here, however, are those contextual images which seemed relevant in the construction of parental behaviour of the twenty two couples in my sample.
To a certain extent, what is basically being discussed in this area is how respondents drew upon environmental and genetic images in understanding their children. Although they were not specifically asked to consider the environment versus heredity issue, it was apparent that they were as varied and as ambivalent in their views as most other human beings, including the specialists! The basic pragmatism in the development of subjectively satisfactory images meant, however, that respondents were able to hold what specialists would see as theoretically contradictory views with the greatest of ease. This was essentially because the process of understanding and making sense of their child involved drawing on a repertoire of images, some of which might be given greater weight than others, in certain situations, and at different times. 4

(a) Social Contextual

Three main sets of images will be discussed in this section. These were the kinds of images to which respondents most frequently referred. Basically they formed images of the child and its behaviour in the context of what could be seen as overlapping sets of social situations. These were: (i) the particular social situation in which the child was immediately involved; (ii) the family situation; and (iii) the wider social context. It must be recognised that the images to be discussed were very much more complex than these three simple categories suggest. While the quotations are principally to illustrate the images, it is hoped that they also give some indication of the complex interactive and definitional features of the process of image formation itself.

4. This point was discussed in detail in Chapter Four, pp.145-154.
Firstly, as part of the process of understanding their child, respondents frequently referred to the importance of considering the immediate situational context. By this they meant either the physical or social context, or a combination of the two. Everyone either explicitly or implicitly made distinctions, for example, between the child in its home and non-home context. An extension of this was their image of the child in familiar and unfamiliar surroundings and situations. Some respondents, for instance, confidently planned all sorts of activities since they saw their child as responding well in unfamiliar contexts; others approached such situations with great trepidation. Contextual images were also used to broaden their basic understanding of the child. The Hislops, for example, had the following conversation about their two daughters in their joint interview:

Patrick: "One's an introvert, the other's an extrovert."

Kathy: "Yes, that's what it really boils down to, although Julie's not really such an introvert as she makes out."

Patrick: "No, it's all relative, it's not all the time."

Kathy: "She's fine on her own, without anybody there, she'll talk, but then so is Anna, she'll talk much more if I'm not there, to strangers." (jt)

Social situational images of this kind were also implemented to make sense of specific items of a child's behaviour. The features of the relevant social situation were frequently examined if, for instance, a child was perceived by the parents as acting "out of character" or "unacceptably". By putting the child's actions within their situational context, parents were doing two main things. They were reassuring themselves that the perceived aberrant behaviour firstly was comprehensible and secondly did not
require them to make any more general reassessment of their view of their child. Barry Coulson's observation that their elder child had been a nuisance during a recent visit to a friend was revised when Jean put forward a contextual understanding. Barry explained:

"... he was a pest really, he was going upstairs, he was (Jean: 'I don't know what he was doing upstairs.') you know, I don't know, you see this is."

Jean: "You see, this is, I think where you probably couldn't see his point, in that you obviously wanted to talk to Mike (Barry's friend) but I suppose Matthew (child) wanted your attention you know."

Barry: "Yes, I think that's it, you see, the other kids had gone so he had nobody to play with." (W/E)

Of course, respondents did not always see their child's behaviour as generated simply by the social situation. Equally often they put forward an image of the child as asserting his/her personality and manipulating the situation. A good example of this occurred during one of the interviews with the Pringles. It was quite late in the evening when their younger daughter came downstairs, appeared at the living room door, demanded a special drink, and refused to go back to bed without it. After much gentle persuasion she got what she wanted and went back to bed. Ben commented:

"She's got courage anyway, if you (K.B.) weren't here she'd be absolutely killed for that you know."

Sheila: "I'd grab her and dump her on her bed." (laughing)

Ben: "She would cry for a second and then that would be it, but she knows when to sort of perform, you know, she knows (laughs), we won't make exhibitions of ourselves if we've got visitors." (W/E)

(ii) Secondly, understandings of the child were developed by considering his/her behaviour in the context of other family members. A more complex point is intended here than simply
extending the previous section and seeing the family as one kind of social context. This, of course, is part of the process but the aim is to highlight the definitional intricacies involved by considering the form which it often took during the interviews. This kind of image usually arose if parent A was either being somewhat critical of a child, or was suggesting that an item of the child's behaviour was incomprehensible. Parent B then tended to suggest that the behaviour had to be seen in the light of Parent A's image of, and behaviour towards, that child. Parent B might also make a similar response but refer it to the sibling definitional context. Essentially, it is being suggested that respondents developed contextual images of their child's behaviour by seeing it as a response to the images and behaviour of other family members. Some illustrations should clarify this intricate but very basic point.

Examples of images of the child in the context of a parental definition came from the Hemingways and the Wilsons. Alan Hemingway tended to be critical of his two children, stressing that they had very strong and determined personalities. His wife, Dianne, felt that he defined their daughters as demanding and badly behaved partly because he expected too high standards of them, and reacted accordingly. Here the Hemingways could be seen as involved in the negotiation of practical interpretations of the abstract boundaries of behaviour "needed" by children. Dianne felt that she allowed the children more leeway than did Alan, and that she therefore had fewer confrontations with them. She disagreed with his abstract image of how children should behave, and maintained that they were only hard to deal with in the context of his "unrealistic" expectations.
Louise Wilson told of how her two daughters seemed to dislike each other intensely, and also expressed worries that they would end up with no relationship at all, as had her husband and his brother. Here projected images were also important meanings behind her parental concern. The following conversation took place in their final interview when Nick maintained that Louise was accentuating the situation by developing this image of the children's relationship:

Louise: "But em, they're just going through a stage at the moment where they loathe each other."

Nick: "Egged on by Mummy."

Louise: "Why?"

Nick: "Cos you set off every day to look for the loathing in the two children."

Louise: "Well it's not difficult when they come in with sort of bite marks and nip marks all over them (K.B.: 'Do they?') Oh, little girls are horrid."

Nick: "Louise was encouraging them to escalate the war the other day by encouraging the one to thump the other."

(all laugh)

Louise: "Yes, well I got this half strangled child saying 'Jane (elder sister) squeezed me!' (laughs) and I said 'well, thump her one'. So now they thump each other and then come to me crying afterwards, so it's just a waste of time altogether, but I'm sure they'll grow out of it." (F)

This quotation also provides an excellent illustration of the vital importance of interpretative acts of parents. Nick completely disagreed with Louise that there was anything "out of the ordinary" in their daughters' fights. He defined it simply as sibling rivalry over scarce resources, and refused to give it the status of a problem or a worry in his discussions with Louise. She,

5. Here, incidentally Louise employed the coping mechanism of phase or stage to cope with her tensions about her daughters' relationship. This response was common to most respondents.
however, had tried many tactics to lessen the amount of fighting and ill feeling, whereas Nick simply ignored it.

A similar kind of family definitional process also took place with reference to images of the child and its behaviour formed through making sense of the sibling relationship. An excellent example came from the Johnsons when, in a particular instance, they concluded that it was only possible to make sense of one child's behaviour by seeing it in the context of the actions of the other (and the mutual sibling images involved).

The incident took place when Barbara was at work and the children were being looked after by their home-help (Mrs. Smith). Nicola, the elder child, had been behaving badly by trying to put a door handle in her mouth, and defying Mrs. Smith to do anything about it. When her brother Thomas tried to persuade her to stop doing this, lest she hurt herself, Nicola punched him hard in the face. On arriving home, Barbara had found it difficult to understand this unusual and callous action, and had been angry with Nicola.

When Ian arrived home, however, he put the following somewhat different interpretation on the incident:

Ian: "He'd said what he (Thomas) had to make Nicola cross and he's said it in such a way that to an outsider like Mrs. Smith (Barbara: 'AND me!') or to Barbara (Barbara: 'Not an outsider!') it would seem that he was being genuinely solicitous, but in fact he was (Barbara: 'Doubly crafty') being slightly derisory, not in, not in the tone that he used, but Nicola, Nicola would have known that he was, he was mocking her, or sort of kicking her when she was down I suppose, that's the nearest."

Barbara: Embarrassing her (Ian 'Yes, yes!') because she was defying Mrs. Smith, KNOWING that she was being naughty in her defiance." (P)

(iii) Thirdly, parents formed images of their children in the wider social context. By this two main points are suggested.
In the first place, respondents formed images of their child's reactions in extra-familial contexts. In the second place, they formed images of how the child was viewed by others in these contexts. In both of these ways, respondents were continuously forming contextual images of the child which helped them to make sense of his/her present behaviour. They could also draw on these images to help them make everyday decisions about possible course of parental behaviour.

Respondents were concerned to have information about how their child behaved and reacted in social situations where they themselves were not present. Reports of playgroup leaders, schoolteachers and other parents were often related to me. Whether or not these reports had been actively sought by the respondents, they were rapidly assimilated and evaluated as part of the parental process. In fact, they often drew on these somewhat scattered and superficial comments either for reassurances that all was well with their child, or for hints that something might be wrong. The Pringles, for example, related frequent reports about how their daughters fared at playgroup. During their final interview, they spent a lot of time trying to make sense of their younger daughter, Helen's, behaviour which, at that point, had been reported as being somewhat introverted and "out of character". Ben's comments illustrated the extent to which they acted on these reports, when he said:

"Helen seems to have been going through a bad spell at school (Sheila: "God!"). Her teacher seemed to think that she was getting idle and not bothered with things you know. To the extent that Sheila took her to the Doctor and she was put on an iron tonic which has er, not really, I don't know, she's been very much better recently, hasn't she?" (F)
A slightly different example came from the Vaughans. They, in fact, observed their daughter's reactions in the extra-familial context of the Sunday School prizegiving. Subsequently, they felt the need to modify their image of Jenny when her behaviour in that situation was not as they had anticipated. They made the following remarks in their final interview:

Roy: On Sunday there was the prizegiving in her Sunday School and she was in her element in the class, you know, quite proud of herself and sort of joining in with all the other children cos that was the first time that I had seen her like that, you know. You'd (to Elizabeth) maybe seen her at playgroup or that but em, I hadnae really seen her up until Sunday, taking part in anything just herself, you know. I enjoyed seeing her.

Elizabeth: "Cos I said to Roy 'just look, I bet she'll not go up for her prize'. You see, this is it, where you can be so wrong about them." (P)

Images were also formed in the context of how others perceived the children. Most respondents, however, felt it difficult to answer the direct question "how do you think other people see your children?" except in the most general terms. About a third of the respondents said that, in any case, they either did not care what others thought of their children, or else were only concerned about the opinions of valued outsiders. This, however, was where a semi-structured panel study methodology proved its worth and elicited much more valuable information than had the simple direct question. Throughout my meetings with the respondents they, in fact, frequently referred to other people's remarks about their children. This was especially the case with the mothers. It is not being suggested that this kind of contextualising activity had a clear-cut direct effect on respondents' images of their children. There was, however, such a distinct awareness in this respect that some indirect reassessment or
confirmation of images was undoubtedly taken place. In terms of my analytical perspective this can be seen as an important way of sustaining belief in their images. When an image was perceived to be confirmed by outsiders, this enhanced its subjective satisfaction. A simple example was that I was told by different couples that their child was kind and thoughtful. They all substantiated this by relating how the playgroup leader had told them that their child was always the one who took a newcomer under his/her wing. Equally, if the parents heard of any behaviour defined as violent or odd, this generally led to considerable reflection about the child.

Two somewhat contradictory sets of images of children were, in fact, being held concurrently. On one hand, the respondents generally placed a high value on developing individuality and originality in the child. On the other hand, they also expressed an awareness that the child would have to make its own way in wider society and face any problems which might result from its 'individuality', increasingly without themselves as buffers. Either explicitly or implicitly, they acknowledged that outsiders had no reason to understand and accept the child in the same way as did the parents. A degree of sensitivity to the opinion of outsiders seemed therefore, to these respondents, to be one of the ingredients of parenthood. This had subtle, indirect effects on their images of children and parental behaviour.

An example of this kind of process was given by Madeleine Harris. Their position was particularly sensitive in this

6. This point was introduced in Chapter Six, pp.203-207. Here I explore further the practical implications of this abstract image.
respect since they were the only non-British family in the sample. They talked at one stage about their awareness of differences in manners and conventions, such as terms of address. Madeleine spoke as follows about people's reactions to her elder child's calling them by their Christian names:

"Well, I suppose she could pick up Auntie whatever, but I think that it would be so strange she wouldn't bother about it. As I say, this kind of thing. It's more a matter of behaviour and also I think in some sense I feel sometimes that people feel that they're typical wild American children, you see, no manners, this sort of thing. And sometimes it hurts because I don't want it to carry over to the children in how they're accepted or rejected, but there again I don't WANT to stress these things." (F)

(b) Temporal Contextual Images

Respondents not only made sense of their children by considering everyday, ongoing social contexts, they also developed images which referred to their own previous parental actions. The most frequent instance of this has already been discussed. This was where parents formed images of their children's current behaviour as being contingent on their own inexperienced treatment of them at an earlier stage. John Clark said, for example:

"I think to begin with, we probably gave in too easily, this is what did the trouble, whereas now we're trying to stop it because it was just getting to the stage that, as soon as she went out the door, she'd start whining until she came back in again and she'd still be whining." (I)

Similarly, respondents sometimes related an item of their child's behaviour to something which they had unthinkingly said. This area of images tended to be forward as well as backward looking. The main underlying reason for not mentioning certain subjects in front of the child was that it might have some

7. This point was discussed in the section on comparisons in the present chapter.
deleterious effect on him/her in future years. (Here again was a projected abstract image.) Even when their children were still quite young, respondents related their behaviour occasionally to a previous parental remark, now perceived as unfortunate. The Harris's gave a good illustration of this in their final interview. Madeleine said about her elder child:

"Mostly any SERIOUS talk we had about them was after they were in bed or some such thing but, you know, often we would say something to each other about them, or remark about something that they had done, while they were still around. But she was OBVIOUSLY, you know, becoming very aware not only of what she was doing but of OUR reaction to what she was doing, (K.B.: 'Was she?') and began to, you know, size it up and em ... as I'm saying, the kind of self consciousness that I wouldn't like to see happen too much." (F)

This quotation also again highlights the interpretative activities of parents. Here Madeleine Harris related the development of selfconsciousness in her daughter to some chance overhearing of occasional comments. The Harris's accorded legitimacy to this "understanding". Subsequently they altered their communication process, by becoming very much more careful about what they said in front of their daughter.

Images of the child related to temporal contexts were also formed in a much more immediate way. All respondents related their attitude to the child, and the child's attitude to them, to the amount of time which they had together. Three main ways in which temporal factors affected images of the child were constantly mentioned. Firstly, that at the stage of very young children, the mother was perceived as having to spend too much time with them. The beneficial effects of each having an occasional break from the other were frequently mentioned. Judy Davies felt,

8. This is a similar kind of legitimating tactic to the use of "explanatory incidents" discussed in Chapter Four, pp.150-154.
for instance, that one effect of being constantly with the child was the undermining of the pleasures of the relationship. She said about her three year old son, Robert:

"I think we generally get on quite well together, we enjoy each other and, I think I'm enjoying him much more now that he's sort of off my hands more, you know, I'm having time during the day to watch him, just quietly when I'm doing things." (I)

Secondly, it was frequently remarked that, during the week, the father had very little time with the children, and that this led to his having a different kind of relationship with them from that of the mother. This point will be elaborated in Chapter Nine. The main point to be made here, however, is that respondents often related aspects of the father's images of children to this temporal context. Thirdly, distinctions were made between quantitative and qualitative temporal contexts. This was usually expressed by contrasting "passing time" (which implied simply mutual co-presence) and the more active "spending time" (which implied more dynamic interaction). Here we can see a further example of the social definitions of time.9 The meanings attached to time, as opposed to the quantification of time per se, were vital factors involved in the negotiation of parental behaviour. All of the respondents operated on the underlying assumption that a child needed to have time actively "spent" on him/her in the way of specially focussed attention. They saw this as very different from simply being with the child and "passing" time. They frequently said, however, that the simple rigours of everyday living led them to neglect this perceived need. Kathy Hislop said of a neighbour who gave a lot of time to playing with her baby:

9. This point was introduced in Chapter Three, pp.104-106.
"She seems to be very patient and obviously devotes time to Gillian, which I envy because I felt when mine were that age they should have had more time devoted to them, but, I was just never in the frame of mind, well not NEVER, but, didn't feel in the frame of mind to do it (laughs). I'm only glad now that mine don't NEED so much time devoted you know, to teaching the, showing them things, because they can do it themselves." (F)

Simplistically, this third point can be related to the previous two as follows. Most respondents claimed that the quantitative limitations on the father's time with the children meant that, in effect, he consciously gave them his attention and "spent time" with them when it was available. (This, at any rate, was how they felt the situation should be?) On the other hand, the mothers tended to feel that their time was not so clearly delineated and that it took a sort of conscious effort to "spend" as opposed to "pass" time with their children. Helen Moffat commented:

"I think your child deserves your whole undirected attention, it might just be for ten minutes, but for PART of each day that it's just you and she doing something, well not even doing something, or talking." (I)

Some of the ways in which mothers created a belief for themselves that they did "spend time" with their child are discussed in the following chapter.

Lastly, by far the most frequently implemented temporal contextual images of the child related to notions of phases and stages. For all respondents such images seemed to constitute a range of understandings of their child which provided a very high level of subjective reassurance. In the interview situation, the basic procedure was that they tended to focus on an item of the child's behaviour (usually something viewed as problematical) and then they resolved it subjectively by maintaining that it was a non-
permanent phenomenon. This was done in two main ways. On the one hand the particular item of behaviour was defined as a temporary manifestation common to most children or "well known" in child development. Dianne Hemingway said, for example, of her 18 month old daughter:

"Joanne, she's still quite clingy to me, but I think there's a lot of children her age are." (I)

On the other hand, the behaviour was seen as a temporary attribute of that one particular child in the context of his/her ongoing development. Shirley Jackson said, for example, about Elaine:

"Her temper tantrums are getting less (laughs) which is because she's not so frustrated. I think most of her temper tantrums before were coming from the sheer frustration of not being able to do what the, because it was always older children that she played with, and not being capable of doing what THEY were doing. And I think most of the temper tantrums stemmed from that." (F)

Whichever way the behaviour was defined, the process could be seen as another way of making sense of the child. Simplistically, certain items of behaviour were being assessed in order to decide whether or not parental intervention was required and, if so, what form it should take. By forming images of the child which related items of behaviour to this temporal context, respondents were quite effectively coping with the vast uncertainties involved in parental behaviour. By defining behaviour as a phase or stage they could either feel justified in simply "riding the storm", or else reassure themselves that any interventions were merely palliative gestures in an inevitable course of events.

Some further comments are necessary about this process. Firstly, although a few respondents had actually read about theories of child development, the majority based their images
on vague and impressionistic information. In many ways this lack of formal knowledge was a great subjective advantage because it enabled respondents to develop very flexible ideas about the ages at which certain phases were supposed to occur. Dianne Hemingway, for example, was quite happy with the following images of her younger daughter, Joanne:

"But if you speak to other parents of three year olds, well Joanne's at the age now, one and a half; they're all terribly irritating cos they're at, what do they call them, the negative age." (W/E) (my underlining)

Another example came from Hannah Gilchrist, who felt that the fact that her three year old needed a light in her bedroom was nothing to worry about. She explained:

"I think this is a phase children go through because em I see this house across here, em, their hall light's on all night. Their boys are five; and a friend of mine that has twin boys, their light's to be left on and they're four." (W/E)

Such an open-ended definition of phases gave parents considerable leeway in deciding whether or not positive action was necessary. The Mitchell's problems with their elder child, Rachel, provided a good illustration of this. After a considerable time of seeing her difficulties as a phase, they eventually decided to seek outside advice about her clingingness and behavioural upsets. They reflected on their previous reasonings as follows:

Alice: "Well mainly we'd let it ride because I felt sure that time, time would cure it (Ray: 'Mmmhm'). But as time hadn't seemed to make a GREAT deal of difference, and em I knew she was YOUNG and so on."

Ray: "You were getting a bit screwed up about it that was all."

Alice: "Yeah, but well, em, I expect if in ANOTHER year it was STILL as bad, we'd take more advice and so on." (W/E) (Interestingly the specialist's advice was to regard the problem behaviour as a phase!)
A second relevant point is that everyday parental behaviour was constantly grounded in ongoing interpretations of the child's behaviour as being either a facet of his/her personality, or simply a phase or stage (or sometimes both). The Johnsons, for example, had the following discussion about five year old Nicola:

Barbara: She's priggy, she doesn’t like certain sorts of disorder, and if she sees, I don't mean PHYSICAL disorder though, I mean people not conforming to the rules and things. (Ian: 'Yes') She's a very self-righteous person and if she sees people em, which she sees often because her brother is SO different from her, she gets very indignant and outraged and upset in general.

Ian: "It's perhaps partly to do with her age though, because kids of that age tend to be a bit priggish." (Barbara agreed.) (Jt)

Such a facility of being able to understand behaviour by seeing it as a phase or stage seemed to be acquired primarily through experience. Here again we see the practical implementation of underlying assumptions that family life is a learned reality. As discussed earlier, respondents tended to look back on their initiation into parenthood as being characterised by an over-attention to the slightest whimper.10 It seemed, to a certain extent, that such a preoccupation with the quirks of one particular child gradually lessened as parents became more confident in forming contextual images such as phases or stages. This ability to see the child in a wider context led most respondents, by the time of my fieldwork, to claim that they had developed a less fraught and somehow more resigned general view of the child's development. They tended to talk about this in two main ways. Sometimes, they referred back to their reactions to their first child and commented on how they were now reacting differently.

10. See the section on "first or second born" earlier in the present chapter.
with the second. Colin Duncan gave a good illustration when talking about his reactions to his younger child Sarah. He said:

"You realise right away that, it must just be this age band that she's in you know, why she's reacting like this, or acting like this. And em, we DO tend to treat some of her, oh I call them problems, differently you know. Cos you know it'll only be a wee while and she'll grow out of it. And we learnt this from Alistair, (elder child) but unfortunately (laughs) he got the rows.

Mary: "Just lack of experience." (F)

At other times, respondents simply made general statements about the inevitability of both problematical and pleasant phases in their children. John Clark made a fairly typical statement in his first interview when he said about being a mother:

"I suppose you've definitely gotta be a bit of a psychologist yourself, try your best to, by whatever means you have, to help the children to grow up happy. But er, it's a losing battle, I think, because whenever you think you've found the answer to whatever ails them, it just starts all over again." (I)

(c) Genealogical Contextual Images

Another way in which respondents made sense of their children was to put them into the context of their own personalities and lives. At an early point in the fieldwork respondents were asked to describe the ways in which their children were like or unlike themselves and their spouses. Reactions to this question varied. Most of the respondents gave their replies without challenging whether or not this was a valid frame of reference for them. Of these, a few people related a large number of intricate points of similarity and dissimilarity. The majority of this group, however, (about half of the total sample) simply explained one or two points which they spontaneously felt to be relevant. By and large, people saw their children as having physical and
personality points of similarity to and difference from both parents. Five couples, however, (each spouse independently of the other), said that they perceived one or both of their children as having many facets which strongly resembled one or other of the spouses. The Johnsons were one of these couples who identified strong likenesses. Barbara said for example:

"You see I'm a very jealous person, feel consumed with jealousy sometimes. And it's a horrible feeling, and I realise now in Nicola, you know, see it in Nicola that I was jealous as a child too and that she's so like me I can't bear it for her because you make yourself very unpopular and very, very unattractive." (W/E)

Interestingly, however, it must be noted that even if spouses agreed that such strong likenesses existed, their interpretations of these images did not necessarily lead to similar parental behaviour. Ian Johnson gave a hint of this when he said:

"I think Barbara feels despondent because she's, Nicola's so like HER in temperament so she can see, em, she sees all the worst side of it. Whereas I, I just don't take as gloomy a view, don't know why." (W/E)

On this particular point the Johnsons provided a typical example of the negotiation of parental behaviour. They agreed that Nicola's temperament was like that of her mother but constantly debated how, as parents, they should react to the child. Ian evaluated the "problems" of the particular temperament as being less serious than did Barbara. The eventual way in which each 'managed' the child was the outcome of this interactive and evaluative process. They agreed that Ian usually "dissolved" the tense situations between mother and daughter which arose when Barbara was defined as over-reacting to her daughter's temperament.

The reactions of the relatively few respondents who expressed reservations about the "like self/or spouse" question were, in themselves, interesting. Two people simply said that they found
it difficult to describe such things because they just did not think about the child in that way, seeing him/her as an independent individual. Another respondent maintained that she could only answer the question with reference to her spouse, because she was able actually to observe him and the children. She felt that it was impossible for an individual to perceive him/herself sufficiently accurately to make personal comparisons with his/her children. Six respondents qualified their replies by saying that they would describe those characteristics which seemed to be childlike manifestations of the adult concerned. People who said this then tended to make comparisons by referring to what they thought they and their spouses had been like as children.

Finally, two respondents claimed that it was impossible to compare a child with an adult because their personalities were at such different stages of development. Many of these reactions were thus implicitly based on the abstract image that children were different from adults.11

Thus a few respondents had some reservations about forming understandings of children by referring to the personalities of the parents. Despite this, however, during the course of the interviews it was apparent that these respondents too tended, in practice, to implement such images if other ways of making sense of the child were not proving satisfactory. The essential differences within the sample were not so much that some people avidly embraced such genealogical contextualisations and others did not, but rather that some felt them to be more subjectively satisfying understandings than did others.

11. See Chapter Six, pp.207-212.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed some of the grounded images of their children which respondents developed in the course of their everyday parental experience. Two main categories of images were described: comparative and contextual. In the section on comparative images I dealt with respondents' interpretations of the fact that they had two children. In the discussion of contextual images I examined how respondents formed understandings of their children by locating them in social, temporal and genealogical settings. All of these images were regularly used in the negotiation and legitimation of parental behaviour.

I have, up to this point in the thesis, made only passing references to the distinctions between the parental behaviour of the spouses. However, despite respondents' claims to equality of parental roles, their accounts revealed some fundamental differences between motherhood and fatherhood. It is to this I now turn in the following chapters.
CHAPTER EIGHT

BEING A MOTHER

Introduction

On first asking, the majority of respondents maintained that being a mother and being a father were essentially similar activities. As the fieldwork progressed, however, it was evident that, whilst respondents were concerned to sustain their belief in mutual involvement with the children, they were in fact describing two very different kinds of everyday parenthood. In this chapter and the next I shall outline some of the respondents' perceptions of being a mother and of being a father. Alongside this descriptive material I shall select out some of the special analytical features of each kind of parenthood. The development of parental behaviour is treated as a negotiated reality. The use of images of children is especially highlighted as a crucial element in this process.

The main factor characterising respondents' perceptions of being a mother was her greater time commitment, at this stage, to child-rearing. In line with the general arguments of this thesis, however, the following discussion centres on the meanings attached by respondents to this "objective fact". Analytically, these meanings resulted in very different taken-for-granted precepts behind the negotiation of parental behaviour. This discussion of being a mother is presented with the qualification that it represents respondents' constructions at one particular stage in the family life cycle. In all the families there was at least one child of pre-school age. Respondents themselves operated with an underlying assumption that being a parent was a
dynamic situation which altered with the changing contexts of the family life cycle.¹

I group respondents' views of being a mother into three main analytical categories of meaning. These I have called (1) context, (2) knowledge, (3) responsibility and availability. Most attention is devoted to "context" since this seemed to be the most important set of meanings. "Knowledge" and "responsibility and availability" are more or less corollaries of this main point. Again, it must be stressed that in everyday life these categories were by no means as distinct as my analysis suggests. Also, although all respondents made reference to these meanings during their accounts, this was done with varying degrees of explicitness.

1. Context

The negotiation of parental behaviour involved frequent comments and interchanges about one another's activities. Analysis of respondents' accounts showed, however, that such interchanges were often qualified by the acknowledgement that individual patterns of behaviour were being developed in the context of differing overall relationships with the child. No matter how great was the father's involvement in backstage negotiation, it was the mother who was predominantly in the front line in the ongoing childrearing activity. The mother's greater time commitment meant that, at this stage, she and the child had to relate to each other through the full gamut of events of every working day. Much of this chapter centres on the meanings attached by respondents to this initial perception. From another angle, respondents' interpretations of the different contexts of maternal and paternal behaviour can be related to their underlying assumptions about

¹. See my discussion of this point in Chapter Three, pp. 106-113.
permanence and temporariness in family life. In the following sections the interpretations of different contexts are discussed with reference to the disciplining of children and the division of labour.

(a) Disciplining Children: An Example

The importance of the different contexts in which maternal and paternal behaviour were being developed was often taken-for-granted until problematical issues arose. One such issue was the disciplining of children. What respondents actually meant by the term "discipline" was, in itself, very varied and merits more complex investigation than is appropriate with the confines of this thesis. Simplistically, two main views of the concept of discipline seemed to exist concurrently. Firstly, disciplining involved teaching the child ideas about "right and wrong", as each parent defined it, and enforcing these by means of varying punishments. This was perceived as being for the benefit of the parents as much as for the children. One respondent referred to it as "civilising" the children and making it possible to live with them. Often this view was legitimated by reference to images of children such as their defined needs for "boundaries". Secondly, it was seen to involve encouraging the child to develop an internal "sense" of discipline, self discipline. By this respondents meant fostering the growth of a certain rational and reflective awareness of self and others. Projected images of the child were often put forward to support this view. Respondents tended to see "reason" and example as the main ways of instilling this awareness. As Helen Moffat argued:

2. See Chapter Six, pp.207-209.
3. Projected images were discussed in Chapter Six, pp.227-236.
"... all discipline is finding your own discipline isn't it? I mean if children haven't got their own discipline, it doesn't matter what external disciplines are imposed on them, they're going to rebel. But if they've got a sort of reasoning in them that this is a sensible thing to do and I've got other people to think of not just myself, well, I think this is important." (I)

Before embarking on the main part of the discussion it is important to note the overall picture of the disciplinary activity of parents which emerged from respondents' accounts. The mother was presented as the main agent of discipline in the child's life. Judy Davies' view of being a mother was typical in this respect. She commented:

"I think (she has) more parental control than the father because the mother's with the children an awful lot more than the father is." (I)

Although most respondents mentioned disciplining as constituting an important feature of "being a father", no-one suggested that this should be put aside as his responsibility. The notion of "wait till your father comes home" was frequently abhorred. Rather, it was defined as important simply that the father supported the supposedly mutually agreed line, and reinforced discipline on important matters.

The meanings behind these stated views can be examined on two levels. Firstly, respondents themselves emphasised that the constant presence of the mother meant that she was inevitably the main disciplinarian. The Gilchrists, for example, discussed "being a mother" during their joint interview. Hannah said:
"I think it's a lot more involved than a father. I mean, for half an hour each night when you come in, you can hardly teach her what's right and what's wrong, 'cos at that time of night she's tired and she's ready for bed and she's a different child anyway." (Jt)⁴ (my underlining)

Several respondents pointed out that it would be practically impossible for the father effectively to lay down rules about disciplining if the mother did not wish to abide by them. Respondents' accounts suggested, however, that fathers were very much involved in the backstage negotiation of disciplinary behaviour. Ian Johnson said, for example, that he found it difficult at times to support Barbara because he felt that she was too harsh in her methods. Although he used the coping mechanism of the "attribution of permanency" to alleviate the tensions of his critical feelings,⁵ he also exerted pressures on her to modify her behaviour, as the following quotation illustrates. He explained:

"I disapprove of this but she keeps saying well this is the way she IS, and she HAS these great mood swings. I think she's a very good mother in lots of ways, she does a lot FOR them and she's a very loving mother. And I think, well, if that's the way she is, well, even though I don't like it, I reckon I'll have to sort of put up with it. Well, what I do is, if she goes on a bit too far I try and make her feel guilty like I did with this dislocation thing. (Barbara had dislocated Thomas' arm by pulling him away from something too roughly.) If I'd been a perfect husband I'd have said 'well, just forget about it, it was an accident, don't blame yourself'. But I tended to be a bit reproving and I was rather cross about the whole thing; just to make it sink into her a bit more that she IS a bit too rough with them." (I)

---

4. Note that Hannah also uses a grounded contextual image of the child to legitimate her claim to predominance in discipline.
5. This coping mechanism was described in Chapter Five, pp. 87 - 89
Secondly, on an analytical level, the overt rejection of the father as the main disciplinarian can be seen as another aspect of sustaining belief in mutual involvement with the children. As will be shown in Chapter Nine, couples employed many tactics to sustain this belief. In line with this argument, it would have been perceived as detrimental to the father-child relationship which they were attempting to create if they defined the child as seeing the father as principally an agent of discipline. As Martin Chapman remarked:

"So I'm not seen (by the children) as an ogre, you know, 'wait till your father comes in' sort of thing or 'wait till I tell your father'. We don't carry that policy out so, I don't have to be an ogre, except when it's necessary when I'm there at the time." (Jt)

Disciplining children was perceived by respondents as a particularly sensitive area of behaviour. Couples gave frequent instances of disagreements. I would suggest that disagreements were perceived as especially problematical because they threatened the image that the child needed consistent parental behaviour. Analysis of these disagreements (both reported and witnessed), showed the complexity of meanings being negotiated behind each disciplinary act. Spouses argued with one another about many aspects of the disciplinary process including, for example: (i) the method of discipline, (ii) the choice of behaviour towards disciplining, (iii) interpretations of the child's reactions to each parent's disciplinary behaviour and (iv) interpretations of the context in which the "misbehaviour" took place. Each of these

---

6. See Chapter Six, pp.221-222.
7. The importance of the interpretation by the agent of discipline of the context in which "the offence" occurs has been examined in the work on deviance of many interactionists. See for example, Rubington, E. and Weinberg, M.S. (Eds.), Deviance: The Interactionist Perspective, The Macmillan Company, 1968, esp. part two.
sets of meanings will be introduced and discussed in this chapter. Examples (i), (ii) and (iii) are treated as most relevant to the section on "context", whereas example (iv) is incorporated into the next section entitled "knowledge".

(i) **Methods**

Legitimations of the disciplinary methods of the mother, whether these were perceived as harsher or more lax than those of the father, were often related to their overall context. Mary Clark said, for example:

"If Louise does something naughty I SHOUT, and John says I don't treat her nicely. So I used to flare up, and the usual 'you don't know what it's like having a child from 6 o'clock in the morning till 7 o'clock at night AND up through the night. You NEVER had to get up through the night'." (I) (my underlining)

Roy Vaughan also reacted against his wife’s occasional severity towards their daughter, but again felt that this had to be seen within the context of their total day together. He explained:

"She’s got the children all day and maybe I’ll come in at night and she’ll tell Jenny 'go through there now', sort of in a quick voice. And I could maybe say 'dinna talk to her like that'. But I don’t because I realize she’s had them all day and you don’t know what’s happened during the day you know." (I) (my underlining)

Several husbands felt that their wives were not strict enough with the children. They defined their own attempts to invoke discipline as more successful because they were more forceful, or more consistent, in their methods. Again, the wives tended to counter their husbands’ arguments by putting forward a contextual legitimation. The Burns’s, for example, had the following argument during their final interview:
Carol: "But they get so. seeing me every twenty four hours or whatever, it's just this constant voice coming at them 'don't do this, don't do that'. It just rubs off, they don't even look at me now." (my underlining)

Eric: "But that's cos you don't mean it." (laughs)

Carol: You know, I mean it as well as I CAN, but, you know, you're asking me to do the impossible (Eric: 'Not really'). Then YOU'RE not taking your part in their disciplining."

Eric: "Well they do it when I tell them to do it but I have a bit of difficulty sometimes because they're so conditioned by it."

Carol: "It's IMPOSSIBLE, Eric."

Eric: "No it's not impossible, it's traumatic initially (laughs) I'm sure."

Carol: "For everyone, you know."

Eric: "More especially for YOU, more especially for you than them." (F)

Unlike Carol Burns, who would not concede that Eric's methods were any better than her own, Dianne Hemingway felt that her husband was much better able to deal with her elder daughter's moody behaviour. She saw Alan as firmer than herself and more determined to be "in control". He replied that he simply practised 'diversionary tactics' to get his own way with the child. Dianne, however, felt that, in the everyday course of events, she seldom had the time to apply such methods. She said:

"If I'm doing nothing else, you know, if I've got a few hours that I'm dealing specifically with them, I WILL go out of my way to take her mind off it. But if I'm working to a tight schedule, you know, I have to be out at a certain time and I've got to do this n' that before I go out, I just, there isn't time." (W/E)

In these ways, negotiation of the mother's disciplinary methods acknowledged that her reactions to the child took place in a different context from those of the father. This was in part, I suggest, because the amount of time, and the context within which
she related to the child, led to the development of different images of children. Several mothers for example described how they "enjoyed" the children more when they saw less of them. Meanings attached to the different contexts were also illustrated by accounts of the alterations in the father's disciplinary methods when he was placed in what was perceived as a similar situation. It was often mentioned, for instance, that fathers changed their attitudes towards disciplinary methods when they had to deal with the children for full days, either at weekends or on holiday. Martin Chapman said:

"I maybe see them (his children) for about half an hour in the morning, at the most two hours at night. So I see them for about two and a half hours a day from Monday to Friday, so I'm bound to have a very lenient attitude with them. But it's different when I'm here all day. If we're cooped up in the house, you know, if it's a day when we can't get out." (W/E)

Here Martin acknowledged that he had a different image of the children's "misbehaviour" dependent on the amount of time spent in their presence, and on the environment in which they were relating to one another.

Several other fathers also maintained that they were less patient with the children, and much quicker to reprimand rather than persuade, at these times. James Gilchrist, for example, had been much criticised by Hannah for his "soft" attitude to their elder daughter and his inability to smack her. Towards the end of the fieldwork, however, he found himself at home for a few weeks between jobs. During this time he was much more sensitive to Susan's misbehaviour, and began to reprimand her more frequently

---

6. My comments on the actual similarity of such "similar situations" are given in Chapter Nine, pp. 335-336.
and more severely. Ben Pringle found that he became much more erratic in his disciplining of his daughters when he was with them for full days. He and Sheila had the following conversation when Sheila remarked that she was pleased to hear him say, on record (sic), that he too could be erratic. She felt that he usually maintained that it was she who was the failure in this respect. Ben replied:

"No, well if I HAVE said it was you, it's for your own good, and the fact that you have had to, you know, look after them throughout the day. And you keep sort of er, you DO keep sort of asking me 'where the hell am I going wrong?' and 'why do they exhaust me so?'. And I try and point out to you the fact that you must, you know, you must be less erratic in your treatment of them. But this doesn't eradicate ME from blame because I'm just as bad."

Sheila: "But you shouldn't be because you don't see them for as long as I do."

Ben: "No, but I mean when I've had them for the whole day." (It) (my underlining)

(ii) Definitions of behaviour worth disciplining

Thus it can be argued that, in the negotiation of disciplinary methods, it was taken-for-granted that the mother acted in a different context from the father. Implicit in this was the assumption that methods differed according to the amount of time spent with the child. Disciplining children also involved decisions about which aspects of behaviour merited a reprimand. Respondents frequently maintained, for example, that the mother had gradually become accustomed to not noticing every little "misbehaviour" of the child. They said that the mother simply did not have the time or the energy to deal with every issue. Many of the fathers were presented as more likely to focus on these "little things" (sic), and to take more forceful stands over issues which the mothers had decided to ignore.
For the Jacksons, Wilsons and Moffats, one such issue was behaviour at table. All three couples related their disagreements on this matter to the differing perspectives from which the mothers approached the problem. Not only did the mothers have to face the situation more frequently, but they also saw it as of minor importance compared with the many other behavioural problems with which they constantly dealt. In my terms, the mother's perspective also differed because she was better able to develop subjectively satisfactory contextual images of the child's behaviour. She defined the behaviour as less problematical because she had wider direct experience than did the fathers of the similar behaviour of other children. Louise Wilson described their own particular situation in the following way. Speaking about Nick she said:

"... in some ways I think he's stricter, well he's just less used to your own children, this is basically what it is. I think he in some ways expects more of them than I would ever expect them to do. You know, their bad table manners annoy me but they INFURIATE him. (K.B.: 'Do they?') Oh, he can't eat with them. And he certainly does hit them a lot more for a lot less than I would do, although I certainly smack them. I think in general he tends to be a lot harder with them physically than I would be, but then every other husband I've seen has done this." (I) (Note coping mechanism at the end.)

Helen Moffat said that she had become so used to the noise at table that she was able to ignore it. She described, however, a recent row where George had become furious with the children over this issue. In her terms, this was because he had been working away from home for a few evenings and, on his return, the noise had seemed even more oppressive than usual to him because it was less familiar.

9. This point is directly related to the discussion of social contextual images in Chapter Seven, pp. 252-261.
(iii) Interpretations of the child's reactions

A further way in which respondents attached meanings to the different context in which the mother's disciplinary behaviour was developed was by reference to the child's reactions. Here respondents constructed temporal contextual images of children to legitimate their actions. They "made sense" of the child's perceived different reactions to the mother's disciplinary efforts from those of the father by relating them to the amount of time which each spent with the child. Although such images were usually put forward to legitimate the greater obedience obtained by the father, some respondents also used them to legitimate the opposite situation. In this way my arguments again relate to the forms of images used in the negotiation processes, rather than their specific contents.

As will be elaborated further in the following chapter, respondents maintained that the unequal amount of time spent with the child led to his/her perceiving each parent differently. They constructed images that, for example, the child perceived the father's authority in a different way from the mother's. The actual exercise of this authority was also held to have a different subjective meaning to the child. Alan Hemingway felt, for instance, that the child had more opportunities to learn about the mother's reactions compared with the father's. He used this image to legitimate his greater success in getting their younger daughter to go to bed. He explained:

10. The concept of temporal contextual images was introduced in Chapter Seven. The present section can be seen as a further elaboration of the points on pp.261-265.
"My thoughts are that she thinks of me as a bit more strict, and she HAS to go to bed for me. I know that probably won't last but she knows, probably because she's had more chances of getting round Dianne, she can do that. She's not really had the chance with me yet." (W/E)

Helen Moffat expanded this kind of point further when she maintained that the regularity of the mother's discipline ultimately resulted in its having less emotional meaning to the child. She said:

"If HE's cross, if I'M cross with her it's just 'oh', you know, mummy again', but if HE says anything she's heartbroken." (I)

By contrast Elizabeth Vaughan, Hannah Gilchrist and Alice Mitchell all felt that their husbands' disciplinary efforts made less impact on the child than did their own. Their husbands agreed with this view, and either said that they thought this unimportant or that the mother was inevitably more influential in the childrearing processes. These alternative images of the child's different perceptions of his/her parents' discipline relate to my earlier observation that respondents defined the mother as the main agent. These three respondents said that their children took little notice of their fathers' discipline because they were not with them enough to be trained in this way. Also, they constructed an image of the child as having learnt to perceive the mother's methods as punishment. The more lenient approach of these three fathers was defined by their wives as ineffective. They all maintained that the children either ignored or defied their fathers' disciplinary efforts. Elizabeth Vaughan said that Jenny would obey her.

Note here this respondent's use of the underlying assumption that family life is a learning situation. Interestingly, because he defined children as learning entities, he also felt that his current success with this particular item of discipline might simply be a "phase". 
"... probably because she knows that if she doesn't em, I'll give her a good smacking, which her daddy doesn't do. I could say he's only done it a couple of times, em, I've maybe had to say to him 'for goodness sake give her a smacking'. So I think she knows that she'll get away with it, so she doesn't seem to pay much attention." (I)

Hannah Gilchrist felt that, in some ways, the different contexts in which the child related to the father impeded his attempts to discipline. Like most respondents she emphasised that, in the lesser time the father spent with the child, he was seen by him/her as "fun". James agreed, but said that he still felt that, as a father, discipline was an area in which he should be involved. Hannah replied:

"But it's difficult really because you can only be involved at the weekend and at the weekend you're there and it's a game. If you take them swimming it's a special treat and anything you do is, you know SPECIAL. But every day a mother's got to be there and teach her right from wrong." (Jt) (my underlining)

To a certain extent the images of the child's reactions which these three mothers developed highlighted the ways in which the rest of the respondents were maintaining belief in mutual involvement as parents. In the negotiation processes they too acknowledged that the mother, being the main agent, had greater overall control over the ways in which the child was disciplined. Barbara Johnson said, for example:

"She's a bit of an anxious child, possibly because we've been fairly severe with her. And yet we've, well of course ME mostly, and Ian's agreed. I THINK he's agreed, whether he's done it for the sake of peace I don't know, i.e. followed my general sort of trends. It's usually the mother that does most of the disciplining anyway." (I)

I would suggest that one way in which this view of the mother's greater influence and involvement could be modified was by parents constructing an image that the father's disciplinary acts, although objectively fewer, had nevertheless a greater
subjective effect on the child. The Johnsons also illustrated this attribution of meaning when they discussed the matter during their joint interview. Barbara said:

"I feel that a child will probably respect in the final analysis the father's authority above the mother's authority because the mother (pause)".

Ian: "Well because he exercises it less frequently."

Barbara: "Yes. The child, I think children in general see the mother as less authoritarian."

(b) The Division of Labour: An Example

A second illustration of the way in which respondents perceived maternal behaviour as being developed in a different context came from their accounts of the division of labour. As will be elaborated in the next chapter, fathers were only very infrequently placed in the position of concurrently managing children and ongoing household matters. This was so even in the case of the most actively involved husbands, who claimed that, when they were at home, they helped out with whatever needed to be done. In fact, this situation usually resulted in the separation and sharing of household and childcare/management tasks. The classic example was the early evening routine. Most couples described how, if both of them were at home, one bathed and dealt with the children whilst the other cleared away the debris of the evening meal. Thus, if the fathers were dealing with childcare, their wives were carrying out the other pressing domestic tasks. This meant that paternal behaviour was usually being carried out in a different overall context from maternal where, most of the time, childcare and domestic tasks were faced concurrently.

12. In the next chapter I discuss how fathers were usually expected only to occupy the children (i.e. child mind) when they took over responsibility. Any other chores which they carried out during that time were viewed as a bonus.
Respondents' accounts were characterised by the frequent acknowledgement of this different context. Often, for example, wives reminded their husbands of this if they felt that husbands were being in any way critical. Andrew Davies was, for instance, telling me that he was doing much more domestic work since the arrival of their second child. He and Judy then had the following exchange:

Andrew: "I spend my day off in the kitchen, that's what I do. If I'm not cooking, I'm making up feeds."

Judy: "And then of course, as I say to him, well try doing that AND washing, housework, feeding, cooking - you wouldn't last a day." (W/E)

Similarly, Martin Chapman remarked on how much he enjoyed looking after the children and did not find this to be as hard work as Sylvia maintained. Sylvia replied:

"I was just saying that when I do go out and come back, em, he's always saying how EASY it is to look after the children. But this is because he just looks after them, you know. He's not having to wash dishes and cook and go to the village shopping, WALKING, not by car. You know, if you go into the village it's either a morning wasted or an afternoon wasted." (W/E)

Husbands also made reference to the different contexts in which the wives related to the children. Sometimes they did this directly, using verbal acknowledgement of the wife's more demanding situation as a coping mechanism. Often, however, the reference to the different context was indirect. George Moffat, for example, pointed out jokingly that he was never asked to do the dishes any more. When I asked why, he replied:

"I think it means that if I'm not doing the dishes I've got the kids, you see, jumping all over me or away out for a walk or something. And that lets Helen get them done in half the time, under probably about half the pressure." (I)
Respondents perceived the more diffuse interweaving of the mothers' general housework and childrearing commitments as resulting in difficulties which were not faced so acutely by the fathers. Two main problematical areas were mentioned most often. Each can be related to underlying assumptions about family life and images of children. Firstly, being a mother was defined as potentially having considerable implications for the woman's overall personal existence and development. This was not necessarily the case for the man. Here respondents' accounts reflected their assumptions that family life was cyclical; that children were only transient but potentially overpowering family members; and that individuality should not be swamped in the shared reality of family life.

Secondly, and of particular relevance to this section, the mother's situation of having to relate to the child within the context of her other work commitments was perceived as having special problematical features. The main difficulty was that respondents' images of children involved attaching high priority to understanding them, and interpreting and dealing with their needs and wants. For these respondents, therefore, children were not beings to be ignored. The other demands of the mother's work situation meant that this was, however, an ever present possibility. In addition, respondents' projected images of children led the mothers to be very aware of the degree of priority which they attached to the child in the context of their other work commitments. Here,

13. See Chapter Five, pp.156-167 for some illustrations of the ways in which beliefs that family life should be "fairly" shared were sustained in the face of this contradiction.
images of the potential impact of parents' present actions, and
the desire for the future friendship of the child, were especially
pertinent. Marjorie Russell's statement was typical. She said:

"You’re torn between the housework and the children, and ideally the children should always come first. But in practice, if you’ve got visitors coming that night or something, the housework comes first and the children get left along the line somewhere. But whether this does them any harm or not I don’t know. Because if they get TOO much attention, they won't learn to be independent, it's hard to say." (I)

The latter part of this quotation also provides interesting illustration of the use of needs and wants as coping mechanisms.

The uncertainties involved in developing parental behaviour, and the many possible ways in which perceived needs and wants could be satisfied in practice, led to the continuous pragmatic selection of the most subjectively satisfactory image at any one point in time.

The wives' working days were intimately connected with childrearing. For these respondents this was seen not just as administering everyday physical needs but also as catering for emotional and psychological needs. All of the wives made this latter point, even if this took the form of expressing guilt that they did not accomplish it adequately. Kathy Hislop put forward her view of this dilemma as follows, she explained:

"When you’re a housewife you get used to doing certain things in the house and when you become a mother suddenly these have to be put in second place and the children sort of take over in importance to, well to the housework very often. Em, especially when they’re younger, and in the winter when they can’t get out, can’t amuse themselves, and there’s ironing to be done and washing to be done. Or, there’s things that you would like to do, just for the sake of doing them, in the house, which you can’t do because there’s a child needing amused. And, because you’re a mother you feel that, well the child isn't just THERE."
You don't feel that you've done your duty em keeping it in clean clothes, keeping its face clean, feeding it. I think it does involve giving up a certain amount of time to the child and, I suppose, developing some sort of relationship and, well, teaching it." (I)

Like all of the mothers, Kathy maintained that the way to satisfy the emotional and psychological needs of the child was to "develop a relationship" (sic) with him/her. Again, using respondents' terminology, this involved "giving time to the child". By this they meant some form of special directed attention, such as conversing with the child, teaching, or entertaining him/her. "Conversing" was perceived as a self conscious activity focused directly on the child. This was defined as qualitatively different from the ongoing exchanges intrinsic to child management.

Similarly, although by giving up paid employment for a time all of the wives had acknowledged that they would be constantly available to the child, they made further qualitative assessment of this "availability". Simply to "be there" was not perceived as adequate in terms of their abstract images of children. "Being there", although helping to satisfy the child's needs for security and stability, was defined as only a small part of the necessary total relationship.

Paradoxically, it was in some ways seen as easier for the father to feel satisfied with the quality of time which he gave to the child. Again, the ways in which respondents attached meanings to this time was connected with the different contexts in which they saw maternal and paternal behaviour as being developed. The father's "being with the child" was an activity separate from his defined work commitment. In addition, it was objectively less than that of the mother. In many of the families, therefore, the
time which he "gave" to the children was often institutionalized into special "time with Daddy". Analytically this was a further mechanism for sustaining belief in mutual involvement with the children. Although, like the mother, the father might be engaged in activities not even directly related to the child, respondents imbued this "time" with greater significance. Many, for example, described how the children were encouraged to be with the father after he arrived home in the evenings. They might be in his company when he changed his clothes, sat down to relax, or assisted with some of the evening chores. If the children were with the mother in similar circumstances, such "time" tended to be much more taken-for-granted and not defined as "given". As is discussed later in this chapter, respondents constructed images of the children as defining the father differently from the mother.14 In part such images were the meanings which they defined the child as attaching to the different amounts of time which he/she had with each parent.

Some of the wives had developed their own subjectively satisfactory means of sustaining belief that they "gave time" to their children, despite their current work commitments. Like the fathers, they did this by also institutionalising some time especially for the children. One respondent had a "minimal housework" (sic) day each week, when she devoted her time entirely to the children. Others tried to work into their weekly routine a regular event especially for the children, such as a visit to the swimming baths. Here again we can see the importance of gestures as coping mechanisms. It was not the amount of time

"given" to the child but the assessment of its quality which was relevant for the maintenance of belief. In this respect some of the wives said that it was important to "give" just a few minutes each day of direct attention to the child. This might comprise reading a story after lunch, or simply sitting down and conversing with the child. The impression given by most of the wives was, however, that they felt under constant pressure to deal adequately with the many demands of their domestic lives without neglecting this qualitative aspect of childrearing and vice versa.

The following comment from Mary Clark was typical. Here she was justifying to her husband the fact that she and her elder daughter frequently got on badly with one another. This usually occurred, she maintained, because it was practically impossible to satisfy adequately the child's demands for attention whilst dealing with the household chores. She explained:

"... during the day, if I didn't have to do any cooking, or cleaning, or laundry, or ironing then Louise and I would get on quite well together really. The days when I've got nothing to do such as, well yesterday and Wednesday, I'd nothing very much to do, we got on beautifully, there was no problem. I sat and drank cups of dirty water and artificial mince, and there was no problem. But as soon as I stop to do housework then the trouble begins. She comes to the back door and she cries and she lies down on the floor because I can't just drop everything. Everytime I put my hands into water, she WANTS something which, I'm sorry I can't do it." (Jt)

Although this respondent was facing particular difficulties in dealing with her three year old, many other respondents described a similar clash of activities. Sometimes mothers succeeded in organising some suitable alternative entertainment for the child whilst they were busy with other things. Most often, however, they tended to feel that they simply concentrated
on one area of responsibilities rather than the other, and they expressed guilt if the childrearing aspect was taking second place. (Interestingly, guilt was seldom expressed by those respondents who had decided that "the house came second".) A final interesting corollary was that the mothers expressed guilt when they rejected the child's demands for attention. It was, however, perceived as much more legitimate if the fathers came home from work and were too tired to respond adequately to the children.

2. Knowledge

Related to respondents' perceptions of the different contexts in which maternal and paternal behaviour was developed were their views that the mother had more extensive knowledge of home and family than did the father. I would suggest that this knowledge was not only viewed as more extensive, but also that the directness of its acquisition meant that it was accorded greater legitimacy in the negotiation processes. Here then are further practical interpretations of underlying assumptions about parenthood as a situation of learning, and the high value attached to direct experience. In this section I shall consider some of the ways in which the meanings attached to knowledge affected the development of parental behaviour. The practical contradictions of a belief system which held that parenthood was a learning situation, but also one which was mutually and "fairly" shared, will again be evident. These contradictions stemmed from the fact that the mother was in a more constant learning situation than was the father. In the family, just as in other social institutions, knowledge implies influence. The

15. The way in which respondents attached meanings to different kinds of knowledge was discussed in Chapter Four, pp. 146-150.
mother's greater knowledge and influence in the development of parental behaviour inevitably affected the extent to which it could be seen as "fairly" shared.

(a) Knowledge and practical childcare

Dealing with the practical aspects of childcare was perceived by respondents as essentially a learned skill. It involved not only knowing how to do things for children (abstract images) but also how best to do things for that particular child (grounded images). In an earlier section on comparative images I suggested that respondents developed a greater definitional confidence that they "knew" how to deal with the second child.16 Many looked back on their problems with the first child as being due to a lack of knowledge and direct experience. Similar beliefs about knowledge characterised the ongoing division of practical childcare between spouses. Possession or lack of knowledge were frequently put forward to legitimate the mothers' and fathers' activities in this area.

(i) Firstly, mothers were defined as having had greater opportunity to learn the skills of practical childcare. The majority of respondents claimed that mothers were better or quicker at, for example, dressing and undressing children, changing nappies etc., simply because they had had more practice. The physical care of very small children and babies was viewed as especially problematical. Here perceptions of the father's greater size and gaucheness were frequently added to his lesser knowledge to further legitimate the mother's "superior" childcare ability. Respondents related "explanatory incidents" of fathers putting

16. See Chapter Seven, pp. 246-251.
on nappies inadequately so that they slipped off. Other incidents were related of fathers perhaps putting odd combinations of clothes on to the children. Stories were also told of fathers "forgetting" to brush the children's hair, or not taking out ribbons, when they undressed them. Only in two cases were the fathers defined as equally knowledgeable about the overall practical care of small children. Even these two fathers, however, claimed other gaps in their knowledge. They said, for example, that they did not know where clean clothes, nappies etc. were kept, and which items of clothing the mother wished the child to use. Ian Johnson said:

"I still tend not to dress kids unless the clothes are put out because I find when I DO dress them their clothes aren't there, and it takes me a half a bloody hour to find them."

Barbara replied:

"Well that's because you won't find out where they're kept." (W/E)

In part the definition of the mother's greater knowledge of practical childcare stemmed from an initial image of the fragility of small babies. Philip Barber gave one of the many examples of this when he said:

"I mean, there IS a skill in just knowing how to handle a very small baby. It takes a little time to develop it and if you're not in the HABIT of doing it, it's, you're not quite so careful or safe as you might be." (I)

As the mothers had been with the babies constantly, they had had to overcome their initial apprehensiveness in this respect. Respondents' accounts suggested, however, that fathers had had the choice of whether or not to attempt the various tasks. Few of the fathers had bathed or dressed the babies regularly. Most,

17. The notion of an "explanatory incident" was introduced in Chapter Four, pp.
though, had made a token effort which sustained the belief that they could do it if they had to.\(^\text{18}\)

This initial predominance of the mother in practical child-care tended to be self perpetuating. The usual legitimating procedure was as follows: the mother "knew" best how to carry out the tasks; therefore she was more efficient than the father; therefore it was in everyone's interests that she should continue. In most of the families, therefore, the wives still continued to dress, or supervise the dressing of both children even when both parents were present. As Elizabeth Vaughan commented:

"I'm always moaning you see that there's three of me. Roy'll come through and say 'well I'm ready then' and I'm just in the middle of getting one of the kids ready. And then I've still got Jenny and then I've got to stick something on myself." (\(\text{\textsuperscript{w/E}}\))

Thus respondents defined the mother as having more extensive knowledge of practical childcare. She was perceived as having acquired this essentially through her greater direct involvement with domestic and family matters. This meant that, in many instances when fathers were dealing with childcare, they only carried out part of the total task. Mothers continued to be involved in a "supervisory" capacity. The classic example was the bathing of the children. Although in several families this task was frequently relegated to the fathers, they seldom carried out the entire procedure. As Helen Moffat remarked:

"If he's in in the evenings he's quite happy to fling the children in the bath when I'm doing the dishes. As long as I don't expect him to clean the bath or pick up the children's clothes." (I) (my underlining)

---

\(^{18}\) See Chapter Five, pp.174-175 for further illustrations of this point.
(ii) Secondly, dealing with children's practical needs also entailed sustaining belief that the parent "knew" what the child wanted. This was especially problematical when dealing with a baby who could not communicate verbally. In such a situation of extreme uncertainty several respondents resorted to the belief in a "maternal instinct" to provide a subjectively satisfactory legitimation of their practical decisions.\(^{19}\) However, even when their small child was able to communicate verbally, respondents continued to interpret and negotiate with one another the validity of these claimed needs. Again, the mother's knowledge was perceived differently from that of the father. Margaret Barber maintained that Philip played a very large part in practical childcare. Nevertheless, during their joint interview, she qualified these views when she said to Philip:

"I dare say that on some matters I would make a decision (about a child's needs) before YOU did. But probably because I knew them, knew certain aspects of them better, I mean their eating habits and so on." (Jt)

The mother's greater time commitment was perceived as enabling her to have a wider fund of direct experience on which to draw when interpreting the child's practical needs. She was also better placed to put forward subjectively satisfactory grounded images of the child to legitimate her behaviour. These were two of the factors which, I would suggest, resulted in her interpretations either being overtly accorded greater legitimacy, or simply in their being tacitly taken-for-granted in the negotiation processes.

---

\(^{19}\) This was often subsumed under the category of 'common sense' to which considerable legitimacy was attached. This was discussed in Chapter Four, p.146.
Thus the evaluation and attribution of knowledge was one set of meanings being negotiated in the development of parental behaviour. Respondents' accounts indicated that one practical result of this was that, when several things were happening concurrently in the domestic situation, such as preparing to leave the house together, it was the mother, rather than the father, who tended to carry out the majority of childcare activities. Another example was the return home as a family following an afternoon out shopping or visiting. Exceptions to this were those tasks which had been imbued with special significance for sustaining belief in father involvement. Here the concurrent evening tasks provided a typical example. The father was frequently engaged in special tasks for the children, such as bathing them or reading a story. Even in this situation, however, the mother's overall domestic knowledge meant that she tended to continue to be involved, and in overall control.

(b) Knowledge and Disciplining

The different meanings attached to the "knowledge" of the mother were further illustrated when respondents talked about disciplining children. Here I shall take up the final point (iv) concerning the meanings attached to discipline, which was introduced earlier in this chapter. In the development of disciplinary behaviour the definition of "misbehaviour" was also contextual. The use of comparative and contextual images of children played an important part in this process. Respondents saw the mother as better able to make sense of the child in this way since she had wider direct experience. In this section I

---

shall show how the mother's disciplinary behaviour was legitimated in terms both of her greater contextual knowledge of the child, and of her wider experience of success and failure in this respect.

This must first be placed against the background of respondents' accounts of the disciplining process itself. Analytically this can be seen as a direct reflection of underlying assumptions about family life as a shared learning situation. Respondents saw the development of "successful" disciplining as a process of "trial and error". They felt that, not only did the parents have to work out effective tactics, but also the children had to learn to see such acts as a punishment. Thus the development of subjectively satisfactory disciplining was an ongoing interpretative and negotiated process.

Respondents related many instances of trying out a repertoire of parental reactions to the child's misbehaviour. Some said that they had discovered one particular method which they defined as invariably successful. The Johnsons, for example, discovered that they could persuade Thomas to stop misbehaving, or to obey their instructions, by counting up to three. The Coulsons, Robsons and Davies's all maintained that the only effective way to stop "naughtiness" was to send the child to his/her room. Most respondents, however, described how they went through a repertoire of reactions, dependent on their perceptions of the seriousness of the misbehaviour, and on the overall context in which it occurred. Usually they tried methods defined as progressively harsher until the desired end result was felt to have been achieved. Dianne Hemingway said:
"We try explaining, you know, saying 'no you mustn't, no you mustn't two or three times. Try explaining, and if that doesn't do any good then I just smack her, or smack her and put her out of the room." (W/E)

Occasionally, respondents said that none of their disciplinary tactics had any effect. This obviously jeopardised their beliefs that parents should be able to manage and understand their children. At this point they usually, therefore, resorted to coping mechanisms such as "phase or stage" or "defining the problem as immutable." These were put forward to legitimate their stated solutions, which were either to simply live through the problematical behaviour or else to work out how to avoid the inevitably tumultuous scenes. Louise Wilson explained:

"I've tried everything. I've tried bribing her, I've tried being nice to her, I've tried being terribly cruel to her, I've tried shutting her up, I've tried hitting her. And I can truthfully say there's not one thing that makes any difference whatsoever (laughs). She just sort of comes round in her own time." (W/E)

The mother's more extensive knowledge of these repertoires had two important effects on the development of parental disciplining:

(i) Firstly, the father approached disciplining the child in the context of the mother's related experiences with him/her.

(ii) Secondly, his definitions of what constituted "misbehaviour" were, in part, dependent on knowledge of the ongoing relationship between mother and child.

(i) It seemed that the father had to take into account the prior "trials and errors" of the mother. The mother was perceived as the main agent of discipline. This meant that she made the majority of initial definitions of what constituted "misbehaviour", and also made the initial attempts at remedies. She therefore

"knew" more about the situation, and was often able to "tell" the father whether or not a projected course of action might succeed. No matter whether the father accepted or rejected the mother's frame of reference, his view of the situation was in part being structured by her information. One such typical exchange about disciplining came from the Burns's.

Carol: "Everything I say to him (elder child) he contradicts or alternatively ignores it."

Eric: "Doesn't do that to me."

Carol: "Best of luck to you then because at the moment it's a very trying business."

Eric: "It's a bit of a problem getting him to bed and that. I think it's a question of spare the rod (and spoil the child!). I think if you were physically violent to him for a couple of times it would sort him out."

Carol: "No, no. I've had that physical violence stage with him when he kept on, you know, doing jobs in his pants. It doesn't improve anything." (F)

(ii) Definitions of what actually constituted misbehaviour were also, in part, contextual. In order that the father could fit in with the mutual disciplining of the child, he was reliant on the mother's knowledge of these ongoing contexts. This point is akin to Cicourel's empirical observation that it was almost impossible for a researcher to "make sense" of the tape-recorded remarks which a mother made to her child during an average morning. This was because many of the remarks were indexical, that is, contained complex references to contexts only experienced by the mother and child.

The mother, at this stage, was involved with the child in more numerous and varied situations than was the father. In

22. Aaron Cicourel made this observation during a seminar at Edinburgh University in 1971.
this respect her contextual knowledge was much greater. Respondents described many instances of the father not "knowing" that the child was, or was not, allowed to behave in a certain way. This was often simply because this was an arrangement made between mother and child during the day. Similar gaps in the mother's knowledge occurred much less frequently. Sylvia Chapman said, for example:

"But at the same time, em, if I think that Martin was unjustified in giving her (Anne) a row, I'll say 'oh it was an accident'. Or if he hasn't perhaps seen ALL of what's happened or that, and he'll say 'oh well I didn't know that, I'm sorry.'" (W/E)

The Barbers, like all of the other respondents, saw their children as being able potentially to exploit such parental inconsistencies and, as Philip put it, "to play one of us off against the other." Respondents' accounts indicated that this occurred very often because the father had inferior contextual knowledge. The Barbers discussed this as follows with reference to their elder daughter:

Philip: "It's just that there are sometimes little arrangements that you have with her that I don't know about."

Margaret: "Yes, during the day for instance, there might be certain things that I would allow and Philip might have said 'no'. (Philip: 'And she goes to you, you see.'). So that in fact there IS a dilemma there because I can't say anything to Karen, I have to say to PHILIP, 'look, she's normally allowed to do so n' so.' But this is just one of the hazards of being an absent father by day." (F)

(c) Implications

In this section I have argued that, at this stage, the mother was perceived as having a larger fund of directly acquired knowledge about the child than was the father. This was taken-for-granted by respondents in their negotiation of parental behaviour. The
implication of this is that the mother had a subtle influence over the development of the husband's paternal behaviour, since she was his major source of information about the child and its world. I would suggest that in this way the mother was continuously exerting a greater effect on the father's behaviour than vice-versa. These effects were manifested in various ways. As was discussed in Chapter Seven, the formation of social contextual images of children constituted an important element in the process of understanding and making sense of the child. It seemed that the husbands in the sample saw their wives as having greater opportunities to form valid images, they felt themselves to be less directly "informed", and therefore tended often to concur with their wives' interpretations of the child.

Frequently this was illustrated by the husband either referring to his wife for some information or conceding that her opinion on some specific issue was likely to be more accurate than was his own. At other times these feelings were presented as a generalised view of the parental process. An example of this was given during the final interview with the Johnsons when they were considering how they had arrived at their ideas about dealing with the children. Their discussion was as follows:

Barbara: "I think they just emerged sort of naturally."

Ian: "Sort of, em, well I think they probably . . ."

Barbara: "We didn't have any great sort of think out sessions did we?"

Ian: "Well I think they probably emerged through you, (Barbara: 'Yeah') and I was quite happy to acquiesce because YOU were the prime bringer up of the children. (Barbara agrees) I mean inevitably because I'm not here all the time and Barbara, well for the first two or three years of their life, she was here all the time." (F)
Only occasionally was the mother's greater knowledge challenged. This was usually where the father had been accorded some special intuitive knowledge of the child. Sometimes, for example, he was considered to be more "on the child's wavelength". Usually, however, the mother's wider experience of the child enabled her to make a more subjectively acceptable legitimisation of her decisions or actions.

3. Responsibility and Constant Availability

For these respondents being a parent involved understanding the child and administering its needs. Their accounts indicated that, at this stage, they defined the mother as taking the greater direct share of this responsibility. Although, as will be discussed in the following chapter, they sustained belief in father involvement, it was nevertheless taken-for-granted that the overall everyday responsibility lay with the mother. Margaret Barber saw it in the following way, she said to Philip:

"The only moment in my life when I feel FREE is when I'm asleep I reckon. (Philip laughs) Because even when someone else is looking after them, with the exception let's say of when you're looking after them, or when Mummy's looking after them. If it's someone else is looking after them, you (I) still feel responsible for them." (Jt)

In this section I shall describe some of the ways in which the mother's assumption of everyday responsibility affected the negotiation of parental behaviour. Examples are taken from the division of labour and the organisation of "leaving the child".

(a) The Division of Labour: An Example

The underlying assumption that family life was a "fairly" shared reality led the majority of respondents to stress mutual responsibility for the familial division of labour. Their accounts revealed, however, that, in practice, the wife took

23. See Chapter Six.
overall responsibility, and the husband was regarded as the "helper". Being a "helper" meant that the husband was (or was not!) incorporated into the ongoing organisation being administered by his wife. He was, in part, reliant on her for information about the current state of that organisation, and its participants, in order to "know" what to do. It also seemed that being a "helper" involved a greater exercise of choice and preference. This exercise of preference was incorporated into the negotiation of parental behaviour. It was, for example, taken-for-granted that the wife would, by and large, look after all of the children's needs; whilst the husband would choose to look after some of them if he was present, and willing and/or able. If the husband was absent or chose not to do certain things, then the responsibility again reverted to the wife.

Paradoxically, one way of illustrating the effect of the assumption that the wife had overall responsibility is to show how the husband's relationship with the child was differently managed. The wife had a diffuse, overall responsibility for childrearing and housework. By contrast, childrearing activities seldom became as totally interwoven with the husband's domestic commitments. He tended to have much more specific and well defined spheres of involvement in the total domestic division of labour. Simplistically, the father was usually doing something with or for the children; or he was carrying out a task in which it had been negotiated between the spouses that the children could be involved; or he was engaged in some well defined domestic task separate from the children.

A brief examination of the final alternative illustrates the greater structuring and segregation of the development of paternal
behaviour, and, by implication, the mother's taken-for-granted position of responsibility. Respondents' accounts indicated that when, for example, the husband was engaged in some well-defined domestic task (or doing some "job-connected" work at home) the wife often made sure that the children were either kept out of his way, or that they were removed if they impeded his progress. The usual explanation of this was that the husband might be carrying out "dangerous" jobs such as woodwork or cleaning windows. In contrast, the wife generally had to organise her "dangerous" tasks concurrently with child management.

The Chapmans said, for instance, that they usually had to remove Anne from Martin's company when he was doing jobs around the house. They recounted a recent occasion when Martin had become angry when he was unable to make progress owing to the child's presence. The conversation went as follows:

Sylvia: "When Martin's here I'M just not wanted (by Anne) you see. But Martin gets annoyed because she's always on his tail. But, er, she'll have nothing to do with me; it's because she's got me all week and her daddy's here at the weekend."

Martin: "But there again, I've got to get things done and I don't get any opportunity to get them done (Sylvia: 'I know'), because she's following me around like a shadow." (W/E)

Alan Hemingway also said that he became upset when the children impinged on his activities. During their final interview he complained strongly that a whole day had just passed when all of their efforts had gone into looking after and entertaining the children. Dianne reacted sharply against this and said:

"Yes, but you spent the whole morning doing the car and nothing stopped you." (my underlining)

Alan: "No, I wouldn't have let it stop me. But it only didn't stop me because you were around to attend to all those screams and yells." (F)
Occasionally, some of the husbands made sure that their 
wives were allowed to get on with a task, unimpeded by the children. 
This seemed to be regarded, however, as more of a special 
situation. As such it was usually given particular emphasis 
during an interview, rather than being mentioned in a taken-for-
granted manner. Analytically, therefore, this could be viewed 
more as a "gesture" which sustained belief in a fairly shared 
reality.

(b) Constant availability

A corollary of this taken-for-granted overall responsibility 
was the premise that the mother was constantly available to the 
child. Respondents maintained that, at this particular stage 
when the mother was dealing with the majority of the child's 
basic needs, he/she continued to make demands of the mother even 
when the father was available. Anna Robson said:

"But Jim's lucky. For instance, I can get a sewing 
machine out on a Sunday because I think 'that's good, Jim's 
here, that's a diversion for both of them.' They don't go 
to him with their skinned knees, they still come to me. 
And Jim goes on merrily tuncing the car or whatever he's 
doing. They never bother HIM." (1) (my underlining)

Similar examples were given even by those couples who stressed 
that the child favoured his/her father and tended to spend a lot of 
time with him. Mary Duncan said:

"They like to be with him all the time you know. 
I mean, I'm just not here, em, apart from if they NEED 
anything, you know, if they want a drink or a biscuit 
or anything like that." (w/e) (my underlining)

Margaret Barber saw Philip as equally able to deal with the 
children's needs and wants. She felt, though, that the children 
had learned to turn more to their mother because of the different 
context in which the relationship had been developed. Like most 
respondents she maintained that the child also tended to turn to
its mother at times of special need, such as illness. She said:

"Quite often in times of stress a child will turn to the person that usually deals with the stressful situation. Karen tends to turn to ME at the moment and want ME. I personally don't think that's because she loves me more than Philip; it's just, because I'm here more often I usually deal with it, and deal with it presumably more or less to her satisfaction." (I)

Thus respondents defined the child as seeing its mother as more constantly available. This feeling of always being in demand was, in fact, perceived as oppressive by many of the wives. Marjorie Russell spoke as follows about the kinds of pressures she felt that the children exerted on her behaviour:

"They absolutely HATE it when Mummy's not there. If Mummy's at the kitchen sink, that's fine, they can go and play. But if I for any reason go and lie down, that's not the same. They can't they don't like THAT. They like Mummy to be THERE AND AWAKE, and to pay attention to them; and THEN they can go away." (I)

Two implications follow from these examples. Firstly, respondents seemed, in part, to see the constant availability of the mother (in their current situation) as satisfying one of their basic images of the child's needs: that of security. Secondly, it is important to note that they maintained that this kind of pressure to be "available" was not experienced in the same way by the father. On an analytical level, I would suggest that this was supported by their grounded image that the child itself made fewer direct demands on the father, and was therefore less dependent on his constant presence. The result seemed to be that the father was less likely, therefore, to feel constraints on his activities. He was also better able to retain spheres of activity into which the child did not encroach. Thus the negotiation of parental behaviour has also to be seen within the
context of the parents' images of the ways in which their children saw them.

(c) **Delegation of Childcare: An Example**

Beliefs about the mother's overall responsibility and availability were also reflected in respondents' accounts of the delegation of childcare. This applied to their organisation of "leaving" the child, whether it was a matter of the occasional babysitter, or a permanent substitute whilst the parents were engaged in other activities (most especially when both had jobs).

Most of the times that a respondent wished to carry out activities away from the home, the child was "left" with the other parent. For these respondents, joint activities away from the child were much rarer than were individual activities. The majority of them simply saw this as the most convenient way of carrying out non-domestic activities. A regular and frequent organisation of babysitters was not seen as an attractive proposition because it cost money, or time (return "sits"), or obligation ("taking advantage" of friends/relatives). A minority of respondents put forward images of children to legitimate the fact that they were seldom "left". Usually these images were grounded in their experience that the children were unhappy if their parents were not available, or simply that the children were somewhat afraid of non-familiar people. "Explanatory incidents" were often related.

The organisation of babysitters was usually, however, taken-for-granted as being the mother's responsibility. It was predominantly the wives who both made arrangements for a babysitter to come, and who also returned the babysitting service if necessary. Only one couple said that they shared return babysitting equally
depending on whoever felt like going. In the majority of couples the husband either never went babysitting or went only under special circumstances. Examples of these were if it was to be a particularly late "sit"; if the other household had a television; or if the husband would have more peace and quiet to work or study in someone else's house. The apparent lack of "fairness" of the situation was usually qualified, however, by respondents maintaining that the husband was willing to go. This can be seen as another coping mechanism to sustain belief in fairness in the face of a practical violation.

Context and knowledge were the usual legitimations put forward to account for the wife's organisation of babysitting. They said that: (i) she knew the other families and sitters better; (ii) the other children were more familiar with the wives; and (iii) many people preferred women to "sit" for small babies. Here also then one can see the use of images of children's needs and wants to legitimate this division of parental labour.

Context and knowledge were also used to legitimate the wife's organisation of more permanent delegation of childcare, such as nursery schools or childminders. It appeared that the mothers not only did the actual organisation of these matters, but that they also made the initial observations about when the child would be able to cope with the situation. Here again the mother was perceived as in a better position to make such decisions because of her greater knowledge of the child and its world.

24. This couple was in a somewhat special situation, though, as their usual babysitting arrangements involved using a mutual listening device with their next door neighbours.
I would suggest that, once established, this basic situation is rather difficult to change. As the Rapoports found, even in the dual career family, the wife tended to take greater overall responsibility for childcare (and its delegation) than did the husband. I have argued that, in part, this arises from taken-for-granted views that the mother has overall responsibility and is more "available" to the child. "Leaving" the child is, therefore, more problematical to the mother.

Looking to the future, most of the wives anticipated returning to paid employment. (Some of them in fact did this during the fieldwork.) One of their major considerations about a suitable job was whether or not it would fit in with the organisation of the children. By that point in time the husbands would be well established in their own working routines. It was, therefore, not seen as viable to start from the basic premise that childcare could be organised around the jobs of both spouses. By the end of the fieldwork, eight of the wives were either involved in, or seriously considering, some form of paid employment. In every case the organisation of alternative methods of childcare was seen as the wife's responsibility. This alternative method of childcare might involve employing childminders, taking the children with her to work, or working only at those times when the husband was able to look after them.

Although it was, by and large, a mutual decision that the wife should work, it was she who tended to express worries that her absence might cause problems for the children. The absence of the father was, by that point, taken for granted. Barbara Johnson, who, at that stage, was perhaps the most determined of

all the wives to have a second career, said that she would feel
bound to give this up if she perceived that the substitute
care of her two and a half year old son was unsatisfactory.
Carol Burns, who worked night shifts as a nurse, felt it
necessary to convince her husband (and herself) that the bed
wetting and clinginess of their three year old daughter were
not sufficiently serious to warrant her giving up her job.
She and Eric had the following conversation during their fourth
interview:

Carol: "Going to somebody else's em, even with me
there em, she clings to me in case I'm gonna vanish.
So I don't know if it's because I'm working and she
disappears on a Thursday" (i.e. when a friend looked
after the child to enable Carol to sleep).

Eric: "Och she's always asking for you at night, em I
mean if she appears, I mean she knows fine where you
are!"

Carol: "Mmhm, but I don't think it's upsetting her."

Eric: "Well she does trot round to come to bed with me
occasionally."

Carol: "Yes, but I mean once she's in bed with you she's
fine. There's no "mammy, mammy" misery. I mean I don't
think it's worth giving up work for that." (W/E)

Conclusion

In this chapter various characteristics of being a mother, as
presented in respondents' accounts, have been examined. Firstly, I
looked at the different contexts in which the mother's behaviour was
developed, compared with that of the father. Examples were taken from
the areas of disciplining children, and the division of labour. These
were used to illustrate that, in part, maternal behaviour differed
from paternal because the mother was, in various ways, involved in a
different overall relationship with the child. The difference hinged
on the fact that the mother was with the child for the majority of
her working day. Secondly, I examined respondents' views that the mother had, at this point, greater knowledge of home and family matters. Two areas of behaviour, practical childcare and disciplining children, were further analysed to illustrate the effects, in practice, of the mother's greater knowledge. Thirdly, being a mother was seen to be characterised by feelings of overall responsibility and constant availability. I examined the implications of this for the division of labour and the organisation of surrogate childcare.

Thus, some doubts have already been cast on the actual similarity of maternal and paternal behaviour. Being a mother had, for these respondents, some important distinctive features. The same was true of fatherhood, and it is to this that I turn in the next chapter.
CHAPTER NINE

"I think fathers should be very involved with the children, and I think the time for them to be involved is right from the word go. I think, if they're going to get on well with their children when they are older, they've got to start right from the beginning and develop the relationship at the same time as the mother develops a relationship." Maureen Rankin (I)

1. Introduction

The theme of this chapter is the problematical nature of fatherhood. Respondents' accounts showed that, whereas many fundamental aspects of "being a mother" were taken-for-granted, this did not apply in the same way to "being a father". No matter how dissatisfied the wives might feel about the adequacy of their parental behaviour, they had, nevertheless, negotiated with their husbands a subjectively satisfactory base of early motherhood. At this stage this comprised, in essence, an involvement on a general level which was "proved" by being constantly available and responsible for the children, and thus in a continual learning situation. Respondents defined this basic situation of being at home with small children as extremely demanding but vital in the context of present day British society.

Fatherhood was not perceived as having this fundamental and unchallengeable base. In order to sustain their underlying beliefs about parenthood, respondents did not consider it adequate for the husband simply to earn the money and act as a male presence in the household. Being a father was perceived as also entailing a direct involvement and active interest in the children. In this context the problematical nature of being a father lay essentially in negotiating
with the mother a mutually satisfactory degree of **direct** involvement in home and family life, during the non-job time perceived as available. Although, within the sample, there was variation in the kinds and range of "appropriate" behaviour being negotiated, respondents held very similar everyday images of fatherhood. More importantly, they had similar myths and coping mechanisms which enabled them to sustain belief in the reality of the paternal behaviour which they were creating.

Spouses negotiated with each other mutually satisfactory arrangements which enabled them to maintain belief in the **direct** involvement of the father. In terms of demonstrable practical results this involvement varied both between couples, and within each family over time. The crucial factor in the process of belief maintenance was the ability to draw on various spheres of behaviour at different levels, all of which provided "proof" of involvement. These will be discussed in this chapter. Importantly, it was **not**, however, perceived as necessary for the father to participate fully and constantly in all of these spheres. Rather it was a matter of his participating sufficiently regularly in those particular spheres which spouses had identified as relevant to their own family situation. (Or, alternatively, being able to rationalize his temporary non-participation, in which case beliefs could be suspended!) In other words, for father involvement to be subjectively satisfactory it did not tend to be measured against some abstract set of behavioural ideals. It was negotiated and evaluated in terms of the paternal behaviour perceived as appropriate by the spouses within their own special situation at any one point in time. Images of children played an important part in this process.
A brief description of respondents' general perceptions of the overall division of labour provides background to the following discussion of the different levels of father involvement. Basically their accounts provided a picture of the division of labour as a flexible and dynamic entity. During the course of the panel study each couple described many changes in their everyday administration of home and family. They saw these changes as being related principally to (a) alterations in the extra-familial commitments of group members and (b) to differing perceptions of children's needs.

(a) The majority of respondents (including both husbands and wives) reported, for example, changes in their paid employment commitments, or routines, throughout the year. All of these had necessitated re-arrangements in the domestic routine. Usually the result was simply an increase in the wife's overall workload or organisational activities since, as I argued in chapter eight, she tended to have the taken-for-granted major responsibility for domestic matters. Five of the husbands, though, reported doing slightly more childminding as a result of their wives' commitments. By and large, however, the majority of changes affected the wives predominantly, and stemmed from their husbands spending more time at work. Husband involvement in home and childcare was thus seen as fluctuating and problematical.

(b) The division of labour was also described as changing in response to developments within the family. Differences in this respect were described between the pre-children, one child, and two children stages. Meanings attached to children played an important part in the legitimation of these changes. Respondents claimed that the husbands had been more involved with practical household
chore before children, when both spouses were working. Once the woman was at home with one child, most respondents then saw it as either desirable or inevitable that she took the main responsibility for carrying out household chores in addition to her childcare activities. Also, at first, images of the fragility of small babies were used to legitimate the more peripheral involvement of the father in childcare. As the first child grew older most respondents defined the husband as becoming more involved with him/her. Gradually, more practical "gestures" were carried out by the husband, which supported this belief. As is discussed later in this chapter, further changes occurred with the addition of the second child.

1. I would suggest that for the majority of respondents this again was partly mythical. The belief in mutual sharing of the everyday household division of labour at that previous point seems also to have been sustained by the coping mechanisms of voluntarism, potential interchangability and gestures, which were described in Chapter Five. With few exceptions, having maintained that they "shared" this early division of labour, all respondents then proceeded to describe the women as having done most of the shopping, general housework, cooking, washing and ironing. There were also specially allocated chores, very much along stereotyped sex role lines of car maintenance/odd-jobs/heavy gardening/ for the men, and sewing/mending/light gardening for the women. The men, however, seemed to have carried out their 'special' chores instead of the everyday chores whereas the women did theirs in addition.

2. It seemed, from these retrospective accounts, that, after the birth of the child, it became more necessary to sustain belief in a "fairly" shared reality through the husband's involvement with childcare rather than housework. Many of the husbands who laid greatest claim to taking a "fair share", freely admitted that their wives did most of the housework and that they only carried out a few specific tasks, and/or helped out generally, if their wives were "struggling". There no longer seemed any need to claim that housework was a mutual responsibility. (Note, also, however, that I have already pointed out in Chapter Five that most respondents defined this as a phase in the family life cycle. They stated that this would change again if and when the wives were no longer full time housewives.)

3. See page 333 of the present chapter.
Alongside changes in family commitments and structure, respondents also perceived their children as developing and altering. Their images of these developments often led to revised definitions both of the child's needs, and of the father's ability to deal with them. A frequently cited example was the greater willingness of the father to become spontaneously and regularly involved with childcare when the child was no longer seen as "a baby". Marjorie Russell said:

"I think men like them when they're a wee bit bigger to handle and so on, and a bit more independent and able to say what they want." (F)

Carol Burns echoed this when she said that Eric did more for the children now that they were no longer "babies". She said to Eric:

"I think you are doing more now because the children are becoming more people, and are more communicating with you. Whereas before they were, you know, a bit lumpy." (Jt) (my underlining)

Also, as the child became better able to do things for itself, the father might become more involved in a supervisory capacity. As David Russell said of his three and five year olds:

"... take bathing as an example: I just throw them into the bath and let them get on with it themselves, you see. I never do that (wash them). I mean, that's up to them. Or I just leave them to soak and take them out." (W/S)

I would suggest, therefore, that, not only did the changing image of the child affect the division of labour, but also that the image of the father's ability altered. The progression to his being regarded as having acquired "adequate" knowledge was more gradual

---

4. This is an extremely complex process of image transformation and merits a more detailed examination than my own data allow. I would submit that the images of size of the child and its ability to communicate, as presented in the quotations, are only two of a myriad of meanings.
than that of the mother. His opportunities to provide "practical proof" of ability were less, relative to the mother. At the same time, however, that the father's fund of directly acquired knowledge was defined as increasing, his childcare abilities became more taken-for-granted.

2. Father involvement

There were three principal overlapping areas within which spheres of paternal behaviour were being developed. These were (a) dealing with general domestic and family matters; (b) negotiating acceptable parental behaviour in relation to the mother; and (c) developing a direct relationship with the child. The first and second areas are progressively further removed from the situation to which, in theory, respondents attached so much importance. This was that being a parent was a learning situation characterised by direct personal experience. It is suggested that, even though the importance of (c) was stressed by all respondents, most spheres of paternal behaviour were directed towards (a) and (b). For the majority of the husbands, time limitations and personal choice led them in practice to be only minimally involved in the third area. The interest for this thesis lies in the ways in which a generalised belief in father involvement was sustained, and the kinds of direct relationships with the child which were developed.

(a) Dealing with general domestic and family matters

This was the widest area of paternal behaviour in which respondents claimed involvement. Being a father meant sharing overall responsibility for the administration of domestic matters, such as finances, care, education, and development of children; and taking part in the organisation of family activities. Images of the child as being different from adults, and as having
to be administered by his/her parents, were implicit in this view of fatherhood. The underlying assumption that parenthood was a shared reality, meant that respondents had to sustain belief that the father also took part in this administrative activity.

This area of overall administrative activity was extremely broadly defined by respondents. They all sustained a belief that the fathers were involved. In practice, however, there was considerable variation between couples in the kind, and amount, of administrative activity actually undertaken by the fathers. This is an interesting area of behaviour, since there was often only a fine subjective distinction between theoretical and practical involvement. All of the husbands were kept "informed" by their wives, and claimed an interest in this everyday administration. All of the respondents sustained a belief in this theoretical level of paternal involvement by claiming, for example, that domestic matters, especially those pertaining to the children, constituted a major part of their "mundane" conversation. The variation lay in the extent to which husbands played an active part in making decisions, allocating priorities, and general organisation.

In addition, it was a crucial part of this practical involvement that the husband's activity was believed to be a vital ingredient by both spouses. His involvement remained more on the theoretical level if, for example, the wife regarded him simply as a "sounding board" for the decisions which she had already made. The response of the wife was always vital, since it was her everyday existence which tended to be most affected by these administrative and

5. These images were discussed in Chapter Six, pp.207-212.
organisational decisions. Also, the very constancy of her presence gave her considerable power over the choice of those activities or routines which were actually put into practice.

The different levels of involvement will be illustrated firstly by presenting the two extremes which existed amongst the respondents. The position of the majority of the respondents will then be discussed. Given the importance attached to the wife's greater experience and knowledge in the domestic sphere, the tendency was towards a general theoretical involvement, with occasional practical interventions negotiated between the spouses.

Two of the fathers maintained that their involvement was demonstrated by their acting in a sort of "overseer" capacity. For couples to sustain belief in this behaviour, the fathers had to be seen simply to be aware of, and interested in, the ongoing developments of home and family. They were required primarily to acknowledge and acquiesce to the decisions constantly being made by the mothers. This extreme type was illustrated by Patrick Hislop when he spoke as follows about "being a mother":

Patrick: "Being a provider of a stable home life and, much more so, influencing the children by example, em, much more so than the father."

K.B.: "Why do you see it as being much more so than the father?"

Patrick: "Because the mother will inevitably be in much closer contact with the children. And this is obviously to some extent just because of my particular job, not just MY particular job, many fellows in my position because of the demands of their job, they are not in as close contact with the children as they could be or should be so that your presence is required only "in extremis." (I)

6. Patrick was trying to make a name for himself in a professional career. This involved him in hard work and long hours away from home.
In addition, Patrick perceived his wife's greater knowledge/involvement in domestic matters generally as justifying his own lack of direct administrative activity in those spheres also. Both of the couples who adopted this position perceived the mother as inevitably central in domestic matters, and, for them, this was a major legitimation in itself for the peripheral involvement of the father.

In addition they, more than any of the other respondents, stressed that women understood and dealt with children better than did men. Images of children were put forward to legitimate these beliefs. Roy Vaughan said, for example:

"I think, you know, the women handle them every day n' that, and the child gets used to the handling of the one person. And I think probably if I HAVE handled her, em, quite often the child wants her mother you know. She just, she probably feels uneasy with me handling her and I'd say (to Elizabeth) 'och, you fix her up'.'" (W/E)

Both Kathy Hislop and Elizabeth Vaughan concurred with their husbands' views of fatherhood. The fact that this was a negotiated reality, in which images of children played an important part, was illustrated by the accounts of those respondents who said that they had not initially had such a similarity of views. Maureen Rankin said that Derek had helped out with the babies and done lots of things, "... he probably never thought he would do." (I)

The Rankins both now defined this as an essential way for the father to develop a relationship with the child. Projected images of the future relationship of father and child were used to legitimate his current practical involvement with baby and infant care. Philip Barber said that he had come to view fatherhood in a similar way to this, but only with Margaret's guidance. He commented:
"I think probably the majority of men don't, they see themselves in the role of father as PLAYING with the children rather than, you know, nurse-maiding the children. And THAT was certainly MY kind of feelings as far as I'd thought about it. Margaret was very keen for me to be an active participating father em, in EVERY respect. So that I've been present at the birth of BOTH kids em, and I read up the pamphlets beforehand; and we'd go to the hospital for the daddy's evening before the happy event and see a film of the birth." (I)

Philip Barber was, in fact, one of the three fathers whose views were in direct contrast with the Hislops and the Vaughans. These three maintained that their overall responsibilities were only really being met if there was a very active involvement in the ongoing administration. Being a father meant a practical sharing of mundane decisions and organisation whenever one was available for participation. Nothing should be simply "left up to the mother", except where time constraints made an effective sharing impossible. (Interestingly, the three fathers who believed most strongly in the importance of this practical overall involvement, were in occupations which had allowed them flexible time schedules.) This kind of attitude is again best illustrated with reference to childrearing. Philip Barber said:

"I think it's one's parental responsibility to SPEND time with one's children, and to sort out priorities like this in the early years in particular, when the child's development is progressing at a VERY rapid pace and so much of the basic pattern is being set. That it's a FATHER'S responsibility, as well as a MOTHER'S, to give the TIME that is required for looking after the children in a very practical way." (I)

The most frequent pattern seemed to be a combination of elements from these two extremes. Belief in father involvement in this area was sustained by similar mechanisms to those described earlier in the thesis. 7 Spheres of behaviour

7. See Chapter Five, pp.167-172.
considered appropriate in their own family set-up were negotiated on a hypothetical level by respondents. Usually the behaviour was subsequently held "in reserve", and only minimal practical applications were required to maintain beliefs. It was subjectively satisfactory simply to maintain that the father "would if he could", or "could if he had to". In addition, temporal fluctuations occurred between practical and theoretical involvement in this area. On occasions, for example, some fathers were completely absent from the home for a period of time. Since, however, this was usually because of job commitments, a belief in involvement was sustained at its widest level. The situation was interpreted as a phase which would be in the long term interest of the family.

A good illustration of the typical fluctuations between theoretical and practical administrative involvement was given by Alan Hemingway. During the course of his first interview he initially maintained that parenthood was a shared administrative responsibility, but subsequently went on to allocate the major part of initiative in these spheres to his wife. He said about "being a mother":

"... very much the same (as being a father) I would think, in our case. These areas are very definitely the problems that we share, em, the children. We don't slot one aspect of their well-being into my area and another into Dianne's, em, they're very much OURS in terms of these kinds of decisions. And that's one thing we talk about a lot." (I)

He also said, however:

"Dianne's sphere of things em, involves very much more the children, in terms of doing things with them and, er trying to be original in what we do, and doing the things that we ought to do. And these are very much her areas of initiative, because she will always say before I ever get round to it, 'we ought to do such n' such with the kids', and we DO it." (I)
Other examples occurred when the husbands claimed an overall interest in the pre-school education of the children, but the wives made all of the practical decisions and arrangements. Sometimes, however, the fathers did become actively involved by, for instance, providing transport to an alternative playschool. Equally, if initial arrangements proved unsatisfactory, husbands then became more involved in the subsequent decisions to sort out the problems.

The various "fall back" levels of involvement, and the narrow divide between theoretical and practical administrative activity, made this area of being a father the easiest in which to sustain belief. The other two areas were more dependent on practical than theoretical proof of involvement. For the majority of respondents, as long as practical administrative activity was undertaken when it was perceived to be appropriate, then this area was very much taken-for-granted in the negotiation process. Most instances of lack of involvement were coped with by treating them as an inevitable phase or stage. Most of the time spouses had agreed (tacitly or overtly), or agreed to differ, on the spheres of behaviour perceived as necessary to demonstrate involvement in this area. This was, however, an ongoing debate, and often spheres deemed important were learnt as much by default as by positive discussion. An example of this was given by the Burns, when they talked about the choice of schools for their elder child. Carol had looked round various schools and felt that Eric should do likewise because, "if he's gonna be any help to his child he should know how they do things in his school." (F) Eric maintained that he was considering the matter, and that he
had amassed information through hearsay. This, however, was not adequate practical proof for Carol, and she was, therefore, strongly critical of Eric's apparent lack of involvement.

(b) Negotiating acceptable parental behaviour in relation to that of the mother

This second main area of "being a father" entailed sustaining belief in involvement through the relationship with the mother. Here paternal behaviour was perceived as (i) supporting the mother in her childrearing activities; (ii) relieving her of practical and psychological pressures when present; and (iii) acting as substitute when she wished to have time away from home and family. The father was very reliant on cues from the mother in this area. His spheres of behaviour were developed very much in the context of the mother's information about herself and the children. The father was vulnerable in his personal evaluations of the everyday family events since he was absent from a great deal of the ongoing childrearing. Therefore, although he might criticise aspects of the information relayed to him, he was unable to challenge its validity, since the mother's account was his prime source. In addition, he could never be certain that he had grasped "the total picture", since, inadvertently or deliberately, the mother's account was bound to be selective. As the transmission of information is essentially an interpretative act, the mother's images and assessment inevitably played a highly influential part in the development of paternal behaviour.

(i) Support in childrearing activities

The different contexts within which maternal and paternal behaviour was developed seemed to affect the overall attitude which

8. See my discussion of this in Chapter Eight.
each spouse took to the other's parental acts. Simplistically, the husbands tended to adopt an "understanding" attitude, whereas the wives were more "critical". This was shown in the many situations where one spouse was unhappy about some aspect of the other's childrearing behaviour. In such a situation it could be seen as constructive and legitimate for the wife, drawing on her wider knowledge, to "advise" her husband on the most appropriate course of action. In some ways the wife pointing out the husband's childrearing "mistakes", and explaining them, was a short cut to passing on knowledge about the child. It was, in fact, often rather difficult for the wife to stand back and allow the husband to learn through his own experience and "make his own mistakes" with the child. This was very interesting, because it implied that when the wife had achieved a certain level of subjectively satisfactory competence in childrearing, it then became more difficult for her to accept others making what were defined as "mistakes" with the child. Barbara Johnson expressed her own awareness of this dilemma as follows, she explained:

"There are one or two areas where we haven't actually agreed, aren't there?" (Ian: 'I suppose there must be."
"I, I'll say 'oh for goodness sake', you know, I might get a bit cross about the way he's handling a situation because I don't agree with it. But it doesn't OFTEN arise, and when it DOES arise, well, I feel I've got NO right because they're HIS kids as well as mine and who am I to say how he's gonna handle the situation?"

During the course of the interviews respondents often related instances where the wives had felt impatient with, or overruled, the husbands' childrearing activities. Husbands, however, usually tended to mute their own criticisms by qualifying them. On occasions when a husband was too overtly critical, the wife tended to counter defensively, and claim as legitimization the
context in which she had to act. A typical example of this was
to counter that the criticism was unjust because the husband was
not subject to pressures of home and children every day of the
week.

Therefore, an important way in which couples sustained
belief in father involvement without disrupting the assumptions
of fairness and equality, was for the husband to adopt a
supportive and understanding attitude to his wife's childrearing
activities. Analytically, another suggested interpretation of
this could be that the husband's awareness of his lack of directly
acquired knowledge led him to be tentative in his criticisms.
Any critical comments were usually couched in an acknowledgement
of the arduousness of the wife's situation, or that the husband's
inferior knowledge might have led him to an incorrect conclusion.
Roy Vaughan said, for example,

"I wouldn't like to do that every day you know,
and so I can understand how she feels when I DO come
in at night you know. It's quite a job for a woman
really, two children. So I wouldn't condemn her at
all, you know, just she maybe gives them a row, but
they must be due or she wouldn't give it." (I)

Thus, images of children's needs and wants were put forward with
the qualification that their practical interpretation had to be
seen in the context of the parent-child relationship. Roy might
believe his children needed "fair" treatment but he acknowledged
that constant interaction with them could undermine this. Ian
Johnson maintained that he was aware of violating this kind of
background supportive involvement at times when he felt Barbara
was being too rough with the children. Even his very frank
comments were, however, presented not as a criticism of her
childrearing methods, but rather as an acknowledgement that she
occasionally gave way to the strains of being tied at home with the children.

At other times husbands supported their wives' childrearing activities, because, even if they felt critical, they were aware of their own relative lack of knowledge. This was well illustrated when the Coulson's related an incident which had occurred during a visit to some friends. They had decided to leave their elder child with the friends whilst they went out for the evening. Their child cried and protested to his father that he did not wish to be left. Against Barry's wishes, Jean insisted that they ignored his protests and went out, maintaining that this was not serious and that the child would be perfectly all right once they had left. Events proved Jean to have "assessed the situation correctly" and Barry commented:

"So, you know, he realized that I was soft, like that, and latched on to it like a rocket. Whereas Jean identified it, and he didn't go to her, because he knew that she would recognize that he was being a bit of a fraud; and I didn't, and it really annoyed me. (Jean laughs.) But, you know, I mean you've got to leave children from time to time er, and they ARE going to be upset. I don't know why, I just felt terribly sorry for him. I felt, to my way of thinking he was desperately upset. I didn't know he was such a good actor. (P) (my underlining)

When jointly faced with a childrearing situation requiring immediate action, it was often impossible for the husband to amass the amount of relevant information which the wife could take-for-granted. The wife was defined as more informed, and therefore more able to make a mutually acceptable, (or more readily legitimated), spontaneous decision. Exceptions to this sometimes occurred when the situation concerned was well known to both parents. In such circumstances the husband's actions had perhaps been accorded some special legitimacy. He was, for example, perceived as being
"more comforting", "more effective", "firmer", or "more on that particular child's wavelength." Most frequently, however, greater legitimacy was accorded to the wife's childrearing decisions and behaviour, with the husband expressing his involvement by acting in a generally supportive capacity.

(ii) Practical and psychological relief

Father involvement was also expressed by relieving the mother of some of the practical and psychological pressures of childrearing when both parents were present. Although, for all respondents, this was an important element in the construction of "being a father", the amount of "practical proof" required to sustain such beliefs varied considerably. For some couples, such relief was little more than an extension of the supportive behaviour; for others, it entailed the father working alongside the mother in a well defined range of activities. The extent to which involvement could be indirectly demonstrated through the relationship with the mother was illustrated by Louise Wilson when she said of the father:

"... at the younger stages of their (children's) lives, they're very much less important, em, except I think that they, em, give the mother a feeling of security. And if the mother is feeling insecure then she can transmit it to the children." (Jt)

For all respondents, beliefs in the underlying assumptions of fairness and equality, and of mutual involvement with the children, were sustained by reference to this sphere of paternal behaviour. To cope with the fluctuations in availability of the father,

9. All respondents mentioned such pressures. Their statements were usually legitimated by a temporal contextual image of the child, i.e. that a child's constant presence was often demanding and stressful.
respondents emphasised the voluntary aspect of his domestic activities, and stressed that "help" was always given when really needed. Carol Burns, for example, commented:

"I think he's very good really, em, he comes in and sometimes he's whacked 'cos he's had a very brain-filled day, which can be much more exhausting than pick and shovels. And er, they (children) just crawl all over him like ants, and he puts up with it, which I think is quite good." (I)

Even at those times, however, when the father was perceived as equally available, emphasis on his voluntary assistance tended to continue. At weekends, for example, couples tended to continue with a similar allocation of practical childrearing tasks to that of during the week. In addition, most families tried to minimise the mundane tasks typical of the weekday domestic routine. The majority of wives said that they tried to make weekends "different" by doing only the most basic chores. Weekends were usually perceived both as a break from routine, and as an opportunity for leisure and relaxation.

The availability of the husband at the weekend was perceived as enabling activities to take place "as a family", (such as visiting), or facilitating activities where it was easier for two parents to 'manage' the children, (such as city shopping expeditions). The presence of the father was the main means by which normal pressures on the mother could be relieved. The husbands tended to be "involved" at weekends, but usually as part of a different range of activities, with relaxation often as an important aim. Voluntarism and "opting in" were still highly relevant. Barry Coulson, for example, said:
"And, em, I mean, if you've got children, that's it, it's non stop work. I mean I participate when I feel like it, but if I feel like burying my head in the newspaper I do, or if I feel like ignoring the disturbances that are going on, then I can do it. Jean sometimes will call upon, em, will say 'can you help me out', or something, and I can do it. And I don't want her to feel that she has to do all the work, I usually help her more at weekends." (I) (my underlining)

As has been discussed, voluntarism in itself was a positive means of sustaining beliefs. The issue of voluntarism, however, became complicated by the fact that many activities required knowledge about when and how they should be done. Here again, the situation of wife as information agent was crucial. Even if husbands assumed a stance of voluntary availability, they could still, in effect, "bop out" of practical involvements by asserting a basic lack of knowledge. Alice Mitchell said:

"Em, something, if it's very obvious that I'm very pressed em, he does it off his own bat; but most things, I mean, like most men he'll walk into a room just littered with toys at 6 o'clock, and say 'is there anything I can do?'." (I)

Being a father was negotiated, therefore, in the context of less specific knowledge compared with that of the mother. In addition, stress was laid on voluntarism as an important means of sustaining belief in father involvement. In the light of these two points it was very interesting that a major way in which fathers "proved" their involvement was by entertaining the children, or simply "keeping them occupied". This was an area of activity which fathers could carry out spontaneously and voluntarily, with the minimum of specific knowledge or consultation with the mother being necessary. It was also concurrently relieving the mother of psychological and practical childrearing pressures.

---

10. This is discussed in Chapter Five, pp.174-176.
The father's practical involvement in childcare was also defined as changing in response to the perceived demands on the mother. (Again note the taken-for-granted assumption that this was cyclical.) The majority of couples said, for example, that after the arrival of the second baby the father tended to become more involved with the practical care of the first child. Colin Duncan provided a very typical explanation of this trend. He said:

"I would say possibly a father would HAVE to do more, you know. Perhaps with the one child he would take turn about because he wanted to. But I would say when the second child came along the father had more to do. He was more OBLIGED to do it, you know, it wasn't a case of just wanting to do it, obviously with the mother involved with the baby." (W/E) (My underlining, note assumption of voluntarism and "opting in").

Those who said this did not happen, usually maintained that it was because he had been already actively caring for the child in a practical way. By and large, however, when the father was present he relieved the mother of the care of the first child, whilst she attended to the baby's needs. Images of children, notably the "fragility of babies", meant that this particular division of childcare was taken-for-granted. Only on very infrequent occasions did the father take over care of the new baby in preference to that of the first child. At such times this was usually, in fact, a "gesture" arising out of a comparative image of the reaction of the first child to the baby. The mother might "give" the first child some specially directed time whilst the father dealt with the baby.

Regardless of the actual amount of practical involvement of the fathers, their being willing and available was, at times, perceived as vital relief for the wives from their constant
childrearing responsibilities. The importance of the mechanisms for sustaining beliefs in this area of expression of father involvement was shown by its occasional violation. During the course of the research several families went through periods where the husbands were either working extremely hard, or were away on business. All made similar comments about the increased strain on the wives which was shown in various ways, when the husbands had to withdraw from their usual activities in home and family.

The following statements illustrate some of the ways in which respondents saw the results of the suspension of husband support. David Russell commented:

"Oh well, when I'm away so much em, it makes you (to Marjorie) increasingly bored with a housewife's existence. (Marjorie: 'Oh yes.') The other day I came home and the atmosphere was pretty frigid." (F)

Helen Moffat said:

"Yes, the children miss seeing their father. They don't say they do but they become a bit difficult in the evenings when they expect he would normally be there (sighs). Er, I feel tired, I feel as if they're never away from me just now, it's the weekends are really terrible." (H/S)

(iii) Being a father as "mother substitute"

A final means of demonstrating involvement through the relationship with the mother was that of being able to deputise for her when she wished to leave the children, or in times of emergency. Again, in order to sustain belief in this sphere of involvement, it was not necessary to establish a regular system of obligation but rather to create a situation of voluntary availability. For various reasons spouses tended to use one
another as babysitters and childminders where possible. When family life was perceived as entailing fairness and equality, and a mutual involvement with the children, it was important to maintain a belief that, just as the father was able to "escape" from domestic responsibilities, so also was the mother. In addition these respondents were dependent primarily on the human resources of their own nuclear unit. None of them relied on any regular help from the wider kinship groups either through choice or through geographical separation. It seemed that friends and neighbours were only used to a limited extent since most of them were similarly restricted by their own childrearing responsibilities. All of these factors resulted in an important element of fatherhood being seen as the ability to substitute for the mother.

Interestingly, however, in order to maintain beliefs in father as mother substitute he needed only to deputise for part of the mother's usual activities. The main requirement was simply to mind the children. Some wives made elaborate arrangements, such as preparing food in advance, in order to assist their husbands with these substitute activities. Even when this was not considered necessary, domestic activities additional to the childminding were usually defined as a welcome extra. Only partial substitution was necessary because the wives, even in their absence, retained overall responsibility and knowledge.

Also, the standards of childminding did not need to be equal to those of the mother for "being a father" to be subjectively

11. These were discussed in Chapter Eight, pp.309-311.
12. These points were elaborated upon in Chapter Eight.
Adequacy of parental behaviour was defined differently if it was carried out by the father. Here then was an implicit acknowledgement that definitions of children's needs were not **factual** but negotiable, and that there were therefore a variety of ways in which they might be satisfied. The Duncans, for example, related a story concerning one occasion when Colin had been left in charge of the children for the day. It was treated simply as an amusing illustration of the different attitudes of "being a father" that Colin had become so absorbed in digging the garden that he had forgotten both to switch on the fire and lights in the house, and also to give the children some tea. A similar belief in the partial substitute activities of the father was illustrated by the Wilsons when they had the following conversation about Nick's childminding abilities. This occurred during their joint interview.

Louise: "As far as the children are concerned I mean, you've done everything with the kiddies, you could look after a child as well as I could."

Nick: (laughs) "Well not quite so well."

Louise: "Oh you'd probably kill them off in the first half hour but, I mean, that would be your own personality problem, you could manage all the sort of necessities." (Jt)

Thus, although "being a father" was perceived as involving deputising for the mother, this activity did not need to be frequent, or of an equivalent standard, in order to be subjectively satisfactory.

---

13. This provides empirical support for a point made by Ater and Deacon that "those involved in family management should recognise the influence of family interpersonal interaction on the standards to be achieved in resource allocation." Ater, C.E. and Deacon, R.E., "Interaction of Family Relationship Qualities and Managerial Components", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1972, pp.257-263. In the present thesis it is argued that the meanings attached to the father's substitute activities are separate from an objective assessment of these activities.
(c) Being a father in relation to the child

Finally, being a father was perceived as entailing a direct relationship with the child. This area was especially problematical since, compared with the mother, the father could invest less time in such activity. This meant that much of the father's direct involvement with the child tended, in any case, to be mediated through the indirect understandings provided by the mother, rather than through his own personal experience. Nevertheless, respondents defined the development of a direct father-child relationship as crucial. Elaborate mechanisms were developed to construct and sustain belief in its reality. It was important that this area of activity was subjectively satisfactory to the spouses since it was an expression of many of their underlying assumptions about family life. Direct father involvement sustained, for example, beliefs about fairness and equality, and about family life as a situation of learning.

In addition, an important aspect of the negotiation of parental behaviour was the ability to put forward subjectively satisfactory understandings of the child and its world. For these respondents to define the father as actively involved in this process, his legitimations of past and intended parental acts had, in part, to be perceived as grounded in his direct experience. The importance of the direct father-child relationship was illustrated by Alice Mitchell when she discussed Roy's non-involvement. This dominated their negotiation of parental behaviour, since Alice was critical, firstly, that she had to carry out almost all of the childrearing herself, and, secondly, that her husband was relatively inept in this sphere. She explained:
"I find em the lack of regularity of the life and em, almost the lack of Roy being there to, to SHARE it very hard." (W/E) and also felt that "If he was with them more, em, I think he would get to handle the children much more tactfully, em, more slickly you know. I mean I didn't know to begin with but you quickly learn how to avoid the big scenes, em, how to distract their attention and so on, em, I'm sure that comes with just being with the children." (I) (my underlining)

Alice attributed some of her own, and the children's, current problems to this lack of direct involvement, and expressed many worries about the children's future development if this "inadequate" paternal behaviour continued.

This, then, was an area of activity which was accorded great importance, but was also perhaps the most problematical in terms of "practical proof". To a certain extent respondents sustained their beliefs by maintaining that the fathers valued the direct relationship with the child, and derived pleasure from it. The implication was always that, in the future or given more time, a greater involvement would be desired. Statements such as the following from Shirley Jackson occurred frequently. She said of "being a father":

"I think, em, loving, really very much the same as what a mother involves. Er, loving your children, playing with them, spending time with them. I think Edward would like to be able to spend MORE time with the children, but unfortunately he isn't in, em you know, he isn't sort of nine to five." (I)

Only two fathers, however, actually claimed that they would like to be at home all day with the children. Even they subsequently qualified such statements by admitting that, like their wives, they found that, in fact, prolonged periods of direct involvement were a strain. Implicit in this view was the image of the child as demanding and potentially oppressive.14 Both

mothers and fathers put forward many statements indicating that such images of children were affected by the amount of time one had to spend with them. The images were thus contextual. John Clark, for example, said:

"I would like to be at home during the day to see the children when they're doing things. When I come home they're getting tired, they're just going to have their tea and off to bed so that (pause). Although, at the weekends (laughs) I often think I've had enough of them and I'm glad to get back to work again." (I)

Again, the importance of sustaining the belief that being a father involved enjoying a direct relationship with the child was shown by its violation. If, during an interview, husbands denied valuing such involvement there were immediate reactions from the wives. According to Alan Hemingway, other people outside of the family often reacted similarly. He was unusual amongst the respondents in that he openly admitted a dislike of the extent of his direct involvement with his children. He described these reactions as follows:

"... the effect of having had two children em, for the greater part of our married life makes me LONG now for a period without any more, particularly at that age. Em, because I used to say this so often you know, to people who were shocked, you know, they would say, 'isn't it lovely having children?' and I'd say 'no it's not', because I don't enjoy it as an exercise. And people of course take this the wrong way: they think I don't like the kids, which is a different thing altogether, of course I do. But the physical act of having the children about, and generally existing with them about, and em doing the things that they'd love to do, I do not enjoy." (I)

Occasionally, during the course of the interviews, some of the other husbands commented, for example, that they only liked being with the children for short periods; that they often found their demands oppressive; or that they quickly became bored with entertaining them. Typically, their wives countered such
statements by emphasising how well father and child got on with each other, and by reminding them of pleasurable times spent together. Such comments and reactions are treated here as an integral part of the process of negotiating paternal behaviour. Although varying actions might result from such an exchange, they were all directed at sustaining belief in the value of a direct father-child relationship. Some wives responded by reiterating that this was a vital aspect of "being a father"; that his reactions were no different from her own; and that this was an area of activity which must be shared. Other wives responded by limiting the extent of direct involvement so as to maximise the positive value which the father might then attach to the relationship, and so encourage his continued participation. The importance of these illustrations lies not in the variation itself, but in the fact that the different responses were aiming to sustain similar meanings behind parental behaviour.

When the development of a direct relationship with the child was defined as a crucial part of "being a father", the amount of time available for paternal activity required a heightened significance. The father had the problem of making time to "get to know" the child, and this did not apply in the same way to the mother. As the mother was, at this stage, more constantly available to the child, she was perceived as being able to "get to know" him/her through the whole variety of everyday interactions. The father, on the other hand, had more deliberately to set time aside, or organise his other commitments, in order to sustain belief that he was achieving this direct knowledge. In addition, underlying assumptions that parenthood was a process of learning, and images that children needed consistency and should be "understood",
implied that time had to be regularly "made" for them. Also, the context of his relationship with the child was different from that of the mother, since she often played a significant part in organising the times when father and child could be available to one another. All of these elements behind the father's time with the child resulted in mechanisms to sustain belief that he frequently and actively "spent" some of it on him/her.

A most significant example of a mechanism to sustain this belief was put forward by almost all of the respondents. This was the situation of the father being left in total charge of the children and household whilst the mother went out. Here a variety of beliefs were in fact being sustained concurrently. First of all, this was "practical proof" of his involvement and such an act supported the validity of the important coping mechanism, voluntarism. Secondly, the husband was seen to be "spending time" directly with the children. In these circumstances he had to learn about them, and how to deal with them, directly through his own experience. Such experience affected the negotiation processes, since it enabled fathers to form direct images with which they might support or challenge the mothers' interpretations. Dianne Hemingway felt that, through having been left in total charge, Alan had had practical experience of just how demanding their children could be. She said:

"The moment that everything's untidy, em, he doesn't complain because he knows what it's like himself. You know, if HE'S had the children all morning and I've been out shopping, I'll come back and he'll say 'I haven't done anything at all, I've just looked after them.'" (I)

This example provided a further illustration of the mother exerting considerable influence over the development of the father's behaviour. Paradoxically this occurred through her
virtually abdicating her own perceived "responsibility". This meant that, in her absence, the father had an opportunity to learn his parental behaviour totally through direct, unmediated experience.

The significance of the mother's influence was further emphasised when she chose not to exert it. This was very much the exception in the sample, and applied fully to only one couple. In two cases, however, the husbands were left totally in control only very infrequently. Kathy Hislop tended to leave practically no childcare to Patrick. In addition, she seldom went out on her own, or asked him to "substitute". She felt that children were the mother's responsibility, and were of little interest to men. Consequently, Patrick was defined not only as inept at practical childcare, but also as being frequently unable to really "understand" the children. This was especially the case in the first interview when Kathy said:

"So I automatically did everything (with the babies). I think, in a way, Patrick maybe missed out a bit when the children were babies. I think if I had let him do a bit more he would have seen a bit more what had to be done, as far as looking after the children goes." (I)

Interestingly, by the time of the final interview she had, occasionally, left the children with Patrick. Apparently, through their experience of this direct involvement, she had revised her images of his capabilities. She said:

"More and more now, though, I realise that he's quite capable of looking after them on his own (laughs). And at night time, if I'm going out, then I WILL leave them to be put to bed after I'm gone." (F)

15. Patrick was, however, very much involved on the 'theoretical' level. The Hislops maintained that their children were a predominant topic of conversation in their lives. In their individual interviews they put forward very similar images of the children. This I take to be evidence that Patrick was kept very much "in touch" by Kathy.
It seemed, from respondents' accounts, that the fact that the father had less time with the children, than did the mother, in itself affected their images of one another. The mother also played a part in this process since, in his absence, she transmitted images of the father to the child. Personality variables aside, it seemed that the intermittent presence of the father led to the child reacting differently to him compared with the mother. The example has already been given of the child continuing to turn to the mother for comfort and certain kinds of assistance, even when the father was also present. On the other hand, many respondents felt that the intermittent presence of the father could lead to his being perceived by the child as a "refreshment" from the mother. Several of them claimed, for example, that the elder child in particular tended to prefer the father's company when both parents were present. Jean Coulson's comment was typical of at least half of the respondents. She said of her elder son:

"If we're both here he tends to go for Barry (husband). But I think that's because I'm here all the time and it's great to have Dad at home sort of thing." (I)

It is also possible to interpret such statements as further mechanisms for sustaining beliefs in father involvement. The success of a direct relationship could be claimed to be undeniably "proven" when the child chose to spend time with the father!

Even if respondents did not claim a special personal relationship between father and child, they still defined his intermittent presence as, per se, enabling a different relationship, compared to that with the mother. The fact that the father was regularly able to approach the relationship afresh, and unencumbered by the

cumulative effects of constant interactions, established him as different from the mother. Whether couples maintained that he was seen by the child as, for example, more lenient or more strict, varied with the particular relationship. Elizabeth Vaughan said to her husband:

"You have more time to sit down with them and play with them and, sort of comfort them more than I do (Roy: 'Do I?') because, well you come home and you've got more patience and, you can give them sympathy." (Jt)

(My underlining. The Vaughans here are negotiating their image of how the children see Roy.)

Alan Hemingway, however, gave this explanation for his being able than Dianne to get the children to comply with his wishes. He said:

"I think, they see less of me and what they do, see of me tends to be fairly strict and, I'm a bit more determined than Dianne really to get my own way." (F)

Thus, although descriptions of the differences were family specific, respondents tended to relate these special mutual reactions of father and child to the general point that their interactions were intermittent compared with those of the mother.

This point had many ramifications affecting the negotiation of parental behaviour between the spouses. As discussed earlier, the father was very reliant on the mother's understandings of the child since he was frequently unable to challenge her direct experience. Occasionally, however, a father was presented with aspects of the child which, intuitively, he found difficult to accept, since he had not himself directly experienced them.

Nick Wilson, for example, found it hard to accept that his younger daughter was especially difficult to handle, since he had never witnessed her having a temper tantrum. These tantrums usually took place when Louise was shopping locally, and Nick was never
present. Although he "believed" Louise's accounts, he felt unable to offer any constructive suggestions since he had never experienced the situation. In fact, when such perceived gaps in the father's understanding were mentioned by respondents, it was usually because the mother had found the situations to be extremely problematical. The father, however, had either challenged the mother's ability to handle it, or had simply been defined as not sufficiently sympathetic. Derek Rankin, for example, had not fully appreciated the extent to which his first child had cried, since this had occurred primarily during the day when he was at work. Maureen felt that Derek had been unable realistically to understand both her worries about the baby, and the strain which she felt, since he had not been directly involved. Also, different experience of the child sometimes led to disagreement as to how easy or difficult he/she was to deal with. During the negotiation process such disagreements were frequently related to the different amounts of direct involvement of father and mother. Mary Clark claimed, for example:

"He (John) doesn't see Louise as as naughty or as bad as I do. But then he only sees her 5 to 6.30 every night, and on holiday he did say 'Hmm yes, she CAN be a problem'." (Here the Clarks were negotiating the image of exactly how difficult their daughter was.)

All of the factors discussed in this section can be related to the most frequently stressed aspect of being a father in relation to the child. This was the definition of the father as a source of fun and pleasure. Here the father was defined as providing enjoyment for the child, both in his own right, and as a complement to the more practical involvement of the mother. Helen Moffat argued, for example:
"I think mothers and fathers do have different roles, and I think fathers are much more fun, and I think you get as much fun probably being a father. I think you get less of the draggy things like trailing them to the dentist when they don't want to go, you know, you can take them to the swings. And I think fathers SHOULD be fun, I think they should be light relief. But I think, because he's such fun and he's so precious, I think what he does, actually DOES with the children makes more impression." (I)

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this was a sphere of activity in which the father could most easily and regularly provide practical proof of his direct involvement with the child. It was also one means of sustaining beliefs in fairness and equality in the face of the uneven availability of each spouse. The appearance of the father was defined as relieving the routine, and the constancy of interaction, for both mother and child. His "non work" time usually coincided with evenings and weekends, during which the wife was also trying to organise "non-work" periods for herself. There was, therefore, a comparatively greater emphasis on non-routine tasks and activities in which the father could take part. The different context in which paternal activity usually took place tended to enhance the "pleasure" aspects of "being a father".

The intermittent presence of the father also facilitated the construction and maintenance of belief in father as fun and pleasure. Although it could also be used to add emphasis to his position as disciplinarian, the father's intermittency was most frequently used to establish a belief in the positive affective involvement between himself and the child. This process was perceived by respondents as a mutual definitional situation in which non-constant presence could be used as an advantage. Firstly, it meant that the father was potentially able to have
a different perspective on the children from that of the mother.

Ben Pringle commented:

"I would have said that I have enjoyed them more than Sheila has, perhaps because I haven't been here all the time you know, being at work. And I wouldn't really say that they were a drudge, I regret that Sheila finds them that, but it's because she tries to be too good to them, you know." (I)

Secondly, the father's actions were seen by respondents as being somehow defined differently by the child, since they were less frequent and less taken-for-granted than those of the mother. Such meanings were held to affect the father-child relationship, although varying results were described. Some respondents felt, for example, that one pleasurable gesture from the father, such as telling a story was, so to speak, more "savouré" by the child. Others felt that the child made many more demands on the father than the mother when he was thus defined as a temporary source of pleasure. This long quotation from Martin Chapman provides excellent illustration of many of these points. He said:

"I wouldn't say that em, the mother is seen so much as a source of pleasure as the father is. I think the, er, from the child's point of view, they don't see the father so much as the mother. And generally when the father comes home from work I'm quite pleased to see them, em, so he's seen more as a pleasure source than the mother is. So that, although the reason that he's not there all day, his authority is generally accepted because they get so much pleasure from the father that when he says 'no', they know that it means no. They don't take so much pleasure from the mother in the respect that they're in closer contact with her all the time. And when the mother buys them a bag of sweets, it's not so much pleasure as when the father buys them a bag of sweets." (I)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described some of the important features of being a father, as presented by respondents. They all maintained that an important element of fatherhood was that he should be "involved"
with his children. I have argued that sustaining this belief in
"involvement" was problematical for respondents, in part, because the
father had much less time available for the children than did the
mother. I analysed three different levels of "involvement": an
administrative interest in home and family matters, a supportive
relationship with the mother, and a direct relationship with the
children themselves. With reference to these levels, each family
negotiated the kinds of practical "proof" required of the father, which
they felt to be appropriate to their own particular situation.

This discussion of being a father brings my analysis of parenthood
to a close. In the final chapter I shall summarise the thesis and
consider some of its implications.
CHAPTER TEN

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

A study of this nature does not lend itself to a final chapter involving "conclusions", in the quantitative sense of proven facts which should now be tested and replicated. I do not, therefore, intend to make vast claims as to the generalisability of my account. Rather, the work must be evaluated in its own terms, as an in depth exploratory study of a small number of middle class families. I do feel, however, that it allows me to make comments comparing aspects of my findings with those of other researchers. Also, that I can suggest further areas of study which might build on some of the themes in this work.

1. Summary

This research on parenthood was based on an interactionist approach to studying families. I hoped that the use of such an approach would be profitable in two main ways. Firstly, that it would enable me to examine how the respondents themselves viewed the various family roles. These, I felt, must be treated as problematical, and seen as topics for investigation in their own right. Secondly, that it would facilitate an interpretation of family life as a "unity of interacting personalities."\(^1\) Thus, the definitional and interactional elements involved in the development of family behaviour might be studied.

The analysis was based on a piece of qualitative empirical research. Twenty two couples, each with two children, were interviewed five times over a period of fifteen months. The method employed was that of the

---

minimally structured interview. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Grounded analysis was conducted throughout the period of empirical study. Themes and issues which emerged in the early stages were incorporated into the later research programme.

Analysis of respondents' accounts indicated that they adhered to similar underlying assumptions about family life, although the practical interpretations of these in everyday life varied. With reference to parental behaviour in particular, such assumptions provided sets of benchmarks amidst a plethora of uncertainties.

Firstly, respondents emphasised that marriage and parenthood were situations of "learning". This assumption was illustrated by their views that there was no realistic prior preparation for parenthood. Respondents felt that the most subjectively satisfactory way to discover how to be a parent was through direct experience involving "trial and error", even though this had perceived drawbacks.

Two important themes of the thesis had their roots in this underlying assumption about family life as a learning situation.

(i) It was suggested that respondents perceived parenthood as a problematical situation, in which they faced the continuous challenge of "making sense" of the child and its world.

(ii) This process of image formation was accorded greatest legitimacy by respondents where it had developed out of a direct involvement with the child. Thus, since at this stage the mother was the more continuously involved parent, her interpretative activity played an important part in the construction of paternal behaviour.

Secondly, respondents saw family behaviour as being life-cyclically oriented. Their perceptions and interpretations of these stages
provided further reference points for their mutually-held realities. This was essentially a process of attaching social meanings to time and temporal changes. As with the other underlying assumptions, the life-cycle beliefs were comprehended as vague concepts. They therefore allowed considerable leeway in how they were realised in everyday life. Respondents contrasted, for instance, the perceived permanence of the marital situation with the image of the child as only a temporary full-time visitor to his/her parents' lives. They also interpreted their own, and their child's behaviour, in terms of its appropriateness to the life-cycle stages, as they perceived them. They saw their current stage of the family life-cycle as affected by the addition of children in various ways. Material, physical and social-psychological effects were most frequently mentioned.

The final underlying assumption implicit in their accounts was that family life was a shared reality. Respondents defined themselves as being part of a family unit, and attributed beneficial and disadvantageous meanings to this. Given that behaviour occurred with implicit reference to the presence and interests of the other group members, respondents stressed that the mutually-held realities should be "fairly" negotiated. The actual definitions of "fairness" varied within the sample. Analytically, the important factors were the ways in which beliefs in fairness were created, negotiated and seen to be sustained by "practical proof" within each family group. Communication processes played a crucial part in this; and respondents stressed that there should be open communication within the group. That they also perceived their communication processes to be inadequate, or impaired, was discussed more fully later in the thesis.
I argued that these assumptions provided a broad framework for the mutually-held reality of family life. On an everyday level, however, respondents were engaged in continuous practical interpretations of these meanings. I treated the development of parental behaviour as emerging from the negotiating processes within the group. These processes were characterised by the use of legitimations and legitimating tactics. Negotiation was seen as a process of reassurance that the right prescriptions (or here, interpretations) were being applied. Legitimations operated to justify both previous and intended actions. Examples of the use of legitimations were given. In particular the way that images of children were used to justify parental behaviour was illustrated. This was an evaluative, selective and interactive process.

Legitimating parental behaviour also involved continuous choices about the kinds of knowledge which made subjective sense to each spouse. Again, the considerable legitimacy attached to knowledge derived from personal experience was illustrated. "Common sense" knowledge was felt to be closer to this than was "scientific" knowledge. However, the subjective satisfaction of a legitimation could fluctuate and vary through time. Thus, the process of legitimating parental behaviour was also pragmatic and tactical. This was exemplified in the use of "explanatory incidents", where one experience or incident was regarded as sufficient evidence on which to base a whole set of beliefs about appropriate behaviour.

The process of constructing the mutually-held reality of parenthood involved continuous possibilities of conflict and misunderstanding. Often, situations developed which were too problematical, too changeable, or too much the subject of basic disagreement, to accommodate behaviour
which could be defined as adequately legitimated. Therefore, a more pragmatic set of supportive mechanisms also operated. These I called "coping mechanisms".

Two main levels of coping mechanisms were described and illustrated. The first related to those tensions and dilemmas which were perceived by respondents as potentially amenable to compromise or change. The second set of coping mechanisms pertained to problematical issues about which respondents felt that they could do little. They were used, in effect, simply to make the issues feel bearable.

The discussion, to this point in the thesis, involved an analytical examination of how respondents negotiated and sustained belief in their mutually-held realities of parenthood. I then focussed, in greater detail, on some of the crucial meanings being negotiated. Images of children were suggested as being especially important. These were divided analytically into "abstract" and "grounded" categories. "Abstract" images of children were derived essentially from the individual's social stock of knowledge. "Grounded" images were developed out of the parent's ongoing biographical experience. Both sets of images were sustained through negotiation processes between family members.

I described three main categories of "abstract" images. Firstly, respondents held general images of children and childhood. Of particular importance for this thesis was their belief that children should be "understood". Secondly, they adhered to various beliefs concerning children's needs and wants. I divided these into two sections: psychological and physiological. Thirdly, respondents developed "projected" images. These involved respondents in anticipating their children's future characters, their own future relationships with their children, and the children's existences in a future society, independently of their parents.
My discussion of "grounded" images was presented with the reservation that there was a continuous interplay between such ongoing interpretations of the child and the "abstract" images previously described. Firstly, I looked at respondents' comparative images of their children. I suggested that the way in which they "made sense" of their child and its behaviour was affected by whether or not he she was first or second born. This was because, by the time their second child was born they had acquired a fund of direct experience with the first, on which to draw. Respondents also felt that the second child was less of a novelty, and that this also affected their behaviour towards him/her. Finally, comparative images of each of the two children were formed by seeing the behaviour of the one within the context of the other.

Secondly, I examined respondents' contextual images of their children. These involved "making sense" of the child by locating him/her in (i) social, (ii) temporal and (iii) genealogical contexts. These may be briefly summarised as follows:

(i) Respondents developed understandings of the child by placing him/her and his/her behaviour in the context of what could be seen as overlapping sets of social situations: the particular social situation immediately involved, the family situation, and the wider social context.

(ii) They also located the child and its behaviour in the context of previous events. Important elements in this process were the social definitions of "time", and the use of the notions of phase and stage.

(iii) Finally, respondents "made sense" of their child by placing him/her in the context of their own personalities and lives.
After examining in detail the respondents' images of children, I turned to their beliefs and assumptions about "being a mother", and "being a father". The special features of being a mother were separated into three analytical categories: context, knowledge, and responsibility and availability. Firstly, I argued that the mother developed her parental behaviour in a different subjective context from that of the father. At this stage she was in the front line in the ongoing child-rearing activities; and her greater time commitment resulted in a more direct involvement with the child. Secondly, I suggested that respondents viewed the mother as having a more extensive knowledge of home and family than did the father. On the one hand, this knowledge implied influence and, on the other, responsibility. Thus, thirdly, being a mother was characterised at this stage by her taking the greater share of the direct parental responsibilities of understanding the child, and administering its needs. I argued that the mother's position of overall responsibility and constant availability was a taken-for-granted assumption behind the development of mutual parental behaviour.

I saw the construction of paternal behaviour as a highly problematical exercise. Basically, this was because it was more difficult for respondents to sustain belief in their much valued precept of the father's having a direct involvement with the child. Respondents' accounts indicated that father involvement was claimed at three levels: his general administrative involvement, his relationship with his wife, and his direct relationship with the child.

Firstly, the widest level of claimed involvement was the administration of general domestic and family matters. This was a very broad sphere of activity and could be sustained, at times, by a
minimum of practical "proof". For example, father involvement at
this level could be demonstrated simply by his being willing to talk
about the children, and discuss plans for them, with his wife.
Secondly, paternal behaviour was negotiated in terms of the husband's
relationship with his wife. Here, practical "proof" of involvement
was given (a) by providing support in childrearing activities, (b)
by relieving the mother of the practical and psychological pressures
of childrearing, and (c) by acting as a "mother substitute". Thirdly,
respondents defined being a father as entailing a direct relationship
with the child. This was a particularly problematical area because,
compared with the mother, the father had less available time in which
to demonstrate practical "proof". I examined several of the
mechanisms which were developed to construct and sustain belief in
the father's direct relationship with his child.

It is important to note that, in order for respondents to sustain
belief in these various levels of father involvement, it was not
perceived by them as necessary for him to participate fully or
constantly. Rather, it was a matter of each couple negotiating the
kind of practical "proof" which they found to be subjectively satisfactory.
This was achieved by the father's participating sufficiently regularly
in those particular spheres which spouses had identified as being
relevant to their own family situation.

2. Implications

This thesis has theoretical and empirical implications which
are, I feel, related. The kind of methodological approach which I
adopted was as a consequence of my favouring an interactionist
perspective. Following on from this, the empirical contributions of
my work stem largely from an appreciation of some of the ways in which
family behaviour, and particularly parenthood, was a mutually constructed and sustained reality.

My use of an interactionist perspective has had two main advantages. Firstly, it has allowed me to move away from the classic role-theory approach, which has been so dominant in British family sociology. Secondly, it has helped me to look critically at some of the beliefs and assumptions behind family life, which seem to have considerable implications for the parental behaviour actually developed.

The role-theory approach has, I feel, paid insufficient attention to how individuals perceive and socially construct their family lives. I have attempted, throughout the thesis, to emphasise the essential mutuality of the development of parental behaviour. Thus, although undoubtedly individuals will hold and express beliefs independently of their spouses and children, the dynamic of family life lies, surely, in how they exchange, modify and challenge such beliefs in everyday interaction.

The adoption of an interactionist approach facilitates, virtually by definition, the study of family processes. For example, using the role-theory approach, "expectations" brought to marriage and parenthood by the spouses have often been examined, and their implications for the resultant role behaviour discussed. There has, however, been little concern with how couples subsequently create and sustain ongoing "expectations" about their mutually-held realities; with how they perceive and communicate these; and with how they cope with the contradictions and dilemmas integral to the process. Critics have, for instance, stood the study of divorce on its head, and asked, "Why do people stay married?" It is less usual, and perhaps more constructive, to ask, "How do people stay married?"
I have also tried to look at actions in terms of the meanings which they embodied for other family members. I see such an approach as influenced by the kind of criticism expressed by Herbert Blumer concerning "variable analysis". This, he said, had left out the process of interpretation or definition that goes on in human groups. Following this, I was not concerned simply to assess, for example, the objective contribution made by the father to the family workload. Rather, I was interested in respondents' interpretation of his activities. Thus, for instance, my respondents tended to claim that the husband made less objective contribution to household chores following the arrival of children. (Or rather, in my terminology, it became less important to them to sustain belief in a joint involvement in these spheres.) Instead, respondents saw it as more important for the husband to spend available time doing things with, or for, the children, thus sustaining the belief in the direct involvement of the father. Also, the frequency, standard and reliability of the husband's contributions to domestic matters were evaluated differently from those of the wife. For his contributions to be perceived as satisfactory, the couples negotiated particular arrangements which allowed them to sustain beliefs that, for example, the husband would do things voluntarily, and that he could cope if necessary.

Moving on to a consideration of some of the empirical contributions of the thesis, I think my analysis of respondents' accounts allows me to comment on five topics in particular. These are (a) the position of the woman, (b) the social construction of paternal behaviour, (c) the importance of the effects of children, (d) the development of

---

middle class parental behaviour and (e) the question of the egalitarian marriage.

(e) The position of the woman

My study was carried out with a group of intelligent, educated and often well qualified women. Most of them had active plans for returning to some form of paid employment after the children were at school, and some of them returned to work during the fieldwork period. Only a very small minority seemed to have embraced domestication per se as the main focus of their lives for an indefinite period. Nevertheless, all of them had given up their jobs, if only temporarily, after the births of the children. In addition, their future work plans were being thought out in terms of arrangements which could accommodate their ongoing childcare responsibilities. Men might be "involved" in taking a share of these responsibilities, but their work plans would not be fundamentally affected. Thus, my evidence supports the findings of several researchers that the woman continues to adopt the principal responsibility for childcare and organisation of surrogate childcare.3

This, it would seem to me, is one of the major problems facing those who would wish radically to alter the position of women in modern society. As Joan Huber pointed out, "only women can have babies, but the fact that women are also expected to rear them is a man-made decision."4 I make no attempt here


to evaluate or analyse how this situation has come about. My analysis has, however, allowed me to describe some of the practical reasonings of the actors involved in its perpetuation. It is perhaps these basic assumptions and interpretations which operate against fundamental change in the current arrangements for bringing up children in our society.

I do not feel that this situation is being perpetuated simply by the lack of alternative childcare facilities, although this must play some part. I suspect that, even if these alternatives had become readily available, most of my respondents would have used them only as an aid and not as a total substitute. Their images of children's needs and wants were perhaps the chief impediment to radical change. Respondents believed that children should be "understood", and that parenthood should involve the ongoing challenge of making sense of their child. They all felt that one of the parents should stay at home with the child in its early years. This was perceived as a vital way of satisfying the child's perceived needs for love and affection, consistency, security, and stability. Respondents did not even consider full time childcare substitutes. (The comment of one respondent seemed to reflect the overall view, he said, "if they're gonna have kinks they may as well be our kinks"). Each couple claimed that, in their case, (whether they felt this to be "unfortunate" or not), the woman had been the obvious choice, in part because of her lesser earning potential. I say "choice", but I suspect that this reflects respondents' ex-post-facto justifications, rather than this having been anything other than taken-for-granted at the time of decision.
No matter what one might feel about respondents' interpretations of their situation, the fact remains that the woman rapidly became involved in an ongoing direct learning situation with the child. This seemed to lay the basis for subsequent decisions. Her situation was perceived as providing the most subjectively satisfactory way of developing valid understandings of the child. She was also defined as being more directly knowledgeable about other aspects of the child's world. These images formed the basis of the mother's overall responsibility for the everyday administration of the child. They were supported by further images that the child itself came to rely upon, and define, the mother in a different way from the father.

Researchers have often taken the woman at home with small children to be relatively powerless compared with the man, and compared with her own position at other points in the life-cycle. Thus Blood and Wolfe stated that "Having a young child creates needs for the wife which lead her to depend more on her husband for help, financial support and making decisions." Such a view stemmed essentially from their study of decisions per se, rather than decision making processes. This approach also tended to treat the power to influence family decisions as somehow accruing from experience in, and prestige derived from, the wider occupational world.

5. Blood, R.O. Jnr., and Wolfe, D.M., op. cit., 1960, p.42. (Note also that the tone of this quotation definitely implies that the women rear the children, and the husbands "help", rather than regarding husbands and wives as engaged in a shared set of parental responsibilities.)
My study seems to offer a somewhat different view of power in the middle class family at this stage of the life-cycle. Respondents attached considerable legitimacy in family matters to knowledge derived from direct experience. The women in my sample were much more directly involved in home and family matters than were their husbands. Particularly in the sphere of parental decisions, they therefore exercised considerable overt power. In addition, the covert power of the woman has been neglected in previous research. As regards my own sample, I have expressed this in terms of wives acting as "information agents" for their husbands. Thus, the woman can be seen as exercising continuous indirect power, because she has the knowledge which provides much of the framework for their mutually-held reality of family life. Through this influence over the structuring of contexts within which decisions take place, the women at home with small children must be seen to be far from the "powerless dependent variable" as which she has often been presented.

(b) The social construction of paternal behaviour

In this thesis I emphasised the problematical features of fatherhood and treated paternal behaviour as a reality which was socially constructed within the family group. I suggested that the couples were engaged in sustaining beliefs that the father was "involved" with the children and, most importantly, that this had to be "proved" to be a direct involvement.

Although they did not approach fatherhood from this kind of interactionist perspective, some other researchers seem to have reached rather similar conclusions. Leo Bertemeier, for example, observed that when the child was very small paternal behaviour
might be carried out principally through the father's relationship with the mother. My own respondents certainly took this to be an important component of "being a father". Thus the father could be seen to "prove" his involvement by relieving his wife of the psychological and physical pressures of looking after children. Karen Geiken looked at expectations concerning husband/wife responsibilities in the home, and, in particular, at three categories of family responsibilities: childcare tasks, housekeeping tasks and authority patterns. She found that, usually, the more "mental" the task, the greater was the extent of sharing which took place between husband and wife. This conclusion has some relevance for my discussion of father involvement in general childcare. Communicating about the children, and discussing the administration of their problems, was taken by my respondents to be "practical proof" of father involvement. Such "mental" sharing was considerably emphasised in their accounts as, I am sure, it also was by Geiken's respondents. This, I suggest, was one of the important ways in which respondents sustained belief that parenthood was a shared reality.

In their most recent book, the Rapoports and their colleagues made several important points about fatherhood which are relevant to this thesis. They based their discussion of "Fathers, Mothers and Others" on a "selective review of the state of knowledge of the needs of parents." From this they concluded

that the "conventional model" of the conjugal family was often at variance with the experiential world of parents as people; and they suggested some of the new directions in which they saw parenthood as developing.

One of the trends which they suggested as perhaps emerging was the shift of fatherhood from a peripheral to a more central position in the existence of both the individual and his family. However, they qualified this suggestion by pointing out that:

"Many fathers do not wish to share the load and are not convinced that it is essential for them to do so. Many writers and sociologists have put forward their accounts and analyses on the basis of an assumption that most fathers will not be either able to change or willing to" 10

The Rapoports' concept of "active" fathering is similar to the arguments in this thesis about "direct involvement" of the father. On the basis of my analysis I would suggest that, whilst it was important to my respondents to sustain belief in father "involvement", this was, in practice, "proved" less by an objectively equal sharing of tasks and responsibilities, than by the strategic use of activities and gestures. There were, for example, different levels of childcare activities which respondents claimed to be "proof" of father "involvement". Some of these entailed a much greater active involvement with the children than did others. Also, it seemed that the occasional proof of willingness or ability to carry out childcare tasks was sufficient for respondents to sustain belief in the existence of "active" fathering. In addition, strategic importance was attached to particular practical activities, such as bathing the child or entertaining him/her.

All of these observations lead me to suggest that the everyday behaviour of my respondents involved coping mechanisms which indicated that, in fact, the "peripheral" father situation still persisted. Although these fathers might have been more involved with the practical care of their children than were those of previous generations, my analysis suggests that equal parenthood was far from being achieved. Of course, structural factors play their part in the perpetuation of the "peripheral" father; and I agree with the Rapoports that social changes, for example in more flexible occupational arrangements and alternative childcare facilities, would be necessary if "active" fathering were to be positively encouraged.11

The Rapoorts also felt, however, that there were much more subtle hindrances, in the sphere of social attitudes, to changes in paternal behaviour. They commented that:

"The myths of motherhood and the biological base for the domestic division of labour may have to recede further before fathering is actively sanctioned by society."12

My work indicated that the mother continued to assume a greater direct everyday responsibility for the children than did the father. Additionally, the father's care of the child was, in fact, evaluated differently from that of the mother by the family members themselves. My analysis, therefore, leads me to sympathise with Joan Huber's recent assessment of the situation,

11. See their arguments in full in "New Directions in Parenting", ibid, Chapter 9.
she said:

"One basic theme pervades feminist literature: women are kept in their place by their responsibility for childcare and domestic work. This proposition implies that the problem is not only women's invisibility in market and political institutions but also men's invisibility in the home. Many men still see only one side of the problem: de-segregating the world of work, hard as that may be. The other side may be even harder: bringing men back in - to the kitchen, to the bathroom when it is time to scour the kiddies, and to the utility room which contains a fancy many-dialed machine that many men have not mastered. The most intractable issue is childcare - a problem of equality in parental responsibility that has hardly been addressed."

(c) The Importance of Effects of Children

The influence of images of children on parental behaviour has been stressed in this thesis. The degree of emphasis which I have given to this aspect arose directly out of the content of my respondents' accounts of parenthood. I have also stressed this particular element in order to provide some balance to the parent-effect model, which has so dominated studies in this area. Future researchers might now direct themselves to a more complex analysis of how the various factors involved in developing parental behaviour are perceived and evaluated by the actors themselves.

Some of my findings can, however, be related to the scattered references to perceptions of children in the existing literature. Certainly some of the Newson's comments seem directly relevant to my analysis. They commented, for example, on the fact that the way the mother interpreted an item of the child's behaviour

was the main factor behind her response. Thus, as in my sample, exactly the same kind of behaviour at table was being treated differently by various respondents. To quote the Newsoms:
"... the four year old's capacity for behaving in any particular manner is in practice of lesser importance than his mother's expectations about such behaviour." 14

Many researchers have related such expectations to social class variations. Martin and Clark, for instance, found that the definition of appropriate ten year old behaviour was different in the middle class than it was in the working class. 15 My own analysis, however, often revealed almost polar variations within a sample of similar socio-economic position. I would suggest, therefore, that much more detailed descriptive study is necessary of the everyday components of these "expectations". "Images of children" could be one of these components. Much more attention must, however, be devoted to the social construction of meanings (and "expectations") within the family group. There is, for example, scope for study of the range of practical interpretations concerning the kinds of behaviour which are defined by actors as "fulfilling" these "expectations". In my analytical terminology this could be seen as analogous to the kinds of behaviour which were taken to constitute "practical proof" that underlying assumptions were being upheld.

In their analysis of the assumptions about parenting implicit in the work of various experts/advisers, the Rapoports have also

highlighted the importance of ideas about children. 16

Interestingly, several of the assumptions which they examined were similar to those of my respondents. As the Rapoports themselves commented, debates amongst the various scholars involve issues which are often "sophisticated expressions of many folk issues of the day." 17 Thus, experts have also stressed that, for example, care of children is not only physical but also psychological. They have pointed out that a neglect of a child's emotional requirements could be dangerous, as irreversible damage might result. 18 More recently, the "learning" aspects of childrearing have been stressed by experts. 19 The Rapoorts concluded that such opinion has, until recently, placed the child's needs as paramount, with a concomitant neglect of the parents' needs, and, in particular, those of the mother.

Whilst images of children are constantly found to be implicit in works on parenthood, seldom have they been explicitly addressed by a researcher. Lois Meek Stolz did look at her respondents' ideas about the behaviour, characteristics, and

17. Ibid, p.33.
18. The Rapoorts noted, for example, that some "babybooks" have changed their practical directives because of a shift, from viewing the baby as potentially manipulative, to seeing him/her as having needs for attention, which should be gratified. Ibid, p.47. This is not far removed from my respondents' beliefs about the importance of spending time with one's child. See Chapter Six, pp.263-264.
interactive effects of children. I suspect, though, that since she devoted relatively few pages to these topics, the findings were probably incidental to the main "influences on parental behaviour", which had already been conceptualised and incorporated into the research design. Nevertheless, some of her findings were similar to my own. Her discussion of parents' responses to their children's behaviour, however, blurred the fact that this is often the end product of negotiated interpretations. Also, arguably, her methodology prevented her from appreciating the importance of the mother's interpretative activity in providing meaning contexts for the father's behaviour. She simply noted, without reflection, that:

"Similar to the findings about the influence of children's behaviour, there is unusual agreement between mothers and fathers in the degree and order of emphasis on the nine characteristics of children." 21

Moving on to these "characteristics of children", she acknowledged the importance of parents' typifying processes as a means of finding their way through the constant stimuli being given off by a child. She commented that "parental" practices are modified not only by the behaviour of children, but also by the characteristics of children as perceived and interpreted by parents." 22 (my underlining) She observed that parents had many beliefs about what children were like at different ages or developmental level; and she noted that the sex of the child, and its ordinal position in the family, seemed also to affect the parental response. Again, although some of her respondents

22. Ibid, p.188.
typically expressed their thoughts in terms of "we did this" or "we thought that", she did not examine the process within the family of interpreting and negotiating the meanings which were socially attached to temporal concepts.

Finally, Stolz looked briefly at parent-child interaction and noted "the tendency for interaction with a sibling to influence later practice with another child, and also the tendency for failure to lead to changes in practice." Unfortunately, she did not expand upon this observation. This seems to suggest a broader point of criticism of studies of parenthood. Where good descriptive material has been collected, the researchers have perhaps been too content simply to take it at its face value. Future researchers might try to use such material analytically to develop further understandings of the everyday creative activity involved in developing family behaviour.

(d) The development of middle class parental behaviour

My work has some implications regarding the issue of education for parenthood. Two related questions might be raised: firstly, what is the actual effect of expert/scientific opinion on everyday parental behaviour?; and, secondly, what kinds of advice is it possible and legitimate for experts to give?

It seemed, from their accounts, that most of my respondents, several of whom were themselves scientists or teachers, tended to reject most kinds of detached objective/rational approach to parenting. They saw such information as, at best, irrelevant, and even, at times, detrimental to their own parental activities.

(Practical medical advice was the main exception to this trend.) Rather, respondents placed considerable value on knowledge gained through their own personal experience. Such views must be seen as related to their underlying assumptions about children, and what parenthood actually involved. Thus, the "muddling through" which both Gavron and the Newsons noticed, and which my respondents also frequently described, is, perhaps, an inevitable situation when parenthood is conceptualised as a process of making sense of the child through a direct learning involvement.

Does this mean that education about parenthood was totally irrelevant to my respondents? The answer to this must be a qualified "no", since, undoubtedly, they must have been exposed to some such information, filtered through the media. The qualification lies in respondents' interpretation of such information. They seemed to regard it as simply one kind of knowledge on which to draw in the face of the many uncertainties involved in making parental decisions. Perhaps my respondents, after at least three years of being parents, now accorded less legitimacy to "scientific" advice because they had acquired a more subjectively satisfactory fund of "common-sense" knowledge, derived from personal experience. Certainly, it is hard to imagine that they paid no attention to the plethora of medical and media information concerning first pregnancy and then the looking after of the first baby. It must be stressed, though,

that the use of this information is an interpretative and evaluative process. Thus, I am inclined to agree with M.L. Kohn that, whilst the middle class might "know" about the scientific canons of childrearing, "they need not follow the experts' advice. We know from the various studies of the mass media that people generally search for confirmation of their existing beliefs and practices and tend to ignore what contradicts them."²⁶

A similar line of reasoning has led Judith Lorber to argue more recently that, despite the vast amount of literature about how to bring up children,

"Currently, parenting in America is an amateur enterprise, and inherited and self-developed concepts and techniques of child-rearing prevail. The dominance of the lay person is not really jeopardised by the existence of professionals such as paediatricians, child psychologists, psychiatrists and school teachers."²⁷

There are, in any case, some more fundamental questions which have yet to be resolved concerning "scientific" approaches to parenthood. According to Alice Rossi, the suggestion that enough is known about parenthood to try to educate people is, in itself, problematical. She said:

"Brim points out that we are a long way from being able to say just what parental role prescriptions have what effect on the adult characteristics of the child. We know even less about how such parental prescriptions should be changed to adapt to changed conceptions of competency in adulthood."28

More recently, the Rapoports have ably demonstrated that any sets of strictures about parenting are, in themselves, based upon cultural assumptions concerning family life which may, or may not, be in line with actual or desired experience. They suggested, rightly, that information and advice about parenting must be assessed in terms of its particular cultural context, so that,

"Beliefs and practices which may have a dogmatic certainty about them may be seen as myths of our time, variables open to study and possibly also change."29

28. Rossi, A.S., 1968, op.cit., p.36. Here Rossi was referring to Brim, O.G., 'The Parent-Child Relation as a Social System: I Parent and Child Roles', Child Development, 1957, pp.343-364. More recently the Rapoports maintained that expert knowledge continues to be ambiguous and contradictory. On the basis of their review of the literature they concluded that, "one is left with many child development issues where there is discrepant and changing information from experts. This leaves open the question of what is the appropriate response, from both parental and child points of view." Rapoport, R. and Rapoport, R.N., et al, 1977, op.cit., p.180. Such lack of definite knowledge was certainly reflected in my respondents' accounts. I have tried, therefore, to describe some of the ways in which they developed everyday parental behaviour, in the context of such apparently broad and flexible cultural assumptions.

The question of the egalitarian marriage

Various researchers have claimed that there is a trend towards greater equality between spouses in family role behaviour. Whilst, in a historical context, this may very well be true, my own analysis leads me to question the actual degree of equality which existed in the marriages in the present sample. My data suggest that the kinds of developments which were taking place amongst respondents were concerned more with sustaining beliefs about equality, rather than constituting practical attempts to create objectively equal arrangements. In fact, several of the assumptions which the respondents held about family life could be seen as inimical to the creation of equal roles. For example, their images of children's needs and wants had led them all to decide that one parent should give up work to look after the children, at least for a while. This was always the woman. In addition, they tacitly assumed that the woman had overall responsibility for domestic matters, the man being a "helper". Such assumptions were supported by beliefs that the man did not "know" how certain things should be done, or did not "see" those chores which needed some attention.

These are some of the points which lead me to agree with those researchers who have cast doubt on the suggested trends towards greater equality in spousal roles. I feel that my own work extends their preliminary observations by detailing some of the processes which seemed to result in the perpetuation of inequalities in the middle class marriages under study. Ann

Oakley commented, for instance, that:

"... both husband and wife may believe that the man does more domestically than he actually does; in any case there is likely to be a gap between the general attitude and actual task performance."

In this thesis I have examined such attitudes and the part they played in the negotiation of parenthood. Also, I have attempted to describe some of the mechanisms by which beliefs in equality were sustained in the face of behavioural contradictions.

A vital element in the process of belief maintenance is the subjective meaning attached to an item of behaviour. Ann Oakley, for instance, simply noted the fact that the husbands in her sample were reported (by their wives) to take a greater share in childrearing than in housework. I found that this applied also to my own respondents. My concern, however, was to understand the meanings which such an observation had for the negotiation of parenthood. I would argue that, for example, once the women were at home with the children, my respondents felt it to be less necessary to sustain belief that everyday care of the household was a shared exercise. Many of them stated quite freely that the men had, in fact, done more housework when both spouses were employed outwith the home. At the same time, and for the many reasons outlined in this thesis, it became much more subjectively important to sustain belief in joint involvement with the children. Thus, it would seem that the areas in which it is subjectively important to "prove" a fairly shared involvement vary through the family life cycle.

Once the familial division of labour is studied in terms of negotiation, strategic meanings and the maintenance of beliefs about equality, then issues of sexual politics become more pertinent. Often, the politics involved in the family situation are sufficiently covert that the participants themselves may be unable to realise that such processes are taking place. I am, for instance, sure that all of my respondents regarded themselves as having relationships with their spouses in which one did not deliberately exercise power over the other. (I have, in fact, described some of the ways in which the respondents sustained beliefs in a "fairly" shared reality, by means of compensatory coping mechanisms.)

A recent and perceptive article by Jack Sattel has, however, helped me to see the aspects of sexual politics which, arguably, were revealed in my respondents' accounts. Sattel examined the notion that "inexpressivity" in males was a cultural trait. Applying the arguments of sexual politics he suggested instead that, "... male inexpressiveness empirically emerges as an intentional manipulation of a situation when threats to the male position occur."32 Surely the kinds of coping mechanisms which my respondents described as supporting their belief in a "fairly" shared reality are not too far removed from Sattel's observation. Two seem immediately to be relevant: the assertion that the man did not "see" certain things to be done around the house; and the great value attached to the belief in the man's willingness to take his share. These two mechanisms, it could

be suggested, stemmed from the man's retention of an overall prerogative of potential non-involvement. This meant that he could be seen to approach the negotiation of familial tasks from a basically different standpoint to that of the woman.

The preceding discussion makes me somewhat sceptical about the Rapoport's recent suggestions concerning the development of "equity" in male/female relationships. By "equity" they meant "the presence of equal opportunity plus the feeling of fairness if there is inequality of conditions". Their theoretical paper contained some fundamentally important points. They argued, for instance, that pressures for equality between the sexes did not allow for the idiosyncracies of individual choice, but pushed people towards "compulsory adherence to a new stereotype". Also, they made several important practical suggestions such as: "males will not only have to 'help' but to share in the redistribution of responsibilities as well as helping activities.".

However, their suggested alternative of "equity" has its own drawbacks, underplaying, as it does, the notions of sexual politics. It would, for example, appear to put the burden of developing "equable" and flexible arrangements squarely on the individual couple concerned. This assumes that each spouse would be similarly motivated, and that "equity" would simply "emerge". My own work would suggest that the main problem lies in the fact that actors are often unaware that some of their basic assumptions about family life mitigate against a development such as "equity".

34. Ibid, p.421.
The cultural specificity of basic beliefs would have to be revealed before true "equity" could be achieved. I would argue that, in fact, my respondents were developing "equable" arrangements, as defined by the Rapoorts, but that these hindered, rather than enhanced, the movement towards a truly egalitarian marriage.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I summarised the thesis and considered some of its implications. These concerned the position of women, fatherhood, the effects of children, and issues pertaining to middle class parenthood and marriage. I compared and contrasted some of my arguments with those of other family sociologists.

My aim in this thesis was to develop some understandings of the everyday parental behaviour of a small group of middle class couples. As such, the work was limited in its scope. Hopefully, however, it will have stimulated many further questions on which more extensive research might be based.
APPENDIX 1

THE INTERVIEW GUIDES

1. GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

(This was the same for both spouses.)

A. General

(i) How many of you are there living in the household?

(ii) How old are the children?

(iii) What is your husband's/your job?

(iv) What kind of hours does your husband/you work, including evening work?

(v) Do you/your wife have a job at the moment? What did you/your wife do before she gave up paid employment?

(vi) What kind of hours do you/your wife work?

B. Marriage "First a few questions about marriage in general."

(i) How long have you been married?

(ii) How old were you when you got married?

(iii) Before you were married, what did you think marriage would be like?

(iv) What would you now tell a young woman to expect from marriage?

(v) What would you now tell a young man to expect from marriage?

(vi) What kinds of preparation, if any, do you think you had for marriage?

(vii) What kinds of preparation, if any, do you think your husband/wife had for marriage?

(viii) What do you think being a wife involves?
(ix) What do you think being a husband involves?
(x) Does your spouse agree/disagree with the points you've just been making about husbands and wives?
(xi) Could you tell me about any adaptations you yourself feel you have had to make in your marriage (or are still making)?

C. First Married
(i) Now could you tell me about when you were first married, before you had children, what was this like?
(ii) What things are the same or different now?
(iii) When you were first married, how did you both work out who was going to do what as regards the running of a home?
(iv) What kinds of difficulties arose at this time?
(v) And what kinds of things did you do in your leisure time when you were first married?

D. Children "Now, to move on to your children."
(i) Imagine I'd never met your children, could you describe them both to me?
(ii) Is your child at all like, or different from, you as a person?
(iii) Is your child at all like, or different from, your spouse as a person?
(iv) In what ways do you think your children are the same as, or different from, other children?
(v) In what ways are they the same as, or different, from each other?
(vi) What do you think "being a mother" involves?
(vii) Does your husband/wife agree, or disagree, with this?
(viii) What do you think "being a father" involves?
(ix) Does your husband/wife agree, or disagree, with this?
(x) In what ways, if any, do you think that having children has affected your life?

E. **Spouse** "Now let's think about your husband/wife a little."

(i) Imagine I'd never met your husband/wife - could you
describe him/her to me - and what kind of a person is
he/she?

(ii) In what ways is he/she the same as or different from other
husbands/wives?

(iii) What kinds of things do you agree or disagree about?

(iv) How would your husband/wife describe the children?

(v) Does your husband/you spend as much time at home as you
both would like?

(vi) What kinds of things does your husband/you do in the home
and with the children generally?

(vii) How often does he/you do these things?

(viii) Does he/you generally do them "off his own bat", or who
suggests them to him?

(ix) What kinds of leisure activities do you both have?

(x) How often do you do things separately and together?²

---

2. All of these questions were asked, but their order was flexible.
I found that, once a respondent began to talk easily, he/she
frequently gave me a considerable amount of information about
topics in advance of my raising them. I always encouraged
the spontaneous giving of information, but later refocused the
respondent's attention on the particular topic, as I had originally
intended. Most of the interviews lasted for about two hours.
2. GUIDE FOR THE JOINT INTERVIEW

As explained in the methodology, the questions for this interview were basically the same as those for the individual interviews. This time, however, I simply left a list of questions, and a tape-recorder, with respondents and asked them to discuss the topics with one another.

The length of these interviews varied from half an hour to two and a half hours. The average time was about one to one and a half hours.

3. GUIDE FOR THE FOURTH INTERVIEW (W/E)

(i) "What's been happening since we last talked?"

This question opened up as wide a range of topics as respondents wished to raise. I also tended, here, to remind them of things they had mentioned in previous interviews, and to ask if there had been any subsequent developments. Usually, respondents talked quite effortlessly by this point in the fieldwork; and this section occupied perhaps a quarter of the total interview.

(ii) "Could you think back and tell me, in as much detail as possible everything that happened last weekend?"

First of all I asked respondents for their definitions of when the "weekend" started (and why). I then asked them to begin their descriptions with the Friday evening.

I asked them to talk about their weekend in very great detail. My detailed probing of all aspects of their accounts was typically prefaced by such phrases as: "I know this probably seems obvious to you, but could you tell me a little more about why X always does that?";

---

3. This was conducted with the husband and wife together.
and "Is that what usually happens, tell me some more about it?" My probing was so detailed that it caused one woman to remark "my goodness, she'll be getting into bed with us next!"

I queried all the aspects of their domestic division of labour such as: washing up, making beds, preparing food and drinks, shopping, dressing and feeding the children, bathing the children, getting up through the night to children, etc. Whenever an activity was mentioned during their accounts of their weekends, I asked if this was the usual way such an activity was carried out, and asked why this was so. I asked about any occasions when a different method of dealing with the chore might be employed. If one spouse was described as always dealing with a particular chore, I queried this.

Their accounts of their weekends also encompassed activities outwith the home, and encounters with non-family members. Where one spouse childminded whilst the other pursued domestic or non-domestic activities, I asked about the frequency and regularity of this pattern. I also asked whether, and how often, this childminding situation was reversed. I asked, in detail, about the reasons behind each family's adoption of a particular behaviour pattern in this respect. Information about the organisation of babysitting, and the reasons for that particular method, was obtained.

Frequently, respondents talked about visiting or being visited during the weekend. I also probed at length about these visits. I made a point of asking about the children's behaviour and activities, if these were not specifically mentioned.

(iii) "Now, having heard all about your previous weekend, could you tell me everything that happened last night, so that we can compare a weekday with a weekend?"
The evening was then examined in as much detail as had been the weekend. If, for any reason, respondents remarked that the previous evening had not been typical, I asked them why this was so, and then sought further information about the most recent "typical" evening.

(iv) If the following topics did not come up spontaneously during the preceding discussions I also asked about:

(a) The father's attitude to looking after babies.
(b) Any changes in their attitudes and behaviour towards the second child. (Here I probed particularly for any differences in the father's involvement in practical childcare.)
(c) Any differences between their winter and summer existences.
(d) Babysitting arrangements.

These interviews tended to last for two to three hours.

4. GUIDE FOR THE FINAL INTERVIEW (F)

(i) Changes and developments since the last interview. (Here a format was followed similar to that in the Fourth Interview.)

(ii) "Could you tell me, in as much detail as possible, about the most recent conversations you've had about the children, i.e. what have you been talking about with reference to the children before I arrived tonight?" (If, for any reason, this proved difficult I asked for the most recent conversation which they could remember.)

(iii) Could you each tell me a bit about the way your own parents brought you up - what do you think were their ideas about, and methods of, childrearing?
"Could we try something a bit different now. I am going to give you each a pen and paper and ask you to write down brief answers to one or two questions. The questions are all to do with the children, and, when you write your answers, I want you to first of all think of each of the children separately, and then of both of them together, you know, as 'the kids.'"

(v) Firstly could you write down what things, if any, worry you about each or both of the kids. What things do you think might prove to be future worries?

(vi) Now could you write down what things to do with the children give you the most pleasure?

(vii) What things do you find most difficult to cope with in your relationship with each or both of the children.

(At this point the answers were pooled and discussed in detail.)

(viii) Obviously not mentioning full names and addresses, could each of you tell me about the friend, acquaintance or relative whom you consider to be the best parent you know. (I asked them to think independently of their choices before telling me about them.)

(ix) Now tell me about the worst parent you know. Tell me a bit about where they go wrong and why?

(x) Have you any idea about how your neighbours, friends, and relatives see your children?

(xi) How would you like these people to see your children?

(xii) Last question, if you had another child, would you do anything differently and why?

These interviews also lasted for two to three hours. Again, the questions were used partly to stimulate discussion between the husband and wife on a defined topic.
APPENDIX 2

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

University of Edinburgh
Department of Sociology
Adam Ferguson Building
George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LL
Telephone: 031-667-1011

Dear [name of respondent],

I believe [name of "link"] has asked you both if you would be interested in taking part in a project on the Family. This letter is simply to introduce myself to you and to ask you to confirm that you are, in fact, still interested in my project.

I am now in my second year of a Ph.D. in Sociology and am hoping to begin my fieldwork in June. The empirical part of the project should take about nine months to a year and will involve study of some twenty to thirty families. I should like very much to call round to your home and explain more about the project. Could you please post a brief reply to me saying if you are still willing to take part. If you are I shall phone to arrange an appointment in the very near future.

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Backett
APPENDIX 3

THE FAMILIES

All of these names are fictional. This list of pseudonyms is intended to help the reader to follow the detailed quotations. The ages of the children are as given in the first interview.

1. Philip and Margaret BARBER
   Karen (3½) Mary (6 months)

2. Eric and Carol BURNS
   John (5½) Alison (2½)

3. Martin and Sylvia CHAPMAN
   Anne (2½) Judy (1 month)

4. John and Mary CLARK
   Louise (3½) Elizabeth (10 months)

5. Barry and Jean COULSON
   Matthew (3) Robert (10 months)

6. Andrew and Judy DAVIES
   Robert (2½) Ian (newly born)

7. Colin and Mary DUNCAN
   Alistair (5) Sarah (3½)

8. James and Hannah GILCHRIST
   Susan (3) Lucy (3 months)

9. Jeff and Madeleine HARRIS
   Frances (4½) Ian (2½)
10. Alan and Dianne HEMINGWAY
    Laura (2½) Joanne (1½)

11. Patrick and Kathy HISLOP
    Julie (5) Anna (2½)

12. Edward and Shirley JACKSON
    Simon (2½) Elaine (10 months)

13. Andrew and Marjorie JEFFRIES
    Brian (6) Michael (3)

14. Ian and Barbara JOHNSON
    Nicola (5) Thomas (2½)

15. Ray and Alice MITCHELL
    Rachel (2½) Kenneth (13 months)

16. George and Helen MOFFAT
    Pamela (5½) Ruth (2½)

17. Ben and Sheila FRINGLE
    Monica (5) Helen (3)

18. Derek and Maureen RANKIN
    Lynne (6½) Jonathon (2½)

19. Jim and Anna ROBSON
    Martin (6) Jacqueline (2½)

20. David and Marjorie RUSSELL
    Kathleen (5½) Timothy (3½)
21. Roy and Elizabeth VAUGHAN
   Jenny (3½)      Catherine (1)

22. Nick and Louise WILSON
   Jane (4)       Clare (2½)
APPENDIX 4

Some Details of the Personal and Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

1. Husband's occupations and wife's previous or current occupation at time of interview.

As I assessed social class, in part, on the basis of the occupations of the husband and the wife, I present these here for each couple. In order, however, to preserve anonymity, I do not link occupations to the pseudonyms given in Appendix 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Engineer/Manager</td>
<td>Telephonist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>Secondary Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td>Clerkess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Midwife (currently night nurse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts Manager</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Research Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draughtsman</td>
<td>Clerkess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>University Lecturer (currently Open University Tutor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer at College of Education</td>
<td>Primary Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Broker</td>
<td>Boutique Owner/Model (currently running small maternity clothes business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Official</td>
<td>Secretary (currently part time work for National Childbirth Trust)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Manager of chain of shops</td>
<td>Bank Official</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Husband

Civil Servant
Surveyor
Customs and Excise Official
Work Study Engineer
Computer Engineer
Typographer
Chartered Surveyor
Research Scientist
Doctor

Wife

Teacher (currently Social Work Trainee)
Nurse
Clerkess/Administrator (currently helping with administration in a relative's shop)
Telephonist
Primary Teacher
Clerkess/Model
Primary Teacher
Nurse (currently part-time nurse)
Secondary Teacher

2. Other characteristics

(a) By the end of the study all of the respondents owned their own home.
(b) All but one of them ran a car.
(c) All of them lived either in a middle class area of the city or on one of the new private estates near Edinburgh.
(d) Twenty nine of the respondents were Scottish, two were Irish, two were American and thirteen were English.
(e) Twenty seven respondents had lived in Scotland for all, or most of their lives. Eleven respondents had lived in Scotland for seven to ten years. Six respondents had lived in Scotland for three to six years.
(f) All respondents were aged between 25 and 35 years.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BLUM, F.H. (1952) "Getting Individuals to give Information to the Outsider". Journal of Social Issues, pp. 35-42.


LEIK, R. (1963) "Instrumentality and Emotionality in Family Interaction": Sociometry, pp.131-146.


